

STRATEGIC ORIENTATION AND FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY AMONGST MIDDLE INCOME GROUP IN THE NIGER DELTA: MODERATING CORE VALUE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of strategic orientation on financial sustainability among middle-income earners in the Niger Delta, with core values as a moderating variable. Economic sustainability, the dependent variable, is measured through revenue reliability, cost efficiency, and financial independence. In contrast, the independent variable, strategic orientation, encompasses dimensions of strategic aggressiveness, innovation orientation, and risk management. The research employs an ex post facto cum cross-sectional survey design, utilizing secondary data sourced from the National Bureau of Statistics and World Bank-supported surveys. The target population comprises professionals, entrepreneurs, and civil servants categorized as middle-income earners.

Findings reveal a significant positive relationship between strategic orientation and financial sustainability, highlighting that proactive engagement with opportunities, innovation, and risk management practices foster economic resilience. However, the study identifies a nuanced role of core values; while these principles provide ethical grounding and stability, they may restrict the adoption of innovative or high-risk strategies necessary for dynamic market adaptation. This duality underscores the importance of balancing adherence to core values with strategic flexibility.

Recommendations include promoting innovation and risk-taking through targeted training, optimizing financial operations for efficiency, and fostering core values like accountability and transparency that align with strategic objectives. Businesses are also encouraged to diversify income streams and integrate adaptive strategies to mitigate economic volatility.

Keywords: Strategic orientation, financial sustainability, middle-income earners, Niger Delta, core values.

1.0 BACKGROUNDS TO THE STUDY

The Niger Delta region, though rich in natural resources, faces persistent economic challenges that disproportionately affect its middle-income group. These individuals, often regarded as the backbone of economic stability, are caught in a precarious position due to the volatile nature of the region's economy, environmental degradation, and a lack of diversified economic opportunities. The major challenge for this group lies in achieving financial sustainability

amidst fluctuating incomes, rising costs of living, and limited access to robust financial systems. Financial sustainability, defined as the ability to manage financial resources effectively to ensure long-term stability and growth, is critical for this group to maintain their living standards and foster resilience against economic shocks.

In the context of the Niger Delta, financial sustainability is particularly relevant due to the region's dependency on oil revenues, which introduces economic instability. For middle-income earners, sustainability encompasses the need for reliable income streams, efficient financial management, and reduced reliance on external support. Revenue reliability is vital for this group to meet their obligations, while cost efficiency ensures prudent allocation of resources. Financial independence enables them to reduce dependency on volatile income sources, creating a buffer against unforeseen disruptions. As scholars such as Balabanova et al. (2013) emphasize, these dimensions collectively enhance economic resilience and foster long-term stability.

Strategic orientation has emerged as a critical framework for addressing financial sustainability challenges. Defined as the strategic posture an organization or individual adopts to align resources with goals, strategic orientation involves deliberate actions that enhance decision-making and operational efficiency. The dimensions of strategic orientation include strategic aggressiveness, which emphasizes proactive efforts to capitalize on opportunities and mitigate threats; innovation orientation, which focuses on leveraging creativity and technology to improve outcomes; and risk management, which underscores the importance of anticipating and mitigating financial and operational uncertainties. Empirical studies such as those by Gatignon and Xuereb (1997) show that these dimensions not only enhance financial outcomes but also foster resilience by aligning strategies with dynamic economic conditions.

Financial sustainability, as the dependent variable, is measured through dimensions such as revenue reliability, cost efficiency, and financial independence. Revenue reliability refers to the ability to maintain consistent income streams, which, as Bowman (2011) notes, is essential for long-term economic stability. Cost efficiency highlights the importance of resource optimization to reduce waste and enhance profitability, aligning with Balabanova et al.'s (2013) findings that cost management is a key determinant of financial success. Financial independence reflects the capacity to reduce reliance on external support, fostering resilience and self-sufficiency. These measures are crucial for middle-income earners in the Niger Delta, where economic volatility demands strategic financial planning.

The interrelationships between strategic orientation and financial sustainability are well-documented in the literature. Strategic aggressiveness drives proactive financial behaviours, enabling individuals and organizations to seize opportunities and reduce vulnerabilities. Innovation orientation fosters creative problem-solving, allowing middle-income earners to diversify income streams and optimize resources through technology and innovation. Risk management strengthens financial sustainability by reducing exposure to uncertainties and ensuring prudent financial practices. As highlighted by Gatignon and Xuereb (1997), these dimensions work in tandem to enhance financial outcomes and build resilience.

Previous empirical studies align with the focus of this research. For instance, Smith and Darko (2014) examined the role of core values in driving organizational sustainability and found that

aligning strategies with foundational values enhances long-term outcomes. Similarly, Olawale and Ojo (2023) explored the impact of innovation and risk management on financial performance in Nigerian small and medium enterprises (SMEs), emphasizing the role of strategic orientation in navigating economic challenges. While these studies provide valuable insights, they often focus on organizational contexts, leaving a gap in understanding how these dynamics apply to individuals or specific groups, such as the middle-income earners in the Niger Delta.

This study departs from existing literature by integrating core values as a moderating variable that enhances the relationship between strategic orientation and financial sustainability. Core values, which represent fundamental beliefs and guiding principles, shape decision-making and influence the adoption of strategic practices. By investigating the moderating role of core values, this research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how middle-income earners in the Niger Delta can achieve financial sustainability amidst complex socio-economic challenges. Through this approach, the study not only fills a critical gap in the literature but also offers actionable insights for fostering resilience and stability in a region fraught with economic uncertainties.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Financial sustainability is a critical concern for middle-income groups in the Niger Delta, a region characterized by economic volatility, environmental degradation, and socio-political instability. For these individuals, financial sustainability—the ability to effectively manage financial resources to ensure long-term stability and growth—is increasingly difficult to achieve. Rising living costs, unpredictable income flows, and limited access to formal financial systems exacerbate the precariousness of their financial situation. The middle-income group, often regarded as the economic stabilizer of society, faces unique challenges in this region due to its reliance on an oil-driven economy, which is highly susceptible to global price fluctuations and local disruptions.

