

Organizational Ambidexterity and Agility of Food and Beverage Firms in Abia State, Nigeria

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Abstract: *The study investigates the relationship between organisational ambidexterity and agility of food and beverage firm in Abia State. A population of 168, food and beverage firms in Abia State, Nigeria was covered. The study was a census study. The Spearman rank correlation coefficient statistical tool was used for the analysis. The findings revealed a strong significant relationship between organisational ambidexterity and dimensions of agility (alertness and responsive capacity). The study concludes that organisational ambidexterity relates with agility of food and beverage firms in Abia State. The study recommends that the food and beverage firms should balance exploration and exploitation by fostering a culture of continuous learning and innovation, investing in flexible and adaptive systems, optimizing existing processes, and integrating feedback mechanisms to enhance their alertness and responsive capacity.*

Key words: *Organisational ambidexterity, Exploration, Exploitation, Agility, Structural Alertness, Responsive Capacity.*

Introduction

Agility is a crucial attribute for food and beverage firms operating in a highly dynamic and competitive environment. It is of paramount importance to food and beverage firms due to the fast-paced nature of the industry, the need to meet evolving consumer preferences, the ability to navigate supply chain disruptions, the necessity to comply with regulatory changes, and the opportunity to harness technological advancements. Organizational agility refers to the ability to rapidly adapt to market changes and respond swiftly to consumer demands, technological advancements, and regulatory shifts (Doz & Kosonen, 2010).

In the food and beverage industry, where trends can shift overnight and consumer preferences evolve rapidly, maintaining agility is essential for sustained success and competitiveness. Additionally, agility enables food and beverage firms to respond effectively to supply chain disruptions and external shocks. The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, highlighted the importance of being able to pivot operations and adjust supply chains rapidly. Companies that demonstrated agility by quickly shifting to online sales, adapting their supply chains, and

introducing new safety measures were better positioned to navigate the crisis and maintain operations (Ivanov & Dolgui, 2020).

Regulatory changes also necessitate agility. The food and beverage industry is highly regulated, with frequent updates to safety standards, labeling requirements, and environmental regulations (Shams, 2016). Firms that can swiftly align their practices with new regulations avoid costly compliance issues and can even turn regulatory changes into competitive advantages by being early adopters of new standards (Trienekens & Zuurbier, 2008). Moreover, technological advancements and digital transformation are rapidly changing the landscape of the food and beverage industry. Agility in adopting new technologies such as automation, artificial intelligence, and data analytics can significantly enhance operational efficiency, product innovation, and customer engagement (Teece, Peter et al., 2016). Agile firms can leverage these technologies to streamline their processes, reduce costs, and offer personalized experiences to their customers, thereby gaining a competitive edge.

Firms that cultivate agility are better equipped to thrive in this challenging environment, ensuring long-term success and resilience, but firms are continually challenged to balance the dual imperatives of exploitation and exploration—a concept known as organizational ambidexterity (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013). Exploitation involves leveraging existing competencies and optimizing current operations for efficiency and reliability, whereas exploration requires innovation, experimentation, and the pursuit of new opportunities. Achieving a balance between these two dimensions is crucial for sustained competitive advantage, particularly in industries characterized by rapid technological changes and shifting consumer preferences.

Organizational ambidexterity, the ability to balance exploitation of existing capabilities with exploration of new opportunities, is crucial for the long-term success of firms, especially in dynamic industries like food and beverage. This dual capacity allows companies to optimize current operations while innovating for the future, providing a competitive edge. By fostering both efficiency and innovation, ambidextrous firms can swiftly adapt to market shifts, regulatory changes, and evolving consumer preferences. This balance not only enhances operational efficiency and product innovation but also ensures the firm remains resilient and capable of capitalizing on new opportunities (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013; Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004).

Achieving ambidexterity offers a competitive advantage and strategic flexibility, enabling firms to sustain short-term performance while driving long-term growth. It encourages continuous learning, adaptability, and a culture that values both stability and change, which is vital for navigating unforeseen challenges and sustaining market relevance. Ambidextrous organizations can respond quickly to disruptions and leverage emerging trends, ensuring long-term sustainability and success in a rapidly evolving industry landscape (Lavie, Stettner, & Tushman, 2010).

