

Sustainability and Business Performance of Big Joe Water, Benin City

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Abstract

The study examined the sustainability and business performance (measured by customer satisfaction) of Big Joe Water. The dimensions of sustainability adopted for the study are environmental sustainability, social sustainability and economic sustainability. The specific objectives are to ascertain the relationship between the environmental sustainability activities of Big Joe Water and its business performance, determine the effect of the social sustainability initiatives of Big Joe Water on its business performance, and examine the impact of economic sustainability practices of Big Joe Water on its business performance. The study found that a positive and significant relationships exist between customer satisfaction and social and economic dimensions of sustainability. However, the relationship between environmental sustainability and the business performance of Big Joe Water is not statistically significant. It is recommended that Big Joe Water focuses on improving the communication and visibility of its environmental sustainability initiatives. Customers may not be fully aware of the company's efforts in this dimension, leading to a lack of impact on satisfaction. Implementing clear and transparent communication strategies, such as eco-friendly labels on products, informative signage, or digital platforms, can effectively convey the company's commitment to environmental sustainability and potentially enhance customer satisfaction.

Keywords: Business Performance, Customer Satisfaction, Organisation, Sustainability, Water

INTRODUCTION

The concept of sustainability was introduced into business by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) over 20 years ago (Crittenden, Crittenden,

Ferrell, Ferrel & Pinney, 2010). According to Crittenden et al. (2010), the concept includes a large assortment of terms and management approaches such as; environmental responsibility, social responsibility, sustainable development, and many more. Regardless of the term used, its intention is to argue for business responsibility among organizations. According to the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), the term ‘sustainable development’ is a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Furthermore, sustainability includes three dimensions; social, environmental and economic sustainability and authors have argued that business practices should address all three dimensions in order to be considered sustainable (Kumar, Rahman Kazmi & Goyal, 2012).

The growing contemporary societal awareness of the significance of sustainable development coupled with the increasing recognition of the environmental and social impacts of business activities has led to the development and growth of sustainability practices in business. A key aspect of marketing theory concerning promotion of new ideas and consumer behavior also reveals the significance of sustainable marketing for sustainable development (Jovic & Korac, 2016). As society becomes more conscious of sustainability, consumers are demanding that companies align their business activities with environmental and social responsibility. This shift in consumer behavior, along with regulatory pressures and the pursuit of competitive advantage, has elevated the importance of sustainability in business activities. All these have led to sustainability metamorphosing from a mere conceptual idealization to a very important part of corporate strategy. The world over, the manufacturing sector produces the highest amount of waste daily with negative environmental consequences. In a bid to neutralize these detrimental environmental consequences, a lot of manufacturing organizations are confronted with critical challenges in attaining progress whilst also attending to the environmental challenges resulting from their operations which in the long run, creates an abyss which might absorb the manufacturing sector, economy and the environment (Mbang, Ogbo, Emeh, Gabriel, Iheonkhan & Afolabi, 2020).

The contemporary focus towards sustainability in the global business environment has been propelled by the compelling necessity to tackle environmental concerns and ensure long-term viability, especially in industries with pronounced environmental footprints, such as the water production sector. The intensity of global concerns on availability of hygienic water for consumption and concern for human well-being has seen water production companies at the forefront of sustainable business practices. Water production firms (table water as they’re fondly called), in Nigeria have paid no consideration to the innovation of products that meets both economic and environmental sustainability of the business (Nwankwo & Nwankwo, 2022). They have constantly been unsuccessful in evaluating the negative environmental consequence of

their products, specifically their packaging which are usually sachets and PET bottles which often end up in drainages and causes blockage, which to a large extent, has a negative effect on the populace. This has deemed it fit to undertake a study delving into the sustainability activities and business performance of water production companies, using Big Joe Water, a water production, packaging and distribution company located in Benin City, Nigeria, as a case study.

Objectives of the Study

This paper aims to uncover how Big Joe Water achieves economic success while also being environmentally, socially and economically conscious. The specific objectives are to;

1. ascertain the relationship between the environmental sustainability activities of Big Joe Water and business performance of Big Joe Water.
2. determine the effect of the social sustainability initiatives on the business performance of Big Joe Water.
3. examine the impact of the economic sustainability practices on the business performance of Big Joe Water.

Research Hypotheses

H₁: There is no significant relationship between environmental sustainability and satisfaction of Big Joe Water customers.