The financial sustainability challenges confronting this group have far-reaching consequences. Revenue instability undermines their ability to meet essential obligations, such as education, healthcare, and housing, leading to a decline in living standards. Poor cost efficiency, stemming from inadequate financial planning and wasteful expenditure, further drains their resources, leaving little room for savings or investments. Moreover, the lack of financial independence, marked by over-reliance on unstable income sources or external support, renders them vulnerable to economic shocks. These challenges collectively stifle their capacity to achieve economic mobility, eroding their quality of life and fostering socio-economic insecurity in the region.

Strategic orientation offers a promising pathway to address these challenges by equipping middle-income earners with the tools to navigate financial uncertainties. The dimensions of strategic orientation—strategic aggressiveness, innovation orientation, and risk management—can significantly enhance financial sustainability. Strategic aggressiveness enables proactive engagement with economic opportunities, allowing individuals to diversify income streams and reduce dependence on a single source. Innovation orientation emphasizes the adoption of creative solutions and technology to optimize resource use, improve productivity, and generate

additional revenue. Risk management fosters resilience by mitigating exposure to financial uncertainties and ensuring prudent financial decision-making. Together, these dimensions create a framework for enhancing financial sustainability by addressing its core dimensions: revenue reliability, cost efficiency, and financial independence.

Several previous studies have explored the intersection of strategic orientation and financial outcomes. Bowman (2011) examined how revenue diversification impacts financial stability in nonprofit organizations, while Balabanova et al. (2013) highlighted the role of cost management in enhancing economic resilience. Olawale and Ojo (2023) investigated how innovation and risk management influence financial performance in Nigerian SMEs, emphasizing the importance of strategic practices in navigating economic challenges. However, most of these studies focus on organizational contexts, leaving a gap in understanding how strategic orientation applies to individuals, particularly middle-income groups in economically volatile regions like the Niger Delta.

Core values, as a moderating variable, play a pivotal role in shaping the effectiveness of strategic orientation in enhancing financial sustainability. Core values represent the guiding principles and ethical foundations that influence decision-making and strategic priorities. For middle-income earners in the Niger Delta, aligning strategic practices with core values fosters consistency, accountability, and adaptability, enhancing the implementation of revenue diversification strategies, innovative financial tools, and risk management frameworks. Smith and Darko (2014) demonstrated that core values significantly enhance organizational sustainability by providing a moral compass that aligns strategies with long-term goals. Similarly, the integration of core values into individual financial practices ensures that strategic orientation is not only effective but also sustainable and ethically grounded.

This study addresses the gap in the literature by focusing on the interaction between strategic orientation and financial sustainability at the individual level, with core values as a moderating factor. By exploring how middle-income earners in the Niger Delta can leverage strategic aggressiveness, innovation orientation, and risk management to address financial sustainability challenges, this research provides a novel perspective that bridges theoretical insights with practical solutions. It highlights the potential of core values to enhance strategic orientation, offering a comprehensive approach to achieving financial stability in a region fraught with economic uncertainties.

Identifying the middle-income group in the Niger Delta region

Identifying the middle-income group in the Niger Delta region involves a combination of economic, social, and demographic indicators. While there is no universal definition of the middle-income group, researchers and policymakers typically rely on a set of criteria to classify individuals or households within this category. These criteria include income levels, occupational status, consumption patterns, access to basic services, and ownership of assets.

1. Income Levels

- Middle-income households are typically those earning between the lower and upper thresholds of income as defined by national standards or regional living costs. For

instance, the World Bank categorizes middle-income groups globally as those earning \$10 to \$50 per day in purchasing power parity (PPP).

- In the Niger Delta, specific income thresholds can be adjusted based on regional living costs, inflation rates, and economic conditions. These thresholds should account for the area's relatively higher cost of living due to oil-driven inflation and urbanization.

2. Occupation and Employment Status

- Middle-income earners often hold stable, skilled, or semi-skilled jobs. These include civil servants, professionals (teachers, nurses, and engineers), entrepreneurs, and small business owners.
- In the Niger Delta, middle-income individuals may also include those engaged in the oil and gas sector, small-scale traders, or artisans whose incomes exceed subsistence levels.

3. Consumption and Expenditure Patterns

- Middle-income groups are identified by their ability to meet basic needs and afford some discretionary spending.
- They are typically able to spend on healthcare, education, housing, transportation, and occasionally luxury goods or services.
- Surveys of consumption expenditure patterns can provide insights into the spending behaviour of households in the region.

1.3 Qualities of Middle Income Group and Analysis: A Stylized Facts

1.3. Table presenting stylized facts about the middle-income group in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria:

Category	Details
Composition	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Professionals (e.g., teachers, civil servants, small business owners, artisans).- Skilled workers in oil and gas companies.- Entrepreneurs.
Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Income range: ₦100,000 to ₦400,000 per month (varies based on cost of living in urban vs. rural areas).- Access to secondary and tertiary education.- Ownership of homes or rented apartments in urban and semi-urban areas.- Higher consumption patterns compared to low-income groups.- High dependency ratio due to extended family systems.

Measurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Income Brackets: Based on Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) poverty and inequality measures. - Expenditure Patterns: Proportion of income spent on essentials (housing, food, education). - Access to Amenities: Ownership of vehicles, access to healthcare, and ICT use.
Identities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Predominantly literate and urbanized. - Mixed ethnic composition (Ijaw, Urhobo, Ogoni, Itsekiri, etc.). - Participation in civic organizations and local politics. - Significant contributors to community development projects.

Source: World Bank, Nigeria

<https://microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/6410/download/180546>

1.3.1 Meals by Class and Characteristics

The middle-income group in Nigeria typically consumes meals that reflect moderate affordability, nutritional value, and cultural preferences. Their meals often balance traditional dishes with occasional indulgence in higher-cost or modernized foods. Below is an overview of the class of meals commonly eaten by the middle-income group?

