

Cage Analysis: An Examination of Dangote Refinery

Samuel Ayodele Majekodunmi, Oluwatobi Azeez Ahmed & Lawal Taofeek Owolabi

Abstract

This study explores the international business operations of Dangote Refinery (DR), a major player in the global energy market and a subsidiary of Dangote Group. Using the CAGE framework (Cultural, Administrative, Geographical, and Economic distances) as a theoretical lens, this study examines challenges and opportunities this refinery encounters in its cross-border operations. This research employs a qualitative methodology, relying on secondary data sources such as industry reports, academic journals, company publications, and news articles to provide a comprehensive analysis. Findings reveal that cultural differences, such as language barriers and consumer behavior, necessitate localized marketing strategies for successful market penetration. Administrative challenges, including regulatory disparities and trade barriers, emphasize the need for proactive compliance and collaboration with local governments. Geographical factors highlight the strategic importance of DR's location near Lagos ports, which facilitates international exports but is hindered by inadequate infrastructure and logistics within the region. Economic disparities across target markets require adaptable pricing strategies and product offerings to address varying income levels and industrial demands. This study underscores the significance of leveraging the CAGE framework to navigate these dimensions effectively. Strategic recommendations include adopting multilingual and culturally resonant marketing approaches, aligning operations with regional regulations, investing in infrastructure development, and tailoring pricing models to market conditions. By addressing these cross-border complexities, DR enhances its competitive advantage and operational efficiency in the global energy market. This research contributes to the understanding of strategies for overcoming challenges in the context of the oil and gas industry. It highlights the importance of integrating theoretical frameworks like CAGE into practical business decision-making to maximize opportunities.

Keywords: Cage Analysis; Examination.

Introduction

Dangote Refinery (DR), part of Dangote Group, is one of the largest integrated refinery

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and petrochemical projects in the world, with an annual capacity to refine 650,000 barrels of crude oil per day. Located in Lagos, Nigeria, this refinery aims to significantly reduce Nigeria's dependence on imported petroleum products and enhance energy security across West Africa (Ndubuisi, 2024). Beyond its substantial contribution to Nigeria's economy, DR is also a critical player in the broader global energy market. As a large-scale multinational enterprise, it faces the complexities of navigating various international markets, regulatory landscapes, and economic environments. In today's globalized economy, understanding cross-border business dynamics is crucial for multinational corporations (MNCs) like DR. Cross-border business analysis enables companies to anticipate the challenges posed by differences in cultural, administrative, geographical, and economic conditions (Okonkwo, 2024). With the increasing pace of globalization, MNCs must develop strategies that can address these international differences effectively. In this context, cross-border business analysis not only facilitates market entry but also enhances the operational efficiency of MNCs operating in diverse regions, allowing them to maximize opportunities while minimizing risks (Ferreira & Falcão, 2019; Hattangadi, 2023).

The CAGE framework, introduced by Ghemawat (2001), is a tool designed to help businesses assess four major distances that influence international business operations: Cultural, Administrative, Geographical, and Economic. These dimensions are particularly relevant for multinational companies like DR, which operates in markets with varying degrees of cultural differences, regulatory challenges, geographical constraints, and economic disparities. By examining these four factors, companies can tailor their strategies to better align with the conditions of target markets, thereby improving their chances of success (Ghemawat, 2020).

Objectives of this study are two-fold: Firstly, to evaluate cultural, administrative, geographical, and economic factors affecting DR's cross-border operations. Secondly, to provide insights into how DR navigates these (Cultural, Administrative, Geographical, and Economic) factors, with an emphasis on strategic adjustments DR has made to overcome barriers and capitalise on opportunities.

Research Objectives

This research has specific objectives, which are stated below:

1. To establish the relevance of the application of target marketing in overcoming cultural barriers and enhancing competitive advantage for Dangote's refinery.
2. To confirm the importance of alignment with regulatory policies in overcoming administrative barriers and enhancing competitive advantage for Dangote's refinery.
3. To unravel the essence of strategic location in overcoming geographical barriers and enhance competitive advantage for Dangote's refinery.
4. To unveil the necessity of cost-competitiveness in overcoming economic barriers and enhance competitive advantage for Dangote's refinery.

