EFFECT OF AUTONOMY AND COMPETITIVE AGGRESSIVENESS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF SELECTED MANUFACTURING FIRMS IN SOUTH EAST NIGERIA

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Abstract
The performance of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria has been challenged by dynamic market conditions and evolving employee expectations, necessitating an examination of factors such as autonomy and competitive aggressiveness. This study investigated the impact of autonomy and competitive aggressiveness on the performance of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria. A survey design was adopted, utilizing structured questionnaires to collect data from employees of ten selected manufacturing companies. A purposive sampling technique was employed to target knowledgeable personnel, and the Taro Yamane formula was used to determine a sample size of 308, which was increased to 400 to account for non-responses. The collected data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to evaluate the measurement and structural models. The findings revealed that autonomy and competitive aggressiveness significantly enhances performance of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria. Based on these results, it is recommended that manufacturing firms promote autonomy through decentralized decision-making and non-monetary incentives. Additionally, firms should adopt aggressive competitive strategies, such as innovation and proactive marketing, to maintain a competitive edge and improve organizational performance.
Keywords: *Autonomy, Competitive Aggressiveness, Organizational Performance*

INTRODUCTION

Globally, the manufacturing sector is a cornerstone of economic growth, innovation, and employment. Manufacturing firms face a rapidly evolving competitive landscape driven by globalization, technological advancements, and shifting consumer preferences. To thrive in such a dynamic environment, firms adopt various entrepreneurial strategies, including fostering autonomy and competitive aggressiveness. Autonomy, which entails granting individuals or teams the freedom to make decisions, has been linked to increased innovation and adaptability (Dess et al., 2021). Similarly, competitive aggressiveness, defined as a firm's boldness in outperforming rivals, enhances market positioning and resilience in competitive industries (Urban & Wood, 2022). These strategies have proven critical in diverse economies, from advanced manufacturing hubs in Germany and Japan to emerging markets in Asia and Africa.

In developing economies, autonomy and competitive aggressiveness take on heightened importance as firms contend with resource constraints, infrastructural deficiencies, and volatile markets. For instance, in sub-Saharan Africa, manufacturing firms have adopted aggressive competitive strategies to counter the influx of foreign goods while leveraging autonomy to innovate and localize their offerings. Studies indicate that firms in South Africa and Kenya benefit significantly from these entrepreneurial orientations, as they help mitigate external uncertainties and capitalize on niche market opportunities (Mwiti & Kinyua, 2023). These findings emphasize the global relevance of autonomy and competitive aggressiveness in fostering firm success, even in challenging economic contexts.

In Nigeria, the manufacturing sector is pivotal to national economic development but is fraught with challenges such as inconsistent government policies, inadequate infrastructure, and competition from imported goods. These challenges necessitate the adoption of strategies that enhance organizational adaptability and competitiveness. Recent research highlights that Nigerian manufacturing firms leveraging autonomy to empower managers and employees report higher levels of operational efficiency and innovation (Akpa et al., 2023). Similarly, firms employing competitive aggressiveness, such as targeted marketing campaigns and strategic pricing, have been able to secure greater market shares and withstand competitive pressures.

In South-East Nigeria, the region stands out as a significant contributor to the country's manufacturing output, with industries ranging from food processing to textiles and electronics. However, the

competitive pressures in this region are pronounced due to the proliferation of local competitors and imported substitutes. Manufacturing firms here have increasingly adopted autonomy to foster innovation and quick decision-making, allowing them to adapt to infrastructural limitations and policy uncertainties. Competitive aggressiveness has also proven vital, with firms engaging in aggressive market penetration strategies to outmaneuver rivals and capture market segments (Usoroh, 2021). These entrepreneurial strategies have positioned the region as a hub for industrial resilience and growth despite its unique challenges.