Meal Type	Examples	Characteristics
Staple Foods	Rice (e.g., jollof rice, fried rice), yam (boiled, pounded yam), plantains, semovita, garri, fufu, amala.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Affordable and readily available. - Often accompanied by soups or stews.
Soups and Stews	Egusi soup, vegetable soup (e.g., edikaikong), ogbono soup, banga soup, tomato stew, and pepper soup.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Typically prepared with moderate quantities of protein (fish, chicken, or meat). - Rich in spices and local flavours.
Proteins	Fish (e.g., catfish, tilapia), chicken, turkey, beef, goat meat, eggs, and occasionally prawns or snails.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Moderately affordable proteins are common. - Occasional splurging on premium options like prawns/snails during celebrations.
Carbohydrates	Bread (sliced or locally baked), noodles, potatoes, pasta, and cereals (e.g., cornflakes, oatmeal).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Combines quick-to-prepare options like noodles with more traditional carbohydrate staples.
Fruits and Vegetables	Watermelon, oranges, bananas, pawpaw, spinach, ugu (fluted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increasing consumption due to health awareness.

	pumpkin leaves), okra, tomatoes, and onions.	- Often purchased fresh from markets.
Snacks and Drinks	Puff-puff, buns, akara, meat pies, chin-chin, suya (grilled meat), soft drinks, malt drinks, and fruit juices.	- Affordable snacks are a regular part of the diet. - Occasionally, middle-income earners indulge in branded fast foods.
Convenience Foods	Packaged foods like biscuits, canned drinks, and processed juices.	- Rising consumption of convenience foods for on-the-go lifestyles.

Source: Authors' Compilation (2024) supported by available data

Table 1.3.2

In the past 7 days, did members of this household consume any of the following meal

		Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes: Staple Foods, Proteins, Fruits and Vegetables, and Convenience Foods	30.2	30.3	30.3
	No	69.5	69.7	100.0
	Total	99.6	100.0	
Missing	System	.4		
Total		100.0		

Source: Authors' Computation (2024)

Table 1.3.2 provides insights into the dietary habits of middle-income households in the Niger Delta, reflecting their capacity to afford specific types of meals. Based on the data, 30.3% of respondents indicated that their households consumed staple foods, proteins, fruits and vegetables, and convenience foods in the past seven days. This implies that these items fall within the financial reach of this income group, showcasing their ability to access essential and moderately priced components of a balanced diet. These food types are fundamental and reflect a mix of tradition and affordability, aligning with the dietary expectations of middle-income earners.

Conversely, the data reveals that 69.7% of respondents did not report consuming soups and stews, carbohydrates, snacks, and drinks within the same period. This suggests that while these items are popular and culturally significant, they might have been deprioritized due to cost constraints or shifts in consumption patterns. The inability to afford these items indicates that, despite their classification as middle-income, many households in the region still face limitations in diversifying their meals. The findings highlight a disparity within this group, where income levels vary enough to affect the composition of their diet, leaving certain desirable food categories out of reach for a significant majority.

1.3.3 Niger Delta State Middle-income group Household Survey

STATE	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
VALID				
Abia	5400	2.7	2.7	2.7
Akwa Ibom	5400	2.7	2.7	8.1
Bayelsa	5400	2.7	2.7	16.3
Cross River	5400	2.7	2.7	24.1
Delta	5400	2.7	2.7	26.8
Edo	5400	2.7	2.7	32.2
Imo	5400	2.7	2.7	43.1
Ondo	5400	2.7	2.7	75.6
Rivers	5400	2.7	2.7	86.4
Total	48600	24.3	24.3	315.3

Source: Authors' Computation (2024) using NBS (2021). National Bureau of Statistics - Living Standards Survey 2018-2019 and 2022-2023

The Niger Delta State Middle Income Group Household Survey provides a detailed breakdown of the distribution of middle-income households across the region. Each state, including Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo, and Rivers, recorded a frequency of 5,400 households, representing 2.7% of the total surveyed population per state. This uniform percentage suggests an even representation of middle-income households across the surveyed states, which may reflect efforts to ensure balanced sampling or a comparable distribution of this income group in the region.

The cumulative percentage increases steadily as additional states are considered, with a total of 48,600 households surveyed, accounting for 24.3% of the total sample. This proportion highlights the significance of the middle-income group in the overall demographic profile of the Niger Delta, offering valuable insights into their living standards and economic behaviour. The survey's reliance on data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), spanning 2018 to 2023, underscores the robustness of the methodology, combining recent trends with historical perspectives to paint a comprehensive picture of middle-income households in the region.

2.0 LITERATURE

The topic of Strategic Orientation and Financial Sustainability amongst Middle-Income Groups in the Niger Delta: Moderating Core Value can be anchored on three relevant theories that provide a foundation for understanding the relationship between strategic orientation, financial sustainability, and core values.

2.1.1 Resource-Based View (RBV), proposed by Barney in 1991. This theory emphasizes that an organization's or individual's competitive advantage is derived from the unique resources they possess, including tangible and intangible assets; for middle-income groups in the Niger

Delta, their education, entrepreneurial skills, and access to local markets can be viewed as strategic resources. These resources, when effectively utilized and aligned with a strategic orientation, can drive financial sustainability by creating opportunities for consistent income and growth. The core values of hard work and resilience within the region further enhance the capacity to leverage these resources for long-term financial stability.

2.2.2 Stakeholder Theory, introduced by Freeman in 1984, posits that the success of any entity is influenced by its ability to consider and address the needs of all stakeholders, including employees, customers, suppliers, and the community. This is particularly relevant to the middle-income group in the Niger Delta, as their financial sustainability often hinges on maintaining strong relationships within their networks. Strategic orientation that prioritizes collaboration and community engagement resonates with the communal values in the region and fosters trust, which can improve financial outcomes and long-term viability.

2.2.3 Institutional Theory, articulated by DiMaggio and Powell in 1983, highlights the role of institutional norms, rules, and cultural systems in shaping organizational and individual behaviour. For the Niger Delta's middle-income group, adherence to societal norms and values such as trustworthiness and communal support influences their financial decisions and strategic orientation. Institutions such as cooperatives, local financial groups, and cultural practices act as moderating forces, reinforcing the importance of core values in achieving sustainable financial outcomes.

