



Developing A Framework of Coherent Corporate Strategy: The Case of Successful Companies

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to develop a conceptual framework of coherent corporate strategy for successful companies in the UAE. The conceptual framework has been developed with the help of theoretical and as well as practical support using secondary sources. A desk-based research and case study analysis based on secondary data have been employed to identify the main constructs of the conceptual framework. The theories such as resource-based view, dynamic capabilities, balanced scorecard, strategic alignment model, environment analysis theories, and blue ocean strategy have been reviewed for their application to the UAE organisational context. Furthermore, real-life case study analysis resulted in practically supported constructs that were backed with theoretical support to validate and developed the conceptual framework. The developed framework is anticipated to guide the development of a coherent corporate strategy to achieve success in the UAE telecommunications sector and possibly in other similar regions. Through the synthesis of theoretical principles and practical insights from real-life cases, the framework has endless benefits for managers, policymakers and executives for strategy formulation in Dubai's competitive business market. Future studies can be to develop hypotheses and test to validate the constructs of the framework in different industries and contexts.

Keywords: strategy making; corporate strategy; RBV; dynamic capabilities; coherent corporate strategy; successful corporate strategy; UAE corporate strategy

Introduction

The business environments are changing across the globe with high competition among the major players. Companies must develop a coherent corporate strategy that ensures alignment between company resources, capabilities, and goals. A corporate strategy is an important component that shapes the direction, priorities and purpose of an organisation (Feldman, 2020). It can be viewed as a unique framework for a company to achieve a competitive edge over rivals and deliver quality services for its clients to maximise shareholder value. The existing research on this topic has received considerable attention with various studies proposing theoretical frameworks to guide companies in creating and implementing strategies. For instance, Mazzei and Noble (2017) discussed the development of a framework for corporate strategy focused on understanding how big data can be useful. However, the existing studies highly relate to the Western context with inadequate focus on the Middle East region, especially Dubai. There has been a debate regarding the relevance of Western theories to the Eastern context limiting their transferability and applicability (Filatovchev, et al., 2020; UWN, 2019; Messner, 2016; Abi-Raad, 2019; Barkema, et al., 2015). The unique business environment of UAE and Dubai with its economic and diverse cultural factors is an area open for exploration. Studies (Wesarat, et al., 2014; Wilkins, 2021; Vel and Gomiscek, 2021) stressed the significance of understanding and explaining company success in a UAE context because of differences in cultural values which may impact the behaviours differently.

Given the need for a framework that can be applied to develop a coherent corporate strategy in UAE organisations, the current author investigated the real-life case of successful companies. By analysing the best practices of successful companies operating in Dubai and the relevant theoretical underpinning behind them, a conceptual framework is developed. The framework is helpful for companies in UAE to develop a coherent corporate strategy. The case of successful companies in the UAE is taken into consideration to provide insights for developing a coherent corporate strategy. Particularly the case of Etisalat and Du Corporation operating in the UAE telecom sector is selected. The reason for selecting these two companies is because of their success in the telecom market of UAE over time. According to Brand Finance (2023), a leading brand strategy and valuation consultancy firm, Etisalat has "regained its position as strongest brand in Middle East region with a Brand Strength Index (BSI) score of 89.1 out of 100". On the contrary, Du was ranked among the top ten teleports in 2017 and reported to maintain its position "as a leading global provider of broadcast services" as per the World Teleport Association (Du.ae, 2018). Both companies are successful in Dubai and have strong market presence, the sustained development of the successful companies through planning and execution of coherent strategy is valuable for insights. The research contributes to the existing knowledge by providing insights into the creation and development of coherent corporate strategy in a UAE context. The study is expected to reduce the gaps in the current literature while providing suggestions for future research. The outcomes are expected to produce implications for policymakers, academics researchers in the corporate strategy field and managers in a Middle Eastern business context. Overall, the research aims to answer two main research questions:

- What theoretical notions of corporate strategy coherence are prevalent in the literature and how do they align with real-life cases of successful companies in Dubai?
- What are the key constructs of a conceptual framework for developing a coherent corporate strategy based on the existing theories and cases of successful companies in Dubai?

Literature Review

Theoretical Review

Resource-Based View (RBV)

Several theories and concepts are relevant to the development of a coherent corporate strategy. For instance, the resource-based view (RBV) suggested that a corporation's resources and outstanding capabilities are the main elements contributing to its competitive edge (Barney, 1991). Several authors have contributed to the development and refinements of RBV (Barney & Wright, 2021; Wernerfelt, 1984; Teece, et al., 1997). From RBV's perspective, the firms should take account of the capabilities and internal resources of the company for developing a coherent corporate strategy. However, RBV lacks consideration of external factors like political forces, technological components, and market dynamics. Studies (Almazrouei & Yassin, 2020; Shatilo, 2020) have stressed the inclusion of external environment analysis as it can impact corporate strategy development and implementation.