H₂: There is no significant relationship between social sustainability and satisfaction amongst Big Joe Water customers.

H₃: There is no significant relationship between economic sustainability and satisfaction amongst Big Joe Water customers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Business Performance

In other to attain organisational goals, objectives, and long-term profitability, an effective and efficient framework of checks and balances is required (Cerrone, 2013). A highly recognized and convenient yardstick of checks and balances a majority of organizations use is business performance (Mills, Gerber & Terblanche-Smit, 2016). Business performance has to do with how good a firm is in attaining its objectives and goals and is critical for the success and sustainability of the firm. It is an evaluation of how effectively and efficiently a firm utilizes its human and non-human resources in realizing its mission and delivering stakeholder value (Božić & Poola, 2023). They further stated that it can be appraised in several ways, such as financial metrics, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, employee engagement, productivity, innovation and environmental impact, among others, as varied stakeholders may have

varied perspectives as regards business performance and attach importance to the varied metrics according to their interests or goals. Current business performance in Nigeria is confronted with a great degree of unsustainable business practices as a result of firms failing to align with ethical practices to preserve the environment (Enuoh, Pepple, Kekong, Etim, Bassey & Offiong, 2021).

Customer Satisfaction as a Proxy for Business Performance

Customer satisfaction can be said to be a subjective variable resulting from feelings, perceptions and a comparison between what customers get with what they expected (Suchánek & Králová, 2018). Customer satisfaction emerges from the appraisal of expected performance in relation to the real perceived performance and the cost paid (Abedi & Jahed, 2020). Ban and Jun (2019), sees it as a classic measure of performance resulting from the supremacy of the customer experience and aspects throughout the gap between expectations of customers and actual experience. It can also be said to be a phenomenon where offerings offered by specific firms meet or exceeds customer's requirements. Satisfaction influences repeat purchases, favourable word-of-mouth intention, loyalty and eventually higher profit and reduction of costs (Shourov, Talukder & Rahman, 2018; Tao & Kim, 2019). According to Willie (2020), customer satisfaction is a key factor in enhancing business performance. Previous research works have shown that customer satisfaction shows the degree of the performance of the total products of a firm, taking into consideration customer requirements (Ilieska, 2013). Environmental management is a tool through which a firm presents itself as being trustworthy, and also, as a rationale for customers to identify with them (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006). Similarly, customers of firms are presented with the opportunity to contribute to the development and repair of the society as a result of them being associated with firms that engage in social development and repair, making them feel better satisfaction with the firm's products (De Mendonca & Zhou, 2019). Furthermore, through enhancement of their environmental performance, firms place themselves in a better position to increase confidence among customers in their environmental management activities, as a result of the firm's environmental performance reflecting the accomplishment of their environmental management activities. These lead to better satisfaction of customers (Mithas, Krishnan & Fornell, 2005), and loyalty (Mustonen, Karajaluoto, & Jayawardhena, 2016).

Concept of Sustainability

Sustainability encompasses the responsible and efficient use of resources, preservation of ecological integrity, and promotion of social equity to ensure the long-term health and prosperity of both present and future generations (Wheeler, 2004). Although not explicitly stated as "sustainability", Peter Drucker is one of the first researchers in marketing and management to explore the idea of sustainability, when he concluded

that management “has to consider the action that is likely to promote the public good, to advance the basic belief of our society, to contribute to stability, strength, and harmony” (Drucker, 1955, p.382). According to Oruezabala and Rico (2012), sustainability has to do with a business simultaneously achieving three interlinked goals - economic prosperity, environmental protection, and social equity. It is the idea that humankind has to change its behavior fundamentally in order to minimize further environmental damage (Soyez, 2012). According to Olsen, Slotegraaf and Chandukala (2014), it is the commitment to the well-being of the economy, society, and environment; looking at CSR-related initiatives that highlight commitment to the environment and the related effects. Sustainability has become more mainstream as a result of the rise of environmental issues on the ability of firms to deliver customer value, globalization of business, increasing magnitude and importance of environmental pressures and liabilities, rising competition for natural resources, the constitution of externalities in business decision making, consumer demand for sustainable products and processes, and the recognition that sustainable products and services can be profitable (Mittelstaedt, Shultz II, Kilbourne & Peterson 2014). It is a sense of shared responsibility towards the environment reflected in daily activities and actions focused on meeting personnel and store-level performance targets, initiatives to improve the ways the store contributes to reducing the company’s environmental impacts and efforts to promote environmentally responsible choices by a wider range of customers while also meeting their demands (Hensen, Keeling, Ruyter & Wetzels, 2016).

