DETERMINANTS OF FINANCIAL REPORTING TIMELINESS OF LISTED HEALTHCARE FIRMS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
The main objective of the study is to examine the impact of audit committee characteristics and financial reporting timeliness of listed healthcare firms in Nigeria. The model formulated depicts Financial Reporting Timeliness (FRT) as dependent variable, while audit committee independence, audit committee meeting, audit committee size and audit committee financial expertise as independent variables. The study employed ex-post factor research design which relies mainly on using secondary data. The population of the study consists of all the listed healthcare firms in the Nigerian Stock Exchange out of which ten (10) listed firms were used as the sample size through census sampling technique. The study was conducted for a period of ten (10) years ranging from 2009-2018. The study has also adopted the multiple regressions as the technique of data analysis. The result shows positive and insignificant relationship between ACI and FRT, while there is a negative and significant relationship between ACS and FRT. The result also shows negative and insignificant impact between ACM and FRT, and indeed, there is negative and significant impact between ACFE and FRT. Based on these findings, the study recommends that the management of listed healthcare firms as well as the regulatory authorities such as the securities and exchange commission (SEC) should intensify efforts towards ensuring full autonomy of the audit committee and they should meet at least four (4) times in a year. Indeed, a reasonable number of audit committee size should be determined and such should be technically and professionally acquainted with financial knowledge as it has been empirically found that there is significant relationship between the

explanatory variables and financial reporting timeliness of listed healthcare firms in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Audit Committee, Financial Reporting, Timeliness, Healthcare Firms, Nigeria.*

BACKGROUND ISSUES

Financial reporting is considered a paramount aspect of running a successful business firm particularly when attention is given to timeliness in providing the financial statement. Appropriateness in the provision of the monetary report emphasized the importance of the information given with its impact on the management, shareholders and other stakeholders interested in that business. The relevance of the financial report is to be provided at the right time since it timeframe requires for it availability which if not will render the report useless making the possibility of economic shortfall within the profitability of the firm business (Al-Ajmi, 2008).

In respect of performance of monetary report, the work of independent audit committee is required in order to conduct their duties to check whether there is problem or not. That is why the independency of the audit committee is so entrenched so as not to be influenced by the management because only then they can work accordingly and objectively in order to give the financial report a sense of acceptability to its users. Hence, the independent nature of the Audit committee is crucial for the relevance of any financial report (Kolins, Cangemi, &Tomasko, 1991). Furthermore, what made directors that came from outside the firm to be resilient and objective on their performance is the issue of reputation which is well known in the private and public sphere and which spur them to dedicate themselves selflessly (Nguyen and Nielsen, 2010).

Klien (2002) stated that if an audit committee size of a firm is restricted, the size of directors to be selected to work with the audit committee member could be controlled as well. When choices are restricted, the expertise exhibited conveyed to the audit committee could be short and therefore, function of the audit team can be adversely affected. The size of an audit committee can be attributed to the numbers of directors in the panel in a firm. A panel size which is superior provides a greater variety in which the audit committee members can be appointed to discharge their individual monitoring roles (Adelopo, Jallow, and Scott, 2011). Among the tactic an audit committee member should apply is the issue of asking probing questions to the management because it will assist in understanding the level of commitment offered by the management in lieu of the accomplishments of the firm (Spira, 2003).

Interestingly, the rate of meetings is among the yardstick that could add to income control as inactive audit committee members are unwilling to put eyes on the management accordingly. The adoption of the timing of audit committee meetings as proxy to quantify activeness of audit team members was strengthened by Vander Zahn and Tower (2004). Hutchinson, Percy and Erkurtoglu (2008) also used the numerical status of audit committee meetings as representation to the activity of audit committee. A meeting provides an avenue for audit committee members to understand and be informed of the activities of the companies, and more importantly to be informed of any material results of auditors within and outside the firm. On the other hand, a frequent audit committee meeting encourages external auditors to lift up matters of concerns as early as possible.

Most of the duties of the audit committee are focused toward financial aspects, such as dealing with external auditors and reviewing periodic financial reports. The audit committee needs to be manned with members who are financially sound. A financially knowledgeable team of audit committee should work toward enhancing the trust of those that owns shares as the shareholders identify the monetary statements and in respect to the income figures stated as trustworthy free from errors that will affect the financial reports. This financial information could be for three months statements or end of the year financial reports. For instance, Raghunandan and Rama (2003) discovered shareholders are likely to support ratification of appointment of auditors into the committee especially if the member is a professional in financial matters.

