Proactiveness and Market Competitiveness of Manufacturing Firms in South-East, Nigeria

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Abstract
The research examined the relationship between proactiveness and market competitiveness of manufacturing firms in south-east Nigeria. Because it was a survey, a cross-sectional research design was adopted. The population consists of 184 manufacturing enterprises from Nigeria's South-East Region. A total of 920 respondents were drawn from 184 industrial businesses. A questionnaire was utilized to gather data, and the hypotheses were evaluated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Statistics. The results show a substantial relationship between the proactiveness and market competitiveness of manufacturing firms in southeast Nigeria. As a result, the research showed that proactiveness is connected with the market competitiveness of manufacturing firms in southeast Nigeria. The study recommended that companies aggressively engage in market research and trend analysis to uncover potential prospects by pursuing a first-mover approach and considering the market circumstances, competitive environment, and capabilities of the company to achieve market competitiveness. They should anticipate discovering and entering new markets through proactiveness. To attain market competitiveness, conduct market feasibility studies, review the regulatory environment, and evaluate prospective markets' competitive landscapes.

Keywords: *Proactiveness, Opportunity seeking, First-mover strategy, New market recognition**,** Market competitiveness, Sales volume*

Introduction

In today's dynamic and competitive business environment, manufacturing firms are constantly seeking strategies to enhance their market competitiveness. Market competitiveness is critical for business success and sustainability, especially in dynamic and globalized markets. It refers to a firm's ability to effectively compete with other firms in the same industry by offering products or services that meet or exceed customer expectations. The importance of market competitiveness can be understood in several key aspects. Survival, growth, and profitability are examples. In a competitive market, non-competitive firms risk losing market share and eventually facing financial difficulties or even closure. Competitive firms, on the other hand, are more likely to survive and grow because they can attract customers and expand their market presence. Sultana et al. (2019)

found that market competitiveness is positively associated with firm growth and survival, especially in industries with high competition.

Profitability is an indicator of market competitiveness. Competitive firms are better positioned to achieve higher profitability, as they can command premium prices for their products or services and achieve economies of scale. This allows them to invest in research, development, and innovation, further enhancing their competitiveness. Adekola et al. (2017) observed a positive relationship between market competitiveness and profitability among Nigerian non-financial service firms. Competition drives firms to innovate and differentiate their products or services to meet changing customer needs and preferences. Innovations can lead to new market opportunities, increased customer loyalty, and a competitive edge over rivals. Efficiency and Productivity: Competitive pressures encourage firms to improve their operational efficiency and productivity, reducing costs and improving quality. This allows them to offer competitive prices while maintaining profitability. Dhole et al. (2019) found that efficient working capital management is positively correlated with market competitiveness among Australian firms.

Competitive firms are more likely to deliver high-quality products or services, leading to greater customer satisfaction and loyalty. Satisfied customers are more likely to repeat purchases and recommend the firm to others, contributing to long-term profitability. In today's competitive business environment, market competitiveness is a critical factor for firms' success and sustainability. Firms that are able to effectively compete are more likely to survive, grow, and achieve long-term success. Therefore, understanding and enhancing market competitiveness should be a key focus for firms seeking to thrive in dynamic and competitive markets. One key strategy that has gained prominence is proactiveness, which involves anticipating and initiating change rather than simply reacting to events. Proactive firms are better positioned to identify and capitalize on opportunities, leading to improved market performance.

Statement of the Problem

In the south-east region of Nigeria, manufacturing firms face unique challenges and opportunities. The region is rich in natural resources, skilled labor, and market potential. However, there is low market competitiveness. The poor market competitiveness of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria, leading to low sales volume, can be attributed to several factors. The inability of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria to satisfy customers, resulting in low sales volume, can have several adverse effects on the firms. Low sales volume directly impacts a firm's revenue and profitability. Reduced revenue can lead to financial difficulties, affecting the firm's ability to invest in innovation, expansion, and other critical areas.

Inability to satisfy customers can lead to a loss of market share as customers switch to competitors offering better products or services. This can further exacerbate the firm's revenue decline and hinder its long-term growth prospects. Firms that consistently fail to satisfy customers are likely to become less competitive in the market. Competitors who can meet customer needs more effectively are likely to gain a competitive advantage, further marginalizing the struggling firm

(Smith et al., 2019). Low sales volume and poor customer satisfaction can limit a firm's growth opportunities. Without a strong customer base and positive reputation, it can be challenging to expand into new markets or introduce new products successfully.