The relationship between organizational ambidexterity and agility is particularly pertinent in the food and beverage industry, where firms must innovate to meet changing consumer demands while simultaneously optimizing their existing product lines and processes (Lee, Lee, & Garrett, 2019). This dual focus requires a strategic alignment that fosters both efficiency and flexibility, enabling firms to thrive in a volatile market environment (Junni, Sarala, Tarba, & Weber, 2015). Understanding how food and beverage companies navigate these complexities offers valuable insights into the mechanisms that drive organizational success in a highly competitive and ever-evolving industry. Despite several studies (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013; Teece, Peter et al., 2016; Shams, 2016) on organizational ambidexterity and agility, the dearth of empirical study on

organizational ambidexterity and agility of beverages firm in Rivers State, motivates this study. The study will bridge the existing gap in knowledge. Agile organizations are better equipped to anticipate and respond to these challenges, ensuring long-term resilience and success (Felipe, Roldán, & Leal-Rodríguez, 2017).

Statement of the Problems

Food and beverage firms often faces unique pressures, including fluctuating raw material costs, stringent regulatory requirements, and evolving dietary trends, necessitating a nimble and responsive organizational structure (Shams, 2016). The sector struggle with agility due to the inherent challenges of balancing exploitation and exploration, known as organizational ambidexterity. Balancing resources between optimizing current operations (exploitation) and pursuing new opportunities (exploration) often leads to internal conflicts, reducing overall agility (Lavie, Stettner, & Tushman, 2010). Firms optimized for exploitation may develop rigid structures and cultures resistant to change, hindering their ability to innovate and respond quickly to market shifts (Junni, Sarala, Tarba, & Weber, 2015).

Maintaining dual structures for exploitation and exploration can result in silos and fragmented communication, slowing decision-making processes and reducing agility (Tushman & O'Reilly, 1996). strategic missteps—rigidity from too much exploitation or inefficiency from too much exploration—both of which impede agility (March, 1991). Rapid changes in consumer preferences, technological advancements, and regulatory requirements necessitate agility, but the unpredictability of these changes complicates the balance between stability and innovation (Raisch & Birkinshaw, 2008).

While ambidexterity—balancing exploitation and exploration—is critical for the success of food and beverage firms, it also presents significant challenges that can impede agility. Organizational ambidexterity requires firms to simultaneously optimize existing processes (exploitation) and innovate (exploration), which can create conflicts and complexities that hinder their ability to respond quickly to market changes (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013). key issues arise from this tension between maintaining stability and fostering innovation Several

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to investigate the relationship between organizational ambidexterity and agility of food and beverage firms in Abia State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the relationship between exploration and alertness of food and beverage firms in Abia State, Nigeria.
2. Determine the association between exploration and responsive capacity of food and beverage firms in Abia State, Nigeria.
3. Assess the relationship between exploitation and alertness of food and beverage firms in Abia State, Nigeria.
4. Determine the link between exploitation and responsive capacity of food and beverage firms in Abia State, Nigeria

Research Question

1. What is the relationship between exploration and alertness of food and beverage firms in Abia State, Nigeria?
2. How does exploration relate with responsive capacity of food and beverage firms in Abia State, Nigeria?
3. What is the relationship between exploitation and alertness of food and beverage firms in Abia State, Nigeria?
4. Determine the link between exploitation relate with responsive capacity of food and beverage firms in Abia State, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between exploration and alertness of food and beverage firms in Abia State, Nigeria.

Ho₂: There is no significant between exploration and responsive capacity of food and beverage firms in Abia State, Nigeria.

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between exploitation and alertness of food and beverage firms in Abia State, Nigeria.

Ho₄: There is no significant relationship between exploitation and responsive capacity of food and beverage firms in Abia State, Nigeria.

Literature Review

The Dynamic Capabilities Theory

The Dynamic Capabilities Theory, introduced by Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997), provides a framework for firms to achieve and sustain competitive advantage in rapidly changing environments by integrating, building, and reconfiguring internal and external competencies. This theory emphasizes the importance of ambidexterity—balancing the exploitation of existing capabilities with the exploration of new opportunities—and agility, which is the rapid implementation of changes in response to environmental shifts. In the food and beverage industry, where consumer preferences, technological advancements, and regulatory requirements constantly evolve, dynamic capabilities are essential for sensing market opportunities and threats, seizing them, and reconfiguring assets to maintain competitiveness.