In the recent decades, the increasing rate of corporate frauds and financial mismanagement by prominent firms has become the order of the day. These firms include Enron, WorldCom, Parmalat, among others. This continuous case of frauds and mismanagement of financial resources have left a serious doubt about the financial reporting timeliness of listed firms in Nigeria most especially in the Nigerian healthcare sector. In Nigeria, like other countries of the world, there have been a series of popular cases of accounting manipulations which was mainly attributed to financial reporting timeliness such as that reported in relation to Cadbury Nigeria Plc, 2006; Afribank Plc, 2009; Lever Brothers Nigeria Plc, 2004 and Oceanic Bank Plc, 2009 among others. More recently, the cases of Stanbic IBTC, 2015 and Oando Nigeria Plc, 2017 were associated with financial reporting timeliness. These unethical practices have captured the attention of investors whose confidence in financial reporting timeliness and auditing functions is drastically falling. Indeed, stakeholders in the accounting profession- regulatory authorities, academia, accounting firms, and policy makers are now faced with the challenge of rebuilding public confidence in the area of financial reporting timeliness by listed firms. More specifically, Healthcare firms are key to the economic development of every country. In Nigeria, the healthcare sector plays pivotal roles which place it among the leading sectors of the economy.

Recently, issues related to monetary transactions have clearly brought the stage of misuse in the system by financial market regulators and operators in Nigeria. Consequently, the present incidences regarding the sale of counterfeit shares of quoted companies to the public which forces many firms to collapse due to ineffectiveness of the corporate governance. These collapsed firms include Abacus Merchant bank, Onwuka Hitech and many others (Dabor and Tijjani, 2010). Also, many previous works on audit committee characteristics and financial statement appropriateness focused more attention on financial sector and some sub-sectors of the manufacturing industry while ignoring the importance of the healthcare firms to the Nigerian economy. This creates a gap for further research by examining the determinants of financial reporting timeliness of listed healthcare firms in Nigeria. Consistent with this objective, the study therefore hypothesized that, audit committee independence; audit committee size, audit committee meetings and audit committee financial expertise have no significant impact on financial reporting timeliness of listed Health care firms in Nigeria.

This study is designed to examine the determinant of financial reporting timeliness of listed healthcare firms in Nigeria for the period of ten (10) years from 2010 to 2019. As a key player of economic and financial development of any nation, health care firms are not only meant to give adequate and timely medical care but also trace, supervise, and control disease epidemic by augmenting the national health care policy and strategy prevailing in the country Therefore, listed healthcare firms were selected as the domain of the study because of their crucial role to the economy in terms of input to the National Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and also helped the Nigerian economy to be less reliant on importation of healthcare products. Specifically, the term "Determinants" is used as a nomenclature for Audit Committee Characteristics (ACC) as the explanatory variable of the study which is proxied by Audit Committee Independence (ACI), Audit Committee Size (ACS), Audit Committee Meetings (ACM) and Audit Committee Financial Expertise (ACFE). On the other hand, the explained (dependent) variable is proxied by Financial Reporting Timeliness (FRT).

Accordingly, the outcome of this study will be of immense benefit to a large number of users of accounting information. Investors will know the effect of audit committee independence, audit committee size, audit committee meetings and audit committee financial expertise on financial reporting timeliness of listed healthcare firms in Nigeria as they invest their funds for expected returns. Further, the results of this study will be of great benefit to managers in ensuring relevant, reliable and timely financial reporting by the listed healthcare firms in order to continue to impact on the socio-economic well-being of their host communities; shareholders in making an informed-decision as well as determining management efficiency in managing the affairs of a company; employees in demanding for increase in salary and other remunerations as well as good working condition and government for revenue generation in form of taxation from the annual profit of a healthcare firm.

Similarly, the study will also make some significant impetus to the field of accounting and finance in Nigeria. Because there are controversial views among scholars in respect of the relationship in the existing literature between Audit Committee Characteristics (proxied by ACI, ACS, ACM and ACFE) and Financial Reporting Timeliness (FRT).The regulatory authorities particularly the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) as well as corporate affairs commission (CAC) will find the result of this study vital in providing laws for policy implication which will be useful for decision making particularly in respect of stock market regulations and other stakeholders. In addition, the study will be among those that may provide additional evidences for future debates in the field of accounting and finance.

