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Artificial Intelligence in Divestiture Strategy and Strategic Decision-Making in International Oil Companies (IOCS) in Nigeria

Ebikebena Redwell EMOTONGHA, Ph.D
University of Africa, Toru-Orua, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. https://orcid.org/0009-0003-0181-3572

Okpimah Special Aaron Emoefe (PhD), MAMN
Department of Business Administration, Southern Delta University, Ozoro Delta State, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT: This paper examined artificial intelligence (AI) in divestiture strategy and strategic decision-making of international oil companies (IOCs), with particular attention to Nigeria. The study aimed to examined how artificial intelligence improves the decision-making speed and quality of information used in divestiture strategies. A peer review qualitative data design was adopted. The study drawn evidence from peer-reviewed journals, and company's official reports, which focuses on divestment cases involving Shell Petroleum Development Spin-off of its onshore outlets, Eni' sale of Nigerian Agip Oil Company to Oando: Renaissance group, Total Energy's spin-off of its portfolio, and ExxonMobil's Spin-off of its Nigerian shallow-water subsidiary to Seplat Energy. The evidence was subjected to thematic content analysis on four decision domains: AI-driven asset valuation analytics, AI-driven human capitals analytics, AI-driven financial statement analytics, and post-divestment monitoring. The findings indicate that AI-driven asset valuation analytics, AI-driven human capitals analytics, AI-driven financial statement analytics, and post-divestment monitoring explained data quality, decision quality and decision-making speed. AI can integrate heterogeneous operational, financial, geological, market, regulatory and environmental information, identify patterns, generate scenarios and improve the speed and quality of strategic decisions. The paper concludes that AI-driven divestiture strategy with AI-driven human capitals analytics, AI-driven financial statement analytics improve strategic decision-making processes. It is recommended that IOCs should establish an AI-enabled portfolio intelligence platform that integrates AI-driven human capitals analytics, AI-driven financial statement analytics, and post-divestment monitoring data for decision support.

KEYWORDS: Artificial intelligence, Divestiture Strategy, Strategic Decision-Making, international oil companies, AI-Driven Asset Valuation, AI-Driven Financial Analytics.

INTRODUCTION

The study was triggered by recently observed managerial issue in the corporate world: strategic decisions on which assets to retain, sell, transfer or redeploy while simultaneously managing declining asset attractiveness, operational risks, regulatory requirements, environmental liabilities, energy-transition pressures and stakeholder expectations by international oil companies (IOCs).

> Peter Drucker said: "*the greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence- it is to act with yesterday's logic*". Paul Lutus said: "*And the most successful people are those who accept, and adapt to, constant change. This adaptability requires a degree of flexibility and humility most people can't manage*".

Thus, in turbulent times when businesses and industries are unable to break-even and profit margins seem to decline or losses are increasing, it becomes essential for corporate strategist to rethink the strategic decisions in the organizations. According to Sedky (2026) decision-making represents one of the most fundamental activities within organizations, shaping strategic direction, operational effectiveness, and long-term performance outcomes. Every organizational result, whether successful or detrimental, can ultimately be traced back to a series of decisions taken by leaders at different levels of the enterprise (Dai et al., 2024). The locus of making such decision can be: 'Centralized': Top management (CEO, Executive Team, and Board) makes key divestment decisions to salvage such managerial situations. However, this is common in smaller or highly integrated simple-tall structure for consistency and control. 'Decentralized': business unit leaders propose or decide on divestments, with corporate oversight. It promotes agility but risks coordination issues due to complex-flat structure.

Decision-making quality has become a critical organizational concern. It is not about decision frequency or speed alone. High-quality decisions are those that are informed, timely, aligned with strategic objectives, risk-aware, and supported by clear accountability mechanisms (Danach et al., 2025). Strategic decision-making involves making choices that balance economic growth, environmental protection and social governance. However, divestiture strategic decisions are made when organizations experiences decline in sourcing of finance, decline in capital investments and unpaid dividends for a period of time. Businesses and industries under this situation are unable to break-even. Divestiture strategy can be

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defined as a process of adjusting the firm's ownership by selling an asset, subsidiary, investment, or equity by the parent company to maximize the shareholders' value or to achieve other goals such as paying down debt or creating a more focused or specialized firm (Kolev, 2016). In simple words divestment is the opposite of investment because instead of investing, putting in capital, you are selling the investment, taking out the capital.

