Reputation Re-Construction and Its Influence on Competitiveness of Nigerian Firms

Bolaji Olaoye, Oluwole Iyiola, Chinonye Moses

Abstract*in this paper, we attempt to analyze how organizational competitiveness of selected manufacturing firms in nigeria can be boosted through reputation re-construction. By analyzing recorded responses gathered through semi-structured, open-ended interviews, three main themes are developed using qualitative content analysis of transcribed responses given by 21 randomly selected managers of 7 manufacturing companies in nigeria. The themes point to organizational needs and reputation re-designing as vital ingredients needed for growth and stability of business to provide competitiveness. Inter-coder reliability (using cohen kappa method) of 81% between two coders ensured sufficient trustworthiness for the study. It is suggested that for manufacturing firms to effectively contribute to economic development, the organization must carefully focus on the main themes herewith developed*

Keywords: *Competition, image, manufacturing, organization*

I. INTRODUCTION

Reputation is a crucial business ingredient in today's evolving business environment. It has a significant influence on a firm's market value, so that reputation loss poses serious business risk(Eccles et al., 2007). To this end, organizations globally have increasingly accorded a prime position to reputational risk in business analyses and strategic management(Deloitte Risk Advisory, 2016). More specifically on financial performance, the global risks report as developed by World Economic Forum (2012) posited that reputation directly yields about twenty-five percent of a firm's market value and enables investors to enjoy profit for their investment decisions. The need for businesses to improve on reputation management has become more important nowadays, due to reputation challenges faced in the past by business giants like Enron and WorldCom (Gabbioneta et al., 2014). This reality and the socio-economic implication for Nigeria's industrial sector calls for serious concern, as the sector continues to struggle to be economically relevant, hence, an issue with reputation mismanagement will further affect performance negatively. It is against this backdrop that this study evaluates how reputation can be used to drive competitiveness amongst Nigerian manufacturers

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II. LITERATURE

For amanufacturing entity to operate optimally, it must possess a reputation that depicts harmonious relationships with interest groups and investors both on the inside and outside. This helps the firm gain desired trust and confidence(14). Several reputation-denting events have been witnessed in the past within the Nigerian manufacturing sector (4;23), examples include; false record declaration(37), compromise on product quality(Onuoha, 2012), employee casualization(20) and environmental pollution among others. (4) asserts that often times, these problems have led to scandals, industrial strikes, regulatory sanctions, sack of top executives and even total collapse of firms involved. Reputation literature by Nigerian scholars and researchers affirm that customers are increasingly having low reputational perceptions about the local manufacturing firms in terms of quality, pricing and customer service supports, when compared to their foreign counterparts (19;2). Similarly, scholarly studies have further identifiedthat reputational determinants are not being strategically managed by most of these firms, thus limiting their competitiveness(4;23). (7)asserts that perceived reputation of non-transparency and official non-disclosures of true accounting records continue to mar the supposed good reputation of many manufacturing entities, especially in countries like Nigeria(4), resulting in dwindling trusts from the public. This phenomenon stems from deficient strategic governance, non-disciplined leadership and unreliable performance data, all limiting Nigeria's manufacturing firms from attracting investors as well as exposing them to disincentive economic policy measures like high interest rates, multiple taxations, and duplicated regulatory measures(Cravens & Oliver, 2006). Notably, the overall negative attitude of manufacturing entities has also drawn sanctions from a number of regulatory organizations, further eroding stakeholders' confidence in the firms. In the same vein, competitiveness of many of the manufacturing firms in Nigeria has been jeopardized by failure to leverage on employees as image-projection ambassadors(10) that build desirable reputation. Rather, manufacturing companies have turned to regular staff casualization (24) lowremuneration, and other discouraging working conditions that strainemployee-management relations and result in low commitment and performance Reputation and competitiveness of many manufacturing entities in Nigeria are being impaired due to external stakeholders' perception that they are socially responsible and are being solely driven by profit maximization, detrimental to the welfare of communities where they operateand to the society at large (19). Perceptions of social irresponsibilitywhich affect customers and investors' confidence in the firms are in terms of environmental pollution, poor waste management and aloofness to social supports to the operational community (30).

According to (28), the importance of reputation as a social asset cannot be over-emphasized and can endear an organization to customers, investors, employees, regulatory agencies among others for a sustainable competitive advantage. However, reputation is such a sensitive asset and must be properly guided, since carefully built reputation may be tarnished with a little error(12). Hence, it has been observed that the manufacturing sector in Nigeria has the potential to perform better and take its rightful competitive place in the economy when firm level reputation is strategically managed (34).

