



Strategic Agility and Organizational Competitiveness of Small and Medium Enterprises in Oyo State, Nigeria: Mediating Role of Organizational Culture

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ABSTRACT

The research underscores the crucial role played by strategic sensitivity (SS) and strategic response (SR) in shaping key aspects of organizational competitiveness, such as price competitiveness and leadership in pricing. Intentionally, three industries (manufacturing, service, and trade) were specifically selected, and a sample of 550 Small and Medium-sized Enterprise (SME) operators in Oyo State was chosen through a simple random sampling technique. The data collection involved using a structured questionnaire, and the analysis was carried out using Path Analysis – Structural Equation Modelling (PA-SEM) with the assistance of STATA version 15. The findings indicate that SS has a significant and positive direct impact on price competitiveness, price leadership, and organizational culture. Similarly, SR is shown to exert noteworthy positive direct effects on price competitiveness, cost leadership, and organizational culture. Furthermore, the study unveils that organizational culture indirectly enhances both price competitiveness and cost leadership through its connections with SS and SR. These findings suggest that organizational culture acts as a valuable asset for gaining a competitive edge. Investing in the development of a robust culture rooted in strategic awareness and effective response can indirectly contribute to both price competitiveness and cost leadership.



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INTRODUCTION

In today's fiercely competitive business landscape, characterized by unpredictable and dynamic environments, ever-changing demand, open market competition, deregulation, and globalization facilitated by the Internet, every organization is affected. According to Sajuyigbe, Ayeni, and Inegbedion (2021), the convergence of technology with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, shifting customer preferences, and continual changes in demand and competition pose a threat to the survival of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) worldwide. Ogunleye, Adeyemo, Adesola, and Yakubu (2021) highlight that SMEs globally face challenges such as diversified demand, rapidly evolving technologies, global competition, shorter product lead times, and reduced product life expectancy, resulting in significant hardships. Supporting this assertion, the OECD Report (2020) reveals that over 68% of UK SMEs are grappling with severe liquidity challenges, with about 32% considering mergers in the face of the dynamic business environment compounded by the impact of COVID-19. The report further indicates that more than 75% of Belgian companies report a decline in profits, and in the Netherlands, over 45% of companies are experiencing profit losses due to intensified competition and the ongoing impact of COVID-19. Additionally, the report notes that over 70% of companies in Asian and African countries are grappling with constant technological changes, evolving customer preferences, and competition, all exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This challenging scenario compels scientists, researchers, and managers to devise strategies to prevent the complete collapse of the small business sector. One of these strategies is strategic agility.

Research indicates that strategic agility enables organizations to continually explore new opportunities, adapt to changes in the business environment, and take decisive actions to manage uncertainty, ensuring survival and prosperity in a highly competitive global environment (Sajuyigbe et al., 2021; Reed, 2020; Ogolla, 2020; Ansoff et al., 2019). Ravichandran (2018) defines strategic agility as an organization's ability to consistently adapt and adjust its strategies to remain in the market and create value. Teece, Peteraf, and Leih (2016) share a similar perspective, emphasizing that organizations exhibiting strategic agility continually adapt to ongoing changes in the business environment, identify opportunities and threats, and initiate strategic initiatives on a daily basis. Another crucial component aiding SMEs in strategically responding to business opportunities and gaining a competitive advantage is organizational culture. As per Kamau and Wanyoike (2018), organizational culture serves as a potent catalyst in shaping the connection between strategic agility and organizational performance. Tierney (2006) further affirms that organizational culture acts as a foundation fostering operational effectiveness, teamwork, and consistent employee behavior within organizations.

According to Felipe, Roldán, and Leal Rodríguez (2017), organizational culture plays a pivotal role in implementing policies and strategies that facilitate organizational agility. The cultivation of common beliefs, core values, and attitudes towards individual behavior is highlighted as essential for achieving this goal. Consistent with this perspective, Appelbaum, Calla, Desautels, and Hasan (2017) assert that culture equips organizations to identify threats, seize business opportunities, and enhance organizational performance amid a global and dynamic business environment. They emphasize the utility of culture in navigating and responding effectively to these challenges. In essence, this implies that fostering a culture of agility within organizational structures and systems is imperative for enabling SMEs to promptly adapt to dynamic business environments and secure a competitive advantage.

