

Entrepreneurial personal networks and performance of small and medium scale Enterprises (SMEs) in Kano State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study evaluated the effect of entrepreneurial personal networks on performance of small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs), using 393 respondents selected from manufacturing, education, trade and other services in Kano state, Nigeria. SMEs' efforts toward providing solution to the problem of unemployment in Nigeria and the world at large face stiff opposition from their conception as a result of many factors being responsible. The study employed cross sectional research design in which data was collected using mixed strategies, interview and questionnaire, results using Pearson linear correlation and regression analysis. Results indicate there is positive and significant relationship between SMEs performance and entrepreneurial personal networks. Entrepreneurial personal networks had a significant effect on SMEs performance. The study adds value to the growing body of knowledge in the field of entrepreneurial development activities. The study recommends that entrepreneurial personal networks should be encouraged by ensuring that operators participate vigorous networking activities with their local chamber of commerce and make sure that such activities are done frequently so that their abilities can be broadened and improve their performance, the study serves as a reference to anyone who is interested in establishing his personal business as it provides insight into the improvement of entrepreneurial personal

networks in starting a new business and also for any organization that is interested in achieving profitability or continue sustaining effective business venture.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial personal networks, small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs), performance of SMEs.

1. Introduction

The explosion and growth of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) undoubtedly has positively affected bottom-line economic activities. The upward economy boom has led to the creation of employment, alleviation of poverty, improved standards of living, generated more revenue for governments, enhanced the use of local raw materials, creating viable markets, act as a training ground for future entrepreneurs and reduction in crime rate [17]. SMEs in Kano for some years now have not performed creditably well and hence have not played the expected vital and vibrant role in the economic growth and development of Nigeria [31]; [16]. Although the Nigerian government is turning to SMEs as a means of economic development and solving problems of unemployment, several challenges are currently facing Nigerian SMEs such as lack of necessary business ideas [2], lack of appropriate and adequate managerial and entrepreneurial investment, poor funding and widespread corruption and harassment of SMEs in the country by some agencies of government over unauthorized charges

and levies which have plagued performance of SMEs in the country [3]. These factors among others have affected SMEs in one way or the other. SMEs performance is also constrained by internal and external factors, such as the carrying capacity of the environment, competition, government regulations and bureaucratic procedures [9]; [10]; [3]; [5]; and [25].

2. Literature review

Literature shows that there is no universal agreement as to a precise definition of the term “network”. However, certain commonalities are significant. [12] Defined an entrepreneur’s network as the sum total of his or her relationships that involves all the connections that a person has with other people. Network is a specific type of relation linking a defined set of persons, objects or events or a set within which certain types of mutually rewarding relationships exist, from where an entrepreneur can obtain resources and get critical support for the development and growth of a business. Resources that can be obtained through networking include information about business opportunities, innovation, referrals, business linkages, shared costs, networks of business partners, professionals, technicians, specialists, generalized consultants, the supply chain, potential contractors, bankers, distributors, clients, customer linkages, sector based trade associations, professional memberships, chambers of commerce, institutional ties as well as networks of collaboration and coordination.

[18] Also focus on the personal nature of networks by pointing out that entrepreneurs make use of resources that are external to the venture by establishing personal relationships that may be used for professional assistance. They stressed that the objective of networking is to gain a competitive advantage by extending resource availability beyond the assets

under direct control of the entrepreneur. [8] Observe that networking is the process of enlarging the entrepreneur’s circle of trust and stresses that networking is a function of the negotiation process. Similarly, [22] while attempting to distinguish social capital from social networks, suggested that networks are based on trust that entrepreneurs when building networks seek out persons described as ‘trusted alters’ (people with similar beliefs, experiences, patterns of association) such as relatives, old friends or previous work associates. They further maintain that networks can be categorized as those that provide personal support, professional support (entrepreneurial networks) or public support (social networks).

[19] Maintain that networking enhances the development of social networks between entrepreneurs housed within the incubator and growth depends upon trust and the growth of the networks will be inhibited by a lack of trust, often exhibited by an unwillingness to share information.

3. Small and medium enterprises

There is no single definition of small and medium scale enterprise business that is universally accepted. For instance, different sectors of the economy have different interpretations of the SMEs business. Although different countries define SMEs businesses differently, it is accepted practice to make use of quantitative and qualitative criteria when attempting to define small and medium scale enterprise business [13]. In the European union the most frequent upper limit designation of SME is 250 employees, but some countries set the limit to 200, while the United States consider SMEs to include firms with fewer than 500 employees. In South Africa, SME is regarded as the ones with the potential for job creation and makes a substantial contribution of 35% to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of South Africa, thus classifications are small firm: 10 - 99 employees, medium firm: 100 - 249

employees [29]. SMEs from Nigeria context are described thus: The Federal Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Nigeria described SMEs as firms with a total investment N750, 000 as capital but excluding costs of land and paid employee of up to fifty (50) persons [26]. Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) defined SMEs as those enterprises with turnover of up to N500, 000 only. [21] defined SMEs as enterprises with a labor size of 11-100 workers or a total cost of not more than N50 million, including working capital but excluding cost of land. The study adopted the definitions given by the National council of industry [21] as the operational definition of SMEs. The choice was made considering the total cost (\$50 million) employed and the number of employees (11-100) as measuring indicators and also as they enabled the researcher to capture several SMEs at the grass root level of the areas.

