

# Strategic Agility and Organizational Competitiveness of Manufacturing Firms in Rivers State, Nigeria

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**Abstract :** *This study examined the relationship between strategic agility and organizational competitiveness of manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. The research problem focused on the inability of manufacturing firms to develop approaches that will enable them to encounter any unpredictable challenges in order to design, produce, and market products superior to those offered by competitors. In solving this problem, four hypotheses were formulated in their null forms that were empirically tested to achieve desired four objectives. The study utilized a cross sectional survey and a population of 193 managers and supervisors of ten (10) manufacturing firms represented the study subjects. A sample size of one hundred and thirty (130) respondents was drawn from the population, and the simple random sampling technique was utilized. Copies of questionnaire was used for data collection. The predictor variable (strategic agility) was operationalized using strategic insight and strategic flexibility, while the criterion variable was measured using differentiation and cost leadership. The Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient was used to evaluate the data and determine how the organizational competitiveness metrics and the strategic agility dimensions relate to one another. The analysis's findings indicated that a substantial correlation exists between strategic agility with the measures of organizational competitiveness. The research concluded that manufacturing firms that exhibit high levels of strategic insight and strategic flexibility are better positioned to achieve organizational competitiveness in the industry. It was recommended among others that the manufacturing firms should conduct regular environmental scanning and market research to identify opportunities and possible ways of mitigating risks so that they can improve their competitiveness in the industry.*

**Keyword:** Organizational Competitiveness, Strategic Agility, Strategic Flexibility.

Strategic Insight.

## Introduction

In the face of market turbulence, high competition and overwhelming effects of the environmental dynamism, organizations need substantial amount of agility to adapt alterations, make specific modifications, and bolster its capacity for inventiveness in order to sustain profitability and rivalry throughout time (Chung, et al., 2019; Liu & Yang, (2020). According to Roman et al.; (2018), achieving competitive advantage is a critical success factor that help improve the sustainability and success of the company. Clearly, one of the most important factors for surviving in the corporate world is competition. The various factors that influence the competitiveness of organizations are both endogenous and exogenous. Endogenous (internal) elements in the company's competitiveness study are related to the workflows, frameworks, workforce, organizational design, productivity, and managerial methods used by each organization. Businesses and organizations' endogenous elements work together to boost output and provide a sustainable competitive edge (Trinh et al., 2012).

Businesses must therefore effectively manage their resources, aim for a bigger proportion of expanding markets, and turn risks into opportunities if they want to achieve a sustained edge over rivals. Maintaining competitiveness in organization is critical towards improving the sustainability and continuity of the firm.

It is however essential for businesses to enhance their strategic agility as such will impact the success of the business. According to Trinh et al. (2012), strategic agility has emerged among the new short-term critical elements that contribute to a sustainable future for all businesses, whether they are public or private. Additionally, it works toward career advancement and corporate excellence, both of which contribute to exceptional overall competitiveness (Idris & Al-Rubaie, 2013). In the rapidly evolving corporate landscape of today, leaders and employees alike must possess an extensive viewpoint and an understanding of the commercial advancements and cultural trends reshaping the world (Kanyi, 2011). Strategic agility enhances a business's future preparedness and is a reliable predictor of becoming an industry leader and achieving better market capitalization growth, according to Rohrbeck and Kum (2018). They also underlined that companies with strategic agility character acquire strategic insight to ensure outstanding efficiency and advantages over others in the future. Several work on competitiveness have been done over the years. Nevertheless, there are paucity of works on how strategic agility relate with organizational competitiveness of manufacturing firms in Rivers state. This study tend to cover this gap.

## Statement of the Problem

The problem of low competitiveness of firms has affected the performance and continuity of the firm. An essential component of a country's economy is its manufacturing sector.. It contributes significantly to creating jobs, boosting output, and propelling economic expansion. Nigeria's manufacturing sector is a vital industry that makes a substantial involvement in the GDP of the nation by generating wealth, jobs, and more tax income for the government. It has also been recognized as a crucial industry in the country's efforts to diversify and move away from its reliance on oil. Regretfully, the country's manufacturing sector has long faced numerous obstacles that have kept it from reaching its maximum potential. Over the past ten years, several of these difficulties have gotten worse. Some companies in the manufacturing business are struggling due to their failure to achieve high market share and to secure an optimal return on investment. The problem of low competitiveness of firms has not only affected the way these companies operate but has also impacted negatively on the continuity of the business. However, it has been observed that manufacturing firms lack strategic agility in their business, and this has diminished their competitiveness over time.

### Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between strategic agility and organizational competitiveness of manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. The specific objectives included to;

- i. Examine the relationship between strategic insight and differentiation.
- ii. Examine the relationship between strategic insight and cost leadership.
- iii. Determine the relationship between strategic flexibility and differentiation.
- iv. Determine the relationship between strategic flexibility and cost leadership.

### Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated;

**HO<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between strategic insight and differentiation of manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.

**HO<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between strategic insight and cost leadership of manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.

**HO<sub>3</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between strategic flexibility and differentiation of manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.

**HO<sub>4</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between strategic flexibility and cost leadership of manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.

## 2.0 Review of Related Literature

### Theoretical Review

**2.1 Resource Based View** This work is founded on resource based theory. Pursuant to the resource-based paradigm, a firm's primary distinguishing feature and differentiation is its assets. Based on the notion, companies must examine themselves and increase their competitiveness through focusing on internal elements that may be improved to boost the business's productivity and effectiveness (Moliterno & Wiersema, 2007). In this sense, the resource-based view illustrates how businesses can differentiate themselves, be seen as exceptional in their activities or behavior, and possess the ability to capitalize on their own special strengths and promote attributes that differ significantly from the opinions of different entities and that are presumably to represent their own view of service (Moliterno & Wiersema, 2007; Newbert, 2007). In other words, according to the theory, the company's assets are its main source of edge over others (Teece, 2007; Ray et al., 2004; Moliterno & Wiersema, 2007). The reason this idea applies to this research is that it demonstrates how companies can achieve their competitiveness through proper utilization of firm's resources.

### 2.2 Conceptual Review

#### 2.2.1 Strategic Agility

Strategic agility hold significance in today's dynamic and complicated environment, since it facilitates the development of strategies to address any unforeseen difficulties that a business may meet (Gunasekaran, 1999). The word "agile" was initially used to refer to a cohesive customer-supplier collaboration for product layout, production, and sales in order to boost competitiveness (Gunasekaran, 1999). Doz and Kosonen (2008) characterized strategic agility as a crucial mechanism that enables organizations to transform, reinvent themselves, and adapt so as to sustain their existence. They define it as the capacity of a company to continuously modify and realign its tactical focus within its core business to generate value. Similarly, Sampath (2015) viewed strategic agility as an organization's adaptability to shifts in the business environment, its ability to identify opportunities, threats, and risks, and its capacity to swiftly and repeatedly initiate new strategies. Likewise, Teece, Peteraf, and Leih (2016) characterized strategic agility as an organization's capability to successfully and profitably reallocate and reroute its assets, toward higher-value activities that enhance or safeguard value, depending on internal and external changes. Strategic agility can be attained through elements, assets and abilities

that vary based on the context and environment in which businesses function, claim Lengnick-Hall & Beck (2016). Businesses functioning in dynamic environments will require a distinct set of strategic agility capabilities than those operating in comparatively secure environments.

## **2.2. Strategic Insight**

Strategic foresight, identified as a key dimension of strategic sensitivity (Mavengere, 2013), plays a vital aspect in shaping strategic agility by detecting, analyzing, and interpreting change-inducing factors, assessing their potential impact on the company, and initiating appropriate responses (Rohrbeck, Thom & Arnold, 2015). It involves recognizing, learning from, and anticipating emerging ecological patterns (Inkinen & Kaivo-oja, 2009), with an emphasis on both short-term adjustments, stated to as track changes, and long-term patterns, known as pattern recognition (Mavengere, 2013). Strategic foresight is viewed as method that strengthens an organization's capacity to evaluate new dangers and potential, principal motivators, resource dynamics, and causal relationships that influence various future scenarios—ranging from possible and plausible to probable and preferred—enabling better-informed strategic decision-making (Kuosa, 2016). It entails analyzing the anticipated evolution of the corporate landscape to proactively identify and address potential advantages and dangers arising from emerging trends. Additionally, it comprises an assortment of methods that empower firms to enhance performance and strengthen their future market positioning (Rohrbeck & Kum, 2018).