One factor that may improve market competitiveness is proactiveness. Proactivity requires a forward-thinking perspective and the ability of the organization to anticipate and prepare for the future (Linton, 2006). Hence, lack of being proactive may contributes to poor matket competitiveness. Therefore, understanding the relationship between proactiveness and market competitiveness is critical for the success and sustainability of manufacturing firms in the region. However, in this context, there is a gap in the literature regarding the specific role of proactiveness in enhancing market competitiveness. While existing research has highlighted the importance of proactiveness in improving firm performance and competitiveness, there is limited empirical evidence on the relationship between proactiveness and market competitiveness, particularly in Nigeria's South-East region. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the relationship between proactiveness and market competitiveness of manufacturing firms in the south-east region of Nigeria.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study was to investigate the relationship between proactiveness and market competitiveness of manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to:

1. Investigate the relationship between opportunity seeking and market competitiveness of manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria
2. Ascertain the relationship between first mover strategy and market competitiveness of manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria
3. Determine the relationship between new market recognition and market competitiveness of manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between opportunity seeking and market competitiveness of manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria?
2. How does first mover strategy relate with market competitiveness of manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria?
3. What is the relationship between new market recognition and market competitiveness of manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria/

Research Hypotheses

Ho_1: Investigate the relationship between opportunity seeking and market competitiveness of manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria

Ho2: Ascertain the relationship between first mover strategy and market competitiveness of manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria

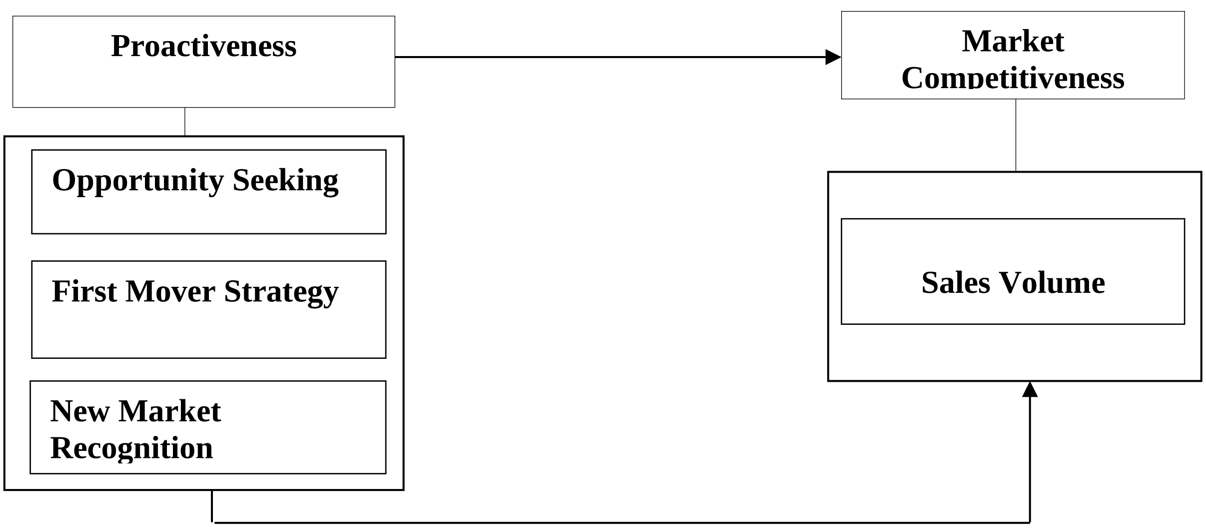
Ho3: Determine the relationship between new market recognition and market competitiveness of manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

The conceptual review of this study focused on concept of proactiveness with three dimensions and market competiveness with sales volume as it measure. Furthermore, the literature review will also examine Dynamic Capability Theory that support these concepts.

Conceptual Framework



Source: Adapted from Matsuno et al. (2002) Joseph Schumpeter in Kotler (2003), and Kotler (2003).

