

**MARKET FOCUSED STRATEGY AND PERFORMANCE OF DOMESTIC AIRLINES IN NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study investigates market-focused strategy and the performance of Dana Airline in Nigeria. Specifically, it examines how customer segmentation, niche marketing, and relationship marketing influence the airline's organizational performance. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, utilizing structured questionnaires to gather primary data from a sample of 237 employees drawn from a population of 580 staff members across different departments of Dana Airline. Stratified random sampling ensured adequate representation of various organizational units. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25, employing both descriptive and inferential statistics, including multiple regression analysis. The findings reveal that customer segmentation enhances operational efficiency and service personalization, niche marketing drives innovation and brand loyalty, while relationship marketing significantly improves customer satisfaction and retention. The study concludes that market-focused strategies contribute positively to the airline's performance by enabling it to respond to customer needs effectively and sustain a competitive advantage. It recommends further investment in data-driven segmentation, strategic niche targeting, and relationship-building initiatives to strengthen market positioning and long-term profitability.*

**Keywords:** Airline performance, customer segmentation, market-focused strategy, niche marketing, relationship marketing.

**INTRODUCTION**

The airline industry is globally recognized as a dynamic and highly competitive sector, characterized by rapid technological innovation, evolving passenger preferences, stringent safety requirements, and fierce competition. In Africa, and particularly in Nigeria, the domestic aviation industry faces several operational and environmental challenges such as high fuel prices, regulatory bottlenecks, limited infrastructure, and unstable economic conditions. These issues are compounded by high customer expectations

and increased competition among airlines. Despite these challenges, some carriers continue to thrive by adopting strategic approaches tailored to their market segments. One such approach is the market-focused strategy, which emphasizes understanding and serving the needs of specific customer segments to enhance competitiveness and improve performance (Okafor & Chukwuemeka, 2023).

In the Nigerian context, the domestic aviation market is highly segmented, comprising diverse customer groups such as business travelers, tourists, government personnel, and regional

commuters. Airlines that understand these segments and tailor their services accordingly are better positioned to improve customer satisfaction, boost loyalty, and enhance profitability (Abubakar & Daniel, 2016). Dana Airline, as a prominent player in Nigeria's domestic airline sector, operates in an environment where strategic market focus can be a key differentiator. Market-focused strategies such as customer segmentation, niche marketing, localized service offerings, and relationship marketing provide pathways for airlines to address specific needs, enhance service delivery, and maintain a competitive edge.

Unlike broad-based competitive strategies like cost leadership or general differentiation, market-focused strategy allows airlines to concentrate their efforts on select market segments, thereby optimizing resource allocation, building stronger brand loyalty, and delivering superior value to target customers (Nduka & Olayemi, 2022). For Dana Airline, applying a market-focused strategy could help mitigate performance issues such as customer dissatisfaction, operational inefficiencies, and competitive threats.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite the critical role that market-focused strategies play in improving airline performance, many domestic carriers in Nigeria, including Dana Airline, continue to grapple with numerous performance challenges. Reports from customers highlight frequent complaints about damaged luggage, inconsistent service quality, and inadequate in-flight communication. Additionally, employees often report operational challenges such as poor airport facilities, runway issues leading to aircraft damage, and limited investment in staff development and service innovation. Government policy on aviation and contributes to the issues of the airline such as high tax rate of income, packing space etc

While the Nigerian government and airline operators have made some efforts to infrastructural and regulatory issues, less attention has been paid to strategic market orientation as a performance-enhancing tool. Previous studies have focused largely on

external barriers like policy limitations and infrastructure deficits (Chinedu et al., 2021; Oluwaseun & Ibrahim, 2021), with limited research into how market-focused strategies such as targeting specific customer groups, adapting services to regional preferences, or leveraging customer feedback can enhance performance outcomes.