By and large, the outcome of this study would immensely contribute to the existing body of knowledge. This is based on the notion that there is several numbers of studies on Determinants of Financial Reporting Timeliness around the globe. However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is dearth of evidence using data from previous researches that empirically investigated the nexus between the explanatory variables; (ACI, ACS, ACM and ACFE) and financial reporting timeliness of listed healthcare firms in Nigeria. The outcome of this study therefore, will serve as a reference for further research specifically in terms of empirical review. The result of this study would be of great contribution to the existing literature by making proper inclusion and reconciliation between the explanatory variables specifically; the Audit Committee Independence (ACI), Audit Committee Size (ACS), Audit Committee Meetings (ACM) and Audit Committee Financial Expertise (ACFE) thereby, providing a more accurate, reliable and acceptable measure for the determinants which were proxied by audit committee characteristics.

Finally and most importantly, the study even though, has not adopted any new techniques, would be of great relevance methodologically by employing two-step regression models and making proper combination of Correlational and ex- post factor as the techniques for data analysis and research designs for the study respectively. Thereby, expanding and strengthening their application which is worthwhile.

The remaining part of this paper is organized as follows: Section two deals with the review of relevant literatures concerning the subject matter and the theoretical framework that anchors the study. Section three dealt with the methodology adopted for the study. Section four centered on the discussion of the results and the hypothesis testing. While conclusion and recommendations were provided in section five.

REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES AND THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS

Various empirical studies have been conducted on the determinants of financial reporting timeliness of listed firms. Most of these studies have identified some attributes viz; Audit Committee Independence (ACI), Audit

Committee Size (ACS), Audit Committee Meetings (ACM) and Audit Committee Financial Expertise (ACFE) to examine whether they have significant impact on financial reporting timeliness by the practicing firms.
However, the findings documented by majority of these studies seem to be mixed, conflicting and inconclusive.

AUDIT COMMITTEE INDEPENDENCE AND FINANCIAL REPORTING TIMELINESS

Emeh and Apah (2013) studied audit committee characteristics and appropriateness of financial reports: Practical Evidence from Nigeria; the paper investigates the influence of audit committee and appropriateness of financial statements for 35 organizations mentioned in Nigerian Stock Exchange (NSE) covering years of 2007-2011. Information was drawn from yearly account statements and duly analyzed with diagnostic tests, pooled least square and granger causality test. Outcome of work pointed audit team autonomy (ATA) to be linked with appropriateness of financial statements. Consequently, the practical outcome of the work reached conclusions and recommendations for resourceful and competent audit committee distinctiveness to tackle the 21st century serious problems bedeviling business settings.
Ousii and Boulila (2016) studied the impact of audit committee effectiveness and financial coverage appropriateness: The case of Tunisian mentioned firms. Therefore, study aimed to assess relationship among audit from outside the firm that delays and audit committee qualities available in past researches that most relatively influenced audit team usefulness. Audit team qualities investigated in the work are audit committee power, audit committee associate financial knowledge, audit committee associate autonomy, audit committee figure, and audit committee thoroughness as descriptive autonomous variables. They conducted the analysis using data obtained through a survey for a sample of fifty four Tunisian organizations mentioned over the period 2011 and 2013. Outcome of the work pointed to the direction that audit committee financial proficiency adds value to audit committee success and may translate to considerably decrease delay from auditors that came from outside the firm. The results showed audit committee financial know-how has a harmful outcome and statistically important.

Hossein and Yasser (2017) studied the effect of audit committee and their uniqueness on the organizations' Data Settings; the current work looked at examining the effect of existence of audit team attitudes on business data settings. These attitudes are autonomy, financial proficiency, dimension, and the sex status of the audit committee. Many techniques have been studied to measure data setting in the bookkeeping and fiscal studies; this study is frontrunner in creating a complete timetable using mathematical technique to weigh data settings. The effect of the existence of audit committee on data setting during 2008 to 2015 that was the timeframe prior and after the consent of the interior control guidelines were examined. Outcomes that studied the data realized from forty one organizations using panel data method to a significant linkage among the existence of audit committee and data setting. The study lacks empiricisms as it is merely conceptual and focused only on autonomy and fiscal proficiency.

