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An Assessment of Etisalat International Marketing Strategy for the Nigerian Market

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Abstract

Etisalat is a global business which currently operates in 16 countries across the Middle East, Asia and Africa, and as one of the 25 leading global telecoms companies, the management team has identified Nigeria, the largest black Nation on earth as a strategic opportunity to increase both its brand perception and returns to its shareholders. This piece, written based on few frameworks and models to provide an analytical recommendation to the leadership of Etisalat on how to penetrate the market, and also sustain its presence despite the monopolistic competition. The report provides an insight into a business case establishing the growth of LTE subscriptions in the market and also provides a macroeconomic analysis of the business environment of the Nigerian market. The popular SWOT analysis framework guided the critics of the status and capability of Etisalat as a global business, providing insight to its competitive advantages and its area of development as a brand. One identified opportunity for Etisalat, among many others, is the strong governmental and public relations capability of Etisalat which is considered a strategic opportunity to grow its presence in the region. The report also analyzed the economy of the country from a macro and more objective perspective. Identifying key challenges and strategic case for why Etisalat would succeed in Nigeria despite the obvious challenges. Identifying FDI in the telecoms industry as a growing area, the country has been able to help service businesses attract more infrastructural investment which has also reduced the cost of operation at scale. Finally, the piece provides critical short-term and long-term recommendations with an implementation plan which further identifies areas of immediate opportunities.

Keywords: Etisalat, Management, Marketing strategy, SWOT analysis.

1 | Introduction

Headquartered in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, Emirates Telecommunication Group Company PJSC, doing business as Etisalat is a multinational telecommunication service provider that is ranked one of the top 15 largest mobile network providers globally. Currently, operating in 18 countries across the globe, the firm

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wishes to expand its business operations to Nigeria, one of the fast-rising economies in the World with a population of almost 200 million people. Founded 43 years ago, Etisalat launched its Middle East's first mobile network in 1982. Since then, the global corporation has expanded its business operations across the Middle East, Sudan, Afghanistan, Ivory Coast etc.

The international business has established a global footprint to do business in 16 countries across Asia, the Middle East and Africa. The company is highly renowned for operating in a wide array of macro-economic and geopolitical contexts. Anticipating the GDP growth of countries like UAE, Morocco, Pakistan and Egypt will improve in the face of oil price volatility, the company anticipate a strategic re-entry into emerging economies like Nigeria to create stronger leverage in its global competitive landscape.

Understanding that there is varying context, the company is developing a different entry strategy for different countries and market. This study does not just analyze the current competitive landscape of the markets where Etisalat is operating; it also provides a macroeconomic analysis of the Nigerian market to determine the best strategy to enter into the West African Nation. Also, this piece provides some recommendations on how the company can provide value in Nigeria considering the unprecedented transformation that the telecoms industry is experiencing across the world, the evolution of technology, the change of business models, altering customer needs and behaviour, the rise of competitors which have drained the top players of their market shares. This all-encompassing international marketing intelligence is aimed to help the top leadership of Etisalat International make a more informed decision on its entry into Nigeria and also provides a highlight on how to survive the local competition.

2 | Business Case

This piece is a presentation made to the leadership of Etisalat on how to regain its presence in Nigeria after it failed in Nigeria in 2017 due to unpaid debt which claimed its market relevance in its West African market. According to the Africa Market Outlook 2015, the number of mobile LTE subscriptions in Nigeria from the 2nd quarter of 2014 to the 2nd quarter of 2015 has experienced a substantial increase. Nigeria had 486 thousand LTE subscriptions in the second quarter of 2015 which was a considerable increase from 407 thousand in the 1st quarter of 2015. The same study reveals that Nigeria is second on the continental ranking for the Mobile LTE markets in Africa by a number of subscriptions in the 2nd quarter of 2015 [1]. As at December 2018, there is a total of 174 Million different subscribers in Nigeria with the MTN Nigeria Communications holding the largest market share at 38%.

