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Strategic Management Capabilities and Competitive Advantage of Manufacturing Firms in South-East, Nigeria

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Abstract: *Manufacturing firms in the South-East Nigeria operate in an increasingly turbulent environment characterized by intense competition, technological change, rising production costs, exchange-rate volatility, infrastructure deficiencies, changing consumer preferences and pressure to improve product quality and market responsiveness. In such an environment, possession of physical resources alone may not guarantee superior competitive performance; firms require managerial capabilities that enable them to formulate appropriate strategies, allocate resources effectively, respond to environmental changes, innovate and sustain valuable organizational competencies. The study examined the relationship between strategic management capabilities and competitive advantage of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria. The study was anchored principally on the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Dynamic Capabilities Theory. A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was adopted. The study population comprises 184 registered manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria and the target respondents were managers, directors/CEOs, and other managerial personnel of selected manufacturing firms across the five states of South-East Nigeria: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states. The sample size of*

126 firms was determined using the Taro Yamane formula at a 5% level of precision. Proportionate sampling was subsequently employed to allocate the sample across the five states. A structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale was used for primary data collection. Descriptive statistics such as frequency tables and percentage, and multiple regression were employed to test the hypotheses at the 5% level of significance. The findings of the study indicated that strategic planning capability (t-value 3.135), environmental scanning capability (t-value 3.335), strategic decision-making capability (t-value 3.235) and strategic implementation capability (t-value3.241) have positive and significant effect on competitive advantage. However, environmental scanning has the strongest explanatory power over other strategic management capabilities because it enables manufacturing firms to know what is changing, why it is changing and how they should respond before competitors do, thereby providing the information and adaptability necessary for superior competitive advantage. The relatively stronger effect of environmental scanning was also explained by its enabling role in the other strategic management capabilities. Effective strategic planning and strategic decision-making require accurate and timely environmental information, while strategic implementation requires the organization to execute strategies that remain relevant to prevailing environmental conditions. The study recommended that manufacturing firms should develop stronger strategic intelligence, implementation discipline, innovation capability, managerial learning systems and continuous environmental scanning.

Keywords: Strategic management capabilities, competitive advantage, manufacturing firms, strategic planning, environmental scanning, strategic decision-making, strategy implementation, South-East Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Strategic management has become an important determinant of organizational survival, growth and competitive positioning (Ekaneem et al, 2025). Organizations operate within environments characterized by economic, technological, political, social and competitive changes. Consequently, managers must continuously understand environmental developments, identify opportunities and threats, mobilize resources, formulate appropriate strategies and ensure that strategic decisions are effectively implemented. Strategic management goes beyond the preparation of strategic plans and involves a continuing managerial process through which an organization establishes direction, analyses its environment and internal capabilities, formulates strategies, allocates resources, implements chosen strategies and evaluates strategic outcomes (Adebayo, 2026 ; Adani et al, 2025). The importance of strategic management is particularly evident in manufacturing. Manufacturing firms depend on efficient resource utilization, technology, supply-chain coordination, product development, quality management, marketing, finance and human resources (John et al, 2023; Fred et al, 2023). A weakness in any of these areas can increase costs and reduce the firm's ability to compete. Manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria occupy an important position in the regional economy. The region has a strong entrepreneurial culture and a concentration of firms involved in food and beverages, plastics, pharmaceuticals, building materials, household products, textiles, footwear, machinery, chemicals and other industrial activities (Ike & Uzodimma, 2024). However, manufacturing firms in the region face considerable challenges which include inadequate electricity supply, high energy costs, poor transportation infrastructure, foreign-exchange instability, inflation, high cost of imported inputs, limited access to long-term finance, technological constraints, changing consumer preferences and intense domestic and international competition (Henry et al, 2019 ; Johnson et al, 2017).

Recent reporting has also highlighted how exchange-rate volatility and input-cost pressures have forced Nigerian manufacturers to reconsider sourcing and production strategies, with some firms increasing local sourcing and supply-chain collaboration (Nwodo et al, 2024 ; World Bank, 2023). These environmental conditions make strategic management capabilities increasingly important. A manufacturing firm with strong strategic capabilities can identify environmental changes earlier, respond faster and deploy resources more efficiently than competitors. The Resource-Based View argues that firms can obtain sustained competitive advantage from valuable, rare, difficult-to-imitate and non-substitutable resources and capabilities. Strategic management capability can therefore be regarded as an organizational resource that helps firms coordinate other resources to create value. Dynamic Capabilities Theory extends this argument by emphasizing the ability of firms to sense opportunities and threats, seize opportunities and transform their resource base in changing environments. Teece, Pisano and Shuen(1997) argue that competitive advantage can depend on distinctive organizational processes, asset positions and organizational paths. Empirical evidence from South-East Nigeria supports the importance of strategic management. For example, Onyekwelu's (2020) study of manufacturing firms in the region found significant effects of strategic objectives, strategy formulation, strategy implementation and strategy evaluation on organizational performance. More recent research has found a positive relationship between innovation and competitive advantage among selected manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria, while technological capability has also been examined as a determinant of competitive advantage (John & Robinson, 2020). Despite these studies, there remains a need to examine strategic management capabilities specifically as an integrated organizational capability and their relationship with competitive advantage, rather than focusing primarily on general organizational performance or individual strategic practices.