Food and beverage firms can leverage dynamic capabilities to enhance their ambidexterity and agility. By continuously monitoring market trends and consumer behaviour, firms can sense shifts and adapt strategies accordingly, such as the rising demand for plant-based foods and sustainable practices (Nielsen, 2015). Agile firms can quickly capitalize on these opportunities by launching new products, adopting new technologies, or entering new markets, as demonstrated by firms that successfully pivoted to e-commerce during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ivanov & Dolgui, 2020). Additionally, reconfiguring resources and capabilities, like optimizing supply chains or investing

in production technologies, ensures that firms maintain efficiency while innovating, sustaining long-term competitiveness in a fast-evolving market landscape.

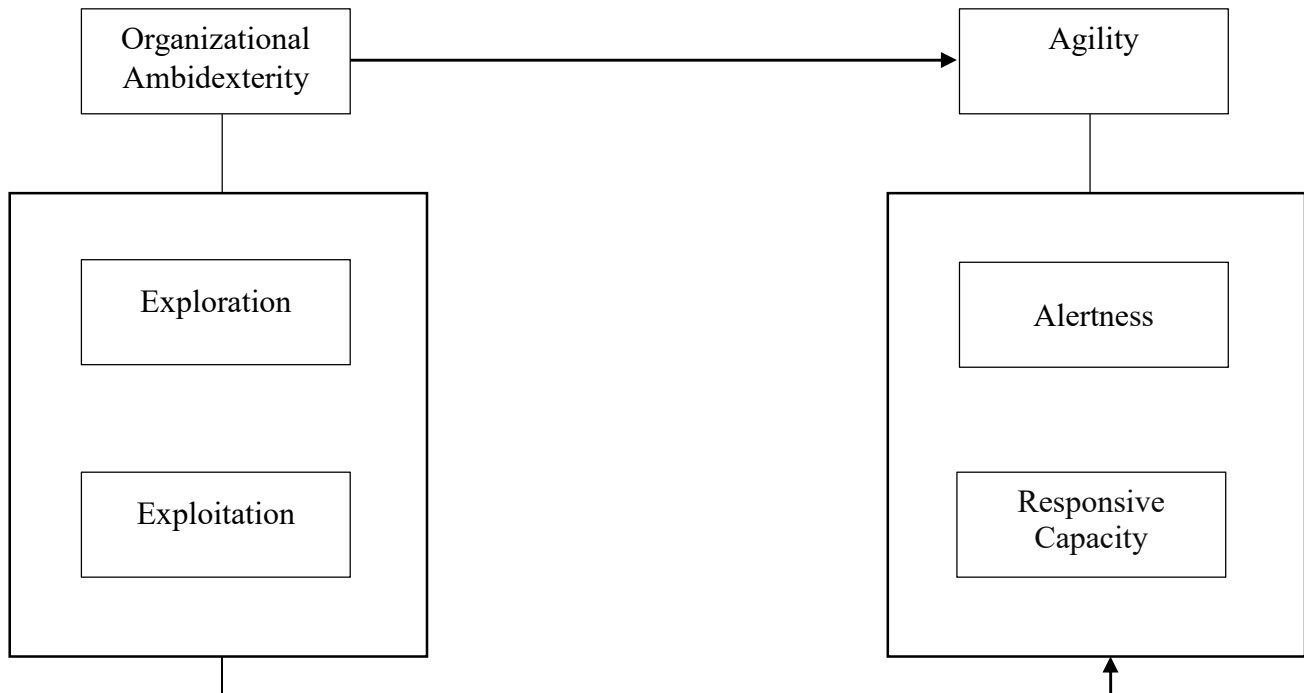


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of organizational ambidexterity and Agility

Source: Adapted from Akdogan, Akdogan and Congöz (2009); Holsapple and Li (2008).