Research Questions

This investigation has specific exploratory questions, which are presented below:

1. Does the application of target marketing lead to overcoming cultural barriers and enhancing competitive advantage for Dangote's refinery?
2. Does alignment with regulatory policies lead to overcoming administrative barriers and enhancing competitive advantage for Dangote's refinery?
3. Does location strategy lead to overcoming geographical barriers and enhance competitive advantage for Dangote's refinery?
4. Does cost-competitiveness lead to overcoming economic barriers and enhancing competitive advantage for Dangote's refinery?

Literature Review

The CAGE framework, introduced by Ghemawat (2001), is a widely recognized tool for analyzing the impact of Cultural, Administrative, Geographical, and Economic distances on international business. It provides a structured way to assess challenges and opportunities businesses face when operating in or expanding to foreign markets. Each dimension—Cultural, Administrative, Geographical, and Economic—highlights specific aspects of the environment that influence cross-border business strategies. This framework is particularly useful for multinational companies aiming to adapt to diverse market conditions (Okonkwo, 2024).

Cultural distance refers to differences in language, norms, values, and consumer behavior that can hinder business operations. For example, variations in communication styles and cultural expectations can create misunderstandings between multinational corporations and local stakeholders (Bjorvatn & Randøy, 2023; Chen et al., 2024). Administrative distance focuses on disparities in governance, legal systems, and institutional frameworks that can create barriers, such as regulatory challenges and trade restrictions. Geographical distance addresses physical proximity and logistical issues, which are particularly relevant for industries reliant on efficient transportation networks. Economic distance highlights differences in income levels, market sizes, and labor costs, affecting demand for goods and services (Ghemawat, 2020).

The relevance of the CAGE framework lies in its ability to identify and quantify these barriers, enabling companies to design strategies that minimize risks while maximizing opportunities. For instance, Ghemawat (2020) emphasized that businesses must account for cultural nuances to develop marketing strategies that resonate with local consumers. Similarly, administrative and economic differences often dictate entry modes, such as joint ventures or wholly owned subsidiaries, which provide firms with a competitive edge in navigating foreign markets (Ferreira & Falcão, 2019; Hattangadi, 2023). By systematically addressing these dimensions, the CAGE framework aids multinational companies in making informed decisions about market entry, product localization, and supply chain optimization.

Existing studies on DR's business strategies highlight its efforts to address the complexities of operating across diverse markets. For instance, Ndubuisi (2024) noted that the refinery's strategic focus on self-sufficiency in energy production aligns with Nigeria's regulatory policies, thereby reducing administrative barriers. Furthermore, DR's location in Lagos enhances its accessibility to key international markets, mitigating geographical constraints (Prager, 2024; Wang et al., 2024). This refinery's emphasis on partnerships with global technology providers demonstrates its

commitment to overcoming cultural and administrative challenges through collaboration (Smith et al., 2022).

The impact of each CAGE dimension on international business is evident across various industries. For instance, cultural distance significantly influences consumer preferences in food and beverage sector, necessitating product localization (Bjorvatn & Randøy, 2023; Chen et al., 2024). Administrative barriers, such as tariffs and regulatory compliance, are particularly pronounced in the pharmaceutical and oil industries, requiring strategic alliances to navigate these complexities (Okonkwo, 2024). Geographical challenges, such as transportation costs and supply chain disruptions, are critical for the logistics industry, where proximity to markets plays a pivotal role. Economic disparities, on the other hand, influence pricing strategies and scalability of operations in emerging markets (Ferreira & Falcão, 2019; Hattangadi, 2023).

For DR, cultural distance is addressed through targeted marketing strategies that consider local preferences while leveraging global best practices. Administrative distance is mitigated by aligning its operations with Nigerian government policies, including the Local Content Act, which supports domestic job creation (Prager, 2024; Wang et al., 2024). Geographical distance is minimized by its strategic location near Lagos ports, ensuring efficient export logistics. Finally, this refinery's ability to produce cost-competitive petroleum products underscores its response to economic disparities in both local and international markets (Ndubuisi, 2024).

In summary, the CAGE framework provides a robust tool for understanding the complexities of cross-border business operations. By addressing cultural, administrative, geographical, and economic differences, companies like DR can enhance their competitive advantage in the global market. Application of this framework not only highlights challenges but also underscores strategic measures needed to navigate international business environments effectively.