Divestiture strategy involves sells off, spins off, and split off, or otherwise disposes of a business unit, division, or asset based of an organization. It is often part of portfolio optimization to focus on core competencies, improve financial performance, or respond to external pressures. Strategic divestiture is an important mechanism through which multinational corporations reshape their portfolios, release capital, reduce exposure to unattractive assets and redirect managerial attention toward activities with stronger strategic fit. In the oil and gas industry, divestiture has become particularly consequential because firms are simultaneously responding to mature assets, operational and security risks, environmental liabilities, regulatory change, investor expectations and the energy transition. Recent evidence from Africa shows that IOCs divestments can reduce companies' exposure to stranded-asset risks while potentially transferring financial, environmental and operational responsibilities to host governments, national oil companies, local operators and communities (Abolarin, *et al*., 2025).

Empirically, Nigeria's oil and gas industry have experienced several divestiture strategic decisions in recent time: Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) announced in January 2024 that it had agreed to sell "The Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited" (SPDC) to Renaissance, while retaining its deepwater and integrated-gas positions. The transaction was completed in March 2025, after regulatory approvals, and Shell stated that the strategic intent was to simplify its Nigerian portfolio and focus disciplined investment on deepwater and integrated gas (Shell, 2024, 2025). Similarly, Eni completed the sale of Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NAOC) to Oando in August 2024 as part of an upstream portfolio-rationalization strategy, while retaining its interest in the SPDC joint venture and continuing to emphasize deepwater and Nigeria LNG (Eni, 2024). ExxonMobil announced the sale of its Nigerian shallow-water affiliate to Seplat Energy as part of a divestiture strategy to prioritize competitively advantaged investments while retaining deepwater assets (ExxonMobil, 2022). These transactions show that divestiture strategy is not simply an exit decision; it is a strategic reconfiguration decision that need quality information and speed decision-making.

Traditionally, organizations have relied on manual and conventional information-processing systems to evaluate asset performance, human capital capabilities, financial statement reporting quality, and post-divestment monitoring before making strategic divestment decisions. These processes have been found to be time consuming, resulting in delayed access to critical information, increased uncertainty and reduced responsiveness to emerging business opportunities to organizations. However, the emergence of artificial intelligence offers organizations to automate data processing, analyze complex organizational information, generate predictive insights and improve the timelines of strategic decisions. However, artificial intelligence is changing the information environment in which strategic decisions are made. Generative AI systems can process large and diverse datasets, identify patterns, support prediction and generate strategic alternatives.

Csaszar, Ketkar, and Kim (2024) provide empirical evidence that natural-language processing models can generate and evaluate strategies at levels comparable to investors in experimental settings. Their findings are important for divestiture because an asset sale involves search, representation and aggregation of information under uncertainty precisely the cognitive processes that machine-learning systems AI can augment. The literature reveals a gap at the intersection of AI-driven strategic decision-making and IOC divestiture. Research on IOC divestment explains why companies rebalance portfolios, while AI research demonstrates growing capacity for strategy generation and evaluation. Therefore, the fundamental dilemma addressed in this paper is the limited empirical understanding of how artificial intelligence (AI) can be incorporated into international oil companies IOC divestiture strategy without replacing managerial accountability. Hence, this study examined how artificial intelligence AI-driven divestiture strategy improves strategic decision-making in international oil companies (IOCs) in Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives are to:

1. Examine the influence of artificial intelligence (AI)-driven divestiture strategy on decision-making quality in international oil companies (IOCs) in Nigeria.
2. Examine the influence of artificial intelligence (AI)-driven divestiture strategy on decision-making speed in international oil companies (IOCs) in Nigeria

