

MARKET FOCUS STRATEGY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF PLASTIC MANUFACTURING COMPANIES IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the relationship between market focus strategy and sustainability of plastic manufacturing companies in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study adopted cross-sectional survey with respondents' rate of 30 top strategic management staff in the plastic manufacturing companies in Rivers State, Nigeria. Data were generated using the structured questionnaire. The bivariate analysis for the study was achieved with the use of Spearman's Rank Order Correlation coefficients. The findings showed that market focus strategy has a strong positive and significant influence on the measures of sustainability of plastic manufacturing companies in Rivers State, Nigeria. The findings of the study concluded that market focus strategy had a strong positive and significant influence on the measures of sustainability in the plastic manufacturing companies in Rivers State, Nigeria. This clearly indicates firms that adopt market focus strategy can easily stay closer to their customers and effectively monitor their needs. A low cost position gives the company a defense against rivalry from competitors because its lower costs mean that it can still earn returns after its competitors have competed away their profits through rivalry. Management should target a profitable niche market segment in order to achieve high customer retention. Similarly, plastic manufacturing companies should scan the environment fully to identify the best segment to target and adopt market focus strategy to satisfy customer wants and needs in market segments that are sustainable.

Keywords: Market focus strategy, sustainability, environmental, economic sustainability

INTRODUCTION

The era of organizations being obsessed by profit-maximization activities is speedily changing and waning. Contemporarily, organizations and the business world have recognized that continuity constitute the nucleus of all business activities (Jamal, Zahid, Martins, Mata, Rahman & Mata, 2021). This latest notion has altered the corporate world and given birth to corporate sustainability which produces durable value for all stakeholders of the organization (Jamal, 2021). According to Katarzyna (2021) the emergence of the theory and practice of sustainability in strategic management and other spheres of management, is said to have been initiated by three

key groups: the ecologists, business strategists and the United Nation's World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, captioned the 'Brundtland Commission'. The Ecologists' interpretation on sustainability is alleged to have been invented since 1712 by the German aristocrat Hans Carl von Carlowitz, who centred his thought on the sustainable production of wood in Saxony-Germany as a deterrent to scarcity of wood (natural resources required by the mining and ore smelting industry). The basic tenet of sustainability then was a concern over the protection and conservation of natural /environmental resources from excessive exploitation and environmental degradation.

According to Ajor (2019), organizational sustainability is the continuing commitment by business to behave ethical and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce, their family, the local, global community as well as future generations. However, organizational sustainability is beyond economic interest, it has taken on more meaning and identity that encompasses other elements in its composition, such as environmental and social sustainability (Luke, 2013). Organizational sustainability is thought to enhance the ability of business organizations to improve their host communities, customers, employees, stakeholders and proffer solutions to their peculiar needs which may lead to improve corporations with organization (Espstein & Buhovac, 2011). The UN-Brundtland (1987) report of the World Environmental and Development Commission, named after its Chairperson, Gro-Harlem Brundtland, the Norwegian Prime Minister popularized the concept of sustainability and which have gained prominence in every sectors of life (Irene, William & Elizabeth, 2017). The UN-Brundtland report (1987) defined sustainability as the development that meets the needs of present generation without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet theirs. However, a sustainable organization requires that firms should put into consideration long-term economic, environmental, and social effects when formulating the production and other policies (Setia & Soni, 2013).

In spite of all these studies carried out, organizations in their attempt to convert resources to output still neglect the environment, economic aspect by dumping wastes and return pollution to the environment. It is however obvious that organizational sustainability is not only reliant on strategic leadership, business ethics and management information system, entrepreneurial mindset but also on the incorporation of focus strategy to aid organizational sustainability. Schaltegger (2017) opine that sustainability become a process that continually disrupts the status quo and harness turbulence to achieve long-term goals of the organizations through constant innovation, transparency, commitment, sustain strategy and responsibility. Hence, strategy is the direction and scope of an organization over the long term that provides advantages for the organization through its pattern of resources within a demanding environment. Market focus strategy refers to the ability of firms to reposition themselves in a market, change their game plans, or dismantle their current strategies to serve a niche in the market. According to Nanyangwe and Phiri (2021) posit that market focus strategy is aim at focusing on a particular buyer group, segment of the product line or geographic market. Market focus as well as differentiation is done in different forms. If the low cost and differentiation strategies established in the entire industry with the aim of achieving the objectives, then entire market focus strategy revolve around achieving a specific goal and each of the functional policies designed with respect to this objective. The focus strategy focuses on this principle that in this way, companies can be reached to their limited strategic goals more effective and more efficient than other competitors can. As a result, the company through better meets the needs of a specific target,

achieve differentiation, reduce costs in providing the services or both (Vahdati, 2018). Market focus means producing products and services that fulfill the needs of small groups of consumers. There are two alternative types of focus strategies; low-cost focus strategy and best-value focus strategy. Low cost focus strategy offers products or services to a small range of customers called a niche group of customers at the lowest price possible in the market. Best-Value focus strategy offers products or services to a small range of customers at the best price-value available in the market.