2.2 Conceptual Review

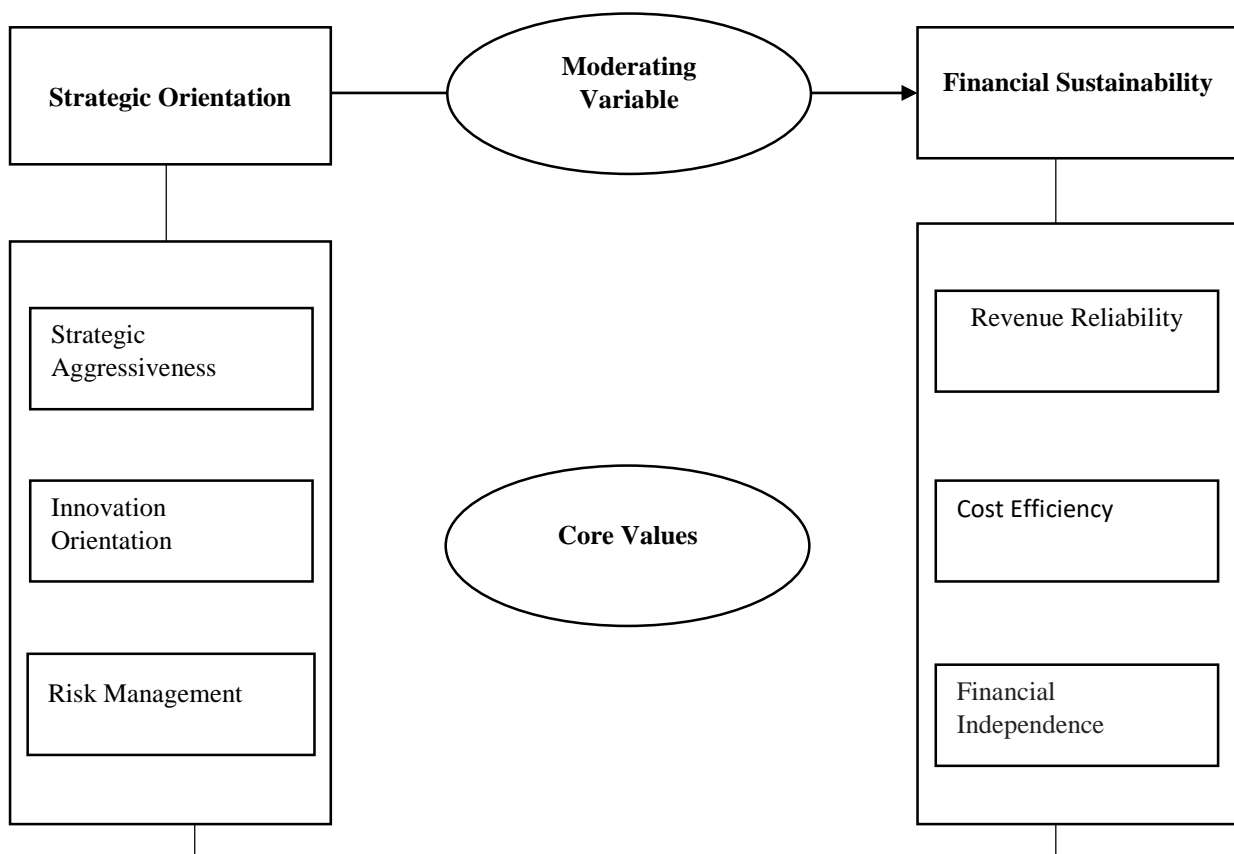


Figure 2.1 Conceptual Model of the Relationship Strategic Orientation and Financial Sustainability amongst Middle-Income Groups in the Niger Delta.

Source: Conceptualized by Silva Opuala-Charles (2024) and adapted from the Strategic Aggressiveness - Alqahtani, F., & Paranagamage (2021); Innovation Orientation - Chandra, S., & Kumar(2020); Risk Management - Al-Mutairi, A., & Mohammed (2019).while the measures of Financial Sustainability adapted from the Revenue Reliability – Bowman (2011); Cost Efficiency- Balabanova et al. (2013); Financial Independence – Fowler (2000). The moderating variable is Core Values - Smith & Darko (2014).

3.0 METHODS OF ANALYSIS

The methodology for analyzing the relationship between strategic orientation and financial sustainability among middle-income groups in the Niger Delta involves robust quantitative techniques to explore the interconnections between variables. Below are the key methods of analysis used in the study:

3.1 Research Design

The study employs an Ex post facto cum cross-sectional survey design, suitable for collecting data at a single point in time to examine the interplay between strategic orientation and financial sustainability. This design helps capture the experiences and perspectives of middle-income earners in the Niger Delta regarding the dimensions of strategic orientation and their financial practices. However, the data used was secondary data sourced by the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics through World Bank support.

3.2 Sampling, Data Collection and Sources

The study utilized random sampling of 48,600 middle-income households drawn across the nine (9) states of the Niger Delta. Secondary data was gathered using structured questionnaires administered by the National Bureau of Statistics - Living Standards Survey [Data set 2021-2023]. World Bank, Development Data Group. <https://doi.org/10.48529/8GBE-Z155>. The questionnaire includes sections on:

- **Strategic Orientation:** Measuring strategic aggressiveness, innovation orientation, and risk management.
- **Financial Sustainability:** Assessing revenue reliability, cost efficiency, and financial independence.
- **Core Values:** Evaluating how guiding principles influence strategic and financial decisions.
- The sample frame includes professionals, small business owners, and civil servants categorized as middle-income earners based on regional income thresholds.