### **2.2.3 Strategic Flexibility**

There is little doubt that the creation and execution of plans are correlated with strategic flexibility. Strategic flexibility is closely linked to a business's performance, especially during periods of significant disruption caused by the current economic crisis. In contrast to markets with high levels of demand unpredictability or technical advancement, where an aggressive market exposure at the expense of flexibility is the preferable strategy, this association is particularly significant for businesses operating in extremely crowded marketplaces (Grewal & Tansuhaj 2010). The inability to conduct thorough assessments necessary for strategy formation pursuant to the significant degree of uncertainty surrounding market development and environmental change forecasts is the dilemma of strategic flexibility. Furthermore, it is nearly difficult for a big business to maintain its adaptability and agility in the face of shifting market competitors. Since firms are better equipped to handle risks and possibilities when they have more competitive intelligence, it would appear that strategic flexibility and competitive intelligence are related.

### **2.2.4 Organizational Competitiveness**

Being able to contend is a multifaceted concept that can be used to determine a nation's, industry's, or company's financial viability (Ambastha & Momaya, 2003). According to Wilfred, et al., (2014), organizational competitiveness is the capacity to generate more economic value than other competing firms. Conversely, enterprise competitiveness is the ability to design, produce, and/or market goods that are better than competitors', considering both cost and other variables than price aspects of the product (Yosuke & Shibata, 2013; Sadegh et al., 2015). At the organizational level, competitiveness is defined as a business's ongoing ability to consistently provide high-quality goods and services, outperform other companies, attract clients, expand its market share, and sign deals for lucrative operations that support the business's strategic expansion and raise employee standards.

### **2.2.5 Differentiation**

Goods or distinctive services must evolve from being unrivaled by relying on brand loyalty in order to be considered differentiable. A business may be presented with superior quality, performance, or distinctive characteristics, all of which can support the higher costs. Product differentiation companies, according to Miller (1987), typically make significant investments in R&D to elevate their capacity for creativity and improve their capacity in order to remain in front of the advancements of their rivals (Jermias, 2008). Businesses that use differentiation strategies are able to produce something novel that is seen as distinctive by the entire industry. In the words of Leitner and Guldenberg (2010), cost-benefit methods outperform differentiation in terms of return on assets. Using a differentiation strategy, the company seeks to differentiate itself from competitors in a number of key domains that customers value..

### **2.2.6 Cost Leadership**

Implementing a cost leadership plan involves investing in manufacturing equipment, gaining expertise, and strict control over total operating costs, often achieved through initiatives such as downsizing and quality management. This strategy emphasizes the aggressive development of efficient large-scale facilities, continuous efforts to reduce costs through experience, stringent cost control, and minimal overhead expenses. It also involves avoiding marginal customers and cutting costs in areas like research and development, service, sales force, and advertising. According to Carter and Pucko (2005), both competitive pricing and distinct market positioning strategies positively impact various performance indicators, particularly financial performance. Consequently,

Porter (1985) recommended that cost leadership businesses should strictly control expenses, refrain from overspending on promotion or creativity, and offer their products at a discount.

### 2.3 Empirical Review

Several work have been done in relation to the various concepts. Kamasak, et al., (2018) seeks to explore the consequences of strategic flexibility on the relationship between knowledge management and innovation performance. This was accomplished by administering a self-administered questionnaire to a sample of 187 Turkish companies from various industries, and testing a few assumptions. Innovation performance was more significantly correlated with the two-way interaction between strategic flexibility and knowledge management than with the direct and unidirectional relationship between the two. Thus, strategic flexibility was determined to be a prerequisite for knowledge management to be effective in generating innovative performance.

Arokodare and Asikhia (2020) theoretically investigated the relationship, as part of the antecedent of strategic foresight, between business performance and strategic agility. The study's underlying hypotheses were the notions of entrepreneurial innovation and dynamic capability. To help illustrate the link between strategic agility and company success through strategic foresight, a conceptual model was created. The majority of previous research demonstrated that strategic foresight and agility had greatly improved firm excellent performance. The study found that foresight and strategic agility have greatly improved firm excellent performance in a spectrum of industries.

Nabeel-Rehman and Nazri (2019) demonstrates the positive impact of information technology (IT) capabilities on small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) performance. Additionally, the paper explains the impact of information technology capability dimensions upon the small and medium scale enterprises performance results by using corporate entrepreneurship and absorptive ability as a mediating sequential process. The work utilized data from a sample of 489 manufacturing SMEs in Pakistan and the partial least squares (PLS) technique. A survey was conducted for data collection, utilizing a cluster sampling approach. This research contributes to the IT literature by differentiating IT capability into two distinct dimensions—IT integration and IT alignment—enabling a clearer distinction between various sources of IT capabilities. Furthermore, the findings provide insights into the dynamic capability concept by theoretically and empirically illustrating how absorptive capacity and corporate entrepreneurship successively influence firm performance outcomes. Additionally, this study contributes to SME literature by evaluating performance at two levels: innovation performance and overall firm performance. The analysis results indicate that absorptive capacity and corporate entrepreneurship play a significant mediating role in how both aspects of IT capabilities and performance results are related.