Conceptual Framework

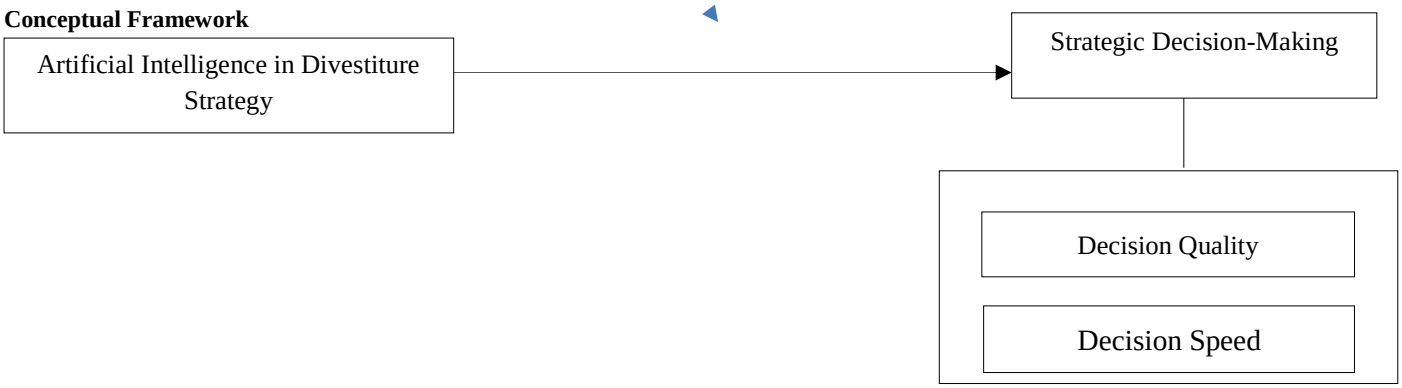


Figure 1 indicate the conceptual framework on the relationship between artificial intelligence AI in divestiture strategy and strategic decision-making

Source: Desk Research, (2026)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How artificial intelligence (AI)-driven divestiture strategy affect decision-making quality in international oil companies (IOCs) in Nigeria?

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2. How artificial intelligence (AI)-driven divestiture strategy and decision-making speed in international oil companies (IOCs) in Nigeria?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Divestiture Strategy

Divestment is about: what to sell, when to sell, who to sell to and for how much. Artificial intelligence aids the strategist to establish solution without bias. Divestiture refers to the sale, disposal or withdrawal of an asset, subsidiary, business unit or geographic operation. From a strategy perspective, divestiture can be used to correct portfolio misfit, improve capital allocation, reduce risk, release resources, respond to changes in the external environment or enable investment in higher-priority businesses. In the oil and gas industry, divestiture may involve whole subsidiaries, operated interests, non-operated interests, mature fields, shallow-water assets or non-core infrastructure. The Nigerian evidence indicates that recent IOC divestitures have been selective rather than equivalent to complete withdrawal from the country. Shell's SPDC transaction preserved Shell's presence in deepwater and integrated gas; ExxonMobil's announced transaction focused on shallow-water assets while retaining deepwater positions; and Eni's NAOC transaction was accompanied by continued investment in deepwater and Nigeria LNG (Eni, 2024; ExxonMobil, 2022; Shell, 2024). This pattern suggests portfolio optimization: the firms are reallocating capital and managerial attention among asset classes rather than simply abandoning the national market. Consequently, the quality, and speed integration of decision information are central to divestiture strategy.

Artificial Intelligence in Divestiture Strategy

The world is moving towards artificial intelligence as systems become more digitalized and complex. Artificial intelligence plays an assistive role to human intelligence, highlighting the fact that cognitive technology is programmed to enhance human intelligence and not replace it, hence, the concept of augmented intelligence (Nissi-Amadi, Tamunomiebi & Biriowu, 2020). The human resources in organizations are geared towards insights for a better career that is technologically driven; employees are leveraging on artificial intelligence as a force for building a cohesive organization for enhance service quality. The world is not waiting as it is the 4th industrial revolution with digitalized economy. The traditional work environment has a perceived boundary between digital and physical world. Organizations seek to re-evaluate jobs and skills that are digital based for operations and determine alternative ways of actualizing desired outcomes. The automation has become a main pillar through which organizations achieve better outcomes with speed and accuracy. Digitalization and automation are also elements of augmented intelligence (Nissi-Amadi, *at al*., 2020; Tonye, Mazzacano, & Matthew, 2025). Artificial intelligence offers employees information and connectivity, unimagined opportunities as well as unprecedented threats if not fully comprehended and managed. Artificial intelligence will amplify human effectiveness but also has the capacity to threaten human autonomy hence the need for perfect augmentation. Augmented intelligence creates greater surveillance, more interactions and high economic equalities.

Strategic Decision-Making

Strategic decision-making is characterized by uncertainty, complexity, delayed feedback and bounded managerial cognition. AI can potentially expand managerial search by processing more alternatives and data sources than an individual or conventional spreadsheet-based process can handle. Csaszar et al. (2024) argue that AI can augment strategic decision processes through improved search, representation and aggregation, and their experiments demonstrate that large language models can generate and evaluate strategic ideas at a level comparable to human participants in selected contexts. For IOCs, AI can support predictive analytics, anomaly detection, scenario generation, natural-language analysis of regulatory and contractual documents, geospatial interpretation, production forecasting, maintenance analytics, market intelligence and risk scoring (Tabassi, 2023). However, these capabilities do not eliminate managerial judgment. AI outputs are conditional on training data, assumptions, model design and context. A model can be statistically sophisticated while producing strategically inappropriate recommendations when critical qualitative factors are missing.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Nawaz, Arunachalam, Pathi, and Gajenderan, (2024), study explores the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on human resources management practices by focusing on key outcomes such as accuracy, automation, computing power & capacity, real-time experience, personalization, and time-saving & cost saving. The research aims to identity the potential benefits of AI adoption. Data from 274 IT employees in Chennai City is Collected through a well-structured online questionnaire. Using IBM SPSS version 21 software and AMOS version 21 is used for analysis, the study proposes a novel research framework. The findings indicate that variables like accuracy, computing power & capacity, and personalization significantly influence time-saving & cost reduction, while automation and real-time experience do not. The novel contribution of this study lies in its exploration of the specific outcomes of utilizing AI technologies in human resources management practices. By focusing on key variables such as accuracy, automation, computing power & capacity, real-time experience, personalization, and time-saving & cost saving, the research provides a comprehensive understanding of the expected outcomes when implementing AI in human resources management and the relationship among those outcome variables.

