

Exploring Competitive Strategy for Capturing Political Power by Political Parties in Nigeria

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Abstract

In Nigeria, many political parties are stuck in the middle as lack of competitive strategy abound. They fail to explore competitive strategy with a view to gaining sustainable competitive advantage in the contest for power. This phenomenon is responsible for their dismal performance in elections. To enable a political party gain sustainable competitive advantage in elections, competitive strategy is now imperative. While the smaller political parties with lesser access to resources should pursue a differentiation focus strategy, the larger political parties with greater access to resources, should pursue a differentiation cost strategy. It is a dynamo of danger to embark on a political struggle without a competitive strategy.

There are several factors which affects the effectiveness of political parties in political contest in Nigeria. As a result of my ontological position which is within the domain of relativism, the focus of this study is only on the impact of competitive strategy on the success of political parties elections. This research is based on existing theoretical and practical knowledge on competitive strategy. Data was collected from the literature on competitive strategy by means of critical analysis of the literature. Data analysis for purposes of explication of understanding was done through critical analysis of literature and dialectic reflection about my understanding of it.

Key words: Competitive strategy, focus strategy, differentiation strategy, differentiation focus strategy, cost leadership, political gain, voters, voters population, political contest, political struggle

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Competitive strategy involves taking offensive or defensive actions with a view to creating a defensible position. Competitive strategy provides tools for capturing the richness and heterogeneity of political parties while providing a disciplined structure for examining them (Porter, 1980). To achieve the objective of any organization, the selection of a competitive strategy is imperative. In the pursuit of their *raison d'être*, political parties in Nigeria often ignore competitive strategy. This identified gap is responsible for their inability to capture political power. As a result of the identified challenge, competitive strategy as a driver of success and the suitability of differentiation focus strategy will be examined in this study.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

As stated by Gill and Johnson, (2010:188), the tacit answers to questions about ontology (what are we studying?) impact upon any methodological engagement. Ontology, which is the starting point for most of the debates among philosophers, is between realism and relativism and the nature of reality and existence. The traditional position of realism hold that the world is concrete and external and that science can only progress through observations predicated on direct correspondence to the phenomena being investigated (Easterby-smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). As argued by Putnam (1987), while the internal realism assumes the existence of single reality, it is impossible to access reality directly and possible to gather indirect evidence of what is going on in fundamental physical processes. As Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson points out, internal realism accepts that scientific laws once discovered are absolute and independent of further observations. They argued further that in line with the position of relativism, scientific laws are not simply out there to be discovered, but created by people. Gill and Johnson (2012:201) differentiate between realist and subjectivist assumptions about the status of social reality. Realist assumptions about the ontological status of the phenomena, assume that to constitute social reality entails the view that they exist, 'out there', independently of our perceptual or cognitive structures. We might not already know its characteristics, indeed it may be impossible for us to ever know these characteristics in a correspondence sense, but this reality exists, it is real, and it is there potentially awaiting inspection and discovery. On the other hand, subjectivist assumptions about the ontological status of the social phenomena entail the view that what we take to be social reality is a creation, or projection, of our consciousness and cognition. What we assume to be 'out there' has no real, independent, status separate from the act of knowing. In perceiving, or knowing, the social world is created (Manicas and Secod, 1983). Maxwell (1992) posits that

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knowledge claims are dependent on the person who makes them. To avoid relativism, Manicas and Secod (1983) and Maxwell (1992) supports the adoption of realist ontology which regards reality as independent. As argued by Sandberg (2005) however, accepting a constructionist epistemology and adopting a realist ontology give rise to a major challenge. As Smith and Deemer (2000:880) argued, any elaboration of criteria must take place within their commitment to ontological realism on the one side, and on their realization that they are obligated to accept a constructivist epistemology. In other words, their truth criteria need to take into account that knowledge claims are dependent on the perspective of the person making the claims and that knowledge claims should correspond to objective reality (Sandberg, 2005:46). According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2012) for a relativist ontology, there is no simple reality that can be discovered but many perspectives on the issue. The relativist position assumes that different observers may have different viewpoints. As Collins (1983) points out, what counts for the truth are contexts and time bound. As illustrated by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2012) a realist view will assume there is a single figure which represents the difference between income and expenditure, and that the accounts posted by companies at the year-end are normally accurate. The internal realist will see a more complex position: the boundaries may be permeable with acquisitions and divestments taking place during the previous year, highly diverse activities may be woven into single threads, and decisions will be taken about how to divide ongoing activities between one year and the next. From a relativist position, it would be recognized that profit is just one indicator of corporate health and other indicators, such as sales growth, innovation rates, or stock market valuations may be equally relevant- with one view taking precedence. There are several varieties of realism. A traditional position view the world as concrete and external and that science can only progress through observations that have a direct correspondence to the phenomena being investigated. According to Bhaskar (1989:12), the transcendental realism assumes that “the ultimate objects of scientific inquiry exist and act (for the most part) quite independently of scientists and their activity. As stated by Putnam (1987), internal realism assumes that there is a single reality, but asserts that it is never possible for scientists to access that reality directly, and it is only possible to gather indirect evidence of what is going on in fundamental physical processes.