Strategic agility, extensively studied and recognized as a pivotal factor in enhancing corporate performance, has been conceptualized in various ways in advanced countries.

However, many SMEs in Nigeria have yet to incorporate a culture of agility into their organizational structures and systems (Sajuyigbe et al., 2021). Consequently, companies find it exceptionally challenging to leverage organizational culture effectively in responding swiftly to the dynamic business environment and capitalizing on emerging business opportunities (Ogunleye et al., 2021). The concept of strategic agility is relatively novel within the SME sector in Nigeria. While there are limited studies exploring the impact of strategic agility on organizational performance, there is a notable dearth in research examining the mediating role of organizational culture between strategic agility and organizational competitiveness in the SME sector. It is against this backdrop that the current study seeks to address this gap in the strategic management literature by investigating the mediating influence of organizational culture in the relationship between strategic agility and organizational competitiveness.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework:

Numerous studies have underscored the relevance of dynamic capabilities theory for organizations, particularly Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) operating in dynamic and unpredictable environments. This theory serves as a valuable tool for SMEs, aiding them in cultivating core competencies to establish short-term competitive positions that can subsequently evolve into a more sustainable competitive advantage (Arokodare & Asikhia, 2020; Arokodare, Makinde & Fakunmoju, 2020; Ogolla, 2020). According to Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997), dynamic capabilities theory provides a framework to identify specific capabilities within SMEs that serve as sources of competitive advantage, especially during periods of rapid and unpredictable change. Ansoff et al. (2019) and Teece, Peteraf, and Leih (2016) demonstrate how dynamic capabilities theory aids scholars and researchers in comprehending the foundational elements contributing to the long-term success of SMEs. Simultaneously, it assists managers in elucidating essential strategic agility components, such as strategic sensitivity, strategic response, and collective capability, which should be embraced to attain organizational competitiveness in terms of cost leadership, pricing competitiveness, and innovation within globally competitive markets.

In a parallel study, Al-Qudah (2018) supports the theory by asserting that SMEs' ability to integrate their resources plays a pivotal role in achieving organizational competitiveness, specifically in terms of cost leadership, price competition, and innovation. Turulja and Bajgoric (2016) also posit that the capacities exercised by a group or team can enhance an organization's competitiveness. Similarly, Sajuyigbe et al. (2021) emphasize the role of dynamic capabilities theory in supporting SMEs to harmonize culture and resources, thereby bolstering competitiveness through strategic alignment and proactive organizational development. Consequently, the theory asserts that SMEs can strategically fuse culture, allocate resources judiciously, and adapt their operations to cultivate organizational competitiveness in terms of cost leadership, pricing, and innovation.

The Concept of Strategic Agility

The roots of agility can be traced back to a review supported by the US Navy Research Institute (ONR), with origins dating to researchers at the Iacocca Institute in 1991 who initially introduced the term "agile production." Strategic agility, as a concept, denotes an organization's capacity to detect environmental changes, swiftly adapt to them, and capitalize on emerging opportunities while minimizing associated risks. This entails maintaining flexibility, fostering innovation, and staying responsive to the ever-changing and uncertain business landscape. The relevance of strategic agility has been underscored in today's swiftly

evolving markets and the advancement of technologies (Hitt et al., 2019; Vecchiato, 2015). According to Teece (2007), strategic agility is the intentional and continual creation and reconfiguration of internal and external competencies to align with the demands of a rapidly changing environment.

Additionally, Doz and Kosonen (2008) perceive strategic agility as a company's ability to rapidly renew competencies and business models in the face of change. Diverse research approaches have conceptualized strategic agility; for example, Sajuyigbe et al. (2021) gauged it through strategic response, strategic sensitivity, and collective capability. Ansoff et al. (2019) measured strategic agility using resource fluidity, collective capability, and strategic response. Teece, Peteraf, and Leih (2016) framed strategic agility in terms of strategic sensitivity, strategic response, collective commitment, and resource fluidity.