Below is a practical list of notable manufacturing organizations selected for the study across the five states, with each state having two organizations. Abia State, particularly Aba, has International Glass Industries and Metal and Engineering Manufacturers; Ebonyi State has Ebonyi State agro-Processing Firms and Greenfield Metal Firms; Anambra State has Innoson Vehicle Manufacturing Company ltd and Ibeto Group Manufacturing operations; Imo State has Paint Manufacturing Companies and Chemical Manufacturers while Enugu State has Nigerian Breweries Plc and Emenite ltd respectively. This study therefore investigates strategic management capabilities and competitive advantage of these manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria operate in a highly competitive and uncertain business environment. Although the region possesses substantial entrepreneurial and industrial potential, many manufacturing firms struggle to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. The problems confronting manufacturing firms include high production costs, unreliable energy supply, inadequate infrastructure, technological limitations, and shortage of foreign exchange, high interest rates, supply-chain disruptions, intense competition and rapidly changing customer requirements (David et al, 1997; Kaplan & Nortonz, 1996 ; Grant, 1991). These problems can weaken the ability of firms to compete on price, quality, innovation, distribution and customer service. A major concern is that some firms may respond to environmental challenges reactively rather than strategically. Where managers lack adequate strategic analysis capabilities, important environmental threats may not be identified early. Where strategy formulation is weak, resources may be directed toward activities that do not create sufficient customer value. Similarly, poor implementation can cause well-designed strategies to fail. Another problem concerns the ability of firms to adapt to technological and market changes. Competitive advantage is increasingly dependent on innovation, digitalization, quality improvement, operational efficiency and rapid response to customer needs (Teece, 2007; Teece et al, 1997)

Although previous research has established relationships between strategic management and organizational performance in South-East Nigeria, fewer studies have examined strategic management capabilities as an integrated construct and linked them directly to competitive advantage (Wheelen et al, 2018). For example, a previous South-East Nigerian study examined strategic objectives, formulation, implementation and evaluation and found significant effects on organizational performance. Other studies have focused separately on technological capability, innovation or diversification and competitiveness. The gap therefore concerns the insufficient integration of strategic analysis, formulation, strategic decision-making capability and implementation into a single explanatory framework for competitive advantage. The study seeks to address this gap.

Objectives of the Study.

The main objective of the study is to examine the relationship between strategic management capabilities and competitive advantage of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria. The study specifically seeks to:

i).determine the effect of strategic planning capability on competitive advantage;
ii).examine the effect of environmental scanning capability on competitive advantage;
iii).ascertain the effect of strategic decision-making capability on competitive advantage;
iv).ascertain the effect of strategy implementation capability on competitive advantage;

Research Questions.

The research questions raised to guide the conduct of the study are;

i).What is the effect of strategic planning capability on competitive advantage?
ii).To what extent does environmental scanning capability affect competitive advantage?
iii).To what extent does strategic decision-making capability affect competitive advantage?.
iv).What effect does strategy implementation capability has on competitive advantage?

Research Hypotheses.

The following null hypotheses are formulated for the study and would be tested at the 5% level of significance:

H01: Strategic planning capability has no significant on competitive advantage of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria.
H02: Environmental scanning capability has no significant effect on competitive advantage of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria.
H03: Strategic decision-making capability has no significant effect on competitive advantage of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria.
H04**:** Strategy implementation capability has no significant effect on competitive advantage of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria

Significance of the Study.

The study is significant to the following bodies;

Manufacturing Managers- The study helps managers understand the strategic capabilities necessary for developing and sustaining competitive advantage.

Business Owners and Entrepreneurs- It provides guidance on how systematic environmental analysis, strategic planning and innovation can improve business competitiveness.

Government and Policymakers- The findings assist policymakers in designing industrial policies that support strategic capability development, technology adoption, innovation and manufacturing competitiveness.

Investors- Investors use the findings to assess whether manufacturing firms possess managerial capabilities that can support sustainable competitive performance.

Researchers- The study contributes to literature on strategic management, resource-based capabilities and competitive advantage, particularly within the Nigerian manufacturing context.

Academic Institutions- The study serves as reference material for students and scholars in strategic management, marketing, entrepreneurship and business administration.

Scope of the Study.

