

Article

Competitive Aggressiveness and Growth of Telecommunication Firms in South-South Nigeria

Victor A. Akubor¹, Noble S. Letam²

1. Department of Entrepreneurship, Faculty of Administration and Management Sciences, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria
 2. Department of Entrepreneurship, Faculty of Administration and Management Sciences, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria
- * Correspondence: akubarv@yahoo.com, Sordum.letam@iaue.edu.ng

Abstract: This study examined the relationship between competitive aggressiveness, a core dimension of corporate entrepreneurial orientation, and three measures of firm growth (financial growth, operational growth and market growth) among telecommunication firms in South-South Nigeria. Anchored on the resource-based view, the dynamic capabilities perspective and competitive dynamics research, the study adopted a correlational survey design. The population comprised 24 branch offices of four licensed operators (MTN, Airtel, 9mobile and Globacom) located in the six South-South states. Five respondents were purposively selected from each branch, giving 120 questionnaires, of which 110 (91.7%) were retrieved and analysed. A structured five-point Likert instrument measured competitive aggressiveness (five items) and each growth measure (five items each). The overall Cronbach's alpha from the pilot test was .944. Descriptive statistics showed moderate levels of competitive aggressiveness (composite mean = 3.26) and growth (financial = 3.30; operational = 3.23; market = 3.12). Spearman's rank-order correlation showed that competitive aggressiveness was positively and significantly related to financial growth ($\rho = .443$, $p < .001$), operational growth ($\rho = .514$, $p < .001$) and market growth ($\rho = .407$, $p < .001$), with the strongest association observed for operational growth. All three null hypotheses were rejected. The results suggest that firms that monitor rivals, respond decisively to competitive moves and move first on service changes tend to report stronger performance on all three growth measures, although the associations are moderate and based on perceptual, cross-sectional data. The paper recommends that operators pursue disciplined, capability-backed competitive aggression, invest in competitor intelligence, align pricing and promotional tactics with network capacity, and treat operational readiness as the channel through which aggressive moves become sustainable growth. Future studies should use longitudinal and objective financial data and test mediating and moderating mechanisms.

Keywords: Competitive aggressiveness; entrepreneurial orientation; firm growth; telecommunication firms; South-South Nigeria

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1. Introduction

The Nigerian telecommunications industry has changed from a peripheral service into the infrastructure on which voice, data, mobile money and broadband services now depend [1], [2]. It is one of the fastest-growing sectors in sub-Saharan Africa and contributes significantly to national output [3]. The scale of the market is evident from the financial results of its largest operator: MTN Nigeria Communications PLC reported a 36.1% rise in total revenue to ₦3.4 trillion in 2024, driven by data, voice, fintech and digital services [4]. At the industry level, service revenue was reported at approximately US\$7.6 billion for the same year [5]. The market is also forecast to expand from about US\$9.09 billion in 2024 to US\$11.43 billion by 2029 [6].

Growth on this scale does not accrue automatically to every operator. The industry is concentrated in a small number of licensed firms that compete for the same subscribers, the same spectrum and the same scarce infrastructure. In such a market, a firm's strategic posture towards its rivals is as consequential as its technology. Entrepreneurial orientation (EO) is the construct most often used to describe that posture. Following Miller [7], Covin and Slevin [8] and Lumpkin and Dess [9], EO is understood as a firm-level disposition toward innovativeness, risk-taking, proactiveness and competitive aggressiveness. Meta-analytic evidence shows that EO is positively associated with firm performance across contexts [10].

Competitive aggressiveness, the focus of this paper, refers to a firm's propensity to challenge competitors directly and intensely in order to enter the market or improve its position [9]. In telecommunications it appears as price and promotional contests, rapid answers to rivals' product launches, bundling, network-coverage races and the attempt to be first with new services. It is arguably the most visible EO dimension in a market with only a handful of players, yet it is also among the least examined in the Nigerian telecommunications literature. Existing studies have tended to treat EO as a single construct or to emphasise innovativeness and proactiveness [11], and where competitive aggressiveness has been tested in Nigeria the results have been mixed [12], [13].

A second limitation concerns how firm outcomes are defined. Much Nigerian work measures "performance" or "competitiveness" as a single construct. Growth in telecommunications is plainly multidimensional. Financial growth reflects revenue, profit, cash flow and cost efficiency. Operational growth reflects network capacity, service-delivery efficiency, productivity and process improvement. Market growth reflects customer-base expansion, market share, new segments and brand loyalty. A strategy that lifts one of these may leave another unchanged or even harm it. A price war, for example, can win subscribers while straining margins and network quality. Examining competitive aggressiveness against each growth measure separately therefore gives managers more actionable information than a single aggregate.

The South-South region (Rivers, Delta, Bayelsa, Edo, Cross River and Akwa Ibom States) is a useful setting. It is oil-rich and urbanising, with high demand for connectivity in cities such as Port Harcourt, Warri, Uyo, Benin City and Calabar. It is also characterised by constraints such as right-of-way disputes, unreliable grid power, high diesel costs and vandalism of telecommunication assets [14]. Firms must therefore compete aggressively while operating under conditions that can erode the gains of aggression. Whether competitive aggressiveness translates into financial, operational and market growth under these conditions is an empirical question that this study sets out to answer.

The paper makes three contributions. First, it isolates competitive aggressiveness from the other EO dimensions and tests it against three distinct growth measures within one sector and one region. Second, it provides primary evidence from four licensed operators across all six South-South states, a setting that prior EO studies concentrated in Lagos, Abuja and the South-East have rarely covered. Third, it offers practical guidance on how aggressive competitive behaviour relates to different kinds of growth, which helps managers decide where to place competitive effort.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. Sections 2 to 6 set out the problem, framework, aims, questions and hypotheses. Section 7 reviews the literature. Section 8 describes the methodology, Section 9 presents the results, Section 10 discusses the findings, and Sections 11 and 12 give the conclusions and recommendations.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's telecommunications industry has expanded rapidly through 4G and 5G deployment, digital payment platforms and value-added services, and active mobile subscriptions are reported to exceed 200 million [3]. The rising demand for e-commerce, online education and telemedicine has widened the market opportunity. Yet operators in the South-South region continue to face infrastructure shortfalls, regulatory delays, high

operating costs and volatile macroeconomic conditions, including exchange-rate swings and inflation, that make expansion decisions uncertain [15], [2]. Under these conditions, firms compete intensely for a limited and price-sensitive subscriber base.

