

Entrepreneurial Intensity and Corporate Agility of Small and Medium Enterprises in Abia State, Nigeria

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Abstract: *This study investigated the relationship amongst entrepreneurial intensity and corporate agility of Small and Medium Enterprises in Abia State, Nigeria. The cross sectional survey was adopted and a population of 950 SMEs in Abia state were covered. A sample size of 274 respondents were drawn. The simple random sampling was employed and copies of designed questionnaire were administered in collected data. The data were analyzed employing the Spearman Rank Order Correlation and the result showed a significant relationship amongst the dimensions of entrepreneurial intensity (innovativeness and pro-activeness) with responsive capacity and alertness. The study concluded that entrepreneurial intensity in terms of innovativeness and pro-activeness help in boost the agility of SMEs in Abia State, Nigeria. It was recommended among others that the owner of the SMEs should ensure constant innovation in their offerings to customers as such will help enhance the responsiveness of the firm.*

Keywords: *Alertness, Innovativeness, Pro-Activeness, Responsive Capacity*

1.0 Introduction

The idea towards attaining and sustaining a firm's agility in a highly proliferating domain has become very crucial owing to the need to enhance the firm's survival in the turbulent business world. Corporate agility has gained the attention of researchers in recent times owing to the high level of unprecedented level of uncertainty in the Nigeria. Organizations that must stay relevant in this era must be agile enough to adapt to variety and also resilient enough to withstand uncertainties. In conjunction to the assertion above, Lawler (2014) argued that corporate agility is essential because it allows for the effectual and effective reallocation of firm's resources to activities that produces greater results in response to changes in both internal and external factors. In alignment with the thought of Anggraini and Sudhartio (2019), corporate agility is the collection of procedures that permit firms to detect varieties in their environments and enhance their ability to adapt to them in an effective, cost effective and timely manner. The Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) has been one of the key sector that has led to the development of most countries in the world.

However, the effect of this SMEs has not really be felt in Nigeria as compared to other developed countries. Improving the agility of the Small and Medium Enterprises will help enhance the sustainability, survival and overall wellbeing of the firms. Arokodare (2020) opined that organizations need to easily identify and adapt to its surroundings in order to remain relevant and strive through difficult times. For the Small and Medium enterprises to remain agile, it is important

that the entrepreneur display high entrepreneurial intensity as such will help boost the fortune of the organization. Entrepreneurial intensity in this era will help the SMEs to be proactive to varieties in the business environment and then develop relevant strategies to stay robust and agile. Entrepreneurial intensity is composed of three fundamental dimensions which include inventiveness, risk-taking, and proactiveness (Morris & Sexton, 1996). The first dimension, innovativeness, is concerned with developing new ideas, services, and technology. Risk-taking deals with the willingness to commit considerable resources to opportunities with an unclear consequence and return on investment. These risks can be reduced by an entrepreneur's or company's understanding of the opportunity, as well as through technology, unique competencies to ensure corporate resilience. Proactiveness is the third component of entrepreneurial intensity and it encompasses initiative, competitive aggression, and boldness. The problem of low corporate agility of SMEs has affected their survival, reduced their resilience and it has made many of the firms to fizzle out of operation. The problem still persist over the years despite various inquires to address the issue. Hence, this study examined how entrepreneurial intensity relate with corporate agility of small and medium enterprises in Abia State, Nigeria.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate how entrepreneurial intensity relate with corporate agility of SMEs in Abia State. Specifically, the objectives are to investigate the relationship between;

- i. Innovativeness and responsive capacity of SMEs in Abia State.
- ii. Innovativeness and alertness of SMEs in Abia State.
- iii. Pro-activeness and responsive capacity of SMEs in Abia State.
- iv. Pro-activeness and alertness of SMEs in Abia State.

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were formulated and tested;

H01: There is no significant relationship between innovativeness and responsive capacity of SMEs in Abia State.

H02: There is no significant relationship between innovativeness and alertness of SMEs in Abia State.

H03: There is no significant relationship between Pro-activeness and responsive capacity of SMEs in Abia State.

H04: There is no significant relationship between Pro-activeness and alertness of SMEs in Abia State.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

This work take its precept from Resource-Based View (RBV). It views a company as a composition of heterogeneous resources with a possibility of generating useful skills which will result to a

business's benefit (Caldeira & Ward, 2003). Barney (1991) emphasized further that resources are able to offer persistent competitive advantage because they are valuable, uncommon, inimitable, and non-substitutable. When the entrepreneurial has such resource, such will enable them to respond to dynamism which will thus enhance their corporate agility.