The geographical scope covers the five states of South-East Nigeria such as Abia State, Anambra State, Ebonyi State, Enugu State and Imo State. The organizational scope covers selected manufacturing firms operating in the region. The study focused on four strategic management capabilities such as strategic planning, environmental scanning, strategic decision-making and strategic implementation. Competitive advantage was measured through cost efficiency, product differentiation, product quality, market responsiveness, customer value and relative competitive position.

Definition of Terms.

Strategic Management**:** The continuous process of analyzing the environment, formulating strategies, implementing them and evaluating strategic outcomes.(Mintzberg et al, 2019).

Strategic Management Capability**:** The organizational ability to effectively undertake strategic analysis, formulate and implement strategies, evaluate outcomes and adapt to environmental changes (Mintzberg et al, 2019).

Strategic Analysis Capability**:** The firm's ability to systematically gather and interpret information about its internal and external environment (Teece et al, 1997)

Strategy decision-making Capability**:** The ability of managers to develop appropriate strategic choices based on organizational objectives and environmental conditions (Ike & Uzodimma, 2024)

Strategy Implementation Capability: The ability to translate strategic decisions into actions through effective resource allocation, leadership, communication and coordination.(John et al, 2024).

Competitive Advantage**:** The ability of a firm to create superior customer value and/or achieve a stronger competitive position than rivals (Porter, 2003; 1985; 1980)

Review of Related Literature.

Concept of Strategic Management-

Strategic management involves the coordinated decisions and actions through which organizations establish objectives, analyze their environment, develop strategic choices, implement them and evaluate their effectiveness. It is both a process and a managerial philosophy (Mintzberg et al, 2019). As a process, it provides a systematic framework for decision-making. As a philosophy, it encourages managers to think about the long-term direction and sustainability of the organization. Strategic management is important because organizations cannot control all environmental forces. Managers must therefore develop capabilities that enable them to anticipate changes and respond effectively.

Strategic Management Capabilities-

Strategic management capability refers to the organizational capacity to perform strategic activities effectively. (Mintzberg et al, 2019). It includes the ability to obtain strategic information, analyze competitors, understand customers, evaluate internal resources, formulate appropriate strategies, allocate resources, implement strategies, monitor strategic performance, learn from strategic outcomes, innovate and adapt. Strategic management capability is therefore broader than merely having a written strategic plan and has the following dimensions (John et al, 2023 ; Mintzberg et al, 2019):

i).Strategic Planning Capability-

Strategic planning capability is the ability of an organization to set long-term goals, analyze its current position, identify future opportunities and threats, and develop appropriate strategies for achieving its objectives. It involves defining the organization's vision, mission, priorities, and competitive direction. A firm with strong strategic planning capability can allocate its resources effectively and prepare for future market changes.

ii).Environmental Scanning Capability-

Environmental scanning capability refers to the ability of an organization to continuously collect, analyze, and interpret information about its internal and external environment. This includes monitoring customers, competitors, technology, government policies, economic conditions, and social trends. Effective environmental scanning enables managers to identify opportunities and threats early and make proactive strategic decisions. Tools such as strength, weakness, opportunity and threat (SWOT) analysis, political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal factors (PESTEL) analysis, competitor analysis and industry analysis can facilitate environmental scanning capabilities.. A manufacturing firm that understands competitors' prices, product innovations and distribution systems can respond more effectively to competitive threats

iii).Strategic Decision-Making Capability-

Strategic decision-making capability is the ability of managers to make sound, timely, and informed decisions that affect the long-term direction and performance of an organization. It

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involves identifying strategic problems, evaluating alternative courses of action, assessing risks, and selecting the best option. This capability helps organizations respond effectively to competition, uncertainty, and changing business conditions.

iv).Strategic Implementation Capability-

Strategic implementation capability refers to the ability of an organization to translate strategic plans and decisions into effective actions and measurable results. It involves allocating resources, communicating strategic objectives, assigning responsibilities, coordinating activities, and monitoring performance. Strong implementation capability ensures that well-designed strategies are successfully executed and contribute to the achievement of organizational goals. Important implementation factors include leadership, organizational structure, resource allocation, employee commitment, communication, organizational culture, technology, coordination and performance measurement. A strategy can be theoretically excellent but fail if implementation is poor. This is particularly relevant in manufacturing where strategic implementation may involve investment in machinery, employee training, new production processes, quality systems and distribution networks.