Dimensions of Sustainability

Environmental Sustainability: Environmental sustainability in business encompasses practices that reduce carbon emissions, conserve resources, minimize waste, and support eco-friendly product development (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2019). It involves adopting green marketing approaches, such as promoting energy-efficient products, using sustainable packaging, renewable energy, efficient use of water, avoiding surface and groundwater pollution, minimizing or eliminating air and noise pollution, implementing re-use and recycling initiatives, proper waste treatment, disposal and elimination, ethical use of land and protection of wildlife habitat (Mukherjee, Kamarulzaman, Vijayan & Vaiappuri, 2016). Companies embracing environmental sustainability can enhance brand reputation and meet the evolving expectations of environmentally conscious consumers. De Mendonca & Zhou (2019) submitted that customer satisfaction is also related with the enhanced environmental performance of companies.

Social Sustainability: Social sustainability in business focuses on promoting social well-being and addressing social issues through responsible business practices

(Maignan & Ferrell, 2004). It involves fair trade, ethical sourcing, philanthropy, good working environment, health and safety, training and development, equal employment opportunities, community engagement, and industry accountability (Mukherjee, Kamarulzaman, Vijayan & Vaiappuri, 2016). Socially sustainable businesses contribute to positive societal impact, strengthen stakeholder relationships, and foster brand loyalty. According to Shi (2020), firms engaging in socially sustainable practices have a positive influence on customer satisfaction by leaving a good impression in the customer's mind.

Economic Sustainability: Economic sustainability in organizations emphasizes long-term profitability and economic viability while considering the impacts on various stakeholders (Beltz & Peattie, 2012). It involves responsible financial management, ethical pricing, efficiency in production processes, profitability, innovation, research and development, value management, proper life cycle and risk assessment, and creating shared value for both the company and society (Mukherjee, Kamarulzaman, Vijayan & Vaiappuri, 2016). As put forward by Jančiauskaitė, Lasickaitė & Ripkauskaitė (2019), it involves maximization of profit, return on investment, ethical competition, corporate activities and marketing, sustainable management of the supply chain and innovation. By aligning business activities with economic sustainability, companies can achieve sustainable growth and maintain stakeholder trust and satisfaction.

Theoretical Review

Sustainability in business activities is a pressing contemporary issue due to the complex interplay between environmental, social, and economic factors. Also, various stakeholders are becoming more conscious and aware of sustainability issues, which play a key role in their interactions with business organizations. Two theoretical underpinnings are used to link the relationship between sustainability in business activities and business performance.

Triple Bottom Line Theory: The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) theory provides a foundational framework for understanding sustainability in business activities. Coined by Elkington (1997), the TBL theory posits that businesses should consider three dimensions of performance: environmental, social, and economic. Mohr and Webb (2005) discuss the positive impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, including environmental and social practices, on consumer attitudes and behavior. They emphasize that integrating sustainability into business strategies can enhance brand image and consumer perceptions. Porter and Kramer (2006) discussed the concept of shared value, which involves aligning social and environmental goals with business strategies. They argue that businesses can achieve both competitive advantage and social benefits by integrating sustainability into their strategies. TBL theory emphasizes

the need for businesses to balance their activities to achieve long-term sustainable development. In the context of business strategies, the TBL theory suggests that organizations should integrate environmental and social considerations into their decision-making processes to achieve sustainable competitive advantage.

Stakeholder Theory: Stakeholder theory provides a valuable perspective on sustainability in business by emphasizing the importance of considering the interests and expectations of various stakeholders. According to Freeman (1984), stakeholders include not only shareholders but also employees, customers, communities, and the environment. Sustainable business activities should strive to meet the needs and expectations of these stakeholders while minimizing negative impacts. Hartmann and Slapničar (2020) explored the linkages between stakeholder theory and various sustainability practices, such as corporate social responsibility (CSR), sustainable supply chain management, and stakeholder engagement. It highlights the role of stakeholder theory in driving sustainable business practices, fostering innovation, and enhancing organizational resilience. By engaging stakeholders in the marketing process, organizations can build mutually beneficial relationships and enhance long-term sustainability.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a survey research design. The adoption of the survey research design was based on its high adaptability in data collection, the potential to establish a rapport, and a substantial range of questions to encompass diverse perceptions of respondents (Malhotra, Birks & Wills, 2013). The population comprises all the three hundred (300) distributors and major retailers of Big Joe Water in Benin City. A sample of 100 was taken. Convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method, was utilised to administer the questionnaire. The instrument was converted to e-copy and distributed electronically to the selected sample. This approach was chosen because it facilitates easy access to respondents and saves time.

