**EFFECT OF COST LEADERSHIP STRATEGY ON THE TEAM PERFORMANCE OF FOOTBALL CLUBS IN THE NIGERIAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE**

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**ABSTRACT**

The Nigerian football league is one of the most popular sports leagues in the world, and it has been attracting more fans and sponsors in recent years. The evolving financial landscape of football, emphasizing the importance of clubs operating sustainably and independently generating revenues. This underscores the need for football clubs in Nigeria to develop effective strategies, such as cost leadership, to maintain financial stability while enhancing on-field performance. Despite its potential impact, there exists a notable gap in research regarding the effect of the cost leadership strategy on the team performance of football clubs within the Nigerian football league. Hence the need to examine the effect of cost leadership strategy on the team performance of football clubs in the Nigerian Football League (NFL). Survey research design was employed for the study and a structured questionnaire on the subject matter was administered. Stratified sampling technique was used to categorize the football clubs and purposive sampling was used to select the 37 out of 90 registered clubs. Fifteen copies of questionnaire were distributed to all the relevant administrators of each of the 37 clubs. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Multiple Regressions were used to examine the effect of cost leadership strategy on team performance, All tests were conducted at 5% level of significance. The findings on the effect of cost leadership strategy on the team performance league showed that player wages (p=0.001), transfer fees (p=0.000), operational cost (p=0.009), ticket prices (p=0.000) and sponsorship deals (p=0.014) were significant except merchandise prices (p=0.605) that was not significant. The study concluded that, competitive strategy variables were found to be significant to financial performance of football clubs in the Nigeria football league. The study recommends that football clubs should regularly review and adapt their strategies to align with the dynamic nature of the Nigeria football league.

**Keyword:** Cost Leadership Strategy, Team Performance, Football Clubs, Nigerian Football League

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The confluence of sports and economics presents an intriguing narrative of ambition and performance, particularly within the context of football clubs in the Nigerian football league (Suleiman, 2018). As organizations with their own unique aims and objectives, football clubs navigate a complex landscape where on-field success must align with off-field financial viability. This intricate balance is underscored by the concept of cost leadership strategy and its potential impact on team performance within the Nigerian football league (Thoma and Stefa, 2020). Santeri (2018) aptly characterizes the field of sports economics as one that intertwines the passion for sports with financial rationalization.

In the case of football clubs, this fusion of sporting enthusiasm and economic pragmatism is paramount, as it shapes the trajectory of the league's development (Anyanwu and Nnadozie, 2018). Football, being a global phenomenon, transcends cultural, religious, and political boundaries, uniting fans in Nigeria and beyond in their love for the game. Amidst the growing interest in football within Nigeria, the Nigerian football league has seen a surge in fans, sponsors, and investors (Appleyard and Field, 2018). However, alongside this growth come financial challenges and a need for comprehensive research into the impact of strategic decisions, such as cost leadership strategy, on team performance. This examination is crucial for ensuring the sustainability and success of football clubs in the Nigerian football league (Ayorinde et al., 2016).

Deloitte (2021) highlights the evolving financial landscape of football, emphasizing the importance of clubs operating sustainably and independently generating revenues. This underscores the need for football clubs in Nigeria to develop effective strategies, such as cost leadership, to maintain financial stability while enhancing on-field performance. Furthermore, competitive strategy emerges as a critical determinant of success for football clubs in the Nigerian football league (Bednář, 2020). Managers play a pivotal role in navigating the complexities of decision-making, including the adoption of cost leadership strategies, to achieve a competitive edge while maximizing financial resources (Bello and Aremu, 2020).

As football continues to evolve globally, with events like the proposed European Super League shaping the discourse, there is a growing imperative to understand the intricate interplay between financial strategies and team performance within football leagues like Nigeria's (Chiweshe, 2020). The Nigerian football league is experiencing rapid growth, attracting increased interest from fans, sponsors, and investors (Chadwick, 2019). As clubs vie for supremacy in this competitive landscape, the adoption of effective strategies becomes paramount. Among these strategies, the cost leadership approach emerges as a focal point, promising to influence the performance of football clubs in significant ways (Chuka, 2020).

However, despite its potential impact, there exists a notable gap in research regarding the effect of the cost leadership strategy on the team performance of football clubs within the Nigerian football league (Darby, 2018). While extensive literature explores various aspects of football management and strategy in developed footballing nations, there is a glaring absence of studies addressing the applicability and efficacy of cost leadership within the unique context of Nigerian football (Echevarria, 2018). Moreover, as the league undergoes rapid transformation and strives for financial sustainability, understanding the implications of cost leadership on team performance becomes increasingly pertinent (Espita-Escuer and García-Cebrián, 2017). Yet, the dearth of empirical evidence and scholarly discourse on this subject impedes the league's ability to make informed decisions regarding strategic management and resource allocation.