Organizational Ambidexterity

According to Raisch et al. (2009), ambidexterity refers to a company's capacity to simultaneously seek for new prospects and groundbreaking developments (i.e., exploration) and exploit existing business processes with ever-higher levels of efficiency (i.e. exploitation). Organisational ambidexterity is the capacity of an organisation to successfully manage concurrent exploration and exploitation efforts. Exploration include taking chances, developing new information, and seeking out new opportunities; exploitation, on the other hand, concentrates on honing present skills, maximising productivity, and making the most of available resources in order to create value in the near term. O'Reilly and Tushman (2004) presented organisational ambidexterity as a crucial skill for businesses to maintain competitive advantage in quickly changing settings. They maintained that businesses frequently have to choose between taking advantage of their current capabilities and investigating new ones. Businesses that do well in both areas are better able to innovate, adjust to shifting market conditions, and sustain long-term success. Numerous causes and consequences of organisational ambidexterity have been studied empirically. An organization's ambidextrous skills have been found to be influenced by a number of factors, including organisational structure (He and Wong, 2004), strategic alignment (Benner and Tushman, 2003), upper management backing (Jansen et al., 2009), and knowledge management procedures (Zhang and Li, 2010). Furthermore, research indicates that ambidextrous companies typically surpass their

rivals in terms of long-term survivability, revenue growth, and inventiveness (O'Reilly and Tushman, 2008; Simsek et al., 2009).

Exploration

One of the essential elements of ambidexterity is exploration, which is the capacity of the company to look for and test out novel concepts, ideas, and markets (March, 1991). Exploration can be characterised as looking for something or being able to find it, as well as having the courage to try something new and find creative solutions to problems. Because exploration enables businesses to continuously innovate and adapt to changing circumstances, it serves as a gauge of organisational ambidexterity. Organisations can obtain a competitive edge by investigating new avenues and spotting trends, disruptive technology, and undiscovered markets ahead of rivals (Benner & Tushman, 2003). Furthermore, through exploration, businesses can diversify their holdings and protect themselves from market volatility. Enterprises can mitigate risks and enhance their ability to withstand external disruptions by allocating resources across multiple promising prospects (Gupta, Smith, & Shalley, 2006). But flexibility and control must coexist in harmony for exploration to be fruitful. Employing procedures and frameworks that guarantee responsibility and resource distribution, along with cultivating a culture that welcomes experimentation and embraces failure, are essential for organisations (Garud & Karnøe, 2003).

Exploitation

Baum, Li, and Usher (2000) proposed that the term "exploitation" pertains to knowledge acquired by localised exploration, refined experience, and the choice and use of preexisting procedures. Benner and Tushman (2002) contended that exploitative innovations are those that advance the current technological trajectory while enhancing existing components. Similarly, He and Wong (2004) distinguished between exploratory and exploitative innovation, defining the latter as technological innovation targeted at breaking into new product-market domains and the former as activities focused at enhancing already-existing product-market domains. In a number of respects, exploitation is a gauge of organisational ambidexterity. In the short term, it guarantees performance and stability since it shows that the organisation can make the most of its available resources and talents. Second, it supports discovery by offering the stability and basis required for creativity to flourish. Thirdly, companies may adjust to shifting market conditions and still be competitive in their core operations when they strike an efficient balance between exploration and exploitation. Conclusively, exploitation functions as an essential gauge of organisational ambidexterity, enabling efficient use of current resources while concurrently encouraging creativity and flexibility.

Agility

Agility continues to be a critical difference for businesses looking to preserve a competitive edge and ensure long-term success as the rate of change quickens and disruptions occur more frequently. As stated by Jones and colleagues (2011). "The ability of an organisation to quickly adjust to changes in its surroundings without sacrificing its primary goals and purposes is known as

organisational agility. It includes adaptability, reactivity, and fortitude in the face of complexity and ambiguity." In today's dynamic corporate environment, which is marked by quickening technical breakthroughs, altering market trends, and unpredictability from outside sources, organisational agility has become more and more important. Organisations that possess agility are better equipped to handle obstacles and react quickly to changing circumstances. It entails the capacity for innovation, adaptation, and prompt decision-making while upholding operational effectiveness and strategic emphasis. The ability to make decisions quickly is a crucial component of organisational agility, according to Bradley and Fredericks (2017). Decentralised decision-making in agile organisations enables teams at all stages to make well-informed decisions on their own. Because hierarchical approval processes do not act as a bottleneck, quicker reactions to changes in the market and customer needs are possible. Organisational agility also depends on cultivating a culture of experimenting and discovery. Businesses that promote creativity and take calculated risks are better able to adjust to changing conditions and profit from new trends (Bradley & Fredericks, 2017). Agile companies consistently iterate and enhance their strategies and procedures by accepting failure as a source of insightful information.