Concept of Competitive Advantage-

Competitive advantage refers to a firm's ability to perform activities or create value in ways that competitors cannot easily replicate. Porter's (2003/1993) competitive strategy perspective emphasizes the importance of achieving a defensible position within an industry. Competitive advantage may arise from lower costs, superior quality, differentiation, innovation, customer service, strong distribution, brand reputation, technology, speed and flexibility. The dimensions of Competitive Advantage are (Porter, 2003/1993));

i).Cost Advantage- A firm has cost advantage when it can produce and distribute products at lower cost than competitors while maintaining acceptable quality.

ii).Differentiation Advantage- Differentiation occurs when customers perceive the firm's products as distinctively valuable.

iii).Quality Advantage- Superior quality can enhance customer satisfaction, loyalty and reputation.

iv).Innovation Advantage- Firms that continuously introduce useful products and processes can maintain stronger competitive positions.

v).Market Responsiveness- A responsive organization can identify and satisfy changing customer needs faster than competitors.

vi).Customer Value- Customer value represents the benefits customers perceive relative to the costs they incur.

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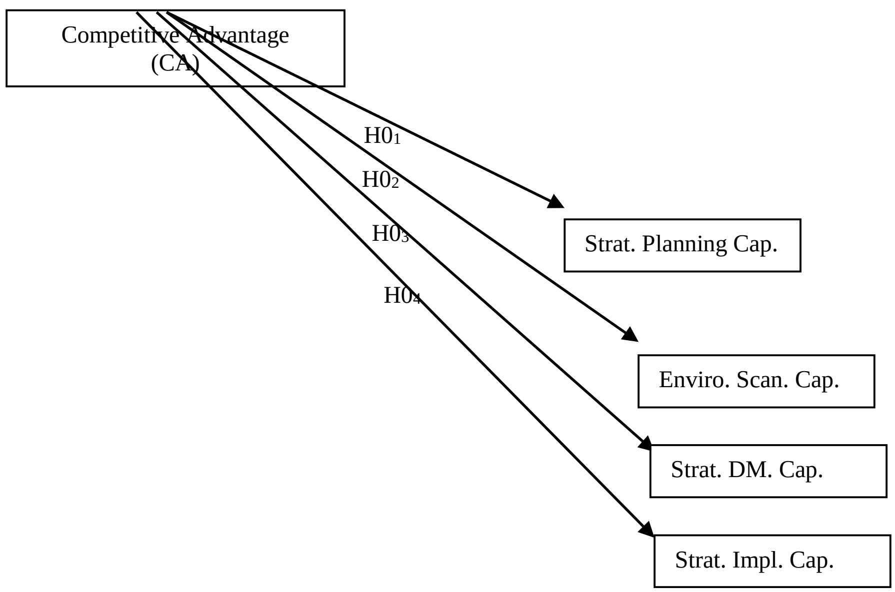

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the study depicting the Dependent variable (competitive advantage) and the Independent variables (strategic planning capability, environmental scanning capability, strategic decision-making capability and strategic implementation capability).
Source: Researchers' Conceptualization, 2026

Theoretical Framework

Resource-Based View-

The Resource-Based View is the principal theoretical foundation of the study. Barney's (1992) resource-based model proposes that resources capable of generating sustained competitive advantage should possess characteristics relating to value, rarity, imperfect imitability and non-substitutability. Strategic management capabilities can be regarded as intangible organizational resources. For example, a manufacturing firm may possess experienced strategic managers, strong organizational knowledge, effective planning systems, superior market intelligence, strong innovation routines and organizational learning capabilities. These capabilities may be difficult for competitors to imitate. Thus, strategic management capabilities enhances effective resource deployment which results to superior value creation and competitive advantage**.**

Dynamic Capabilities Theory-

Dynamic Capabilities Theory, developed prominently by Teece, Pisano and Shuen (1997) explain how organizations adapt their resources and capabilities to changing environments. The theory emphasizes three broad activities: which are sensing – identifying opportunities and threats; seizing – mobilizing resources to exploit opportunities and transforming/reconfiguring – modifying organizational resources and capabilities. This theory is highly relevant to manufacturing firms facing technological, economic and competitive changes.

Contingency Perspective-

The contingency perspective suggests that there is no universally superior strategy. The effectiveness of a strategy depends on environmental and organizational conditions. Thus, the appropriate strategic capability for a firm may depend on industry characteristics, firm size, technology, market conditions, competitive intensity and organizational resources.

Empirical Reviews.

Onyekwelu (2022) examined strategic management and organizational performance in manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria. The study used 300 respondents from a population of 1,200 employees and found that strategic objectives, strategy formulation, implementation and evaluation significantly affected organizational performance.

A study of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria examined vertical diversification and organizational competitiveness. The study found significant positive relationships between backward/forward integration and organizational competitiveness (NWODO)

Adani et al (2024) examined innovation and competitive advantage among selected manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria. Their study involved 2,002 staff, with 322 respondents, and reported a moderate positive relationship between innovation and competitive advantage ($r = .61$, $p < .01$).