Table 1 Four Different Ontologies

Ontology	Realism	Internal Realism	Relativism	Nominalism
Truth	Single truth	Truth exists, but it is obscure	There are many truths	There is no truth
Facts	Facts exist and can be revealed	Facts are concrete, but cannot be accessed directly	Facts depend on view point of observer.	Facts are all human creations.

Source: Easterby-Smith, M, Thorpe, R and Jackson, P (2012) Management Research 4th Ed, London: Sage, P.19.

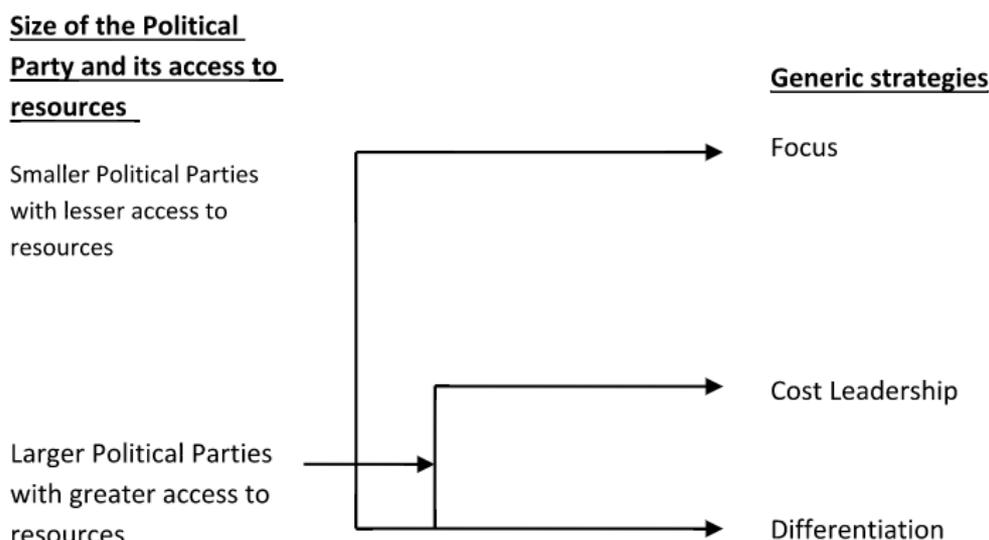
Internal realism does accept, however, that scientific laws once discovered are absolute and independent of further observations. The position of relativism goes a stage further in suggesting that scientific laws are not simply out there to be discovered, but that they are created by people (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson added, “From a relativist ontology, there is no single reality that can somehow be discovered, but many perspectives on the issue. The relativist position assumes that different observers may have different viewpoints”. The position of Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson is supported by Collins (1983:88) who asserts that “what counts for the truth can vary from place to place and from time to time”. The position of nominalism goes further by suggesting that the labels and names we attach to experiences and events are crucial. Cooper and Burrell (1988) envisage social life as paradoxical and indeterminate. Cunliffe (2011), supports this perspective when he argued that social reality is no more than the creation of people through language and discourse. According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2012), there is no truth; and the interesting questions concern how people attempts to establish different versions of truth.

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3.0 DETERMINATION OF GENERIC STRATEGIES.