Entrepreneurial orientation is widely credited as a driver of firm performance [12], [16]. However, three gaps weaken the evidence base for the telecommunications sector in South-South Nigeria. First, the studies are concentrated on small and medium-sized enterprises in Lagos, Abuja and the South-East rather than large, structured corporate firms. Second, those that do examine telecommunications in the region have either treated EO as one construct or reported on innovativeness and proactiveness, leaving competitive aggressiveness largely unexamined [11]. Third, outcomes are usually specified as a single performance or competitiveness measure, which conceals whether competitive aggressiveness works through finances, operations or the market.

The result is that managers and policymakers do not know whether aggressive competitive behaviour is associated with financial, operational and market growth, or whether its benefits are confined to one dimension. Without this knowledge, operators cannot calibrate the intensity and direction of competitive effort, and there is a risk of costly rivalry that does not translate into growth. The problem addressed in this study is therefore the lack of empirical evidence on how competitive aggressiveness relates to the financial, operational and market growth of telecommunication firms in South-South Nigeria.

1.2 Conceptual Framework

The framework treats competitive aggressiveness as the independent variable and firm growth as the criterion variable, measured through three dimensions. Competitive aggressiveness is operationalised through five behaviours: responding aggressively to competitors' marketing, actively challenging rivals for market share, continuously monitoring competitors' actions, adopting aggressive pricing or promotional tactics, and striving to be first to introduce competitive changes in services [9], [17].

Financial growth is the increase in profitability, revenue, cash-flow strength, cost efficiency and financial position relative to competitors. Operational growth is the improvement in operational efficiency, employee productivity and service delivery, internal processes, resource management and system flexibility. Market growth is the expansion of the customer base, market share, new market segments, brand recognition and loyalty, and customer retention. The framework is shown in Figure 1. Each arrow corresponds to one hypothesis tested in Section 9.

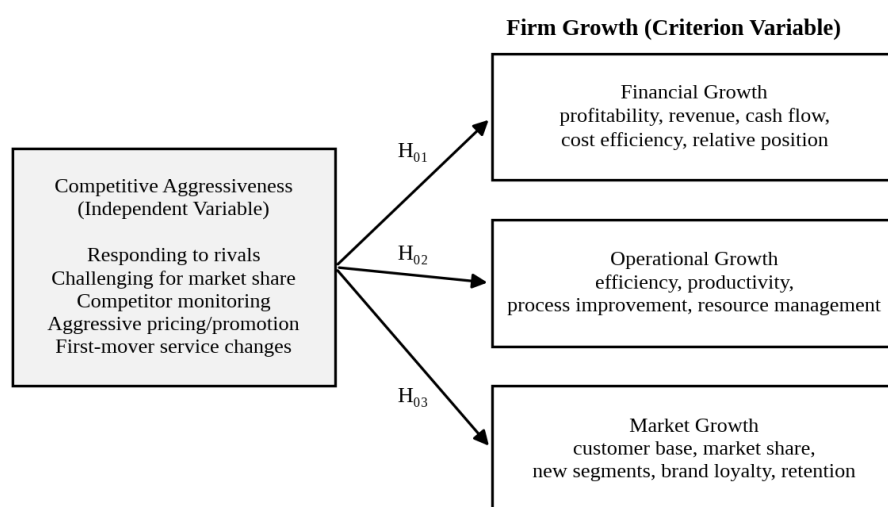


Figure 1. Conceptual framework: competitive aggressiveness and the growth of telecommunication firms.

Source: Adapted from Lumpkin and Dess [9] and the researcher's conceptualisation (2026).

The framework rests on a simple logic derived from the resource-based and dynamic capabilities literatures. Aggressive competitive action can capture customers and revenue (market and financial growth), but it also demands capacity and organisational routines to sustain it (operational growth). By testing all three, the study can show where aggression is most strongly associated with growth.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine the relationship between competitive aggressiveness and the growth of telecommunication firms in South-South Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the relationship between competitive aggressiveness and the financial growth of telecommunication firms in South-South Nigeria;
2. Examine the relationship between competitive aggressiveness and the operational growth of telecommunication firms in South-South Nigeria; and
3. Assess the relationship between competitive aggressiveness and the market growth of telecommunication firms in South-South Nigeria.

1.4 Research Questions

The study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between competitive aggressiveness and the financial growth of telecommunication firms in South-South Nigeria?
2. What is the relationship between competitive aggressiveness and the operational growth of telecommunication firms in South-South Nigeria?
3. To what extent is competitive aggressiveness related to the market growth of telecommunication firms in South-South Nigeria?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

H₀₁: Competitive aggressiveness has no significant relationship with the financial growth of telecommunication firms in South-South Nigeria.

H₀₂: Competitive aggressiveness has no significant relationship with the operational growth of telecommunication firms in South-South Nigeria.

H₀₃: Competitive aggressiveness has no significant relationship with the market growth of telecommunication firms in South-South Nigeria.

1.6 Review of Related Literature

This section reviews the concept of competitive aggressiveness and the three growth measures, discusses the theories that explain the expected relationships, evaluates previous empirical studies and identifies the gap the study addresses.

1.7 Conceptual Review

1.7.1 Entrepreneurial orientation and competitive aggressiveness

Entrepreneurial orientation describes the strategy-making processes and managerial postures that lead a firm to act entrepreneurially. The construct was developed from the work of Miller [7], who characterised an entrepreneurial firm as one that innovates, takes risks and acts proactively, and was extended by Covin and Slevin [8]. Lumpkin and Dess [9] widened the construct by adding autonomy and competitive aggressiveness and by separating the latter from proactiveness. They argued that the dimensions may vary independently, so that each can be examined on its own terms. This independence is the justification for studying a single dimension in the present paper.

Lumpkin and Dess [9] define competitive aggressiveness as a firm's propensity to directly and intensely challenge its competitors to achieve entry or improve position, that is, to outperform industry rivals in the marketplace. It is typified by a combative posture and a forceful response to competitors' actions. Proactiveness, by contrast, concerns anticipating future demand and acting ahead of it, whereas competitive aggressiveness is a response to, or an attack on, rivals. In practice, the two overlap in the first-mover behaviour captured by the fifth item of the present instrument, but the dominant character of competitive aggressiveness is rivalry-oriented.