4. Performance of SMEs

In the field of entrepreneurship, SMEs performance has been considered as an important construct. There has been no agreement, however, among researchers on the appropriate measure of performance. Previous studies have suggested that growth and financial measures are important performance measures for small and medium enterprises [30]. A few studies have used non-financial measures of SMEs performance such as customer and product performance, customer satisfaction and employee turnover [24]. [14] On their definition revealed nine important criteria that are often used as indicators of business success thus: Profit, growth and innovation, firm-survival or longevity, contributing back to society, personal satisfaction, satisfied stakeholders, in particular customer satisfaction and employee satisfaction, achievement of work-life balance and public recognition. Financial measures are considered critical in determining the survival and success of the

firm. [11] also categorized SMEs performance measurement into four, namely: (i) Profit which include: return on assets, return on investment and return on sales (ii) Growth in term of: sales, market share and wealth creation (iii) Stakeholder satisfaction which include: customer satisfaction and employees satisfaction and (iv) competitive position which include: overall competitive position and success rate in launching new product. This study adopted profit, [27]; [11]; [14] sales growth [7]; [30] innovation [24], years of survival from the literature as measures of SMEs performance.

5. Empirical review

Prior empirical studies have also established a positive relationship between entrepreneurial networks and SMEs performance. For example, [6] investigated networks and performance of SMEs in different stages of business life cycle in Netherlands, using a qualitative approach. The results revealed a significant positive relationship between performance and entrepreneurial networks in both the start-up stage and the growth stage of the firm. Examined the influence of network effects on SMEs performance using data collected from 227 CEOs of small Iranian information technology companies. Their results showed that emotional intelligence drives entrepreneurial style, network structure and external networking behavior. Their results also showed that entrepreneurial style does not influence external networking behavior. This suggests that entrepreneurs consider emotional intelligence in making business contacts as energies entrepreneurial style, network structure and external networking behavior that lead to business success. In another study, [4] evaluated networking, resource acquisition and the performance of SMEs in three major cities in China. They used exploratory method, questionnaire and telephone interviews among 102

respondents. Their results showed evidence that resource acquisition and performance of a firm were positively correlated with networking. The study showed that networking is very important for an entrepreneur that will enable him acquire different types of resources for effective performance of his business. The finding from [4] suggests that entrepreneurs can interact effectively with others and this may also play a role in their firm performance. This implies building inter-firm linkages between firms and creditors in value chains which able access to resources and reap of the benefits that contribute to firms' growth and success. In another study, [20] examined factors affecting the performance of SMEs in Malaysia, using 209 SMEs in the manufacturing and manufacturing related services sector, via e-mail. The result of their study showed that the use of marketing information skills can influence the performance of SMEs at the highest. There is a clear connection between good business with use of marketing information skills as well as the application of information technology and the performance of SMEs.

In a related study, [28] examined social capital in the growth of science-and-technology-based SMEs. Using a longitudinal multiple case study of three companies and selected industry experts, the results of their longitudinal multiple case studies showed that; (i) different types of networks and relationships were important in the transitional periods between the growth phases that enhance performance; and (ii) the role of social capital and its different dimensions varies in developing, maintaining and utilizing these partnerships and network relationships. Networking is very important in varying events such as growth of the business, maintenance and even connecting partners for effective performance. This suggests that entrepreneur who succeed devote effort to knowing when, where and

how to plan for the events of networking as it help them to express problems effectively. [23] Assessed the entrepreneur's network and firm performance in Yangzi River Delta manufacturing center of domestic capitalist enterprises in China. Using chief executive officers (CEOs), a novel sequential framework to analyze concrete network ties over time, result revealed that it is the content of ties that matters crucially for the relationship between networks and firm performance. The implication that stand out from [23] findings, is that the tasks of entrepreneurs in interaction/networking with other people adequately help them planned for it, since network content will enable them raise capital, acquire good employees, delegate effectively, establish trust and legitimacy, develop networks, monitor, evaluate and retain workers and so on for the growth of the business.

