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VALUE RELEVANCE OF EARNINGS AND BOOK VALUE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN BIG4 AND NON-BIG4 AUDITED LISTED FIRMS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study empirically examined the comparative value relevance of earnings and book value between big4 and non-big4 audited listed firms in Nigeria. The study covered 161 listed firms for the period 2014 -2019. However, an adjusted population of 154 firms was used with aid of a filter. The study employed quantitative data extracted from the annual reports of the sampled firms and the study aligns itself to positivist paradigm. Data were analyzed based on multiple regression technique with the aid of STATA, and the study revealed that both EPS and BVP are value relevant in both models. However, EPS and BVP in the first model are more value relevant. On the whole, the study found that accounting information of firms audited by Non-Big4 audit firms is more value relevant than that audited by Big4 audit firm. Thus, the study recommends inter-alia that regulatory authorities such as CBN and SEC should ensure that firms engage the service of audit firms not necessarily the Big4 audit firms as this helps improve the credibility of the report.

Keywords: Accounting information, earnings per share, book value per share, Big4 Audit firms, Non-Big4 Audit firms.

1. Introduction

The essence of accounting report is to provide stakeholders with information as to the economic reality of the firm to which they own a stake. This information must have the ingredients necessary to be of relevance for use in the investment decision of the investors thus influencing the value of the firm. Hence, the concept of value relevance, rooted on the pillars of relevance and reliability. It has to do with the ability of accounting figures to

summarize the fundamentals that support stock values. Levitt (1998) viewed value relevance as the nexus that exists between accounting information and share price. Financial statements form part of the key mechanisms through which listed firms transmit financial information to investors and the general public (Kaushalya and Kehelwalatenna, 2020). Accounting information is considered value relevant when it influences the investors' decision with regards investment (Uwuigbe, Uwuigbe, Jafaru, Igbinoba, & Oladipo, 2016; Chaudhry & Sam, 2014).

Plethora of studies was conducted in the field of value relevance in advanced and developing economies. These studies looked at value relevance from different viewpoints such as pre and post IFRS introduction (Prihatni, Subroto, Saraswati & Purnomosidi, 2018), sector analysis (Aruwa & Naburigi, 2015), cross country analysis (Elbakry, 2016), and traditional Ohlson's analysis. However, this study seeks to examine comparatively, the value relevance of earnings and book value between big4 and nonbig4 audited listed firms in Nigeria. A priori expectation of the study is that the investors and the general public would be able to determine the accounting information that is more value relevant between the firms audited by Big4 audit firms and those audited by Non-Big4 audit firms. It ensures that a company's credibility with investors and shareholders is preserved.

The findings of the previous studies on the value relevance of accounting numbers were diverse and inconsistent. Also, the previous studies failed to look at value relevance from the view point of comparison between the firms that were audited by big4 and those that were audited by nonbig4 audit firms in Nigeria or in any part of the world. To fill this vacuum, therefore, this study aims to carry out a comparative analysis of value relevance of earnings and equity book value between big4 and non big4 audited listed firms in Nigeria.

Based on the foregoing objective, the study hypothesizes in null form as follows:

H₀₁: there is no significant difference in the value relevance of earning per share between Big4 and Non-Big4 audited listed firms in Nigeria.

H₀₂: there is no significant difference in the value relevance of book value per share between Big4 and Non-Big4 audited listed firms in Nigeria.

The study covers all the listed companies in Nigeria for the period 2014 -2019. The findings will add to existing empirical evidences in the area of value relevance of accounting information, it will be utilized by the policy makers, existing and prospective investors, managers, practitioners and academicians.

This section entails introduction, the subsequent sections encompasses literature review and theoretical framework, section three comprises research methodology, section four entails results presentation and discussion and finally, section five covers conclusion and recommendations.