Nwodo, Dike and Onyeokoro (2024) investigated technological capability and competitive advantage among selected industrial firms in South-East Nigeria, highlighting technological capability as an important strategic resource for competitiveness. Evidence outside the South-East also supports the strategic-capability argument. A 2023 study of manufacturing firms in South-South Nigeria found that strategic alliance and resource availability significantly influenced competitive advantage (Fred et al, 2023). Similarly, recent Nigerian manufacturing research has examined competitive strategies such as cost leadership and differentiation using structural equation modelling, demonstrating continued scholarly interest in strategy–performance relationships in the sector (Onyekwelu, 2022)

Gap in Literature

The reviewed literature revealed four important gaps. First, several studies have focused on organizational performance rather than competitive advantage. Second, some studies have investigated isolated capabilities such as innovation or technological capability rather than strategic management capability as an integrated construct. Third, existing South-East Nigerian studies have not sufficiently integrated strategic analysis, formulation, implementation, evaluation and innovation/adaptation within a single conceptual model. Fourth, changing business conditions make it necessary to examine strategic capabilities not only as planning mechanisms but also as dynamic organizational capabilities. This study therefore adopted an integrated model.

Methodology.

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The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey research design. The design is appropriate because data were collected from managers and strategic decision-makers of manufacturing firms at a particular point in time. The study covered South-East Nigeria, consisting of states such as Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo respectively. The region has a substantial concentration of manufacturing, trading and entrepreneurial activities. The population of the study comprised manufacturing firms registered with the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN) and operating in Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States. An earlier MAN-based study identified 184 registered manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria and that the target respondents were managers, directors/CEOs, and other managerial personnel. The sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane formula at a 5% level of precision. From the population of 184 firms, a sample size of 126 firms was obtained. Proportionate sampling was subsequently employed to allocate the sample across the five states, resulting in 25 firms from Abia, 32 from Anambra, 22 from Ebonyi, 24 from Enugu and 23 from Imo State. A multistage sampling technique was adopted which involved purposive selection of manufacturing firms meeting predetermined inclusion criteria of being engaged in manufacturing, has operated for a specified minimum period, preferably five years, operates in one of the five South-East states, has identifiable management personnel and willingness to participate. This was followed by stratification according to state and the proportionate allocation of questionnaires according to the number of eligible respondents in each state. Lastly, the simple random sampling of respondents within the selected firms was employed. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to respondents while secondary information were obtained from academic journals, books, government publications, industry reports, company publications; and reputable databases. A structured questionnaire was used to elicit information from respondents. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). The researchers obtained necessary authorization from participating organizations and five research assistants were trained to administer the questionnaires. The face and content validity of the instrument were ascertained through the subjection of the questionnaire to experts in strategic management, marketing and research methodology who reviewed the questionnaire and ensured its relevance to the study. The reliability of the instrument was also ascertained using cronbach's alpha which was used to determine internal consistency. A coefficient of approximately 0.70 was obtained and considered acceptable for the study. Data were analyzed using both descriptive statistics such as tables, frequency, percentage and inferential statistics such as multiple regression. The regression model is specified as:

$CA=\beta0+\beta1SPC+\beta2ESC+\beta3SDMC+\beta4SIC+\epsilon$

Where:

CA = Competitive Advantage

SPC = Strategic Planning Capability

ESC = Environmental Scanning Capability

SDMC = Strategy Decision-Making Capability

SIC = Strategic Implementation Capability

β_0 = constant

β_1–β_5 = regression coefficients ε = error term.

The **Decision Rule** states that the null hypothesis will be rejected where: $p<0.05$ and retained where: $p\geq 0.05$.

Findings and Discussions

This section presents the findings of the study based on the responses obtained from 126 respondents across five states of the South East, Nigeria. The findings are organized according to strategic planning capability, environmental scanning capability, strategic decision-making capability, strategic implementation capability and competitive advantage, and the regression results used to test the study hypotheses.

Strategic Planning Capability

This dimension measures the firm's ability to establish clear objectives, formulate strategies, allocate resources and develop plans for achieving organizational goals. This subsection presents respondents' views on the effect of strategic planning capability on competitive advantage of manufacturing firms in South East, Nigeria. The questionnaire items focused on developing clear long-term strategic objectives, regular review of strategic plans, resource allocation and strategic priorities..