The fundamental basis of above industry performance is sustainable competitive advantage which is indicated by low cost or differentiation (Porter, 1985). Salavou (2015) studied characteristics of successful strategies of companies in the manufacturing industry and concluded that the combination of assets and how to use them is an important factor on profitability of the company. Ekwoaba and Uwem, (2019) investigated the effect of competitive intelligence on small business sustainability in selected cleaning services companies in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study found that competitive intelligence had a significant effect on small business sustainability in the selected cleaning services companies in Lagos State. However, plethora of studies have been conducted by researchers regarding focus strategy and organizational sustainability, we have not seen much of the empirical investigation on the relationship between focus strategy and organizational sustainability in plastic manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. Notably, there is a lack of empirical studies and practical evidence about the applicability of Competitive Strategy on organizational sustainability. Therefore, this study is intended to bridge this gap in the literature. To this end, this study departs from previous studies and aim to examine the relationship between market focus strategy and sustainability of plastic manufacturing companies in Rivers State Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study include to:

- i. examine the relationship between market focus strategy and economic sustainability of plastic manufacturing companies in Rivers State, Nigeria.
- ii. examine the relationship between market focus strategy and environmental sustainability of plastic manufacturing companies in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Conceptual Framework

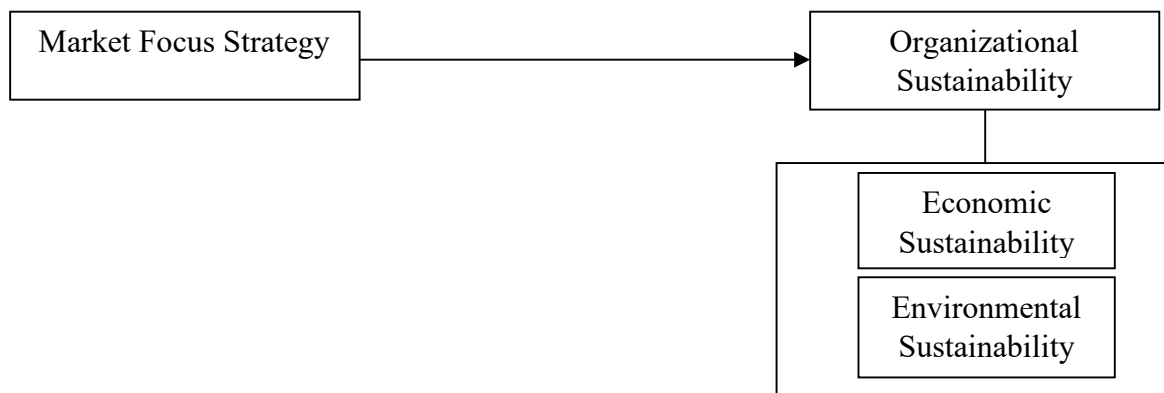


Figure: 1 showed the relationship between focus strategy and sustainability

Source: Desk Research (2025)

Research Questions

1. To what extent does market focus strategy affect economic sustainability in the plastic manufacturing companies in Rivers State, Nigeria?
2. To what extent does market focus strategy affect environmental sustainability in the plastic manufacturing companies in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between market focus strategy and economic sustainability in plastic manufacturing companies in Rivers State Nigeria

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between market focus strategy and environmental sustainability in plastic manufacturing companies in Rivers State Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundation

Resource Based View Theory

Resource Based View Theory was coined by Penrose (1959). The theory regards the firm as a bundle of resources and capabilities that are heterogeneously distributed across firms that persist over time (Ambrosine & Bowman, 2009). Barney (1991) posits that firm resources are valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable. Firm can use them to implement value creation strategies that provide a sustainable competitive advantage (Peteraf & Barney, 2003). The foundation of resource based view theory is that an organization gains competitive advantage through the acquisition and application of resources. The focus is on the configuration of the resources such that they provide a competitive advantage for the firm (Peteraf, 1993). There are two major assumptions of RBV. The first one state that resources must be heterogeneous in nature and assumes that firms achieve competitive advantage when business makes use of resources that are significantly different from that of competitors. The second assumption is that a firm's resources are non-movable and non-transferable. That is, resources attributed to a particular company do not move from one company to another at least in a short run (Akio, 2005). The application of this theory will lay the organisation to observe and take up competitive strategy as one of the important strategy in performing their marketing strategy to achieve superior `sustainability. In addition, with the skills available, the organisations can make use of competitive strategy and convert into marketing capabilities effectively to gain competitive advantage.

