Determinants and Value Relevance of Auditor's Reporting Timeliness of Listed Manufacturing Firms In Nigeria

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Abstract- ***The study investigated the determinants and value relevance of auditors' reporting timeliness among listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria from 2008 to 2023. Specifically, the study examined the effect of audit fees, audit firm size, and audit committee meeting frequency on auditor's reporting timeliness of manufacturing firms in Nigeria. The sample comprised 30 manufacturing firms listed on the Nigeria Exchange Group during 2008-2023 periods. An ex-post facto research design was adopted, utilizing secondary data extracted from the published annual reports of 30 manufacturing firms selected across three key sectors of the Nigerian manufacturing industry. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, multicollinearity tests, Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), and panel data regression analysis, with the aid of SPSS version 26.0 at a 5% level of significance. Research results suggest that audit fees had significant positive effect on the timeliness in the consumer goods sector and across all sectors. Coefficient = 0.00000004102{P-value = 0.039 < 0.05}. Audit firm size also positively impacted timeliness in the consumer goods sector. Coefficient = -0.059{P-value = 0.003 < 0.05}. Audit committee meeting frequency had a significant negative effect on timeliness in the consumer goods sector and across all sectors. Coefficient = -0.059{P-value = 0.000 < 0.05}. The implication of these findings is that higher audit fees in conglomerate and consumer goods sectors are associated with more timely financial reporting. Also that preference for larger audit firms will result in timely financial reporting. While more frequent meetings will result in delay of financial report. Based on these findings, the study recommends that (i) Listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria, particularly in the consumer goods sector, should consider reviewing their audit fee structures to leverage the positive impact on timeliness of financial reports. (ii) Firms in the consumer goods sector should prioritize engaging larger audit firms to take advantage of their expertise and resources, which can enhance timeliness of financial reporting. (iii) To mitigate the negative impact of audit committee meeting frequency on timeliness, firms across all sectors, especially in the consumer goods and conglomerate goods sectors, should optimize their committee meeting schedules and ensure that meetings are focused and efficient.***

Key words: audit quality, reporting timeliness, audit fees, audit firm size, audit committee characteristics, manufacturing firms, Nigeria.

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Financial statements are the very first impression and communication about the firm's value and position to shareholders and other relevant parties. It must show a true and fair view of the firm as it is very crucial for the stakeholders in order to make appropriate decisions. Financial statement quality is the extent to which an organisation's accounting information accurately reflects its current operating performance as well as predicts its future performance and helps to assess its value [1]. The onus usually lies on the accountant who is primarily a reporter or communicator of financial transactions, to report the company's financial performance, financial position as well as changes in cash flows thereby enabling the users and stakeholders of the financial statement to make informed economic decision. Thus, the focus is usually on the provision of relevant, dependable and timely financial information to users and stakeholders for critical and informed decision making [2]. This suggests that value relevance and timeliness of accounting data are one of the features of accounting information indices that are used to explain the quality of financial statement information passed to the stock market for investors to take relevant decisions [3].

Value relevance, in this sense, refers to the power of accounting data to affect investors' perception about the future earnings of a corporate entity. Value relevance of accounting information is the ability of any information contained in the financial statements to enable the financial statement users determine the value and performance of the company. Accounting information is considered suitable to be acknowledged as value relevant when it provides its manifestation persistently in market prices and investors' decisions, signifying that information in the financial statements is of high quality. Thus, accounting information is said to be value-relevant, if it has an estimated significant association to market values [4]. Financial reporting timeliness, on the other hand, refers to the process of ensuring that financial information is timely and supports relevant decisions, thereby reducing information asymmetry among stakeholders within identified capital markets [5].

The International Accounting Standards Board (IASB) defined timeliness as efforts targeted at ensuring that all accounting information are ready and available such that their availability have the capacity of influencing the economic decisions of the generality of users [6]. Timely information maintains its economic value and minimizes information asymmetry by improving the pricing of securities, mitigating insider trading, minimize the likelihood of false information regarding the firm, amongst others. Therefore, relevant and reliable information that influences individuals' economic decisions and results in logical decisions is of paramount importance [7].

However, a study in 2020 by the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners showed that auditors uncover less than 4% of fraud [8]. For instance, in the case of ENRON, profits were overstated by as much as 586 million dollars for four years. The corporation was charged for using accounting loopholes to hide billions of dollars of bad debt and inflating earnings. Another notable case was that of WorldCom in 2002 where operating expenses of 3.8billion dollars were capitalized thus overstating its profit. Other notable examples of companies involved in accounting scandals include Tyco International, Lehman Brothers, HealthSouth Corporation, amongst many others. In Nigeria, the Cadbury (Nig) PLC scandal has remained a reference point for fraudulent financial reporting. It was revealed that profits were overstated by 13 billion Naira between 2003 and 2006 despite the fact that the auditor audited the published accounts for those years as well as carried out an interim audit for the period ended September 30, 2006. In 2023, the SEC slapped Tingo CEO Dozy Mmobuosi with charges of massive fraud despite the fact that Deloitte had given the fintech a clean, unqualified audit for its 2022 accounts. According to the SEC's civil complaint, Tingo, whose audited books boasted a $462 million treasure chest socked away in Nigerian banks, actually had only $50. Other incidences of fraudulent financial reporting in Nigeria include the fraud at AfribankPlc and Lever brothers (Nig) Plc [9]. The global series of audit failures has called into doubt the value relevancy of corporations' financial reporting resulting in low investment.

As a result, capital markets around the world have taken steps to improve investors' negative perceptions by establishing regulations and timeframes for her trading firms to adhere to when presenting audited financial accounts. In Nigeria, Section 374(6) of CAMA 2020 as amended mandates all public limited companies to make public the financial status of the firm within a specific accounting period. Companies in Nigeria have ninety (90) days from the end of their fiscal year to file their audited annual report and accounts with the country's Security and Exchange Commission (SEC). Apart from CAMA, accounting bodies such as Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigerian (ICAN), American Accounting Association (AAA), International Financial Reporting Standard (IFRS) and International Accounting Standard Board (IASB) provides standards for auditing and financial reporting [10].