As business environment changes around the world, economic growth and development are mainly driven by manufacturing sector in most countries(9). (1) explained that the case is however different for Nigeria where most of the locally consumed products are produced by foreign-based firms and subsequently imported into Nigeria for consumption at a huge cost to the national economy. This is a pointer that Nigerian manufacturing sector has a reputation of under-performance, even though it has the potential to be a huge contributor to the nation's GDP if properly managed (38). A number of existing literatures have affirmed the dismal and non-sustainable performances of manufacturing industry in Nigeria, focusing mainly on non-availability of supportive infrastructures; efficient transportation, effective communication lines, good road networks as well as access to funding sources(22). Only a few studies have so far pointed to holistic management of the reputation of the firms for desirable competitiveness.

A. Overview of Organizational Competitiveness

Prolonged instability within the business environment has made competitiveness more valuable for most organizations. (39) opined that globalization is changing the face of business worldwide, causing service delivery to come with more ease. This means that globalisation and other market dynamics have increasingly threatened organizational survival, sustainability and firms' competitiveness. Competitiveness is multi-faceted, dynamic and relative as it is influenced by context as well as time. In economics, competitiveness can be evaluated at macro and micro economic levels. At microeconomic level, competitiveness hinges its importance on the fact overall, there is a serious competition for places amongst organization in a business market and the efficiency of the firms ultimately determines competitiveness of economies. At macroeconomic level, certain conditions such as economic policies, education and productivity all influence competitiveness as a whole and firms' competitiveness in particular. Porter (1998) defines firm level competitiveness as an organization's ability to carry out the process of complete production (design, manufacture and market goods and services) which are better than what competitors offer, while also taking cognizance of the price and other qualities that are not price-based. Proponents of competitiveness at organizational level through various studies posit that thirty-six percent of profit advantage by firms could be accounted for by the firms' general attributes and activities since the environmental factors are more or less the same for organizations in economic competition .

Competitiveness refers to how much a firm yearns to succeed when compared to other firms. It is this hunger for success that a firm transfers to its products, so that the products are superior to others. Competitiveness may be referred to as an organization's ability to outshine others in all areas of the business front in order to achieve profit. In line with the views of a number of scholars, competitiveness is an organization's capability to sustain and expand market share, within its operational domains in a way that satisfiesits various stakeholders and meets its overall objectives. Similarly, (5) posited that coping with changes that may affect a firm's structure is competitiveness. Hence, it also refers to a situation in which an organization becomes outstanding within its operational domain (sector). Provision of excellent work packages for employees as well as good return on investment to stakeholders arevital attributes of competitiveness (26). This implies that it can be measured by financial performance. Generally, production and sales are functions of improved financial performance, a pointer to competitiveness. As such, improved competitiveness is a way to decipher improved financial performance, just as a poor financial performance is a pointer to being a poorly competitive organisation(31).

Generally, pointers to competitiveness are multifaceted and intertwined. (32) highlights the shortcomings of traditional theories on competitiveness and the necessity for a new theory. This observation is made more important because the firm as a single entity cannot adequately capture the contribution of its different component parts to its overall competitiveness, given the fact that majority of firms are structured along functional lines like productions, marketing, and finance among others. In other words, competitiveness is achieved through cooperative efforts of various operational functions, as such it is linked to strategy process which may be difficult to capture with traditional measures of competitiveness which focusesmainly on financial performance.

B. The Nigerian Manufacturing Sector

European multinational companies dominated Nigeria's manufacturing sector at independence. Industrialization was not encouraged at the time as the country was preferred as a producer of raw materials and sales point for foreign manufactured goods. The pronunciation of the first national development plan gave room for industrialization, aimed at reducing how much the nation relied on foreign products, hence, local manufacturing was greatly encouraged. Continuous hunger for industrialization gave rise to major developmental projects such as the Kanji dam and the Ughelli thermal plants. Table 1 shows how GDP and value added both increased tremendously between 1963 and 1967. However, the major dependence on foreign technological expertise for machineries and manpower ensured the total neglect of local expertise andprevented the realization of the consolidated objectives behind the First National Plan (9).

Economic development was slow-paced due to the civil war which ended in 1970, but the second national plan ensured that local companies were better equipped for the business market, which coincided with the period of oil boom. Today, the manufacturing sector in Nigeria has not performed up to expectations, and there is likelihood that with improved reputation, the sector that return to its position within the Nigerian economy.