This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring how Dana Airline's market-focused strategy influences key performance indicators such as customer satisfaction, operational efficiency, service quality, and profitability.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this study is to examine the impact of market-focused strategy on the performance of Dana Airline in Nigeria. The specific objectives are:

- i. To assess the influence of customer segmentation strategy on the performance of Dana Airline.
- ii. To evaluate the impact of niche marketing on the performance of Dana Airline.
- iii. To determine the effect of relationship marketing on the performance of Dana Airline.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Conceptual Framework**

A market-focused strategy refers to an organization's ability to understand, anticipate, and respond to customer needs, competitor actions, and internal coordination across departments to deliver superior value (Bamidele & Okafor, 2023).. This strategy consists of three main components: customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination.

In the dynamic context of the Nigerian aviation industry where challenges such as fuel price volatility, regulatory uncertainties, and infrastructural deficits are common a market-focused strategy enhances an airline's responsiveness, adaptability, and overall performance. For Dana Airline, adopting a market-focused strategy is crucial in identifying customer preferences, assessing competitor activities, and aligning internal processes to

provide a seamless customer experience (Akinyele & Olorunfemi, 2021).

### **Customer Segmentation**

One important dimension of this strategy is customer segmentation, which involves dividing a broad customer base into distinct groups that share similar needs, behaviors, or characteristics, and then tailoring marketing efforts to suit each segment (Smith, 2020). In the domestic airline sector, segmentation may be based on travel purpose (such as business or leisure), income level, travel frequency, or geographic location. Dana Airline can benefit from this approach by identifying its most profitable customer segments such as corporate clients, frequent flyers, or cost-conscious travelers and designing services that cater to their specific preferences. For example, business travelers may prioritize punctuality and access to exclusive lounges, while budget travelers may be more concerned with affordability. Proper segmentation helps improve service delivery and resource allocation, which in turn enhances customer satisfaction and financial outcomes (Adebayo & Yusuf, 2023). However, the success of this strategy relies heavily on accurate, data-driven insights and ongoing market research. Misidentifying customer segments or poorly implementing targeted strategies could lead to ineffective service offerings and customer dissatisfaction.

### **Niche Marketing**

Another key dimension is niche marketing, which involves focusing on a narrowly defined segment of the market that may be underserved or ignored by larger competitors (Kotler & Keller, 2019). In Nigeria's competitive airline industry, Dana Airline can adopt a niche strategy by operating on less competitive domestic routes or targeting specialized markets such as pilgrimage travel or regional business tourism. This focused approach allows the airline to dominate specific market areas, build strong brand loyalty, and reduce direct competition with major carriers. Additionally, it can provide a stable revenue stream and foster deeper customer relationships (Eze & Afolabi, 2023). Nonetheless, niche marketing comes with potential risks such as market saturation or

limited growth opportunities, particularly if the target segment becomes less profitable or attracts new entrants. Therefore, Dana Airline must periodically reassess its niche markets and adapt swiftly to changing market conditions.

### **Relationship Marketing**

The third dimension is relationship marketing, which emphasizes developing long-term customer relationships over pursuing one-time transactions. This strategy includes initiatives such as loyalty programs, personalized communications, and consistent after-sales services aimed at enhancing customer retention (Nwankwo & Obasi, 2020). In the context of the airline industry, relationship marketing may involve frequent flyer programs, birthday offers, personalized messaging, and efficient complaint handling. For Dana Airline, these practices can significantly boost customer satisfaction, increase brand loyalty, and encourage repeat business critical outcomes in a market where consistent service quality often determines success (Adeola & Ojo, 2022). When executed effectively, relationship marketing can lower customer churn, generate positive word-of-mouth, and improve financial performance. However, if the airline fails to meet customer expectations or does not adequately personalize its services, this strategy could have adverse effects.