This study, in particular, conceptualizes strategic agility by focusing on strategic sensitivity and strategic response. The rationale lies in the connection between these dimensions and the competitiveness of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). SMEs' ability to navigate challenges and exploit opportunities in dynamic business environments is crucial. Strategic agility empowers SMEs to swiftly adapt to shifting market conditions, innovate in response to customer needs, and effectively compete with larger, established counterparts (Teece, 2011). Therefore, strategic agility encompasses the ability to sense and seize new opportunities, discard outdated or less profitable practices, and rejuvenate the firm's strategic direction and resource foundation.

Concept of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)

The categorization of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) varies globally, with different countries and regions employing diverse criteria such as employee count, total sales, and assets to determine their classification. For instance, the OECD (2020) adopts a classification method based on employee count, assets, and annual sales. Definitions may range from a criterion of less than 100 employees in Indonesia to an annual sales limit in Vietnam. China describes SMEs according to the number of employees. Within the European Union (EU), SMEs are defined as companies with fewer than 250 employees and total sales below €50 million. In Nigeria, the definition of SMEs is contingent on asset value, the number of employees, and sales figures, exhibiting variations in criteria depending on the specific business landscape of each region (OECD, 2020).

Strategic Sensitivity and Organizational Competitiveness

Strategic sensitivity within SMEs encompasses the capacity to promptly recognize and respond to changes in the market. This critical strategic capability empowers SMEs to evaluate customer preferences, monitor evolving market trends, and make pricing decisions aligned with the dynamic market conditions (Ansoff et al., 2019). As articulated by Shusha (2013), strategic sensitivity serves as a facet of strategic agility, specifically crafted to discern new opportunities, employ innovative techniques, and address threats with a fresh and insightful approach. Fourné et al. (2014) assert that strategic sensitivity significantly contributes to the competitiveness of organizations, particularly in terms of cost leadership, by facilitating the swift adaptation of operational processes within SMEs. This adaptability enables SMEs to identify opportunities for cost savings, streamline their operations, and maintain a competitive edge in terms of cost efficiency.

Ansoff et al. (2019) contend that SMEs endowed with strategic sensitivity are more likely to respond promptly to external environmental changes, shifts in market conditions, and alterations in customer preferences. This responsiveness enables SMEs to adjust their pricing

strategy promptly in response to competitive moves or changes in customer demands. In agreement, Pradhan and Pradhan (2015) emphasize that strategically sensitive SMEs are more likely to be cognizant of shifts in cost structures. Concurrently, Arokodare and Asikhia (2020) highlight the interconnected nature of strategic sensitivity, price competitiveness, and cost leadership in SMEs. They stress that heightened strategic sensitivity allows SMEs to establish competitive prices while simultaneously effectively managing costs to sustain a competitive position. Rohrbeck and Kum (2018) further reinforce this connection by asserting that strategic sensitivity directly correlates with organizational competitiveness, measured by both price competitiveness and cost leadership.

Empirical evidence, as supported by Teece, Peteraf, and Leih (2016) attest that strategic sensitivity serves as a robust predictor of both price competitiveness and cost leadership. This intricate link suggests that strategic sensitivity in SMEs plays a crucial role in enabling them to set competitive prices while efficiently managing costs, ultimately contributing to their overall competitiveness in the market (Raushan, 2016).

Based on the presented empirical evidence, the following hypotheses are posited:

H1: There exists a positive and significant association between strategic sensitivity and price competitiveness.

H2: There exists a positive and significant association between strategic sensitivity and cost leadership.

Strategic Response and and Organizational Competitiveness

Strategic response denotes the actions an organization takes in response to shifts in its external environment or the strategic moves of competitors. These responses typically form part of a comprehensive strategic management process aimed at securing the organization's long-term success and competitive advantage (Sajuyigbe et al., 2021). Ansoff et al. (2019) elaborate that a strategic response involves an organization's capability to adapt to a dynamic business environment by making adjustments to its organizational capabilities. Successful strategic responses often necessitate adaptability to changing market conditions, a crucial requirement for both price competitiveness and cost leadership strategies (Bassam, 2019).