III. III. METHOD

This study utilizes content analysis to understand the underlying meanings of responses given by respondent who are managers drawn from a number of manufacturing firms in Nigeria. First, a code-book is developed for the study by two coders, who make up part of the study team. Subsequently, responses to semi-structured interview questions were recorded and transcribed. By comparing recorded speech to the statement on the code-book, codes were developed and grouped on the basis of responses given by all twenty-one managers selected across seven manufacturing firms. Furthermore, certain themes were developed from the initial codes generated. Coding was done in two stages; the first phase involves coding across individual managerial level, before the inter-level coding was carried out.

Managers were randomly selected across three levels of management; junior, mid and upper levels (based on years of experience on the job). 0-5years were classified as junior managers; 6-10 as midlevel managers, while 11 or more years signifies upper level managers. A pilot survey was carried out prior to developing the interview schedule for this study. This was deemed necessary in order to include the right questions within the schedule. Interview questions within pilot survey were administered on manager of manufacturing firms different from those selected within this study. Following responses gathered from pilot survey, it was observed managers responded in line with the ideas of Fombrun et al. (2000) as well as Fombrun and Van Riel (2004). Hence, figure 1 points to certain relevant constructs used to develop the final interview schedule used for this study. The schedule contains fifteen (15) questions. Furthermore, interview was subjected to wide range of expert judgment on several research fronts using the online based research gate and google scholar platforms respectively. Table 1 shows the questions developed for the study

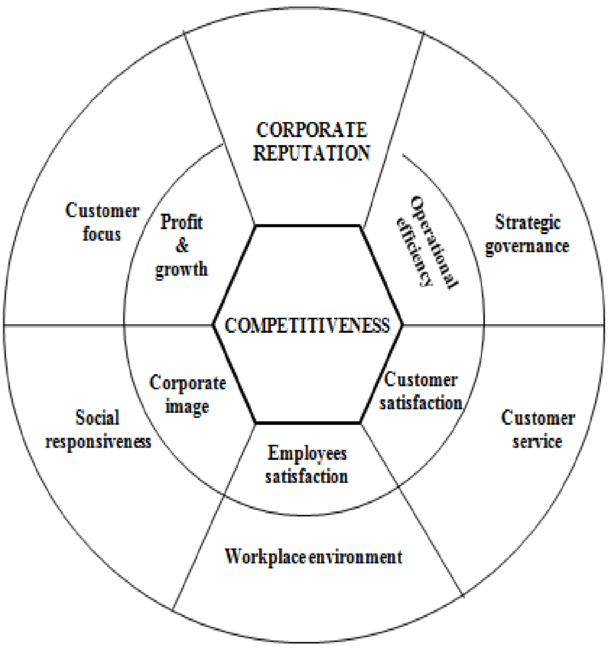

Figure 1: Constructs for development of interview schedule (After; Fombrun et al., 2000; Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004)

Table 1: Interview questions

S/N	Question
1.	Explain how you rate your organization's current reputation?
2.	Would you say the current reputation is good enough to place it above competitors? Please explain
3.	Do you think your company needs reputation re-construction? If yes, why?
4.	What crucial areas would you identify as important to your firm's reputation reconstruction?
5.	How relevant is your organization's leadership to boosting its reputation?
6.	How would you rate the quality of your firm's products in boosting reputation?
7.	Operational efficiency is a function of leadership and quality, can this help rebuild your organization's reputation? If yes, how?
8.	In what ways can CSR help rebuild reputation?
9.	Corporate image is greatly related to reputation, is your firm's image good enough to make it a market giant?
10.	Focusing on customer needs is said to yield profit, can this also promote a firm's reputation? If yes, how?
11.	Can your organization's current workplace environment boost its reputation? If yes, how?, If no, why not?
12.	Can current customer service level boost reputation? If yes, how?
13.	How can employee satisfaction be used as to drive firm's reputation and competitiveness?
14.	Comment briefly on the customer satisfaction activities of your organization with respect to perceived influence on reputation
15.	Would you say your firm's customer care activities can help re-construct its reputation? If yes, how?

Quantitative content analysis method adopted for this study is an old data analytical tool, it is a research technique for the systematic, objective, and direct description of the contents that show up in communication as described by (6). It also refers to a method that focuses on the exact content and concealed characteristics of media. According to (21), qualitative content analysis is a research method that depends on items of written content and personal influences through coding and recognition of styles (21). As a qualitative research method,content analysis points to a direct means of describing an event by means of the context in which data about the event is supplied (36). A major merit of the method is that data can be reduced to basic ideas that reveals underlying phenomenon(8; 21; 13).