Concept of Proactiveness

Being the first to market and anticipating organizational actions are two essential components of entrepreneurial proactivity. According to Dess and Lumpkin (2001), entrepreneurship has also come to be linked with taking the initiative, which includes seeing and seizing fresh chances as well as engaging in developing markets. A forward-thinking viewpoint and the organization's capacity to foresee and prepare for the future are prerequisites for proactivity as a gauge of firm orientation (Linton, 2006). Accordingly, proactivcness has been defined by Lumpkin and Dess (2001) as the forward-looking perspective of a market leader with the foresight to act in anticipation of future demand and shape the environment. Okeyo et al. (2016) have proposed that proactivcness is the tendency to be forward-looking and to be first mover in a business, which contributes to gaining competitiveness.

Numerous researchers have examined proactivity in a variety of methods. Sharma and Vredenburg (1998) discovered a connection between proactive responses to uncertainty at the nexus of business and environmental challenges and the formation of distinct organizational capacities.It was once believed that these skills would affect a firm's ability to compete. For their part, Buysse and Verbeke (2003) have stated that research has demonstrated that in order for businesses to transition to a more empirically significant level of proactiveness, multiple concurrent improvements in different resource domains are necessary, and more proactive environmental strategies are linked to a wider and deeper coverage of stakeholders. According to the results of Oni and Daniya's (2012) research, businesses with a high level of entrepreneurial proactiveness consistently grew in size and hired skilled workers in response to performance metrics. The research also concludes that an individual's ability to succeed as an entrepreneur in general determines how well a firm performs.

Proactivity also increases the desire to engage in and learn from training situations, which is a measure of motivation to learn (Major et al., 2006). Consequently, proactive workers who make an effort to maximize their employment opportunities are more likely to feel capable and prepared to take initiative in a fast-paced work setting. Proactive tasks like asking questions to identify the best products and services, actively pursuing prospects through follow-up, asking for the sale, and identifying unmet customer needs are generally involved in both production and sales activities. A company is more likely to successfully target markets with a specific unmet need and establish consistent contact between the firm and the customer if it actively seeks opportunities, learns about potential markets, its own target market, and the pertinent decision information (Major et al., 2006).

The act of taking action in order to obtain benefits and be prepared for situations that may arise rather than waiting till after an occurrence has happened is an example of being proactive, which may be described as the decision to act before an event has actually taken place (Ofem, 2004). Indeed, being proactive is a solution to the problem that arises from the fact that the 1ntrapreneurial process requires initiative. Authors such as Lumpkin and Dess (2001) demonstrate that proactivity, as opposed to risk-taking, is a critical component in the performance of new products. Authors such as Lumpkin and Dess (2005) demonstrate that proactivity, as opposed to risk-taking, is a critical component in the performance of new products.

Opportunity Seeking

According to Santos et al. (2015), the pursuit of business opportunities is an essential cognitive process that is necessary for entrepreneurship. This is because opportunity seeking ultimately results in the decision to capitalize on an opportunity in an 1ntrapreneurial enterprise. Without opportunity seeking, entrepreneurship may not exist. The efforts made by individuals to search for and discover concepts that may have the potential to be developed into a commercial enterprise.

Guo et al. (2016) continue by stating that identifying opportunities is essential to the survival of SMEs, as well as their ability to gain a competitive edge and perform better. In the context of this study, the concept of "opportunity seeking" refers to the act of perceiving favorable prospects for making changes in processes, goods, markets, or eco-systems. According to Shane (2003) and Baron (2004), having access to relevant information is essential for locating potential possibilities (2007).

The gathering of information, for instance, on modifications to technical standards, regulatory mandates, or demographics, lays the groundwork for the identification of opportunities that materialize as a direct consequence of these modifications (Baron & Ensley, 2006). According to Baron (2006), opportunity seeking is a cognitive process (or processes) that entrepreneurs use to identify or perceive untapped sources of economic value. This is done via searching for business opportunities. According to Guo et al. (2016), one of the most important factors in the survival of firms as well as their competitive advantage and superior performance, is the ability to recognize opportunities. Aside from this, Guo et al. (2016) say that businesses need to be proactive when looking for opportunities, but they also need to take exploitative actions in the form of business model innovation in order to gain value.