AUDIT COMMITTEE SIZE AND FINANCIAL REPORTING TIMELINESS

Siti and Md (2012) studied the causes of audit appropriateness: proof from Malaysia; the aim of the work is to assess causes of audit coverage appropriateness in respect to impact of audit committee performance in Malaysian audit market. Audit committee dimension, audit committee credentials and audit committee gatherings are regarded as component of corporate governance mechanism. Consequently, their research adopted the Agency Theory and earmarked 8 hypotheses. 491 complied Malaysian mentioned organizations from Bursa Malaysia formed part of the population sample with requirements and linked to monitoring by the Central Bank of Malaysia. Regression analysis is conducted to assess audit information appropriateness determinants. Their conclusion indicates that audit report lateness is caused by audit team figure, audit team gatherings, auditor type, audit judgment, total assets and company's proceeds. They found zero clues to enumerate link between panel autonomy and audit committee credentials on corporate financial report timeliness. The research contributes immensely to knowledge on business administration and audit information appropriateness even though their work study examines consequences of regulatory changes.

Emeh and Apah (2013) studied audit committee characteristics and appropriateness of Financial Reports: Empirical Evidence from Nigeria; their research assess the result of audit committee and appropriateness of financial information for 35 firms listed in the Nigerian Stock Exchange (NSE) for the period 2007-2011. The study collected data and analyzed it using diagnostic test, pooled least square and granger causality from yearly information and financial statement. Their finding recommends that audit committee figure is not connected to appropriateness of financial information with any significances. Their research emphasize that audit committee characteristics should work efficiently to tackle the 21st century complexities in corporate governance environment.

Alshrifi, Muhammad, Imam and Widya (2016) examined the effects of the audit committee characteristics on the timeliness of financial reporting in manufacturing companies in Indonesia. The variables used in this study are timeliness of financial reporting as dependent variable, while audit committee independence, audit committee size, audit committee financial expertise, and auditor meeting as independent variables. Their research adopted Purposive Sampling Method and manufacturing companies in Indonesia serving as the population of the study. 92 manufacturing companies listed in Indonesia Stock Exchange (IDX) for the period of 2010-2012 were used as sample of the study through their financial statement sourced from the Indonesia Stock Exchange official website. Hierarchical regression analysis was used to test hypotheses. Their findings indicated that audit committee size negatively affects the timeliness of financial reporting.

AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING AND FINANCIAL REPORTING TIMELINESS

Emeh and Apah (2013) studied audit committee characteristics and timeliness of financial reports: empirical evidence from Nigeria; their study assessed the impact of audit committee and timelines of financial reports for 35 quoted firms in the Nigerian Stock Exchange (NSE) for the period 2007-2011. Data was collected from the annual reports and accounts and diagnostic tests, pooled least square and granger causality test were used for analysis. The study indicates that audit committee meeting (ACM) is not significantly linked to the timeliness of financial reports. As a result of this, conclusions and recommendations were drawn for effective and efficient audit committee characteristics to address the 21st century challenges to corporate environment. Ousii and Boulila (2016) studied the impact of audit committee effectiveness and financial reporting timeliness: The case of Tunisian listed companies. Therefore, the study aimed to assess the link between external audit delay and audit committee attributes found in prior studies that most significantly affect audit committee effectiveness. The audit committee qualities studied in their research is audit committee authority, audit committee member financial expertise, audit committee member independence, audit committee size, and audit committee performance as explanatory independent variables. They conducted the analysis using data obtained through a survey for a sample of 54 Tunisian listed firms over the period 2011–13. Their conclusion indicates that audit committee financial expertise contributes to audit committee performance which in turn could reduce external audit delay significantly. The results showed that audit committee financial expertise has a negative effect and statistically significant.

Alshrifi, Muhammad, Imam and Widya (2016) examined the effects of the audit committee characteristics on the timeliness of financial reporting in manufacturing companies in Indonesia. The variables used in this study are timeliness of financial reporting as dependent variable, while audit committee independence, audit committee size, audit committee financial expertise, and auditor meeting as independent variables. The population of the study comprises manufacturing companies in Indonesia by adopted purposive sampling method. 92 manufacturing companies listed in Indonesia Stock Exchange (IDX) for the period of 2010-2012 were used as sample of the study collected from the Indonesia Stock Exchange official website. The hypotheses were measured using hierarchical regression analysis. The results showed that the audit committee meeting negatively affects the timeliness of financial reporting while the result contradicted the stance of the Agency Theory.

