Assessing the role of positioning strategy on market performance of soft drink manufacturing enterprises (SDMEs) in Rwanda

By
Nimusima Pereez[1], Karuhanga Nathan[2], Mukarutesi Dative[3], Gasana Charles[4], Kampire Charity[5] and Turyamushanga Labson[6]
[1] Corresponding author:
[1, 2,3,4,5] University of Rwanda College of Business and Economics
Email: pereeznimusima@gmail.com
[6] Department of Business Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Kabale University, Uganda.

Abstract

The study empirically attempts to answer two questions: Does positioning strategy influence market performance? Do resources of a firm have a directional influence on positioning strategy-performance relationship? The sample includes 149 marketing/sales and corporate staff of Urwibutso Enterprises Ltd and Inyange Industries Ltd which are soft drink manufacturing enterprises in Rwanda. A structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data. A multiple and simple regression model was employed to estimate the nature of the relationship between dependent and independent variables. Market share, sales and profitability were applied as comprehensive measures for market performance, and Aaker and Shansby's model was applied as a measure for positioning strategy. Results confirm that a firm's assets and capabilities have a strong and significant association with a firm's positioning decisions and targets. This means that, managers can use resources and capabilities to strengthen an enterprise' positioning strategy decision making function.The study further observes that the 57.5% of variations in performance in these enterprises are largely explained by product quality, Price and cultural symbols (Table 9). Impliedly, if an enterprise emphasises a limited number of positioning dimensions, performance results in terms of Market share, sales and profitability get better.

Key words: *Rwanda, positioning strategy, market performance, RBV, soft drink manufacturing*

JEL Classification Codes: D13; D63; H53; I131; I138; J13;

Introduction

Conceptually companies exist through, with and by product sales that they make. But sales figures or numbers realized are a function of many marketing factors including positioning. Though sales performance per se as a construct falls outside this study scope, the contextual sales trend variations on one hand and adoption of exit strategies by some soft drink manufacturing enterprises in Rwanda are among the problem foundations for this study. For example Bralirwa, a long standing hard and soft drink manufacturing enterprise has, exhibited sales performance trend variations over years with 0.6% sales decline in 2013; 1.4% decrease in total sales volume in 2016 and a 12.4% reduction in total sales volume in 2017 (Bralirwa Annual Reports 2013, 2016 &2017). Yet, on the other side of contextual observation, some products have not lived to see their first anniversary in Rwanda like Marakujya Juice in 2010, Ingenzi Pineaple Juice in 2016 etc. They closed doors and exited the market in their few months of launching their products on the local market in Rwanda. Amazi ya Huye also a highly recognised and visible brand with high demand in 2002 through 2010, is almost a fading name on the market. *As researchers we got so much preoccupied with whys of such mix of market phenomena and the choice of study constructs hinges on this reality.* Admittedly, the current stance of manufacturing enterprises' performance in Rwanda like other countries in the region manifests some critical challenges including low production capacity due to inadequate financial resources, unreliable supply, lack of market information and high transport costs (Sophia, 2013). Considering the entrepreneurial significance of these manufacturing enterprises to the economy in general: i.e representing 69% of all formal business establishments in the industry sector in Rwanda, contributing 6% to the national GDP (NISR, 2018) and providing 14.3% of the formal private sector employment (IBES, 2014), exploring into understanding theoretical and empirical strategies that they can employ to improve their performance is a worthy project.

The search into what explains market performance of enterprises remains unclear in extant literature. Resource-Based Theory (RBT) confirms that firm's resources and capabilities determine its competitive advantage and the firms that enjoy superior capabilities relative to their competitors have significant advantage over them. The theory advocates using the company's internal resources, competencies and capabilities as essential determinants of strategy formulation. This paradigm argues that differences in the firm's performance can be traced back to heterogeneous assets and capabilities owned by the company. It assumes that each firm has unique resources and capabilities (Wernerfelt, 1984) and the growth of the firm is subject to the efficient use of resources and deployment of capabilities. However, according to Porter, (1991), resources are not valuable in and of themselves but because they allow firms to perform activities that create advantages in particular markets; even the competitive value of resources can be enhanced or eliminated by changes in technology, competitor behaviour or buyers' needs which the theory over looks. Moreover, the volatile nature of business environment today, arguably, requires firms not to leverage their competitive position solely on the basis of their assets and capabilities only as advocated by RBV. The theory does not specify which type of resources and capabilities that lead a firm to attain market success. While the researchers are engraved into these RBV issues, they strongly believe that resources have ability to create market power for an organisation which is an inside-out perspective that Grant, (1991) tend to emphasise. Grant explains that incumbent firms' possession of specific resources help build entry barriers based upon scale economics, patents, experience advantage, brand reputation. He also asserts that even other structural sources of market power that is financial and other resources base on firm's resources. Birger, (1984) opts to use the word 'resource position barrier' in trying to explain same phenomena. He uses resource position barrier, to indicate a potential for high returns, since one competitor will have an advantage just like entry barriers in the traditional market context. He maintain however that the firm's ability to exploit this resource position barrier is what is most important i.e its ability to create a situation where its own resource position directly or indirectly makes it more difficult for others to catch up. While Resource-based and market-based theories tend to be contradictory in some respects (the former emphasising the need to base strategy on external, market considerations and the latter on internal organisational resources and capabilities, Hooley et al.,(1998) posit that, positioning decisions seek to find a match between market requirements and company abilities in seeking a competitive position for the business company. They emphasise that positioning strategies need not to choose between these two approaches. They maintain that by placing same value to market demands and capability profiles when selecting markets to enter and implementing positioning strategies, firms can enduringly match between their offerings and their markets. On the basis of these arguments the study poses the question: Do resources of a firm have a directional influence on positioning strategy-performance relationship?