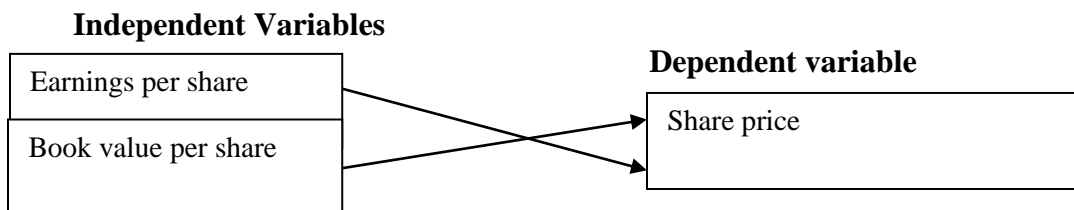
2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

There exist a number of previously documented empirical evidence in the field of value relevance of accounting information; though with varying perspective and approach. Some of which found a positive impact of EPS and book value per share on share price (Mamman, 2013; Trabelsi & Trabelsi, 2014; Ijeoma, 2015; Bengi, Ahmet, & Irene, 2020), while others found negative influence of earnings per share and book value on share price (Busari, 2019; Trabelsi & Trabelsi, 2014). Other studies, such as Prihatni, Subroto, Saraswati and Purnomosidi (2018), Olugbenga (2016), Umoren and Enang (2015), and Suadiye (2012), look at it from the standpoint of value relevance of accounting information before and after

IFRS implementation. There are contradictions in previously documented empirical investigations, where some studies claim to have found a strong impact of accounting information on share price others, such as Balakrishnan (2016), argue that accounting figures have no effect on share price. In addition, some empirical evidences documented inter-sector comparison (Aruwa and Naburgi, 2015; and Bagudo, 2015) and some form of cross country analysis (Elbakry, 2016).

Conversely, the studies were not able to look at value relevance of accounting information based on comparison between Big4 and Non-Big4 audited listed firms in Nigeria, also the studies did not cover the entire listed firms in Nigeria, again, their findings may not be capable of being replicated when conducted on the entire listed firms in Nigeria considering, the sample size, the passage of time and environmental disparities. Hence, the need for a more encompassing and robust study to bridge the observed gap.

Research Framework: this simply presents diagrammatically, the association between accounting information and share price. Thus:



Signaling theory is deemed seemly in this circumstance as it facilitates characterization of behavior when two parties (individuals or firms) have differing knowledge. The prevalent instance is that, the sender is at discretion to choose whether and how to transmit (or signal) that information, while the receiver, is at liberty to interpret the signal. The signaling theory is based on the proposition that financial report items convey message to an entity's stakeholders. Furthermore, this knowledge has the likelihood of affecting stakeholders' decision with regards a particular firm. As a result, it is reasonable to conclude that the share price in a company's financial statement is a critical variable that provides information to securities market investors. This information conveyed by financial report is deemed value relevant if it aids investors' decision as to investment or divestment in any given firm or economy.

3. Methods and Techniques

This study is based purely on correlational research designs as it entails evaluating the association between accounting information and share price. The study covers all the 161 publicly traded companies in Nigeria for the period 2014-2019. However, the study used adjusted population with the aid of a filter reducing the firms to 154 listed firms. Only quantitative data were extracted from the audited financial reports of the selected companies, and analysis was made based on multiple regression technique with the aid of STATA package, and the study is in line with positivist paradigm.

In a bid to empirically evaluate the comparative value relevance of earnings and book value between Big4 and Non-Big4 audited listed firms in Nigeria, multiple linear regression models will be adopted. The first model is to capture the value relevance of earnings per share and book value per share, for the Non-Big4 audited listed firms in Nigeria. However, the second model is to incorporate the value relevance of earnings per share and book value per share, for the Big4 audited listed firms in Nigeria. The models are as follows:

$$SP_{it} = \alpha_{it} + \beta_1 EPS_{it} + \beta_2 BVPS_{it} + \varepsilon_{it} \text{----- (I)}$$

$$SP_{it} = \alpha_{it} + \beta_1 EPS_{it} + \beta_2 BVPS_{it} + \varepsilon_{it} \text{----- (II)}$$

Note:

α : constant

β_1 – β_2 are the coefficients of the parameter estimates.

i : panel data

ε : the error term

Table 1: Variables Measurement

| Variable Acronym | Variable Name | Variable Measurement | Source (s) |
|------------------|------------------------|--|--|
| SP | Market value per share | Share price as at the end of march of each accounting year | (Zulu, De Klerk, & Oberholster, 2017). |
| BVPS | Book value per share | Equity divided by no. of equity shares outstanding | (Uwuigbe et al., 2016)) |
| EPS | Earnings per share | Earnings after tax divided by no. of shares outstanding | (Sullubawa, 2015) |

Source: Computed by Author based on literature, 2022

Robustness tests

With a view to ensuring the reliability and validity of the statistical inferences to be drawn for the study, the study conducted various levels of robustness test. The test involves multicollinearity and serial correlation test, heteroscedasticity, fixed and random effects tests, hausman specification test, langrangian test, and any other test deemed necessary in order to substantiate and corroborate the validity and reliability of result of the study.