In the context of SMEs, existing research draws connections between strategic response and organizational competitiveness, particularly in terms of price competitiveness and cost leadership. For instance, Berezhnoy (2017) advocates that responding strategically to external changes or competitive moves may involve a renewed focus on cost reduction and operational efficiency. This could encompass initiatives such as process improvements, technology adoption, and achieving economies of scale to lower production costs. Murungi (2015) underscores that strategic responses are driven by a deep understanding of the market and customer needs. SMEs opting for price competitiveness or cost leadership must remain attuned to market demands and dynamically adjust their strategies. Bassam's (2019) study establishes a positive and significant association between strategic response and organizational competitiveness, measured by both price competitiveness and cost leadership.

Similarly, Doz (2014) highlights that strategic response empowers SMEs to react to market changes or competitive maneuvers, allowing them to strategically adjust their pricing strategy to remain competitive. This may involve tactics such as price reductions, discounts, or other pricing strategies tailored to attract customers or respond to changes in market dynamics. Rose and Norwich (2014) also affirm that strategic response compels SMEs to adapt to market changes by strategically reducing costs to thrive in dynamic and competitive

environments. This implies that both price competitiveness and cost leadership are influenced by strategic response. McCleskey (2014) supports this assertion, confirming that strategic response is a robust predictor of organizational competitiveness in terms of both price competitiveness and cost leadership.

Based on the presented empirical evidence, the following hypotheses are posited:

H3: There exists a positive and significant association between strategic response and price competitiveness.

H4: There exists a positive and significant association between strategic response and cost leadership.

Mediating Effect of Organizational Culture

Organizational culture encompasses shared values, beliefs, norms, and practices that shape the conduct of individuals within a company (Ghumie & Alawi, 2022). As posited by Fidyah and Setiawati (2020), culture plays a pivotal role in influencing how employees interact, make decisions, and respond to challenges, thereby forging a distinctive identity for the organization. The profound impact of an SME's culture on decision-making processes and strategic choices in response to external stimuli is highlighted by Febrina, Astuti, and Triatmanto (2021). This underscores the idea that a robust culture cultivates employee engagement, a crucial factor for SMEs seeking to enhance collaboration and innovation (Febrina, Astuti, & Triatmanto, 2021).

In alignment with this perspective, Doz and Kosonen (2008) assert that strategic agility involves an organization's ability to swiftly adapt to environmental changes, enabling proactive responses to both opportunities and challenges. SMEs fostering a culture of continuous learning are better equipped to embrace change, acquire new skills, and contribute to strategic agility (Schein, 2010). Salih, and Alnaji (2014) observe that a flexible and adaptable culture empowers SMEs to promptly adjust strategies in alignment with the dynamic business landscape. This indicates that a culture valuing innovation encourages employees to experiment and adapt swiftly, thus fostering agility (Nuryanto et al., 2020).

Open communication, as noted by Nungchim and Leihaothabam (2022), is a crucial cultural element facilitating the flow of information and aiding agility by ensuring swift awareness of changes. Similarly, Jamali et al. (2022) describe organizational culture as a platform that assists SMEs in embracing adaptation as a norm, promoting a mindset where change is viewed positively—an essential component for strategic agility. Jigjiddorj et al. (2021) reaffirm the influence of organizational culture on dynamic capabilities, underscoring the significance of cultural elements in fostering agility among SMEs. This suggests that embracing a conducive organizational culture is pivotal for SMEs aiming to cultivate strategic agility. By nurturing cultural traits that support flexibility, innovation, and continuous learning, SMEs can adapt swiftly to changes, ultimately enhancing their competitiveness in dynamic business environments. Hence, the following hypotheses emerged:

H5: Organizational culture mediates between strategic sensitivity and price competitiveness

H6: Organizational culture mediates between strategic response and price competitiveness

H7: Organizational culture mediates between strategic sensitivity and cost leadership.

H8: Organizational culture mediates between strategic response and cost leadership.