The manufacturing sector in South-East Nigeria plays a crucial role in the country's economic development but is plagued by persistent challenges that hinder optimal performance. A notable issue is the high rate of firm emergence and collapse, which has been linked to poor implementation of intrapreneurship processes (Eze et al., 2018; Nkeiru et al., 2021). Limited autonomy for employees and managers restricts their ability to make swift decisions and foster innovation, while inadequate competitive aggressiveness leaves firms vulnerable to competition at both domestic and international levels. Despite the critical role of entrepreneurial orientations such as autonomy and competitive aggressiveness in enhancing organizational performance, existing research has focused on other regions in Nigeria, leaving a gap in understanding the unique dynamics within the South-East. For instance, Usoroh (2021) found that autonomy and competitive aggressiveness positively but insignificantly affect SME growth in North-Central Nigeria. However, these findings may not be directly applicable to the manufacturing sector in South-East Nigeria due to the region's distinct socio-economic and infrastructural challenges.

Furthermore, studies such as Ogamba and Nwuche (2016), Delic et al. (2021), and Mulu et al. (2023) have consistently shown that autonomy significantly enhances employee commitment, job satisfaction, and performance, while competitive aggressiveness boosts organizational competitiveness and profitability (Onumah & Kairo, 2022; Aroyeun et al., 2018). However, these studies were conducted in diverse contexts, including Kenya, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North-Central Nigeria, none of which share the unique characteristics of South-East Nigeria's manufacturing landscape. This creates a critical gap in the literature regarding the influence of autonomy and competitive aggressiveness on the performance of manufacturing firms in the South-East. Thus, this study seeks to investigate the relationship between autonomy, competitive aggressiveness, and the performance of selected manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria, providing valuable insights for the sector's sustainable development.

Based on the foregone, the following null hypotheses are stated to guide the study:

H01: Autonomy has no significant effect on the performance of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria.

H02: Competitive aggressiveness has no significant effect on the performance of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Autonomy

Autonomy in business is closely tied to the ability of individuals or teams to take independent initiative and drive future actions. Paulus and Hermanto (2022) emphasize its forward-thinking nature, describing autonomy as empowering individuals or groups to independently plan and execute strategies. Similarly, Hussain et al. (2015) define autonomy as the degree of independence granted to individuals or teams to pursue opportunities and address challenges, positioning it as a cornerstone of entrepreneurial and innovative behavior. Al-Mamary and Alshallaqi (2022) and Oni et al. (2019) expand this perspective by framing autonomy as both the right and ability to exploit opportunities. For Al-Mamary and Alshallaqi, autonomy encompasses not just the freedom to act but also accountability for introducing, developing, and completing concepts, highlighting autonomy as a balance of independence and responsibility. Oni et al. (2019) further underscore autonomy as the capacity to make judgments and take actions free from excessive organizational interference, emphasizing the need for swift, effective decision-making to achieve successful outcomes.

Rahman et al. (2016) center autonomy on the creative and goal-driven actions of individuals or teams who independently bring visions to fruition. Musawa and Ahmad (2019) frame autonomy as an independent spirit characterized by open and unrestricted decision-making, highlighting its cultural and mindset aspects within organizations. Boss et al. (2023) stress autonomy's role in adaptability, defining it as the freedom for teams to innovate and adjust strategies in response to changing market conditions, thus ensuring flexibility and responsiveness. Horvat et al. (2013) extend the concept by including stakeholder involvement, suggesting that autonomy enables diverse internal and external voices to shape company strategies. This inclusive approach not only fosters internal innovation but also ensures that external perspectives, such as those from customers or partners, inform organizational decisions, creating a dynamic, adaptable, and stakeholder-driven business environment. Together, these definitions illustrate autonomy as a multifaceted concept vital for fostering innovation, accountability, and adaptability in dynamic environments.

Competitive aggressiveness

Competitive aggressiveness is a firm's deliberate and strategic approach to managing its competitive environment and achieving market dominance. Paulus and Hermanto (2022) define it as calculated actions aimed at gaining a competitive edge, emphasizing proactive strategies that help firms secure or maintain market leadership. This includes tactics such as price reductions, increasing marketing budgets, and expanding production capabilities (Li et al., 2022; Panjaitan et al., 2021). Madhoushi et al. (2011) describe competitive aggressiveness as a firm's readiness and willingness to compete fiercely for market share, highlighting its intent to dominate through aggressive market strategies. Vaniala and Huhtala (2016) add that competitive aggressiveness involves bold, direct challenges to competitors, such as targeting rivals' key customers or launching disruptive products. Together, these definitions underline competitive aggressiveness as a dynamic force driving companies to proactively outperform their rivals and capture greater market share.