The research instrument employed for data collection was a questionnaire, divided into two sections, A and B. Section A contains the demographic information of respondents. This includes gender, age, educational qualification, and year of patronage. Section B comprised 16 question-items, four each on environmental sustainability, social sustainability, economic sustainability and customer satisfaction. Data obtained from the structured questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, percentages, mean and standard deviation. The relationship between the dimensions of sustainability and business performance (customer satisfaction) was estimated using multiple regression model. All analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 22.0 Version) at a 5% level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section contains the analyses of data collected from the fieldwork in line with the objectives of the study.

Description of demographic information

The demographic profiles of the respondents are presented in Table 1:

Table 1: Demographics of respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	36	45.0
	Male	44	55.0
	Total	80	100.0
Age	25years & below	5	6.3
	26 - 30years	12	15.0
	31 - 40years	42	52.5
	41 - 50years	17	21.3
	Above 50years	4	5.0
	Total	80	100.0
Education level	HND/B.Sc. or Equivalent	48	60.0
	Postgraduate	32	40.0
	Total	80	100.0
Years of patronage	Below 1year	12	15.0
	1-3year	12	15.0
	4-6year	15	18.8
	7-10years	10	12.5
	Above 10years	31	38.8
	Total	80	100.0

Table 1 shows that 55% of the respondents were male while 45% were female. This shows that most of the respondents were male. The age distribution showed that majority of the respondents (42, 52.5%) were between 31 - 40years old. This is followed by respondents within the age range of 41- 50years. This category accounts for 21.3%. 6.3% were 25years and below while 5% were above 50years. 48 (60%) of the respondents have first degree (HND/B.Sc) while 32 (40%) have postgraduate qualifications. This shows that the respondents are educated. The respondents' length of patron shows that 15% of them have patronized Big Joe Water for less than a year, 15% patronised for 1 – 3years, 18.8% patronised for 4 - 6 years, 12.5% patronised for 7 - 10 years and majority (38.8%) have patronized for more than 10years.

Description of dependent and independent variables

Table 2: Description of research variables

S/N	Statement	Mean	SD
5	Big Joe Table Water complies with environmental and regulatory standards	4.48	0.914
6	The company reduces carbon dioxide (CO ₂) emissions	3.91	1.116
7	The company reduces solid wastes	4.24	0.917
8	The company minimises the production of toxic and harmful substances	4.25	0.921
Environmental Sustainability		4.22	0.797
9	Big Joe Table Water has improved relationship with the host community and customers	4.60	0.821
10	The products of Big Joe Table Water contribute positively to societal well-being	4.63	0.802
11	The company has improved living quality of surrounding community	4.29	0.903
12	The company values diversity and inclusion in its operations	4.31	0.880
Social Sustainability		4.46	0.772
13	The product of the company is affordable	4.73	0.711
14	The pricing policies of the company is transparent	4.54	0.810
15	The company produces quality, clean and safe water	4.83	0.671
16	The company offers loyalty rewards or discounts to customers	4.29	0.903
Economic sustainability		4.59	0.672
17	The overall quality of the products provided by Big Joe Table Water is satisfactory	4.70	0.719
18	The company is committed to sustainable and environmentally friendly practices	4.40	0.836
19	The company communicates sustainability practices in a satisfactory manner	4.16	0.974
20	The taste and purity of the company water is satisfactory	4.79	0.688
Customer Satisfaction		4.51	0.701

Table 2 shows that the overall mean and standard deviations of the variables are: environmental sustainability ($\bar{X} = 4.22$; $SD = 0.797$); social sustainability ($\bar{X} = 4.46$; $SD = 0.772$); economic sustainability ($\bar{X} = 4.59$; $SD = 0.671$); and customer satisfaction ($\bar{X} = 4.51$; $SD = 0.701$). The mean scores shows that majority of the respondents agreed with the statements.