3.3 Analytical Tools

Regression Analysis

Multiple regression models are used to test the impact of strategic orientation dimensions on financial sustainability measures.

$$SO_i = \beta_{01} + \beta_1 SA + \beta_2 IO + \beta_3 RM + \mu_{i1} \quad (3.1)$$

$$FS_i = \beta_{02} + \beta_1 RR + \beta_2 CE + \beta_3 FI + \mu_{i2} \quad (3.2)$$

Where:

SO = Strategic Orientation

SA = Strategic Aggressiveness

IO = Innovation Orientation

RM = Risk Management

RR = revenue reliability

CE = Cost Efficiency

FI = Financial Independence

μ = Error term; β_0 = intercept term; $\beta_1 - \beta_4$ = parameters

Moderation Analysis

Employs interaction terms to test the moderating effect of core values on the relationship between strategic orientation and financial sustainability.

$$FS_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SO + \beta_2 CV + \beta_3 (SO \times CV) + \mu_i$$

Where:

SO = Strategic Orientation

CV = Core Values

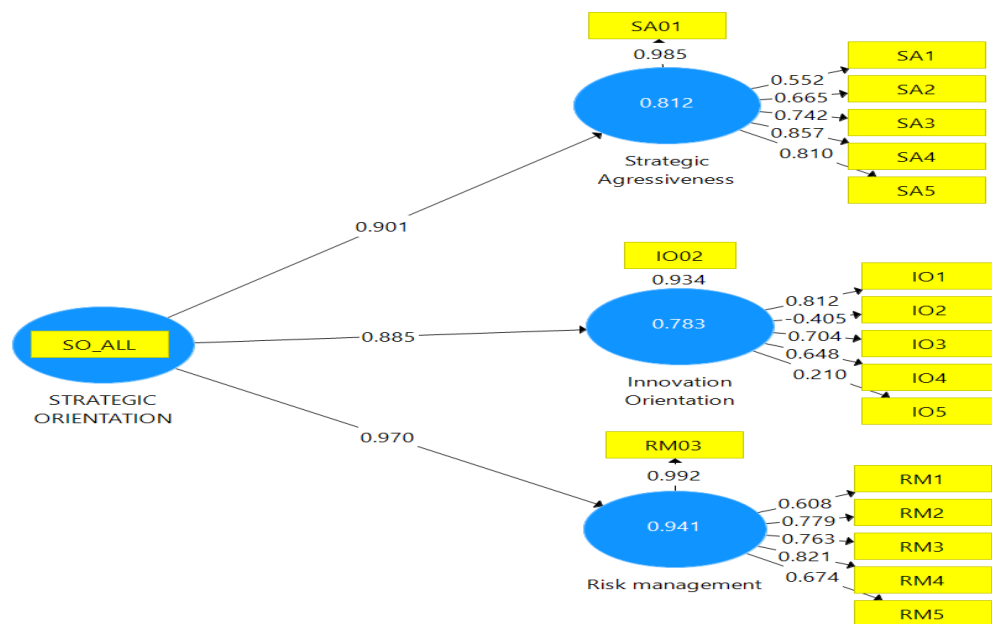
(SO × CV) = Interaction term representing the moderation effect.

Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to ethical guidelines by ensuring voluntary participation, confidentiality of respondent information, and informed consent.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Multivariate relationship between Strategic Orientation and its dimensions



Source: Authors' Computation (2024)

The graph illustrates the relationship between strategic orientation and its three critical dimensions: strategic aggressiveness, innovation orientation, and risk management. Each dimension plays a vital role in shaping the overall construct of strategic orientation, as evidenced by their high factor loadings, which indicate strong contributions.

Strategic aggressiveness is a significant component of strategic orientation, with a factor loading of 0.901, demonstrating its substantial impact. Within this dimension, sub-indicators such as SA3 (0.742) and SA4 (0.857) exhibit stronger correlations than others. This suggests that elements like proactive competition and rapid decision-making are integral to fostering strategic aggressiveness. For the middle-income group in the Niger Delta, adopting strategic aggressiveness can be instrumental in addressing financial sustainability challenges. These individuals, including entrepreneurs and professionals, often face economic uncertainties and volatile markets. Embracing proactive strategies, such as pursuing emerging market opportunities and staying ahead of competition, can help stabilize their financial position and enhance growth.

Innovation orientation, with a factor loading of 0.885, also plays a pivotal role in strategic orientation. Among its sub-indicators, IO1 (0.812) shows a strong alignment, while IO2 (-0.405) reflects a negative correlation, indicating potential barriers to implementing innovation effectively. This disparity underscores the need for targeted approaches to foster creativity and technological advancement while addressing challenges such as cost constraints and limited technical expertise. Middle-income earners in the Niger Delta can improve their financial sustainability by leveraging affordable innovation, such as adopting mobile technology for business operations or collaborating with innovation hubs to improve their productivity. Empirical studies, such as those by Egbetokun et al. (2019), highlight how innovation orientation enhances resilience and adaptability in volatile economies, which aligns with the realities faced by this demographic.

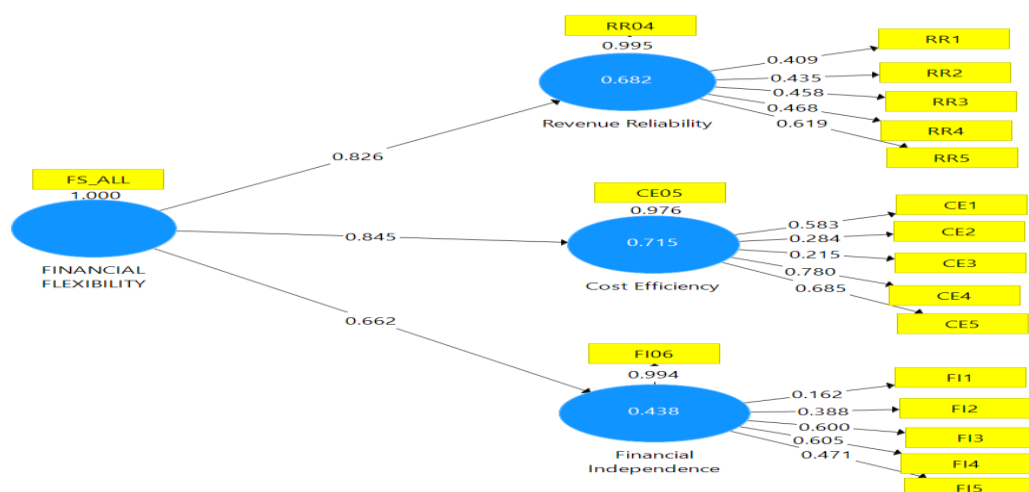
Risk management demonstrates the strongest connection to strategic orientation, with a factor loading of 0.970, reflecting its critical importance. The sub-indicators, particularly RM3 (0.763) and RM4 (0.821) reveal that effective risk assessment and mitigation strategies significantly contribute to financial stability. Given the socio-economic and environmental challenges prevalent in the Niger Delta, risk management becomes indispensable for middle-income groups. By implementing structured risk strategies, such as diversifying income streams or investing in insurance and contingency plans, these individuals can better withstand economic shocks and safeguard their financial sustainability.