Therefore, this study aims to fill this critical gap by examining the effect of the cost leadership strategy on the team performance of football clubs in the Nigerian football league. Investigating how cost leadership influences various performance indicators such as match outcomes, player development, and financial stability, this research seeks to provide valuable insights for league stakeholders, managers, and investors. Ultimately, a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between cost leadership and team performance will equip football clubs in the Nigerian league with the knowledge needed to navigate the competitive landscape effectively and sustainably.

**2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Conceptual Review**

**Football**

Football is a globally popular team sport played between two teams of eleven players each, aiming to score goals by kicking the ball into the opponent’s goal post (Ezeuduji, 2018). It involves a blend of physical skills and strategic thinking, fostering camaraderie and community among fans worldwide. Originating in England in the 19th century, football has evolved over time, with its history traced back to ancient civilizations like China and Greece (Frithiof, 2020). In Nigeria, football was introduced by the British in the early 20th century, leading to the formation of various clubs and competitions.

**The European Experience in Football**

The Europeanization of football represents a significant chapter in the sport's history, marking Europe's profound influence on its global trajectory. Rooted in its rich footballing tradition and organizational prowess, Europe has shaped the modern landscape of the sport in multifaceted ways (Fagbadebo, 2017). At the heart of the European experience in football lies a deep sense of ownership and passion for the game. European football culture transcends borders, uniting fans from diverse backgrounds under the common banner of their beloved clubs and national teams (Floris and Jan 2021). This fervor has cultivated a unique relationship between football and European identity, where the sport serves as a cultural touchstone, fostering a sense of belonging and shared heritage.

One of the most prominent manifestations of Europe's influence on football is the proliferation of multinational club competitions (Gavin, 2020). Tournaments like the UEFA Champions League and the Europa League epitomize the continent's commitment to excellence and its ability to orchestrate high-stakes, globally televised events. These competitions showcase the best talent from across Europe, pitting legendary clubs against each other in epic battles for supremacy (Graeme et al., 2018). Moreover, Europe's approach to player mobility has transformed the global football landscape. The Bosman ruling in 1995, which prohibited restrictions on the number of foreign players within European Union teams, heralded a new era of globalization in football. This decision opened the floodgates for cross-border transfers, enabling players to ply their trade in different leagues and cultures, enriching the sport's diversity and competitiveness (Guy, 2021).

**Development of Football in Nigeria**

The journey of football in Nigeria is a testament to the enduring power of sport to capture the hearts and minds of a nation. From its humble beginnings to its current status as a cultural phenomenon, football has played a pivotal role in shaping Nigerian society and identity (Idowu et al., 2019). The introduction of football to Nigeria can be traced back to the early 20th century, with the British colonialists serving as the catalysts for its spread. As the game took root in Nigerian soil, it quickly garnered widespread acceptance and enthusiasm among the populace (Haas, 2018). Local communities embraced football with fervor, organizing friendly matches and informal tournaments as a means of recreation and social bonding. Despite these challenges, football continues to thrive as a cultural and economic force in Nigeria. The game serves as a unifying force, transcending ethnic, religious, and socio-economic divides to foster a sense of national pride and identity (Ivorian, 2019). Moreover, football's economic impact is significant, contributing to job creation, tourism, and revenue generation through various channels such as sponsorships, broadcasting rights, and merchandise sales (James, 2020).

**Strategy as a Concept**

Strategy involves long-term decision-making aimed at defining a business's direction, leveraging core competencies, and ensuring consistency of approach (Kalim, 2018). It plays a vital role in football club management, influencing decisions related to growth, internationalization, and competitive positioning (Lewis, 2018).

**Competitive Intelligence vs. Football Club Strategy**

The evolution of strategic concepts in football clubs involves top managers defining strategies based on external and internal factors, with specialized structures supporting strategic decision-making. Strategic information plays a crucial role in formulating and implementing strategies, enabling clubs to exploit market imperfections for competitive advantage (Lucía et al., 2016).

**Economic Profitability of Football Clubs**

Economic profitability in football clubs depends on resource costs, market dynamics, and information imperfections (Mathews, 2016). Strategic information, derived from exploiting these imperfections, becomes a key driver of profitability. Football clubs adopt strategies such as cost leadership, differentiation, and focus to achieve competitive advantage and financial success (Nwakanma, 2019).