Mer (2023) studied the role of AI in facilitating seamless onboarding, diversity and inclusion (D&I), work engagement, emotional intelligence and employees' mental health. Thus, a conceptual model of recent trends in HRM in the context of AI and its organisational outcomes is proposed. A systematic review and meta-synthesis method are undertaken. A systematic literature review assisted in critically analysing, synthesising, and mapping the extant literature by identifying the broad themes. The findings of the study suggest that using natural language processing (NLP) and robots has eased the onboarding process. D&I is promoted using data analytics, big data, machine learning, predictive analysis and NLP. Furthermore, NLP and data analytics have proved to be highly effective in engaging employees. Emotional Intelligence is applied through AI simulation and intelligent robots. On the other hand, chatbots, employee pulse surveys, wearable technology, and intelligent robots have paved way for employees' mental health. The study also reveals that using AI in HRM leads to enhanced organisational performance, reduced cost and decreased intention to quit the organisation. Thus, AI in HRM provides a competitive edge to organisations by enhancing the performance of the employees.

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Emotongha and Bayo (2024) examined lean production strategies and environmental sustainability of industrial goods companies in Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised of (45) senior management staff of industrial goods companies listed on the Nigeria Business Directory in Southern Nigeria. The study used primary data. The study employed Multiple Regression Coefficients to test the hypotheses. The findings showed that traditional production lean strategies has more predictive influence compare to modern lean production strategies on environmental sustainability in Dangote petro chemicals. Also, the findings showed that modern strategy has more predictive influence compare to traditional strategies on environmental sustainability in Indoroma Eleme Chemicals. Furthermore, modern lean strategy has more predictive influence compare to traditional lean strategy on environmental sustainability in Nigeria LNG Limited.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative empirical data design using multiple-case evidence in Nigeria oil and gas industry. The approach was adopted because the research question concerns how AI-driven tools improves strategic decision-making, while public information about proprietary IOC decision-support systems is limited. Rather than inventing survey responses or claiming access to confidential AI systems, the study analyzed observable transaction evidence and evaluates how documented AI driven could support the decision-making processes represented by IOC recent transactions. The population consists of four IOC-related divestment strategy cases were used as focal evidence: Shell–SPDC, Eni–NAOC/Oando, ExxonMobil–MPNU/Seplat, and Total Energies' Nigerian portfolio divestiture strategies. These cases were included because they involve material petroleum assets, publicly documented strategic rationales and clear evidence of portfolio differentiation. Company announcements and reports were supplemented by peer-reviewed and scholarly literature on AI, decision-making and IOC divestment strategies. Source triangulation was used to reduce dependence on a single corporate narrative.

Thematic analysis was adopted. Documents were coded into four thematic categories: AI-driven asset valuation analytics, AI-driven human capitals analytics, AI-driven financial statement analytics, and post-divestment monitoring. AI-driven analytical tools were then mapped against these categories. The analysis used pattern matching and cross-case comparison. A finding was considered stronger when the same strategic pattern appeared across more than one IOC case or was supported by both company disclosures and independent research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1: Cross-case Evidence on IOC Divestiture Strategy

Case	Observed Strategic Decisions	Evidence Relevant to AI-Driven Decision-making
Shell–SPDC	Exit Niger Delta onshore oil production; focus on deepwater and integrated gas.	Portfolio segmentation; asset-risk comparison; valuation; environmental and operational due diligence.
Eni–NAOC/Oando	Rationalize upstream portfolio; divest onshore NAOC while retaining selected interests and deepwater/LNG exposure.	Portfolio optimization; scenario comparison; reserve/production analysis; transaction-risk assessment.
ExxonMobil–MP NU/Seplat	Divest shallow-water affiliate; retain deepwater positions; prioritize competitively advantaged assets.	Comparative asset economics; production forecasting; risk-adjusted capital allocation.
Total Energies Nigeria	Selective divestments alongside continued investment in attractive offshore/gas positions.	Dynamic portfolio monitoring; market and production scenarios; contract and regulatory analysis.