Hossein and Yasser (2017) examined impact of audit committee and its characteristics on the firms' information environment which is aimed at studying the impact of the presence of audit committee and its characteristics on the corporate information environment. Independence, financial expertise, size, and the gender of the audit committee were considered as the characteristics. Despite the existence of many techniques in weighing the influence of information environment in the accounting and finance literature, this research is considered first of its kind in the academia that create a full index using mathematical method to determine information environment. Under their investigation, they studied the impact of the presence of audit committee on information environment during 2008-2015 that was the period before and after the approval of the internal control guidelines. The findings covered 41 firms' data using panel data technique that the outcome indicated a positive relationship between the presence of audit committee and information environment. The Panel data technique was used in analyzing 121 firms with the result indicating that independence and financial expertise are positively associated with information environment. However, no significant relationship was found between audit committee meeting and information environment. The study dwelled solely on independence and financial expertise.

AUDIT COMMITTEE FINANCIAL EXPERTISE AND FINANCIAL REPORTING TIMELINESS

Accordingly, Emeh and Apah (2013) studied audit committee characteristics and timeliness of financial reports: empirical evidence from Nigeria; the paper examines the effect of audit committee and timelines of financial reports for thirty-five firms quoted in the Nigerian Stock Exchange (NSE) for the period 2007-2011. The data for this study were collected from the annual reports and accounts. The collected data were analyzed using relevant diagnostic tests, pooled least square and granger causality test. The result suggests that audit committee financial expertise (ACFE) is significantly related to the timeliness of financial reports. Based on the empirical result, their result arrived at a conclusions and offered recommendations for enhancing audit committee characteristics to be able face the challenge of corporate environment in the 21st century.

Ousii and Boulila (2016) studied the impact of audit committee effectiveness and financial reporting timeliness: The case of Tunisian listed companies. Therefore, the study is geared toward understanding the link between external audit delay and audit committee attributes highlighted in prior researches which most affect audit committee effectiveness significantly. The study assessed the qualities of audit committee authority, audit committee member financial expertise, audit committee member independence, audit committee size, and audit committee performance as independent variables worth explaining. They conducted the analysis by obtaining data through a survey for a sample of 54 Tunisian listed firms over the period 2011–13. The findings of their study emphasize that audit committee financial expertise contributes to audit committee effective performance and which could significantly reduce external audit delay. The results showed that audit committee financial expertise has an unfavorable effect and statistically significant.

Moreover, Alshrifi, Muhammad, Imam and Widya (2016) assess the effects of the audit committee characteristics on the timeliness of financial reporting in manufacturing companies in Indonesia. The timeliness of financial reporting as dependent variable while audit committee independence, audit committee size, audit committee financial expertise, and auditor meeting as independent variables are used in the study. The Ninety two manufacturing companies listed in Indonesia Stock Exchange (IDX) and their financial statement within the period of 2010-2012 were used as sample of the population through purposive sampling technique. The research hypotheses were tested with the help of hierarchical regression analysis. The outcome indicates that financial expertise of the audit committee does not in any way affect the timeliness of the financial reporting.

THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS AND MODEL BUILD-UP

Accordingly, agency theory becomes a formal concept after the work of Jensen and Meckling (1976) as it is argued on philosophy that firms pursue their goals taking into account the expenses of getting agents (Agency Cost) to pursue the interest of the principal, since corporations are not always run by the principal. The theory clearly pointed out that the different parties involved in the same situation with same objective will have different motivations. This means that agent will always have the power of information thereby creating information asymmetric between the agent and the principal. However because of inefficiency and effectiveness are inseparable there will be conflict of interest within and among the parties.

The relationship characterized by the agency agreement is that the principal is expected to designate a temporal authority to the agent since the welfare of the former is affected by the actions of the later (Arrow, 1985). Malatesta (2008) indicated that this representation of decision-making power by the principal to the agent often differed as a result of separation of ownership and control in present day corporations. Jensen and Meckling (1976) therefore, considers agency relationship as a contract where the principal sought the service of the agent in order to undertake a certain duties on the behalf of the principal that involve representing some decision-making powers to the agent by the principal with mandate of controlling the economic resources of the firm.

Easterbrook (2009) highlighted that there are 2 main shortcomings against the agency: it include moral hazard (hidden actions) and serious selection (hidden information). Moral hazard is adjudged to include conditions in which the agent's attitude are either hidden from the principal or are too expensive to supervise the behavior of the top management team, since at times performance are not easy to be judged. On the other hand, adverse selection used to happen when an agent have the information which is not seen or is expensive for the principal to have since the boards of directors when dealing with the chief executive officers were often disadvantaged when it comes to information. As a result of the aforementioned conflicts between the agent and the principal, companies are obliged to use control mechanisms to reduce agency costs and information asymmetry like the audit committee (Kalbers, 1988). Similarly Adam (1994) states that in order to reduce agency costs between principals and agents, the firm may invest more in the internal audit function and pay higher fees for external auditors to ensure reliability of the financial reporting and the audit quality.