**The Information and Strategy of Football Clubs**

Football clubs employ various strategies, including cost leadership, differentiation, and focus, to gain competitive advantage (Ogunnaike and Adenugam 2019). Porter's generic strategies framework helps clubs analyze market dynamics and align their strategies with industry conditions. Access to high-quality information is essential for effective strategic decision-making and long-term success in the football industry (Okeke and Agu, 2018).

**Theoretical Review**

**Competitive Advantage Theory**

Cost leadership strategy, a key component of competitive advantage theory, emphasizes achieving a competitive edge through efficient cost management (Porter, 1985). In the context of Nigerian football clubs, this strategy entails minimizing expenses while maintaining or enhancing team performance. By adopting cost-effective measures in player recruitment, training, and operations, clubs aim to optimize their financial resources and gain a competitive edge over rivals.

Factorial endowment, one of Porter's determinants, plays a crucial role in implementing cost leadership strategy (Razano, 2020). Factors such as player wages, facilities, and operational expenses significantly impact a club's cost structure. Nigerian clubs must leverage their resources effectively, investing in talent development and infrastructure while minimizing unnecessary expenditures (Sugden and Tomlinson, 2018).

Moreover, demand conditions within the Nigerian football landscape influence the efficacy of cost leadership strategy (Suleiman, 2018). Clubs must align their cost structures with market demand, balancing financial constraints with fan expectations and competitive pressures. Through strategic pricing, ticket sales, and sponsorship deals, clubs can maximize revenue streams while controlling costs (Thomas and Stefan, 2020).

**Critical Theory**

Critical theory offers insights into the socio-economic dynamics that impact cost leadership strategy and team performance in the Nigerian football league (Bale 2017). Structural inequalities, economic disparities, and institutional constraints influence clubs' ability to implement cost-effective measures and achieve sustainable success. In Nigeria, factors such as corruption, mismanagement, and inadequate infrastructure pose challenges to cost leadership strategy (Tri, 2018). Critical theory highlights the need for transparency, accountability, and institutional reforms to address systemic barriers and promote financial sustainability within the league.

Moreover, critical theory underscores the importance of social activism, grassroots movements, and stakeholder engagement in advocating for fair play, ethical conduct, and equitable resource allocation. Challenging existing power structures and advocating for inclusive practices, critical theory informs strategies for enhancing cost efficiency and team performance in the Nigerian football ecosystem (World Trade Organisation, 2020).

**Economic Theory of Professional Sports Leagues**

The economic theory of professional sports leagues provides insights into the revenue dynamics, investment incentives, and competitive balance associated with cost leadership strategy in the Nigerian football league. Clubs must navigate the trade-offs between cost containment and investment in player talent, facilities, and marketing initiatives to maximize their competitive advantage (Dobson and Goddard, 2011).

Compared to the North American model, the Nigerian football landscape exhibits unique characteristics such as promotion and relegation, diverse ownership structures, and limited regulatory frameworks. These factors influence clubs' ability to implement cost leadership strategy effectively and achieve sustainable success.

Furthermore, the emergence of breakaway leagues and commercialization trends underscores the complexities of revenue generation, broadcast rights, and club autonomy in the Nigerian football ecosystem. By analyzing the economic incentives and institutional arrangements underlying these developments, stakeholders can inform policy interventions and strategic initiatives to optimize cost efficiency and team performance.

**Empirical Review**

Understanding the influence of cost leadership strategy on team performance is crucial for football clubs in the Nigerian Football League (NFL). Existing empirical research provides valuable insights into this relationship.

The NFL has transitioned from grassroots development to a more professional approach, influenced by initiatives like the Club Licensing System. This system, implemented by the Nigerian Football Federation (NFF), emphasizes specific criteria related to infrastructure, personnel, and finance, shaping clubs' competitive strategies. While studies like those by Onuoha and Okonkwo (2019) and Oluwole and Etefia (2018) focus on broader competitive strategies, the examination of cost leadership specifically remains limited.

Research by Olawale et al. (2019) highlights the NFL's dependency on various revenue streams, including government funding, broadcasting rights, sponsorship, and matchday revenue. However, a significant revenue-expenditure gap poses challenges to financial stability. While studies like those by Isidoro and Stephen (2020) and Calahorro et al. (2022) analyze financial efficiency and regulatory impacts, the direct link between cost leadership and financial performance in the NFL requires further investigation.