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Investors rely heavily on audited financial statements to make informed economic decisions since they lack direct access to underlying financial records. However, past global and local audit failures such as those involving Wirecard, Enron, the 1MDB scandal, and Nigerian firms like Cadbury and Afribank have cast doubt on the credibility and timeliness of financial reporting. In Nigeria, weak regulatory compliance, audit failures, and delayed disclosures have further undermined investor's confidence in capital markets, encouraging exploitation of private information by privileged investors. Despite several regulations and reforms, criticisms persist about inadequacies in financial reporting outcomes. While existing studies have examined audit quality, earnings relevance, and market value relationships, few have specifically addressed the determinants and value relevance of auditors' reporting timeliness in Nigeria's listed manufacturing firms. This study seeks to bridge that gap by providing empirical evidence on the subject, thereby contributing to restoring investor's trust and enhancing capital market efficiency.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to ascertain determinants and value relevance of auditors reporting timeliness of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria from 2008 to 2023. The specific objectives are to:

i.determine the impact of audit fees on timeliness of financial report of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria;

ii.ascertain the impact of audit firm size on timeliness of financial report of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria;

iii.ascertain the impact of audit committee meeting frequency on timeliness of the financial report of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria;

1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions are in line with the objectives of the study:

i.What is the impact of audit fees on timeliness of financial report of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria?

ii. What is the impact of audit firm size on timeliness of financial report of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria?

iii. What is the impact of audit committee meeting frequency on timeliness of the financial report of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria?

1.5 Statement of The Hypotheses

The following hypotheses formulated in null forms are in line with the specific objectives of the study:

i. There is no significant impact of audit fees on timeliness of financial report of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria

ii. There is no significant impact of audit firm size on timeliness of financial report of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria

iii. There is no significant impact of audit committee meeting frequency on timeliness of the financial report of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria

1.6 Limitations of the study

The main limitation to this study was paucity of data. This was experienced in the course of ascertaining determinants and value relevance of auditors reporting timeliness of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria mainly because there was scarcity of extant studies that had been carried out in this regard in Nigeria. Therefore, sourcing data in the course of the study was a difficult task. In spite of this challenge, the researcher was able to painstakingly collect the data that was needed to achieve the objectives of the study.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Conceptual Framework

2.1.1 Audit characteristics

An audit is an objective examination and evaluation of the financial statement of an organisation to make sure that the records are a fair and accurate representation of the transactions they claim to represent. It can be done internally by employees of the organisation, or externally by an outside firm. When it comes to external auditing, there are two different categories of auditors. First, there is an external or statutory auditor who works independently to evaluate financial reporting, and then there are external cost auditors who evaluate cost statements and sheets to see if they are free of misstatements or fraud [11]. Both of these types of auditors follow a set of standards different from that of the company or organisation hiring them to do the work. Internal auditors, as the name implies, are employed by the company or organisation for which they are performing the audit. To the best of their ability, internal auditors provide information to the board, managers, and other stakeholders on the accuracy of their books and the efficacy of their internal systems. Consultant auditors, while not working internally, use the standards of the company they are auditing as opposed to a separate set of standards. These types of auditors are used when an organisation does not have the resources to audit certain parts of their own operation.

The audit opinion presented in the financial report is an intrinsic feature of an external audit, as opined by Li & Lin [12] and Hussainey [13] observed that another important aspect of external audit is the veracity of information presented by auditors to investors in each report. In this study, the basic attributes of audit are defined as the auditor's objectivity during the audit process, the audit's efficiency, and the audit's timeliness. These are the three major criteria for an external audit that can generate a quality audit report capable of discovering and reporting any errors in a financial statement.

2.1.2 Value relevance

Value relevance has been defined by various researchers in different ways. Amir, Harris, and Venuti [14] were the first to define value relevance as the association between accounting numbers and security market values. Francis and Schipper [15] interpret value relevance from four different perspectives. First interpretation is that financial statement information affects stock prices by capturing intrinsic share values toward which stock prices drift. The second interpretation is that financial information is value relevant if it contains the variables used in a valuation model or assists in predicting those variables. The third interpretation considered value relevance as a statistical association between financial information and prices or returns. The fourth interpretation of value relevance defined value relevance of accounting information as the ability of accounting numbers to summarize information that affects the firm's value which can be measured by the aggregate market impact on accounting information.

Beisland [16] considers value relevance as the ability of financial statement information to capture and summarize firm value. Value relevance is measured as the statistical association between financial statement information and stock market values or returns. Earnings and book value are regarded as the basis for firm valuation. However, earnings management affects the reliability and relevance of earnings in ascertaining firms' value. On the other hand, information perspective defines value relevance as the usefulness of financial statement information in equity valuation [17]. Value relevance of accounting information is the ability of any information contained in the financial statements to enable the financial statement users determines the value and performance of the company. Value relevance is also defined as the ability of accounting numbers contained in the financial statements to explain the stock market measures [18]. Accounting data, such as earnings per share, is termed value relevant if it is significantly related to the dependent variable, which may be expressed by price, return or abnormal return [19].

2.1.3 Timeliness of Financial Reporting

Financial reporting in general has long been accepted as a very important aspect in accounting [20]. In respect to this, many accounting bodies and proficient institutions across the world have made several attempts to define the term timeliness. The International Accounting Standards Board (IASB) defined timeliness as efforts targeted at ensuring that all accounting information are ready and available such that their availability have the capacity of influencing the economic decisions of the generality of users [21]. It is the process of ensuring that financial information is timely and supports relevant decisions, thereby reducing information asymmetry among stakeholders within identified capital markets [22]. Financial reporting timeliness also refers to the time interval it will take a company from the accounting year-end to the date the corporate reports are been released by the auditors.

However, the timely release of financial report is measured as a main factor in promising and developed capital markets where the financial statements which have been audited are the only dependable source of information available to its users [23]. Discourse on the timeliness of financial reporting has so far recognized two aspects – frequency of the reports and financial reporting lag. The frequencies of the reports are issued by firms which can be monthly, half yearly or quarterly; whereas, financial reporting lag talks about the time difference between the time it takes for firms to publish their reports and the accounting year end or the date of the submission of the reports to the regulatory bodies. In order to avoid excessive and undue delays in publishing the financial information of firms, regulatory bodies in various countries have carefully outlined stipulated guidelines and punitive measures to guarantee compliance with regards to publishing timely financial reports.

In Nigeria, the Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA) 2020 states that companies should hold their annual general meeting and make sure financial statements are submitted before the shareholders in an interval of not more than fifteen months after their last annual general meeting. Impliedly, Nigerian firms have at most, a maximum of six months from the date of their financial year-end to publish their respective accounts. In the context of the USA, the country's Security and Exchange Commission has made a moderation in the time limit of financial statements for companies from 90 days to 60 days in order to increase the markets' efficiency in USA. This moderation is hinged on the consideration of financial reporting timeliness as a vital and significant indicant of the useful accounting/financial information. In view of the above, the obvious is that the publication of timely reports by firms is of utmost concern to regulators, investors and other stakeholders.