Dynamic Capabilities View

One of the most prevalent theories in this regard is dynamic capabilities, which was drawn from the concept of RBV (Wójcik, 2015). As per dynamic capabilities views, firms must work on their ability to respond and adapt to changing external conditions of the market (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997). This involves the ability to determine threats and opportunities, exploit the possible opportunities and reconfigure company resources to meet changing dynamics of the market (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997; Pisano, 2015). The theory poses limitations in terms of focusing primarily on the process rather than the outcomes brought by the change influencing the practicality. Furthermore, Collis & Anand (2019) argued that the dynamic capabilities view does not allow for satisfying the needs of all the customers residing in possibly different parts of the work.

Politics, Economics, Socio-cultural, Technological, Legal and Environmental factors (PESTLE)

Apart from dynamic capabilities, PESTLE analysis is an established framework that is used to analyse external factors impacting company performance. PESTLE stands for Politics, Economics, Socio-cultural, Technological, Legal and Environmental factors. Using PESTLE companies can determine the influence of macro-environmental factors that may influence the corporate strategy development process. Studies (Matovic, 2020; Citilci & Akbalik, 2019; Ivada & Kusumawardhani, 2021) have demonstrated the importance of PESTLE and environment analysis for businesses to survive in the market. This is done by determining the external factors which are not controlled by the firm and monitoring them for effective management. An external environment analysis is crucial for strategy formulation and implementation (Sammut-Bonnici & Galea, 2015).

Strategic Alignment Model (SAM)

As opposed to focusing either on internal or external factors, Strategic Alignment Model (SAM) called for alignment between a company's internal resources, external factors, and capabilities. Venkatraman & Camillus (1984) stated that companies can gain success by aligning their strategy with culture, structure, goals, and technology. The four basic components involved in SAM include business strategy, IT strategy, IT infrastructure and organisational infrastructure. From this perspective, a coherent corporate strategy must ensure alignment among people, processes, structure, strategy, and culture. However, Njanka et al. (2021) criticised SAM for its lack of transparency regarding how to achieve strategic alignment. The authors also stated that the alignment between IT and business is a complex phenomenon to be maintained in the long run.

Blue Ocean Strategy (BOS)

On the contrary, the Blue Ocean Strategy (BOS) argues that firms should focus on innovation and create new markets instead of competing in the existing ones (Kim & Mauborgne, 2015). Nevertheless, the telecom sector in UAE is highly competitive and it is challenging for companies to determine new market spaces. The risks associated with entering an unpredictable and untested market with relevance to the telecom industry are also significant. BOS has been supported by several studies in terms of innovating processes and attaining competitive advantage in new markets. BOS is not applicable in the context of the highly competitive telecommunication market in Dubai because there are only two major players (Du and Etisalat). However, the theory provides implications for the constructs of the framework such as "Innovation Strategy Development". Specifically, the theory is used to argue that "market differentiation" should be prioritised while developing a coherent corporate strategy for achieving success along with "continuous improvement" in terms of identifying new opportunities.

Balanced Scorecard

As opposed to theories focusing on internal and external factors of the firms, the concept of a Balanced Scorecard (BS) introduced by Kaplan & Norton (1992) supports that firms must incorporate a balanced approach to consider financial and as well as non-financial metrics. BS implies balancing measures of financial performance such as using Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), internal business processes, customer satisfaction, growth, and learning. Using KPIs, companies can develop a coherent corporate strategy that addresses stakeholders' needs. However, there is an associated challenge with the determination of appropriate KPIs reflecting the strategic objectives of the company (Klimaitienė, Derengovska, & Rudzioniene, 2020).

While the above-mentioned theories are relevant to consider while developing a coherent corporate strategy due to their noteworthy contributions, they all have limitations as discussed. A critical and integrative approach is applied to select the relevant aspects of these theories to inform the determined constructs of the developed framework. Particularly, the conceptual framework is developed after careful analysis of the identified best practices and determination of the relevant theoretical aspects. The relevant successful companies' cases such as Etisalat and Du are discussed next.

The Case of Etisalat and Du: Successful Companies in Dubai

The case of Etisalat and Du is particularly selected to gain insights regarding the development of a coherent corporate strategy and increase its relevance to the UAE context. Etisalat and Du are the two top companies operating in the UAE telecom sector to provide telecommunication, internet and other related services.