Competitive aggressiveness manifests in several actions: aggressive pricing, intensive promotion, rapid imitation or pre-emption of rivals' moves, capacity expansion, and attempts to win market share at the expense of competitors [9]. Research on competitive dynamics shows that the intensity, speed and complexity of such actions matter, and that firms that act more frequently and more quickly than rivals tend to earn superior returns, although rivals' retaliation may erode the advantage [19], [20]. Wales, Parida, and Patel [17] show that the performance effect of a firm's capabilities depends on its entrepreneurial orientation, which points to the need to consider posture and capability together. These observations underpin the expectation in this study that competitive aggressiveness will be positively but not perfectly related to growth.

Competitive aggressiveness can also be costly. Excessive aggression may provoke retaliation, trigger price wars, overstretch resources and distract management [20]. In capital-intensive industries such as telecommunications, where network quality is a core product attribute, aggressive price cutting without matching capacity can reduce service quality. The environment is therefore not neutral: the value of aggression depends on the firm's ability to deliver on the promises it makes in the market.

In the telecommunications context, competitive aggressiveness includes tariff reductions and bonus offers, data bundles, aggressive retail and distribution expansion, advertising campaigns, number-portability offers, quick launches of new network technologies and sustained surveillance of rival operators' offers. Because the Nigerian market has few players, each firm's actions are readily observed and often matched, which makes the intensity of rivalry unusually high and the measurement of aggressive behaviour particularly relevant.

1.7.2 Firm growth and its measures

Firm growth refers to the expansion of a firm in terms of its resources, capabilities, market reach, revenue and organisational capacity. It is a multidimensional phenomenon that can be assessed through financial, structural and market indicators, and its drivers include entrepreneurial orientation, managerial competence, innovation capability and access to resources [18], [10]. Growth is also a contingent outcome. A firm may expand in one dimension, such as revenue, while another dimension, such as operational efficiency, deteriorates. This is why the present study measures growth along three separate dimensions.

Financial growth is the increase in the firm's financial resources, profitability and economic value over time. Typical indicators are revenue growth, profit margin, return on investment, cash-flow strength and cost efficiency. It matters in telecommunications because network build-out, spectrum acquisition and technology upgrades require continuing capital. Financial growth also signals stability to investors, lenders and regulators.

Operational growth is the improvement of internal processes, infrastructure and service-delivery capability. In a telecommunications company it is evidenced by efficiency gains, higher employee productivity, process improvement, effective resource use and flexible systems that can adapt to market changes. Operational growth determines service quality and coverage, both of which directly affect customer satisfaction and competitiveness.

Market growth is the expansion of the firm's presence and share in its market. Indicators include customer-base growth, market share, entry into new segments, brand recognition, customer loyalty and retention. In the South-South, where the population is heterogeneous and mobile adoption is rising, market growth also entails reaching underserved areas and semi-urban segments.

The three dimensions are interdependent. Market growth supplies the revenues that sustain financial growth; financial growth funds operational investments; and operational growth improves quality, which supports retention and market growth. Examining

competitive aggressiveness against each dimension therefore helps to show whether aggressive behaviour is linked to one stage of this cycle more than another.

1.7.3 Competitive aggressiveness and growth: conceptual linkages

Competitive aggressiveness and financial growth. Aggressive competitors can win a larger share of customers, raise sales volume and, where pricing is managed prudently, convert volume into revenue and profit. First-mover and fast-follower behaviour can create temporary monopoly rents. At the same time, price-based aggression compresses margins and can start a cycle of retaliation. The net effect on financial growth is therefore expected to be positive but moderated by cost discipline.

Competitive aggressiveness and operational growth. Competition forces firms to upgrade networks, shorten service-delivery cycles and streamline processes in order to match or exceed rivals. Continuous monitoring of competitors reveals performance gaps and benchmarks, prompting internal improvement. A competitive posture can thus act as a discipline that raises operational standards. Conversely, aggression without capacity can overload infrastructure, so the relationship hinges on whether operations are strengthened in tandem.

Competitive aggressiveness and market growth. This is the most direct link. Challenging rivals for share, responding to their campaigns and being first with new services are all aimed at acquiring and retaining customers. Aggressive firms are expected to report faster customer-base growth and share gains. The relationship may be weaker, however, where customers are loyal to incumbents, where switching costs are high or where rivals match each move quickly, as is common in a concentrated market.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

The study is underpinned by the resource-based view and the dynamic capabilities perspective, and draws on competitive dynamics research to explain the specific mechanism linking aggressive action to growth.

1.8.1 Resource-based view (RBV)

The resource-based view, associated with Barney [21], holds that sustained competitive advantage derives from firm resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable (VRIN). Firms are assumed to be heterogeneous in their resource endowments, and these resources are not perfectly mobile. Superior performance arises when a firm exploits its distinctive resources and capabilities better than rivals.

Applied to this study, competitive aggressiveness is not simply a tactic but an organisational capability embedded in managerial cognition, market intelligence routines and decision-making culture. Firms that systematically monitor competitors, respond quickly and sustain aggressive campaigns possess knowledge and routines that rivals find hard to copy. RBV therefore predicts that firms with stronger competitive aggressiveness will register stronger financial, operational and market growth, because they are better able to convert internal capability into external advantage. It also explains why aggression without supporting resources is unlikely to be sustained.

RBV has been criticised for being inward-looking, for assuming that resources are relatively stable, and for saying little about how new resources are created [22]. In a fast-changing industry like telecommunications, these limitations are significant, and they motivate the use of a complementary perspective.

1.8.2 Dynamic capabilities theory

Teece, Pisano, and Shuen [23] extended the resource-based logic by emphasising the firm's ability to integrate, build and reconfigure internal and external competences to address rapidly changing environments. Dynamic capabilities include sensing opportunities and threats, seizing them and transforming the resource base [24]. Eisenhardt and Martin [25] describe them as identifiable organisational routines, such as product development and strategic decision making, through which firms alter their resource base.

Competitive aggressiveness can be viewed as the observable expression of these capabilities. Monitoring rivals corresponds to sensing; launching a counter-offer or a new service ahead of competitors corresponds to seizing; and mobilising capacity and process changes to support the move corresponds to reconfiguring. The perspective predicts that aggressive firms with strong dynamic capabilities achieve stronger growth, and also indicates why operational growth is likely to register the strongest link, since reconfiguration is predominantly an operational activity. Critics note that the concept is sometimes vague and difficult to measure, so the present study operationalises it through concrete, observable behaviours.