First Mover Strategy

According to Patterson (1993), a corporation that is the first to apply a certain strategy within a specific context is referred to as a first mover in the business strategy literature. The strategy of first mover may, for instance, be tied to a service strategy, a process strategy, or a product strategy; and the scope might be a market segment, an industrial sector, or a foreign nation (Patterson, 1993). As mentioned by Chaffee (1985), because of its universality and strategic focus, the current study employs this concept. It has been proposed that the first-mover method has a variety of beneficial repercussions for the performance of the first movers (Urban et al., 1986; Patterson, 1993). In terms of brand loyalty, for example, pioneering brands have a demand advantage over following brands as customers favor the first brand they try that performs well (Schmalensee, 1982). Early movers often have more extensive organizational learning and, as a result, have better access to opportunities than their followers (Glazer, 1985).

New Market Recognition

What constitutes the creation of a new market is the execution of a new marketing strategy that calls for significant modifications in product design, packaging, placement, promotion, or pricing. This is done in order to appeal to a demographic that is not currently being served by the existing market (OECD Oslo Manual, 2005). Repositioning a company's product in the market with the purpose of raising sales is one of the goals of new market recognition, along with better satisfying the desires of customers, opening up new markets, and expanding business opportunities. Along the same lines as the four P's of marketing price tactics, product package design attributes, product placement, and promotion activities new market recognition is intricately tied to all of these facets of marketing (Kotler, 1991). The act of adopting a new marketing approach is known as innovation in marketing. This might entail considerable modifications to the product's design or packaging, as well as significant shifts in where the product is placed, how it is promoted, or how much it costs.

When a company expands its operations into a new geographic market, such as a new town, state, or even country, this phenomenon is known as "new market entry." When a company breaks into a new market with the introduction of a new product or service, this may also be considered a physical phenomenon. According to the prevalent way of thinking, companies expand into new markets with the expectation of realizing a profit from their activities. As a consequence of this, new market entry has been studied for a long time in relation to the size of the focal market, which is also known as market potential or market demand. This is because the size of the focal market is considered to represent, to a large extent, the projected post-entry revenues from the new market (Fuentelsaz & Gomez, 2006). When referring to a product or service, market demand refers to the entire quantity that customers in the market buy, whereas market potential refers to the point at which market demand approaches infinity as industry marketing effort rises (King & Tucci, 2002).

Market Competitiveness

One thing that can be certain for a marketer is that no matter what product they bring to the market, they will face competition. The level of competition that it will face is very variable, since it is dependent on both the sort of product and the market. It is essential for the success of every firm to be able to compete successfully with other companies in its industry. Building a competitive advantage in marketing is the most effective strategy to deal with existing competitors. The capacity of a marketing organization to provide superior value to clients than that of their rivals is essential to maintaining market competitiveness. In their contribution to the analysis of competitive marketing, Bacak et al. (2005) stated that in order to guarantee that the funds allocated to public relations and advertising are used most efficiently, a thorough examination of market competition and business rivalry is necessary. According to Bacak, the purpose of this research is to make sure that the funds allocated for public relations and advertising are used where they would have the most impact. The author continued by saying that for leaders to carry out strategic planning for their companies' futures in an efficient manner, it is absolutely necessary for them to be aware of who their competitors are and precisely what they face in order to guarantee that their firms will have sufficient market share in the future. According to him, the purpose of any competitive marketing study should be to find ways to increase market share.

Sales Volume

The capacity of a company to invest and maintain itself by multiple components, including competitiveness, is one of the ways that market competitiveness may be measured. One of these components is sales volume. Since the 18th century, Ricardo has been credited with developing the notion of comparative advantage. Following in his footsteps, Porter developed the idea of sales volume (1995). According to Porter et al. (1995), sales volume is often misunderstood and interpreted as ability or a competitive advantage. It refers to the capability that a specific manufacturer or organization has or obtains as a result of its capacity to investigate future markets, comprehend and respond to the wants or desires of the market, particularly from the point of view of customers. To put it another way, the increasing sales volume is the metric that most exemplifies the success that the firm has had in relation to its rivals (Feng et al., 2017). The expansion of the company's sales is driven mostly by causes both within and external to the business (Market share

The degree to which a specific firm is successful in terms of market competitiveness in terms of sales volume may be measured by calculating the percentage of an industry's or a market's total sales that the company earns over a certain amount of time. In this context, a company's share of the market is calculated by taking its total sales for the relevant period and dividing it by the total sales of the industry for the same period. A high-level perspective of a company's size in relation to its competitors and the market in which it works is provided by this statistic. The findings of previous research studies indicate that an increase in sales plays a vital function in the enhancement of company performance (Ghozali & Handriani, 2018).