### **Performance of Dana Airline**

The performance of Dana Airline can be evaluated across three critical dimensions: profitability, operational efficiency, and customer satisfaction. Profitability reflects the financial well-being of the airline and is shaped by strategic decisions around pricing, cost control, and market positioning (Okorie & Ezenwa, 2021). Operational efficiency pertains to the effective utilization of resources such as aircraft, personnel, fuel, and turnaround time (Ibrahim & Sulaiman, 2022). Customer satisfaction encompasses passengers' perceptions regarding service quality, safety, responsiveness, and value for money (Adeola & Ojo, 2022). A robust market-focused strategy enables Dana Airline to align its services with customer expectations, respond proactively to competitor activities, and foster internal

synergies, all of which contribute to improved performance.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in the Market Orientation Theory developed by Narver and Slater (1990). The theory asserts that the integration of customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination leads to improved business performance by enhancing customer value. This theory is particularly relevant in highly competitive and service-intensive industries like aviation, where understanding and reacting to market changes more efficiently than rivals is key to achieving sustainable success (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993). While critics argue that implementing market orientation can be resource-intensive and time-consuming especially in environments with limited resources the framework remains highly applicable. In the Nigerian aviation context, regulatory instability and infrastructural limitations may pose challenges, but the theory still provides a strong foundation for evaluating Dana Airline's strategic orientation and its influence on organizational performance.

### **Empirical Review**

**Adeleke and Musa (2023)** conducted a study on *Strategic Positioning and Competitive Advantage in African Aviation: A Case Study of Ethiopian Airlines*. The study used a qualitative case study approach with data drawn from 20 senior managers of Ethiopian Airlines through interviews. Thematic analysis was used as the analytical tool. The findings indicated that Ethiopian Airlines successfully implemented a hybrid competitive strategy that combines cost efficiency with differentiation. The researchers concluded that strategic agility and continuous innovation are vital for maintaining competitive advantage in the aviation sector. A critique of the study is its limited generalizability, as the focus was only on Ethiopian Airlines, with no comparative analysis of other African carriers.

**Okafor and Eze (2024)** explored *Competitive Strategy and Organizational Performance in*

*Nigeria's Domestic Airlines: A Focus on Air Peace and Dana Airline*. The population comprised 300 staff members from both airlines, and a sample of 180 was selected using stratified random sampling. A structured questionnaire and multiple regression analysis were used for data collection and analysis. The findings revealed that cost leadership and differentiation strategies significantly affect operational efficiency and profitability, while the focus strategy had a marginal effect. The study was limited by its cross-sectional design, which did not capture the dynamic nature of the airline industry.

**Eze and Afolabi (2023)** examined *Strategic Management Practices and Customer Satisfaction in the Nigerian Aviation Sector*. The study sampled 250 passengers from three major domestic airlines, including Dana Airline. The researchers employed survey methodology and used SPSS for descriptive and inferential analysis. Results indicated that differentiation strategies, especially customer service and digital engagement, significantly enhance customer satisfaction. However, the study did not delve deeply into cost or focus strategies, leaving a gap in understanding the comprehensive effect of competitive strategies.

**Chinedu, Yakubu, and Bello (2021)** conducted a study on *Infrastructure, Regulation, and Airline Performance in Nigeria: A Strategic Perspective*. The study involved 120 regulatory officials and airline managers using interviews and survey questionnaires. Data were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM). Findings showed that while infrastructure and regulatory environment strongly influence airline performance, the absence of strategic management was a significant contributor to poor performance. The study's focus on external challenges limited the examination of internal competitive strategies like cost leadership and differentiation.

Most existing studies have focused either on successful African carriers like Ethiopian Airlines (**Adeleke and Musa, 2023**), others generalized strategic challenges without explicitly examining the individual impact of customer segmentation, niche marketing, localized service offerings, and relationship