Etisalat's Best Practices

Etisalat was developed almost four decades ago as the first telecommunications company, the company serves 16 countries with a net profit of AED 9 billion in 2020 (Etisalat.ae, 2023a). It is among the strongest brands across the Middle East and makes a strong case to learn about successful companies in Dubai. An analysis of its strategies reveals that diversification is adopted to reduce the reliance on telecom products. Etisalat provides diversified products such as e-commerce, financial services, and digital entertainment (e&, 2023). The marketing strategy also uses several approaches such as moving beyond television (TV) advertisements and reaching wide audiences through social media networks and apps. For instance, Etisalat Egypt launched its YouTube campaign to benefit from screen time in 2018 which resulted in 50% progress in watch duration and the organic views doubled (Etisalat, 2018b). Another strategy is to expand to international markets through acquisition and partnerships. For instance, Etisalat acquired 26% shares of Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL) along with control over management in 2006 (Rizvi, 2022). In addition to this, the company uses a customer-centric approach by prioritising customer satisfaction. This includes several initiatives like loyalty programs, customised offers for customers, and digital channels. For instance, the Etisalat loyalty program in Kabul, Afghanistan for its valued customers allows earning points which can be used to receive valuable and exciting gifts (Etisalat.af, 2023). The customer care centre of Etisalat is well established, and the customer service representative is trained to resolve the complaints and concerns of their customers promptly (Etisalat, 2023). Empirical evidence was presented by Muneeb and Shinwari (2020) who conducted 220 surveys with customers of Etisalat in Afghanistan and found that customer relations management is important for Etisalat and other telecom companies to increase organisational profitability and performance.

Apart from this, digital innovation is prioritised by the company as part of its TARGET strategy (e&, 2023). For instance, Etisalat has heavily invested in innovating its products with a focus on emerging technologies. This includes the Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI) and 5G which are brought to the surface through its innovation centers and partnerships with emerging tech companies for novel services and products. Some of these innovations include "Smart Living" for smart home solutions and an enterprise-based solution of cloud services such as "Business Edge". The offering of 5G services and other advanced connectivity technologies is likely to boost the revenue to around 4.7 trillion USD by 2025 (Athar, et al., 2021). Recently launching a new brand identity e& (Etisalat and), the company's annual report shows a net profit of 10 AED billion (Etisalat, 2022). The company is also committed to environmental, social and governance (ESG) to ensure ethical and sustainability practices (Etisalat, 2020). Nadeem & Aziz (2018) highlighted one of the important changes in the subsidiary of Etisalat in Pakistan. The company became more performance-centric by going through cultural and structural changes. The workforce was reduced to 18,000 and major changes were done to performance management (Nadeem & Aziz, 2018). The annual confidential reviews changed to a balanced scorecard approach to manage the performance of the employees along with changes to leadership formation initiatives.

Du Corporation's Best Practices

Du Corporation was started in 2006 and has maintained its position in the UAE telecommunication market in the presence of a dominating player Etisalat. Du also adopted a diversification strategy as it provides various services apart from telecommunication services like broadband connectivity, IPTV, internet exchange, data hub, carrier and satellite-related services for individuals and enterprises (Du.ae, 2023). The market strategy is also unique such as advertising campaigns like "Keep On Charging" and sponsorship of the Dubai Marathon apart from using social media and TV-based advertisements.

Du's annual report in 2022 indicated that the net profits increased by 10.8% and revenues up to 9.2% since last year (Du, 2022). Du also prioritises customer satisfaction and innovation strategies to address the needs of its stakeholders and shareholders. The company provides a range of cost-effective services and products to ensure that digital innovation is served to everyone. The commitment to innovation is also reflected in its innovative products like "Homefront" for smart home security solutions, and Apart from this Du focuses on small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and provide tailored services for SMEs, large business, and governmental organisations (EITC, 2015). Du invests heavily in research and development to come up with innovative products and services with U5GIG Innovation Lab and use cases focused on leveraging IoT, 5G and AI technologies (Gulf News, 2016). Du is also observed to link partnerships to innovation. For instance, Du partnered with Ericsson intending to introduce AI and automation and bring digital transformation to its operations. In the words of Fahad Al Hassawi, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Du Corporation, "Ericsson's AI and data-driven operations solutions will be critical in powering our customer-centric approach and enabling us to meet increased and changing market demands with agility and quality (Geronimo, 2023)".

In addition to this, Du Corporation engages in proper resource allocation to get a competitive advantage over competitors. For instance, Du began operations related to 5G Drones are partnered with Dubai authorities to make the most of its resources (Zawya.com, 2022). Similarly, Du partnered with Vodafone to get into a strategic partnership agreement. This allowed Du to get access to Vodafone's products and devices along with taking benefits from its supply chain experience (Vodafone Group, 2009). Employees, as resources and valuable assets of the company, are also prioritised in terms of

continuous learning and development. This is quite evident from Du Corporation's initiatives to ally with Nokia to enhance employees' expertise and skills (Bhat, 2022b). The performance management of the employees and the company overall is taken seriously. Du has realised and implemented a balanced scorecard approach to managing performance from the beginning (Palladium.com, 2022). A set of key performance indicators (KPIs) allows the company to track the performance of the employees and the associated business areas to bring changes to the relevant business units in need. The sustainability report 2017 of the Du Corporation highlighted that the balanced scorecard approach has provided the management to act strategically and align productivity with profitability for an effective corporate strategy (EITC, 2018). Like Etisalat, Du Corporation also focuses on sustainability initiatives and green processes to protect people, the environment and the planet.