Abuanzeh, et al., (2022) analyzed how knowledge management construct mediates the function of strategic agility in achieving competitiveness in Jordan's public higher education institutions. The study examined the body of research on businesses' strategic characteristics and knowledge management. The resource-based perspective theory serves as a prism through which organizations can connect knowledge management to strategic results. Through the use of a questionnaire and a quantitative research approach, the proposed theoretical model was evaluated. The primary analytical process and testing of the suggested study hypotheses were carried out using a PLSSEM technique. The findings revealed that knowledge management and strategic agility both significantly and favorably impacted attaining competitiveness.

### 3.0 Research Methodology

**Research design** this study utilized the cross sectional survey design.

**Population for the study** the population for the study consisted of 193 managerial employees of 10 manufacturing firms in Rivers state, Nigeria was covered.

**Sample size determination** the TaroYamane (1968) formula was used in arriving at a sample size of 130 respondents.

**Sampling Technique** the simple random sampling techniques was utilized which ensured that all members of the study elements were chosen

**Method of data** structured copies of questionnaire was used in gathering data from respondents. Strategic agility was operationalized using strategic insight and strategic flexibility.

**Measurement of variables** Strategic insight was measured using 5 items; strategic flexibility was measured using five items; Organizational competitiveness was measured using differentiation and cost leadership. Differentiation was measured using 5 items, and cost leadership was also measured using 5 items. The items were rated on a 4-point likert scale. **Data analysis Technique** Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient was used in analyzing the data.

## Result

A total of 130 copies of questionnaire were administered and only 110 were well filled and used. The analysis was at 95% level of significance and the decision rule was to accept null hypotheses when P-value is less than 0.05 otherwise reject.

## Test of hypotheses 1 and 2

**Table 1: Strategic Insight and Measures of Organizational Competitiveness**

			Strategic Insight	Differentiation	Cost Leadership
Spearman's rho	Strategic Insight	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.640**	.696**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	110	110	110
	Differentiation	Correlation Coefficient	.640**	1.000	.612**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	110	110	110
	Cost Leadership	Correlation Coefficient	.696**	.612**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	110	110	110

Source: Author's Field Survey (2025) - SPSS version 25 output extracts

The result of the analysis in Table 1 shows a significant level  $p < 0.05$  ( $0.002 < 0.05$ ),  $\rho = 0.640$  between strategic insight and differentiation. This indicates that a substantial correlation exists between strategic insight and differentiation. The outcome between strategic insight and cost leadership showed a favorable and meaningful connection with analysis at significant level  $p < 0.05$  ( $0.000 < 0.05$ ),  $\rho = 0.696$  between strategic insight and cost leadership. This indicates that strategic insight and cost leadership are significantly correlated. Accordingly, the null hypotheses of hypotheses 1 and 2 were rejected and the alternate hypotheses accepted.

**Table 2 Strategic Flexibility and Measures of Organizational Competitiveness**

			Strategic Flexibility	Differentiation	Cost Leadership
Spearman's rho	Strategic Flexibility	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.582**	.664**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	110	110	110
	Differentiation	Correlation Coefficient	.582**	1.000	.612**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	110	110	110
	Cost Leadership	Correlation Coefficient	.664**	.612**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	110	110	110

Source: Author's Field Survey (2025) - SPSS version 25 output extracts

The result of the analysis in Table 2 shows a significant level  $p < 0.05$  ( $0.007 < 0.05$ ),  $\rho = 0.582$  between strategic flexibility and differentiation. This means shows a strong correlation exists between strategic adaptability and differentiation. The null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted. The result of the analysis in Table 2 also shows a significant level  $p < 0.05$  ( $0.000 < 0.05$ ),  $\rho = 0.664$  between strategic flexibility and cost leadership. This suggests that cost leadership and strategic flexibility are significantly correlated. The alternative hypothesis is accepted, whereas the null hypothesis is rejected.

## Discussion of Findings

Based on the above findings, the study realized the following.