Beyond financial metrics, understanding stakeholder dynamics and the implementation of cost leadership strategies is essential. Research by Ayorinde et al. (2016) explores the aggressive nature of football fandom among tertiary students in Lagos, suggesting implications for club strategies. Additionally, Ebohon (2020) emphasizes the role of football culture in fostering national unity, suggesting potential synergies between cost leadership strategies and community engagement initiatives.

Studies like those by Thomas and Stefan (2020) and Hampus (2013) examine the impact of regulatory frameworks like Financial Fair Play (FFP) on financial and sporting outcomes in European football leagues. While the direct applicability of FFP to the NFL may be limited, understanding regulatory dynamics and their implications for cost leadership strategies is essential for clubs seeking competitive advantage.

Okpala-Okaka (2020) highlights disparities in media coverage and fan engagement between the NFL and top European leagues like the English Premier League (EPL). Analyzing cost leadership strategies in the context of market dynamics and media visibility can provide valuable insights into their effectiveness and potential for enhancing team performance.

While existing empirical research offers valuable insights into various aspects of competitive strategy and financial performance in the NFL, the specific impact of cost leadership on team performance warrants further investigation. By examining stakeholder dynamics, regulatory impacts, and market dynamics alongside cost leadership strategies, researchers can provide nuanced insights that inform strategic decision-making and enhance the competitiveness of football clubs in the Nigerian Football League.

**3. Methodology**

The data for this study were obtained from primary sources, with questionnaires serving as the primary data collection instrument. The questionnaires were structured in a close-ended format to facilitate efficient data gathering. Utilizing a 5-point Likert scale, the questionnaire design was aligned with previous research to ensure validity and reliability. Each selected football club provided respondents who participated in the survey. The questionnaire comprised two sections. Section A focused on capturing demographic information about the respondents, while Section B was tailored to address the specific objectives of the study.

**Model Specification**

The linear relationship between the dependent and independent variables in this study is functionally expressed below:

Y = f(X1, X2, X3 X4, X5, X6) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 1

TP = β0 + β1PW + β2TF + β3OPC + β4TP + β5MP + β6SD + ε \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_2

Where:

TP = Team performance (dependent variable)

PW = Player wages

TF = Transfer fees

OPC = Operational cost

TP = Ticket prices

MP = merchandise prices

SD = sponsorship deals

β0, β1, β2, β3, β4, β5 and β6 = Coefficients for the respective variables

ε = Error term

**4. Results and Discussion**

**Effect of the Cost Leadership Strategy on the Team Performance of Football Clubs in the Nigerian football league**

The regression analysis in Table 1 examines the impact of various aspects of cost leadership strategy on the team performance of football clubs in the Nigerian football league. Player wages has a negative coefficient (-0.154) and significant p-value (0.001) indicate that higher player wages are associated with lower team performance. It suggests that controlling player wages might improve team performance.

Transfer fees with a positive coefficient (0.181) and significant p-value (0.000) means that higher transfer fees are linked to better team performance. This implies that investing more in transfer fees could enhance team performance. Operational cost has a positive coefficient (0.127) and significant p-value (0.009) imply that increased operational costs positively affect team performance. Efficiently managing operational costs might lead to improved performance.

Ticket prices with a negative coefficient (-0.195) and significant p-value (0.000) suggest that higher ticket prices are associated with lower team performance. Adjusting ticket prices downwards may positively impact team performance. Merchandise prices had non-significant coefficient (0.026) and p-value (0.605) indicate that merchandise prices do not significantly affect team performance. It suggests that changes in merchandise prices may not have a substantial impact on performance. Sponsorship deals with a positive coefficient (0.115) and significant p-value (0.014) means that higher sponsorship deals are linked to better team performance. Securing more lucrative sponsorship deals could contribute to improved performance.

Furthermore, the regression analysis yielded an R-square of 0.679, indicating that approximately 67.9% of the variance in team performance can be explained by the model. The adjusted R-square, slightly lower at 0.653, suggests a good fit of the model, accounting for various factors influencing team performance within the context of a cost leadership strategy.

The analysis indicates that transfer fees, operational costs, and sponsorship deals have significant positive effects on team performance, while player wages and ticket prices have significant negative effects. However, merchandise prices do not seem to have a significant effect.