Conceptual Framework

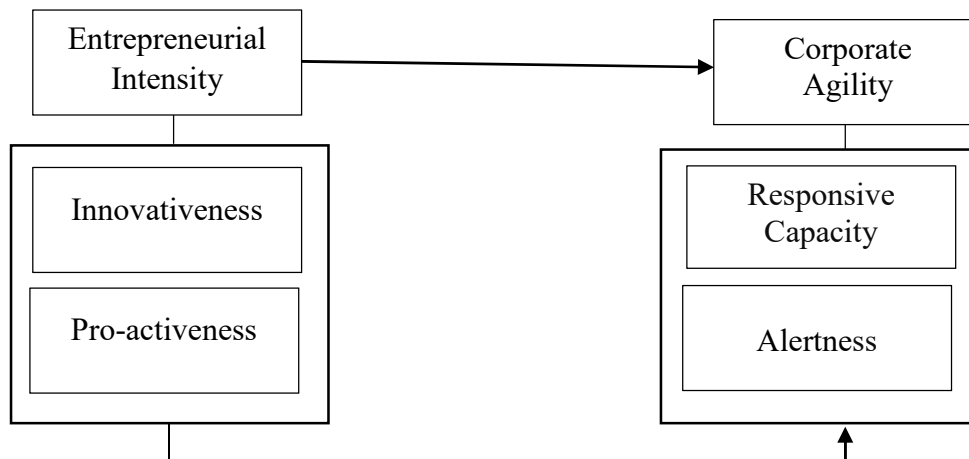


Figure 1: A conceptual framework of entrepreneurial intensity and corporate agility

Source: adapted from Chanu and Karmakakar (2017); Holsapple and Li (2008).

Entrepreneurial Intensity

The term "entrepreneurial intensity," first used by Lumpkin and Dess in 1996, describes the level of dedication, motivation, and effort an entrepreneur puts forth to seize opportunities and accomplish their objectives. This idea emphasises the ardent and unwavering pursuit of entrepreneurial endeavours, emphasising the vital and determined role that vigour and determination have in the success of entrepreneurs. The degree and frequency of entrepreneurial activities are referred to as "Entrepreneurial Intensity," according to Heilbrunn (2005). A person's degree is determined by their capacity for innovation, willingness to take risks, and proactive nature, while their frequency is determined by the quantity of entrepreneurial endeavours they engage in. The factors that determine the level of entrepreneurial intensity are degree and frequency. The ability to come up with fresh concepts that lead to the development of new goods or services is commonly associated with being innovative, and taking risks entails having the willpower to persevere through difficulties that may have unfavourable consequences. Being proactive means having a positive outlook on life and having faith in your ability to improve your competitiveness. Thus, the term "entrepreneurial intensity" describes the erratic character of entrepreneurship in a person. As per Morris and Sexton (1996), Entrepreneurial Intensity is defined as the sum of the degree and frequency of entrepreneurial actions that make up a firm's level of entrepreneurship. As previously said, there are three main components to entrepreneurship: innovation, taking calculated risks, and proactiveness.

Innovativeness

The invention of new technological ideas on how to man extractive industrial equipment is required on constant basis as the old fashion of doing things becomes obsolete due to constant changes in the environment. Innovation according to Gamal (2011) “is the introduction of new product, services and process through a defined business model into the marketplace either by utilization or commercialization”. Hence it involves the process, products, services as well as business model innovation and these contribute significantly to strengthening organizational competitive advantage. Gowell, (2011) noted that, despite the fact that innovation involves bringing new novelties to market, it does not guarantee a successful entrepreneurial practice if the entrepreneur does not offer what is acceptable by the consumers. When innovation is used or practiced, the goal should be to reduce costs and attract customers through the innovation's inherent quality in order to make business operations profitable. According to Hitt et al. (2005), innovativeness is a reflection of a company's propensity to support and engage in fresh concepts, experimenting, and creative processes that may lead to the development of new goods, services, or technological advancements. This means that in order to identify innovative ways to create value, entrepreneurs must cultivate a culture that leans towards innovation. They must also engage in encouraging oneself and think beyond the box in terms of technology, knowledge, and boundaries (Hitt et al., 2005).