2.1 | Company Overview

Ranked 25th largest telecommunication operator globally, and largest in the United Arab Emirates in 2016, Etisalat had 12.9 million Euros in revenue in the same year [2]. In 2017, Etisalat was ranked top in the Middle East as the most valuable brand by Brand Finance in its Middle East 50 2017. Coming top with a 7 Billion US Dollar brand value against other competitors like Emirate Airlines. Structured as a global business, Etisalat International Investments which oversees global and international business growth and expansion outside the UAE. The International Business Unit, under the leadership of Hatem Dowidar, CEO of Etisalat International, has successfully expanded its presence to 14 countries beyond its headquarters. The global management team consists of 14 members, with 11 directors on the board. vision is to shape the digital future and empower societies through innovation and connectivity.

2.2 | Strategy Statement

In recent years, telecoms and adjacent industries have been in a state of flux on account of ongoing changes within the macroeconomic environment and the increasing and evolving influence of digital developments. In light of this, the Etisalat Group has conceived a new vision supported by a bold corporate strategy to maximise shareholder value in this developing market landscape.

In 2017, the company delivered consolidated revenue of AED 51.7 billion and consolidated operating profit of AED 17.45 billion which represented about a 3% increase YOY in the UAE and the Group's consolidated revenue declined 1% to AED 51.7 billion in 2017 due to the unfavourable exchange rate movements mainly in Egypt. However, the business hits a year-over-year revenue growth was 2%. While the company has experienced some challenges with its decline in its global profitability, the company's shareholders make a case for global growth as consolidation for the decline.

2.3 | Company Assessment

International Revenue Outlook: Revenues of International consolidated operations for 2017 declined year-on-year by 7% to AED 20.0 billion negatively impacted by the unfavourable exchange rate movements in Egypt in addition to competitive pressure of mobile segment in Morocco and a fixed segment in Pakistan. Revenues from international operations represented 39% of Group's consolidated revenue. The report uses the SWOT analytical framework to provide a structured assessment of the global operations of the company.

2.4 | SWOT Analysis

The SWOT tool is used to provide insight and differential analysis of the current status and business condition of Etisalat, helping the international marketing team to make a more informed decision. The framework also will help is provide information on the strategic strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Etisalat as it considers expanding into the new market [3].

Table 1. Swot analysis of the company.

Strength	Weakness
Human capital investment.	Long-term growth is affected by high inventory cost and investment dilution.
Strong engineering team with global knowledge.	
Successful merger and acquisition trials.	Weak financial planning is not done properly and efficiently. The current asset ratio and liquid asset ratios suggest that the company can use the cash more efficiently than what it is doing at present.
Strong organizational and project management.	
Maturity model, OPM3 with good returns on capital expenditure.	Though, good at M&A, cultural integration is poorly managed.
Overall great new market performance.	
Strong partnership network and ecosystem across 18 countries.	Overly diversified product portfolio which weakens differentiative competitive strength.
Strong network across the value chain.	Demand forecasting capability is weak.
Successful product deployment and management team.	Need more technology capabilities through investment.
Quality assurance due to automation.	
Competitive tariffs for greater take-up.	Continued to follow, an aggressive marketing strategy which enabled it to capture a 30% market share in less than two years of operation.
Stronger and high-tech undersea fibre optic cables.	
International connection for data services at a competitive price.	
UAE has one of the lowest mobile tariffs in the region.	

Table 1. Continued.

Opportunities	Threat
The demographic profile of the market. Nigeria, for instance, has a growing youth population.	Focus on oil-producing economies and drastic reduction of oil prices might affect the profitability of the company.
Mobile Number Portability (MNP) enables mobile subscribers to keep their mobile telephone numbers when changing from one mobile network operator to another.	New markets have a lot of startups offering more affordable services.
Strong governmental and public relations which help for new emerging market penetration.	Currency fluctuations because of the volatile political situation in the countries where Etisalat is operating.
Ever-changing customer behaviour and needs pose a new business opportunity for the company.	Access to human capital and talent in developing economies.
Investment capability for structured product management and diversification.	Cultural differences might also pose some threat to the leadership of Etisalat.
Etisalat can practice a differentiated pricing strategy by leveraging on new technology.	Imitation of the counterfeit and low-quality product is also a threat to Etisalat's product, especially in the emerging markets and low-income markets.
More acquisition opportunities of start-ups disrupting communications.	Direct and intense local competition and protectionism of the government from international business.
The economic boom and increasing customers' purchasing power in emerging and fast-rising economies will help create a more profitable business environment for Etisalat.	Liability laws in different countries are different and Etisalat may be exposed to various liability claims given changes in policies in those markets.