Companies that have a larger push to boost sales will create future profits, which generates a notable rise in the willingness to invest in the company (Rostamkalaei & Freel, 2016; Powell & Eddleston, 2017). The rise in the level of business investment activities will have a beneficial effect on the performance of the company. According to findings from other studies carried out by Qadorah (2016), Ali et al. (2016), and Wang et al. (2016), the conclusion reaches the same point: the growth rate of sales mediates the impact of investment on business performance. A firm that operates in a market segment that is seeing rapid expansion is required to maintain a sufficient level of working capital in order to fund its day-to-day operations if it wants to maintain a high sales volume or experience further expansion.

Proactivness and Market Competitiveness

According to the findings of a research, proactiveness contributes to the increased competitiveness of a firm. Greater levels of innovation lead to improved corporate competitiveness, as shown by a large number of research that investigated the connection between innovation and performance. Proactively managing the market and interacting with customers is becoming a more crucial component of creating customer value, allowing firms to outperform their competitors. (Narver, Slater & MacLachlan, 2004; Blocker et al., 2011). Proactive firms obtain this competitive edge by being more aware of their clients. This awareness helps them anticipate future needs, respond to latent wants, and ultimately give better customer value. By being more aware of their clients, proactive businesses may get this competitive edge (Narver et al., 2004). This is particularly true in the context of business-to-business (B2B), where there is a higher demand on companies' capacity to develop deeper customer connections and complicated client demands (Flint et al., 2002; Lindgreen & Wynstra, 2005). (Tuominen et al., 2004; Narver et al., 2004; Day, 2011).

Theoretical Review

This study adopted the Dynamic Capability Theory by Teece et al. (1997). Dynamic Capability Theory was initially introduced by Teece et al. (1997) in their paper "Dynamic Capabilities and Strategic Management." Teece et al. (1997) has been particularly influential in developing and promoting this theory, which has become a key concept in strategic management and organizational theory. Dynamic Capability Theory posits that a firm's ability to proactively sense and seize opportunities in its environment is a key driver of competitive advantage. According to this theory, firms that develop dynamic capabilities, such as the ability to innovate and adapt quickly, are better able to respond proactively to changes in the competitive landscape. Proactiveness is a key element of this theory, as it highlights the importance of firms actively shaping their environments rather than simply reacting to them.

Proactiveness, within the context of Dynamic Capability Theory, involves actively seeking out and creating opportunities in the external environment, rather than waiting for them to arise. This can include activities such as investing in research and development to anticipate future market trends, forming strategic partnerships to access new markets or technologies, or making preemptive moves to block competitors' actions. Thus, by being proactive, firms can enhance their dynamic capabilities by continuously learning, innovating, and adapting to changing circumstances. This proactive stance enables firms to not only respond effectively to changes but also to shape their environments in ways that favor their competitive position.

Summary and Gap in Literature

Examining the relationship between proactiveness and market competitiveness of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria is crucial, yet there appears to be a gap in the literature. Existing studies tend to focus on developed economies or generalize findings across industries without considering the unique context of the South-East Nigerian manufacturing sector. Therefore, the present study conducted empirical research specifically in the South-East Nigerian context to understand how proactiveness influences market competitiveness.

Methodology

Because the study is survey-based, it used a cross-sectional research approach. The study's cross-sectional research strategy is appropriate since it gathered and analyzed the necessary data at that specific moment. This study's target demographic included all manufacturing companies in Southeast Nigeria. According to the information that is currently available, the southeast area of Nigeria is home to 184 operational manufacturing companies (Manufacturers Association of Nigeria, Enugu Regional Office, Enugu, Nigeria, 2022). Therefore, the 184 manufacturing companies in Nigeria's South-East constitute the study's population.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Since this study adopted a census method in determining the population of the study. The sample size is the entire 184 firms which represents the functional manufacturing companies employed as the population for the study. This decision was made because the size of 184 companies is not too large to engage and that's why the researcher decided to employ the census sampling technique which allows the use of the entire population as the sample size.