Alertness

A key component of agility is alertness, which is the capacity of an organisation to perceive and react quickly to changes in its surroundings. Businesses that are alert are better able to recognise new possibilities and dangers, adjust their strategies quickly, and maintain an advantage over their rivals. Teece (2007) asserts that companies that are highly alert are more responsive to changes in the market, advances in technology, and competitive manoeuvres. Agile organisations are also better able to make well-informed decisions and reallocate their resources. Furthermore, according to Teece (2007), alertness entails the ability to precisely evaluate signals and convert them into actionable ideas, going beyond simple vigilance. Organisations that adopt a proactive mentality are better equipped to foresee disruptions, use trends, and innovate in response to changing client demands. To sum up, attentiveness is an essential indicator of organisational agility. Organisations can improve their capacity to manage uncertainty and prosper in ever-changing markets by fostering a culture of alertness, interpretation, and responsiveness.

Responsive Capacity

The ability of an organisation to promptly adjust and react to alterations in its surroundings, such as modifications in the market, breakthroughs in technology, or unforeseen disturbances, is known as responsive capability. This idea highlights how crucial speed, agility, and efficiency are to the functioning of a business and its decision-making procedures. Responsive capacity is a crucial component of organisational agility, according to Eisenhardt and Martin (2000), allowing businesses to successfully navigate unstable conditions and seize new possibilities. They contend that businesses with a high capacity for responsiveness are better able to detect changes in their surroundings, act quickly to make judgements, and make the required modifications to maintain their competitive edge. According to Teece (2016), an organization's responsive capability is its "ability to recognise and respond to external changes, as well as to mobilise resources to address those changes effectively." This idea emphasises the significance of not just recognising changes in the industry, technological, or regulatory environment, but also having the systems in place to

respond to them quickly. Compared to less agile competitors, a highly responsive organisation is better able to take advantage of new possibilities and reduce risks.

Empirical Review

Ürü, Gözükara and Ünsal, (2024) studied organizational ambidexterity, digital transformation, and strategic agility for gaining competitive advantage in SMEs. A quantitative research design was used in the study. The research population were the managers of 17451 small-scale SMEs in the wholesale and retail trade sector within the provincial borders of Istanbul. The data obtained from 366 valid surveys were analyzed using the Smart PLS program. The outcome demonstrated the favourable relationship between competitive advantage and organisational ambidexterity and digital transformation. It was also shown that the relationship between the competitive advantage and ambidexterity of small-scale SMEs is partially mediated by digital transformation, with strategic agility acting as a moderator in this relationship. However, the study came to the conclusion that the relationship between the ambidexterity and competitive advantage of small-scale SMEs is unaffected by environmental dynamism.

Akdogan, Akdogan and Congöz (2009) examined organizational ambidexterity: an empirical examination of organizational factors as antecedents of organizational ambidexterity. This study aims to explain organizational ambidexterity and organizational factors that are antecedents of ambidexterity in a theoretical way and to examine the impacts of these factors on organizational ambidexterity empirically. Data was obtained from private corporations operating in Kayseri (Turkey). The association between organisational ambidexterity and conflicting organisational traits was investigated using regression analysis. The findings demonstrate that exploitation, exploration, and their interaction (ambidexterity) are strongly and favourably correlated with paradoxical organisational traits. Organisational ambidexterity rises in direct proportion to the degree of decentralisation, formalisation, and connectivity.

Anekwe et al., (2020) examined ambidexterity and organizational performance of manufacturing firms in Enugu State, Nigeria. A correlation survey method was employed. A total population of 386 people were used in the study. Taro Yamane formula was used to determine the sample size of 196. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to test the hypotheses. According to the study, inventive ambidexterity and market share significantly correlate favorably (correlation coefficient =.914, N 189, P 0.01). Additionally, it was discovered that contextual ambidexterity and competitive advantage have a highly significant positive link (correlation coefficient =.820, N 189, P 0.01). The research findings indicate that an ambidextrous company can optimise its performance and competitiveness through the utilisation of both its existing competencies and potential new opportunities. The findings also recommend that an organisation conduct exploration and exploitation activities to enhance business innovation, gain a substantial market share, and secure its long-term viability.