[15] Investigated isolating mechanism as a means to improve performance of SMEs. They examined the effect of entrepreneurial orientation, isolating mechanism, quality of strategy as independent variables and networking capabilities as an intervening variable on marketing performance of Batik small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Central Java, Indonesia. Data collected on 160 owner/manager revealed a direct positive effect of entrepreneurial orientation and quality of strategy on networking capabilities and networking capabilities on marketing performance. Since networking capabilities influence marketing performance, it suggests that entrepreneurs who carefully identify and developed strong networks will be more successful than those who did not, as networking capabilities ensure survival and reduce costs, which are important dimensions of firms' performance. This study has not solely adopted the use of questionnaire to acquire quantitative data for analysis but included interview unlike [6] who used qualitative data only; they

used a combination of face to face meetings and questionnaire; [6] they used questionnaire and telephone interview; [23] used novel sequential framework and [28] used longitudinal multiple case study of three SMEs, also this present study focused on a cross sectional design unlike [28] that adopted longitudinal case study approach.

6. Methodology

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design to collect data from a sample of 396 owners, managers and staff in Kano state, selected using purposive and stratified random sampling techniques. Only those SMEs registered with the Ministry of Trade, Commerce and Industries Kano state and had operated for two years and above and were in manufacturing, education, trade and other services were selected. Data was collected using a questionnaire and an interview guide. The questionnaire was based on a five point Likert scale as used. Because the tools used in data collection were not standardized, we pre-tested them, for validity and reliability before

administration. Data cleaning was through checking for multi co linearity, missing values, checking outliers, testing for normality, linearity, sampling adequacy and test for sphericity. All these tests were first confirmed with the required rules of thumb before final analysis was done. Data were analyzed using means, standard deviations, Pearson's linear correlation coefficient and linear regression.

7. Findings

The main objective of this study was to investigate the effect of entrepreneurial personal networks on the performance of SMEs in Kano State, Nigeria. Data on entrepreneurial personal networks and SMEs performance were collected with ten and 13 questions/items respectively in the questionnaire. Respondents rated the extent of their entrepreneurial personal networks and SMEs performance on a five point scale, where 1 = very low; 2 = low; 3 = moderate; 4 = high; 5 = very high. Their responses were summarized using descriptive statistics as presented in table 1.

Table 1 Means and standard deviations on entrepreneurial personal networks and SMEs' performance of owners, managers and staff in Kano state, Nigeria

Entrepreneurial personal networks elements	Mean	SD	Interpretation	Rank
Selling your vision and mission to staff/linkage	3.19	.935	Moderate extent	1
Direct sale calls to customers	3.18	1.095	Moderate extent	2
Building your market visibility	3.16	.808	Moderate extent	3
Understanding customers by name/creating trust among others	3.12	.912	Moderate extent	4
Referrals to share your products/services	3.12	.808	Moderate extent	5
Membership of exchange groups	2.96	.801	Moderate extent	6
Selling your business to others through giving out business cards and fliers	2.86	1.149	Moderate extent	7
Membership of professional association	2.81	.758	Moderate extent	8
Sharing e-newsletters to your existing customers	2.76	.993	Moderate extent	9
Membership of chambers of commerce	2.74	1.141	Moderate extent	10
Average mean	2.99	0.627	Moderate extent	
SMEs performance indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation	Rank
Competitive strength	3.63	0.833	High performance	1
Customer satisfaction	3.54	0.707	High performance	2
Sales volume	3.48	0.932	High performance	3
Increase in number of customers	3.45	1.042	High performance	4

Increase in profit	3.42	0.989	High performance	5
Supply of inputs	3.36	0.808	Moderate performance	6
Meeting benchmark	3.31	0.852	Moderate performance	7
Personal satisfaction	3.26	0.718	Moderate performance	8
Constant innovation	3.17	0.711	Moderate performance	9
Business survival	3.16	0.836	Moderate performance	10
High business asset	3.16	1.111	Moderate performance	11
High working capital	3.10	0.862	Moderate performance	12
Staff strength	3.04	0.740	Moderate performance	13
Average mean	3.31	0.690	Moderate performance	

Source: Researcher’s Computation from primary data (2017)

Mean range	Interpretation
1.00 – 1.79	very low
1.80 – 2.59	low
2.60 – 3.39	moderate
3.40 – 4.19	High
4.20 – 5.00	Very high

The results in Table 1 reveal that, respondents rated all their entrepreneurial personal networks items moderately, with overall average mean of 2.99. The Moderate ratings in Table 1 suggests that respondents were not very familiar with the entrepreneurial personal networks activities at all levels since they were not able to identify the other levels of assistance of entrepreneurial personal networks events to their business performance. Generally, respondents rated their SMEs performance as being moderate, as indicated by the average mean of 3.31, with a low score on standard deviation, suggesting that scores did not deviate much from the mean. The highest scored aspect of SMEs performance was competitive strength, with a mean of 3.63 and standard deviation of 0.833 suggesting that SMEs viewed their business competitive strength as being the best asset they had. The overall picture on SMEs

performance suggested that the owners, managers and staff were not very satisfied with the current level of their performance, since they were not able to rate any aspect of the performance variables very high. It is also important that the SMEs were able to identify what was not doing well in their enterprises, an indication that they could improve.