Theoretical framework for the study

Independent variables **Mediator** **Dependent Variables**

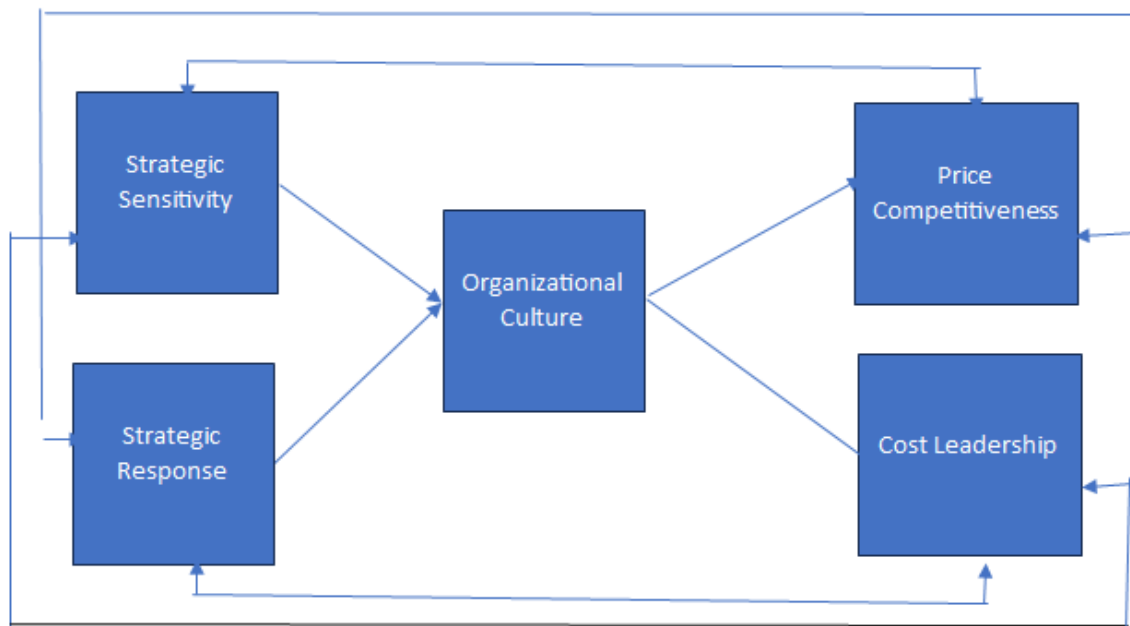


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a descriptive survey design, a methodology aimed at collecting detailed and factual information to describe an existing phenomenon, as outlined by Ezeani (1998). The study targets all small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating in the metropolitan area of Ibadan, Oyo. Ibadan was selected due to its classification as a large city with a substantial number of SMEs across various sectors. Purposefully, three sectors (manufacturing, service, and trade) were chosen, and a sample size of 550 SME operators in Oyo State was determined using a simple random sampling technique. The researcher designed a structured questionnaire employing a Likert scale with five points (5) indicating "strongly agree," (4) "agree," (3) "undecided," (2) "disagree," and (1) "strongly disagree."

To ensure the questionnaire's validity, a panel of experts conducted a content analysis, eliminating items deemed irrelevant to the research problem. Following necessary modifications, the panel recommended the use of the instruments for the study. The scales underwent further item analysis to ascertain their psychometric soundness (see Table 1).

Table 1:

Variables	Items	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Composite Reliability (CR)	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient
Strategic Sensitivity	5	0.69	0.84	0.872
Strategic Response	6	0.65	0.89	0.801
Pricing Competitiveness	6	0.66	0.85	0.799
Cost Leadership	5	0.67	0.82	0.817

Organizational culture	5	0.71	0.81	0.84
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Method of data analysis

Path analysis – Structural Equation Modelling (PA-SEM) was employed to analyze the data with the aid of STATA version 15.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2: Path Analysis (Direct effects)

Path	Coef.	Z	P> z
PC <- SS	.455	5.73	0.000
CL <- SS	.186	2.09	0.037
PC <- SR	.152	1.94	0.045
CL <- SR	.378	4.05	0.000
OC <- SS	.397	4.91	0.000
OC <- SR	.497	6.10	0.000
PC <- OC	.259	3.54	0.000
CL <- OC	.196	2.39	0.017

Note: OC = *Organizational Culture*, PC = *Price competitiveness*, CL = *Cost leadership*, SS = *Strategic sensitivity*, SR = *Strategic response*