Evidence of Best Practices of Successful Companies in Dubai and Strategy Categories with support

A detailed analysis of Du and Etisalat's best practices revealed similar approaches and strategies in various business areas such as resource allocation, customer relations, employee training, performance management, strategic alignment, continuous improvement, innovation, internal and external analysis of the environment and visionary approach to leadership and development of mission and vision. Table 1 includes sources such as official reports, websites of the companies, empirical studies, news articles and other relevant material indicating the best practices used by Etisalat and Du Corporation providing insights for the conceptual framework developed in this paper. The table provides comprehensive and useful insights into the services/products offered by Du and Etisalat and the underlying theoretical support driven by the best practices of both successful companies. The authors have linked these best practices and the involving components to the Strategy Category such as the constructs of the conceptual framework developed and presented in this study. The references are included to provide evidence regarding the mentioned service/product, best practices, and underlying approach.

Table 1 - Identification of Strategic Constructs Determined by Analysing Successful Companies' Best Practices, Author's Contribution

Company	Service/Product	Best Practices	Underlying Approach/Theory	Strategy Category	References
Etisalat	Telecommunication services	Visionary Leadership -Vision to drive digital future to empower societies influencing everyone in the process -Mission includes factors such as empowerment, agility, collaboration, and customer centricity	An all-inclusive approach, Strategic Intent, Organisational culture, and customer-focused approaches	Mission and Vision	(Eand.com, 2023)
Du	Telecommunication services	Visionary Leadership -Vision to enhance life and experience of everyone from anywhere and anytime -Mission components include customer satisfaction, talent acquisition, shareholder value maximisation, innovation, and global transformation	BOS		(Du.ae, 2023)
Etisalat	Telecommunication regulatory services	Regulatory Compliance, Market Analysis	PESTLE, market analysis	Environmental Analysis	(Babatunde & Adewuyi, 2017 ; Hieu & Nwachukwu, 2019; Al Shami, 2022)
Du	Telecommunication regulatory services	Market Analysis, Compliance with laws			(Ameen & Willis, 2016; Hieu & Nwachukwu, 2019)
Etisalat	Robotic Center, Digital Solutions, Fiber optics, GoChat messengers, AI-powered customer service, Etisalat Innovation Center	Digital Transformation, Innovative Products, Research and Development	Dynamic capabilities, BOS	Innovation strategy development	(Etisalat.com, 2021; Etisalat, 2019; Sadaqat, 2017; Bhat, 2022a)
Du	U5GIG Innovation Lab services, Homefront, 5G Drones	Technological Innovation, Innovative Product			(Du, 2017; Venkatesh & Singhal, 2023; Gulf News, 2016)

		development, disruptive innovation			
Etisalat	Expanding to international markets such as PTCL in Pakistan	Acquisition and Partnerships	RBV	Resource Allocation	(Rizvi, 2022; Nadeem & Aziz, 2018)
Du	Expansion to other electronic consumer markets, partnerships with companies to build employees skills	Market Expansion, Partnerships.			(Zawya.com, 2022; Vodafone Group, 2009)
Du	Uses Balanced Scorecard to assess performance	Performance measurement and evaluation	Balanced Scorecard	Performance Evaluation	(EITC, 2018; Palladium.com, 2022)
Etisalat	Uses supervision and monitoring along with other performance evaluation tools such as Balanced Scorecard				(Etisalat, 2018a; Nadeem & Aziz, 2018)
Du	Process and quality management, Customer care 24/7,	Continuous improvement culture through employee empowerment and customer feedback	SAM, RBV	Continuous Improvement	(EITC, 2014; Al Awadhi, Obeidat, & Alshurideh, 2021)
Etisalat	AI-driven virtual assistance, digital solutions, Customer Experience (CX) Committee, Smart Stores	Continuously improving processes, quality of process related to customers	BOS		(Etisalat.ae, 2023b; Etisalat, 2023; Etisalat, 2020)
Etisalat	Green Energy Solutions, Smart processes, CSR initiatives	Sustainability Initiatives	SAM	Focus on Sustainability	(Etisalat.ae, 2023c; Ericsson.com, 2023; Bello, Shariffunddin, Othman, & Osman, 2023)
Du	Community Development Programs, Sustainable processes	Corporate Social Responsibility			(UN, 2022; EITC, 2018)

Conceptual Framework

This paper focused on the development of a coherent corporate strategy using theoretical concepts and best practices from the case of two successful companies operating in Dubai, Etisalat and Du Corporation. Based on the literature review, multiple factors were identified that are relevant to the development of coherent corporate strategy. The interrelation between the identified theoretical factors such as internal resources and capabilities, dynamic capabilities, internal resources, internal and external resources, balanced approach, and financial and non-financial metrics were found to be supported by several previous studies. Table 2 provides the details regarding each construct of the conceptual framework, the associated components, and underpinned theoretical aspects along with references to provide support from existing research.