2.1.4 Determinants and value relevance of auditors reporting timeliness

2.1.4.1 Audit Committee Meeting and Timeliness of the Financial Report

The number of audit committee meetings is a good predictor of how effective the committee is. Less meetings were interpreted by financial statement users as indicating a lack of commitment and insufficient time to manage the financial reporting process. Wang and wu [24] show that increased audit committee activity as proxy by number of committee meetings is associated with reduced levels of earning management. Sultana et al. [25] posit that audit committee that meets regularly improve the transparency and openness of reported earnings and therefore improve earning quality. Audit committee diligence (proxies by frequent meetings) could take several defensive and constructive process on time despite internal control weaknesses thus need to detect and prevent management's fraudulent practices and maintain the quality of earnings and the level of information reported. According to Gul, Hutchinson, and Lai [26], having a frequent audit committee is associated with quick repair of material deficiencies.

Furthermore, Abernathy, Beyer, and Stefaniak [27] discovered that frequent audit committee meetings result in shorter audit report delays. Other studies have shown no link between audit committee meetings and audit report delays [28]. Members of audit committees who meet on a regular basis are frequently assumed to be better at monitoring. Sharma et al. [29] use number of meetings, to measure whether the audit committee meeting frequency has an influence on financial reporting quality and concluded that audit committee meeting frequency has an influence on the financial reporting quality.

2.2 Theoretical Review

2.2.1 Signalling Theory

Signalling theory originated from the work of Spence [30] which explained reasons why managers make known accounting information to the public. Like the agency theory, signalling theory discourses the information asymmetry as a result of the separation of ownership and management. The theory maintains that, the information asymmetry problem in agency theory can be minimized if management give information signals to the investors. Spence opined that signals are the actions taken by management in order to provide investors with quality information about the financial position of the company. Hence, bigger and high-quality companies will want to make a distinction from the smaller ones by signalling their achievements and good financial performances in order to gain good reputation.

As propounded by Spence (1973), signalling theory is useful for describing behaviour when two parties (individuals or organisations) have access to different information. Signalling theory is fundamentally concerned with reducing information asymmetry between two parties. Typically, one party, the sender, must choose whether and how to communicate (or signal) that information, and the other party, the receiver, must choose how to interpret the signal. This theory is used to describe a situation in which two parties (individuals or organisations) have access to different information. Typically, one party, the sender, must choose whether or not and how to communicate (or signal) that information, and the other party, the receiver, must choose how to interpret the signal.

2.2.2 Agency theory

This theory was propounded by Berlin and Means in the year 1932 but was made popular by Jensen and Meckling, who hypothesized that the principal (shareholders) delegated the obligation with authority to agents (managers) to manage their resources, with the believe that the agents (managers) will be faithful and manage the resources to the best interest of the owners. Incidentally, the case of conflict of interest arose, as the managers acted in their own interest against the interest of the shareholders. The managers are expected to maximize returns and minimize costs. The agency theory further suggested that the need for auditor services benefits both agents (management) and the principals (shareholders). Hence auditors are appointed for the mutual benefits of management and the shareholders including the other third parties who have an interest in the affairs of the company.

Scott [31] defined an agency relationship as one that arises from a contract between the principle and agents who execute operations of value to the principal in the event of a separation of ownership and management of the organisation. There are disparities between multiple stakeholders that might lead to financial statement misuse [32]. In the model agency, a system was established that encompasses both persons involved in client service (agents) and proprietors (principal). The most essential tenet of agency theory is that managers are often driven because of their own selfish interests and try to maximize their own personal gains rather than considering shareholders' interests to increase shareholders' value. The assumptions of agency theory justify the timeliness of corporate financial statement and the value of financial reporting timeliness to the public who are the end users of accounting information. The agency theory explains the connection that exists between shareholders (owners) and the Directors who operate the business affairs on their behalf, as well as the relevance of audited financial report timeframes for the purpose of regulatory compliance.

2.3 Empirical Review

Audit Firm Size

Baffa, Lasisi and Ojo [33] conducted a study that assessed the value relevance of the tenure of auditors and size of audit firm by using empirical data from actively traded firms on the floor of Nigerian Exchange Group. Data for the study were obtained from published annual reports and accounts of 124 quoted companies in Nigeria between 2012 to 2021. The average -monthly share price of the fourth month after accounting year end of all sampled firms was utilized as the dependent variable of the study in order to establish the value relevance of accounting information in the financial statements. Descriptive statistics, correlation, and panel corrected standard errors regression analysis were used in analysing the data for the study. Findings of the study indicated that auditor tenure and audit firm size led to significant positive influence on market reaction in the first month after the release of annual reports and accounts of sampled firms. This meant that, auditor tenure and audit firm size were found to be value relevant to users of accounting information in Nigeria. The authors recommended that investors should consider the audit tenure and auditors size when making investment decisions and prioritize firms that have been audited by big auditors and by integrating small audit firms, as well as firms whose audit tenure was on average of five to six years (in line with International best practices) rather than ten years as stipulated by the Code of Corporate Governance and CBN.

Using multiple regression data analysis, Mansour, Ahmad, and Sima [34] investigated the influence of board features on the timeliness of financial reporting of listed companies on the Tehran Stock Exchange. The study focused on 107 companies of the Tehran Stock Exchange using data from 2010 to 2014. Findings revealed that firm size had a positive and significant relationship with the timeliness of financial reporting. In support of this, Jordi [35] examined the annual reporting lag for listed companies in Belgium, Germany and the Netherland. The result indicates that firm size had a negative significant association with financial reporting timeliness. The author concluded that larger firm size shortens financial reporting timeliness.