Similarly, the theory of "Inspired Confidence" was developed in the late 1920s by the Dutch professor Theodore Limperg (Mahdi, 2010). Limperg's theory addresses both the demand and the supply for audit services. According to Limperg, the demand for audit services is the direct consequence of the participation of third parties (interested parties of a company) in the company. These parties demand accountability from the management, in return for their investments in the company. Accountability is realized through the issuance of periodic financial reports. Thus, the function of auditing is to prevent information asymmetries among related parties. High audit quality (as proxied by audit fee) should be related to low levels of information asymmetry and low levels of "uncertainty concerning performance." Therefore, audit committee characteristics should be positively associated with financial reporting timeliness.

Specifically, both the agency theory and the theory of inspired confidence were used in underpinning the findings of this study. While the former links shareholders and the management who are the providers of financial statements to be audited by audit firms, the latter links audit committee and financial reporting timeliness that play a prominent role in ensuring relevant, reliable and timely financial information by the reporting entities.

METHODS AND DESIGN

This study adopted ex-post factor as the research design. The choice of ex-post facto research design in this study is informed by the fact that, the aim is to examine the impact of one variable (independent variable) on the other (dependent variable).The population of the study consists of all the ten (10) listed healthcare firms on the Nigerian Stock Exchange as at 31st December, 2019. In view of the availability of the data for all the firms within the period of the study, the study adopted census sampling techniques by studying the entire firms as sample size of the study. Indeed, the study used secondary data which was obtained from annual reports and accounts of all the firms in our sample size, for the duration of ten years (2010 – 2019). Secondary data used in this study is informed by the quantitative approach of the study, which need quantitative data to test the research hypotheses. Most importantly, multiple regressions is considered appropriate for the study. This is based on the fact that it helps in measuring both causes and effect of the relationship between dependent and independent variables of the study.

In functional form, FRT is expressed as a function of audit committee independence, audit committee size, audit committee meetings and audit committee financial expertise.

FRT= *f*(ACI, ACS, ACM and ACFE)

In econometrical form, the model that is used to empirically test the hypotheses formulated in the first section of this study is as follows;

$$\mathbf{FRT_{it} = \alpha + \beta_1 ACI_{it} + \beta_2 ACS_{it} + \beta_3 ACM_{it} + \beta_4 ACFE_{it} + e_{it}}$$

Where:

TFR= Timeliness of Financial Reporting

ACI = audit committee independence

ACS = audit committee size

ACM = audit committee meetings

ACFE = audit committee financial expertise
e= Error term
α = is the intercept
β_1-β_4 = coefficient of the independent variables
i= Healthcare firms
t= time

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section analyses and statistically interprets the data collected for the study. The section begins with descriptive statistics and correlation matrix. It then presents the regression results and discusses the findings in the light of previous studies. The section concludes with the highlight of the policy implications and recommendations drawn from the findings of the study.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The summary of the descriptive statistics of the variables are presented in table 4.1. The full results are contained in appendix:

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

VARIABLE	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM
FRT	4.0637	0.7447	2.4	5.01
ACI	0.4239	0.2386	0.17	1.5
ACM	1	0	1	1
ACS	4.7800	1.0501	3	6
ACFE	0.4511	0.1559	0.17	1

Source: *STATA Output Result*

Table 2 reports the descriptive statistics for the dependent and independent variable respectively (FRT = Financial Reporting Timeliness, ACT = Audit Committee Independence, ACM = Audit Committee Meetings, ACS = Audit Committee Size and ACFE = Audit Committee Financial Expertise). Most prominent result is the high standard deviation of Audit Committee size (1.0501) relative to the standard deviation of other variables included in the model of the study which ranges between 0.00 to 0.74. This high standard deviation of

Audit Committee size indicates that the simple firms are of different sizes and maturity. This is supported by the average values of Audit Committee independence (0.16) accordingly. Hence; this justified the inclusion of Audit Committee meetings, Audit committee size and Audit Committee Financial Expertise in the model of the study.

However; financial reporting represents that 26% of financial reporting timeliness in the listed healthcare firms in Nigeria is determined by other factors. This result is not surprising due to the nature and combination of the explanatory variable most of which are monitoring mechanisms and audit committee characteristics based. Thus; very scanty proportion financial reporting timeliness are caused by other factors rather than the explanatory variables used in the study.