Table 2 - Constructs of The Framework and Theoretical Evidence, Author's Contribution

Construct	Components	Theoretical Support	Main Themes	References
Mission and Vision	Purpose, values, vision, and mission statement	SAM, RBV, PESTLE	Strategic Intent Core competencies Organisational culture	(Barney, 1991; Barney & Wright, 2021; Godfrey, 2016; Taiwo, et al., 2018; Fitzsimmons, et al., 2022; Bowen, 2018)
Environmental Analysis	Industry Analysis PESTLE factors	PESTLE, Dynamic capabilities	External environment analysis Industry attractiveness, resource scarcity	(Teece, et al., 1997; Teece, 2022; Fahey & Narayanan, 1986; Pulaj & Pulaj, 2015; Matovic, 2020; Aguilar, 1967; Sammut-Bonici & Galea, 2015)
Innovation Strategy Development	Research and Development, Product/Service Innovation	BOS, Dynamic capabilities	Value innovation, Disruptive innovation, Market creation	(Kim & Mauborgne, 2015; Teece, et al., 1997; Winter, 2003)

Resource Allocation	Human, physical, and financial resources	RBV, SAM	Resource heterogeneity, the process of resource allocation and complementarity	(Barney, 1991; Kim & Mauborgne, 2015; Sanchez, et al., 2015; Maritan & Lee, 2017)
Performance Evaluation	Financial and Non-Financial metrics	SAM, Balanced Scorecard	Performance measurement, strategy execution and feedback loops	(Sanchez, et al., 2015; Werner & Xu, 2012; Kaplan & Norton, 1992; Fuertes, et al., 2020)
Continuous Improvement	Process improvements, quality control and management	Dynamic Capabilities, BOS	Innovation of processes, excellency of services and satisfaction of customers	(Winter, 2003; Kim & Mauborgne, 2015; Teece, et al., 1997)
Focus on Sustainability	Environmental and Social Responsibility	RBV, PESTLE	Social responsibility, sustainability value creation and environmental focus	(Barney, 1991; Aluchna, 2018; Porter & Linde, 1995)

The above-mentioned factors are found to be highly relevant to influence the development of a coherent corporate strategy based on literature review findings and analysis. However, there was a need to increase the relevance to the UAE context, for which the case of Etisalat and Du Corporation was included. Figure 1 demonstrates the graphical view of the developed framework followed by a discussion of each component of the framework.



Fig. 1 - Coherent Corporate Strategy, Author's Contribution.

Mission and Vision:

Mission refers to the organisation's specific approach and prioritization of activities for growth whereas vision is an overall approach to reach long terms goals and sustainability in operations and performance (Bowen S. , 2018). It is argued that a clear and compelling mission and vision is necessary. Furthermore, the formulated mission must align with the company's objectives and values. The theoretical support for including this component in the framework lies in the assumptions behind the strategic alignment model (SAM). The model argues that a company's strategy should be aligned with internal resources and the external environment along with organisational culture (Godfrey, 2016). The case study analysis also revealed that both Du and Etisalat focus on mission and vision creation. Etisalat has prioritised driving digital innovation to empower societies and raising talent collectively to increase its digital footprint across the globe. Etisalat's vision is to "move the world and its people forward" (Eand.com, 2023), whereas Du's mission and vision have a centralised focus on achieving customer satisfaction, and shareholder value, and providing enhanced experience globally (Du.ae, 2023). A case study of telecommunication firms by Hieu and Nwachukwu (2019) indicated that strategy formulation must focus on and include factors such as vision, mission, long-term objectives, and strategic analysis of the environment.

Environmental Analysis:

This refers to conducting an in-depth analysis of the external and internal environment of the organisation. The purpose of the internal and external analysis is to determine the threats to the company along with exploring potential opportunities (Fahey and Narayanan, 1986). The external factors may include emerging technologies, market changes, economic disruptions and other factors that may influence company performance (Matovic, 2020). The

environment analysis must also include a critical analysis of the competitive market to identify opportunities for bringing innovative products/services. It is also a prerequisite to analyse the capabilities and existing resources while verifying the existing innovation landscape. Another factor that is crucial for the environmental analysis includes the determination of employee engagement, motivation, and positive attitude towards innovation along with investments and required funds (Pulaj & Pulaj, 2015).