With respect to the respondents of the study, the unit of analysis of the study is the macro level of analysis where the firms themselves are analyzed. Since this was the case, the respondents were the people at the managerial levels who understand the visions, missions, objectives, strategies and operational modes of the firms. Specifically five managers were designated in each firm on the basis of the positions they occupy. These were the top managers, production managers, marketing managers, product development managers and financial managers. This produced a total of 920 respondents.

Sources of Data

The research used primary data. Direct communication with the respondents provided the main data. It was firmly believed that obtaining information from this source would aid in arriving at logical conclusions and forming reliable results.

Instrumentation/Measurement

This research used questionnaire instrument in obtaining data from the respondents. This was due to the fact that the questionnaire was a low-cost instrument, useful in a variety of situations. It provided useful information, and respondents remained anonymous. Most importantly, they are used to quickly collect big datasets, either by direct contact, mail, or online through the web or email. Lastly, it enables respondents to have enough time to mediate on the items before responding to them, which provides meaningful data for the research study.

Validity of Instrument

Both face and content validity were used in the research. Supervisors and other research specialists examined the instrument as a result, and they discovered that the item sentences accurately reflected the variables being assessed (face validity). The research included many questions to evaluate each variable in order to collect sufficient and relevant data for each variable in order to attain content validity. These items were also determined to be appropriate for assessing every component of the variables in this research and were made accessible to experts in the area for validation.

The Instrument's Reliability

In order to determine the instruments' reliability and get reliability scores of 0.7 or higher—the standard for dependability acceptance—the research used the Cronbach Alpha reliability test (Cronbach, 1951). SPSS version 23.0 was used to compute the reliability test, and the outcome indicates an average reliability score of more than 0.7.

Data Analysis

Two methods of data analyses were employed. This study applied the descriptive and inferential analysis. The descriptive data analysis focused on univariate analyses of the demographic data of the respondents and research questions, while, the inferential data analyses focused on bivariate and multivariate testing of hypotheses. The descriptive statistics included the computations of percentage rates, mean score and standard deviations, while the inferential statistic was concerned with testing the relationship between the independent and dependent variables using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient.

Results

The results as depicted in table shows the correlation between the independent variables and the dependent variable.

Table 1: Correlation Results

Correlations

		Opportunity Seeking	First Mover Strategy	New Market Recognition	Sales volume
Opportunity Seeking	Pearson Correlation	1	.755**	.663**	.622**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	226	902	902	902
First Mover Strategy	Pearson Correlation	.755**	1	.624**	.630**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	902	902	902	902
New Market Recognition	Pearson Correlation	.663**	.624**	1	.764**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	902	902	902	902
Sales volume	Pearson Correlation	.622**	.630**	.764**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	902	902	902	902

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Researcher's Desk (2024)

Opportunity Seeking and Sales Volume: The moderate positive correlation between Opportunity Seeking and Sales Volume ($r = 0.622, p < 0.01$) suggests that firms that actively seek opportunities tend to achieve higher sales volumes. First Mover Strategy and Sales Volume: The strong positive correlation between First Mover Strategy and Sales Volume ($r = 0.630, p < 0.01$) indicates that firms that adopt a first-mover strategy tend to achieve higher sales volumes. New Market Recognition and Sales Volume: The strong positive correlation between New Market Recognition and Sales Volume ($r = 0.764, p < 0.01$) suggests that firms that successfully recognize and enter new markets tend to achieve higher sales volumes.

Discussion of Findings

Opportunity Seeking and Sales Volume: The correlation between Opportunity Seeking and Sales Volume ($r = 0.622$, $p < 0.01$) suggests a positive relationship between actively seeking opportunities and achieving higher sales volumes. Chrisman et al. (2012) found that firms with a higher level of entrepreneurial orientation, including a focus on opportunity seeking, tend to have higher sales growth rates. This suggests that firms that actively seek out and capitalize on opportunities are more likely to experience growth in sales volume. Similarly, Wiklund and Shepherd (2003) found that firms with a proactive orientation, which includes opportunity seeking behavior, are more likely to achieve higher sales growth rates compared to less proactive firms. This indicates that a proactive approach to seeking and exploiting opportunities can lead to increased sales volume over time. This aligns with the idea that firms with a proactive approach to identifying and capitalizing on opportunities are more likely to experience growth in sales volume. For example, a study by Wiklund and Shepherd (2003) found that firms with a proactive orientation, which includes opportunity seeking behavior, are more likely to achieve higher sales growth rates compared to less proactive firms.