Table 2 illustrates that strategic sensitivity (SS) exhibits a substantial positive direct impact on price competitiveness ($\beta = .455$; $p < .05$), price leadership ($\beta = .186$; $p < .05$), and organizational culture ($\beta = .397$; $p < .05$). This suggests that organizations with heightened sensitivity to market changes and competitor actions tend to demonstrate stronger price competitiveness, cost leadership, and organizational culture. This finding aligns with Arokodare and Asikhia (2020), who posit that strategic sensitivity is a robust predictor of price competitiveness and cost leadership in SMEs. They emphasize that heightened strategic sensitivity enables SMEs to establish competitive prices while effectively managing costs to maintain a competitive position. Rohrbeck and Kum (2018) further support this correlation by asserting that strategic sensitivity directly correlates with price competitiveness and cost leadership. In a similar vein, Febrina, Astuti, and Triatmanto (2021) affirm a direct link between SS and organizational culture. Therefore, H1 and H2 are substantiated.

Additionally, the results indicate that strategic response (SR) also exerts significant positive direct effects on price competitiveness ($\beta = .152$; $p < .05$), cost leadership ($\beta = .378$; $p < .05$), and organizational culture ($\beta = .259$; $p < .05$). This implies that effective responses to strategic issues lead to enhancements in these areas. The study concurs with Sajuyigbe et al. (2021), highlighting that SR is a pivotal determinant of price competitiveness and cost leadership. In another study, Ansoff et al. (2019) demonstrate a direct association between SR and price competitiveness, cost leadership, and OC. This suggests that successful strategic responses often require adaptability to changing market conditions, a crucial requirement for both price

competitiveness and cost leadership strategies (Bassam, 2019). Hence, H3 and H4 are validated.

The implication of these findings is that both SS and SR emerge as key drivers of success in price competitiveness, cost leadership, and organizational culture. This indicates that SMEs prioritizing an understanding of market dynamics and effective responses can anticipate improvements in these areas. Furthermore, a strong organizational culture plays a significant role in reinforcing the positive effects of strategic focus. Fostering a culture of awareness, adaptability, and strategic execution can amplify the benefits of strategic sensitivity and response.