Content analysis finds application in a wide range of fields; sociology, psychology, medical research and management among others (3), as it is recognized as an easy-to-use method for analyzing text data (8). (21) explained that it is a technique that tries tomake sense of text data by verifying how often a word or group of words is/are used. Similarly, (27) explained that content analysis utilizes a number of pre-defined rules (codes) to understand whatrecorded information truly signifies.

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Prasad (35) explains that the goal of content analysis is to expose the real meaning of every word that appears in a recoded text. (36) noted that the process of coding makes up part of the first steps of data grouping, aimed at derivation of underlying meanings. This highlights the main messages, characteristics or findings.

III.A Trustworthiness

By using qualitative content analysis, trustworthiness can be checked(i.e., a comparison between the ratings done by both coders) and inter-coder reliability measured. It should be noted that qualitative trustworthiness and inter-coder reliability are similar to validity and reliability in quantitative research(29). Qualitative researchersbelieve that merely calculating p-values does not make a hypothesis valid. For the purpose of this study, "S" is a sufficientresponse by a respondent, coded as 1, while "I" is an insufficient response, coded as 0.

Table 2: Comparing codes

Question	First coder	Second coder
1	1	1
2	1	1
3	0	0
4	1	1
5	0	0
6	1	0
7	1	1
8	1	1
9	1	1
10	1	1
11	0	0
12	1	1
13	1	1
14	1	1
15	1	1

Table 3: Calculating inter-coder reliability

		First coder			
		0	1		
Second coder	0	3	1	4	27%
	1	0	11	11	73%
		3	12	15	
		20%	80%		

Cohen's Kappa mainly accounts for probability of agreement (based on chance) between the coders.
By using Cohen's Kappa method, reliability between the coders is given as;

$$\kappa = \frac{Pr_a - Pr_e}{1 - Pr_e}$$

$\kappa = Inter - coderreliability$
$Pr_a = \; Observed\ coding\ relationship$
$Pr_e = Coding\ relationship\ due\ to\ chance$

$Pr_a =$

[illegible]

$$= \frac{3 + 11}{15} = \; 0.93$$

$$Pr_e = (\%\,insufficientresonsesforfirstcoder \times \%\,insufficientresonsesforsecondcoder) + (\%\,sufficientresonsesforfirstcoder \times \%\,sufficientresonsesforsecondcoder) = (0.20 \; \times 0.27) + (0.80 \times 0.73) = (0.054 + 0.584) = 0.638$$

$$\kappa = \frac{0.93 - \; 0.638}{1 - 0.638} = \frac{0.292}{0.362} = 0.81$$

0.81 is an excellent agreement between the two coders(Lavrakas, 2008). Sensitivity and specificityare two other relevant terms that can be calculated from trustworthiness. Sensitivity is the level of similarity between thecodes of both coders i.e.,sufficient codes that are found to be infact sufficient, while specificity refers to the level of insufficient codes found to be trulyinsufficient.
For sensitivity;

$$\frac{Codingrelationshipforsufficientcode}{Totaloutcomeonsufficientcode} \times 100\% = \frac{11}{12} \times 100 = 0.92$$

For specificity;

$$\frac{Codingrelationshipforinsufficientcode}{Totaloutcomeoninsufficientcode} \times 100\% = \frac{3}{3} \times 100 = 100\%$$

IV. IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 4 shows content analysis has been used to develop codes into themes that project the meaning of classified and hidden text in the responses given in the context of reputation re-construction and competitiveness of selected manufacturing entities in Nigeria. It is believed that an understanding of the subject shows up within the generated themes for this study. This implies that themes are the results of the study, since codes are classified into themes based on the treatment that justifies and reflects the mind of the managers. This is done without coding bias.