Methodology

The cross-sectional survey was used and a population of 168 managers and supervisors of the food and beverage firms in Abia State, Nigeria was covered. It was a census study. Organizational ambidexterity was operationalized using exploration and exploitation. Exploration was measured using 5 items (I regularly seek out new opportunities and experiences to expand my skills and

knowledge) while exploitation was measured 5 items (I focus on refining and improving existing skills and processes to enhance efficiency and effectiveness). Agility was measured using alertness and responsive capacity. Alertness was measured using 5 items (I stay vigilant and aware of changes and trends in my environment to identify potential opportunities and threats) and 5 items were used in measuring responsive capacity (I can easily adjust my strategies and actions in response to changing circumstances and new information). The response was measured on a 4-point Likert scale and the data were analysed using Spearman rank correlation coefficient statistical tool.

Result and Discussion

From the 168 copies distributed, only 161 were retrieved and well filled.

Correlations

			Exploration	Alertness	Responsive Capability
Spearman's rho	Exploration	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.705**	.792**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	161	161	161
	Alertness	Correlation Coefficient	.705**	1.000	.698**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	161	161	161
	Responsive Capability	Correlation Coefficient	.792**	.698**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	161	161	161

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

The analysis in Table 1 indicates a significant relationship ($p < 0.05$) between exploration and alertness. The correlation coefficient is 0.705 suggesting a strong positive relationship between exploration and alertness. Furthermore, the outcome depicts a significant relationship ($p < 0.05$) between exploration and responsive capability. The correlation coefficient is 0.792, indicating a strong positive relationship between exploration and responsive capability.

Correlations

			Exploitation	Alertness	Responsive capability
Spearman's rho	Exploitation	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.732**	.755**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	161	161	161
	Alertness	Correlation Coefficient	.732**	1.000	.711**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	161	161	161
	Responsive capability	Correlation Coefficient	.755**	.711**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	161	161	161

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

The analysis in Fable 2 reveals a significant relationship ($p < 0.05$) between exploitation and responsive capability, with a correlation coefficient of 0.732, indicating a strong positive relationship. Additionally, the results show a significant relationship ($p < 0.05$) between exploitation and responsive capability, with a correlation coefficient of 0.755, suggesting a strong positive relationship between these variables.

Discussion of Findings

Exploration and Alertness

The analysis on exploration and alertness yielded correlation value of 0.705 with a p-value of 0.000, indicating a positive, strong and significant relationship between the two variables. The coefficient of determination (R^2) value of 0.497 signifies that 49.7% of the total variation in alertness can be explained by changes in exploration. This implies that as individuals or organizations engage more in exploration activities, their level of alertness tends to increase. The strong positive and significant relationship, indicated by a correlation value of 0.705, suggests that actively seeking new opportunities and experiences (exploration) contributes significantly to maintaining a high level of alertness. The R^2 value of 0.497 means that 49.7% of the variation in alertness is explained by changes in exploration. This emphasizes the importance of exploration in enhancing an individual's or organization's capacity to remain vigilant and aware of their environment. This result aligns with the findings of Ürü, et al., (2024) that organizational ambidexterity, relates with strategic agility for gaining competitive advantage in SMEs.

Exploration and Responsive capability

The analysis of exploration and responsive capability revealed a correlation coefficient of 0.792 with a p-value of 0.000, indicating a significant and positive, strong relationship between these variables. The correlation determination (R^2) value of 0.627 suggests that 62.7% of the total variation in responsive capability can be explained by changes in exploration. This implies that as individuals or organizations increase their engagement in exploration activities, their responsive capability tends to improve significantly. The strong positive and significant relationship, indicated

by a correlation coefficient of 0.792, suggests that seeking out new opportunities and experiences (exploration) greatly enhances the ability to adapt and respond effectively to changes. The R^2 value of 0.627 means that 62.7% of the variation in responsive capability is explained by changes in exploration. This highlights the crucial role of exploration in strengthening an individual's or organization's adaptability and responsiveness to new challenges and environments. This finding is consistent with the research conducted by Anekwe et al., (2020) that ambidexterity relates with organizational performance of manufacturing firms.