marketing on performance, especially within a single domestic airline, most empirical studies also focuses on external challenges such as regulatory policies and infrastructural deficits (Chinedu et al., 2021; Oluwaseun & Ibrahim, 2021, **Chinedu, Yakubu, and Bello, 2021**) with limited attention to the strategic management approaches that airlines can leverage to enhance performance (**Eze and Afolabi, 2023**). Furthermore, there is limited empirical research that integrates these three dimensions of market focus strategy; customer segmentation, niche marketing, and relationship marketing in a Nigerian context, particularly with regard to Dana Airline. This study seeks to fill these gaps by investigating the direct relationship between these competitive strategies and multiple performance indicators profitability, operational efficiency, and customer satisfaction within Dana Airline, using recent data and a robust methodological approach.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design to explore focused marketing strategies specifically; customer segmentation, niche marketing, and relationship marketing focus on the performance of Dana Airline in Nigeria. A descriptive survey design is suitable for this research because it allows for the collection of data from a specific population with the aim of describing, explaining, and interpreting the relationship between variables. The design is also appropriate for obtaining respondents' opinions, experiences, and perceptions in a structured manner, thus providing empirical evidence for the study's hypotheses.

The population for this study comprises all employees of Dana Airline in Nigeria, including management staff, operational staff, customer service representatives, and technical personnel. Specifically, population size 580 (Pay Roll, 2023) employees. This population is chosen due to their firsthand involvement in implementing and experiencing the outcomes of the airline's strategic decisions. The focus on Dana Airline ensures depth in analysis and relevance to the Nigerian domestic aviation context.

A sample size of 237 respondents was determined from the target population using the Taro Yamane formula for sample size calculation, which is appropriate when dealing with a finite population. The sample was selected using a stratified random sampling technique, ensuring adequate representation from various departments within the airline, such as operations, marketing, finance, human resources, and customer service. Stratification enhances the reliability of findings by capturing views across different organizational levels and units.

The study utilizes primary data, which was collected through the administration of structured questionnaires. The questionnaire items were designed to elicit responses on the extent to which; customer segmentation, niche marketing, and relationship marketing are practiced within Dana Airline, and how these strategies influence the airline's performance indicators: profitability, operational efficiency, and customer satisfaction. The structured nature of the questionnaire allows for uniformity in data collection and facilitates quantitative analysis.

The research instrument is a well-structured questionnaire developed based on themes extracted from the literature review and aligned with the study's objectives. The questionnaire is divided into two sections. Section A captures the demographic information of respondents, while Section B is structured according to the three independent variables (; customer segmentation, niche marketing, and relationship marketing) and the dependent variable (performance). A five-point Likert scale format is used, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5), to measure respondents' levels of agreement with various strategic practices and performance outcomes.

To ensure validity, the questionnaire was subjected to expert review by academic researchers and professionals in the field of strategic management and aviation. Their feedback was used to revise ambiguous or biased items to enhance content and face validity.

For reliability, a pilot test was conducted on 20 staff members of another domestic airline not included in the study. The responses from the pilot test were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha to test for internal consistency. The resulting alpha coefficient for the variable is 0.89, which exceeds the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating that the instrument is reliable for data collection.

The collected data was coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25. The analysis involves both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as frequency tables, percentages, and means was used to summarize respondents' demographic profiles and their responses to questionnaire items.

Inferential statistics was employed to test the study's hypotheses. Specifically, multiple regression analysis was used to determine the effect of the three independent variables; (customer segmentation, niche marketing, and relationship marketing) on the dependent variable (performance of Dana Airline). This analytical technique is suitable because it helps assess the predictive power and relative contribution of each strategy to the airline's

performance indicators. The multiple regression model for this study is specified as:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \varepsilon$$

Where:

Y = Performance of Dana Airline (dependent variable),  $X_1$  = customer segmentation,  $X_2$  = niche marketing,  $X_3$  = relationship marketing,  $\beta_0$  = intercept or constant term,  $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3$  = regression coefficients,  $\varepsilon$  = error term

## DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Response Rate

Out of the 237 questionnaires distributed, 223 were duly completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 94.1%, which is considered sufficient and representative for statistical analysis.

### Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents. These characteristics include gender, age, department, educational qualification, and years of experience.