2.5 | Macroeconomics: the Nigerian Market

Benchmarking against other African countries in terms of FDI, Nigeria has the highest number of investment influx and also ranks second in Sub-Saharan Africa. Owing this to the political and economic landscape, the country since 2007 has sustained a 50% FDI in the energy sector and 50% in the service sector [4]. As of 2016, the telecommunication industry attracted about 30% of the entire FDI in Nigeria. While there have been debates about the correlation between FDI and telecommunication development in Nigeria, it's also important to note that infrastructural projects are valued at \$100 billion.

A country of about 180 million people with a Gross Domestic Product per capita recorded at 2412.41 US dollars in 2017, the prospect of profitability in telecommunication is high. In the context of FDI as a framework for analyzing the attractiveness of the industry, the telecommunication sector has been mentioned by the Central Bank of Nigeria to be attractive to global investors. This investment, however, impacts infrastructural investment in technology and human capital for the sector [5].

As the FDI investment improves, the Telecoms infrastructure improves, and this has an effect on the cost of transactions from the customers' end and increases the output and productivity of the industry, hence improving the economy [6]. Telecommunication is recognized as one of the fastest-growing sectors in Nigeria but competition is getting fierce among players, hence rates are dropping [7].

With major references to mobile telephony and data transmission, the Nigeria telecoms industry is at emphasis a fast-rising market. The focus of this analysis is to use some more structured analytical techniques to provide insight into Etisalat as a new entrant in the Nigerian market.

2.6 | PESTLE Analysis of the Market

Political

As a young democracy, Nigeria is growing and emerging in its political scape. Currently in the middle of an election, this impacts political stability and investors are laid back to understand the next direction of the government. Evidently, this political instability has also been shown to affect FDI in the past recent months as an investment has dropped by almost 21% in Nigeria.

Economic

Over the past 4 years, the local currency of Nigeria, Naira has dropped against the dollar and now sells at the money market at N300 to USD 1. Inflation continues to be in double digits and the unemployment Rate has risen to 23.1%, with 20.9m Nigerians jobless [8], [9]. The country's GDP growth rate is at -13.98, and the GDP of the country is at 375.8 billion USD GDP, no. 27 in the Global Table of PPP [10]. Currently in Nigeria, according to the CIA's most updated report, total mobile cellular subscriptions are about 145 million. This figure gives the total number of mobile cellular telephone subscribers, as well as the number of subscriptions per 100 inhabitants [9].

Socio-cultural

Nigeria is a highly diverse Nation with about 250 ethnic groups and almost 520 languages spoken across its 923,000 sq km of land. With a population of almost 203 million people [9], Nigeria is big and highly diverse. The most populated country in Africa has its challenges when it comes to reputation and influence across the Sub-Saharan. Challenged with ethnic violence, corruption, internet fraud, and regional unrest in the northern part of its division. Since 2015 after the election of the new leadership, the country has taken huge steps to fight corruption head-on and put back its reputation to the top.

Currently, about 80% of the entire population is below 40% and this youthful population is the key driver to the innovation ecosystem of its entrepreneurial hub. Also, about 40% of the population is below 15 years.

Technology

The telecoms industry has been highly influenced by the efforts of major submarine fibre optics high bandwidth cables. The arrival of companies like MainOne, Glo1 etc has increased accessibility and reach. Nigeria is also linked to Europe by SAT-1 and accessibility and data transmission have been more affordable. The country has also moved, over time, from the 2.5G bandwidth to 4G.

Legal and regulatory

Nigeria's telecoms industry is primarily governed by the Nigerian Communications Act of July 2003 amending the Act of 1992. The act put a total end to the monopoly of Nitel and created a regulatory body called the National Communications Commission (NCC) which is charged with ensuring fair play in the market. Although the market is best categorized as an Oligopoly, it is highly regulated. This type of unstructured market competition has also given rise to the downward pressure on prices for mobile services. With the influx of data technology companies and start-ups in the communication sector, respect for intellectual property rights is still on the low.

2.7 | An Evaluation of the Nigerian Telecommunication Industry

2.7.1 | Competitiveness: application of Porter's five forces model

According to Porter [11], the major reason why firms develop strategies is to cope with the intense competition either by differentiation or low-cost strategy. Hence, the dynamics of the competition that exists in the telecoms industry in Nigeria are primarily captured by the five crucial forces which are shown in *Table 2*.