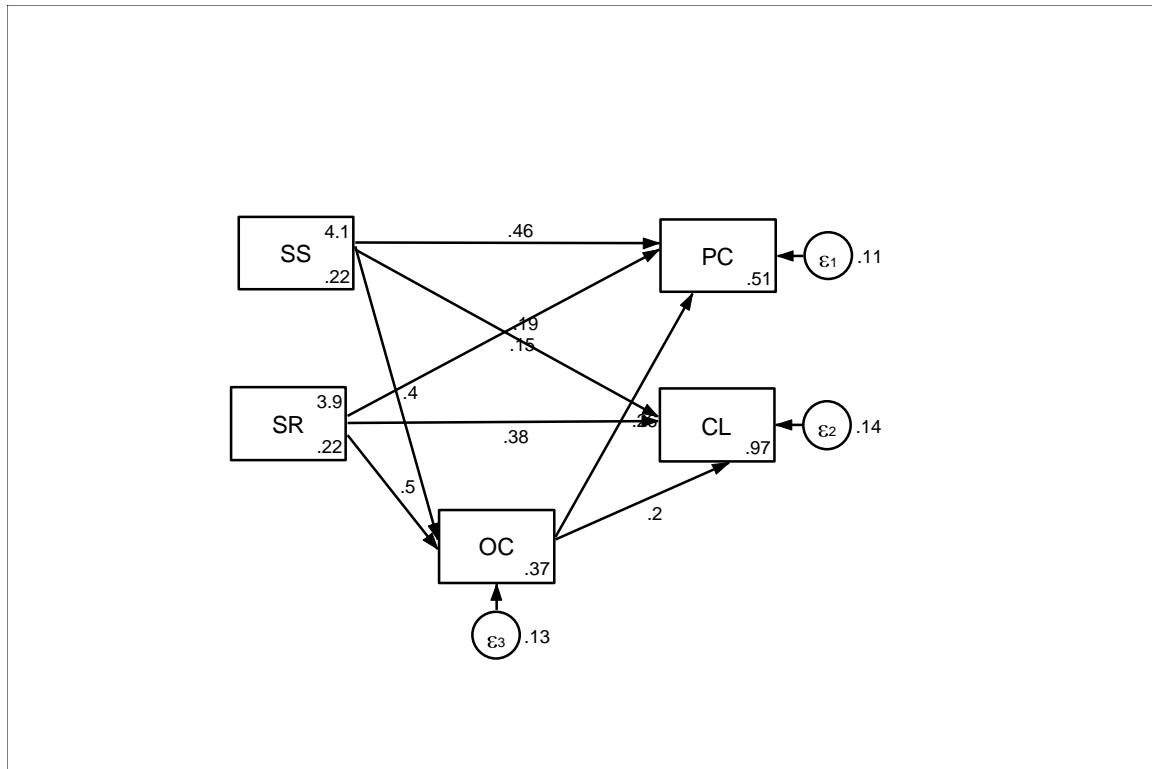


Figure1: PA-SEM

Table 3: Structured Equation Modelling (Indirect effects of Organizational Culture on price competitiveness and cost leadership)

Path	Coef.	Z	P> z
PC <-OC<- SS	.103	2.87	0.004
CL <-OC<- SS	.078	2.15	0.032
PC <-OC<- SR	.129	3.06	0.002
CL <-OC<- SR	.097	2.22	0.026

Note: OC = Organizational Culture, PC = Price competitiveness, CL = Cost leadership, SS = Strategic sensitivity, SR = Strategic response

Table 3 illustrates the indirect impacts of organizational culture (OC) on both price competitiveness (PC) and cost leadership (CL), with mediation through strategic sensitivity (SS) and strategic response (SR). The positive beta-values of 0.103, 0.078, 0.129, and 0.097

signify that a robust organizational culture indirectly enhances both price competitiveness and cost leadership (see figure 1). This suggests that when SS increases, a stronger organizational culture intensifies the positive influence of SS on PC and CL. Similarly, with an increase in SR, a robust organizational culture reinforces the positive impact of SR on PC and CL. Consequently, organizational culture acts as a catalyst or amplifier, augmenting the favourable effects of strategic awareness and response on business performance. The p-values of 0.004, 0.032, 0.002, and 0.026 support the notion that the mediating effect of OC on PC and CL is partial, given that all p-values are below 0.05.

The implication of these findings is that organizational culture serves as a valuable asset in gaining a competitive advantage. Investing in cultivating a strong culture based on strategic awareness and effective response can indirectly contribute to both price competitiveness and cost leadership.

CONCLUSION

The study highlights the pivotal role of strategic sensitivity (SS) and strategic response (SR) in influencing key organizational competitiveness, including price competitiveness, and price leadership. The positive direct impacts observed in both SS and SR underscore their significance in shaping a competitive and culturally robust organizational environment. The study further reveals the indirect effects of organizational culture (OC) on price competitiveness (PC) and cost leadership (CL), mediated through SS and SR. The positive beta-values indicate that a strong organizational culture serves as a catalyst, enhancing the positive impacts of strategic sensitivity and response on PC and CL. The partial mediating effect, supported by the low p-values, suggests that OC plays a significant role in amplifying the positive outcomes of strategic awareness and response on business performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. That SMEs should invest in training programs to enhance strategic sensitivity among employees. This includes developing a deep understanding of market dynamics and competitor actions to foster a more competitive edge.
2. Given the significant positive effects of strategic response on key outcomes, SMEs should focus on strengthening their ability to respond effectively to strategic issues. This involves cultivating adaptability and responsiveness to changing market conditions.
3. SMEs should actively foster a strong organizational culture based on strategic awareness and effective response. This involves promoting values and behaviors that align with the organization's strategic goals and objectives.
4. SMES should integrate strategic sensitivity and response into decision-making processes at various levels of the SMEs. This ensures that strategic awareness and responsiveness are integral components of overall business strategy.
5. Given the dynamic nature of markets, SMEs should continually invest in research and evaluation efforts to stay attuned to evolving market conditions. This will aid in refining strategic sensitivity and response strategies for long-term success.

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