The findings indicate that a well-rounded approach incorporating strategic aggressiveness, innovation orientation, and risk management can significantly enhance financial sustainability among middle-income earners in the Niger Delta. These dimensions, when combined, provide a robust framework for addressing economic challenges, improving resource allocation, and ensuring long-term viability. Research by Ogunleye et al. (2020) reinforces this perspective, demonstrating that strategic orientation positively influences financial outcomes in Nigeria, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises.

Core values also play a moderating role in enhancing the relationship between strategic orientation and financial sustainability. Values such as resilience, adaptability, and ethical decision-making ensure that strategies remain grounded in principles that support sustainable growth. Studies like those by Adesanya et al. (2018) have shown that core values can enhance the effectiveness of innovation and risk strategies, ensuring alignment with broader financial goals.

In conclusion, the graph underscores the interconnectedness of strategic orientation dimensions and their relevance to financial sustainability for middle-income earners in the Niger Delta. By fostering proactive competitiveness, embracing innovation, and implementing robust risk management, this demographic can navigate economic uncertainties effectively. Coupled with a strong foundation of core values, these strategies provide a pathway for achieving sustainable financial growth.

Multivariate relationship between Financial Sustainability and its measures



Source: Authors' Computation (2024)

The graph highlights the relationship between financial flexibility and its dimensions: revenue reliability, cost efficiency, and financial independence. These dimensions collectively shape the concept of financial flexibility, as indicated by their strong factor loadings. Revenue reliability, with a loading of 0.826, signifies its critical contribution to financial flexibility. Sub-indicators such as RR4 (0.619) and RR5 (0.995) show stronger correlations, emphasizing the importance of stable and predictable revenue streams. For middle-income groups in the Niger Delta, revenue reliability is essential to managing financial risks and uncertainties. These individuals often face irregular income flows due to fluctuating market conditions and socio-economic challenges. Strategic orientation, specifically through innovation and risk management, can address these challenges by fostering stable income sources, such as diversified entrepreneurial ventures and partnerships that ensure consistent revenue streams.

Cost efficiency emerges as the strongest dimension with a factor loading of 0.845, reflecting its centrality to financial flexibility. Sub-indicators such as CE4 (0.780) and CE5 (0.685) highlight the importance of optimal resource allocation and minimizing waste. For middle-income earners in the Niger Delta, efficient cost management is crucial in an environment characterized by high inflation and limited access to credit. Strategic orientation can enhance cost efficiency by encouraging innovative financial practices, such as leveraging digital tools to track expenses, adopting cost-effective production methods, and accessing shared resources through cooperatives. Empirical studies, such as those by Olawale and Garwe (2010), underscore the role of cost efficiency in improving the financial sustainability of small and medium enterprises, particularly in resource-constrained settings.

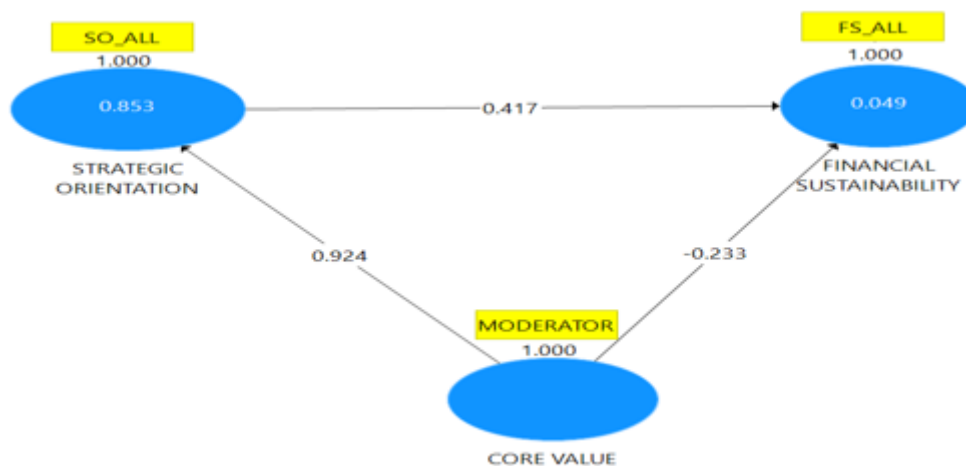
Financial independence, although contributing moderately with a loading of 0.662, remains a significant aspect of financial flexibility. Sub-indicators like FI3 (0.600) and FI4 (0.605) demonstrate that reducing dependency on external funding sources and building self-reliant financial structures are critical to achieving financial independence. However, the relatively lower correlation for some sub-indicators, such as FI1 (0.162), suggests that barriers like limited access to investment opportunities and financial literacy may hinder progress. For the middle-income group in the Niger Delta, achieving financial independence requires targeted strategic initiatives. By adopting strategic aggressiveness, individuals can explore new revenue streams and investment opportunities, while risk management practices can safeguard their finances against unforeseen challenges.

Strategic orientation offers a comprehensive solution to the financial sustainability challenges faced by middle-income earners in the Niger Delta. Revenue reliability can be enhanced through proactive market strategies and innovation that adapts to local demands and economic conditions. Cost efficiency can be achieved by optimizing operational processes, while financial independence can be strengthened through strategic partnerships, capacity building, and effective financial planning. Empirical evidence, such as the work of Egbetokun et al. (2019), supports the effectiveness of strategic orientation in fostering resilience and adaptability, enabling individuals and businesses to thrive in volatile environments.