Positioning scholars have tried to link a firm's long term successfulness with its positioning strategy. Brooksbank, (1994) specifically, emphasise that market taste and preferences must tally with a firm's offering. Fisher, (1991) and Hooley et al., (1998) report strong relationship between positioning strategy and firm performance, while Hooley et al., (2001) and Blankson, et al., (2008) associate a firm's chosen positioning strategy with creation of competitive advantage. These scholars observe and argue that there has been an ardent change in marketing world over. They observe that as features of market offerings become less distinctive, intangible factors gain importance (i.e the management of reputation and manipulation of consumer perceptions and the positioning of the firm and what it offers in the market place become important). Additionally, in markets where the rivalry intensify day-in-day-out and more pronounced competition and buyers have a greater choice, to be successful, a product must occupy an explicit, distinct and proper place in the minds of potential and existing consumers, relative to other rival products on the market. In their book titled "positioning: the battle for your mind", Ries and Trout, (2001) argue that in an 'over-communicated society', in which volume of commercial messages far exceed the individual's mental processing capacity, marketers must focus on how to get into the minds of consumers. Doing so requires making challenging decisions about how a brand might stand out from its competitors and how it might be perceived as superior on a consumer choice dimension. Positioning for that matter becomes a tool to achieve the aforementioned results. A product will not only be purchased, but can warrant a larger margin through increased added value. On the account of these reflections the study seeks to answer the question: Does positioning strategy influence market performance of a firm?

There seem to be differing views on the positioning concept application: product positioning seems to dominate in business marketing (specific product positioning) literature with little emphasis on company positioning, yet there is a general belief that the concept is equally relevant to companies and their activities (Hayes et al., 1996). It is believed that the operationalisation of positioning concerns the modification of tangible characteristics and intangible perceptions of a market offering in relation to the competition. For Solomon, (2007) all the marketing activities which potentially change or improve perceptions about a brand form the positioning of a brand. While pioneers of positioning concept (Ries and Trout, 1981) allege that positioning is a mere communication issue that involve manipulating consumer perceptions about a certain good or service (i.e., focusing on consumer attitudes and preferences), for some scholars, positioning relates to all marketing activities that potentially create or change associations in the mindset of the consumer (Solomon et al., 2006). They refer to positioning as an activity that takes place in the mindset of consumers. Contenders of this view see positioning as a consumer concept rather than a management concept. A relatively similar view is that one shared by Day, (1981) who argues that 'product positioning refers to the customer's perception of the place that a product or brand occupies in a given market'.

Understanding whether and how positioning strategy has affected market performance of enterprises is an important research issue which has unceasingly prompted many empirical studies. For example, Blankson et al., (2011), in their exploratory qualitative case-based study examined the effects of positioning strategies on service retail firms' performance in Dallas–Fort Worth Metroplex, one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the U.S, where 'Branding', 'service', 'value for money' and, to a lesser extent, 'reliability' and 'attractiveness' as positioning strategies were found to have a significant and positive impact on desired profit levels, return on investment (ROI), market share and consumer perception; although emphasis placed on each strategy varies from firm to firm. Their study shows that the pursuit of multiple positioning strategies relates to multiple performance indicators presupposing that pursuing more strategies is better in terms of yielding performance outcomes than the other way round. In a cross-sectional survey of 500 CEOs of supplier companies operating at all levels of the UK timber trade, in terms of specific positioning strategies, Kalafatis et al., (2000) indicate that the domineering and most differentiating strategies relate to hard-choice criteria, *e.g product performance, pricing* etc and/or relationship building factors, e.g *easy to do business with, personal contacts* etc. Though they focused on positioning of suppliers, rather than of product in their study, it shows the dynamic nature of positioning strategy, since no strategy was found to be dominant among the nine companies sampled: *easy to do business with* was found to be associated with three companies while *personal contact, product performance, pricing and a range of offering* were associated with two companies. Their results lead to a conclusion that strategic market considerations (*e.g product performance)* rather than the image building factors (*e.g attractiveness)* are determinants of perceived positioning strategies. They remind us that positioning is a matter of corporate strategy and not sales tactics; it's a crucial strategic choice that is not simply a question of marketing communication but encompasses the entire behaviour of the firm. Earlier alone, Bennion et al., (1994) and Bingham et al. (1995) in their positioning conceptualisation unveil similar positioning dimensions e.g *price and product quality*. In another study conducted by Blankson, et al., (2008), among 1000 executives and owner-managers of services industries in the United States, they found out that positioning strategies (i.e *top of the range, service, value for money, reliability, and the brand name* significantly and positively influence firm performance in terms of sales, profits, ROI, market share, company image, and consumer perceptions. Their study confirms that there is a positive relationship between company performance and its adopted positioning activities. Some, if not, all of these positioning alternatives/types reviewed in literature, ideally represent abstract attributes (often seen as bundle of concrete attributes) which form part of the consumer's purchase evaluation criteria and are frequently comparable across product categories; they are not tangible i.e performance, quality, style, sporty, fast acceleration etc depending on the core product features. Sacco, (1986) advises that companies should not put their strategic focus on a number of claims when positioning a brand because using too many dimensions may lead to disbelief (Kotler, 2003), confusion (Ghose, 1994), or lowered memory (Meyers-Levy 1989), often described as the enemies of positioning (Evans, Luiz, and Raaij 1996), because consumers do not have a clear picture of the brand in their minds. Trout and Rivkin, (1996) even say that human brain has only a limited capacity to remember multiple brand associations. So it's apparent from this discussion that positioning has no rule, save, for every business playing its games and resisting temptations to be all things to all people (Czepiel, 1992). Empirical literature provide evidence to the claim that consumers perceive brands that are positioned on limited dimension or attribute as superior on that specific dimension i.e perform better on that attribute relative to a multiple positioning option, even when the dimension is exactly the same for both options (Chernev, 2007).

The demanding conditions in which firm operate have been challenging and how organisations are responding to changing environment in terms of their strategic positioning is a critical directional question of success or failure. Prahalad et al., (1990) argue that the functional key role of strategic positioning is to identify the organisation's place in its operating environment which essentially depends on its mission and distinctive/core competences. Positioning has often been pointed out as a significant driver of firm performance and some scholars argue that positioning activities that are needs-based and resource-based guarantee long term financial and competitive rewards (Porter, 1996). Brooksbank, (1994) and Porter, (1996), provide evidence of a close association between a company performance in terms of profitability and its well articulated positioning strategy activities. Cravens (1975), perceive positioning as a means of selecting an appropriate marketing strategy geared by the zeal to strengthen the organization's position in competitive markets. Other scholars like Brown et al., (1976), link performance with positioning since its processes lead to competitor analysis and target customer needs identification which have market share and sales implications. Hofer et al., (1978), find a great relationship between positioning strategy and competitive advantage. The same view is shared by Hooley et al., (1998) who argue that positioning strategy is one of the sources of competitive advantage over rivals in commercial organizations.