Model estimation and Hypotheses Testing

Table 3: Estimated regression model and hypotheses testing

Independent Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Hypotheses Testing
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	0.113	0.194	-	0.585	0.560	-
ENVS	0.089	0.062	0.102	1.436	0.155	Do not reject H ₀₁
SOCS	0.230	0.084	0.253	2.750	0.007	Reject H ₀₂
ECOS	0.652	0.085	0.625	7.646	0.000	Reject H ₀₃
R ² = 0.878; Adj R ² = 0.874; F-Statistic = 184.053; F-Statistic (Prob) = 0.000; Number of Observation = 80; Dependent Variable: Business Performance (Customer Satisfaction)						

Results in Table 3 show that positive and significant relationships exist between customer satisfaction and social and economic dimensions of sustainability. The details of the relationship between the dependent variable and independent variables are shown as follows: customer satisfaction and social sustainability [$\beta = 0.230$, $t = 2.750$, $p = 0.007$], and customer satisfaction and economic sustainability [$\beta = 0.652$, $t = 7.646$, $p = 0.000$]. However, the relationship between customer satisfaction and environmental sustainability [$\beta = 0.089$, $t = 1.436$, $p = 0.155$] is not statistically significant. The computed coefficient of determination (R^2) at 0.878 signifies that the independent variables collectively account for 87.8% of the variability observed in the dependent variable. The F-statistic value of 184.053 at the $p = 0.000$ is significant. Therefore, H₀₁ is not rejected while H₀₂ and H₀₃ are rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The study found that positive and significant relationships exist between customer satisfaction and social and economic dimensions of sustainability. However, the relationship between environmental sustainability and customer satisfaction is not

statistically significant. The finding that positive and significant relationships exist between customer satisfaction and the social and economic dimensions of sustainability resonates with the multifaceted concept of sustainability as outlined in extant studies. Sustainability, as defined by Wheeler (2004), involves the responsible and efficient use of resources, preservation of ecological integrity, and promotion of social equity to ensure the long-term health and prosperity of present and future generations. This holistic understanding of sustainability is further supported by Drucker's early exploration (1955) of management's role in promoting the public good and contributing to societal stability and harmony. Oruezabala and Rico (2012) extend the notion of sustainability in business by emphasizing the simultaneous achievement of three interlinked goals: economic prosperity, environmental protection, and social equity. This conceptualization aligns with the contemporary understanding that humankind must fundamentally change its behavior to minimize further environmental damage (Soyez, 2012). The commitment to the well-being of the economy, society, and the environment, as discussed by Olsen, Slotegraaf, and Chandukala (2014), highlights the importance of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives that demonstrate a firm's dedication to environmental causes and their associated impacts. The sense of shared responsibility towards the environment, as articulated by Hensen et al. (2016), reflects a proactive approach within businesses. This approach involves daily activities aimed at meeting personnel and store-level performance targets, initiatives to improve a store's contribution to reducing environmental impacts, and efforts to promote environmentally responsible choices among a wider range of customers. The positive and significant relationships observed between customer satisfaction and the social and economic dimensions of sustainability are thus consistent with the evolving role of sustainability in shaping business practices and consumer preferences.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research outcomes provide a unique and robust understanding on the relationship between sustainability dimensions and customer satisfaction within the broader context of responsible business practices. The research reveals useful insights that show positive and significant associations between customer satisfaction and the social and economic dimensions of sustainability. This aligns seamlessly with the comprehensive understanding of sustainability outlined in extant studies that emphasise responsible resource utilisation, ecological preservation, and social equity for the enduring well-being of present and future generations.

The following recommendations are therefore made based on the findings of the study

- Given the non-significant relationship between environmental sustainability and customer satisfaction, it is recommended that the Big Joe Water focuses on improving the communication and visibility of its environmental sustainability

initiatives. Customers may not be fully aware of the company's efforts in this dimension, leading to a lack of impact on satisfaction. Implementing clear and transparent communication strategies, such as eco-friendly labels on products, informative signage, or digital platforms, can effectively convey the company's commitment to environmental sustainability and potentially enhance customer satisfaction.

- There is need for Big Joe Water to strengthen its commitment to environmental sustainability. This will not only contribute to the ecological well-being but also has the potential to positively influence customer satisfaction. This recommendation can be achieved by engaging in regular audits and adjustments to align with industry best practices.
- Big Joe Water should develop and implement targeted customer education programmes to increase awareness about the importance of environmental sustainability. Big Joe Water should provide information on the company's environmental initiatives and the role customers should play in supporting the initiatives.

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