Further perspectives emphasize the sustained and strategic nature of competitive aggressiveness. Kozubíková et al. (2017) frame it as a forward-thinking behavior, enabling firms to adapt to market dynamics and meet evolving customer demands. Zarrouk et al. (2020) expand this understanding by defining competitive aggressiveness as a deliberate effort to outperform rivals through powerful tactics like market penetration, price competition, and product differentiation. This approach underscores assertiveness and a determination to lead the market by undermining competitors' positions. Hughes-Morgan et al. (2018) and Lacerda et al. (2020) stress the long-term aspect of competitive aggressiveness, describing it as a continuous process of strategic actions aimed at strengthening a firm's market standing. These actions, from sustained product innovations to impactful marketing campaigns, demonstrate that competitive aggressiveness is not a one-off effort but a comprehensive, ongoing strategy for achieving market dominance.

Organizational Performance

Organizational performance encompasses multiple dimensions that collectively measure how effectively an organization achieves its objectives across financial, operational, and social domains. Anderson et al. (2014) defines organizational performance as the evaluation of outcomes across diverse domains, such as financial results, market performance, and social impact, highlighting its multifaceted nature. Sedarmayanti (2017) refines this concept by describing it as the combined result of employees' contributions and management processes. This definition emphasizes the interplay between individual skills, engagement, and structural systems that drive efficiency. Schwens and Wagner (2019) underscore the importance of a holistic view, asserting that performance in one domain, such as operational efficiency, can directly influence success in others, like financial profitability. Wibowo (2016) builds on this by emphasizing the role of leadership and disciplined practices, highlighting that achieving goals depends on strategic alignment and competence at every level. Together, these definitions portray organizational performance as a dynamic balance between human capital, leadership, and structural systems.

Resource utilization and adaptability further shape the concept of organizational performance. Neely et al. (2014) defines it as the effectiveness with which an organization aligns and leverages its resources human, financial, and technological to achieve its objectives. This aligns with Lemon and Verhoef's (2016) assertion that performance is measured by comparing actual outcomes with intended goals, underlining the importance of ongoing evaluation and strategic adjustment. Richard et al. (2009) extends this by focusing on operational capability, describing it as the ability to execute strategies effectively through resource alignment and process optimization. Teece (2018) introduces adaptability as a critical aspect, arguing that the ability to reconfigure resources in response to external pressures, such as market shifts or technological changes, ensures resilience and long-term success. Bolland and Lopes (2018) further highlight the role of data-driven decision-making, noting that information systems enable organizations to monitor outcomes and refine strategies continuously. Linking these perspectives, organizational performance emerges as a result of resource alignment, adaptability, and strategic decision-making, all aimed at achieving sustained success.

Autonomy and Organizational Performance

Autonomy has been widely studied across diverse contexts, highlighting its impact on organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction, performance, and commitment. Ogamba and Nwuche (2016) examined the relationship between autonomy and organizational commitment, revealing a significant positive association with affective, continuance, and normative commitment. The study recommended granting employees autonomy to enhance commitment and satisfaction. Similarly, Delic et al. (2021) found a significant positive relationship between autonomy and job performance and satisfaction in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Mulu et al. (2023), focusing on employees in Machakos County Government, Kenya, concluded that autonomy is a strong determinant of employee performance, recommending the prioritization of non-monetary incentives. However, the contextual differences in these studies suggest their findings may not directly apply to manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria, necessitating localized research.

Further investigations have explored autonomy's broader psychological and strategic implications. Su et al. (2023) demonstrated that autonomy indirectly influences job satisfaction through collective psychological ownership (CPO), emphasizing the interplay between autonomy and shared ownership within teams. In North-Central Nigeria, Usoroh (2021) analyzed the effects of autonomy and competitive aggressiveness on SME growth, finding a positive but insignificant relationship, with recommendations for strategic decision-making and aggressive competition to foster growth. While these studies provide valuable insights, they were conducted in contexts distinct from South-East Nigeria, and their applicability to the manufacturing sector in this region remains unclear, necessitating localized to understand the specific effects of autonomy and competitive aggressiveness on organizational performance in South-East Nigeria.