While there are, in reality, a never-ending number of ways in which firms might position themselves in their markets, Hooley et al.,(1998), highlight six differentiation-based positioning strategies of: price, quality, service, grade, tailored offering, differentiated benefits and innovation. These positioning alternatives/options seemingly tend to fall in the side of the claim of viewing positioning as part of setting sales objectives, demand forecasting and response modelling and or, as part of the general claim that positioning is effected predominantly through the activities of the sales force (Dovel, 1990). The six-step conceptual approach by Bingham et al., (1995) on price, technology, product quality, distribution, image and service as positioning alternatives or strategies have also been criticized for lack of empirical support though, partly fitting well with findings by Bennion et al., (1994) whose research identified four basic positioning dimensions/ factors: service, product, support and price. It is held that the choice and application of a certain positioning strategy is not a fixed process and that there is no single positioning strategy that works for all firms (Gulati et al., 2000). The preceding discussion is an expression of appreciation of the relevance of positioning construct. Webster, (1992) observes that though the construct has been developed in consumer marketing, it has a clear application for industrial products and services. He equates it with overall firm's value position, which he defines as *"…..firm's unique way of delivering value to customers"*. Despite the fact that, academics (Kotler 1997; Hooley et al., 2001) and equally practitioners (Ries and Trout, 1986) have considered positioning as one of the key elements of modern marketing management, there is a dearth of generally acceptable positioning strategy typology that has empirically stood a taste of time such that marketers in the multinational market place can employ (Alden et al., 1999). This shows conceptualization challenges that still exist in development of positioning strategy typologies. Future studies can fill this gap. The existing ones are accused of being too conceptual and descriptive (Buskirk 1975; Aaker et al., 1982), based on limited empirical evidence (Easingwood et al., 1989), and reflect organisational practices and managerial views (Kalafatis et al. 2000) as compared to customer perceptions; that many empirically derived positioning typologies have validity questions in terms of operationalisation……. they may have been accepted without questioning their empirical basis hence many are difficult to operationalise (Kalafatis et al.,(2000). Moreover, it seems quite difficult to develop a positioning strategy typology that captures the consumers' vocabulary regarding descriptions of their perceptions in terms of issues important to them when evaluating or considering purchase or recommending the products or services to their acquaintances!

While extant literature is convinced of the positive effect of positioning strategy on firm performance, the importance of continued empirical examination of this relationship cannot be compromised as has, for long, been called for by several scholars including (Hooley et al., 2001; Porter, 1996); Blankson et al., (2008). They observe that there are meagre research streams documenting this relationship calling for further research. This study attempts to respond to this call. Since also these scholars maintain that positioning strategies are context-specific, this study empirically tests positioning strategy in the context of Rwanda soft drink manufacturing industry.

Methods

The study adopts a descriptive cross sectional design applying quantitative techniques of data collection and analysis. Data was collected from marketing/sales and corporate staff purposively selected from Urwibutso Enterprises Ltd and Inyange Industries Ltd in Rwanda. These enterprises were selected for their background and famous brand in soft drink manufacturing industry. The questionnaire was the method used to collect primary data. Perception test statements and close ended questions were developed basing on the most important theoretical areas reviewed in literature about the key study variables according to authors Aaker, and Shansby (1982); Barney, (1991); Blankson, et al., (2008); Brooksbank, (1994); Delen, (2013); Glick, et al., (2005); James et al., (1993); Porter (1991, 1996); Ries and Jack Trout (1981) etc. Overall, the initial list of perception test statements (descriptors) were 113 which were reduced to 105 after pre-testing (piloted on 10 people) and questionnaire validation by academic and industry experts. These processes were undertaken to ensure that any ambiguity with the statements was, clarified prior to the first stage of data collection. For each statement, respondents were requested to indicate the extent/degree to which the descriptor (s) /statement (s) was relevant to their business positioning strategy practices, resources/capabilities and performance outcomes.

A 5-point likert scale was used to measure descriptors where 5 stood for strongly agree, and 1 stood for strongly disagree. 113 responses were obtained, giving 76% a satisfactory response rate since the respondents strictly were marketing/sales and corporate staff members who understood study variables by theory and practice. Non-response bias was investigated through comparison of early and late responses and through informal follow-up discussions with sales personnel. Reasons given for non-response included (a) out of office (b) still new in the department so could not feel confident to fill the questionnaire (c) misplaced questionnaire i.e given to wrong people in other irrelevant departments. As researchers we are satisfied as to the integrity of the obtained data.

The regression model used for estimating the level of relationships was derived using market share, sales, profitability and market niche as market performance proxies (dependent variable) and positioning strategy (independent variables) proxies by: Product characteristics strategy, Product use or application strategy, Cultural symbols strategy, Competitor strategy, Pricing strategy, Quality strategy, Customisation strategy and Product class strategy. The reason for the adoption of this positioning strategy typology by Aaker and Shansby (1982), is that each dimension has some bearing in the day-to-day practices and relates to consumers' perceptions of products as a basis for manipulating competition (they suggested that competition is a reference point for positioning). They largely fall under controllable managerial decision variables that are manipulated by a firm against its competitor to its favour. The adopted typology could be used to assess positioning activities through employment of strategies (i.e factors) in the firm's communications' strategies or refinement of the tangible characteristics of the offering with the aim of creating a mental image for consumers through implied benefits of the offering (Kotler, 1997). The management of an enterprise can use it to either change attitude (i.e efforts made to alter consumer beliefs or to literally change the market through advertising actions); change brand-product (involving decisions to realistically or symbolically modify the offering or change competition (i.e engage in actions to change the image quality of competing offerings from the ideal point of reference). Managers could employ all or any of the typology's items taking into account the needs, wants and aspirations of the target markets. Indeed, all these are a reflection of what positioning means to different people…. Aaker and Shansby (1982) relate positioning to segmentation decision, yet, for others positioning is an image question Camilleri, (2017), that largely reflect on which product features to emphasise. Though they maintain that positioning decision is often made ad hoc and based upon flashes of insights, there are systematic and research-based approaches to the positioning decision and this typology serves that rationale. Above all, it has been adopted and validated by others.