Porter (1985) submits that there are two variants of focus strategy. They are cost and differentiated focus strategy. In cost focus an organization seeks a cost advantage in its target segment. Both variants of the focus strategy rest on the differences between a focuser's target segments and other segments. Cost focus exploits differences in cost behavior in some segments, while differentiation focus exploits the special needs of actors in certain segments. Such differences imply that the segment that is poorly served by broad-targeted competitors who serve them at the same time as they serve others. The focuser can thus achieve competitive advantage by dedicating itself to the segments exclusively. The benefits of optimizing the strategy for a particular target segment (focus) cannot be gained if you are simultaneously serving a broad range of segments (cost leadership or differentiation).

Figure 1: The Size of a Political Party as a Determinant of Generic Strategies



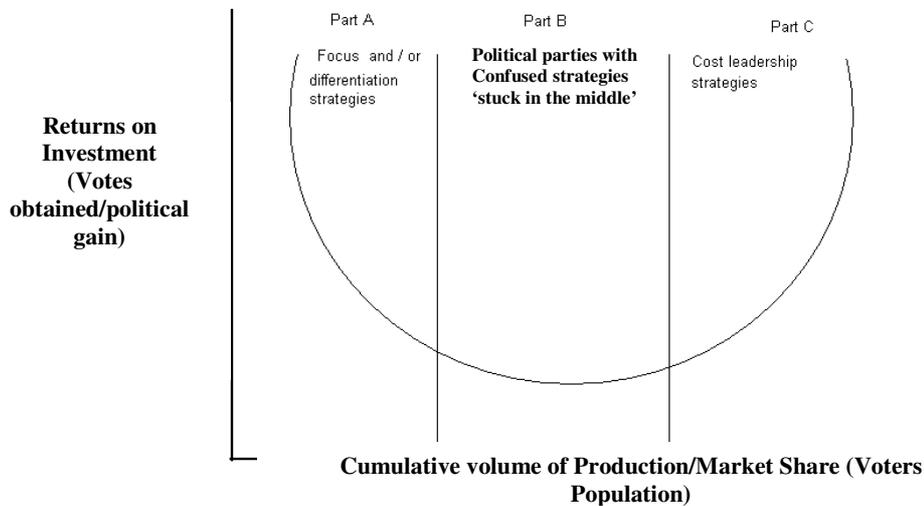
Adapted from: Wright, P(1987) "A Refinement of Porter's Strategies". *Strategic Management Journal* ,(8) 94

As shown on fig 1, the differentiation focus strategy may be adopted by the medium sized and larger organizations. The differentiation focus strategy encompass more complex dimensions than cost leadership and the cost focus strategies. With the cost leadership strategy (used by the larger organizations), the main emphasis is on attaining cumulative volume of operation. This could be attained through emphasis on low initial investment and low operating costs (Wright, 1998:97, Wright and Parsinia, 1988).

4.0 ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE AND DIFFERENTIATION FOCUS STRATEGY.

Various theoretical and empirical investigations have proposed different relationships between cumulative volume of production /market share and returns on investment (Buzzell, Gale and Sultan, 1975). Porter (1980), illustrated the U-Shaped relationship between cumulative volume of product/market share and return on investment. (See figure: 2). Flowing from the perspectives of Porter, Buzzell, Gale and Sultan, the cumulative volume of production/market share is related to voters population and the returns on investment is related to votes obtained/political gains. Within the rubrics of political contest, it must therefore be acknowledged that the success of a political party in an election is not dependent on the size/magnitude of a crowd during political rallies. The maximization of votes/political gains is highly dependent on the potency of the adopted competitive strategy. For example, a political party that is adopting a differentiation focus strategy may target only voters from a given area/state or other segments of voters populations (i.e women, the unemployed, workers, students, pensioners, self-employed, traders, drivers, motorcycle riders (Okada), domestic servants, low income group etc.)

Figure 2: Generic Strategies and Political Gain



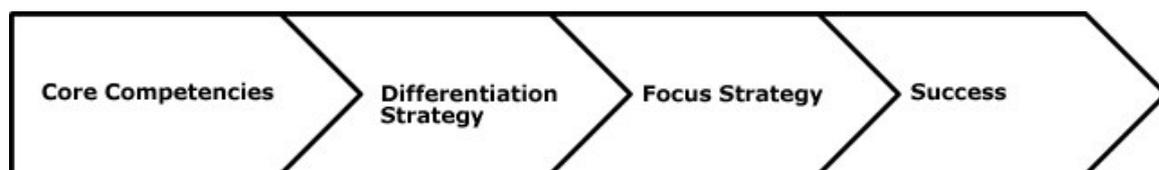
Adapted from: Wright, P (1987) "A Refinement of Porter's Strategies". *Strategic Management Journal*, (8), 98.

