

INFLUENCE OF COMPETITIVE STRATEGIES ON PERFORMANCE OF HOTELS INDUSTRY IN RWANDA: A CASE STUDY OF KIGALI MARRIOTT HOTEL

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Abstract: Over the last three decades, competitive strategy has been shown to involve offering product or service perceived as unique by the consumers. Competitive strategy can be based on many dimensions such as low price, innovativeness, product quality, efficiency, branding among others. Although studies have shown that competitive strategies positively relates to firm's performance, it's not all organizations including hotels that have realize this potential in regards to increased performance. The purpose of this study was to establish the influence of competitive strategies on performance of hotels in Rwanda. The study was carried out in Kigali Marriot hotel in Kigali, Rwanda. This study employed descriptive research design. Target population was 130 employees of the hotel. A sample size of 98 employees was selected for the study. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select the samples. The study used primary data which was collected using questionnaires. Data was collected using questionnaire as the research which was distributed to the respondents by the researcher herself. The collected data was thoroughly examined and checked for completeness. The data was summarized, coded to enhance analysis using statistical package for social science (SPSS). Descriptive statistics frequencies and percentages was used to analyze the data. Correlation was used to portray the relationship between performance and competitive strategies. Regression analysis was used to determine the influence of competitive strategy on hotel performance. Data presentation was done by the use of pie charts and graphs, percentages and frequency tables for easy of understanding and interpretations. The results indicate that hotel in Rwanda have largely adopted competitive strategies in order to compete in the market place. The findings of the study revealed that cost leadership, differentiation and focus strategies have positive significant relationship with hotel performance in Rwanda. However, differentiation strategy had a higher coefficient of determination meaning that, it had the greatest effect on firm performance. Moreover, as opposed to Porter's argument that a firm can achieve a higher level of performance over its rival by either being a cost leader or by supplying differentiated product or service, the hotel industry in Rwanda combined their strategies into cost minimization, product differentiation and focus simultaneously while others chose any of the three strategies. It is also recommended that these firms pay more attention to competitive intensity and adopt other ways of coping with challenges presented by external environment. The study further recommends the need to strengthen this study via a longitudinal study and compare the performance of different categories of businesses as well. The implications from the findings point to a configuration approach on the implementation of competitive strategies by hotels in Rwanda. Hotels that intend to implement a competitive strategy should evaluate the environment to make sure they gain appropriate fit between the strategy and the environment in order to achieve competitive advantage.

Keywords: Cost leadership Strategies, Performance of hotels in Rwanda.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background:

The demands and needs of the environment are constantly evolving and management is about adjusting the company according to the needs and demands of the environment. Increased competition threatens the attractiveness of an industry and reducing the profitability of the players. It exerts pressure on firms to be proactive and to formulate successful

strategies that facilitate proactive response to anticipated and actual changes in the competitive environment (Jonsson & Devonish, 2009). Firms therefore focus on gaining competitive advantage to enable them respond to and compete effectively in the market. Thompson and Strickland (2009) argue that a company has competitive advantage whenever it has an edge over its rivals in securing customers and defending against competitive forces.

Competitive strategies consist the tactics that an organization has and takes to appeal buyers, stand competitive forces and advance its market standing (Thompson and Strickland, 2010). Raduan, Jegak, Haslinda and Alimin (2009) contended that competitive strategies assist an organization to describe its business at present and tomorrow, and determine the industries or marketplaces to participate in. The framework of the competitive strategies and performance of an organization can be linked to Dess, *et al.*, (2009) and in their research on industry behavior, where the profitability of a firm is as a result of the structure of the industry. Industry features and not the organization are the critical determinants of performance of an organization (Barney, 2011).

According to Johnson and Scholes (2008), central capabilities of a firm are more robust and hard to reproduce as they are related to the way linkages in the value chain of a firm are managed. David (2009) contended that higher performance can be attained in a competitive industry through the pursuit of a generic strategy, which include development of an overall cost leadership strategy, differentiation strategy, or focus or niche strategy to industry competition. The above strategies if pursued results in performance of an organization.

Organization performance is an indicator which measures how well an enterprise achieves their objectives (Lester, 2009). Organization performance can be assessed by an organization's efficiency and effectiveness of goal achievement (Pearce, & Robinson, 2009). George (2010) indicates that organizational performance, effectiveness and efficiency are synonyms which are interchangeable. In addition, a number of indicators have been adopted to measure organization performance since mid-1900, such as profit growth rate, net or total assets growth rate, return on sales, shareholder return, growth in market share, number of new products, return on net assets.