The multiple and simple model employed to estimate the impact of positioning strategy on market performance of soft drink manufacturing enterprises in Rwanda is thus, expressed in this study as:

$Y=a+bx$……………………………………..Regression Equation

Where:

Y=Dependent variable (Market performance)

a=Constant

b=Coefficient

x= Independent variable (positioning strategies)

$$MS = a + \beta_1 PCS+\beta_2 PUS+ \beta_3 CSS+ \beta_4 CS+ \beta_5 PS+ \beta_6 QS+ \beta_7 CS+ \beta_8 PCS+ \mu \quad \text{…………Equation 1}$$

$$SZ = a + \beta_1 PCS+\beta_2 PUS+ \beta_3 CSS+ \beta_4 CS+ \beta_5 PS+ \beta_6 QS+ \beta_7 CS+ \beta_8 PCS+ \mu \quad \text{…………Equation 2}$$

$$PF = a + \beta_1 PCS+\beta_2 PUS+ \beta_3 CSS+ \beta_4 CS+ \beta_5 PS+ \beta_6 QS+ \beta_7 CS+ \beta_8 PCS+ \mu \quad \text{…………Equation 3}$$

$$MN = a + \beta_1 PCS+\beta_2 PUS+ \beta_3 CSS+ \beta_4 CS+ \beta_5 PS+ \beta_6 QS+ \beta_7 CS+ \beta_8 PCS+ \mu \quad \text{…………Equation 4}$$

Where:

Performance is measured by:

Market share (MS)=Sales (SZ)=Profitability (PF)=Market niche (MN)

β =Independent variable

a =Intercept

μ =Error terms

Positioning strategies will be measured by:

Product characteristics strategy (PCS) = Product use or application strategy (PUS) = Cultural symbols strategy (CSS)=Competitor strategy (CS) =Pricing strategy (PS)=Quality strategy (QS)=Customisation strategy (CS)= Product class strategy (PCS).

Consequently, we put forward the following question: Does positioning strategy influence market performance? Do resources of a firm have a directional influence on positioning strategy-performance relationship?

Results and discussion

This study is an attempt to answer two questions: Does positioning strategy influence market performance? Do resources of a firm have a directional influence on positioning strategy-performance relationship?

Data was collected from two soft drink manufacturing enterprises in Rwanda i.e Urwibutso Enterprises Ltd and Inyange Industries Ltd. Urwibutso Enterprises Ltd produces different soft drink products such as Akandi, Akarusho, Akarabo, Urwibutso, Agashya whereas Inyange Industries Ltd produces milk and milk products, juices with five different flavours, and mineral water. Both enterprises have above 250 employees, have existed beyond 15 years and find market for their products in Rwanda, East African community and Europe. Marketing, sales and corporate staff were purposively selected to increase the quality and dependability of responses.

The study reveals that managers at Urwibutso Enterprises Ltd and Inyange Industries Ltd had several and varying descriptions of their perceptions on positioning strategies and resources owned. They also gave impressions of their actions and the impact of these actions on their enterprise market performance.

The descriptives in the tables below (i.e table1,2, 5,6,7&8) were generated using a 5- point likert scale which was ordered such that 1 represents Strongly Disagree and 5 Strongly Agree with the issue. A mean close to 1 or 2 reflects disagreement with the Issue at hand, while a mean close to 4 or 5 show\s agreement with the same issue. On the other hand, a mean close to 3 reflects some uncertainty with the issue at hand. The column **N** shows how many of the respondents actually replied that question.

Table .1 Resources Measurement

Resources	**N**	**Min**	**Max**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
We have enough cash and capital resources	113	2.00	5.00	2.11	0.65
The managerial experience of our executives is high	113	2.00	5.00	4.19	0.84
We have an access to low cost factors of production	113	2.00	5.00	2.15	0.61
We are confident about our technical resource (patents, exclusive technologies…….)	113	1.00	5.00	4.24	0.90
Our enterprise is listed on stock exchange market	113	2.00	5.00	2.15	0.66
We have a comprehensive and efficient organizational system, structure and planning.	113	1.00	5.00	4.20	0.51
We have sufficient expertise in product/service development	113	1.00	5.00	4.32	0.54
We have sufficient expertise in customer service	113	1.00	5.00	4.25	0.41
We have sufficient expertise in management	113	1.00	5.00	4.35	0.57
We have access to low cost distribution channels	113	1.00	5.00	2.15	0.54
Our enterprise culture is supportive	113	1.00	5.00	4.32	0.61
Our reputation is good	113	2.00	5.00	4.32	0.59
All our tangible and intangible resources contribute equally to our competitive position	113	1.00	5.00	4.22	0.64
Some of our resources are more contributing to our competitive position than others	113	1.00	5.00	4.17	0.53
We have the ability to implement our strategies	113	1.00	5.00	2.11	0.44

Results in the table 1 above show that on average, Urwibutso Enterprises Ltd and Inyange Industries Ltd have no sufficient cash and capital resources (Mean = 2.11) to implement all their strategic plans and targets, their staff have high level of managerial experience (Mean = 4.19) but constrained by high cost of production on water, electricity, imported packaging materials (Mean = 2.15). Growing many plants such as: fruits, flowers, vegetables and banana were found to constitute an advantage for Urwibutso Enterprises Ltd in terms of somehow reducing production costs, just like strong partnership with farmers was found to advantage Inyange Industries Ltd in terms of getting relatively cheap raw materials..... Furthermore, these enterprises were confident about their technical resources (patents, exclusive technologies) (Mean = 4.24).They are proud of their comprehensive and efficient organizational system, structure and planning systems (Mean =4.20); expertise in product/service development, customer service and management, supportive culture, and reputation (Mean =4.32) despite the fact distribution costs are high and that they are not listed on stock exchange market (Mean =2.15). It was evident that they could not implement all their strategies because of insufficient resources (Mean = 2.12).