Pro-activeness

By making a concerted effort to understand the needs of various stakeholder groups and using organisational resources to advance the interests of stakeholders and shareholders, corporations can actively adopt socially responsible behaviour (Jones and George, 2008). Here, proactive behaviour reflects a top-level management approach to pursuing increased competitiveness, fostering initiative, investigating prospects, and exhibiting competitive aggression and confidence (Erasmus and Scheepers, 2008; Scheepers, et al, 2007). Proactiveness is being proactive as opposed to only responding to potential problems. Workers don't usually need specific instructions or to be prompted to take action; they are often proactive individuals. According to Hitt et al. (2005), proactiveness is the ability of the company to lead the market instead of following it. Proactive entrepreneurs employ procedures to foresee future demands from the market and look for ways to meet those needs before rivals may seize the opportunity. This suggests that being proactive entails setting up resources so they are ready for use in the future and preparing ahead of time for new chances. According to Gawel (2011), proactiveness—looking forward and actively seeking out market opportunities—not only helps businesses turn a profit but also gives them a competitive advantage. Proactive entrepreneurs would thus learn how to become the best in terms of opportunity identification and investment, even if this entirely depends on the supply and demand sides of the market.

Corporate Agility

In the ever-evolving business world of today, corporate agility has become a crucial factor in determining success. Corporate agility is more than just a catchphrase; it's a strategic necessity. It is defined as an organization's capacity to quickly adjust to changes in the market, technology breakthroughs, and customer expectations (Doz & Kosonen, 2010). The ability of a company to identify and react to changes in its surroundings is known as business agility. Corporate agility is defined as "an organization's ability to sense changes in dynamic, rapidly changing environments and promptly respond by staking out market opportunities and maintaining competitiveness

through the building and improving of its capabilities," as stated by Arokodare (2020). This allows an organisation to outperform its competitors while maintaining exceptional results. This expands upon the definitions of corporate agility provided by Anggraini, Sudharto, and Mavengere (2013). But agility isn't only for the manufacturing industry—it applies to every aspect of running a firm. Technology is a key component that makes organisational agility possible in the digital age. According to Ross et al. (2006), cloud computing, big data analytics, and AI-driven automation enable businesses to obtain insights in real-time, optimise workflows, and make information-driven choices with previously unheard-of speed and precision. Furthermore, agility depends not just on internal resources but also on external alliances and teamwork. According to Lichtenthaler and Ernst (2009), agile organisations foster ecosystems comprising suppliers, consumers, and stakeholders. They utilise collaborative skills and synergies to stimulate innovation and generate value. Corporate agility is essentially an attitude, or a culture, that seeps into every part of a business. Teams with vision, readiness to accept change, and capable leadership are necessary. According to Teece (2007), companies that exhibit agility are not merely responsive; rather, they are proactive in nature, proactively predicting market developments and being progressive.

Responsive Capacity

Responsive capability is an organization's capacity to quickly adapt and respond to changes in its environment, such as shifts in the market, technological advancements, or unanticipated disruptions. This concept emphasises how vital quickness, flexibility, and efficiency are to a company's operations and decision-making processes. According to Eisenhardt and Martin (2000), responsive capacity is an essential part of organisational agility, enabling organisations to successfully traverse uncertain conditions and embrace new opportunities. They argue that companies with high responsiveness are more adept at spotting changes in their environment, making decisions fast, and adjusting as needed to stay ahead of the competition. The "ability to detect and react to outside factors, as well as gather resources to tackle these shifts effectively" is what Teece (2016) defines as an organization's responsive capability. This concept highlights how important it is to have the mechanisms in place to react swiftly to changes in the industry, technology, or regulatory environment, in addition to simply identifying them when they occur. A highly responsive business is better equipped to seize fresh opportunities and lower risks than its less flexible rivals.

Alertness

Kirzner (1997) defined alertness as a state of being open to opportunities that are readily available but have been overlooked in the past. An entrepreneur has a remarkable sense of when opportunities arise. Organisational awareness is the ability of a company to spot possibilities as they emerge from technological, social, economic, political, and competitive events. A corporation needs to be vigilant if it hopes to gain a competitive advantage. This is because, according to Helfat and Peteraf (2015), it helps the business to spot opportunities before its competitors do. According to Baron (2006), organisational alertness is the capacity of an organisation to gather intelligence and identify environmental trends ahead of time, enabling it to capitalise on business opportunities. Consequently, managers will possess the ability to employ their imaginative abilities in identifying and evaluating data across diverse knowledge domains associated with the generation of novel opportunities (Kaish & Gilad, 1991). According to Roundy et al. (2017), alertness may have an impact on an organization's performance since alert businesses make decisions quickly, which can help them obtain a competitive advantage in the marketplace.