Tourism is among the country's highest foreign exchange earners. In this regard, Tourism and Hospitality (H & T) Industry is expected to play a leading role in driving Rwandan economy forward. The sector has rapidly grown into a major foreign exchange earner for Rwanda in the last two years. The growth in the sector has been associated to over the years largely been linked to tourist visiting the Mountain Gorillas in the Virunga National Park. However, as the government started marketing Rwanda as a unique tourist destination that can be visited all-year round with special emphasis on hosting international. This growth is coupled with equal growth in number of hotel being established in entire country and especially in Kigali. Many local and international hotels such as Kigali Marriot hotel are in stiff competition for local and foreign customers. To survive this competitive business environment, both local and international hotels must embrace strategies that guarantee a competitive edge. It is in this realization that this study seeks to determine the influence of competitive strategies on performance of hotels in Rwanda.

1.2 Statement of the problem:

Competitive strategies aim at establishing a profitable and sustainable position for a firm against the forces that determine industry competition. This means that organization needs to know what causes the competition and work towards developing strategies that are in agreement with the competencies of the organization in order to be in a position to deal with the environmental changes. Successful competitive strategies results in greater performance and maintainable competitive advantage (Porter, 2010).

Given that the intensity of the competition in the hotel industry and the changing nature of doing business, it is important for all stakeholders to gain knowledge on how best to employ competitive strategies within it in a bid to improve the performance and survival of their hotels (Kimotho, 2010). Although past studies have indicated significant relationship between competitive strategies and organization performance, most managers including those in hotels has not invested in the realization of the effect of competitive strategies on performance of their organizations.

While studies have been conducted on the effect of competitive strategies on performance within banking industries, manufacturing and telecommunication industries, few have been done with a focus on hotel sector. This creates a gap that this study seeks to bridge. In this regard, this study sought to determine the effect of competitive strategies on performance of hotels in Rwanda. In particular this study investigated the effect of competitive strategies of cost leadership, differentiation and focus on performance of hotels industry in Rwanda.

1.3 Objective of the study:

1.3.1 General objective:

The general objective of this study was to determine the influence of competitive strategies on performance of hotels in Rwanda using Kigali Marriot hotel as the case study.

1.3.2 Specific objectives:

This study addressed the following specific objectives;

1. To determine the effect of cost leadership strategies on performance of hotels in Rwanda.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

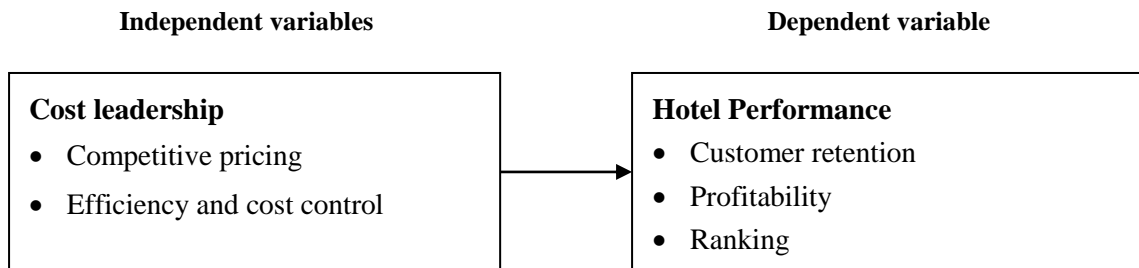


Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework

3. TARGET POPULATION

Population in statistics is the specific population about which information is desired. According to Ngechu (2010), a population is a well-defined or set of people, services, elements, events, group of things or households that are being investigated. Similarly, Cooper and Schindler (2008) define a population as a total collection of elements from which the researcher wish to make inferences. The target population of this study was 130 employees of Kigali Marriot hotel. These included directors, head of sections, supervisors, senior managers and managers as these are the people involved in developing and implementing competitive strategies to enhance performance of hotels.

3.1 Sample Frame:

According to Kothari (2008), sampling frame is a list of all the population subjects that the researcher wishes to target during the study.

Table 3.1: Sampling Frame

Area of Operation	Population	Proportions
Managers and senior managers	22	16
Supervisors	45	34
Head of sections	38	29
Directors	25	19
Total	130	98

3.1.1 Sample size:

From the study population of 130 employees, a sample size of 98 employees calculated using Slovin's (1960) formula were selected to the study:

$$n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$$

Where;

n is the sample size,

N is the population size (130)

e is the desired level of precision (0.05)

$$n = \frac{130}{1+130(0.05)^2} = 98$$

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Effect of Cost Leadership strategies on hotel performance:

The first objective of the study was to determine the effect of cost leadership strategies on performance of hotels in Rwanda. The respondents were asked to indicate the extent has your hotel adopted cost leadership as a competitive strategy.