The theoretical support behind environmental analysis includes theories that support internal and external analysis of the company environment including. For instance, the RBV emphasises the importance of the internal capabilities and resources of the company for long-term success (Wernerfelt, 1984). Lubis (2022) indicated that the unique resources and capabilities of a company like its human capital, intellectual properties and organisational functions can help gain a competitive edge over rivals. Studies (Barney, 1991; Barney & Wright, 2021) specified that these resources should be inimitable, rare, valuable, and non-substitutable to achieve long terms edge over rivals in the market. Apart from RBV, the dynamic capabilities view also argue that companies that flexibly adapt and respond to changing market environments are likely to achieve long-term success (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997). A recent evolution and increased relevance of Dynamic capabilities to the current business market is stressed by Teece (2022), it provides a strong basis for drawing upon the internal resources and capabilities of the company to gain success in the market. Similarly, the framework of the Balanced scorecard allows monitoring and evaluation of the company's performance through the management of internal processes, financial, customer and other internal capabilities including employee learning and growth (Kaplan & Norton, 1992). On the contrary, PESTLE (political, environmental, socio-cultural, technological, legal and environmental) effectively provides an analysis of the external environment of the company (Sammut-Bonnici & Galea, 2015). Aguilar (1967) stresses that external environments can strongly impact a company's operations and can provide implications for business strategies. Likewise, Citilci & Akbalik (2019) explained that organisations have internal and external environments, and analysing the internal environment reveals micro-based factors that can be managed efficiently to gain success. Whereas, the external analysis reveals larger and wider factors that might not be controlled by the organisation but managing these are also important for gaining success and a competitive edge over rivals in the industry (Citilci & Akbalik, 2019). Both environments present a strong outlook to be considered for a coherent corporate strategy framework.

While the above theoretical support stresses the inclusion of environmental analysis of the organisation, the practical support provides real-life insights for this construct of the framework. Studies (Ameen & Willis, 2016; Hieu & Nwachukwu, 2019; Al Shami, 2022; Babatunde & Adewuyi, 2017) indicated the importance of environmental analysis to manage the factors for business success. Ameen & Willis (2016) conducted an external environmental analysis and found that telecommunication companies in the UAE (including Du and Etisalat) retrieved main challenges such as governmental regulations, policies, a monopoly in the market and other external factors like restrictions on using some mobile services. On the contrary, Hieu & Nwachukwu (2019) maintained that Etisalat's effective use of its internal resources and technological capabilities has helped it to remain competitive in the Nigerian telecommunications market. Internal resources such as human resources, policies, employee commitment and structure are important components for strategy formulation and implementation based on the case of Etisalat. Determining the factors that may impact strategy implementation in Etisalat, Al Shami (2022) found that external factors such as individual factors, managerial factors and organisational factors are necessary as these internal components can be used in the right way to implement a successful corporate strategy framework.

Innovation Strategy Development:

The main theoretical support behind innovation strategy development lies in BOS. The theory argues that companies must create new market spaces by innovating products and services to make them distinguishable from existing ones (Kim & Mauborgne, 2015). Due to the monopoly in the UAE telecommunications market of two major companies, Etisalat and Du, BOS might not be applicable to newcomers. However, BOS allows the inclusion of the innovation strategy development in terms of focusing on innovative products, continuously providing new products and standing out in the market competition. Drawing upon this theoretical view, it is argued that a differentiated competitive strategy can be implemented by focusing on innovation and creativity.

After the environmental analysis is done, the responsible personnel or team must develop a strategy targeting and achieving innovation in the company. The view is supported by Shatilo (2020) who stressed the importance of internal and external factors of an organisation and their necessity in the strategic management of innovation processes. An innovation strategy must align with the overall business strategy to ensure that innovation culture is internalised. The strategy should determine areas of innovation, the prerequisites in terms of resources and funds along with the expectation of outcomes. It is suggested to develop a differentiated competitive strategy to ensure that the company has unique strengths distinguishable from its rivals, one of the best practices of both Etisalat and Du. Both Etisalat and Du are offering several innovative products and continue to demonstrate their best practices of focusing on new products and innovative services. These include Smart Living, Business Edge, 5G technologies, Robotic Center, GoChat messenger, AI power customer experiences and Etisalat Innovation Center (Etisalat.com, 2021; Etisalat, 2019; Sadaqat, 2017; Bhat, 2022b; Athar, et al., 2021). Similarly, Du innovated its products and services and leverage emerging technologies like U5GIG innovation lab services, Homefront, 5G drones, IoT technologies and much more (Du, 2017; Venkatesh & Singhal, 2023; Gulf News, 2016). An innovation culture is equally necessary as a company-wide commitment to innovation is likely to promote innovation as a core value of the company. A culture of innovation and risk-taking along with the provision of necessary support and resources may lead to innovative products/services. Based on both above discussed theoretical and practical support, an innovation strategy is likely to provide a competitive edge to companies against their rivals in the market and maintain their position for the long-term.