4. Presentation and Discussion of Result

This section presents and discusses the descriptive statistics table, correlation matrix, robustness tests, and summary of regression result.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics (model one: Non-Big4 audited firms)

| VARIABLES | Min | Max | Mean | Std. Dev | N |
|-----------|---------|--------|---------|----------|-----|
| SP | 0 | 315 | 8.9278 | 29.4569 | 445 |
| EPS | -5.1643 | 496.48 | 1.7517 | 25.8348 | 371 |
| BVP | 0.19 | 3747.5 | 25.4819 | 197.0455 | 371 |

Source: STATA Output

From the table 2 above, share price has minimum value of 0.000, maximum value of N313 and value of 12.251 and standard deviation value of 38.890. The minimum value of 0.000 may mean that for some years we could not access the share price of the studied firms. The maximum value represents the highest price the share of the studied firms was selling for the period of the study. The standard deviation of share price from mean of N 33.89 suggests a high degree of dispersion since it is higher than the mean.

Earnings per share, EPS has an average value of N 1.75, minimum value of N -5.16, maximum value of N 496.47 and standard deviation value of N 25.83. The minimum value of N-5.16 means that firms were experiencing loss and the maximum value of N496.47 kobo means the maximum profit per share made by the firms is not more than the said amount. Also, the standard deviation value of 25.8348 means that there is high degree of variation since it is far higher than the average value of N1.75 kobo.

Book value per share, BVP has a minimum value of N 0.19 kobo, maximum value of N 3,747.5 kobo, mean value of N25.4820 and standard deviation N196.912. The minimum book value of N 19 kobo means some firms have book value per share that is less than the minimum market price. The average value implies that listed firm in Nigeria has a book value of equity per share of N 25.83 kobo which measures the safety level of each share after all accumulated debts are settled. The standard deviation also indicates some degree of dispersion from the mean by about N 196.912 signifying a wide range of dispersion from the average value since the standard deviation is higher than average value. This large variation might be owing to the differences in the size of the studied firms, age of sampled firms, associates, level of activities to mention a few.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics (model two: Big4 audited firms)

| VARIABLES | Min | Max | Mean | Std. Dev | N |
|-----------|----------|--------|---------|----------|-----|
| SP | 0.2100 | 1500 | 39.7849 | 139.5934 | 453 |
| EPS | -0.0620 | 1352 | 15.2470 | 92.3781 | 460 |
| BVP | -0.01978 | 2.3551 | 0.1517 | 0.3194 | 460 |

Source: STATA Output, 2022

From the table 4.2 for the model two (Big4 audited firms), share price has minimum value of 0.21, maximum value of N1500 and mean value of 39.7849 and standard deviation value of 139.5934. The minimum value of 0.21 means that for the period under investigation, it was the least price per share amongst the listed firms. The maximum value represents the highest price the share of the studied firms was selling for the period of the study. The standard deviation of share price from mean of N 139.5934 suggests a high degree of dispersion since it is higher than the mean.

Earnings per share, EPS has an average value of N 15.2470, minimum value of N -0.0620, maximum value of N 1352 and standard deviation value of N 92.3781. The minimum value of N-0.0620 implies that firms were experiencing losses, and the maximum value of 1352 means the maximum profit per share made by the firms is not more than the said amount. Also, the standard deviation value of N 92.3781 means that there is high degree of variation since it is far higher than the average value of 15.2470.

Book value per share, BVP has a minimum value of N -0.01978kobo, maximum value of N 2.3551kobo, mean value of N0.1517 kobo and standard deviation N0.3194kobo. The minimum book value of N-19 kobo means some firms have book value per share that is less than the minimum market price. The average value implies that listed firm in Nigeria has a book value of equity per share of 15kobo which measures the safety level of each share after all accumulated debts are settled. The standard deviation also indicates some degree of dispersion from the mean by about N 32 kobo signifying a relatively higher level of

dispersion from the average value since the standard deviation is higher than average value. This large variation could be as a result of the differences in the size of the studied firms, age of sampled firms, associates, level of activities to mention a few.

Correlation Matrix

Correlation matrix was conducted for both models, and the result of the test indicated the presence of multicollinearity amongst the explanatory variables as some of the independent variables are significantly correlated amongst themselves. However, in order to ascertain as to the presence of harmful multicollinearity, an advanced test, VIF and Tolerance value tests were conducted and the result suggested the absence of harmful multicollinearity (see appendix).