Table 4.2: Respondents views on extent to which hotel adopted cost leadership as a competitive strategy

Level of agreement	Frequency	Percentage
Very great extent	40	50.00
Great extent	20	25.00
Moderate extent	12	15.00
Low extent	8	10.00
Very low extent	0	0.00
Total	80	100.0

On a Likert scale of 5 to 1 where 5 means very great extent and 1 very low extent. Fifty percent of the respondents indicated that the hotel had adopted cost leadership strategy to a very great extent, 25% of the respondents indicated that the hotel had adopted cost leadership strategy to a great extent, 15% of the respondents indicated that the hotel had adopted cost leadership strategy to moderate effect while 10% of them suggested that it only influences to a low extent. None indicated that that the hotel had adopted cost leadership strategy to a very low extent.

Using a five-point Likert scale, the study sought to know respondents' level of agreement on various statements relating to cost leadership strategy in relation to Marriot hotel performance. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were jointly used to summarize the responses as presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.3: Respondents views on cost leadership strategy and hotel performance

Statement	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Std. Dev
The hotel does costing of all products and services	20%	20%	60%	3.7	0.7
The hotel continuously exercises tight cost control and pay attention to details	10%	40%	50%	3.8	0.9
The hotel identifies underperforming areas in order to cut costs	20%	40%	40%	2.7	1.3
The hotel has access to low-cost raw materials than our competitors	20%	20%	60%	3.3	1.1
The hotel improves on production/service delivery process to cut on waste and duplication	20%	40%	40%	3.8	0.9
The hotel has optimum level of personnel	20%	20%	60%	2.7	1.3
The hotel charges lower price than our competitors	20%	40%	40%	3.7	0.7
The hotel emphasizes on efficiency	20%	20%	60%	3.8	1.0
The hotel continuously trains staff on effective resource utilization	20%	40%	40%	3.3	1.1
The hotel vigorously pursues cost reduction	0%	40%	60%	3.8	0.9
The hotel provides services at a low cost but of superior quality	20%	40%	40%	3.9	0.9

The study findings showed that 60% of the respondents strongly agreed that the hotel does costing of all products and services. The hotel continuously exercises tight cost control and pay attention to details as indicated by a mean of 3.8. Moreover, most of the respondents indicated that the hotel identifies underperforming areas in order to cut costs as accounted for by 40%. When asked to state whether the hotel has access to low-cost raw materials than our competitors as accounted for by mean of 3.3 supported by 60% who indicated that the hotel had access to low-cost raw materials than our competitors. In addition, the study findings showed that 40% agreed that the hotel improves on production/service delivery process to cut on waste and duplication. Further, 60% agreed that the hotel has optimum level of personnel. 40% agreed that their competitors' products are sold at relatively affordable prices. The hotel emphasizes on efficiency as accounted for by a mean of 3.8 which was supported by 40% who indicated that the hotel continuously trains staff on effective resource utilization. Sixty percent of the respondents indicated that the hotel vigorously pursues cost reduction while 20% of the respondents disagreed. Finally, 40% agreed that the hotel provides services at a low cost but of superior quality

From the findings of the study, it is further noted that responses to the statements used to measure cost leadership strategy ranged between the mean of 3.4 – 4.2 save for four items which had a mean of 2.6 -3.4 as reflected in Table 4.4. This shows that majority of the respondents were in agreement with the statements that were used to measure cost leadership strategy. Similarly, the standard deviation of majority of the items are in the range of 1.0. It could then be deduced that the responses to the items were not deviating much from the expected responses. It is, however, important to note that two items had a standard deviation of 1.3 each. This is expected since some of the respondents may not have had access to crucial information on where the company sources its supplies as well as cost cutting and efficiency programme used within the organization.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that cost leadership as used by hotels was statistically a significant factor in relation to firm performance. In this regard, if manufacturing firms want to perform at a significantly higher level than competitors it should pursue cost leadership strategy by ensuring that charges and overheads are kept lower. On cost saving measures for cost leadership strategy, it was found that product design technique, use of technology, cutting on administration costs and lowering pricing impacted on hotels in Rwanda confirming the assertion that successful cost leaders usually derive their cost advantage from multiple sources within the value chain.

5.1 Recommendations:

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommends that the hotels adopt cost leadership strategy. The empirical evidence from this study infers that cost leadership has significant effect on performance of hotels in Rwanda. The results of this study thus provide a valuable reference for top five-star hotels in Rwanda in terms of implementing cost leadership strategy as this would help them achieve competitiveness and improve their performance. The study recommends that the hotels pay attention to other value chain management practices that result in reduction of cost.

5.2 Areas for further research:

Further research is also recommended on contribution of Porter's value chain analysis to firm performance. The conceptual model of value chain analysis being the independent variable while firm performance being dependent variable. Value chain analysis describes the activities that organization performs and links them to organizational competitive position relative to firm's goals and objectives. Porter argued the ability to perform particular activities and to manage the linkages between these activities and firm goal and objectives is source of competitive advantage.

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