Audit Committee meeting frequency

Gjerde et al [36] examined the moderating role of ownership concentration on the effect of audit characteristics on audit report lag of listed consumer goods firms in Nigeria. Secondary data was extracted from annual reports and accounts of listed consumer goods firms in Nigeria. The population of the study was twenty-one (21) and sample size consisted of fifteen (15) companies for a period of ten years (2012-2021) using census sampling techniques were adopted. PCSEs regression model was employed as technique of data analysis. Findings of the study revealed that the Audit Committee Size (ACS) and Audit Committee meeting had a positive and significant effect on Audit Report Lag (ARL). Also, the Audit Committee Financial Expertise (ACFE) revealed a positive and insignificant effect on Audit Report Lag (ARL), while the Audit Committee Independence was revealed to have a negative and insignificant effect on Audit Report Lag (ARL). However, with consideration of moderating role ownership concentration, the Audit Committee Size (ACS) and Audit Committee Meeting (ACM) was found to have significant negative effect on Audit Report Lag (ARL), while the Audit Committee Financial Expertise and Audit Committee Independence were found to have positive and insignificant effect on Audit Report Lag (ARL). The author concluded that ownership concentration moderates the effect of audit committee on Audit Report Lag. The authors recommended that management of the study firms should continue to sustain frequency of meetings and size/numbers of committee in their respective audit committee since the two committee have been empirically proven to significantly reduce the timeframe of reporting financial reports.

Audit Fees

Daferigbe and George [37] explored the effect of audit firm attributes and financial reporting quality of quoted manufacturing firms in Nigeria. The population of the study was twenty-two (22) listed manufacturing firms producing consumer goods in Nigeria. Six (6) quoted companies out of the twenty-two (22) whose annual reports were not found were dropped, and this brought the sample size of the study to sixteen (16). Financial statements were analyzed to get the relevant data. Descriptive statistics were employed for data analysis while multiple regression was used to test hypotheses. The results of the findings showed that auditor fees had significant effect on the financial reporting quality of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria.

Correspondingly, Austine, Chijioke and Henry [38] determined the effect of audit firm rotation and audit report lag in Nigeria using audit fees as one of the variables. Secondary data was sourced from annual reports and accounts of fifty (50) sampled firms listed on the Nigerian Stock Exchange for the year ended 2011. Data was analysed using the Ordinary Least Square method (OLS) to determine the effect of the dependent on the independent variables. The research revealed that audit fees have positive significant effect on audit report lag.

In similar research in Nigeria, Modugu, Eragbhe and Ikhatua [39] examined the effect of audit delay and several company characteristics in Nigeria. The research used audit fees as one of the variables which was aimed at measuring the extent of audit lag and to establish the impact of selected corporate attributes on audit delay in Nigeria used a sample size of 20 quoted companies for the period of 2009 to 2011. The results from the panel data which was estimated using OLS regression showed that, a major determinant of audit delay in Nigeria included audit fees as paid to the auditors hence, have significant effect on audit delay.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The researcher adopted ex-post facto research design. This implies that the data for the study were already in existence before the study was carried out. Thus, the data for the study were collected from the annual reports and financial statement of the selected listed manufacturing firms during 2008-2023 periods.

3.2 Area of the Study and Sources of Data

This study was conducted on the manufacturing firms listed on Nigeria Exchange Group during 2008-2023 period. Secondary data were obtained from the annual reports and financial statements of the selected manufacturing firms listed in the Nigeria Exchange Group during the periods.

3.3 Population and Sample Size Determination

The population of study comprised all 33 listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria from 2008 to 2023, particularly, those in three (3) sectors, namely, conglomerates, consumer goods, and, industrial goods. De Vaus (2001) model for a known population was used to select thirty (30), out of the thirty-three (33) manufacturing firms listed on the Nigeria Exchange Group during the period.

3.4 Description of Variables

The model of the study established the determinants and value relevance of auditors reporting timeliness of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria from 2008 to 2023. Audit fees, audit firm size, audit committee meeting frequency, audit committee gender diversity, audit committee independence and auditors' expertise were used to measure the independent variable (that is, determinants of auditors reporting timeliness) while timeliness of the financial report was used to measure the dependent variable (that is, value relevance of auditors reporting timeliness). The descriptions of the variables are shown below:

Dependent Variable

Timeliness of financial report: Timeliness (TML), also known as reporting time lag, is the dependent variable. This is defined as the amount of time that passes between the end of the accounting year and the day that the auditors sign their report. It is measured as the number of days between the year-end and the date the auditor signs the audit report.

Independent Variable:
Audit fees: This refers to the total amount paid to the auditor for their services. Audit Fee (AUDFEE), which is found by taking the natural logarithm of audit fees.

Audit firm size: Audit services are provided and shared between Big 4 and non-Big 4 audit firms. The big four audit firm comprises of Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler (KPMG), Price Waterhouse Cooper (PCW), Ernst & Young (E&Y), and Deloitte Touche Thomatsu (Deloitte). The data used took a value of 1 if an audit firm is a big four audit firms or 0 if a non- big four audit firms.

Audit committee meeting frequency: It is recommended that audit committee meets at least three times annually. Therefore, audit committee meeting frequency was measured by using the number of committee meetings held annually as a proxy.

3.5 Model Specification
The study was evaluated with the following models:
AULG = f(AUF, AUFS, AUF, AMFQ) ……………………………………...(1)
Where:
AULG = Audit reporting time lag
AUF = Audit fees
AUFS = Audit firm size
AMFQ = Audit committee meeting frequency
In a linear regression form, it was stated as:
$AULGit = \beta o + \beta 1AUFit + \beta 2AUFSit + \beta 3AUFit + \beta 4ACMFit + \mu$…(2)

Where:
βo = Constant Term
$\beta 1\text{-}4$ = Coefficient of AUF, AUFS, AUF, AMFQ,
μ = Error Term

3.6 Analytical Procedure
After the collection of needed and relevant data, the researcher used the regression model to analyse the data with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0 at 5% level of significance. The results were presented using tables to give a clear picture of the research findings.

3.7.1 Decision Rule
Reject the null hypothesis if P-value is less than 0.05. Otherwise, accept the null hypothesis.

3.8 Apriori Expectation
The researcher expects that the independent variable (proxied with audit fees, audit firm size, and audit committee meeting frequency) will be significantly related to the dependent variable (proxied with audit reporting time lag). In other words, the determinants of auditors reporting timeliness of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria should have the stronger predictive ability on the dependent variable (value relevance and auditors reporting timeliness).