Theory

Regional Integration Theory

Neofunctionalism theory is adopted as a theory that underpins this investigation. According to Tobar et al. (2025), it is instructive to note that regional integration theories, such as functionalism, neofunctionalism, and intergovernmentalism, provide frameworks for understanding the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). These theories explain AfCFTA's goal of overcoming challenges like small market size by fostering intra-African trade, which can lead to increased economic prosperity through reduced barriers and improved economies of scale (Tobar et al., 2025). While theories like functionalism highlight the role of technical cooperation and neofunctionalism focuses on spillover effects of integration, intergovernmentalism emphasizes state-level cooperation and can explain why some states may act contrary to integration goals.

Neofunctionalism was developed by **Ernst Haas** in the late 1950s and 1960s, with significant contributions from **Leon Lindberg** (Tobar et al., 2025). Neofunctionalism assumes that regional integration is a self-perpetuating process driven by rational actors, but it is shaped by learning and evolving preferences (Tobar et al., 2025). Crucial assumptions include: integration is a process that evolves, **rational actors** (states, interest groups, supranational bodies) are influenced by their interactions and cooperate

across borders, and **supranational institutions** gain power as integration deepens, often creating **spillover effects** that lead to further cooperation in new sectors (Tobar et al., 2025).

Conceptual Framework

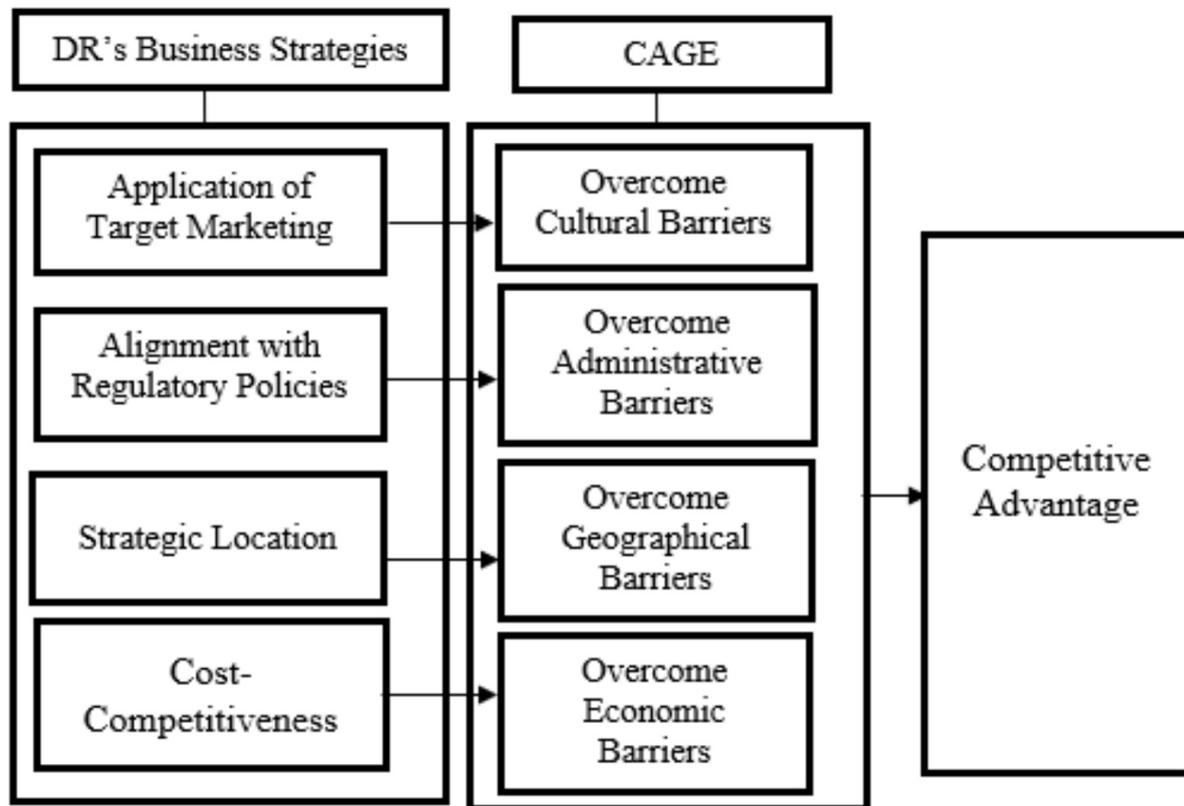


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Conceptual Framework Developed by Researchers

Method

This study adopts a qualitative exploratory methodology relying entirely on secondary data sources for data collection and analysis. Secondary data sources were chosen for their cost-effectiveness and ability to provide a comprehensive understanding of subject matter through the synthesis of existing knowledge and insights. In view of data triangulation: key sources of data for this research include industry reports, academic journals, company publications, news articles, and relevant case studies on cross-border operations in oil and gas sector, particularly focusing on DR. This research is not involving computations, reason being that, it is not designed for quantitative analysis whereby data would be subjected to empirical computational analysis. Every research design has its merits and demerits. The merits of using secondary data were already stated.