In conclusion, the graph demonstrates that financial flexibility, through its dimensions of revenue reliability, cost efficiency, and financial independence, is a critical factor for financial

sustainability. Middle-income earners in the Niger Delta can leverage strategic orientation to address their challenges by enhancing revenue stability, optimizing costs, and building financial self-reliance. This integrated approach ensures long-term financial security and aligns with empirical findings on the importance of strategic decision-making in resource-constrained economies.

Moderating the relationship between Strategic Orientation and Financial sustainability



The graph illustrates the relationship between strategic orientation, financial sustainability, and the moderating effect of core values among the middle-income group in the Niger Delta. Strategic orientation, represented by a strong factor loading of 0.853, demonstrates its significant contribution to financial sustainability, albeit with a direct path coefficient of 0.417, suggesting a moderate positive influence. This indicates that the adoption of a strategic orientation—characterized by proactive market engagement, innovation, and risk management—plays a crucial role in enhancing financial sustainability for middle-income individuals in a volatile economic environment.

A core value, depicted as a moderating variable, shows a path coefficient of 0.924 with a strategic orientation, highlighting its substantial alignment with strategic behaviours and decision-making frameworks. However, the negative moderating effect of -0.233 on the relationship between strategic orientation and financial sustainability suggests that the influence of strategic orientation on financial sustainability is diminished when core values are introduced into the model. This finding implies that while core values are integral to shaping strategic priorities and guiding behaviours, their rigid adherence may sometimes limit the full potential of strategic orientation to drive financial outcomes. For instance, overly conservative or inflexible values may constrain innovation or risk-taking, which are pivotal for financial sustainability.

Empirical studies support these findings. A study by Lumpkin and Dess (1996) emphasizes the importance of aligning core values with entrepreneurial orientation to achieve sustained financial performance. The authors argue that core values act as a compass that guides decision-making but caution that excessive rigidity in values can hinder adaptability in dynamic market conditions. Similarly, Egbetokun et al. (2019) highlight that strategic orientation, when

complemented by adaptable core values, fosters resilience and financial growth, particularly in resource-constrained environments such as the Niger Delta. This underscores the need for a balance between maintaining core values and embracing strategic flexibility to optimize financial outcomes.

The interaction between core values and strategic orientation further reflects the cultural and socio-economic realities of the middle-income group in the Niger Delta. Core values, often shaped by community norms and traditional practices, influence financial behaviours and risk preferences. While these values provide stability and ethical grounding, they may also deter innovative financial practices or investments that could enhance financial sustainability. Strategic orientation, on the other hand, encourages forward-looking and market-driven approaches, but its effectiveness is moderated by how well it aligns with the prevailing core values.

In conclusion, the graph reveals that core values play a dual role in moderating the relationship between strategic orientation and financial sustainability among the middle-income group in the Niger Delta. While core values significantly enhance strategic alignment, their moderating effect indicates potential constraints on leveraging strategic orientation fully for financial gains. Striking a balance between maintaining core values and fostering strategic adaptability is essential for achieving financial sustainability in this socio-economic context. Empirical evidence reinforces the importance of this balance, advocating for a nuanced approach to integrating values and strategies for sustainable financial outcomes.

Multivariate Analysis of Moderating Role of Core Value on Strategic Orientation and Financial Sustainability

Correlations

Control Variables		STRATEGIC ORIENTATION	FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY
CORE VALUE	STRATEGIC ORIENTATION	Correlation	1.000
		Significance (2-tailed)	.070
		df	48597
	FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY	Correlation	.070
		Significance (2-tailed)	.000
		df	48597

The correlation results between core value, strategic orientation, and financial sustainability reveal several important insights regarding the relationship between these variables.

Firstly, the correlation coefficient of 0.070 between core value and strategic orientation suggests a very weak positive relationship. This means that while core values may have some influence on the strategic direction of a business, the effect is minimal. However, the significance level of 0.000 indicates that this relationship is statistically significant, implying that even though the strength of the relationship is weak, it is unlikely to be due to chance. Core

values could still play a role in influencing how businesses approach their strategy, albeit not a major one.

Similarly, the correlation between strategic orientation and financial sustainability also stands at 0.070, which is weak but positive. This suggests that businesses with a well-defined strategic orientation may experience slight improvements in financial sustainability. While the correlation is low, the significance value of 0.000 again confirms that this relationship is statistically significant. Therefore, businesses with strong strategic orientations might have a slight advantage in achieving financial sustainability, but other factors likely play a more substantial role in driving long-term financial performance.

The relationship between core value and financial sustainability is not directly provided in this dataset, but the implications of the weak correlations between the strategic orientation and both core values and financial sustainability suggest that while they are statistically significant, their practical impact may require further exploration. Other factors, such as operational efficiency, market conditions, and access to capital, could be more directly responsible for financial sustainability, even if strategic orientation provides an indirect advantage.

In the context of the middle-income group in the Niger Delta, these findings imply that while businesses in this demographic may benefit from integrating core values into their strategic orientation, the actual impact on financial sustainability may not be profound unless accompanied by other supporting strategies. Strategic orientation, while significant, may need to be complemented by practical financial management practices, cost control measures, and the ability to adapt to local market dynamics.

To achieve sustainable financial success, businesses in the region might need to develop a more comprehensive approach that goes beyond just strategic orientation and core values. They may need to focus on improving operational efficiencies, building strong networks, and accessing diversified income sources while also ensuring that their strategic goals are adaptable to changing economic conditions. Therefore, while strategic orientation plays a statistically significant role, its influence on financial sustainability among the middle-income group in the Niger Delta appears to be one component of a larger, more complex set of variables.

5.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings from the analysis present a nuanced understanding of the relationships among strategic orientation, financial sustainability, and core values, specifically within the context of the middle-income group in the Niger Delta. The results indicate that strategic orientation significantly influences financial sustainability, as evidenced by a positive direct path coefficient of 0.417. This finding aligns with existing literature that emphasizes the importance of adopting a forward-looking, market-driven approach to navigating financial challenges. Middle-income earners in the Niger Delta, who often operate within resource-constrained environments and face economic uncertainties, benefit from such strategic orientation through improved adaptability and resilience. Proactive strategies, such as innovation and market engagement, enable them to capitalize on opportunities while mitigating financial risks, which is vital in a region characterized by fluctuating income levels and economic volatility.