Competitive Aggressiveness and Organizational Performance

Bii et al. (2023) assessed the impact of competitive aggressiveness on the performance of star-rated hotels in Kenya's North Rift Region, grounding their study on stakeholder theory. Employing positivism philosophy and an explanatory research design, the study targeted 575 hotel employees, utilizing structured questionnaires for data collection. Findings revealed that competitive aggressiveness significantly influences hotel performance, enhancing market share, competitive positioning, and adaptability to stakeholder needs. Similarly, Onumah and Kairo (2022) studied the relationship between competitive aggressiveness and profitability of quoted manufacturing companies in Jos Plateau State, Nigeria, with innovation as a mediator. Using structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), the study found that competitive aggressiveness positively affects profitability, and innovation strengthens this relationship. These studies emphasize the importance of competitive aggressiveness and innovation in driving performance and profitability but their findings may not apply universally to manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria due to contextual differences.

Other studies similarly explored competitive aggressiveness in varied contexts. Mohammed et al. (2024) examined its effect on product performance among MSMEs in Niger State, Nigeria, finding a significant

positive correlation between the two and emphasizing the role of aggressive promotional tactics. Usoroh (2021) found autonomy and competitive aggressiveness to positively but insignificantly affect SMEs' growth in North-Central Nigeria, recommending strategic decision-making and competitive practices for sustainable growth. Aroyeun et al. (2018) demonstrated the positive impact of competitive aggressiveness on SMEs' competitive advantage in Ogun State, Nigeria, advocating for investments in marketing and customer relations to enhance organizational performance. Abdullahi et al. (2019) also linked competitive aggressiveness to improved financial performance of small and medium construction enterprises in Nigeria, recommending its adoption for enhanced decision-making and relevance in the construction industry. These findings, while insightful, may not applicable in different contexts, particularly manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria.

Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory

The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory, developed by Wernerfelt (1984), posits that an organization's resources and capabilities serve as the foundation for achieving and sustaining competitive advantage. According to Wernerfelt, resources are defined as assets, knowledge, skills, and processes that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN). These attributes enable firms to achieve superior performance in dynamic and competitive markets. The RBV emphasizes the internal characteristics of a firm, arguing that competitive advantage stems not from external market conditions but from the strategic use of internal resources (Barney, 1991). Barney further refined the theory, highlighting the importance of leveraging these VRIN resources for sustained growth and profitability. This theoretical perspective has become a cornerstone for strategic management and is widely used to explain how firms can create unique value in the marketplace.

Scholars have expanded on Wernerfelt's and Barney's foundational work by exploring the application and limitations of RBV. Priem and Butler (2001) argue that while RBV provides a robust framework for understanding competitive advantage, it often lacks specificity regarding how firms can develop VRIN resources. Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997) introduced the concept of dynamic capabilities as an extension of RBV, emphasizing the need for firms to continually adapt and reconfigure their resource base in response to rapidly changing environments. Additionally, critics such as Kraaijenbrink, Spender, and Groen (2010) contend that RBV overlooks the role of external factors, such as market dynamics and institutional pressures, in shaping competitive advantage. Despite these criticisms, RBV remains highly influential, with scholars and practitioners utilizing it to guide strategic decision-making and resource allocation within organizations.

The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory is highly relevant to the performance of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria, as it emphasizes the strategic role of internal resources in achieving competitive advantage. Manufacturing firms in this region face unique socio-economic challenges, such as limited infrastructure and intense competition, which require them to harness and optimize their internal resources to remain competitive. By leveraging VRIN resources such as skilled labor, innovative capabilities, advanced technology, and efficient production processes these firms can enhance their operational efficiency, adaptability, and market position. For instance, firms that invest in developing unique production techniques or proprietary technology can differentiate their products, thereby improving performance in both domestic and international markets. Moreover, the dynamic capabilities framework, an extension of RBV, underscores the importance of continuous innovation and resource reconfiguration, which are critical for navigating the volatile economic environment in South-East Nigeria. Applying RBV principles can thus enable manufacturing firms in the region to build resilience, capitalize on their strengths, and achieve sustained growth.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a survey design utilizing structured questionnaires to facilitate streamlined responses and ease of analysis. The population comprised all staff members of ten selected manufacturing companies in South-East Nigeria, the company's chosen are those that have over 70 employees and have been in operation for more than five years. These companies collectively employ 1,000 staff, as confirmed by their respective human resources departments (see Table 1). A purposive sampling