1.8.3 Competitive dynamics perspective

Competitive dynamics research examines firms' actions and reactions as the unit of analysis. It holds that a firm's competitive actions provoke rivals' responses, and that the timing, number and scope of actions shape performance [19], [20]. Firms that act more often and respond faster generally enjoy superior market outcomes, although retaliation can limit the gains. This perspective is directly relevant for a concentrated telecommunications market in which a tariff change or a new bundle is quickly visible to rivals. It supports the proposition that competitive aggressiveness is positively related to market growth and, through market share gains, to financial growth, while also warning that effects will be moderate rather than overwhelming because rivals react.

1.8.4 Synthesis

Taken together, the three perspectives predict a positive relationship between competitive aggressiveness and each growth measure. RBV explains why aggressiveness rooted in distinctive capabilities creates advantage; dynamic capabilities theory explains how aggressive action is sustained through reconfiguration; and competitive dynamics explains why the gains are contested and therefore limited in size. Together they justify hypothesising significant positive relationships while expecting magnitudes in the moderate range.

1.9 Empirical Review

Evidence on competitive aggressiveness and firm outcomes in Nigeria is limited and mixed. This section reviews studies that examine EO dimensions, with emphasis on competitive aggressiveness, in Nigerian firms.

Olayemi, Okonji, and Oghojafor [13] surveyed 222 business owners and professional managers of small and medium-sized enterprises in Lagos on the effect of competitive aggressiveness and environmental uncertainties on business performance. Using correlation and t-tests, they found that competitive aggressiveness had a positive and significant effect on business performance ($r = .256, p \leq .05$) and that environmental uncertainties significantly affected EO constructs. They concluded that SMEs should develop competitive aggressiveness strategies and monitor the environment. The study, however, treated performance as a single construct, focused on SMEs and did not consider telecommunications.

Ibrahim and Abu [12] sampled 110 small and medium-sized enterprises in Abuja, of which 97 responses were valid. They reported that proactiveness, risk-taking and autonomy were positively and significantly related to business performance, whereas competitive aggressiveness had a positive but non-significant relationship. The authors attributed the differences among dimensions to the context of the SME sector. The result stands in contrast to Olayemi et al. [13], underlining that the effect of competitive aggressiveness is context-dependent.

Okusanya, Taiwo, Adenugba, and Obisanya [26] studied 568 respondents in consumer goods manufacturing companies in Nigeria and found that all EO dimensions, including competitive aggressiveness, significantly affected market share (adjusted $R^2 = .791$). They recommended that managers integrate innovation, competitive aggressiveness and risk-taking in their strategies to enhance market share. The study supports the competitive aggressiveness–market growth link, but it was limited to

manufacturing and to market share, so financial and operational growth were not examined.

Within telecommunications, Wegwu and Princewill [11] surveyed 103 managers of MTN, 9mobile, Airtel and Globacom in Rivers State and used Spearman's rank-order correlation. They found that innovativeness and proactiveness were significantly associated with competitiveness measured by market share and service quality, while competitive aggressiveness and risk-taking were not emphasised as significant. Nwekeala [15] surveyed 40 managers across eight telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt and found that innovativeness and risk-taking within entrepreneurial marketing strategies were significantly and positively related to sales performance, but competitive aggressiveness was not examined. Kwajaffa [27] reported that marketing and organisational innovations significantly improved the performance of telecommunication companies in Nigeria, again without addressing competitive aggressiveness or disaggregating growth. Akeke et al. [3] found a positive and significant relationship between strategic orientation and the performance of Nigerian telecommunication firms, using responses from 57 line managers and 300 customers, but did not separate the EO dimensions.

Akinwale, Adelowo, and Surujlal [28] examined 242 micro, small and medium enterprise owners in Nigeria and found that innovativeness and risk-taking were more likely to influence financial performance, and that EO dimensions jointly influenced outcomes. Olalekan [29], studying 100 respondents from 20 SMEs in the South-South geopolitical zone, found that process and administrative innovations enhanced competitiveness. Neither study included telecommunication firms nor examined competitive aggressiveness separately. Beyond Nigeria, Wales et al. [17] show that the performance effect of a firm's absorptive capacity is shaped by its EO, which supports the view that posture and capability work together. **Table 1.** Ssummarises the principal studies reviewed and the gaps each leaves.

Table 1. Summary of Selected Empirical Studies on Entrepreneurial Orientation and Firm Outcomes in Nigeria

Author(s) and year	Context and method	Key finding on CA or EO	Gap
Olayemi et al. [13]	222 SME owners/managers, Lagos; correlation and <i>t</i> -tests	CA positively and significantly related to performance ($r = .256$)	SMEs; single performance construct; no telecom
Ibrahim and Abu [12]	110 SMEs, Abuja (97 valid); descriptive and inferential statistics	CA positive but not significant; proactiveness, risk-taking, autonomy significant	SMEs; overall performance; Abuja only
Okusanya et al. [26]	568 respondents, consumer goods firms; multiple regression	All EO dimensions, incl. CA, significantly affected market share	Manufacturing; market share only
Wegwu and Princewill [11]	103 managers of four telecom firms, Rivers State; Spearman	Innovativeness and proactiveness significant; CA not emphasised	Competitiveness proxy; growth not disaggregated
Nwekeala [15]	40 managers, eight telecom firms, Port Harcourt; Spearman	Innovativeness and risk-taking related to sales performance	Sales only; CA not tested
Kwajaffa [27]	Senior managers of telecom firms; inferential statistics	Marketing and organisational innovation improved performance	General performance; CA not tested
Akeke et al. [3]	57 line managers and 300 customers; SEM	Strategic orientation improved telecom performance	EO dimensions not separated; not regional
Akinwale et al. [28]	242 MSME owners; logistic regression	Innovativeness and risk-taking influenced financial performance	MSMEs; financial only; CA not isolated
Olalekan [29]	100 respondents, 20 SMEs, South-South; regression	Process and administrative innovation improved competitiveness	Not telecom; competitiveness proxy

Note. CA = competitive aggressiveness; EO = entrepreneurial orientation.