Table 1: Respondents' Responses on strategic planning capability

S/N	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total
1	The firm develops clear long-term strategic objectives.	50 (40%)	72 (58%)	3 (2%)	- -	-	126 (100%)
2	Management regularly reviews strategic plans	26 (21%)	100 (79%)	-	-	-	126 (100%)
3	Strategic plans guide resource allocation	40 (32%)	84 (66%)	-	2 (2%)	-	126 (100%)
4	Employees understand the firm's strategic priorities	35 (28%)	80 (63%)	5 (4%) -	6 (5%)	--	126 (100%)

Table 1 emphasis on item statement 1 (firm's development of clear long-term strategic objectives) shows that 50 respondents representing 40% strongly agreed, while 72 respondents representing 58% agreed. This gives a combined agreement level of 98%, and only 2% of the respondents remained neutral at the instance of the research, meaning that the respondents agreed that the firm develops clear long-term strategic objectives. The results also show that 21% of the respondents strongly agreed and 79% agreed that management regularly reviews strategic plans, giving a combined agreement level of 100%. Regarding the respondents' responses on resource allocation, 32% strongly agreed and 66% agreed, giving a total agreement level of 98%.while a small proportion of 2% disagreed suggesting that a few respondents do not understand basic functions of strategic planning. Similarly, 28% strongly agreed and 63% agreed that employees understand the firm's strategic priorities, giving a total agreement level of 91% while only 4% of the respondents remained neutral at the instance of the research and 5% of the respondents disagreed. The high levels of agreement across the four questionnaire items suggest that developing clear long-term strategic objectives, regular reviews of strategic plans, resource allocation and employees' understanding of firm's strategic priorities are some of the factors of strategic planning capability.

Environmental Scanning Capability.

This measures the firm's ability to identify and interpret changes in its external and internal environments. This subsection presents respondents' views on the effect of environmental scanning capability on competitive advantage of manufacturing firms in South East, Nigeria. The questionnaire items focused on regular monitoring of competitors, change in customer preferences, change in government regulations, and identification of emerging market opportunities.

Table 2: Respondents' Responses on environmental scanning capability

S/N	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total
1	The firm regularly monitors competitors.	40 (32%)	81 (64%)	5 (4%)	- -	-	126 (100%)
2	Management regularly monitors change in customer preferences	36 (29%)	90 (71%)	-	-	-	126 (100%)
3	The firm responds to changes in government regulations	38 (30%)	86 (68%)	-	2 (2%)	-	126 (100%)
4	Management identifies emerging market opportunities	35 (28%)	85 (67%)	- -	6 (5%)	--	126 (100%)

Table 2 shows that 40 respondents representing 32% strongly agreed, while 81 respondents representing 64% agreed, giving a combined agreement level of 96%, and only 4% of the respondents remained neutral at the instance of the research. This means that the respondents agreed that the firm regularly monitors competitors. The results also show that 29% of the respondents strongly agreed and 71% agreed that management regularly monitors change in customer preferences, giving a combined agreement level of 100%. Regarding the respondents' responses on changes in government regulations, 30% strongly agreed and 68% agreed, giving a total agreement level of 98%.while a small proportion of 2% disagreed, suggesting that a few respondents do not comply strictly to change in government regulations. Similarly, 28% strongly agreed and 67% agreed that Management identifies emerging market opportunities, giving a total agreement level of 95% while only 5% of the respondents remained neutral at the instance of the research and 5% of the respondents disagreed. The high levels of agreement across the four questionnaire items suggest that regular monitoring of competitors, regular monitoring of change in customer preferences, response to changes in government regulations and identification of emerging market opportunities are some of the effects of environmental scanning capability.

Strategic Decision-Making Capability.

This dimension measures management's ability to make timely and appropriate strategic decisions. This subsection presents respondents' views on the effect of strategic decision-making capability on competitive advantage of manufacturing firms in South East, Nigeria. The questionnaire items focused on making prompt strategic decisions, relevant information, alternative courses of action, and participation in strategic decisions

Table 3: Respondents' Responses on strategic decision-making capability

S/N	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total
1	Managers consider alternative courses of action.	44 (35%)	82 (65%)	-	- -	-	126 (100%)
2	Management makes strategic decisions promptly	31 (25%)	92 (73%)	3 (2%)	-	-	126 (100%)
3	Strategic decisions are based on relevant information	35 (28%)	88 (70%)	-	3 (2%)	-	126 (100%)
4	Employees with relevant expertise participate in strategic decisions.	30 (24%)	90 (71%)	- -	6 (5%)	--	126 (100%)

Table 3 shows that 44 respondents representing 35% strongly agreed, while 82 respondents representing 65% agreed, giving a combined agreement level of 100%. This means that the respondents agreed that managers consider alternative courses of action. The results also show that 25% of the respondents strongly agreed and 73% agreed that management makes strategic decisions promptly, giving a combined agreement level of 98%, and only 2% of the respondents disagreed. Regarding the respondents' responses on relevant information, 28% strongly agreed and 70% agreed, giving a total agreement level of 98%.while a small proportion of 2% disagreed, suggesting that a few respondents do not really understand the strategic decision- making and information feedback processes. Similarly, 24% strongly agreed and 71% agreed that employees with relevant expertise participate in strategic decisions, giving a total agreement level of 95% while only 5% of the respondents disagreed. The high levels of agreement across the four questionnaire items suggest the effects of strategic decision-making capability.