technique was employed to focus on personnel well-versed in the industry, ensuring insights into the effect of autonomy and competitive aggressiveness on the performance of manufacturing companies in the region. The Taro Yamane formula was applied to determine the study's sample size as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{1000}{1+1000(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{1000}{1+1000(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{1000}{1+2.245}$$

$$n = \frac{1000}{3.245}$$

$$n = 308$$

The study's sample size is 308, however it was increased by 30% as advice by Israel (2013) to 400 to ensure a minimum return of 308 copies of the questionnaire. Thus 400 copies of questionnaire was shared to the sampled employees of the selected manufacturing companies in South-East Nigeria as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Population and Sample Size Distribution

State	Name of Company	Population	Sample Size
Abia State	Total Aluminium Systems	121	121 *400/1000= 48
	Paul Grace Manufacturing Company	107	107 *400/1000= 43
Anambra State	Sylflora Industries Ltd	89	89 *400/1000= 36
	Delendu Aluminum Manufacturing Company Limited	103	103 *400/1000= 41
Ebonyi State	Izugod Allied Company	112	112 *400/1000= 45
	Ronet Industries Ltd	93	93 *400/1000= 37
Enugu State	Elchee Industries Nigeria Limited	87	87 *400/1000= 35
	Bons Industries Limited	79	79 *400/1000= 32
Imo State	Ariboil Company Limited	131	131 *400/1000= 52
	Gowiz International Company	78	78 *400/1000= 31
	Total	**1000**	**400**

Source: Researcher's Computation, 2025

Data were coded and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to assess both the measurement and structural models. The model of study is specified below: -

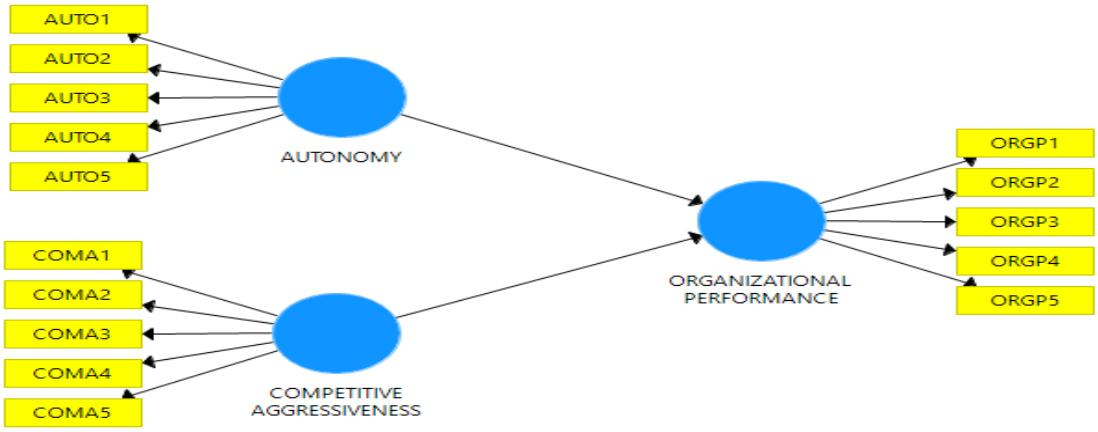

Figure 1: Study Model

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study distributed 400 copies of questionnaire to the selected manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria, with 369 correctly filled and returned, yielding a response rate of 92%. To ensure data integrity, a preliminary assessment was conducted to detect potential issues such as missing values, outliers, or biased responses. The analysis confirmed the absence of missing data, outliers, or biased responses, ensuring the reliability of the collected information.