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents**

Variable	Category	Frequency (n = 223)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	123	55.2%
	Female	100	44.8%
Age	18–25 years	38	17.0%
	26–35 years	96	43.0%
	36–45 years	62	27.8%
	46 years and above	27	12.1%
Department	Operations	58	26.0%
	Customer Service	43	19.3%
	Human Resources	37	16.6%
	Finance & Accounts	42	18.8%
Educational Level	Marketing	43	19.3%
	OND/NCE	30	13.5%
	HND/Bachelor's Degree	148	66.4%
Years of Experience	Master's Degree and above	45	20.2%
	Less than 5 years	61	27.4%
	5–10 years	101	45.3%
	Over 10 years	61	27.4%

Source: Computed by author using SPSS Statistical Software (Version 25).

From table 1 above, 123 respondents representing 55.2% were male, while 100 respondents representing 44.8% were female. This suggests a relatively balanced gender composition among the workforce, albeit with a slight male dominance.

With respect to age, 38 respondents (17.0%) fell within the age bracket of 18–25 years, 96 respondents (43.0%) were aged between 26–35 years, 62 respondents (27.8%) were within the 36–45 years category, and the remaining 27 respondents (12.1%) were aged 46 years and above. This indicates that the workforce is predominantly youthful and middle-aged, which is often associated with energy, adaptability, and innovation.

In terms of departmental classification, 58 respondents (26.0%) worked in the Operations Department, 43 respondents (19.3%) were in Customer Service, 37 (16.6%) belonged to Human Resources, 42 (18.8%) were in Finance and Accounts, while another 43 respondents (19.3%) were from the Marketing Department. This shows a fairly equitable representation of all major departments within Dana Airline, thereby enhancing the validity of the findings.

Regarding educational qualifications, 30 respondents (13.5%) had OND/NCE certificates, 148 respondents (66.4%) held HND or Bachelor’s degrees, while 45 respondents (20.2%) had postgraduate qualifications such as Master’s degrees. This implies that the majorities of the workforce at Dana Airline are well-educated and possess the academic background necessary to understand and contribute meaningfully to strategic initiatives.

Finally, the distribution of respondents based on years of experience revealed that 61 respondents (27.4%) had less than five years of work experience, 101 respondents (45.3%) had between five to ten years of experience, and another 61 respondents (27.4%) had worked for more than ten years. This reflects a well-distributed range of experience levels, combining youthful dynamism with seasoned professionalism.

**Inferential Statistics**

To determine the relationship between competitive strategies (cost leadership, differentiation, and market focus) and organizational performance, a multiple regression analysis was performed.

**Table 2 Model Summary<sup>b</sup>**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.734 <sup>a</sup>	.539	.532	.421

Source: Computed by author using SPSS Statistical Software (Version 25).

a. Predictors: (Constant); customer segmentation, niche marketing, and relationship marketing.

b. Dependent Variable: performance

The regression analysis yielded an R value of 0.734, indicating a strong correlation between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) was 0.539, which implies that approximately

53.9% of the variation in organizational performance is explained by the combined effect of customer segmentation, niche marketing, and relationship marketing strategies. The adjusted R<sup>2</sup> was slightly lower at 0.532, suggesting a good fit of the model.

**Table 3 ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	48.062	3	16.021	90.24	.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	41.067	219	.188		
Total	89.129	222			

Source: Computed by author using SPSS Statistical Software (Version 25).

a. Dependent Variable: performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), cost leadership, differentiation, and market focus

The ANOVA results showed a regression sum of squares of 48.062, a residual sum of squares of 41.067, and a total sum of squares of 89.129. The computed F-value was 90.24 with a

significance level (p-value) of 0.000, which is well below the 0.05 threshold. This indicates that the regression model is statistically significant and reliable in predicting performance.