Exploitation and Alertness

The analysis of exploitation and alertness revealed a correlation coefficient of 0.732 with a p-value of 0.000, indicating a strong positive and significant relationship between these variables. The coefficient of determination (R^2) value of 0.536 suggests that 53.6% of the total variation in alertness can be explained by changes in exploitation. This implies that as individuals or organizations focus more on exploitation, they tend to become more alert. The strong positive and significant relationship between exploitation and alertness indicates that enhancing exploitation practices, such as refining and improving existing skills and processes, can significantly contribute to an increased state of alertness. The R^2 value of 0.536 means that more than half of the variability in alertness can be attributed to changes in exploitation. This finding underscores the importance of effective exploitation strategies in maintaining high levels of alertness within individuals or organizations. These results align with previous research conducted by O'Reilly & Tushman, (2013) that organizational ambidexterity with agility.

Exploitation and Responsive capability

The analysis of exploitation and responsive capability revealed a path coefficient (β) of 0.755 with a p-value of 0.000, indicating a positive, strong, and significant relationship between these variables. The coefficient of determination (R^2) value of 0.570 suggests that 57.0% of the total variation in responsive capability can be explained by changes in exploitation. This implies that as individuals or organizations place greater emphasis on exploitation, their responsive capability tends to increase. The strong positive and significant relationship, indicated by a correlation coefficient of 0.755, suggests that improvements in exploitation practices, such as optimizing and refining existing processes, lead to better responsiveness. The R^2 value of 0.570 means that 57.0% of the variation in responsive capability is accounted for by changes in exploitation. This highlights the critical role of effective exploitation in enhancing an organization's or individual's ability to adapt and respond swiftly to changing conditions or new information. This result is consistent with the findings of Junni, et al., (2015) that exploitation relates with agility

Conclusion

This study examined the organizational ambidexterity and agility of food and beverage firms in Abia State, Nigeria, focusing on the relationships between exploration, exploitation, alertness, and responsive capability. A significant positive relationship was found, with a correlation of 0.705 and p-value of 0.000. Exploration activities explained 49.7% of the variation in alertness ($R^2 = 0.497$). Firms that actively seek new opportunities are better at maintaining high environmental alertness. The correlation was 0.792 with a p-value of 0.000, and $R^2 = 0.627$, indicating that 62.7% of the variation in responsive capacity is due to exploration. This underscores the importance of exploration in enhancing adaptability and responsiveness.

A strong positive relationship was identified, with a correlation of 0.732 and p-value of 0.000. Exploitation explained 53.6% of the variation in alertness ($R^2 = 0.536$). Refining existing processes significantly boosts alertness. The relationship was strong, with a correlation value of 0.755 and p-value of 0.000. Exploitation activities explained 57.0% of the variation in responsive capacity ($R^2 = 0.570$). Optimizing current processes enhances the firms' ability to respond to changes.

The results of this study indicate that both exploration and exploitation are crucial for the organizational ambidexterity and agility of food and beverage firms in Abia State, Nigeria. Firms that effectively balance and integrate exploration (seeking new opportunities) and exploitation (refining existing capabilities) are better positioned to remain alert and responsive to environmental changes. This balance not only supports immediate adaptability but also fosters long-term sustainability and competitive advantage in the dynamic market of the food and beverage industry.

Recommendations

1. Food and beverage firms in Abia State should foster a culture of continuous learning and innovation and encourage employees to seek out new opportunities and experiences, that will enhance the firms' alertness to market trends and changes.
2. Firms should invest in flexible and adaptive systems that allow for rapid response to new opportunities and challenges, implementing agile project management methodologies, promoting cross-functional teams, and use real-time data analytics to improve their responsiveness to changing market conditions.
3. Companies should focus on optimizing and refining their existing processes and capabilities to improve efficiency and performance and carry out regular process audits, continuous improvement programs, leveraging best practices to maintain high levels of alertness and ensuring that employees are skilled in current processes and technologies will contribute to sustained organizational vigilance.
4. Firms should integrate feedback mechanisms that allow for quick adjustments to existing processes and continuously refine their operations, to enhance their ability to respond effectively to market dynamics.

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