The Measurement Model

Evaluating the outer loadings of study items is essential for assessing a measurement model, as these loadings indicate the strength of the relationship between each item and its associated construct. According to Hair et al. (2017), loadings above 0.70 are generally considered acceptable, as they demonstrate that over 50% of the variance in the indicator is explained by the construct. This threshold is important as it ensures that the construct significantly influences the indicator, thereby enhancing the reliability of the measurement. Loadings exceeding 0.70 reflect a strong connection between items and their underlying constructs, increasing confidence in the measurement model's accuracy and validity.

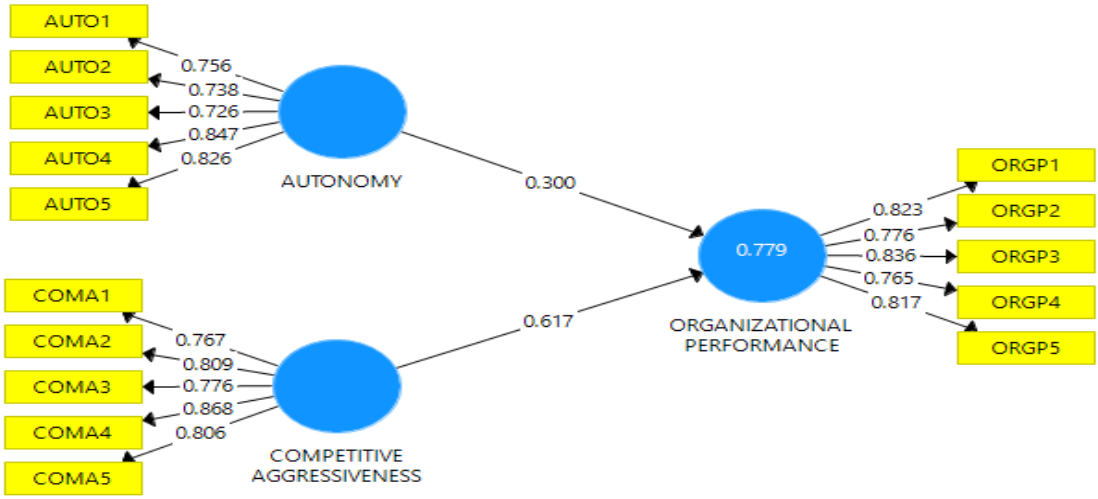

Figure 2: Indicator outer loading

Table 2; Reliability of the Study Scale

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Autonomy	**0.838**	**0.850**	**0.886**	**0.608**
Competitive Aggressiveness	**0.865**	**0.870**	**0.903**	**0.650**
Organizational Performance	**0.863**	**0.865**	**0.901**	**0.646**

Source: Smart PLS Output 2025

The study assessed internal consistency using composite reliability measures, all of which exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 (as shown in Table 2), confirming strong consistency within the constructs. Cronbach's alpha values also surpassed the minimum accepted criterion of 0.70, as recommended by Hair et al. (2017), further validating the reliability of the study's measures. Convergent validity was evaluated through the average variance extracted (AVE), with all variables achieving values above 0.50, indicating that each construct explained at least 50% of the variance in the study items, thereby demonstrating satisfactory convergent validity.

Table 3: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	AUTONOMY	COMPETITIVE AGGRESSIVENESS	ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE
AUTONOMY			
COMPETITIVE AGGRESSIVENESS	**0.587**		
ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE	**0.791**	**0.723**	

Source: Smart PLS Output 2025

Table 3 presents the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), a measure of discriminant validity, which assesses the extent to which constructs are distinct from one another. The HTMT value between Autonomy and Competitive Aggressiveness is 0.587, indicating a moderate correlation and adequate discriminant validity between these constructs. Similarly, the HTMT value between Autonomy and Organizational Performance is 0.791, while the value between Competitive Aggressiveness and Organizational Performance is 0.723. Both values are below the commonly accepted threshold of 0.85 suggesting that all constructs are sufficiently distinct from each other, thus supporting the discriminant validity of the measurement model.

The Structural Model

In assessing the structural model, the standard criteria considered included the path coefficient, t-values, p-values, and the coefficient of determination (R^2). The bootstrapping procedure was conducted using 5000 resamples.