The role of core values as a moderating variable introduces a complex dynamic into this relationship. The significant positive alignment between core values and strategic orientation, represented by a path coefficient of 0.924, underscores the importance of deeply ingrained beliefs and principles in shaping strategic decisions. For middle-income individuals in the Niger Delta, core values often stem from cultural norms, communal expectations, and ethical considerations, which provide a foundation for stability and long-term planning. However, the negative moderating effect of -0.233 on the relationship between strategic orientation and financial sustainability highlights the potential constraints that rigid or overly conservative values can impose. This suggests that while core values can guide behaviour and instil discipline, they may also limit innovation and risk-taking, which are crucial drivers of financial growth and sustainability in a competitive and dynamic economic environment.

Empirical studies provide substantial support for these observations. For instance, Lumpkin and Dess (1996) argue that core values serve as a guiding framework for strategic decision-making but caution against their rigidity, which can hinder adaptability in uncertain market conditions. This perspective resonates with the realities of middle-income earners in the Niger Delta, where strong cultural ties and traditional values often dictate financial behaviours. Egbetokun et al. (2019) further emphasize the role of strategic orientation in fostering resilience and growth, particularly in regions marked by limited resources and structural challenges. Their findings highlight the need for middle-income earners to strike a balance between adhering to core values and embracing flexibility in their strategies to achieve financial sustainability.

The results also reveal a critical departure from conventional assumptions about the interplay of strategy and values. Previous studies often posit that core values invariably enhance strategic outcomes, yet this analysis suggests that their impact is context-dependent. In the Niger Delta, where middle-income earners face unique socio-economic and environmental challenges, the moderating role of core values can either support or constrain financial sustainability. This departure from the norm underscores the importance of contextualizing strategic models and frameworks to account for local realities, such as communal norms, access to resources, and economic volatility.

The findings challenge the prevailing narrative that strategic orientation alone is sufficient to guarantee financial sustainability. Instead, they highlight the need for a nuanced approach that integrates core values while allowing for adaptability and innovation. Middle-income earners in the Niger Delta must navigate the delicate balance between preserving their cultural and ethical foundations and adopting flexible, market-oriented strategies that enable them to thrive in a rapidly changing economic landscape.

In conclusion, this comprehensive discussion demonstrates that while strategic orientation plays a pivotal role in financial sustainability, its effectiveness is influenced by the moderating effect of core values. The alignment of these findings with empirical studies reinforces their validity, yet the observed departure from conventional assumptions highlights the unique socio-economic dynamics of the Niger Delta's middle-income group. This analysis underscores the need for tailored strategic approaches that consider the interplay of values, culture, and economic realities to achieve sustainable financial outcomes.

6.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings from this study illuminate the intricate interplay between strategic orientation, financial sustainability, and core values within the middle-income group in the Niger Delta. Strategic orientation emerged as a significant driver of financial sustainability, reflecting the critical role of proactive, market-driven approaches in navigating the economic complexities of the region. However, the moderating effect of core values demonstrated both enabling and constraining influences, highlighting the duality of deeply ingrained principles in shaping financial outcomes. While core values provide stability and ethical grounding, their rigidity can stifle innovation and adaptability, which are essential for sustained financial growth in an unpredictable economic environment.

The study's results align with existing literature, emphasizing the importance of balancing strategic planning with the socio-cultural realities of the Niger Delta. Yet, it also marks a departure from conventional assumptions by revealing the context-dependent nature of core values' impact on strategic effectiveness. This underscores the need for a tailored approach to strategy that integrates cultural sensitivities with flexibility and innovation.

Ultimately, for middle-income earners in the Niger Delta to achieve financial sustainability, they must strike a delicate balance between adhering to core values and embracing adaptable, forward-thinking strategies. By doing so, they can navigate the challenges of resource constraints, economic fluctuations, and socio-cultural expectations, ensuring long-term resilience and growth in the region.

6.1 Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the relationships between strategic orientation, financial flexibility, and the role of core values, the following recommendations are made to enhance the financial sustainability of the middle-income group in the Niger Delta region.

First, it is crucial for businesses and individuals in this demographic to strengthen their strategic orientation, particularly in the areas of innovation, risk management, and strategic aggressiveness. The strong positive correlation between strategic orientation and financial flexibility highlights the importance of a proactive approach in business strategy. By embracing innovation and risk management, businesses can enhance their financial resilience, ensuring a better response to economic fluctuations and market uncertainties. This can be achieved by investing in training programs that foster innovative thinking and by creating a culture of calculated risk-taking.

Moreover, businesses in the Niger Delta should focus on improving their financial flexibility by ensuring that their revenue reliability and cost efficiency are optimized. The high correlation between these dimensions and financial flexibility underlines the importance of reliable and efficient revenue streams for long-term sustainability. Therefore, organizations should diversify their sources of income and explore new business models that can provide consistent cash flow. Additionally, operational costs should be continuously reviewed and streamlined, with a focus on efficiency improvements through technological adoption and better resource management.

The results also suggest that core values play a moderating role between strategic orientation and financial flexibility. In light of this, businesses should consciously cultivate and reinforce

core values such as transparency, accountability, and community engagement. These values can help build trust and loyalty among stakeholders, including customers and local communities, which are crucial for long-term success. By aligning business practices with local values, businesses can establish stronger connections within the region, fostering an environment of mutual growth and development.

Furthermore, the strategic orientation should not be static but adaptable to changing market conditions. Businesses need to continuously assess their strategies and adjust them in response to both external market forces and internal challenges. This adaptability will help them remain competitive and financially stable, even in times of economic stress.

In conclusion, to enhance the financial sustainability of the middle-income group in the Niger Delta, it is essential to focus on strengthening strategic orientation, improving financial flexibility, and nurturing core values that resonate with the local context. By integrating these factors, businesses can position themselves for sustainable growth, better manage risks, and enhance their overall financial health. Empirical studies on strategic management, financial sustainability, and innovation support the effectiveness of these recommendations in fostering long-term resilience and success.

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