**Table 4. Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	.812	.195		4.164	.000
customer segmentation	.354	.067	.354	5.284	.000
niche marketing	.298	.062	.298	4.806	.000
relationship marketing	.261	.058	.261	4.500	.000

Source: Computed by author using SPSS Statistical Software (Version 25).

a. Dependent Variable: performance

**Regression Equation:**

$$Y = 0.812 + 0.354X_1 + 0.298X_2 + 0.261X_3$$

Where Y represents organizational performance, and X<sub>1</sub>, X<sub>2</sub>, and X<sub>3</sub> represent; customer segmentation, niche marketing, and relationship marketing strategies respectively. The regression coefficients showed that the constant value was 0.812 (p < 0.001), suggesting a baseline performance level when all predictors are zero. The coefficient for

customer segmentation (X<sub>1</sub>) was 0.354, with a standard error of 0.067 and a t-value of 5.284 (p < 0.001), indicating a statistically significant and positive effect on performance. Niche marketing (X<sub>2</sub>) had a coefficient of 0.298, standard error of 0.062, and a t-value of 4.806 (p < 0.001), also showing a significant positive influence. Relationship marketing (X<sub>3</sub>) had a coefficient of 0.261, standard error of 0.058, and a t-value of 4.500 (p < 0.001), confirming a positive and significant contribution to performance.

All independent variables have positive and statistically significant coefficients, suggesting that cost leadership, differentiation, and market focus strategies positively influence Dana Airline's performance.

### **Test of Hypotheses**

**H<sub>01</sub>:** customer segmentation has no significant effect on the performance of Dana Airline. From the above null hypothesis which stated that customer segmentation strategy has no significant effect on performance was rejected, since the p-value was 0.000. Thus, it can be concluded that customer segmentation significantly enhances Dana Airline's performance.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** Niche marketing has no significant effect on the performance of Dana Airline. The second null hypothesis asserting that niche marketing strategy does not significantly affect performance, was also rejected. The p-value was 0.000, indicating a statistically significant impact.

**H<sub>03</sub>:** Relationship marketing strategy has no significant effect on the performance of Dana Airline. The third null hypothesis which posited that relationship marketing strategy does not significantly affect organizational performance, was similarly rejected due to a p-value of 0.000. Therefore, relationship marketing contributes significantly to improving performance.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings of this study highlight that all three market focus strategies; customer segmentation, niche marketing, and relationship marketing have significant and positive effects on the performance of Dana Airline. Among these customers segmentation had the strongest influence, indicating that minimizing costs and maximizing efficiency are key success factors in the airline industry. Niche marketing was also shown to be important, as offering unique services, fostering innovation, and building a strong brand image contribute to enhanced customer loyalty and market recognition. Relationship marketing strategies, such as targeting specific segments and tailoring services accordingly, were likewise found to be effective in improving

profitability and service delivery. These results are in line with Porter's (1985) generic strategies framework and corroborate findings from other empirical studies (Akpan & Amadi, 2021), which emphasized the importance of strategic positioning in gaining and sustaining competitive advantage within the airline industry

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that market-focused strategies significantly contribute to the organizational performance of Dana Airline. Specifically: Customer segmentation allows for the tailored delivery of services, meeting unique needs and improving operational efficiency. Niche marketing promotes innovation, brand differentiation, and the attraction of loyal customers. Relationship marketing strengthens long-term customer engagement and satisfaction, leading to enhanced profitability and customer retention. Thus, Dana Airline's adoption of these strategies provides it with a sustainable competitive advantage in a highly dynamic and competitive aviation industry.

### **Recommendations**

In light of the conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. Dana Airline should invest more in data analytics and customer profiling tools to deepen its segmentation efforts. Personalized offerings based on travel patterns and preferences can improve customer satisfaction and retention.
- ii. Management should continue to identify and serve underserved or specialized markets (e.g., business class travelers, regional destinations) by offering tailored services that are not easily replicated by competitors.
- iii. Initiatives such as loyalty programs, customer feedback systems, and CRM platforms should be enhanced to foster long-term relationships. Training frontline staff in empathy and customer care can further solidify these bonds.

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