Source: **Survey Data, 2026**

The cross-case pattern is consistent: recent IOC divestments in Nigeria are associated with portfolio differentiation rather than indiscriminate withdrawal. Shell explicitly described its SPDC transaction as portfolio simplification and a shift toward deepwater and integrated gas (Shell, 2024, 2025). Eni described the NAOC sale as upstream rationalization and portfolio rebalancing (Eni, 2024). ExxonMobil linked its transaction to disciplined investment and prioritization of competitively advantaged assets (ExxonMobil, 2022). These strategic rationales create a natural role for AI because portfolio optimization requires comparison across multiple asset characteristics rather than reliance on one financial indicator.

Artificial Intelligence AI-Driven Divestment and Decision-making Quality

The result stated that AI can improve the evidence base for asset valuation. Traditional valuation models can be enhanced by machine-learning forecasts of production decline, maintenance requirements, operating costs and price-sensitive cash flows. Natural-language AI can also extract information from contracts, technical reports, regulatory notices and transaction documents. For an IOC considering whether to sell a mature asset, the relevant question is not simply the asset's current cash flow but its risk-adjusted future value relative to alternative investments. AI can generate multiple production-price-cost scenarios and identify variables that materially change net present value. This directly supports the portfolio logic visible in the Shell, Eni and ExxonMobil cases.

Artificial Intelligence AI-Driven Divestment and Decision-Making Speed

The result stated that AI is more appropriately viewed as an augmentation mechanism than as an autonomous strategic decision-maker. Strategic decisions about divestiture involve values and judgments that cannot be reduced to historical data: the acceptable level of environmental exposure, relationships with host governments and communities, national energy-security considerations, reputational risk and the ethical allocation of remediation responsibilities. AI can improve the breadth and consistency of evidence, but the board and executive management remain accountable

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for the decision. This conclusion is reinforced by responsible-AI guidance, which places governance across the AI lifecycle and requires organizations to identify, measure and manage risk (Tabassi, 2023; NIST, 2024).

Table 2: Proposed Empirical Decision Framework

Divestiture stage	AI Contribution	Human governance requirement
Portfolio screening	Rank assets using strategic fit, economics, risk and transition indicators	Define strategic priorities and acceptable risk thresholds
AI-Driven Asset Valuation	Forecast production, costs, prices and risk-adjusted cash flows.	Challenge assumptions and approve valuation methodology.
Scenario analysis	Generate retain/sell/farm-down/redevelop scenarios and sensitivity tests.	Select decision criteria and interpret strategic trade-offs
Negotiation	Analyze comparable transactions, terms and downside exposures.	Protect confidential information and determine negotiating authority.
Post-divestment	Monitor operational, financial, environmental and stakeholder indicators	Assign accountability and trigger corrective action.

Source: **Survey Data, 2026**

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study examined artificial intelligence in divestiture strategy and strategic decision-making in IOCs, using Nigerian divestment cases as empirical evidence. The study concludes that artificial intelligence AI-driven analytics provides a strong capability for improving the decision quality and speed in which divestiture strategies are formulated and evaluated. Thus, the analysis shows that IOC divestiture is increasingly characterized by selective portfolio restructuring: firms may exit mature or less strategically attractive assets while retaining or expanding positions in deepwater, gas, LNG or other advantaged businesses. The central implication is that AI can strengthen the analytical architecture supporting such choices, particularly through data integration, forecasting, and strategic search. However, the evidence does not support the claim that AI caused the observed Nigerian divestments. Public disclosures identify strategic, operational and portfolio rationales but generally do not reveal proprietary analytical technologies used by boards and investment strategist. It is recommended that IOCs should establish an AI-driven portfolio intelligence platform that integrates AI-driven asset valuation analytics, AI-driven human capitals analytics, AI-driven financial statement analytics, and post-divestment monitoring for asset-level decision support. It is recommended that AI should be used to generate multiple divestiture scenarios rather than a single recommendation. Boards and executive committees should retain final authority over material divestiture decisions. AI recommendations should be treated as evidence for managerial judgment, not as substitutes for accountability. IOCs should strengthen data quality and provenance. Future empirical research should test the proposed framework through interviews and surveys of IOC executives, regulators, investment professionals and technical managers, and should examine whether AI adoption is associated with measurable improvements in decision speed, valuation quality.

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