1.10 Gap in the Literature

Four gaps emerge. First, competitive aggressiveness has seldom been isolated in Nigerian telecommunications research. The telecom studies reviewed either emphasised innovativeness, proactiveness or risk-taking or aggregated EO into a single construct. Second, the evidence on competitive aggressiveness is inconsistent, being significant in Lagos SMEs [13] and consumer-goods firms [26] but non-significant among Abuja SMEs [12], which signals the need for sector- and region-specific tests. Third, outcomes have typically been measured as general performance, competitiveness or sales, so it is not known whether competitive aggressiveness is linked to financial, operational and market growth in different degrees. Fourth, the South-South region, with its distinctive

infrastructure and cost environment, has received almost no attention in corporate EO research. This study addresses these gaps by relating competitive aggressiveness to three separate growth measures among telecommunication firms in all six South-South states.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Research Philosophy and Design

The study adopted a positivist philosophy, which holds that reality is objective and can be measured through observable indicators. This stance supports the use of structured questionnaires, numerical measurement and statistical hypothesis testing. A correlational survey design was used because the objective was to establish the direction, strength and significance of the association between competitive aggressiveness and each growth measure without manipulating any variable. The design is appropriate for organisational research in which experimental intervention is impractical.

2.2 Population

The population comprised 24 branch offices of the four licensed telecommunication operators with a physical presence in the South-South region: MTN, Airtel, 9mobile and Globacom. Each operator had one branch in each of the six states (Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Edo and Delta), giving 24 branches. The list of branches was obtained from the Nigerian Communications Commission records and the Nigerian Business Directory [30]. Table 2 shows the sampling frame.

Table 2. Sampling Frame: Branch Offices by State and Operator

State	Principal city	MTN	Airtel	9mobile	Globacom	Branches
Rivers	Port Harcourt	1	1	1	1	4
Akwa Ibom	Uyo	1	1	1	1	4
Bayelsa	Yenagoa	1	1	1	1	4
Cross River	Calabar	1	1	1	1	4
Edo	Benin City	1	1	1	1	4
Delta	Warri	1	1	1	1	4
Total		6	6	6	6	24

Note. Source: Nigerian Communications Commission; Nigerian Business Directory Report [30].

2.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A census of all 24 branches was taken. Within each branch, purposive sampling was used to select five respondents with direct knowledge of the firm's strategy and performance, drawn from operations, finance, marketing and sales, customer service, and business development or strategy functions. This gave 120 questionnaires (5 respondents × 24 branches). Purposive selection was justified by the need for informed respondents who could assess competitive behaviour and growth indicators.

2.4 Instrument

Data were collected with a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale (5 = Strongly Agree to 1 = Strongly Disagree). Section A recorded respondents' demographic information. The remaining sections measured competitive aggressiveness, financial growth, operational growth and market growth, each with five items adapted from the EO and firm-growth literature [9], [18]. The competitive aggressiveness items cover

responding aggressively to rivals' marketing, challenging competitors for market share, monitoring competitors' actions, adopting aggressive pricing or promotional tactics, and striving to be first to introduce competitive changes. The full instrument is shown in Appendix A.

2.5 Validity and Reliability

Face and content validity were established by submitting the draft instrument to experts in entrepreneurship, business management and research methodology at the Faculty of Administration and Management Sciences, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. They reviewed the items for clarity, relevance and coverage of the constructs, and their suggestions were incorporated into the final version.

Reliability was assessed through a pilot test with 10 respondents from telecommunication firms outside the study area but with similar characteristics. Cronbach's alpha computed with SPSS version 25 across the seven construct scores in the pilot instrument was .944, above the .70 threshold recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein [31]. Table 3 shows the item-total statistics for the constructs used in this paper.

Table 3. Reliability Statistics from the Pilot Test (n = 10)

Construct	Corrected item-total correlation	Cronbach's alpha if item deleted
Competitive aggressiveness	.934	.924
Financial growth	.962	.921
Operational growth	.880	.930
Market growth	.876	.930

Note. Overall Cronbach's alpha = .944 (seven construct scores). The pilot instrument also included other constructs not analysed in this paper.

Because the pilot sample was small and the coefficients were computed on construct scores rather than item sets within each construct, the reliability evidence should be read as indicative. Section 11 returns to this point.

2.6 Administration of the Instrument

The researcher administered the questionnaire with six trained research assistants, one for each South-South state. The assistants were briefed on the study's objectives, ethical considerations and data-collection procedures. Questionnaires were delivered and collected in person and, where necessary, electronically by email or Google Forms to improve the response rate. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and of anonymity in reporting.

2.7 Method of Data Analysis

Responses were coded and analysed with SPSS version 25. Demographic data were summarised with frequencies and percentages. Responses on each construct were summarised through frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. Composite scores were formed from the items measuring each construct. Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to test the three hypotheses because the data were ordinal Likert responses and the test does not require normality. Hypotheses were tested at $p \leq .05$. To aid interpretation, 95% confidence intervals for the coefficients were computed through the Fisher z transformation (standard error = $1/\sqrt{n-3}$), and the coefficient of determination (r^2) was obtained by squaring each coefficient. Correlation strength was interpreted as follows: .90 to 1.00, very strong; .60 to .899, strong; .30 to .599, moderate; and below .30, weak.

3. Result

3.1 Response Rate

Of the 120 questionnaires distributed, 110 were retrieved and usable, a response rate of 91.7%. Ten (8.3%) were not returned. The high rate indicates strong participation and is adequate for the analysis.

3.2 Respondents' Profile

Table 4. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 110)

Variable	Category	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	68	61.8
	Female	42	38.2
Age	20–29 years	24	21.8
	30–39 years	46	41.8
	40–49 years	28	25.5
	50 years and above	12	10.9
Education	OND/NCE	18	16.4
	HND/B.Sc.	52	47.3
	M.Sc./MBA	32	29.1
	Ph.D.	5	4.5
	Others	3	2.7
Position	Line staff	34	30.9
	Supervisor	28	25.5
	Middle manager	26	23.6
	Senior manager	16	14.5
	Director	6	5.5
Experience	Less than 2 years	17	15.5
	2–5 years	33	30.0
	6–10 years	37	33.6
	Above 10 years	23	20.9
Department	Marketing	22	20.0
	Operations	29	26.4
	Finance	14	12.7
	Customer service	18	16.4
	IT/Technical	19	17.3
	Administration	8	7.3

Note. Source: Survey data (2026). Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

Most respondents were male (61.8%) and aged 30 to 49 years (67.3%). Nearly half held a first degree or higher national diploma (47.3%) and a further 33.6% held a postgraduate qualification. About 55% had more than five years of experience in the sector, and 44% held middle-management positions or above. The respondents were drawn from operations, marketing, IT, customer service and finance, which gives a functionally

diverse view of competitive behaviour and growth. Because 56.4% of respondents were line staff or supervisors, the findings reflect the perceptions of employees across ranks rather than of top management alone.