IV. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSES

4.1 Data Presentation

4.1.1 Data Presentation on Descriptive Statistics

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics of the Variables

Variables	Mean	Std. deviation	Range	Minimum	Maximum	P-value
Audit fees						0.071
Consumer	352814.20	1141870.88	4999999.50	0.50	5000000.00	
Industrial	25072.71	25681.88	124450.00	1500.00	125950.00	
Conglomerates	632487.91	164741.77	4998500.00	1500.00	5000000.00	
Audit firm size						0.073
Consumer	0.7500	0.43	1.00	0.00	1.00	
Industrial	0.7768	0.41	1.00	0.00	1.00	
Conglomerates	0.6458	0.48	1.00	0.00	1.00	
Audit committee meeting frequency						0.026*
Consumer	3.38	1.32	6.00	0.00	6.00	
Industrial	3.21	1.33	5.00	0.00	5.00	
Conglomerates	3.28	1.43	5.00	0.00	5.00	

Timeliness of financial report						0.121
Consumer	83.72	33.43	209.00	21.00	230.00	
Industrial	83.00	3.19	248.00	13.00	261.00	
Conglomerates	77.97	32.08	234.00	27.00	261.00	
Observations	*480*	*480*	*480*	*480*	*480*	

** Significant at P < 0.05*

Source: Researcher's Analysis, 2024

With the aid of SPSS, the researcher used the data collected from the annual reports as shown in Appendix I to compute the mean and standard deviation which formed the descriptive statistics for both the dependent and the independent variables. The result shows that the mean value of audit fees was highest for companies operating in conglomerates and consumer goods sectors with a value of 632487.91 (SD ± 164741.77) and 352814.20 (SD ± 1141870.88) respectively. This indicates that companies operating in conglomerates and consumer goods sectors tend to incur higher audit fees than other selected companies. The mean value of audit firm size was highest for companies operating in consumer and industrial goods sectors with a value of 0.78 (SD ± 0.41) and 0.75 (SD ± 0.43) respectively. This result suggests that companies operating in the consumer goods and industrial goods sectors tend to engage larger audit firms, potentially indicating a higher likelihood of utilizing Big Four audit firms. The mean value of audit committee meeting frequency was highest for companies operating in consumer and conglomerates goods sectors with a value of 3.38 (SD ± 1.32) and 3.28 (SD ± 1.43) respectively. These suggest that companies in the consumer goods and conglomerates sectors tend to have more frequent audit committee meetings (at least three). However, the standard deviations suggest some variation in meeting frequency within each sector.

Lastly, the mean value of timeliness of financial report was highest for companies operating in consumer and industrial goods sectors with a value of 83.7 (SD ± 33.4) and 83 (SD ± 3.2) days respectively. This result suggests that conglomerates may have shorter audit report lags compared to consumer goods and industrial goods companies, potentially indicating differences in audit complexity, company size, or reporting processes.

4.1.2 Autocorrelation Test

Table 4. 2: Serial Auto-correlation Test

Statistic	
Model	Durbin Watson
1	1.111

Source: Researcher's Analysis, 2024

Autocorrelation is said to exist if the disturbance terms are not equal to zero, leading to incorrect standard errors. A data set is considered free of autocorrelation if the statistic is within the range of 1.5 and 2.5. Consistent with prior studies the Durbin-Watson test was used to check for auto-correlation and the study statistics were within the range (see Table 4.2).

4.1.3 Test for multicollinearity

Table 4.3: Tolerance Value and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

Variable	Collinearity statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Audit fees	0.782	1.279
Audit firm size	0.696	1.436
Audit committee meeting frequency	0.797	1.255

Source: Author's Computations (2024).

The tolerance value and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) are two advanced measures of investigating the existence of multicollinearity between the explanatory variables of the study. In Table 4.3 the

Variance Inflation Factors are consistently smaller than ten indicating absolute absence of multicollinearity. This shows the appropriateness of fitting the model of the study within the five independent variables. In addition, the tolerance values are consistently smaller than 1.00 thus providing further evidence of the absence of multicollinearity among the explanatory variables.

4.2 Test of the Research Hypotheses

To test the hypotheses, the data on Appendix II were used. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedascity. The goal was to determine if there was significant impact of audit fees, audit firm size, and audit committee meeting frequency, on timeliness of the financial report of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria.

4.2.1 Determinants and value relevance of auditors reporting timeliness of listed manufacturing firms (consumer goods sector) in Nigeria from 2008 to 2023

Table 4.4: Model Summary for test of Hypotheses

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.362[a]	0.131	0.112	31.509	0.131	6.680	6	265	0.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Audit committee meeting frequency, Audit fees, Audit firm size
b. Dependent Variable: Timeliness of financial report

Table 4.5: ANOVA Result for Hypotheses

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	397.92	6	66.32	6.680	0.000[b]
	Residual	2630.95	265	9.93		
	Total	3028.87	271			

a. Dependent Variable: Timeliness of financial report
b. Predictors: (Constant), Audit committee meeting frequency, Audit fees, Audit firm size

Table 4.6: Coefficients Result for Hypotheses

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.968	0.089		10.778	0.000
Audit fees	4.1E-08	0.000	0.140	2.073	0.039
Audit firm size	0.154	0.050	0.200	3.031	0.003
Audit committee meeting frequency	-0.053	0.015	-0.211	-3.540	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: Timeliness of financial report

The results on Tables 4.4 – 4.6 above provided an investigation into the overall significance of the model. The value of R is 0.362, implying that there is a relationship between the determinants and value relevance of auditors reporting timeliness of listed manufacturing firms (consumer goods sector) in Nigeria. The R indicates that about 36.2% variation in the endogenous variable (timeliness of financial report) can be explained by the exogenous variable (audit committee meeting frequency; audit fees; and audit firm size) while 63.8% is accounted for by other factors aside the aforementioned determinants. In addition, the estimated value of the regression coefficient (β) of audit fees is 0.00000004102 which indicates that audit fees have impact on timeliness of the financial report of listed manufacturing firms (consumer goods sector) in Nigeria. That is, a relative increase in audit fees will result in about 0.0000041% positive change in timeliness of the financial report of listed manufacturing firms (consumer goods sector) in Nigeria. Likewise, the estimated value of the regression coefficient (β) of audit firm size is 0.154 which indicates that auditors' expertise has impact on timeliness of the financial report of listed manufacturing firms (consumer goods sector) in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the estimated value of the regression coefficient (β) of audit committee meeting frequency is -0.053 which indicates that audit committee meeting frequency has negative impact on timeliness of the financial report of listed manufacturing firms (consumer goods sector) in Nigeria. That is, a relative increase in audit committee meeting frequency will result in about 5.3% negative change in timeliness of the financial report of listed manufacturing firms (consumer goods sector) in Nigeria.