Table.2 Capabilities Measurement

Capabilities	**N**	**Min**	**Max**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
We respond to customers' needs swiftly	113	2.00	5.00	3.00	0.44
We have an appropriate managerial system with improvement capability adaptive to resource and environment changes	113	2.00	5.00	3.10	0.54
We deeply understand the technological trend and catch the changes	113	2.00	5.00	3.02	0.61
Flexibility to adapt to new industry and market trends is our secret	113	1.00	5.00	3.84	0.50
We have the necessary proactive capabilities to deal with change	113	2.00	5.00	2.55	0.46
Our resources are valuable, rare and hard to imitate by competitors	113	1.00	5.00	2.72	0.41

The respondents showed mixed reactions and a relatively low level of confidence on responding to customers' needs, environmental changes and catching up with changes (Mean = 3.00, 3.10 and 3.02). An underground probe (informal talking with sales staff) unveiled that some environmental changes overpower them especially to do with tax regulations and behaviour of customers that keeps changing. Even competition seemed to be stiff where some of their capabilities are imitated by others in the industry (Mean =2.72). This finding is contrary to expectations by Penrose, (1959) who argues that for a firm to have unique competitive advantages, the transfer of resources between firms should be difficult and the chance of replication for competitors should be denied since resource scarcity and inimitability, secure and protect superior returns. Despite all these environmental uncertainties, and being surpassed at times by changes and trying for ways to overcome them (Mean =2.55), they have the willingness to adapt to new industry and market trends (Mean =3.84). Their product varieties in milk, juices of different types and size and natural mineral water constitute a big resource for these enterprises.

Assets (i.e *organisational assets, intellectual property assets and reputational assets*) and capabilities (i.e *human capital, networking abilities, business process related abilities, Knowledge management skills and organisational routines*) were found to have a two-way directional effect on strategy formulation and enterprise performance. A strong and significant association has been found to exist between the levels of these firms' resources and positioning decisions and targets (50.8% at 1% significance level at 2-tailed test) see correlations Table 3 below. There is an observable complex interaction and interconnections of different sets of resources and capabilities in the process of strategy creation. The 39.5% of variance in these two enterprises' Market performance was found to be explained by Resources and Capacities (Table 4). This finding is supported by Wernerfelt, (1984); Barney, (1991) who argue that internal and idiosyncratic resources at the firm-level can explain the variation in success among firms competing within the same industry. Penrose, (1959), supports the view that dynamic interactions between resources and managerial decisions organised within an administrative framework not only provide a thorough explanation of heterogeneity between firms but also enable firms to have unique advantages relative to their competitors. This reemphasises the assets and resources' significance in enhancing a firm's ability to pursue market-driven strategies. Future research can look into the non-accounted for factors that explain the 60.5% variance in these enterprises' performance. However SDMEs in Rwanda are challenged to increase their asset and capability levels if strategic decision making and performance is to be enhanced.

The results presented here give a grounded answer to the question: Do resources of a firm have a directional influence on positioning strategy-performance relationship?

Table .3 on correlations for Resources and Capacities and quality of positioning strategy

Correlations

		Resources and Capacities	Positioning strategies
Resources and Capacities	Pearson Correlation	1	.508**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	113	113
Positioning strategies	Pearson Correlation	.508**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	113	113

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

Table .4 on Resources and Capacities and market performance

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.628[a]	.395	.383	11.00864	.395	33.927	1	52	.000	1.754

a. Predictors: (Constant), resources and capabilities
b. Dependent Variable: Market performance

Table .5 Positioning strategy measurements

Strategies	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Using product characteristics or customer benefits					
We communicate the benefits of our products to the consumers.	113	2.00	5.00	4.22	0.64
Our products have manufacture and expiry dates	113	2.00	5.00	4.13	0.61
Positioning by use or application					
Our products are for office use	113	2.00	5.00	2.55	0.66
Our products are for home use	113	1.00	5.00	3.90	0.51
Our products are for social functions use	113	1.00	5.00	3.70	0.54
Our products are for people on journeys	113	2.00	5.00	4.00	0.60
Positioning by cultural symbols					
We use cultural symbols in our products' design, labelling and packaging	113	1.00	5.00	4.22	0.57
We produce products that represent cultural symbols.	113	1.00	5.00	4.29	0.54
Our products taste, flavour and variety reflect Rwandan cultural values	113	1.00	5.00	4.32	0.84
Our product naming is cultural e.g having some drinks named after a cow etc	113	2.00	5.00	4.18	0.59
Positioning by competitor					
We know our direct and indirect competitors	113	1.00	5.00	4.25	0.74

We know what our competitor doesn't give customers and we try to give it to them	113	1.00	5.00	4.05	0.44
Our products are the same as our competitors.	113	1.00	5.00	2. 03	0.54
Our products are better than our competitors.	113	1.00	5.00	4. 05	0.62
Our products are different from those of our Competitors.	113	1.00	5.00	3.65	0.49
We have geographically extended our product services than our competitors	113	1.00	5.00	4. 23	0.61
Our products have more functional and emotional benefits than for our competitors	113	1.00	5.00	4. 03	0.50
We are concerned with creating a unique position than our competitors on the market	113	1.00	5.00	4. 00	0.64

The study according to table 5 observes that Urwibutso Enterprises Ltd and Inyange Industries Ltd use product characteristics strategy and often communicate product benefits to their consumers (Mean =4.22) as part of their packaging policy to indicate products' manufacture and expiry dates all the time (Mean =4.13). They have positioned themselves as producers of soft drink products for social functions, domestic or home use and for journeys (Mean =3.90, 3.70 & 4.00 respectively). To some extent their products are used at work in offices (Mean =2.55). Cultural symbols were found out to be one of the most positioning strategies Urwibutso Enterprises Ltd and Inyange Industries Ltd use, i.e their products' naming, design, labelling and packaging, products taste, logo, flavour and variety reflect Rwandan cultural values (Mean =4.22, 4.29, 4.32& 4.18 respectively). From enterprise business names i.e Inyange and Urwibutso to product names like Akarabo, Urwibutso, Akandi, Inyange juice, Inyange Whole Milk, Inyange pure ghee, Inyange Yoghurt, Inyange fresh cream, Inyange Mango, Inyange Apple, Inyange Passion Fruit, Inyange Pineaple, Inyange natural mineral water etc in varying sizes are purely Rwandan in origin and culture.