Conceptual Review

Market Focus Strategy

Market focus strategy is about segmenting the industry and serving the narrow niche to the exclusion of others (Porter, 1985 cited in Mutunga & Minja, 2020). Market focus strategy has two variants: cost focus and differentiation focus. Cost focus aims at achieving cost advantage while differentiation focus is about seeking differentiation in a target segment. Cost focus exploits differences in cost behavior in some segments, while differentiation focus exploits the special needs of buyers in certain segments. According to Mutunga and Minja (2020) market focus allows some businesses to compete on the basis of low cost, differentiation and rapid response against much larger businesses with greater resources because market focus lets a business learn its target customers, their needs, special considerations they want accommodated and establish personal relationships in ways that differentiate the smaller firm or make it more valuable to the target customer (Pearce & Robinson, 2005). The focuser's basis for competitive

advantage is either lower costs than competitors serving that market segment or an ability to offer niche members something different from competitors. Focusing is based on selecting a market niche where buyers have distinctive preferences. The niche is defined by geographical uniqueness, specialized requirements in using the product or by special attributes that appeal to members, (Akintokunbo, 2018). A market focus strategy based on low cost depends on there being a buyer segment whose needs are less costly to satisfy than the rest of the market. On the other hand, a market focus strategy based on differentiation depends on there being a buyer segment that demands unique product attributes.

Sustainability

The concept of sustainability has been in the use and alignment with business practice since the World Commission on Economic Development introduced it in 1977 (Crittenden, 2010). Many other related terms such as corporate social responsibility, sustainable development, green marketing and triple bottom line have been employed in a similar context, but all are meant to reflect the expected degree of accountability business should take on society (Grundey, 2012). Sustainability entails ensuring that economic, environmental and social developments are in tandem with the goals of society (Dee, 2010). Sustainability is concerned with business activities, typically considered voluntary which demonstrate the inclusion of social and environmental concerns in business operations and in interactions with stakeholders (Van-Marrewijk & Verre, 2003). Sustainability is defined as growth that encounters the desires of the present without conceding the capacity of future generations to encounter their own desires. Matten and Moon (2008) defined sustainability in its critical sense as the simplest and most fundamental, the ability to sustain. The philosophy of sustainability is based on the demand by the society that a company doing business should distribute the risks, losses and gains fairly (Jonas & Erisson, 2007). It has become a critical focus and source of making the earth a better place to live, since it is expected that by 2050 nine billion people will all be able to achieve a basic quality of life (Belz & Peattie, 2010). Sustainability brings to the consciousness of the people on earth their rate of consumption and how quickly it is affecting the earth beyond its capacity to support (Warde, 2008).

Economic Sustainability: striving for economic efficiency and effectiveness is a primary goal of every business organisation and it is not annulled by the sustainability dimension (Bányai, 2019). But while it is true that a long-term existence of an organization hinge on its financial strength and competitiveness in the environment, for sustainability purposes, when distinguishing the necessity for the moneys for human resource, it is essential to consider the negative impact on employees, society at large, and environment by the struggle for economic effectiveness (Bányai, 2019). Economic sustainability is defined as how firms can stay in business over a long period of time. It is primarily concerned with monetary capital in consideration with natural, social and human capital. Economic sustainability also referred to as economic viability at the core of corporate sustainability, since it generates profit and jobs. It therefore contributes to the general social welfare (Azapagic, 2025). Economic sustainability is one of the measuring indicators of sustainability (IISD, 2015). It involves achieving a balance in all sectors of services. It tackles social issue as poverty reduction, low per capital income, inequality distribution, and inefficiency in the mobilization of resources, unemployment issues, and inflation.

Environmental Sustainability: the environment refers to both the physical and social circumstances which surround people and have influence on them. It is both objective and subjective. This because it includes both bodies and the cote thereon, land mass, forest, grassland, deserts, animals and the man himself where all the interactions that take place (Gana & Toba 2015). It also refers to all the natural endowments and those provided by man in his effort to make life support systems with air, water and land as well as the materials for fulfilling all development aspirations of man (Lawason 2006). Relating it to sustainability is the recognition that the environment represents a wealth of resources which must be protected. This recognition as an aspect of current development agenda can be traced to the 1987 Bruntland commission of the United Nations which ascribed sustainability to development and defined it as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to their own needs comprehensively therefore: Environmental sustainability refers to the conservation, management and rational utilization of natural resources in such way to maintain the integrity of each ecosystem, support all life, ensure the preservation of biodiversity and prevents environmental degradation (Gbenda, 2012). Environmental sustainability forms one of the pillars of sustainability development the others being social sustainability and economic sustainability. It is an aspect of the development process which emphasizes the harness of natural and social resources with major considerations for continuity and the future.