### Strategic Insight and Differentiation

The bivariate hypotheses between strategic insight and differentiation revealed a meaningful connection between the two variables. The Spearman rank order correlation coefficient revealed that the p-value of 0.000 was less than 0.05 ( $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ) which implies that strategic insight has a significant relationship with differentiation. Thus, after rejecting the null hypothesis, the alternative hypothesis was accepted. The outcome of the correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) is 0.640. This thus indicated a strong correlation between strategic insight and differentiation. Thus, enhancing strategic insight will help enhance differentiation. A coefficient of



determination of 0.410 implies that 41.0% of total variation in the differentiation in an organization is accounted for by strategic insight. Thus, the first aim of the research which sought to examine if strategic insight related with differentiation was achieved. This result is consistent with that of Arokodare and Asikhia, (2020) that strategic agility relates with firm performance.

### **Strategic Insight and Cost Leadership**

The bivariate hypotheses found a significant correlation between cost leadership and strategic understanding. The spearman rank order correlation coefficient revealed that the p-value of 0.000 was less than 0.05 ( $p=0.000<0.05$ ) which implies that Strategic insight has a noteworthy connection with cost leadership. This led to the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis and the rejection of the null hypothesis. The outcome of the correlation coefficient (r) is 0.696. This thus indicates that a substantial correlation exist between strategic insight and cost leadership. Thus, enhancing Strategic insight will help enhance cost leadership. A coefficient of determination of 0.484 implies that 48.4% of total variation in the cost leadership in an organization is accounted for by strategic insight. Thus, the second objective of the study which sought to examine if strategic insight relates with Cost leadership was achieved. This result is consistent with that of Vrontis, et al., (2022) that strategic agility relates with firm's performance.

### **Strategic Flexibility and Differentiation**

The analysis of hypothesis four showed a noteworthy correlation between strategic adaptability and differentiation. This relationship existing base on the fact that the p-value was lower can the degree of relevance ( $p=0.000 < 0.05$ ). Thus, the null hypothesis was dismissed, and the alternative hypotheses accepted. Furthermore, the spearman correlation coefficient revealed that Strategic flexibility correlates with differentiation at 0.582. This indicates a robust positive correlation between strategic adaptability and differentiation. A coefficient of determination of 0.339 implies that 33.9% total variation in the differentiation in an organization is dealt with by strategic flexibility. Thus, the fourth objective of the study which sought to examine if strategic flexibility relates with differentiation was achieved. This finding is in agreement with that of Kamasak, et al., (2018) that strategic flexibility relates with innovation performance.

### **Strategic Flexibility and Cost Leadership**

The analysis of hypothesis five reveals a significant relationship between strategic flexibility and cost leadership. The spearman correlation coefficient reveals that the p-value of 0.000 was less than 0.05 ( $p=0.000<0.05$ ) which implies that strategic flexibility has a significant relationship with cost leadership. This led to the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis and the rejection of the null hypothesis. The outcome of the correlation coefficient (r) is 0.664. This thus reveals that there is a significant relationship between strategic flexibility and cost leadership. A coefficient of determination of 0.441 implies that 44.1% total variation in the cost leadership in an organization is accounted for by strategic flexibility. Consequently, the fifth objective of the study was to determine whether strategic flexibility relates with cost leadership was achieved. This results align with the works of Shafiq (2021) that strategic agility relates with organizational performance.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study examined the relationship between strategic agility and organizational competitiveness in manufacturing firms. Strategic agility positively impacts firms' competitiveness as they are better positioned to take advantage of chances and avoid potential threats. Firms that exhibit strategic flexibility have the ability to adjust their strategies, resources, and structures in response to environmental changes. This allows them to remain agile and responsive. Firms that differentiate themselves through unique products, services, or brand positioning create a competitive advantage. This differentiation is an important factor in maintaining competitiveness, as it allows firms to capture customer loyalty and potentially charge premium prices. Focus on cost leadership will enable the firms to manufacture products or services more cheaply than their competitors. This cost efficiency can be a significant source of competitiveness, as it enables firms to offer competitive prices, potentially expanding market share. In conclusion, manufacturing firms that exhibit high levels of strategic insight and strategic flexibility are better positioned to achieve organizational competitiveness in the industry. The research suggested that;

1. The manufacturing firms should be involved in determining possible specific implications and triggering appropriate organizational response to achieve competitiveness through differentiation
2. The manufacturing firms should be involved in planning, formulation, and implementation of strategies especially in times of turbulent changes in order to achieve competitiveness
3. The management of the manufacturing firms need to carefully analyse strategy formulation in order to enable the production of unique products and services from unmatched by relying on customer loyalty to achieve competitiveness.
4. The management of manufacturing firms should be involved in planning, formulation and implementation of strategies to enable the achievement of cost leadership and competitiveness.

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