Strategic Implementation Capability.

This measures the organization's ability to convert formulated strategies into actual actions and results. This subsection presents respondents' views on the effect of strategic implementation capability on competitive advantage of manufacturing firms in South East, Nigeria. The questionnaire items focused on translating strategic plans into actions, provision of adequate resources, monitoring of strategic implementation and taking corrective actions...

Table 4: Respondents' Responses on strategic planning capability

S/N	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total
1	The firm effectively translates strategic plans into actions.	48 (38%)	74 (59%)	4 (3%)	- -	-	126 (100%)
2	Adequate resources are provided for strategy implementation	26 (21%)	100 (79%)	-	-	-	126 (100%)
3	Management monitors strategy implementation	40 (32%)	84 (66%)	-	2 (2%)	-	126 (100%)
4	Corrective actions are taken when implementation deviates from plans.	35 (28%)	80 (63%)	5 (4%) -	6 (5%)	--	126 (100%)

In table 4, 48 respondents representing 38% strongly agreed, while 74 respondents representing 59% agreed, giving a combined agreement level of 97%, and only 3% of the respondents remained neutral at the instance of the research, meaning that the respondents agreed that the firm effectively translates strategic plans into actions. The results also show that 21% of the respondents strongly agreed and 79% agreed that adequate resources are provided for strategy implementations, giving a combined agreement level of 100%. Regarding the respondents' responses on monitoring strategic implementation, 32% strongly agreed and 66% agreed, giving a total agreement level of 98%.while a small proportion of 2% disagreed. Similarly, 28% strongly agreed and 63% agreed that corrective actions are taken when implementation deviates from plans, giving a total agreement level of 91% while only 4% of the respondents remained neutral at the instance of the research and 5% of the respondents disagreed. The high levels of agreement across the four questionnaire items suggest that translating strategic plans into actions, provision of adequate resources, monitoring strategic implementation and taking corrective actions when implementation deviates from plans s are some of the effects of strategic implementation capability.

Competitive Advantage.

This dimension measures management's ability to perform activities or create value in ways that competitors cannot easily replicate. This subsection presents respondents' views on competitive advantage. The questionnaire items focused on offering superior product quality, efficient production processes, quick response to customer needs and response to emerging opportunities.

Table 5; Respondents' Responses on competitive advantage

S/N	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total
1	The firm offers superior product quality that have distinctive features.	44 (35%)	82 (65%)	-	- -	-	126 (100%)
2	The firm has efficient production processes and controls its operating costs effectively.	31 (25%)	92 (73%)	3 (2%)	-	-	126 (100%)
3	The firm responds quickly to customer needs and regularly introduces product improvement.	35 (28%)	88 (70%)	-	3 (2%)	-	126 (100%)
4	The firm responds effectively to emerging opportunities and adapts its marketing strategies when market conditions change..	30 (24%)	90 (71%)	- -	6 (5%)	--	126 (100%)

Table 5 gives a combined agreement level of 100% on item statement1, while item statement 2 has a combined agreement level of 98%, and only 2% of the respondents disagreed. Regarding the respondents' responses on item statement 3, shows a total agreement level of 98%.while a small proportion of 2% disagreed,. Similarly, item statement 4 has a total agreement level of 95% while only 5% of the respondents disagreed. The high levels of agreement across the four questionnaire items suggest the factors on competitive advantage.

Hypotheses

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This section presents the regression results used to test the four hypotheses of the study. The hypotheses examined the effect of strategic planning capability on competitive advantage of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria; Environmental scanning capability on competitive advantage of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria; Strategic decision-making capability on competitive advantage of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria and Strategy implementation capability on competitive advantage of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria. The results are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5: Summary of Regression Results for Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Predictor Variable	Dependent Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-value	F-statistic	R	R^2	Decision
H_{01}: Strategic planning capability has no significant effect on competitive advantage..	Strategic planning capability.	Competitive advantage.	0.703	0.297	3.135**	35.210	0.656	0.430	Rejected
H_{02}: Environmental scanning capability has no significant effect on competitive advantage.	Environmental scanning capability.	Competitive advantage.	0.820	0.217	3.335**	37.030	0.846	0.715	Rejected
H_{03} ;Strategic decision-making capability has no significant effect on competitive advantage.	Social media analytics	Customer satisfaction	0.817	0.244	3.235**	36.361	0.820	0.672	Rejected
H_0 Strategic implementa			0.734						

tion capability has no significant effect on competitive advantage 4;	Strategic implementation capability	Competitive advantage	0.268	3.241**	35.275	0.678	0.459	Rejected

Table 5 shows that all four stated hypotheses have positive and significant effects on competitive advantage of manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria.

Strategic planning capability has a positive coefficient of 0.703, a t-value of 3.135 and R value of 0.656 indicating a positive relationship. The R^2 value of 0.430 shows that strategic planning capability explains 43.0% of the variation in competitive advantage.