Empirical Review

Owaga, (2021) conducted a study to establish the effect of Competitive Strategy on the financial sustainability of registered banks in Kenya. The study focused on the effect of innovative strategies, differentiation, and marketing strategies on financial sustainability. The study was anchored on the theory of competitive advantage and the innovation diffusion theory. The study adopted an explanatory research design with the unit of analysis being the 41 registered commercial banks in Kenya. The sample respondents were 94 respondents drawn from the commercial banks. The study utilized a structured questionnaire in the data collection with the collected data being analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings of the study indicated that there is a positive relationship between Competitive Strategy and the financial sustainability of commercial banks. The study results show there is a significant association between innovative strategies, marketing strategies, and the financial sustainability of commercial banks. The study found an insignificant positive effect of diversification strategies on the financial sustainability of commercial banks.

Nanyangwe and Phiri (2021) carried out a study on the influence of marketing strategies on growth and sustainability in the OEM industry in Zambia. A quantitative survey with structured questions was administered through self-completion questionnaires to 40 respondents, representing a 95% response rate. A descriptive research design was used and a quantitative research strategy used. IBM SPSS was used for correlation analysis, to assess the strength of the relationship between variables. The results indicated that at a 1% level of significance, the Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.01 and 0.000 at sig. (2-tailed) < 0.01 indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship between cost strategy and revenue and market share growth. The results further showed Pearson correlation coefficients of 0.000 at sig. (2-tailed) < 0.01 indicating that there was a statistically significant relationship between differentiation strategy and revenue and market share growth.

Akintokunbo (2018) studied the relationship between Focus Strategy and organizational performance of telecommunication companies in Nigeria. The study used a cross sectional design involving management staff of 4 telecommunication companies in Nigeria. The population was 134 and a sample size of 100 was obtained through the Taro Yamane formula for sample size determination with the simple random technique used. After data cleaning, only data of 93 respondents were finally used for data analysis. The internal reliability of the instrument was ascertained through the Cronbach Alpha coefficient with all the items scoring above .70 bench mark set by Nunnally. Descriptive statistics and Spearman's rank correlation were used for data analysis and hypothesis testing. Empirical results confirm that there is a very positive significant relationship between Focus Strategy and organizational performance in telecommunication companies. The study concluded that Focus Strategy bears a positive and significant influence on firm competitiveness. The study recommended that firms that choose to employ market focus strategies should concentrate on a narrow segment and within that segment attempt to achieve either a cost advantage or differentiation.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted cross-sectional survey research design because of its requirements to collect data from a wide range of subjects to elicit acceptable generalization at a time. This quantitative research design adopts a causal type of investigation to establish the causal relationship between focus strategy and sustainability. Considering all these factors, the study variables in a non-contrived (normal or natural) setting (plastic manufacturing companies) is not manipulated or interfered into by the researcher. The target population of this study consists of all the plastic manufacturing companies registered with the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN) Directory of Rivers State. However, the accessible population was (5) plastic manufacturing firms listed on the Nigeria Industrial Directory: Manufactures Association of Nigeria Rivers State that has operational base in Rivers State, Nigeria. These includes: General Plastic Nigeria Ltd, Delta Plastic Ltd, Nikko Industries Nig. Ltd, Sun Flower Manufacturing Company Ltd, Polo Packaging Industries Ltd. These five companies were used as the population because of their peculiarity of being in the same industry in production of plastic product. However, as an organizational level study, there is no sampling technique. The census approach was used in this study. Thus, (6) managerial level staff formed the respondents' elements of the study. These include the following: General Manager, Manager-Productions, Head of Public Relations/Corporate Social Responsibility, Finance Manager, Research and Development Manager, and Human Resource Manager making it thirty (30) management staff cutting across the five (5) plastic manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. The source of data for this study was primary source. However, the questionnaire was designed with open-ended questions, check-list questions. The study adopts content and face-validity. The study conducted reliability test using Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951). The acceptable value depending on the type of research ranges from 0.70 and 0.90 for exploratory and 0.80 and 0.90 for basic research.