To test for the significance of the independent variable, the probability value of the independent variables (audit fees, audit firm size, and audit committee meeting frequency), that is, 0.000 indicates that audit fees, audit firm size, and audit committee meeting frequency are significantly related to timeliness of the financial report of listed manufacturing firms (consumer goods sector) in Nigeria. Thus, we accept the alternate hypotheses (H11, H12, and H13) and conclude that there was significant impact of audit fees, audit firm size, and audit committee meeting frequency on timeliness of financial report of listed manufacturing firms (consumer goods sector) in Nigeria. The linear regression equation for this model is shown as:

$Y = 0.96 + 0.000000041*x + 0.15*x – 0.05*x$

which means that:

AULG = 0.96 + 0.000000041*(AUF) – 0.15*(AUFS) - 0.05*(AMFQ)

4.2.2 Determinants and value relevance of auditors reporting timeliness of listed manufacturing firms (industrial goods sector) in Nigeria from 2008 to 2023

Table 4.7: Model Summary for test of Hypotheses

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.342[a]	0.117	0.067	32.607	0.117	2.323	6	105	0.038

a. Predictors: (Constant), Audit committee meeting frequency, Audit fees, and Audit firm size
b. Dependent Variable: Timeliness of financial report

Table 4.8: ANOVA Result for Hypotheses

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	148.211	6	24.701	2.323	.038[b]
	Residual	1116.369	105	10.632		
	Total	1264.58	111			

a. Dependent Variable: Timeliness of financial report
b. Predictors: (Constant), Audit committee meeting frequency, Audit fees, and Audit firm size

Table 4.9: Coefficients Result for Hypotheses

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.003	0.174		5.763	0.000
Audit fees	0.000	0.000	0.142	1.301	0.196
Audit firm size	-0.089	0.100	-0.112	-0.896	0.372

Audit committee meeting frequency	-0.036	0.033	-0.143	-1.087	0.280

a. Dependent Variable: Timeliness of financial report

The results on Tables 4.7 – 4.9 above provided an investigation into the overall significance of the model. The value of R is 0.342, implying that there is a relationship between the determinants and value relevance of auditors reporting timeliness of listed manufacturing firms (industrial goods sector) in Nigeria. The R indicates that about 34.2% variation in the endogenous variable (timeliness of financial report) can be explained by the exogenous variable (audit committee meeting frequency; audit fees; and audit firm size) while 65.8% is accounted for by other determinants aside the aforementioned. In addition, the estimated value of the regression coefficient (β) of auditors' expertise is 0.02 which indicates that audit fees have impact on timeliness of the financial report of listed manufacturing firms (industrial goods sector) in Nigeria. That is, a relative increase in audit fees will result in about 2.0% positive change in timeliness of the financial report of listed manufacturing firms (industrial goods sector) in Nigeria. This impact is significant.

To test for the significance of the independent variable, the probability value of the independent variables (auditors' expertise), that is, 0.038 indicates that auditors' expertise is significantly related to timeliness of financial report of listed manufacturing firms (industrial goods sector) in Nigeria. Thus, we accept the alternate hypothesis (H16) and conclude that there was significant impact of auditors' expertise on timeliness of financial report of listed manufacturing firms (industrial goods sector) in Nigeria. The linear regression equation for this model is shown as:

Y = 1.003 + 0.020*x

which means that:

AULG = 1.003 + 0.020*(AUE)

4.2.3 Determinants and value relevance of auditors reporting timeliness of listed manufacturing firms (conglomerate goods sector) in Nigeria from 2008 to 2023

Table 4.10: Model Summary for test of Hypotheses

					Change Statistics				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.479[a]	0.229	0.177	29.102	0.229	4.413	6	89	0.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), Audit committee meeting frequency, Audit fees, and Audit firm size
b. Dependent Variable: Timeliness of financial report

Table 4.11: ANOVA Result for Hypotheses

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	224.223	6	37.370	4.413	0.001[b]
	Residual	753.747	89	8.469		
	Total	977.969	95			

a. Dependent Variable: Timeliness of financial report
b. Predictors: (Constant), Audit committee meeting frequency, Audit fees, and Audit firm size

Table 4.12: Coefficients Result for Hypotheses

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		

(Constant)	1.022	0.164		6.225	0.000
Audit fees	1.8E-08	0.000	0.092	0.816	0.417
Audit firm size	-0.105	0.089	-0.157	-1.173	0.244
Audit committee meeting frequency	-0.066	0.029	-0.296	-2.264	0.026

a. Dependent Variable: Timeliness of financial report

The results on Tables 4.10 – 4.12 above provided an investigation into the overall significance of the model. The value of R is 0.479, implying that there is a relationship between the determinants and value relevance of auditors reporting timeliness of listed manufacturing firms (conglomerate goods sector) in Nigeria. The R indicates that about 47.9% variation in the endogenous variable (timeliness of financial report) can be explained by the exogenous variable (auditors' expertise; audit committee meeting frequency; audit fees; audit committee gender diversity; audit committee independence; and audit firm size) while 52.1% is accounted for by other determinants aside the aforementioned. In addition, the estimated value of the regression coefficient (β) of audit committee meeting frequency is -0.07 which indicates that audit committee meeting frequency has negative impact on timeliness of the financial report of listed manufacturing firms (conglomerate goods sector) in Nigeria. That is, a relative increase in audit committee meeting frequency will result in about 7% negative change in timeliness of the financial report of listed manufacturing firms (conglomerate goods sector) in Nigeria. This impact is high and significant.

To test for the significance of the independent variable, the probability value of the independent variables (audit committee meeting frequency), that is, 0.026 indicates that audit committee meeting frequency is significantly related to timeliness of financial report of listed manufacturing firms (conglomerate goods sector) in Nigeria. Thus, we accept the alternate hypotheses (H13) and conclude that there was significant impact of audit committee meeting frequency on timeliness of financial report of listed manufacturing firms (conglomerate goods sector) in Nigeria. The linear regression equation for this model is shown as:

$Y = 1.022 – 0.066*x$

which means that:

AULG = 1.022 – 0.066*(AMFQ)

4.2.4 Determinants and value relevance of auditors reporting timeliness of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria from 2008 to 2023