The initial source of data, industry reports, provided detailed information on the global oil and gas market, focusing on trade flows, regulatory landscapes, and economic trends. Reports from organizations like the International Energy Agency (IEA), the African Refiners and Distributors Association (ARDA), and PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) were consulted to understand external forces affecting DR's operations. These

reports offer insights into administrative and economic distances, such as regional trade barriers, tariffs, and differences in income levels (ARDA, 2024; IEA, 2024; PwC, 2023).

Academic journals were also crucial in framing the theoretical foundation of this study. Journals such as *Review of International Business and Strategy*, also, *Energy Policy Review*, were reviewed for studies on the CAGE framework, its application to multinational corporations, and its relevance in analyzing cross-border operations. For instance, Ghemawat's (2001) foundational work on the CAGE framework provided a basis for evaluating cultural, administrative, geographical, and economic factors influencing DR's international activities. Recent articles, such as (IEA, 2024; Okonkwo, 2024), analyses of the framework's relevance, were used to update the theoretical understanding of these factors.

Company reports and publications from DR were essential for understanding its strategies and operations. These include annual reports, press releases, and strategic updates from Dangote Group. Such documents provided direct insights into DR's efforts to navigate cultural, administrative, and economic distances, such as partnerships with global firms, compliance with local content laws, and regional supply chain strategies (Dangote Group, 2023; Dangote, 2025). News articles and case studies from reputable media outlets, including Reuters and The Guardian, supplemented these analyses by offering real-time perspectives on challenges and opportunities faced by DR in its cross-border operations. For instance, case studies highlighted DR's role in reducing Nigeria's reliance on imported petroleum products and its efforts to expand into international markets (ARDA, 2024; Prager, 2024; Wang et al., 2024).

The approach to analyse collected data involved applying the CAGE framework to structure and interpret findings. Cultural distance was examined by identifying differences in consumer behavior and market preferences across regions. Administrative distance was assessed by analyzing regulatory frameworks and institutional barriers affecting DR's international operations. Geographical distance focused on logistics and infrastructure challenges, while economic distance considered variations in income levels and market sizes that impact pricing strategies and market penetration. Each of these dimensions was analyzed using hypothetical examples drawn from collected data. For instance, regulatory policies in West African markets were evaluated to highlight administrative challenges posed by cross-border trade (Ndubuisi, 2024).

In essence, this methodology leveraged secondary data to provide a comprehensive analysis of DR's international business operations through the lens of the CAGE framework. By synthesizing insights from various sources, this study presents a nuanced understanding of challenges and opportunities inherent in cross-border operations.

Result and Discussion

Cultural Distance

DR faces significant cultural challenges, primarily due to the diverse cultural landscapes of the regions it serves. Differences in language, social norms, and consumer behavior affect marketing strategies and operational practices. For instance, DR's expansion into Francophone West Africa required adaptations to communication and promotional materials to align with local languages and cultural contexts (Ndubuisi,

2024). Similarly, consumer preferences for fuel types and energy solutions differ across African countries, necessitating tailored approaches to meet regional demands (Okonkwo, 2024). These cultural variations, if unaddressed, can hinder market penetration and customer engagement.

Administrative Distance

Administrative challenges are among the most significant barriers for DR. Regulatory disparities, trade policies, and legal frameworks in various countries influence DR's cross-border operations. For instance, Nigeria's Local Content Act has facilitated domestic job creation and investments, but navigating similar policies in neighboring countries often requires substantial administrative effort (Prager, 2024; Wang et al., 2024). In addition, tariff policies and customs regulations across West Africa increase the complexity of exporting refined petroleum products. Political instability and frequent policy changes in some African countries further exacerbate administrative challenges, creating uncertainties that impact long-term planning (PwC, 2023).