Table 2. Porters’ forces of Etisalat company.

Five Forces	Description
Porter’s five forces	Overall impact on industry competitiveness
Threat of entry	High
Power of suppliers	Low
Power of buyers	Moderate
Threat of substitutes	High
Rivalry among competitors	High
Threat to entry in the telecommunication sector	<p>New entrants to an industry bring new competition, new capacity, dilution of the market share and other resources.</p> <p>Customer switching cost: in Nigeria, customers face a fixed cost of switching from one supplier to another. While some part of these costs is determined by the regulatory agency, transfer fees can be too much to bear to customers when they need to move from one supplier to another.</p> <p>Capital requirement: the telecoms industry is highly protected by the influx of competition because of the huge upfront financial investments needed in this industry. However, because Nigeria is considered a huge market for investors, the size of the capital requirement does not deter large-scale investors from delving into the market [12].</p> <p>Unequal access to distribution channels: industry players have locked down the distribution channels and that makes new entrants find it difficult to play at the scale these already established players run.</p> <p>Restrictive government policy: in Nigeria, the telecoms industry is highly regulated and these types of industries are highly influenced by the government. However, there is an International Telecommunications Union (ITU) which tries to help its members navigate these barriers. Also, it is important to note that this industry is regulated by the NCC and new entrants need some licencing to gain entry.</p>
The power of suppliers	<p>Suppliers in this industry are in fair play with the players. The suppliers' network is driven by the National Union of Postal and Telecommunication Workers (NUPTW) which has been at the forefront of supporting the ecosystem.</p> <p>Although the industry is known for lots of staff lay-off, the industry has not experienced any form of industrial action or outright demands from the union.</p>
The power of buyers	<p>There is a need for a call for quality service delivery from both individuals and corporations in this sector. The customers are sensitive to prices. In this industry, buyers can easily switch from one provider to another without any cost, however, there is a minimal cost of updating previous registration and updating information [13].</p>
Threat of substitutes	<p>The advancement of technology and the growth of the tech hubs and ecosystem have given Nigerians lots of substitutes to use. This provides opportunities for users to get access to equivalent alternatives at a cheaper rate.</p>
Competition among existing rival	<p>The level of rivalry in this industry is considered the basis for its competition. The telecoms industry in Nigeria is very competitive. MTN has almost 50 per cent of the market share while Airtel has just about 20%, Globacom 19%).</p>

2.7.2 | Problem identification

The report is structured to help the management team identify immediate and long-term challenges and problems the company will encounter in its quest to expand to a new market, Nigeria. The approach is to use

two different models and approaches to analyze the situation of the market, identify the problems with the new market and finally use the same approach to identify market loopholes.

The first approach is to use the Porter’s internal value chain framework to examine how values are delivered to users in the industry and use the same model to identify major value roadmap problems.

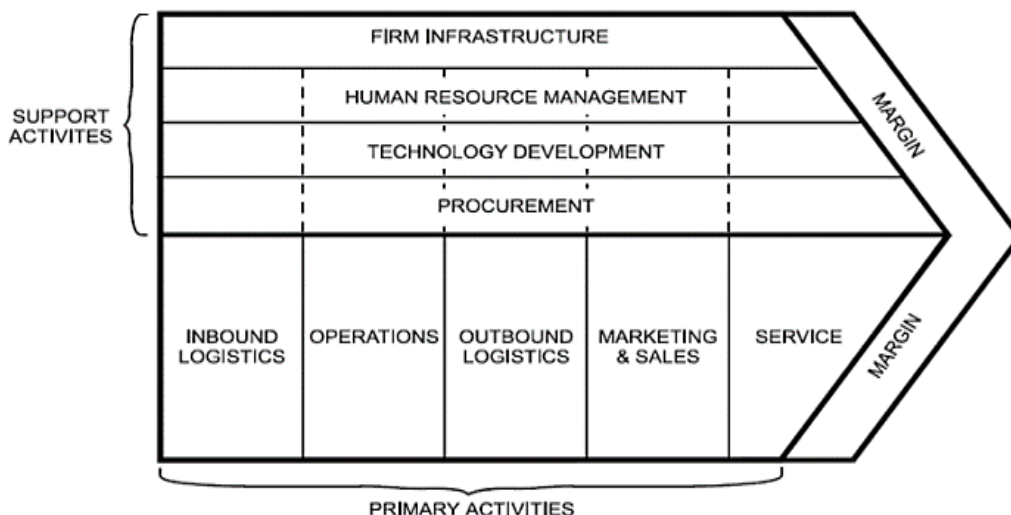


Fig. 1. Competitive strategy [11].