Resource Allocation:

When the innovation strategy is in place as mentioned above, the company must ensure that resources are not only made available but they are also allocated appropriately. The allocation of resources is mainly about human, financial and physical resources of the company. The resource allocation might include investments in the rights direction (Navissi, Sridharan, & Khemati, 2017). As opposed to this, Employee training and skills development is also another important area where companies invest (Ferman, 2021; FHRC, 2017). Companies in the past have often overlooked the importance of employee training (Ehaga & Imran, 2013). Efficient use of employees' skills and expertise as human resources can be beneficial to maximise the productivity and profitability of the firm (Yimam, 2022). Overall, Maritan & Lee (2017) argued that resource allocation is crucial for strategic management of the company including financial, human resources, physical and technological resources. The theoretical support of this construct of the framework lies in RBV and SAM. Both theories argue for focusing on the efficient and right use of resources to attain strategic benefits for the firm. The practical support is well established in Table 1 with the best practices of Etisalat and Du as cases of successful companies in the UAE telecommunications industry. This is demonstrated by how these companies have allocated resources carefully and taken advantage of acquisitions and partnerships. For instance, Du partnered with Nokia and Vodafone Group to benefit from their resources, technological and employee skills development (Zawya.com, 2022; Vodafone Group, 2009). Similarly, Etisalat expanded internationally using its existing resources to gain success and expand its horizons (Rizvi, 2022; Nadeem & Aziz, 2018).

Performance Measurement:

Performance measurement is also necessary for companies to become successful. The framework suggests that performance metrics should be developed along with indicators to monitor and track the progress of the efforts related to innovation strategy. This may include the number of new services or products launched, the revenue generated from these new products/services and patent files. Drawing from the SAM and Balanced Scorecard approach, the companies are suggested to focus on both financial and non-financial metrics of performance. Key performance indicators (KPIs) can be used to achieve effective performance measurement. A balanced scorecard framework influences the inclusion of this component, a balanced set of metrics should be incorporated for measuring and managing performance. Studies (Sanchez, et al., 2015; Werner & Xu, 2012; Kaplan & Norton, 1992; Fuertes, et al., 2020) provided a strong theoretical support for ensuring responsible and strategic performance evaluation and management. Along with this, the studies (EITC, 2018; Palladium.com, 2022; Etisalat, 2018a; Nadeem & Aziz, 2018) have indicated that both Etisalat and Du use a balanced scorecard approach for more comprehensive and responsible performance management and evaluation in their businesses.

Continuous Improvement:

Successful companies must incorporate continuous improvement and evaluation of the firm's efforts towards innovation with the help of customers' feedback, emerging technology trends and maintaining an innovation and learning culture. The company's strategies should be continuously evaluated and improved using the collected feedback and ongoing analysis of the operations. Using dynamic capabilities as a supportive theory along with the importance of strategy formulation (Winter, 2003; Kim & Mauborgne, 2015; Teece, et al., 1997), the presented framework recommends that companies should adopt continuous development and improvement notions.

For practical support, this includes responding effectively to external pressures and market changes. Both Du and Etisalat are actively engaging in process improvement and quality assurance to demonstrate their stance towards continuous learning and improvements. For instance, realising the importance of urgency to meet the 5G demands in the telecommunications market (AlBalooshia, Ahsan, & Rahman, 2021), both companies strengthened their 5G services and leveraged on new technologies like Blockchain and IoT (Etisalat.ae, 2023a; Etisalat, 2023d; EITC, 2014; Du.edu, 2023; Al Awadhi, et al., 2021). This also includes focusing on improving operations to provide prompt customer feedback and support for improvements and quality of the processes.

Focus on Sustainability:

The trends of sustainability practices are on the rise, companies are integrating corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives into business strategy for positive reputation and smooth operations. The firms are increasingly inclined towards incorporating sustainability practices to ensure the meets of current and as well as future generations. RBV implies the importance of resources which includes environmental resources as well as ensuring the firm's CSR, the concept is further supported by value creation and ensuring the performance of the company by focusing on external factors included in the PESTLE. Environmental responsibility is one of the important components that firms should be focusing on while formulating coherent corporate strategy. Etisalat and Du have both taken this seriously and focus on sustainability initiatives, Etisalat focuses on Green Energy solutions and smart processes along with focusing on CSR initiatives (Etisalat.ae, 2023c; Ericsson.com, 2023; Bello, Shariffunddin, Othman, & Osman, 2023). Whereas, Du Corporation has engaged in community development programs and sustainable processes to ensure that people, the planet, and the environment is not impacted by their operations. (UN, 2022; EITC, 2018).