Environmental scanning capability has the strongest explanatory power, with a coefficient of 0.820, a t-value of 3.335, and R value of 0.846 indicating a positive relationship. Its R^2 value of 0.715 means that environmental scanning capability explains 71.5% of the variation in competitive advantage. Environmental scanning is strongest because it enables manufacturing firms to know what is changing, why it is changing and how they should respond before competitors do, thereby providing the information and adaptability necessary for superior competitive advantage. The relatively stronger effect of environmental scanning may also be explained by its enabling role in the other strategic management capabilities. Effective strategic planning and strategic decision-making require accurate and timely environmental information, while strategic implementation requires the organization to execute strategies that remain relevant to prevailing environmental conditions. Consequently, environmental scanning may serve as an upstream capability that strengthens the effectiveness of planning, decision-making and implementation. The result therefore implies that manufacturing firms should not concentrate exclusively on formulating and implementing strategies; they should also develop systematic mechanisms for continuously sensing and interpreting changes in their operating environment.

Strategic decision-making capability has a coefficient of 0.817, a t-value of 3.325 and R value of 0.820 indicating a positive and significant relationship. The R^2 value of 0.672, means that strategic decision-making explain 67.2% of the variation in competitive advantage..

Strategic implementation capability has a coefficient of 0.734, a t-value of 3.241, and an R^2 value of 0.459, meaning that strategic implementation capability explains 45.9% of the variation in competitive advantage.. Since all the t-values are significant at the 5% level and the F-statistics confirm that the regression models are statistically meaningful, all four null hypotheses are rejected. Therefore, strategic planning capability, environmental scanning capability, strategic decision-making capability and strategic implementation capability have significant positive effects on competitive advantage of manufacturing firms South-East, Nigeria.

Conclusion.

Strategic management capability is an important organizational resource for manufacturing firms operating in turbulent and highly competitive environments. The fundamental argument of the study is that competitive advantage does not depend exclusively on physical resources, financial strength or production capacity. It also depends on the managerial ability to recognize environmental changes, make appropriate strategic choices, mobilize resources, implement decisions, evaluate performance and continuously adapt. The RBV explains why organizational capabilities can become sources of sustained advantage when they are valuable and difficult to imitate. Dynamic Capabilities Theory further explains why the ability to sense, seize and reconfigure resources becomes important under changing market and technological conditions. For South-East Nigerian manufacturing firms, strategic management capability is particularly relevant because firms face significant cost, infrastructure, technology, supply-chain and competitive pressures

Recommendations.

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations were made;

i).Strengthen Strategic Intelligence

Manufacturing firms should establish systematic processes for monitoring competitors, customers, suppliers, technology, government policies and economic conditions.

ii).Improve Strategy Formulation-

Management should ensure that strategic decisions are based on reliable market and organizational information.

iii).Strengthen Strategy Implementation-

Organizations should translate strategic plans into measurable programs with clear responsibilities, budgets, timelines and performance indicators.

iv).Develop Strategic Evaluation Systems-

Manufacturing firms should establish regular strategy-review meetings and performance dashboards.

v).Promote Innovation-

Firms should continuously invest in product development; process improvement, digital technology, automation, research and development. This is especially important because recent evidence from South-East Nigeria indicates that innovation is positively associated with competitive advantage.

vi).Develop Human Capital-

Managers and employees should receive continuous training in strategic planning, data analysis, technology;, innovation, leadership and change management.

vii).Strengthen Local Supply Chains-

Manufacturers should identify reliable local suppliers and develop strategic supplier relationships to reduce exposure to foreign-exchange and international supply-chain shocks.

viii).Encourage Strategic Alliances-

Firms should cooperate with Universities, research institutions, technology providers, suppliers, distributors and complementary businesses. Recent evidence from Nigerian manufacturing firms suggests that strategic alliances and resource availability can support competitive advantage.

ix).Adopt Appropriate Technology-

Manufacturing firms should prioritize technologies that improve productivity, quality, flexibility and cost efficiency.

x).Integrate Customer Intelligence into Strategy-
Management should regularly obtain customer feedback and use it in product development, pricing, distribution and marketing decisions.
Contribution to Knowledge.
The study contributes to knowledge in five major ways. First- It integrates multiple dimensions of strategic management capability into one conceptual framework. Second- It links strategic management capabilities directly to competitive advantage rather than focusing exclusively on organizational performance. Third- It extends RBV reasoning by treating strategic management capability as an intangible organizational resource. Fourth- It incorporates innovation and adaptation into strategic management capability, reflecting the importance of dynamic capabilities in turbulent markets. Fifth- It provides a South-East Nigerian manufacturing context for examining how managerial capabilities can translate into superior competitive positioning.

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