3.3 Descriptive Results

Table 5 presents the distribution of responses on competitive aggressiveness. Agreement (strongly agree and agree) ranged from 44.5% to 56.3% across the five items. The highest agreement was recorded for continuous monitoring of competitors' actions and for aggressive pricing or promotional tactics (both 56.3%), followed by striving to be first to introduce competitive changes (55.4%) and actively challenging competitors for market share (54.5%). The lowest agreement (44.5%) related to responding aggressively to competitors' marketing strategies, where 37.3% of respondents were neutral. Disagreement (disagree and strongly disagree) was between 18.2% and 34.5%.

Table 5. Distribution of Responses on Competitive Aggressiveness (N = 110)

Item	SA %	A %	N %	D %	SD %	Agree %	Mean	SD
1. Respond aggressively to competitors' marketing	13.6	30.9	37.3	8.2	10.0	44.5	3.30	1.122
2. Actively challenge competitors for market share	23.6	30.9	18.2	17.3	10.0	54.5	3.41	1.294
3. Continuously monitor competitors' actions	13.6	42.7	9.1	14.5	20.0	56.3	3.15	1.383
4. Aggressive pricing or promotional tactics	22.7	33.6	9.1	14.5	20.0	56.3	3.25	1.466
5. First to introduce competitive changes	10.9	44.5	18.2	6.4	20.0	55.4	3.20	1.312
Composite							3.26	

Note. SA = strongly agree; A = agree; N = neutral; D = disagree; SD = strongly disagree. Agree % = SA + A. The composite is the average of the five item means. Source: Survey data (2026) via SPSS 25.

The item means ranged from 3.15 to 3.41, with a composite mean of 3.26. The highest mean was for actively challenging competitors to capture a greater share of the market (3.41) and the lowest for continuous monitoring of competitors (3.15). These values lie slightly above the scale midpoint, showing a moderate level of competitive aggressiveness. The standard deviations (1.12 to 1.47) reveal considerable variation among respondents, particularly on pricing and promotional tactics (SD = 1.466) and competitor monitoring (SD = 1.383). This variation suggests that competitive posture is not uniform across firms or branches.

Tables 6 to 8 give the item-level responses for the three growth measures. On financial growth (Table 6), more than half of respondents agreed with four of the five statements, the exception being consistent profitability growth, where 37.3% were neutral. On operational growth (Table 7), agreement was highest for continuous improvement of internal processes and effective resource management (both 55.4%). On market growth (Table 8), the share of respondents who agreed was lower than for the other measures, and 25.5% strongly disagreed that the firm had entered new segments, improved brand loyalty or increased retention.

Table 6. Distribution of Responses on Financial Growth (N = 110)

Item	SA %	A %	N %	D %	SD %	Agree %	Mean	SD
1. Profitability consistently increased	13.6	31.8	37.3	8.2	9.1	45.4	3.33	1.101
2. Revenue growth from innovative/risk-taking initiatives	22.7	31.8	18.2	18.2	9.1	54.5	3.41	1.273
3. Strong cash flow position year after year	13.6	43.6	10.0	14.5	18.2	57.2	3.20	1.353
4. Cost efficiency improved through strategic decisions	23.6	33.6	10.0	14.5	18.2	57.2	3.30	1.443
5. Financial position stronger than major competitors	11.8	44.5	19.1	6.4	18.2	56.3	3.25	1.288

Note. SA = strongly agree; A = agree; N = neutral; D = disagree; SD = strongly disagree. Agree % = SA + A. Source: Survey data (2026) via SPSS 25.

Table 7. Distribution of Responses on Operational Growth (N = 110)

Item	SA %	A %	N %	D %	SD %	Agree %	Mean	SD
1. Operational efficiency improved	12.7	30.9	38.2	7.3	10.9	43.6	3.27	1.124
2. Employee productivity and service delivery increased	23.6	30.9	18.2	16.4	10.9	54.5	3.40	1.308
3. Continuous improvement of internal processes	12.7	42.7	9.1	13.6	21.8	55.4	3.11	1.397
4. Effective resource management to reduce costs	22.7	32.7	9.1	13.6	21.8	55.4	3.21	1.491
5. Flexible systems adapting to market changes	11.8	41.8	18.2	6.4	21.8	53.6	3.15	1.349

Note. SA = strongly agree; A = agree; N = neutral; D = disagree; SD = strongly disagree. Agree % = SA + A. Source: Survey data (2026) via SPSS 25.

Table 8. Distribution of Responses on Market Growth (N = 110)

Item	SA %	A %	N %	D %	SD %	Agree %	Mean	SD
1. Customer base grown significantly	10.9	29.1	40.0	7.3	12.7	40.0	3.18	1.135
2. Market share expanded relative to competitors	23.6	29.1	18.2	16.4	12.7	52.7	3.35	1.344
3. Entered new market segments	10.9	40.9	9.1	13.6	25.5	51.8	2.98	1.421
4. Brand recognition and loyalty improved	20.0	31.8	9.1	13.6	25.5	51.8	3.07	1.513
5. Customer retention rate increased	10.9	39.1	18.2	6.4	25.5	50.0	3.04	1.388

Note. SA = strongly agree; A = agree; N = neutral; D = disagree; SD = strongly disagree. Agree % = SA + A. Source: Survey data (2026) via SPSS 25.

Table 9 summarises the three growth measures. Financial growth had the highest composite mean (3.30), followed by operational growth (3.23) and market growth (3.12). On financial growth, the most strongly endorsed items were revenue growth through innovative and risk-taking initiatives (mean = 3.41) and profitability growth (3.33), and 56.3% agreed that their firm's financial position was stronger than that of competitors. On operational growth, the highest item was employee productivity and service delivery (3.40). On market growth, market-share expansion relative to competitors had the highest mean (3.35), while entry into new market segments had the lowest (2.98). Agreement on market growth items ranged from 40.0% to 52.7%, which is lower than for the other two measures.

Table 9. Descriptive Summary of the Growth Measures (N = 110)

Measure	Item means (range)	Composite mean	Agreement range (%)
Financial growth	3.20 – 3.41	3.30	45.4 – 57.2
Operational growth	3.11 – 3.40	3.23	43.6 – 55.4
Market growth	2.98 – 3.35	3.12	40.0 – 52.7

Note. Composite = mean of five item means. Agreement = strongly agree + agree. Source: Survey data (2026) via SPSS 25.