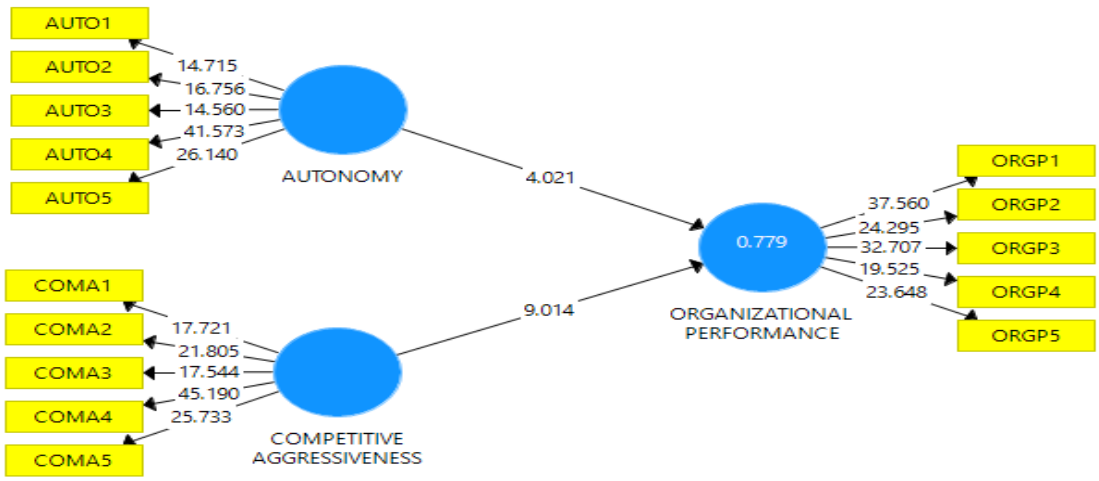

Figure 3: Path Coefficient of the regression model

Table 4: Path Coefficients

	Path Coefficients **(Beta)	S. Deviation	T Statistics	P Values	Decision	F^2
Autonomy -> Organizational Performance	0.300	0.075	4.021	**0.000**	Rejected	**126**
Competitive Aggressiveness -> Organizational Performance	0.618	0.069	9.014	**0.000**	Rejected	**533**

Source: Smart PLS Output 2025

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 (H01): Autonomy has no significant effect on the performance of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria.

The path coefficient for Autonomy's impact on Organizational Performance is **0.300**, with a **T-statistic** of 4.021 and a P-value of 0.000. The T-statistic exceeds the critical value of 1.96, and the P-value is less than the significance threshold of 0.05. This indicates that the relationship between Autonomy and Organizational Performance is statistically significant. As a result, H01 is rejected, meaning that autonomy significantly affects the performance of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria. The f^2 value of 0.126 indicates a small-to-medium effect size of Autonomy on Organizational Performance, suggesting that while autonomy plays a role, its effect is not overwhelmingly large.

Hypothesis 2 (H02): Competitive aggressiveness has no significant effect on the performance of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria.

The path coefficient for Competitive Aggressiveness is 0.618, with a T-statistic of 9.014 and a P-value of 0.000. Similarly, the T-statistic far exceeds the critical value of 1.96, and the P-value is below the 0.05 significance level, demonstrating a significant relationship. Consequently, H02 is also rejected, signifying that competitive aggressiveness significantly impacts the performance of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria. The f^2 value of 0.533 shows a large effect size, indicating that competitive aggressiveness is a major determinant of organizational performance in this context. This suggests that firms with a strong competitive posture are more likely to achieve superior performance outcomes.

Table 5 R^2 Summary and Predictive Relevance of the Model

	R Square	R Square Adjusted	Q^2=1-SSE/SSO
Organizational Performance	0.779	0.0778	0.523