Positioning by competition was found to be highly exercised! Quite surprising to researchers Urwibutso Enterprises Ltd knew Inyange Industries Ltd as its competitor and vice versa for Inyange Industries Ltd. When asked on whether competition considerations guided their positioning decision making (they make investment in knowing their direct and indirect competitors), the respondents expressed their strong emotional feelings (Mean =4.25). However, their emphasis was on each trying to satisfy their customers' needs than what the competitor basically does (Mean =4.05). They equally emphasise functional and emotional benefits and giving unique features to their products, trying to expand their geographical coverage regardless of what other competitors are doing (Mean =4.03 & 4.23 respectively). They expressed contentment that their products are different from those of their Competitors (Mean =3.65); their position was about satisfying market needs better. This finding match with what Brown et al., (1976), recommend. According to them competitor analysis and target customer needs identification should go together. Urwibutso Enterprises Ltd and Inyange Industries Ltd's sensitivity to market competitive behaviour resonates well with principles of competitive advantage Hofer et al., (1978). Once these competitive values are upheld for long may sustainably help these two enterprises in attaining a pleasant competitive edge.

Table .6 Positioning strategy measurements (continued…)

Strategies	**N**	**Min**	**Max**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
Positioning by price					
We deal in highly priced drinks (Premium)	113	2.00	5.00	3.00	0.47
We deal in moderately priced drinks.	113	2.00	5.00	4.23	0.61
We deal in low priced drinks	113	2.00	5.00	2.13	0.56
We tend to balance price considerations with quality considerations	113	2.00	5.00	4.33	0.66
We offer free after sale Services.	113	1.00	5.00	4.04	0.43
We offer discounts	113	1.00	5.00	4.00	0.54
Positioning by quality					
We use the best raw materials to ensure quality of our products.	113	1.00	5.00	4.15	0.57
We try to meet our customers’ perceived benefits	113	1.00	5.00	4.20	0.54
We tend to balance quality considerations with price considerations	113	1.00	5.00	4.33	0.64
Both tangible and intangible attributes of our products count	113	2.00	5.00	4.25	0.59
We view our product from the target customer’s perspective	113	2.00	5.00	4.15	0.59
We deal in both retail and bulk product selling	113	1.00	5.00	4.35	0.64
Our product quality measurements in the laboratory have real-time process monitoring of °Brix, Sugar Inversion, % Diet and CO_2 integrated as a standard (OEM solution) for consistent product quality and taste	113	1.00	5.00	2.15	0.44

Customised Positioning					
We customise our products to suit the needs of various types of customers	113	1.00	5.00	4.32	0.54
We carry out regular market surveys to know about consumer behaviour as an evaluation to control our product image	113	1.00	5.00	2.84	0.54
We have a well defined and known profile of our customers	113	1.00	5.00	2.45	0.50
We differentiate our products according to customers' perceptions	113	1.00	5.00	2.15	0.48
Product Class Strategy					
Our customers know us for our home refreshing juice	113	1.00	5.00	3.85	0.55
Our customers know us for our high quality milk products	113	1.00	5.00	4.00	0.61
Our customers know us for our high quality mineral drinking water	113	1.00	5.00	4.00	0.56
Our products make us unique on the market	113	1.00	5.00	4.01	0.54

Price as a positioning strategy elicited varying responses. Table 6 results above show that they neither target rich people in their pricing policy (Mean =3.00), nor poor people (Mean =2.13). They tend to balance price considerations with quality considerations and moderately price their drinks (Mean =4.33). They offer discounts and free after sales services to their business customers who buy in bulk (Mean =4.04). Quality is a strong positioning strategy for these enterprises; they ensure that the raw materials they use in their production are of best quality in order to be able to meet their customers' perceived benefits of their products, put attention to both tangible and intangible attributes and always view their product from the target customer's perspective (Mean =4.15, 4.25, & 4.14 respectively). However they seemed to be less aware of the technical aspects of product quality measurements (Mean =2.15).Not all their staff are knowledgeable about technical product information. It's only confined to production personnel.

These enterprises vehemently aspire to satisfy their customer's needs (Mean =4.32) but the definition of their customers is broad and unspecific (Mean =2.45). This is to say they tend to largely be product-focused and do less of customer profiling since they target all… they neutrally understand the significance of market surveys (Mean =2.84) because of financial implications.

Urwibutso Enterprises Ltd and Inyange Industries Ltd to a small extent position themselves according to customer classes (Mean =2.15).They produce high quality milk, juice and mineral drinking water, which makes them unique on the market (Mean =4.00).

Table .7 Positioning Strategies and Market Performance measurement

Positioning Strategy-Market Performance relationship measurement	**N**	**Min**	**Max**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
Market share (Increase in number of customers)					
Our market share has grown because of our product characteristics that render functional performance	113	2.00	5.00	4.19	0.60
Product use or application has helped our market share increase	113	2.00	5.00	3.90	0.61
Use of cultural symbols has positively impacted on our market share	113	1.00	5.00	4.24	0.52
Managing competition has got us a good market position	113	2.00	5.00	3.55	0.66
We owe our market share from our prices that are affordable	113	1.00	5.00	4.20	0.41
We have our market share grow because of our product quality	113	1.00	5.00	4.20	0.54
Our customized product strategy has helped us increase our market share	113	2.00	5.00	2.25	0.57
Our product class has created a position for us that has increased our market share	113	1.00	5.00	2.95	0.41
We have experienced a below 20% increase in market share in the last six months in Rwanda	113	1.00	5.00	2.85	0.57
Our market share has increased by 30% in the last six months in Rwanda	113	1.00	5.00	2.85	0.54
Our market share has increased by 40% in the last six months in Rwanda	113	1.00	5.00	2.14	0.54
Our market share has increased above 50% in the last six months in Rwanda	113	2.00	5.00	2.25	0.59
Our market share outside Rwanda has increased	113	1.00	5.00	2.15	0.64
Sales growth (Customer growth rate) in the last six					