Basic economics describes that a firm will be profitable if its total revenue exceeds its cost of delivering value to its customers. Hence, the concept of value chain analysis, postulated by Porter and Stern [14] is to help the firm understand not only their value chain operations but also their competitors, suppliers and distributors' value chains. Using the same model, described in the diagram below, we will be examining basic problems that align with different parts of the value chain.

Table 3. Porter analysis of Etisalat company.

Components of the Value Chain	Activities	Identified Problems
Primary Activities		
Inbound logistics	Receiving inputs. Storing inputs, and disseminating inputs Involves receiving, storing, inventory control, transportation scheduling	Access to channels Outsourcing production Brand customization
Operations	This involves equipment, engineering, assembly, packaging, testing of machines and deployment of devices.	Maintenance of the engineering equipment Engineering network
Outbound logistics	This involves activities that help move finished products to the users: warehousing, order fulfilment, transportation, and distribution management.	Access to distribution channels that have been monopolized by competitors establishing a new logistics network
Marketing and sales activities	This type of activity includes influencing users to purchase the product. This always includes channel selection, advertising, promotional activities, advertising, sales, pricing, managing retail networks.	Managing and enforcing contractual agreements and procurements

Table 3. Contibued.

Components of the Value Chain	Activities	Identified Problems
Primary Activities		
Service activities	This type of activity helps ensure that value delivery to the customer is enhanced and maintained. This includes support services, upgrades, training, installation, spare parts etc. It also includes invoicing, customer service and manual services.	Human capital and engineering talents at scale Brand clash-most of the decentralized service systems also work with other mobile operators Contract enforcing
Support Activities		
Procurement activities	In the telecoms industry, procurement is connected to network infrastructure and service development.	Access to competitiveoptions Payment model Legal enforcement
Human resource management	Activities include recruiting, training and development, retention, remuneration, reward systems and compensation of employees andmanagers.	Culture alignment Access to talents Alignment with new organizational processes, policies, and systems Change management
Firm infrastructures	This includes high-level general management, strategic planning management, legal services, accounting and finance, accounting, public relations.	Scaling leadership Defining management structure
Technology development	Such as research and development, process automation, design, and redesign.	This is a long-term investment with a less clear path to profitability. Make or buy analysis would need to always be conducted.

Also, using the PESTLE analysis model, we'd identify a few macro-economic challenges that Etisalat willlikely experience. While it is quite impossible for Etisalat as a brand to solve these Macro-economicchallenges, it's important to understand the dynamics of the larger context.

Table 4. PESTLE analysis of Etisalat company.

Problems	Explanations
Political problems	The culture of politics in the country can affect business because of the immaturity of the polity. One major effect of these political dynamics is the flow of human capital in the ecosystem.
Economical problems	In some part of the country, the average living condition of the people is below one dollar per day. Hence, the Etisalat product might not scale to some location.
Socio-cultural problems	Nigeria is a country with about 250 different ethnic groups and this basically implies that diversity requires different cultural play to meet the expectations of different markets. Demographically, Nigeria has a huge and impressive youth market. This might imply that the firm will put up a youthful face and increase the branding cost.
Technological advancement	Nigeria has huge accessibility to technology and its ranked 7th on the global ranking of access to the internet of the 201 countries.
Legal factors	The market has a more mature regulatory agency that regulates switching costs for customers and also regulates pricing and competition.

3| Recommendations to the International Marketing Team

It is important to note that Etisalat is a late entrant in the market in Nigeria and the firm needs to develop a more competitive strategy to gain a market share. This means Etisalat would have to compete aggressively with players that have already gained a large market share and also influenced both the supplier end of the chain and the regulators. The piece highlights some strategic recommendations:

Partnership, alliance and cooperation

The firm needs to redefine its model to allow for a more robust and structured form of partnership. Etisalat would need to consider a sharing model that allows it to share already existing infrastructure, suppliers, and channels with competitors. Also, the firm needs to consider a structured partnership for passive infrastructure share as this allows for a considerable reduction in investment across the board. The firm might consider landing on the MainOne or the Glo1 Submarine cables for point of data, mobile broadband and other value-added services.