First Mover Strategy and Sales Volume: The correlation between First Mover Strategy and Sales Volume ($r = 0.630$, $p < 0.01$) suggests that firms that adopt a first-mover strategy tend to achieve higher sales volumes. This aligns with the findings of Lieberman and Montgomery (1988), who found that first movers in an industry often establish a strong market presence and customer loyalty, leading to higher market share and sales volumes. Being the first to enter a market with a new product or service can provide a competitive advantage that translates into higher sales volumes. Additionally, Song et al. (2005) found that firms that are first movers in technology markets tend to achieve higher sales growth rates compared to followers. This indicates that being the first to enter a market with a new product or service can provide a competitive advantage that translates into higher sales volumes.

New Market Recognition and Sales Volume: The strong positive correlation between New Market Recognition and Sales Volume ($r = 0.764$, $p < 0.01$) suggests that firms that successfully recognize and enter new markets tend to achieve higher sales volumes. This is supported by the idea that entering new markets early and effectively can lead to increased sales volume and growth for firms. For example, Gatignon and Xuereb (1997) found that firms that enter new markets early and effectively are more likely to achieve higher sales growth rates. Similarly, Rhee and Haunschild (2006) found that firms that enter new markets quickly and decisively tend to achieve higher sales growth rates compared to firms that delay market entry. This indicates that being able to identify and capitalize on new market opportunities can lead to increased sales volume and growth for firms. Therefore, these empirical studies support the idea that firms that are proactive in seeking opportunities, adopting first-mover strategies, and entering new markets tend to achieve higher sales volumes. This suggests that a proactive and innovative approach to business strategy can lead to increased market competitiveness and growth in sales volume for firms.

Conclusion

Based on the findings the study concluded that there is a significant positive relationship between opportunity seeking and market competitiveness of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria. This because Firms that actively seek out and capitalize on opportunities in the market are more likely to be competitive. This could be due to their ability to innovate, enter new markets, and respond effectively to changing market conditions.

There is a significant relationship between first mover strategy and market competitiveness of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria. While being a first mover can offer advantages such as establishing a strong market presence, it also comes with risks. Firms need to carefully weigh the benefits and risks of a first mover strategy in their specific context.

There is also a significant positive relationship between new market recognition and market competitiveness of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria because Firms that are able to identify and enter new markets successfully are more likely to be competitive. This could be attributed to their ability to diversify their revenue streams and access new customer segments.

In all these findings it suggests that strategic factors such as opportunity seeking, first mover strategy, and new market recognition play a significant role in determining the market competitiveness of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria. Firms that are proactive in these areas are more likely to achieve market competitiveness.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion, the study recommended that:

1. Firms should actively invest in market research and trend analysis to identify emerging opportunities.

2. Establish dedicated teams or departments focused on opportunity identification and encourage a culture that values innovation and creativity. Conduct regular market scans and competitor analyses to uncover potential gaps or unmet needs in the market and develop new products or services to address them.

3. Consider the potential benefits and risks of being a first mover in the market. Evaluate market conditions, competitive landscape, and the firm's capabilities before deciding to pursue a first mover strategy.

Suggestion for Further Research

Subsequent investigations into the moderating effects of variables like firm size, industry dynamics, and environmental uncertainty on the relationship between proactiveness and market competitiveness of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria could be the main focus of future research. This may assist in determining the circumstances in which proactive tactics work best.

Examine how aggressive and competitive the South-East Nigerian manufacturing sector is in the market compared to other areas or nations. The specific elements influencing competitiveness in the South-East Nigerian region might be highlighted by this comparative study. Examine how South-East Nigerian manufacturing companies may become more proactive and competitive in the market by adopting new technologies.

Examining how automation, digitization, and data analytics affect proactive decision-making is one way to do this. Through more investigation into these domains, researchers may enhance our comprehension of the ways in which proactiveness boosts the market competitiveness of manufacturing enterprises in South-East Nigeria. This will yield significant implications for practitioners and policymakers alike.

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