The average ACI of the listed healthcare firms in Nigeria is approximately 0.42. This signifies that about 42% of financial reporting timeliness is influenced by Audit Committee independence while 58% is raised by other factors. This may be due to the high sense of commitment by the management of the listed healthcare firms in Nigeria towards ensuring independence of the audit committee and hence; timely financial reporting. This is supported by the standard deviation value of 0.24 approximately.

Indeed, audit committee meetings shows a null value which simply indicates the collinearly effect of ACM influential reporting timeliness by the listed healthcare firms in Nigeria throughout the period of the study. The statistics for audit committee financial expertise (ACFE) shows an average value of 45% and 55% of audit committee members with specialization in other areas or discipline rather than finance. This is supported in the standard deviation (0.16) of the audit committee financial expertise of the listed healthcare firms in Nigeria. The implication of this is that the larger the number of audit committee financial expertise the higher the financial reporting timeliness by the listed healthcare firms in Nigeria.

Table 2 reports the association between dependent and independent variables as depicted respectively (FRT = Financial Reporting Timeliness, ACI = Audit Committee Independence, ACM = Audit Committee Meetings, ACS = Audit Committee Size, ACFE = Audit

Committee Financial Expertise).

Table 3: Correlation Matrix

VARIABLE	FRT	ACI	ACM	ACS	ACFE
FRT	1.000				
ACI	0.3864	1.0000			
ACM	0	0	0.0000		
ACS	0.1332	0.0349	0	1.0000	
ACFE	-0.5536	-0.1201	0	0.0194	1.0000

Source: *STATA Output Result*

Table 3 indicates that there is a positive correlation between financial reporting timeliness and the explanatory variables most especially the audit committee independence (ACI) and the audit committee meeting throughout the effect in respect of Audit Committee Meetings throughout the period of the study. Indeed, there is a statistical negative correlation between financial reporting timeliness and Audit Committee Financial expertise. However; adequate care should be taken when interpreting the result in respect of Audit Committee Financial Expertise (ACFE) as this does not mean that ACFE has a negative relationship with financial reporting timeliness. Rather, it specifically means that the correlation or relationship between Audit Committee Financial Expertise and financial reporting timeliness is not as strong as that of Audit Committee Independence and Audit Committee Size. Thus, we can only establish if there is a negative or positive relationship between the explanatory variables through the inferential statistics and test of hypothesis.

Interestingly, the relationship between Audit Committee Size and Audit Committee Independence is statistically positive while that of the Audit Committee Financial Expertise is statistically negative. In general, the higher the proportion of the explanatory variables, the more urgent the financial reporting timeliness by the listed healthcare firms in Nigeria.

Table 4: Regression results.

FRT	COEFFICIENT	T-VALUES	P-VALUES

ACI	0.9974	4.11	0.0000
ACM	0	0	0
ACS	0.0937	1.71	0.087
ACFE	-2.4739	-6.66	0.0000
R^2			0.4278
Wald-Chi^2			71.76
F-Sig.			0.0000

Source: *STATA Output result*

From table 4 it clearly shows the cumulative R^2 (0.43) which is the multiple coefficient of determination that explains the proportion or percentage of the total variation in the dependent variable explained by the explanatory variables jointly. Hence, it signifies that 43% of total variation in financial reporting timeliness of listed healthcare firms in Nigeria is caused by their level of Audit Committee Independence (ACI), Audit Committee meetings (ACM), Audit Committee Size (ACS) and Audit Committee Financial Expertise. This indicates that the model is good, adequate and well-fitted and indeed, the explanatory variables are properly selected, combined and used. This can be confirmed by the value of wald-chi^2 of 71.76 and F-sig of 0.0000 which implies that it is significant at 1% level of significance.

AUDIT COMMITTEE INDEPENDENCE AND FRT

The table 4.3 shows that there is a positive significant relationship between audit committee independence and financial reporting timeliness of listed healthcare firms in Nigeria. This can be seen by the computed value of beta coefficient of 0.9974 with the corresponding P-value of 0.0000 The existence of positive significant relationship between audit committee independence and financial reporting timeliness in Nigeria is signifying that ACI is playing a pivotal role in publishing annual financial statements by listed healthcare firms in Nigeria at 1% significant level. This can be validated by the agency theory, because of the agency relationship that exists between the shareholders and the board of directors. The study is in line with Alshirifi, Muhammad and Widya (2016) and contradicted Hossein and

Yaddar (2017).

AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING AND FRT

The table 4.3 shows that there is a null coefficient value with the corresponding T and P-Values respectively. This result is not surprising as a result of the collinearity effect that led to the omission of ACM from the result of the study. This is confirmed by the fact that a dummy value of 1 is assigned to any company that held 3 or more meetings during the year and conversely, a dummy value of 0 is assigned for those healthcare firms that held less than 2 meetings during the year. Interestingly, all the listed health care firms held 3 or more audit committee meetings during the year. By implication, audit committee meetings is statistically, positively and significantly influencing financial reporting timeliness of listed healthcare firms in Nigeria.

AUDIT COMMITTEE SIZE AND FRT

The table 4.3 shows that there is a positive significant relationship between audit committee size and financial reporting timeliness of listed healthcare firms in Nigeria. This can be confirmed by the computed value of beta coefficient of 0.0937 with the corresponding P-value of 0.087 which is significant at 5% level of significant. The existence of positive significant relationship between audit committee size and financial reporting timeliness in Nigeria is signifying that ACS is reducing the delay in publishing annual financial statements by listed healthcare firms in Nigeria at 5% significant level. This can be underpinned by the agency theory, because of the agency relationship that exists between the shareholders and the board of directors. The study is in line with Emeh and Appah (2013).

AUDIT COMMITTEE FINANCIAL EXPERTISE AND FRT

The table 4.3 shows that there is a negative significant relationship between audit committee financial expertise and financial reporting timeliness of listed healthcare firms in Nigeria. This can be seen by the computed value of beta coefficient of -2.4739 with the corresponding P-value of 0.000 that is significant at 1% level of significant. The existence of negative significant relationship between audit committee financial expertise and financial reporting timeliness in Nigeria is signifying that ACFE is reducing the delay in publishing annual financial statements by listed healthcare firms in Nigeria at a significant level. This means the accounting and finance knowledge of the audit committee members is facilitating the quick release of annual financial statements of the firms, thereby reducing the delay in presenting the annual reports and accounts to the shareholders and other stakeholders of the companies. This can be confirmed by the agency theory, because of the agency relationship that exists between the shareholders and the board of directors. The study is in line with Ousii and Boulila (2016), Hossein and Yaddar (2017) and contradicted Alshirifi, Muhammad & Widya (2016).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the findings of this study, some conclusions are made:
Going by the finding of this research, the study conclude that there is the existence of significant linkage among audit committee independence and financial reporting timeliness of listed healthcare firms in Nigeria. In respect of audit committee meetings and financial reporting timeliness, the study concludes a positive considerable linkage among audit committee meeting and financial reporting timeliness of listed healthcare firms in Nigeria. This means an audit committee meeting is reducing delay in releasing the annual report of listed health care firms in Nigeria.
In respect of audit committee size and financial reporting timeliness, the study concludes a positive and significant linkage between audit committee size and financial reporting timeliness of listed healthcare firms in Nigeria. It is signifying that size of audit committee of listed health care firms in Nigeria is influencing their financial reporting timelessness positively. Moreover, with regards to Audit committee financial expertise effect on financial reporting timeliness, the study concludes a negative but significant linkage between audit committee financial expertise and financial reporting timeliness of listed healthcare firms in Nigeria. This means audit committee members with financial

expertise play a tremendous role in influencing the financial reporting timeliness of listed healthcare firms in Nigeria.

The following recommendations were made based on conclusions;

On audit committee independence and financial reporting timeliness, the study recommends even though the I independence of the audit committee to be maintained for prudency, transparency and high level of accountability, there is the need for increasing the numbers of audit members that are independent from management of the firms for proper monitoring of the activities of the management for quick release of yearly information and accounts to all stakeholders.

i. With regard to audit committee meeting and financial reporting timeliness, its recommends management of listed healthcare firms in Nigeria to comply with the maximum number of meetings stipulated by the Nigerian code of cooperate governance;
ii. On audit committee size and financial reporting timeliness, its recommends intervention of regulatory agencies such as the Security Exchange Commission (SEC) in order to monitor the compliance by the listed healthcare firms in Nigeria in respect to minimum numbers of audit committee members as spelt out by the regulators in Nigeria;
iii. In respect to the outcome of audit committee financial expertise and financial reporting timeliness, the study recommends that listed healthcare firms in Nigeria should as a matter of their firms' policy, make sure they engage more people who are knowledgeable in Accounting and financial management in the composition of their audit committee.

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