Empirical Review

Okeke, (2023) examined entrepreneurship intensity and internal business processes of small and medium scale enterprises in Anambra State. The descriptive survey design was adopted. The population of the study was 1,800 made up of small and medium scale enterprises. Questionnaire was used to collect data. The results of the study revealed that there is a significant relationship between innovation and process quality of SMEs; there is a significant relationship between proactiveness and process quality of SMEs and there is no relationship between risk-taking and the process quality of SMEs. The study found a strong positive correlation between SMEs' internal business processes and their level of entrepreneurship. For this reason, the study suggested that small and medium-sized businesses embrace innovation in order to guarantee the implementation of workflow management techniques. To cut down on process time, small and medium-sized businesses can promote proactive, transparent, and adaptable routine activities.

Oshi, Ule and Ogah, (2017) studied entrepreneurial intensity and corporate sustainability in the Nigerian extractive industry. Quasi experimental design was used, simple random sampling technique was used to select 400 personnel from five major extractive firms. Using multiple regression analysis, the study discovered that an entrepreneurial degree of innovation, proactive nature, and risk-taking inclination can help organisations sustain long-term growth. Based on the results, the study came to the conclusion that companies should set up systems to keep an eye out for staff aberrations and unethical behaviour, as well as government participation in the resource-rich sector.

Alarape (2013) examined entrepreneurial orientation and the growth performance of small and medium enterprises in Southwestern Nigeria. Questionnaire was used to collect data. The data generated were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Principal component analysis was used to pinpoint significant EO-causing elements. In addition, linear regressions and parametric and non-parametric relational statistics were used to understand the link and its impact on SMEs' performance. According to the study, SMEs in Southwestern Nigeria often perform poorly when it comes to growth, and there is a positive correlation between EO and performance. A firm's growth performance and EO have a dynamic, non-unidirectional relationship.

Urban and Sefalafala (2015) examined how entrepreneurial intensity and capabilities at the firm level influence performance, while at the same time considering environmental influences on this relationship. An initial electronic survey provided a total of 612 qualifying firms which were coded into a database and a random numbers program was applied to randomly select 50percent of these firms (306) as the final sample. This multistage screening generated a final sample of 117 responses, giving a 38 per cent response rate. The statistical software system, version 10, was utilised to compute the descriptive and inferential statistics. In the meantime, the relationship between the variables in terms of their prediction value was ascertained by testing the hypotheses using hierarchical regression analysis. The results generally corroborate the hypotheses, according to which entrepreneurial qualities and intensity are positively correlated with both internationalisation and company performance; however, there is scant evidence for the moderating effect of environmental hostility. Accordingly, the study suggested that in order to improve performance and raise their degrees of internationalisation, businesses should encourage greater levels of innovation, risk-taking, and proactiveness while building human, social, and technological capacities.

Scheepers, Hough and Bloom (2017) examined entrepreneurship intensity (EI) of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) companies and listed JSE companies (excluding ICT listings}. A cross-sectional survey design was used. A population of 715 companies, consisting of two phases: a pilot survey through personal interviews with the middle-and senior-level managers of 41 companies in the Gauteng area, and a total of 315 respondents (44% response rate) captured electronically. Descriptive analysis, significant differences and correlations was used to analyse the data. The results showed that ICT companies have higher levels of entrepreneurship than JSE enterprises. Additionally, there is no correlation found between a firm's size and entrepreneurial intensity, although there is a negative correlation between age and entrepreneurial intensity. This suggests that an organisation becomes less entrepreneurial as it gets older. While stating that entrepreneurial intensity is industry-specific, the data also showed that organisational variables have an impact on entrepreneurial intensity. Creating favourable organisational conditions that support the development of corporate entrepreneurship is a managerial choice for companies that aspire to be entrepreneurial.