Source: Smart PLS Output 2025

The R^2 value of 0.779 indicates that 77.9% of the variance in Organizational Performance is explained by the predictors in the model, namely Autonomy and Competitive Aggressiveness. Additionally, the Q^2 value of 0.523, derived from the formula Q2=1−SSE/SSO indicates that the model has strong predictive relevance. A Q^2 value greater than 0 demonstrates that the model has good explanatory and predictive power for Organizational Performance, making it a reliable tool for understanding the factors influencing performance in manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study align with existing literature that highlights the significant influence of autonomy on organizational performance. For instance, Ogamba and Nwuche (2016) demonstrated a positive link between autonomy and organizational commitment, reinforcing the idea that granting employees greater independence enhances their engagement and satisfaction. Similarly, Delic et al. (2021) and Mulu et al. (2023) found autonomy to be a critical driver of job performance and satisfaction, emphasizing its relevance in diverse organizational contexts. These findings are consistent with the current study, which also identifies a significant relationship between autonomy and organizational

performance. However, prior research by Usoroh (2021) revealed a positive but statistically insignificant relationship between autonomy and SME growth in North-Central Nigeria, contrasting with the significant effect observed in this study. This inconsistency underscores the importance of contextual factors, suggesting that the manufacturing sector in South-East Nigeria may possess unique characteristics that amplify the impact of autonomy.

Regarding competitive aggressiveness, the study's findings are consistent with research by Bii et al. (2023) and Onumah and Kairo (2022), which highlighted its significant effect on performance metrics such as market share and profitability. These studies demonstrate the strategic importance of competitive aggressiveness in fostering organizational success across industries and regions. Likewise, Mohammed et al. (2024) emphasized the role of aggressive promotional tactics in driving product performance, mirroring the positive relationship observed in this study. However, Usoroh (2021) and Aroyeun et al. (2018) identified a positive but insignificant effect of competitive aggressiveness on SMEs' growth and competitive advantage, respectively, highlighting potential contextual variations. Despite these inconsistencies, the overall evidence supports the critical role of competitive aggressiveness in achieving superior performance, particularly in the manufacturing sector of South-East Nigeria, where market dynamics may necessitate aggressive strategies for sustained success.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the impact of autonomy and competitive aggressiveness on the performance of manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria. The findings revealed that both autonomy and competitive aggressiveness have significant positive effects on organizational performance. Autonomy fosters an environment that promotes employee satisfaction, commitment, and performance, while competitive aggressiveness enhances market positioning, profitability, and adaptability. These results underscore the strategic importance of these factors in driving the performance of manufacturing firms within the unique context of South-East Nigeria. The findings align with existing literature while highlighting the necessity of context-specific considerations in understanding the dynamics of organizational performance. Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

1. Enhance Autonomy in Decision-Making**:** Manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria should prioritize granting employee's greater autonomy in their roles, particularly in decision-making processes. By empowering employees to take ownership of their tasks and responsibilities, organizations can enhance job satisfaction, commitment, and overall performance. This can be achieved through decentralized management structures, training programs, and the use of non-monetary incentives to foster a sense of ownership and accountability.
2. Adopt Competitive Aggressiveness Strategies: Firms should embrace competitive aggressiveness as a critical strategy to thrive in the dynamic manufacturing sector. This includes investing in innovation, aggressive marketing tactics, and proactive customer engagement. By leveraging these strategies, firms can strengthen their market share, improve profitability, and maintain a competitive edge. Moreover, organizations should regularly assess market trends and competitor behavior to tailor their strategies to the evolving business environment.

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Appendix

Study Questionnaire

AUTONOMY	**SA 5**	**A 4**	**N 3**	**D 2**	**SD 2**
Employees have the freedom to make decisions related to their tasks.					
Teams are given autonomy to develop new projects without extensive oversight.					
Our management encourages independence in decision-making.					
We are empowered to take initiative without requiring immediate approval.					
Our firm values self-management and allows employees to handle tasks on their own.					

COMPETITIVE AGGRESSIVENESS	**SA 5**	**A 4**	**N 3**	**D 2**	**SD 2**
We aggressively defend our market position against competitors.					
Our company is focused on outperforming competitors.					
We frequently challenge competitors with new products or services.					
We rapidly respond to competitors' actions in the marketplace.					
We are determined to be a leader in the industry, overtaking rivals.					

ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE	SA 5	A 4	N 3	D 2	SD 2
Our firm has experienced consistent growth in profitability.					
We are able to meet or exceed our performance targets.					
Our firm has achieved a strong competitive position in the market.					
Employee satisfaction and retention have improved over time.					
We have consistently improved operational efficiency.					