Robustness Test

With a view to ascertaining the validity and reliability of the result generated in both models, robustness tests were carried out. First, VIF and Tolerance value tests were conducted and the results in both models indicate the absence of harmful multicollinearity amongst the independent variables of the study as the VIF and Tolerance values appeared consistently less than 10 and 1 respectively. Heteroscedasticity test was carried out and the probability value was significant implying the presence of heteroscedasticity, the study went further to conduct further test, based upon which study reported Robust OLS regression model in order to take care of heteroscedasticity found in the earlier tests on both models. Hence, the results were finally interpreted based on Robust OLS Regression models.

Table 4.3: summary of Regression Results

| | Model 1 | | | Model 2 | | |
|----------|---------|------|----------|----------|--------|---------|
| | Coeff. | Z | Prob | Coeff. | t-stat | Prob |
| Constant | 2.7201 | 2.83 | 0.005 | 35.3769 | 4.74 | 0.000 |
| EPS | 6.4423 | 3.92 | 0.000 | 0.7887 | 3.83 | 0.000 |
| BVP | 0.2275 | 2.54 | 0.012 | -51.1804 | -2.11 | 0.036 |
| R-Sq | | | 0.45 | | | 0.21 |
| F-Sig | | | 15.15 | | | 8.07 |
| Prob. | | | 0.000 | | | 0.000 |
| Hetest | | | 666.5*** | | | 4441*** |

Source: STATA Output, 2022

From the Robust OLS model presented in table 4.3 for model one, it can be seen that F-Sig has a value of 15.15 and a P-value of 0.000 which is significant 1% percent, signifying that the model is well fitted. The R-Squared overall of 45% means that accounting information (EPS, BVP) are responsible for changes in share price to the tune of 45% while other factors not captured in the model explain 55% of changes in share price. Also, for model two, the Robust OLS Regression result indicates Adjusted R-Squared value of 21 percent, signifying that the combined effect of accounting information explains the changes in share price to the extent of 21 percent. The F-Sig of 8.07 which is significant at one percent from the probability value of 0.000 indicates that the model two of the study is also fitted and adequate.

EPS in model one has a beta value of 6.4423, and a P-Value of 0.000 which is significant at 1% indicates that EPS is positively and significantly associated with share price at one percent level. This implies that for every one percent increase in earnings per share, share price will increase by N6.44K. Also, EPS for the second model, has a beta value of 0.788 and p-value of 0.000. This indicates that there is significant positive relationship between EPS and share price. This further implies that for every one percent increase in EPS share price will increase by 788 kobo. This is not surprising as it is in line with a priori expectation and signaling theory that accounting information sends useful information that aids investors' decision making with regards their investment. Also, the coefficient values in the two models appear to be different in volume and this was supported by the chow test conducted (see appendix). Thus, hypothesis one is rejected.

BVP has a coefficient value of 0.2275 with a p-value of 0.012. This indicates the presence of positive and significant association between book value per share and share. This further signifies that BVP positively and significantly influence share price at five percent. This implies that for every five percent increase in book value share price will increase by 22 kobo. The result is in line with our expectation and proposition of signaling theory that as accounting information sends a positive signal to investors this has the influence of pushing the share price upwards and vice versa. Also, book value per share, BVP in the second model has a coefficient value of -51.180 and probability value of 0.036. This indicates that there exists an inverse relationship between accounting information (BVP) and share price which is significant at five percent level. This further signifies that BVP negatively and significantly influences share price at five percent. This further implies that for every five percent increase in equity book value, share price will reduce by N51.18K. The finding is in line with Busari, (2019) and contradicts those of Ijeoma, 2015; Aruwa & Naburgi, 2015). This therefore negates the early stated hypothesis that there is no significant difference in value relevance of book value per share between Big4 and Non-Big4 audited listed firms in Nigeria. Thus, hypothesis two is rejected.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study concludes that earning per share has positive and significant influence on share price. While book value per share exerts a significant negative influence on the share price of listed firms in Nigeria. Also, the study concludes that there is significant difference in the value relevance of earnings and book value per share between Big4 and Non-Big4 audited listed firms in Nigeria. The study therefore, recommends inter-alia that regulatory authorities such as CBN and SEC should ensure that firms engage the service of audit firms not necessarily the Big4 audit firms.

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