Differentiation and creative pricing

The technology landscape has changed greatly with mobile applications with growing social networking capabilities. There is a whole lot around e-health, e-policing, e-education, e-banking etc, and this internet-enabled application offers Etisalat the opportunity to leverage the unique customer needs and demands to offer value. Hence, Etisalat can diversify its product base to generate extra revenue and attract new subscribers. This approach, at scale, will help Etisalat dominate an emerging market. One of the major areas of innovation is for Etisalat to offer unique solutions for free for its subscribers and a pressing challenge is the e-policing and e-traffic control offering.

Ordinarily, because of the monopolistic competitive feature of this market, prices are known to fall as new firms get into the market and product differentiation will be a key factor. Also, Etisalat can consider offering a highly competitive model which allows for price flexibility in areas where the purchasing power of the customers is low. Also, the company can consider opportunities to offer a strategic partnership with manufacturers in different regions to offer after-sale services on user-end equipment, provide 'package solutions' that are viewed as a value-added service and differentiate you from the competition [15]. However, competing on price is not always a worthwhile long-term strategy as firms might compete away profits. Hence, Etisalat must consider differentiation of scope which is driven by quality- this might be an avenue to offer premium values at high prices.

Focus and innovate

Another leverage Etisalat can have over its competitors is the value that comes with technology innovation. Especially with the increase in innovation technology in Lagos, Etisalat can position itself as the 'Friend of Tech'. This positioning will give the business an opportunity to make use of its acquisition and merger capability to take over a few technology-driven products that are disrupting the industry in Nigeria [15].

Implementation

The implementation framework is divided into two major components based on the timeline. The short-term strategies are worked out to be deployed within the first 2 years while establishing the brand and its values in the telecoms industry. The long-term strategies are to be deployed post 3 years and these strategies are identified to help consolidate Etisalat's presence in the regions.

Short term plans

The short-term strategies are focused on ensuring that real values are offered to the users and customers and ensuring that the company achieves a break-even within the first 2 years of working within the market. Highlighted below are the short-term plans that this report has identified.

Partnership, alliances and coalition

To join the battle for supply chain access, one of the easiest approaches to gaining access and building the company's network of suppliers is to join organizations and coalitions that help with access networks.

Sales and marketing

One approach that has worked in the past for new entrants is to outsource the marketing activities to firms that are specialists in marketing.

Service

The short-term goal is to engage local engineers that are regionally dispersed and working directly with local communities. An approach to scaling this outcome is providing incentives to local service providers that work directly with the brand.

Operations

One of the few challenges in the short term is operational efficiency. The recommendation is to work directly with the HR unit of the organization to keep developing the human capital in-house in operational efficiency.

Long term strategies

The long-term implementation strategies should focus on how to overcome some of the forces that are high in the market so that after years of establishing itself in the market [16], Etisalat can become a leading industry player.

The long-term plans, based on the Porter 5 forces, are highlighted below:

- I. The Etisalat supplier network: as Etisalat grows and becomes known in Nigeria, it is important to start building a network of suppliers that are loyal to the brand. Independent of the interdependencies on the ecosystem of suppliers in Nigeria, this approach allows the brand to navigate the supply hurdle and scale its product scope.
- II. Innovating through differentiation: Etisalat needs to keep leveraging the technology emergence in the service industry and provide its customer free (or most affordable) m-services as complementary values.
- III. Increasing barrier to entry: since the threat of entry is high, Etisalat needs to build a model that allows it to scale and influence regulators to set in new policies that raise the barrier to entry. This is done majorly by public relations and government engagement.

4 | Conclusion

As technology changes the dynamics of competition in the telecommunication monopolistic market in Nigeria, it's important for Etisalat to note a few strategic options as it expands its presence in Nigeria which is becoming a fast-rising market. The strategic plans highlighted in this piece will help the international marketing team re-enter the Nigerian market and provide immediate value to customers in a blue ocean niche of M-servicing, providing it with the immediate leverage it needs to gain some market share and also offer continuous value through innovative differentiation.

Funding

Not Applicable

Data Availability

Not Applicable.

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