**Table 1: Result of Regression Analysis on the Effect of the Cost Leadership Strategy on the Team Performance of Football Clubs in the Nigerian football league**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Unstand. Coeff. | | Stand. Coeff |  |  | Collinearity Stat. | |
| Indep. Var. | B | Std. Err. | Beta | t | P-Value | Tolerance | IVF |
| (Constant) | 1.426 | 0.186 |  | 7.684 | 0.000 | 1.426 | 0.186 |
| Player wages | -0.147 | 0.044 | -0.154 | -3.372 | 0.001 | 0.928 | 1.078 |
| Transfer fees | 0.170 | 0.043 | 0.181 | 3.940 | 0.000 | 0.918 | 1.089 |
| Operational cost | 0.135 | 0.052 | 0.127 | 2.617 | 0.009 | 0.823 | 1.215 |
| Ticket prices | -0.249 | 0.058 | -0.195 | -4.273 | 0.000 | 0.934 | 1.071 |
| merchandise prices | 0.029 | 0.057 | 0.026 | 0.517 | 0.605 | 0.779 | 1.283 |
| sponsorship deals | 0.123 | 0.050 | 0.115 | 2.466 | 0.014 | 0.886 | 1.129 |

**Source: SPSS 25**

**ANOVA on the Effect of the Cost Leadership Strategy on the Team Performance of Football Clubs in the Nigerian football league**

Table 2 presented the ANOVA results assessing the overall statistical significance of the regression model regarding the effect of the cost leadership strategy on team performance in the Nigerian football league. The sum of squares for regression is 11.640, with 6 degrees of freedom (df), resulting in a mean square of 1.940. This indicates the variability in team performance explained by the cost leadership strategy. The sum of squares for residuals is 99.277, with 462 degrees of freedom, yielding a mean square of 0.215. This represents the unexplained variability in team performance.

The F-statistic tests whether the regression model is significantly different from a model with no predictors. With a value of 9.028 and a p-value of 0.000, the null hypothesis, which states no relationship between the cost leadership strategy and team performance, is rejected. This implies that the regression model is statistically significant.

The ANOVA results suggest that the cost leadership strategy has a statistically significant impact on the team performance of football clubs in the Nigerian football league. The model provides valuable insights into explaining the variation in team performance, indicating that the observed relationship is not likely due to random chance.

**Table 2: Result of ANOVA on the Effect of the Cost Leadership Strategy on the Team Performance of Football Clubs in the Nigerian football league**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| Regression | 11.640 | 6 | 1.940 | 9.028 | .000b |
| Residual | 99.277 | 462 | 0.215 |  |  |
| Total | 110.917 | 468 |  |  |  |

**Source: SPSS 25**

**Discussion of Findings**

In an attempt to examine the effect of the cost leadership strategy on the team performance of football clubs in the Nigerian football league, findings from the analysis revealed that the effect of a cost leadership strategy on team performance indicates a significant negative impact of player wages and ticket prices, while transfer fees, operational costs, and sponsorship deals exhibit noteworthy positive effects which aligns with the findings of Anyanwu and Nnadozie,. (2018) that examined the relationship between competitive strategies and financial performance of football clubs in Nigeria using selected football clubs in the Nigerian Professional Football League. This suggests that managing transfer fees, operational costs, and securing lucrative sponsorship deals can enhance team performance, but it's crucial to balance player wages and ticket prices to mitigate negative effects. These findings emphasize the importance of controlling wage expenditure for financial stability and maintaining a delicate balance in pricing strategies to uphold fan support and financial health. Conversely, the positive effects of transfer fees, operational costs, and sponsorship deals underscore the significance of revenue-generating activities in bolstering team performance, aligning with the theory of competitive advantage. This underscores the importance of cost control for financial stability and the role of revenue-generating activities in maintaining competitive advantage, supporting the economic theory of professional sports leagues.

**5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The findings from the analysis of the effect of a cost leadership strategy on team performance in the Nigerian football league highlight several key insights. Firstly, it's evident that player wages and ticket prices have a significant negative impact on team performance, emphasizing the necessity of managing these aspects to maintain financial stability and fan support. Secondly, the positive effects of transfer fees, operational costs, and sponsorship deals underscore the importance of revenue-generating activities in enhancing team performance. However, striking a balance between controlling expenses and maximizing revenue is crucial for sustained success.

The study therefore, concluded that the cost leadership strategy has a statistically significant impact on the team performance of football clubs in the Nigerian football league.

Based on the above findings, the following recommendations are made:

i. Football clubs should prioritize strategic cost management, particularly in areas such as player wages and operational costs.

ii. Clubs should focus on diversifying their revenue streams beyond traditional sources like ticket sales.

iii. It is crucial for clubs to adopt balanced pricing strategies for tickets and merchandise.

iv. Given the significant impact of player wages on team performance, clubs should invest in player development programs to nurture talent internally and reduce reliance on expensive external transfers.

v. Clubs should establish systems for continuous monitoring and evaluation of their cost leadership strategies.

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