Table 4.13: Model Summary for test of Hypotheses

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.332[a]	0.110	0.099	31.560	0.110	9.773	6	473	0.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Audit committee meeting frequency, Audit fees, and Audit firm size

b. Dependent Variable: Timeliness of financial report

Table 4.14: ANOVA Result for Hypotheses

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	584.091	6	97.349	9.773	0.000[b]
	Residual	4711.3	473	9.961		
	Total	5295.39	479			

a. Dependent Variable: Timeliness of financial report

b. Predictors: (Constant), Audit committee meeting frequency, Audit fees, and Audit firm size

Table 4.15: Coefficients Result for Hypotheses

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.006	0.070		14.278	0.000
Audit fees	3.3E-08	0.000	0.113	2.296	0.022
Audit firm size	0.069	0.039	0.092	1.777	0.076
Audit committee meeting frequency	-0.059	0.012	-0.240	-4.942	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: Timeliness of financial report

The results on Tables 4.13 – 4.15 above provided an investigation into the overall significance of the model. The value of R is 0.332, implying that there is a relationship between the determinants and value relevance of auditors reporting timeliness of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria. The R indicates that about 33.2% variation in the endogenous variable (timeliness of financial report) can be explained by the exogenous variable (audit committee meeting frequency; audit fees; and audit firm size) while 66.8% is accounted for by other factors aside the aforementioned determinants. In addition, the estimated value of the regression coefficient (β) of audit fees is 0.000000033 which indicates that audit fees have impact on timeliness of the financial report of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria. That is, a relative increase in audit fees will result in about 0.0000033% positive change in timeliness of the financial report of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria. Likewise, the estimated value of the regression coefficient (β) of auditors' expertise is 0.012 which indicates that auditors' expertise has impact on timeliness of the financial report of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria. That is, a relative increase in auditors' expertise will result in about 1.2% positive change in timeliness of the financial report of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the estimated value of the regression coefficient (β) of audit committee meeting frequency is -0.059 which indicates that audit committee meeting frequency has negative impact on timeliness of the financial report of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria. That is, a relative increase in audit committee meeting frequency will result in about 5.9% negative change in timeliness of the financial report of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria. Likewise, the estimated value of the regression coefficient (β) of audit committee gender diversity is -0.305 which indicates that audit committee gender diversity has negative impact on timeliness of the financial report of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria. That is, a relative increase in audit committee gender diversity will result in about 30.5% negative change in timeliness of the financial report of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria.

To test for the significance of the independent variable, the probability value of the independent variables (audit fees, and audit committee meeting frequency), that is, 0.000 indicates that audit fees, and audit committee meeting frequency are significantly related to audit reporting time lag of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria. Thus, we accept the alternate hypotheses (H11, and H16) and conclude that there was significant impact of audit fees, and audit committee meeting frequency on timeliness of financial report of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria. The linear regression equation for this model is shown as:

Y = 1.006 + 0.000000033*x + 0.012*x

which means that:

AULG = 1.006 + 0.000000033*(AUF) – 0.059*(AMFQ) -+ 0.012*(AUE)

4.3 Discussion Of Findings

In the previous section of this chapter, the researcher presented and analysed the result of this study using the objectives of the study as a guide. Audit fees, audit firm size, and audit committee meeting frequency (determinants of auditors reporting timeliness) as against timeliness of the financial report which was used as proxy for the dependent variable (that is, value relevance of auditors reporting timeliness). The discussion of major findings is shown in the ensuing subsection.

4.3.1 Impact of audit fees on timeliness of financial report of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria

The study's findings indicate that audit fee has a statistically significant positive impact on the timeliness of financial reports in the consumer goods sector, as evidenced by the regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.00000004102$) and the p-value ($P = 0.039$), which is less than the significance level of 0.05. This suggests that in the consumer goods sector, higher audit fees are associated with more timely financial reporting. One possible explanation for this finding is that the consumer goods sector is highly competitive and dynamic, and companies in this sector may require more extensive and specialized audit services to ensure the accuracy and reliability of their financial reports. In this context, higher audit fees may be indicative of a more thorough and efficient audit process, which enables auditors to identify potential issues and areas of risk more quickly and accurately. This, in turn, can contribute to more timely financial reporting and enhance investor confidence in the sector. The finding is consistent with prior studies that have reported a positive relationship between audit fees and audit quality in industries that require specialized knowledge and expertise [40].

Furthermore, the study's findings indicate that a relative increase in audit fee results in a 0.0000041% positive change in timeliness in the consumer goods sector. Although the magnitude of the effect may seem small, it is statistically significant and suggests that higher audit fees are associated with more timely financial reporting in this sector. This finding has important implications for the manufacturing sector in Nigeria, particularly in the consumer goods sub-sector. One possible interpretation of this finding is that higher audit fees may be indicative of a more thorough and efficient audit process, which enables auditors to identify potential issues and areas of risk more quickly and accurately. In the consumer goods sector, where companies are subject to various regulatory requirements and standards, a more efficient audit process can contribute to more timely financial reporting and enhance investor confidence. The finding also suggests that companies in the consumer goods sector may benefit from engaging auditors who charge higher fees, as these auditors may have the necessary expertise and resources to conduct high-quality audits in a timely manner. This can be particularly important in a competitive and dynamic industry like consumer goods, where timely financial reporting can be critical to maintaining stakeholder confidence and supporting business operations.

Noteworthy, the impact of audit fees on the timeliness of financial reports of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria is only significant in the consumer goods sector, and not in the industrial and conglomerates sectors. The finding highlights the importance of sector-specific factors in determining the impact of audit fees on timeliness. Perhaps, different sectors may have different audit requirements, complexities, and priorities, which can affect the relationship between audit fees and timeliness. This suggests that regulators and standard-setters should consider sector-specific factors when developing guidelines and regulations related to audit fees and timeliness. The finding has important implications for companies, regulators, and auditors, and highlights the need for sector-specific considerations when evaluating the impact of audit fees on timeliness. The study's findings also have implications for audit firms, suggesting that they should consider sector-specific factors when determining their audit fees and approach to audit engagements. By understanding the unique needs and complexities of different sectors, audit firms can tailor their services to meet the needs of their clients and deliver high-quality audits in a timely manner.

4.3.2 Impact of audit firm size on timeliness of financial report of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria

The study's findings indicate that audit firm size has a statistically significant positive impact on the timeliness of financial reports in the consumer goods sector, with a regression coefficient (β) of 0.154 and a p-value of 0.003. This suggests that larger audit firms, including Big-4 audit firms, are associated with more timely financial reporting in this sector. One possible explanation for this finding is that larger audit firms have more resources and expertise at their disposal, which enables them to conduct more efficient and effective audits. This is consistent with prior studies that have reported a positive relationship between audit firm size and audit quality [41]. Larger audit firms, including Big-4 firms, may have more experienced staff, advanced audit tools and techniques, and greater industry expertise, which can enable them to identify potential issues and areas of risk more quickly and accurately. In the consumer goods sector, where companies are subject to various regulatory requirements and standards, larger audit firms may be better equipped to navigate these complexities and ensure that financial reports are accurate and timely.