While political parties that compete through the cost leadership generic strategy will have higher political gains with higher share of voters (Part C of the graph in Fig. 2), political parties which compete through differentiation and focus strategies would gain smaller shares of voters population and higher political gains/votes (Part A of the graph). We should make further distinction between cost leadership on the one hand and differentiation and focus strategy on the other hand, by an elaboration of part B in the graph which refers to low –performance political parties stuck in the middle. The political party stuck in the middle is almost guaranteed low political gains. The political party in the middle must make a fundamental strategic decision. Either it must take the steps necessary to achieve cost leadership or it must orient itself to a particular target (focus) or achieve some uniqueness (differentiation)(Porter, 1980).

5.0 ELABORATION ON THE PROTOTYPE OF SUSTAINABLE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE FOR POLITICAL PARTIES

In line with the arguments of Wright (1987) and Porter (1985), the best strategy is for political parties with lower access to resources to pursue a differentiated focus strategy to enable it achieve a sustainable competitive advantage. Such parties should promote its core programmes through the exploitation of its core competencies as shown on Fig. 3 (Prahalad and Hamel, 1990).

Fig 3: Linking Core Competencies, differentiation, focus strategy with success



5.1 Core Competencies:

- ❖ Critical thinking
- ❖ Strategy
- ❖ History of our economic and political development
- ❖ Stakeholders management
- ❖ Political science

5.2 Differentiation Strategy:

- ❖ Integrated development of Nigeria
- ❖ War against corruption
- ❖ War against injustice: Everyone is crying out for peace, none is crying out for justice. The attainment of peace is highly dependent on the eradication of injustice.

5.3 Focus Strategy: The party should focus on the following segments of voters

- ❖ The unemployed
- ❖ The workers
- ❖ Students
- ❖ The Pensioners
- ❖ The Self employed
- ❖ Traders
- ❖ Drivers
- ❖ Motorcycle riders (Okada)
- ❖ Domestic servants
- ❖ Low income groups (LIGS)

A political party may utilize the outlined channels and medium in activating its differentiation focus strategy.

6.0 Channels for actualizing focus/differentiation Strategy

- ❖ Town/Village Halls
- ❖ Markets
- ❖ Motor Parks
- ❖ Mosques
- ❖ Churches
- ❖ Cinemas
- ❖ Beer Parlours/restaurants
- ❖ Television viewing centers

7.0 Medium for actualizing focus/differentiation Strategy

- ❖ Emails
- ❖ Text Messages
- ❖ Social Media
- ❖ House to House Campaign
- ❖ Opinion leaders
- ❖ Handbills (English and other local languages)
- ❖ Posters
- ❖ Radio
- ❖ Television

❖ Newspapers

8.0 Discussion

In considering the options for further growth, party leadership must point to the value of pursuing a niche strategy and concentrate on particular voters segment where the party might compete effectively. The party's strategy must therefore emphasize focus and differentiation. Being different should be important to the political party. A given political party must work hard to prove itself as more people oriented than any other party. The party must recognize the importance of working with the values of the electorates and innovate in terms of party programmes (Johnson, Scholes and Whittington, 2005, Omoijiade, 2014). The attainment of sustainable competitive/comparative advantage is no longer predicated on endowment of resources. Innovative capacity is now the fulcrum upon which sustainable competitive/comparative advantage is posited (Porter, 2001, Omoijiade, 2014)

9.0 Conclusion

There is a nexus between sustainable competitive advantage and the success of a political party. The attainment of the objective of the party should be predicated on an appropriate competitive strategy. As a result of limited resources, the pursuit of a broad strategy by smaller political parties will not yield any sustainable competitive advantage. The adoption of a differentiated focus strategy built around Nigerians within defined segments should be explored. The value adding function of any parent organization should not be taken for granted. Indeed, how the corporate headquarters of the political parties create value is central not only to the performance of a party but also to its survival. While the importance of the party at the national level is acknowledged, the corporate headquarters of the party should be able to add value to the party at the State, Local government and Ward levels through offering of services and resources that will enhance external linkages and networks. Where the parenting function of promoting external linkages/network is aligned with the adoption of a differentiated focus strategy, the objective of the corporate existence of the political party will be attained.

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