Geographical Distance

Geographical factors play a critical role in DR's operations due to the costs and logistics involved in transporting refined products. DR's strategic location near Lagos, with access to major seaports, helps reduce logistics costs for international exports (Prager, 2024; Wang et al., 2024). However, infrastructural challenges, such as inadequate road networks and congestion at ports, pose significant barriers to efficient distribution within Nigeria and neighboring countries (Smith et al., 2022). Additionally, physical distance to key international markets in Europe and Asia increases transportation costs and necessitates partnerships with global shipping companies to ensure timely deliveries (Ndubuisi, 2024).

Economic Distance

Economic disparities between countries also impact DR's operations. Variations in GDP, labour costs, and market sizes influence DR's pricing strategies and profitability. For instance, higher income levels in some West African countries provide opportunities for premium pricing, while in lower-income markets, DR must focus on cost efficiency to remain competitive (PwC, 2023). Differences in energy consumption patterns and industrial demand also affect DR's market segmentation and product offerings. For example, countries with underdeveloped industrial sectors may demand smaller volumes of refined products compared to more industrialized markets (Okonkwo, 2024).

Findings highlight several critical implications for DR's international expansion strategy, underscoring the complexity of cross-border operations in the oil and gas sector. By analyzing CAGE dimensions, DR can refine its strategies to navigate challenges and capitalize on opportunities presented by diverse markets.

Implications for International Expansion Strategy

Culturally, the importance of understanding and adapting to regional preferences is evident. For DR, tailoring marketing approaches and product offerings to suit the cultural contexts of target markets is crucial. For example, adopting multilingual communication strategies and engaging with local communities through culturally resonant corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives can enhance brand acceptance

(Ndubuisi, 2024).

Administratively, findings emphasize the need for proactive engagement with regulatory bodies and governments in target countries. DR's compliance with Nigeria's Local Content Act serves as a template for navigating administrative barriers in other markets. Establishing partnerships with local firms and leveraging regional trade agreements, such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), can mitigate administrative challenges and streamline operations (Prager, 2024; Wang et al., 2024).

Geographically, DR benefits from its strategic location near Lagos, but infrastructural challenges within and beyond Nigeria necessitate investment in transportation and distribution networks. Collaborating with governments on infrastructure development projects, such as road and rail systems, can reduce logistical inefficiencies and ensure timely delivery to regional and global markets (Smith et al., 2022).

Economically, DR's ability to adapt its pricing and market segmentation strategies to different income levels and market sizes provides a competitive advantage. For instance, offering cost-effective fuel solutions in lower-income markets while catering to industrial demand in higher-income countries enables sustainable growth (PwC, 2023).

Navigating Challenges and Leveraging Opportunities

DR navigates cultural challenges by employing local expertise and integrating region-specific marketing strategies. Partnerships with regional distributors and marketers further strengthen its cultural adaptability. Administratively, DR focuses on compliance and collaboration, leveraging government relations to ease regulatory hurdles. Geographical barriers are addressed through investments in advanced logistics and transportation technologies, ensuring efficient supply chain management. Economically, DR capitalizes on its economies of scale to offer competitive pricing, making its products accessible across diverse income brackets.

Comparison with Other Multinational Companies

When compared to multinational oil and gas companies like Shell and TotalEnergies, DR exhibits similarities and unique approaches. Like Shell, Dangote invests in local talent and infrastructure, ensuring alignment with host countries' development goals (Okonkwo, 2024). However, unlike these established multinationals, Dangote leverages its deep understanding of regional markets to address localized challenges more effectively. Additionally, Dangote's focus on reducing Africa's dependency on imported refined products positions it as a regional leader, whereas companies like TotalEnergies maintain a global presence with diversified portfolios.

Accordingly, DR's international expansion strategy is shaped by CAGE dimensions, offering both challenges and opportunities. By addressing cultural, administrative, geographical, and economic factors proactively, the company positions itself as a competitive player in the oil and gas industry. Its localized approach, coupled with strategic partnerships and infrastructural investments, sets it apart from global competitors, ensuring sustainable growth and market dominance in Africa and beyond.