Table 1 Reliability Results

S/N	Variables	Cases	Cronbach's Value
1	Market Focus Strategy	3	.996
2	Environmental Sustainability	3	.986
3	Economic Sustainability	3	.982

Source: Field Work, 2025

To determine the strength and direction of the relationship between variables inferential statistical tools was employed using Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Statistics and entered into the data editor of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 26.0) and was use to test the stated hypotheses. The spearman rank correlation coefficient (ρ) was adopted because the data was collected at the ordinal levels.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Market Focus Strategy and Economic Sustainability

Table 2: Correlation Analysis on Market Focus Strategy and Economic Sustainability

		Correlation		
			Focus Strategy	Economic Sustainability
Spearman's rho	Market Focus Strategy	Correlation	1.000	.959**
		Coefficient		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	29	29
	Economic Sustainability	Correlation	.959**	1.000
		Coefficient		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	29	29

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output 26.0, 2025

Table 2 showed the statistical result of market focus strategy and economic sustainability with ($\rho = 0.959$). The analysis indicates that there is a very strong positive relationship between market focus strategy and economic sustainability in plastic manufacturing companies in Rivers State Nigeria.

Research Hypothesis 1

H_{01} : There is no significant relationship between market focus strategy and economic sustainability in plastic manufacturing companies in Rivers State Nigeria.

The results of the probability value ($P-v = 0.000 < 0.05$) indicates a significant relationship in the study. Therefore, based on the empirical result the null hypothesis is hereby rejected and the alternate accepted. Thus, it restated that there is a significant relationship between market focus strategy and economic sustainability in plastic manufacturing companies in Rivers State Nigeria.

Market Focus Strategy and Environmental Sustainability**Table 3: Correlation Analysis on Market Focus Strategy and Environmental Sustainability.**

		Correlation		
			Focus Strategy	Environmental Sustainability
Spearman's rho	Market Focus Strategy	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.954**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	29	29
		Environmental Sustainability	.954**	1.000
	Environmental Sustainability	Correlation Coefficient	.954**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	29	29

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output 26.0, 2025

Table 3 showed the statistical result of market focus strategy and environmental sustainability with ($\rho = 0.954$). The analysis indicates that there is a very strong positive relationship between market focus strategy and environmental sustainability in plastic manufacturing companies in Rivers State Nigeria.

Research Hypothesis 2

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between market focus strategy and environmental sustainability in plastic manufacturing companies in Rivers State Nigeria.

The results of the probability value ($P-v = 0.000 < 0.05$) indicates a significant relationship in the study. Therefore, based on the empirical result the null hypothesis is hereby rejected and the alternate accepted. Thus, it restated that there is a significant relationship between market focus strategy and environmental sustainability in plastic manufacturing companies in Rivers State Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study showed that market focus strategy had a very strong relationship with economic sustainability, also the findings further indicates that market focus strategy had a significant relationship with environmental sustainability in the plastic manufacturing companies in Rivers State Nigeria. The findings corroborate with the conclusion of Mehta and Chugan (2015) points the best way to go about green behavior is instituting and add benefit package and variable incentive element to employees compensation system especially for those who portray environment friendly behavior. The findings agreed with the findings of Berber, Susnjar, Slavic and Baosic (2014) the study findings reveal that there is a positive significant relationship between Green Rewards and corporate sustainability Organizations which rewards their employee's positive green behavior improves their productivity and loyalty and thus positively motivates them towards sustainability. The findings are in line with Nanyangwe and Phiri (2021) results carried out on marketing strategies and growth and sustainability which indicated that at a 1% level of significance, was statistically significant between cost strategy and revenue and

market share growth. Akintokunbo (2018) studied market focus strategy and organizational performance and the results confirm that there is a very positive significant relationship between market focus strategy and organizational performance in telecommunication companies. The study concluded that market focus strategy bears a positive and significant influence on firm competitiveness. The study recommended that firms that choose to employ market focus strategies should concentrate on a narrow segment and within that segment attempt to achieve either a cost advantage or differentiation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study; it is therefore, concluded that market focus strategy had a strong positive and significant influence on the measures of sustainability in the plastic manufacturing companies in Rivers State, Nigeria. This clearly indicates firms that adopt focus strategy can easily stay closer to their customers and effectively monitor their needs. A low cost position gives the company a defense against rivalry from competitors because its lower costs mean that it can still earn returns after its competitors have competed away their profits through rivalry. Cost leaders seek to improve efficiency and control costs throughout the organizations economic activities. Management should target a profitable niche market segment in order to achieve high customer retention. Similarly, plastic manufacturing companies should scan the environment fully to identify the best segment to target and adopt focus strategy to satisfy customer wants and needs in market segments that are sustainable.

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