months					
We have experienced a below 10% increase in our sales	113	1.00	5.00	2.05	0.44
Our sales have increased by 10%	113	1.00	5.00	2.80	0.64
Our sales have increased by 20%	113	1.00	5.00	2.32	0.64
Our sales have increased by 30%	113	1.00	5.00	2. 32	0.64
Our sales have increased by 40%	113	1.00	5.00	2. 32	0.64
Our sales have increased above 50%	113	1.00	5.00	2. 32	0.64
Our sales have declined	113	1.00	5.00	2.25	0.64
Our sales have increased because of our products' features	113	1.00	5.00	2.35	0.64
Our sales have increased because of our product use or application	113	1.00	5.00	3.25	0.64
Using of cultural symbols on our products have helped us increase the level of sales	113	1.00	5.00	4.05	0.64
The way we manage the competitive business environment has helped us increase our sales	113	1.00	5.00	3.85	0.64
Our prices that are affordable have helped us increase our sales volume	113	1.00	5.00	4.10	0.64
Our product quality has helped us increase the level of sales	113	1.00	5.00	4.22	0.64
Our sales have increased because of our customised products	113	1.00	5.00	2.15	0.64
Sales have increased because of our product class	113	1.00	5.00	3.00	0.64

The study reveals in Table 7 above, how these companies' strategy of positioning themselves as a producers of soft drink products for social functions, domestic use and for journeys, capitalising on rendering improved and better product features; use of cultural symbols and affordable prices has influenced their market share and sales volumes (Mean =4.19, 3.90, 4.24, 4.20). Though the respondents acknowledged that their companies' market share is increasing, they were not sure of the extent to which it has increased (Mean =2.85). They had no scientific data to that effect but they were convinced with a 10% increase in profit in the last six months. They were also unable to specifically attribute this margin to any of the strategies. They however expressed certainty about their product quality and affordable prices and cultural symbols to be major drivers of their increasing market share, sales and profitability (Mean =4.10, 4.22 & 4.05 respectively). Study finding by Kalafatis et al., (2000) agree on the explanatory power of product quality and price on performance of a company in terms of profits. Bennion et al., (1994) and Bingham et al. (1995), also emphasise specific positioning dimensions e.g *price and product quality.* Study results by Mustapha, (2017) also confirm that when quality product is produced by an enterprise, appropriately priced, efficiently distributed, it leads to a higher business performance in terms of profitability, increased market share, customer satisfaction and market expansion. Urwibutso Enterprises Ltd and Inyange Industries Ltd's emphasis on a few positioning strategy dimensions i.e quality, price, cultural symbols is shared by Sacco, (1986) who advises that companies should put emphasis on only a limited number of claims when positioning a brand because using too many dimensions may lead to disbelief (Kotler, 2003), confusion (Ghose 1994), or lowered memory (Meyers-Levy 1989), often described as the enemies of positioning (Evans et al., 1996), because consumers do not have a clear picture of the brand in their minds. Trout et al., (1996) acknowledge that human brain has only a limited capacity to remember multiple brand associations. So it's apparent from this discussion that positioning has no rule, save, for every business playing its games and resisting temptations to be all things to all people (Czepiel, 1992) which these two enterprises fall prey to. Empirical literature provide evidence to the claim that consumers perceive brands that are positioned on one dimension or attribute as superior on that specific dimension i.e perform better on that attribute relative to a multiple positioning option, even when the dimension is exactly the same for both options (Chernev, 2007).

As already mentioned in table 6 above, product customisation is less practiced since they direct their offering to the whole market (young, old, educated, uneducated, rural and urban) with products of same characteristics (Mean =2.15) i.e the definition of their customers is broad and unspecific. Respondents expressed their strong attachment these enterprises had to urban centres than rural areas because of income and purchasing power differences. Despite their neutrality to the extent to which market share and sales has increased, their market share and sales have not declined (Mean =2.25).

Table .8 Positioning Strategies and Market Performance measurement continued…….

Positioning Strategy-Market Performance relationship measurement	**N**	**Min**	**Max**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
Market niche performance					
Above 50% of people from all age brackets consume our products	113	2.00	5.00	4.19	0.56
Only people of specific age groups consume our products	113	2.00	5.00	2.11	0.51
Above 50% of all the regions in Rwanda consume our products	113	1.00	5.00	3.00	0.60

Our product is consumed in specific regions in Rwanda	113	2.00	5.00	2.21	0.66
Above 50% of people in cities and towns consume our products	113	1.00	5.00	2.20	0.52
Our product is consumed by both male and female	113	1.00	5.00	4.22	0.54
People from all religions in Rwanda consume our products	113	2.00	5.00	4.11	0.67
Only people of specific income groups consume our products	113	1.00	5.00	2.10	0.41
Above 50% of people from all income groups consume our products	113	1.00	5.00	3.15	0.57
Above 50% of the educated and uneducated people consume our products	113	1.00	5.00	3.15	0.54
Only educated people consume our products	113	1.00	5.00	2.11	0.54
Profitability growth rate (in the last six months)					
Our profits have increased	113	1.00	5.00	4.20	0.64
We have experienced a 2% increase in profits	113	1.00	5.00	2.31	0.64
Our profit growth rate has been between 3 and 10%	113	1.00	5.00	2.31	0.64
Our profit growth rate has been between 10 and 20%	113	1.00	5.00	4.11	0.44
Our profit growth rate has been between 20 and 30%	113	1.00	5.00	2.31	0.64
Our profits have increased above 30%	113	1.00	5.00	2.31	0.64

It was observed from respondents that Urwibutso Enterprises Ltd and Inyange Industries Ltd do not produce for a specific group of people (table 9 above). People from all religions in Rwanda consume their products (Mean =4.11). They do not target specific income group, specific region or specific age group (Mean =2.11, 2.21). Even though they could not specifically aggregate which percentage of which income group consume their products (Mean =2.10), they acknowledge that their profits have increased in the last six months (Mean =4.20). The rate at which their profits are increasing was in range of 10 and 20% (Mean =4.11).