Overall, the descriptive results portray firms that are moderately aggressive and report moderate growth, with market growth the weakest and most unevenly distributed of the three.

3.4 Test of Hypotheses

Table 10 reports the Spearman correlations between competitive aggressiveness and the three growth measures. Figure 2 displays the coefficients with their 95% confidence intervals.

Table 10. Spearman's Rank-Order Correlations between Competitive Aggressiveness and Firm Growth (N = 110)

Hypothesis	Growth measure	ρ	95% CI	ρ^2	p (2-tailed)	Strength	Decision on H_0
H ₀₁	Financial growth	.443	[.279, .582]	.196	< .001	Moderate	Rejected
H ₀₂	Operational growth	.514	[.362, .640]	.264	< .001	Moderate	Rejected
H ₀₃	Market growth	.407	[.238, .552]	.166	< .001	Moderate	Rejected

Note. All correlations are significant at the .01 level (SPSS reports Sig. = .000). Confidence intervals and ρ^2 were computed from the reported coefficients (Fisher z transformation, $n = 110$). Source: Survey data (2026) via SPSS 25.

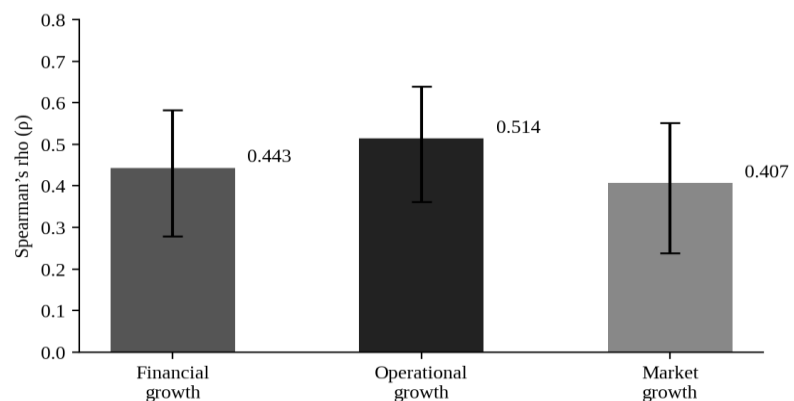


Figure 2. Spearman correlations between competitive aggressiveness and the three growth measures, with 95% confidence intervals.

Hypothesis one (H₀₁)

Competitive aggressiveness had a moderate, positive and significant relationship with financial growth ($\rho = .443$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.279, .582]). The null hypothesis was rejected. Competitive aggressiveness shared about 19.6% of its rank variance with financial growth. Firms that reported stronger competitive aggression also reported higher profitability, revenue growth, cash flow, cost efficiency and relative financial strength.

Hypothesis two (H₀₂)

Competitive aggressiveness had a moderate, positive and significant relationship with operational growth ($\rho = .514$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.362, .640]). The null hypothesis was rejected. This was the strongest of the three coefficients and corresponds to about 26.4% shared variance. Firms that were more aggressive reported greater improvements in efficiency, productivity, process improvement, resource management and system flexibility.

Hypothesis three (H₀₃)

Competitive aggressiveness had a moderate, positive and significant relationship with market growth ($\rho = .407$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.238, .552]). The null hypothesis was rejected. This was the weakest of the three coefficients (about 16.6% shared variance). More aggressive firms reported greater growth in customer base, share, segments, brand loyalty and retention, but the association was smaller than for operational growth.

The three confidence intervals overlap substantially. The ordering of the coefficients (operational > financial > market) should therefore be treated as suggestive rather than as

evidence that the associations differ in the population. Table 11 summarises the outcome of the hypothesis tests.

Table 11. Summary of Hypothesis Tests

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
H ₀₁	Competitive aggressiveness has no significant relationship with financial growth	Rejected ($q = .443$, $p < .001$)
H ₀₂	Competitive aggressiveness has no significant relationship with operational growth	Rejected ($q = .514$, $p < .001$)
H ₀₃	Competitive aggressiveness has no significant relationship with market growth	Rejected ($q = .407$, $p < .001$)

4. Discussion

4.1 Competitive Aggressiveness and Financial Growth

The significant, moderate relationship between competitive aggressiveness and financial growth ($q = .443$) is consistent with the expectation drawn from the resource-based and competitive dynamics perspectives that firms that act decisively against rivals capture more revenue and, if pricing is managed carefully, convert it into profit [20], [9]. It agrees with Olayemi et al. [13], who found that competitive aggressiveness significantly improved business performance among Lagos SMEs, and it is directionally consistent with the finding of Akinwale et al. [28] that EO dimensions are jointly related to financial performance. It differs from Ibrahim and Abu [12], who found a non-significant effect among Abuja SMEs. A plausible explanation is the structure of the market studied here. In a concentrated industry of four operators, rivals' actions are visible and revenue is highly sensitive to tariff, bundle and promotional decisions, so a firm's competitive posture is more likely to show up in financial outcomes than in the fragmented SME markets examined elsewhere.

The coefficient is moderate rather than strong, and that is also informative. About 80% of the rank variation in financial growth is unrelated to competitive aggressiveness. This is in line with the cautions in the literature that price-based aggression can erode margins and provoke retaliation [20], and with the South-South cost environment, where diesel costs, vandalism and power disruptions compress margins whatever a firm's competitive posture. Financial gains from aggression are real but contested.

4.2 Competitive Aggressiveness and Operational Growth

The strongest association was with operational growth ($q = .514$). This outcome is explained well by the dynamic capabilities perspective, under which competitive action is sustained through sensing, seizing and reconfiguring [24], [25]. Firms that monitor rivals closely discover performance gaps, and those that strive to be first with service changes must improve processes, capacity and delivery speed. Operations are the platform through which aggressive moves are executed; a firm cannot sustain an aggressive promotion or a first-mover launch without the network, systems and staff productivity to support it. This reasoning is consistent with Wales et al. [17], who show that the performance effects of firm capabilities are shaped by the firm's entrepreneurial orientation, so capability and posture have to be considered together.

Previous Nigerian studies did not test this link because they did not separate operational outcomes. The present result therefore adds a new insight: competitive aggressiveness may matter more as a discipline that raises internal standards than as a direct revenue lever. The cross-sectional design cannot, however, show whether aggression raises operational capability or whether firms with stronger operations feel

more able to compete aggressively. Both directions are plausible, and probably reinforce each other.