Materials and Methods

A combination of a literature review and a case study analysis of successful companies in Dubai using secondary data was used as the methodology for this study. The case of successful companies in Dubai plays an integral role in the study as the aim is to stress the significance of developing a framework that is relevant for UAE companies. Thus, the analysis of strategies and best practices used by Etisalat and Du as successful companies informed the development of the framework. Yet, the literature review facilitated the starting process of determining the theories that are specifically relevant to developing a coherent corporate strategy. This helped in designing an appropriate structure of the conceptual framework with theoretical support. The factors crucial for developing an effective coherent corporate strategy are highly discussed and supported by theories that were revisited in this study. However, the effectiveness of these theories in a UAE context needs to be carefully explored. The adopted methodology is a novel and flexible approach to conceptual framework development, a combination of desk-based research and real-life case study analysis has provided a strong framework for developing a coherent corporate strategy for telecommunications firms in the UAE and possibly in other countries of MENA and GCC. For the literature review, secondary sources relevant to the field of corporate strategy and associated theories, models or frameworks were used. This included reliable sources such as peer-reviewed academic papers, journal articles, textbooks, and reports. The authors focused on including the newest sources apart from using original references to key theories and models related to corporate strategy. For the analysis of Etisalat and Du, content from official websites, annual reports and news sources were reviewed to produce a useful analysis. Online search engine such as Google was used to access journal databases such as MDPI, Researchgate, Elsevier, and other sources such as company websites, news reports and annual reports. The unreliable sources were excluded such as blogposts, social media websites and forum discussions.

Conclusion

The study provides a conceptual framework that can be used to develop a coherent corporate strategy in UAE companies in the telecommunication sector. A systematic approach is used to propose a novel methodology of combining literature review and case study analysis of successful companies in the UAE. It has also been considered that the proposed framework is not limited to the existing pre-determined paradigms. The framework is focusing on the best practices of successful companies to identify specific factors, strategies and best practices used by successful companies and then the theoretical support to elaborate the framework. The authors argue that the best approach to developing a conceptual framework is by focusing on real-life cases as it would be closely connected to the UAE context. Equally important is to consider the theoretical support of the identified practical actions. Based on this conception, the first step is to consider what factors are used by existing companies that come across as successful in UAE, and accordingly, the necessary components of the framework are organised to reach that level of success and beyond. With this idea, the authors used a systematic approach in developing the framework by effectively incorporating possible methods. After that, an integration of identified theories and best practices of successful companies allowed the development of the conceptual framework.

The study also provides a detailed view of the constructs of the framework and the previous studies that support the components necessary for the development of a coherent corporate strategy in various organisations. The process has been made transparent and clear for other authors to replicate the novel methodology of this paper to develop a conceptual framework for organisations in other sectors. It should be noted that the results of the implementation of the proposed conceptual framework are beyond the purpose of this paper. However, it is suggested that a primary study to validate the framework may provide deep insights into the subject matter. This may help corporate managers to develop a coherent and effective corporate strategy in the telecommunications industry. The authors acknowledge that each conceptual framework for corporate strategy development should be designed depending on the unique circumstances and requirements of the corporate. Nevertheless, the proposed framework aims to bring insights into the development of a coherent corporate strategy based on identified factors from successful company cases. In this light, the suggested framework is expected to provide useful insights for other telecommunications companies in Middle East-North Africa (MENA) and the countries in GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council).

Limitations

Firstly, only secondary data is collected in this study which is limited in providing a comprehensive understanding of the corporate strategies of successful companies in Dubai. Primary research collecting surveys and interviews with top executives of successful companies are likely to provide useful insights into best practices and decision-making processes. Secondly, the study focuses on successful telecom company cases that may not contribute to the generalisability of the findings to other sectors. The strategies identified for the selected companies may not apply to other firms operating in different contexts. Thirdly, the study does not focus extensively on the influence of external pressures such as political instability that may impact the effectiveness of corporate strategies. However, political factors that are considered external factors that may impact business processes are taken into consideration under the construct of environmental analysis of the company for coherent corporate strategy formulation.

Future Work

An expansion of this study is recommended using a larger sample of successful companies in Dubai. In addition to this, the success factors of companies could be analysed in terms of failure or success in different contexts. It is suggested to conduct primary research data to support the constructs of the proposed conceptual framework. The interaction with managers and employees of Etisalat and Du could provide deep insights regarding the identified best practices and strategies. Furthermore, the propositions provided in the study can be tested as hypotheses to accept/reject the factors included in the

conceptual framework. A mixed methods approach is suggested for future work to strengthen the associations or prepare an appropriate version of the framework to achieve desired successful outcomes for corporates in the telecom sector in UAE. Another area could be to explore the applicability of the framework in other geographical locations and evaluate the results to emphasise the importance of including Western/Eastern contexts. Lastly, future work could also explore how organisational culture and leaders may play a critical role in implementing coherent corporate strategies in UAE companies.

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