Table .9 on correlations between Positioning strategies and market performance

Correlations

		Positioning strategies	Positioning strategies and Market Performance
Positioning strategies	Pearson Correlation	1	.678**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	113	113
Positioning strategies and Market Performance	Pearson Correlation	.678**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	113	113

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

A strong and significant relationship has been found to exist between positioning strategies and market performance of the studied enterprises (67.8% at 1% significance level at 2-tailed test) see correlations Table 9 above. The 57.5% of variance in Urwibutso Enterprises Ltd and Inyange Industries Ltd Market performance was found to be explained by positioning strategies (*product attributes, use or application, Price, quality, cultural symbols, customization, product class and Competition*) see Table 10. The result is statistically significant at p>0.05 at 0.000. This means that positioning strategies influence company performance in terms of market share, sales and profitability. The study finds out that Product quality, price and cultural symbols impact more on sale, market share and profitability than other strategies do in these two enterprises. These findings are consistent with study outcomes by Porter, (1996) and Hooley et al., (2001), who argue that a firm's superior competitive position comes, partly, from positioning activities. Blankson, et al., (2008), also in their study on 1000 executives and owner-managers of services industries in the United States, confirm that well formulated positioning strategy influence a company's performance levels.

Table.10 on Positioning strategies and market performance

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.628[a]	.575	.563	11.00864	.395	33.927	1	52	.000	1.284

a. Predictors: (Constant), Positioning strategies

b. Dependent Variable: Market performance

Summary, Conclusion

Summary

This study is an attempt to answer two questions: Does positioning strategy influence market performance? Do resources of a firm have a directional influence on positioning strategy-performance relationship?

A strong and significant association is found to exist between the levels of the firm's resources and positioning decisions and targets at Urwibutso Enterprises Ltd and Inyange Industries Ltd (50.8% at 1% significance level at 2-tailed test) see correlations Table 3. The 39.5% of variance in these enterprises Market performance is explained by Resources and Capacities (Table 4).This finding is supported by Wernerfelt, (1984); Barney, (1991) who argue that internal and idiosyncratic resources at the firm-level can explain the variation in success among firms competing within the same industry. Penrose, (1959), supports the view that dynamic interactions between resources and managerial decisions organised within an administrative framework not only provide a thorough explanation of heterogeneity between firms but also enable firms to have unique advantages relative to their competitors. This reemphasises the assets and resources' significance in enhancing a firm's ability to pursue market-driven strategies. Future research can look into the non unaccounted for factors that explain the 60.5% variance in the company performance.

Positioning strategies *i.e product attributes, use or application, Price, quality, cultural symbols, customization, product class and Competition* were found to influence market performance in Urwibutso Enterprises Ltd and Inyange Industries Ltd. How each strategy affects various performance dimensions (market share, sales, profitability and niche) vary. Product quality, price and cultural symbols were found to impact on sales; market share and profitability more than other strategies do in these enterprises. Only 57.5% of variance of performance was jointly explained by these positioning strategies. Study finding by Kalafatis et al., (2000) agree on the explanatory power of product quality and price on performance of a company in terms of profits. Bennion et al., (1994) and Bingham et al. (1995) also emphasise specific positioning strategy dimensions e.g *price and product quality.* Study results by Mustapha, (2017) further confirm that when quality product is produced by an enterprise, appropriately priced, efficiently distributed, it leads to a higher business performance in terms of profitability, increased market share, customer satisfaction and market expansion. These enterprises' emphasis on a few positioning strategy dimensions i.e quality, price, cultural symbols is shared by Sacco, (1986) who advises that companies should put emphasis on only a limited number of claims when positioning a brand because using too many dimensions may lead to disbelief (Kotler, 2003), confusion (Ghose 1994), or lowered memory (Meyers-Levy 1989), often described as the enemies of positioning (Evans et al., 1996), because consumers do not have a clear picture of the brand in their minds. Trout et al., (1996) acknowledge that human brain has only a limited capacity to remember multiple brand associations. So it's implied from this discussion that positioning requires resisting temptations to be all things to all people (Czepiel, 1992) which these enterprises fall prey to. Empirical literature provide evidence to the claim that consumers perceive brands that are positioned on one dimension or attribute as superior on that specific dimension i.e perform better on that attribute relative to a multiple positioning option, even when the dimension is exactly the same for both options (Chernev, 2007).

Conclusion

On the basis of the association that exist between the levels of these firms' resources and positioning decisions and targets, SDMEs are challenged to increase their asset and capability levels if strategic decision making and performance is to be enhanced. It has been observed that assets and capabilities constitute a big constraint for Urwibutso Enterprises Ltd and Inyange Industries Ltd to implement all their strategies. The 39.5% of variance in these enterprises Market performance is explained by Resources and Capacities (Table 4). This relationship has been acknowledged by Wernerfelt, (1984); Barney, (1991) who argue that internal and idiosyncratic resources at the firm-level can explain the variation in success among firms competing within the same industry. Soft drink industry in Rwanda like any other country in the region is among the most vibrant and growing market… A growing middle class, decreasing literacy, ever increasing rural-urban migration and a growing number of packed soft drink usages constitute a business opportunity for investors in this sector. These developments show that marketing and positioning functions remain essential towards showcasing enterprise' offering thereby informing organisational performance through quality management, maintaining and retaining clients for business success and sustainability.

On the basis of the fact that Product quality, price and cultural symbols were found to impact significantly on sale, market share and profitability than other strategies do in Urwibutso Enterprises Ltd and Inyange Industries Ltd, SDMEs should pursue a limited number of claims (strategies) when positioning their products (Sacco, 1986).

Recommendation and future research

The study attempted to answer two questions: Does positioning strategy influence market performance? Do resources of a firm have a directional influence on positioning strategy-performance relationship? Several other internal or external strategic options that were not covered remained unclear in explaining firm performance differences and these require further research;

First, data was collected and was limited to only Urwibutso Enterprises Ltd and Inyange Industries Ltd, registered formal SDMEs operating in Rwanda**.** The study proposes that further research be carried out to not only SDMEs but also other organizations that are within the manufacturing and mining sector since they are core sectors for Rwanda's economy.

Second, since data collection was only limited to the use of structured questionnaires, and as the main tools, more advanced data collection methods are therefore recommended for future research namely, comparative research, multi-case study and sample study using case interviews.

Also, on the basis of the finding that these enterprises tend to be largely product-focused and doing less of customer profiling targeting all and having a broad and unspecific definition of their customer, they are challenged to narrow their focus to specific niche that they can satisfy better.

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