4.3 Competitive Aggressiveness and Market Growth

The relationship with market growth ($q = .407$) was significant but the weakest of the three. It supports the evidence of Okusanya et al. [26] that competitive aggressiveness is associated with higher market share, although the present coefficient is more modest than the very high explanatory power reported by those authors for consumer-goods manufacturers. It also tempers the interpretation of Wegwu and Princewill [11], whose telecommunication sample did not emphasise competitive aggressiveness as a significant correlate of market share and service quality; the present study, using a growth rather than a competitiveness outcome and a wider regional sample, finds a clear positive association.

Several features of the South-South telecommunications market may explain why the market link is weaker than the operational link. Rivals match one another's tariffs and bundles quickly, so share gains from aggressive moves are short-lived [20]. Customers frequently hold multiple SIM cards, which dilutes loyalty effects. Coverage gaps and service quality problems may limit conversion of promotional activity into retained subscribers. The descriptive results support this reading: market growth had the lowest composite mean (3.12), and entry into new market segments was the weakest item (2.98).

4.4 Overall Interpretation

Across all three measures the pattern is consistent: competitive aggressiveness is positively and significantly associated with growth, with moderate magnitudes. The results offer cumulative support for the resource-based and dynamic capabilities perspectives, which predict that aggressive behaviour rooted in capabilities is associated with superior outcomes, and for competitive dynamics research, which predicts that gains are real but contested. The strongest link being with operations suggests that the capability to execute is the most important channel. Managers should therefore see competitive aggressiveness as an organisational capability that has to be built and funded, rather than as a purely marketing tactic.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between competitive aggressiveness and the financial, operational and market growth of telecommunication firms in South-South Nigeria using data from 110 respondents across 24 branches of four operators. The following conclusions are drawn.

1. Competitive aggressiveness is positively and significantly related to financial growth ($q = .443$), operational growth ($q = .514$) and market growth ($q = .407$). All three null hypotheses were rejected.
2. The relationships are moderate in strength. Competitive aggressiveness is associated with growth but explains only between about 17% and 26% of its variation, so other factors matter as well.
3. The association is strongest with operational growth, which suggests that aggressive competitive behaviour is most closely tied to the firm's internal capacity to execute and improve.
4. Firms in the region exhibit a moderate level of competitive aggressiveness (composite mean = 3.26) and moderate growth, with market growth the weakest dimension, which indicates scope for improvement.

5.1 Implications

Theoretical implications. The results lend support to the resource-based and dynamic capabilities perspectives by showing that competitive aggressiveness, treated as an organisational capability expressed in monitoring, responding and pre-empting, is associated with growth on all three measures. They also extend the competitive aggressiveness literature, which has relied mostly on single performance measures, by

showing that the strength of the association varies across growth dimensions, with the operational dimension the most closely linked. The findings reinforce the Lumpkin and Dess [9] argument that EO dimensions can be studied separately, since a single dimension displays a meaningful and differentiated pattern of relationships.

Practical implications. For managers, the findings suggest that competitive aggression should be planned as a system comprising intelligence, decision speed, pricing discipline and operational readiness, not as a stand-alone marketing activity. For regulators and policymakers, they indicate that rivalry is linked to improved operational and financial outcomes, which supports a competition policy that preserves a contestable market while protecting service quality.

5.2 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Limitations. The findings should be read in light of several limitations. The design is cross-sectional and correlational, so causal direction cannot be established. The data are perceptual and self-reported, and the respondents included line staff and supervisors as well as managers, so common-method bias and rank-related differences in perception are possible. Reliability evidence derives from a small pilot ($n = 10$), and alpha was computed on construct scores rather than within each construct's item set; construct-level reliability from the main sample was not available. The sample covers four operators in one region, which limits generalisation. Finally, the bivariate analysis does not control for firm size, operator, state or the other EO dimensions.

Directions for future research. Future studies should use longitudinal designs and objective financial and network data; report construct-level reliability and validity from the main sample; test competitive aggressiveness together with innovativeness, risk-taking and proactiveness in multivariate models; examine mediators such as operational capability and moderators such as environmental dynamism and regulatory intensity; and compare operators and states.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made for managers of telecommunication firms in South-South Nigeria and for policymakers.

1. **Pursue capability-backed competitive aggression.** Because the strongest association was with operational growth, firms should match every aggressive pricing, promotional or service-launch decision with an assessment of network capacity, staffing and support systems, so that competitive moves do not outrun delivery capability.
2. **Institutionalise competitor intelligence.** Competitor monitoring had the highest agreement but also considerable disagreement across respondents (34.5% disagreed). Firms should set up structured processes, such as regular tariff and coverage benchmarking and a dedicated market-intelligence function, so that monitoring is uniform across branches and informs decisions.
3. **Design pricing and promotional tactics for margin protection.** Given the moderate link with financial growth and the risk of retaliation, tactics should be targeted at specific segments and tested for profitability, rather than applied as blanket discounts that invite price wars.

5.4 Alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals

This study on competitive aggressiveness and the growth of telecommunication firms in South-South Nigeria aligns most closely with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), and it also supports SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). On SDG 8, the findings show that firms that monitor rivals, respond decisively and move first on service changes also report stronger financial growth ($q = .443$), operational growth ($q = .514$) and market growth ($q = .407$). Financially healthy and expanding telecommunication firms sustain revenue, investment and employment, and they support related activities such as mobile money, retail distribution and digital services. This contributes to productive economic activity and job creation in

the region, in line with SDG 8's focus on sustained, inclusive growth and higher productivity through innovation.

On SDG 9, the strongest association was with operational growth. Competitive pressure appears to push firms to upgrade networks, improve service delivery and strengthen internal processes. This supports resilient infrastructure and wider access to information and communication technology, which is a core aim of SDG 9. It is especially relevant in a region where power supply, right-of-way and vandalism problems constrain network expansion. On SDG 17, the study's recommendations call for regulators such as the Nigerian Communications Commission to protect fair competition and service quality and to ease infrastructure constraints. This points to the value of cooperation between operators, regulators and other stakeholders in making competition produce broad benefits. Overall, the study suggests that disciplined, capability-backed competition among operators can advance economic growth and digital infrastructure in South-South Nigeria. Because the associations are moderate and the data are cross-sectional and perceptual, the alignment should be read as supportive evidence rather than proof of causal impact.

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