Findings

While risk-averse investors continue to lament hostile and harsh economic policies in

Nigeria, DR has succeeded in cross-border operations due to strategic navigation of challenges and utilization of opportunities highlighted by the CAGE framework. Through cultural adaptation, administrative alignment, infrastructural investments, and economic agility. Accordingly, DR can sustain its growth, strengthen its market leadership, and contribute significantly to Africa's energy security. In addition, DR's operations exemplify complexities and opportunities inherent in cross-border business endeavors within the global oil and gas industry. By leveraging the CAGE framework, this refinery addresses cultural diversity through tailored marketing approaches, its proactive alignment with regulatory policies, and its strategic location near Lagos ports highlight its capacity to navigate diverse market conditions effectively. Furthermore, this refinery mitigates administrative challenges, such as regulatory disparities, and has opportunities to leverage regional trade agreements like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

More so, DR mitigates geographical constraints through investments in infrastructure and partnerships with global logistics providers, which have streamlined its supply chain operations, ensuring the timely delivery of products. Additionally, DR's approach to economic disparities—by balancing cost-efficiency in low-income markets and catering for premium demand in higher-income regions—demonstrates a nuanced understanding of market dynamics critical to sustaining long-term growth. Insightfully, DR's strategic adjustments across CAGE dimensions not only enhance its operational effectiveness but also reinforce its role as a key player in Nigeria's energy self-sufficiency and global oil and gas market. As DR continues to expand internationally, adopting a robust, dynamic approach to cross-border challenges will remain essential. These findings emphasize the importance of ongoing innovation, strategic partnerships, and adaptive strategies in enabling multinational enterprises to thrive amidst the complexities of the global business environment.

Limitations

In practice, every study has specific limitations. As for this research, a prominent limitation is that CAGE tends to carry Western-centric assumptions; as such, it is less applicable in economies that are not capitalist-inclined. Considering that, Western economies consistently enjoy supremacy of cutting-edge innovation, and the latest technology drive. More so, Western economies are less prone to insecurity, religious intolerance, weak currency, poor power supply, low education, poor health facilities, weak economic indicators, and inadequate social facilities. However, those arguments are not to discourage the implementation of strategic options to mitigate CAGE-associated issues by corporate organizations in emerging economies. As we can see, DR has demonstrated company from emerging economies can successfully implement strategies to address CAGE-associated barriers and explore competitive advantages accordingly. Another limitation concerning this research is that it utilized an exploratory design, relying on secondary sources of data, so, generalization of its outcome is dependent on confirmatory studies that would emerge hereafter. Accordingly, we like to encourage intending researchers to take this work further by applying a quantitative or mixed research design; this would enhance generalisation of findings that align with the report of this research.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The CAGE analysis of DR highlights complexities and opportunities of cross-border operations within the oil and gas industry. Each dimension—cultural, administrative, geographical, and economic—presents unique challenges that require strategic responses to ensure long-term success. Culturally, adapting to diverse consumer preferences and regional norms is essential for market acceptance and brand loyalty. Administratively, navigating regulatory disparities and leveraging regional agreements such as AfCFTA is crucial to overcoming bureaucratic hurdles. Geographical challenges emphasise the need for robust logistics and infrastructure investments, while economic disparities underline the importance of tailored pricing and market strategies. This study concludes that the implementation of CAGE analysis and the instrumentation of an appropriate strategy constitute immense success for DR.

This study recommends that for DR to improve its cross-border business strategies, DR should deepen its engagement with local stakeholders. More so, DR should be committed to building partnerships with local distributors and suppliers. This can enhance cultural understanding and operational efficiency. Additionally, DR should invest in capacity-building initiatives, such as training local talent, to strengthen its regional presence and ensure alignment with local needs. On the administrative front, proactive engagement with regulatory authorities and participation in policy dialogues will help mitigate risks associated with policy changes and legal complexities. Besides, addressing geographical and economic challenges requires strategic infrastructure development, and financial agility is highly recommended. Also, by expanding its distribution networks, especially in underserved regions, DR will reduce logistic bottlenecks and enhance access to key markets. Besides, leveraging economies of scale in production and aligning product offerings with varying income levels across countries can help DR remain competitive while catering to diverse market needs. Also, addressing cultural, administrative, geographical, and economic dimensions is vital for DR's sustenance of global competitiveness. By understanding and mitigating these factors, DR can secure its position as a leader in Africa's oil and gas industry and expand its influence globally. Moreover, adopting a dynamic approach to international business, informed by the CAGE framework, will enable DR to adapt to the ever-changing global market landscape.

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