3.0 Methodology

This inquiry utilized the cross sectional survey design and a population of 950 SMEs in Abia state were covered. A sample size of 274 were drawn from the Population using Krejcie and Morgan (1970). The simple random sampling technique was adopted and data were collected using copies of questionnaire. Entrepreneurial intensity was operationalized in innovativeness and pro-activeness as presented in Chanu and Karmakakar (2017) while the measures of corporate agility were responsive capacity and alertness as given in Holsapple and Li (2008). Each of the measure and dimensions were measures using 5 items on a 4-point liket scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The data were critically analyzed utilizing Spearman Rank Order Correlation.

4.0 Result

From a total of 274 questionnaire given to respondents, only 246 (90%) were retrieved and used and the result is shown below;

Table 1: Innovativeness and Measures of Corporate Agility

		Innovativeness	Responsive Capacity	Alertness	
Spearman's rho	Innovativeness	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.664**	.576**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	246	246	246
	Responsive Capacity	Correlation Coefficient	.664**	1.000	.607**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	246	246	246
	Alertness	Correlation Coefficient	.576**	.607**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	246	246	246

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

Table 1 displays the relationship between innovativeness and measures of corporate agility (responsive capability and alertness). The P-value was 0.000 and 0.000 between innovativeness with responsive capacity and alertness respectively. The correlation was 0.664 and 0.576 respectively which shows a positive link among the variables.

Table 2: Pro-activeness and Measures of Corporate Agility

		Pro-activeness	Responsive Capacity	Alertness	
Spearman's rho	Pro-activeness	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.639**	.531**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.001	.002
		N	246	246	246
	Responsive Capacity	Correlation Coefficient	.639**	1.000	.607**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.	.000
		N	246	246	246
	Alertness	Correlation Coefficient	.531**	.607**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.000	.
		N	246	246	246

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

The outcome of the analysis in table 2 shows that pro-activeness has a significant link with responsive capacity and alertness with p-value of 0.001 and 0.002 respectively. Furthermore, the correlation was 0.639 and 0.531 between pro-activeness with responsive capacity and alertness respectively.

Discussion of Findings

The outcome of the analysis showed that responsive capacity of SMEs in responding to varying environmental dynamics can be enhanced when they possess high level of innovativeness. This is drawn from the evidence of positive relationship between innovativeness with responsive capacity and alertness. The null hypotheses was rejected and the alternate accepted. From the evidence, the coefficient of determination between innovativeness with responsive capacity and alertness are 0.44 and 0.33 respectively. Hence, a unit change in innovativeness will result in 44% variation in responsive capacity and 33% variation in alertness. Furthermore, pro-activeness which is a measure of entrepreneurial intensity has a significant link with responsive capacity with a correlational value of 0.639 which indicated a strong relationship while the correlation with alertness was 0.531. Hence, increasing pro-activeness will help in boosting the level of agility of the SMEs. A unit change in Pro-activeness will result in 0.41% variation responsive capacity and 28% variation in alertness. This findings concurred with Okeke, (2023) which opined that entrepreneurship intensity help enhance internal business processes which enable them to respond to challenges. The outcome also aligned with Oshi, Ule and Ogah (2017) which observed that the entrepreneurial intensity impact on corporate sustainability in the Nigerian extractive industry. Alarape (2013) also argued that entrepreneurial orientation help boost the growth performance of small and medium enterprises.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Organizations are constantly striving towards achieving stability and the only way to maintain high stability is to ensure that the organization stay agile in the turbulent business domain. Entrepreneurial intensity help boost the innovativeness of Small and Medium Enterprises which subsequently help improve the responsive capacity of the organization. No organization can effectively remain responsive to variation in customers taste and preferences when they are not innovative. In this modern day business domain, organizations are constantly introducing radical innovation into their product and services so as to remain relevant and stay agile. Maintaining pro-active posture is relevant in enhancing the level of agility of SMEs. In conclusion, entrepreneurial intensity in terms of innovativeness and pro-activeness help in boost the agility of SMEs in Abia State, Nigeria. It is thus recommended that;

- i. The owner of the SMEs should ensure constant innovation in their offerings to customers as such will help enhance the responsiveness of the firm.
- ii. The entrepreneurs should make constant effort to search out and gratify variation in customers taste and preferences through innovativeness in their product or services as such will help enhance the alertness of the organization.
- iii. The owners of the SMEs should be proactive in order to easily identify challenges and tackle the challenges as such will enhance their level of responsive ability.
- iv. The entrepreneurs should ensure that they intensify their effort towards remaining competitive in the industry as such will help boost their fortune.

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