Table 4: Coded transcript for reputation reconstruction among Nigerian manufacturers

S/N	Low level	Mid level	Upper level	Code
1.	Firm's is badlyreputed	Firm lacks good reputation	Reputation is below expectations	Bad reputation
2.	Reputation cannot drive competitiveness	Current reputation cannot aid competition	Reputation presently cannot influence competition	Bad reputation
3.	change public perception	Increase profit margin	To influence economy	Re-construction needed

4.	Firms' image is crucial	Product & services	Customer care	Re-construction pointers
5.	Leaders are very important to achieving reputation re-construction	Leaders control firms' internal and external processes	They are key internal reputation drivers	Re-construction tools
6.	Product packaging is okay, but can be improved	Products cannot really compete in the market	An improvement on the products would be better	Re-construction needed
7.	Operations are not well organized to drive reputation	Efficiency is below par and may hardly influence good reputation	Reputation will demand better operational efficiency	Re-construction needed
8.	Community development initiatives	Partnering with government on public projects	Imbedding community projects in firms' core values	Reputation pointers
9.	Image building is at infant stage	Firms have experiences image dents in the past	Image is yet to attain a level it can boost reputation	Re-construction needed
10.	Customer focus is crucial to reputation re-construction	Customers are the judge of good or bad reputation	The needs of customer must be prioritized to boost reputation	Re-construction pointers
11.	Employee development	Productivity trainings and seminars	Division of labor	Re-construction pointers
12.	Effective feedback network	Price reduction	Customer-centered promotions	Re-construction pointers
13.	Better work-life balance	Improved wages/salaries	Improved employee involvement in decision making	Re-construction pointers
14.	Working on customers feedbacks	Adjusting products and services to meet customer expectations	Studying and understanding customers	Re-construction pointers
15.	Gaining customer trust	Meeting customer expectations	Taking customer-centered decisions	Re-construction pointers

From the codes generated from responses given by the respondents, two main themes were developed by considering the codes along the lines the hidden meanings of spoken words as shown in figure 2. *Organizational needs* and *reputation re-designing* are the two themes developed within the study. The current bad reputation of the manufacturing forms in Nigeria is what brings the need for a re-construction of reputation so that local manufacturing entities can be better prepared to be ready to compete. Furthermore, organizational leaders are the tools that will be used to drive this re-construction as they have to understand current reputation situations and be ready to truly move on to better improve on it. Reputation re-construction pointers in the context of this study refer to the major activities that the organizations must focus on in order to build new reputation. The pointers include; employee and customer satisfaction, product quality as well as operational efficiency among others.

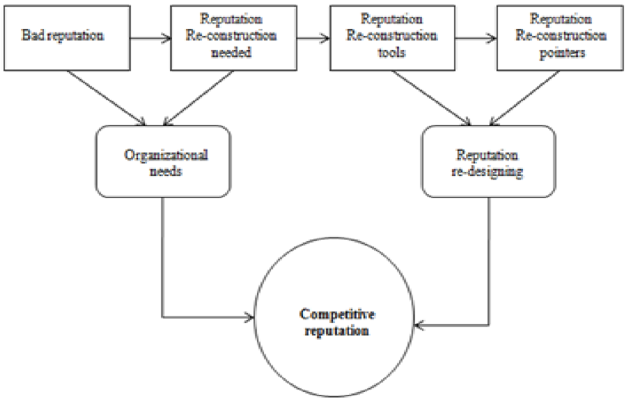

Figure 2: Final themes for reputation and competitiveness of some manufacturing in Nigeria

By using content analysis to generate codes and themes, it was observed organizations must at every point in time look inwards to identify where they are lacking critical skills and competencies and must be to embed such within organizational core values for it to really impact on reputation. These needs are the crucial action plans needed to build better reputation. Companies who have reputation boosting plans in place often operate at very high levels and competition-ready at all times. In carrying out social responsibilities, manufacturing firms move closer to their customers and buildrelationship and trust. This makes corporate social responsibility an important pointer to reputation re-construction. Furthermore, satisfying the customer through effective engagement of employees tends to result in achievement of organizational goals.

V. CONCLUSION

Issues with reputation frequently show up within the Nigerian manufacturing sector, these issues mostly dent the reputation of the firms.

As such, re-constructing reputation must become the priority of organization leadership in these firms. Reputation is important to boost performance and help the firms to compete favorably with their foreign counterparts. Furthermore, reputation will also drive organizational revenue and will ultimately reposition the manufacturing sector to a position where it can positively influence the economy. Content analysis within this study shows that socially manufacturing firms in Nigeria currently need to perform better as far as the reputation is concerned. When firms add corporate social responsibilities, customer focus, employee satisfaction, operational efficiency, e.t.c, to their core values, it ultimately influences how society views them, thus serving as reputation enhancers. Once organisational reputation is re-built, it ultimately drives competitive advantage. Some organisations do not believe on the influence reputation can have, so they prefer to invest so much in advertisement and other alternatives to drive reputation. This study observed that reputation re-construction cannot come via continuous product advertisement, rather, improving product qualitywill better reposition the firm for business competition.

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