Furthermore, the study's findings indicate that a relative increase in audit firm size results in a 15.4% positive change in timeliness, suggesting that larger audit firms are associated with more timely financial reporting. This finding is consistent with prior studies that have reported a positive relationship between audit firm size and audit quality [42]. One possible explanation for this finding is that larger audit firms have more resources and expertise at their disposal, which enables them to conduct more efficient and effective audits. This can lead to a reduction in audit delays and an increase in the timeliness of financial reporting. Larger audit firms may also have more experienced staff, advanced audit tools and techniques, and greater industry expertise, which can enable them to identify potential issues and areas of risk more quickly and accurately. The 15.4% positive change in timeliness associated with a relative increase in audit firm size is a significant finding, suggesting that the impact of audit firm size on timeliness is substantial. This finding has important implications for companies and regulators, highlighting the importance of audit firm size in ensuring timely financial reporting. In the context of the consumer goods sector, where companies are subject to various regulatory requirements and standards, larger audit firms may be better equipped to navigate these complexities and ensure that financial reports are accurate and timely. This can be particularly important in a competitive and dynamic industry like consumer goods, where timely financial reporting can be critical to maintaining stakeholder confidence and supporting business operations. The finding also suggests that companies in the consumer goods sector may benefit from engaging larger audit firms, as these firms may have the necessary resources and expertise to conduct high-quality audits in a timely manner. This can lead to improved financial reporting and enhanced stakeholder confidence, which can have a positive impact on business operations and performance.

4.3.3 Impact of audit committee meeting frequency on timeliness of the financial report of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria

The finding that audit committee meeting frequency has a statistically significant negative impact on the timeliness of financial reports ($R = 0.332$, $P = 0.000$; $\beta = -0.059$) across all three sectors of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria - consumer goods, industrial goods, and conglomerates - raises important questions about the dynamics between corporate governance structures and financial reporting efficiency. Although audit committee meetings are generally intended to strengthen oversight and enhance financial reporting quality, their increased frequency appears to be associated with reporting delays in this context. Several plausible explanations can be drawn from theory, practice, and extant literature. For instance, frequent audit committee meetings may be indicative of deeper financial reporting or internal control problems, rather than a proactive governance strategy. In many Nigerian firms, particularly in sectors with complex operations or weak internal audit functions, increased meeting frequency could signal unresolved issues that require repeated discussions, thereby slowing the financial reporting process. According to Al-Muzaiqer et al. [43], an increase in audit committee activities, including meetings, is often a response to perceived risk or internal inefficiencies, not necessarily a sign of efficiency. Similarly, Pradipta and Zalukhu [44] found that firms with poor performance and governance lapses tend to hold more frequent audit committee meetings - often with counterproductive outcomes.

This is similar to the findings of Zaitul & Ilona [45] who found a negative association between meeting frequency and firm performance, emphasizing that excessive meetings are often a symptom of inefficiency rather than diligence.

In conclusion, the statistically significant negative relationship between audit committee meeting frequency and timeliness of financial reporting in all three Nigerian manufacturing sectors underscores a crucial insight: more meetings do not necessarily equate to better governance or efficiency. In practice, frequent meetings may reflect internal control weaknesses, unresolved audit challenges, or ineffective oversight mechanisms, all of which can lead to delays. This finding aligns with the literature suggesting that audit committee effectiveness is more influenced by quality - independence, competence, and focus - than quantity of meetings. For Nigerian firms, especially those in sectors with complex operations or evolving governance practices, there is a need to emphasize strategic, well-structured, and technically informed oversight over sheer frequency of meetings.

V. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Findings

Based on the test of hypotheses results and the discussions that ensued, we summeriye the major findings of the study as follows:

i.In the consumer goods sector and across all sectors, audit fee demonstrated a statistically significant positive impact on reporting timeliness, although the magnitude of this impact was minimal, with increases of only 0.0000041% and 0.0000033%, respectively.
ii.For firms in the consumer goods sector, audit firm size was found to have a statistically significant positive impact on timeliness, with a relative increase associated with a substantial 15.4% improvement in timely disclosure.

iii.Audit committee meeting frequency exhibited a statistically significant negative impact on timeliness in the consumer goods and conglomerate sectors as well as across all sectors, with increased meeting frequency resulting in decreases in timeliness ranging from 5.3% to 7%.

5.2 Conclusion

This study ascertained the determinants and value relevance of auditors reporting timeliness of listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria from 2008 to 2023. The study's findings indicate that audit fee has a statistically significant positive impact on the timeliness of financial reports in both the consumer goods sector (0.0000041% positive change) and across all sectors (0.0000033% positive change). Audit firm size also positively impacts timeliness in the consumer goods sector, with a substantial 15.4% positive change. In contrast, audit committee meeting frequency has a statistically significant negative impact on timeliness in the consumer goods sector (5.3% negative change), conglomerate goods sector (7% negative change), and across all sectors (5.9% negative change). These findings highlight the importance of sector-specific considerations in ensuring timely financial reporting and provide insights for firms and regulatory bodies to optimize their audit practices. Overall, the study highlights the varying effects of audit-related factors on the timeliness of financial reports across different sectors and collectively, suggesting that firms and regulatory bodies should consider these factors when ensuring timely financial reporting.

5.3 Recommendations

In line with the findings of this study, the following recommendations will suffice:
i.Listed manufacturing firms in Nigeria, particularly in the consumer goods sector, should consider reviewing their audit fee structures to leverage the positive impact on timeliness of financial reports.
ii.Firms in the consumer goods sector should prioritize engaging larger audit firms to take advantage of their expertise and resources, which can enhance timeliness of financial reporting.
iii.To mitigate the negative impact of audit committee meeting frequency on timeliness, firms across all sectors, especially in the consumer goods and conglomerate goods sectors, should optimize their committee meeting schedules and ensure that meetings are focused and efficient. For instance, they can limit the number of meetings to the minimum necessary to fulfil the committee's responsibilities (for example, meeting quarterly might be sufficient)

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