7.1 Relationship between Entrepreneurial Personal Networks and Performance of SMEs in Kano state, Nigeria

Under correlation analysis, the researcher wanted to ascertain the extent to which performance of SMEs was correlated with the entrepreneurial personal networks in Kano state, Nigeria. The two variables were correlated using Pearson’s linear coefficient correlation and it show that the correlation coefficient was 0.491 and significant at $P < 0.000$ as indicated in table 2.

Table 2: Pearson’s linear Correlation Coefficient Results for Entrepreneurial Personal Networks and Performance of SMEs in Kano state, Nigeria

Variables correlated	r-value	Sig value	Interpretation
Entrepreneurial personal networks Vs Performance of SMEs	0.491	0.000	Significant correlation

Source: Researcher’s Computation from primary data (2017)

By this result in Table 2, entrepreneurial personal networks positively and significantly correlate with performance of SMEs since the sig value is below 0.05. This implied that an improvement on entrepreneurial personal networks is likely to increase performance of the SMEs in Kano state, Nigeria.

7.2 Testing the null hypothesis

Null hypothesis was, personal networks have no significant effect on the performance of SMEs in Kano State, Nigeria. To test this, data on entrepreneurial personal networks (Table1) was regressed with the data on small and medium scale enterprises performance. Results are indicated on table 3

Table 3: Regression Analysis for Entrepreneurial Personal Networks and Performance SMEs in Kano state, Nigeria

Variables Regressed	Adjusted R square r ²		F-value	Sig.	Interpretation	Decision on Ho
Entrepreneurial personal networks vs SMEs performance	.239		123.880	.000	Significant effect	Rejected
Coefficients	B	Std. Err.	t	sig		
(Constant)	1.163	.195	5.959	.000	Significant effect	Rejected
Entrepreneurial personal networks	.669	.060	11.130	.000	Significant effect	Rejected

Source: Researcher’s Computation from primary data (2017)

The results of linear regression in Table 3 show that the model was significant since the sig value (0.000) was less than 0.005. The adjusted r square (r²) indicate that the predictor (entrepreneurial personal networks) explains 23.9% variations in SME performance (Adjusted r square = 0.239). The F statistic and p- value that show the model is significant at 0.000. Based on these results the null hypothesis is rejected and we infer that entrepreneurial personal networks can significantly affect SME performance in Kano state Nigeria. The coefficients suggest that a one unit increase in entrepreneurial personal networks can bring a 0.669 improvement in SME performance and vice versa (Beta = 0.669) and this is statistically significant (sig = 0.000, t = 11.130).

Concerning the interview on entrepreneurial personal networks, owners, managers and staff, were not very familiar with the entrepreneurial personal networks activities but with clarifications, they affirmed. Based on the interpretations and understandings the researchers infer that accurate activities of personal networking actually assisted them in activities of their businesses. On their performance, respondents perceived low improvement during the years under study from the discussion.

8. Discussion

The study intended to establish whether entrepreneurial personal networks can significantly affect the performance of SMEs in Kano State, Nigeria. The findings supported the hypothesis that

entrepreneurial personal networks significantly affect performance of SMEs in Kano State, Nigeria. This finding is consistent with many prior empirical studies. Specifically, the positive effect of entrepreneurial personal networks on SMEs performance was consistent with the findings by [6] who revealed that entrepreneurial networks in both the start-up and the growth stages of the firm are indispensable in co-ordinating business resources. Likewise, [4] found results similar to those of the present study. They reported that, networking is very important for an entrepreneur, it enables him acquire different types of resources for effective performance of his business. In describing the correlation between the two variables, [28] indicated that personal networking involved sets of human skills, which enable entrepreneurs coordinate most business activities, for example raising capital, attracting good employees, delegating effectively, monitor, evaluate, maintaining and utilizing these partnerships and retain workers which the present study affirmed.

Accordingly, entrepreneurial networking skills, such as effective communication between entrepreneur and customers, are considered indispensable conditions for retaining customers, as well as achieving sustained competitive advantage. This present study's finding is in line with the report of [20] who stated that there is need to develop networks through effective communication, to expand markets, increase sales and profit, ensure survival and reduce costs, which are important dimensions of SMEs performance. It is important for SMEs owners, managers and staff to implement the strategies on content of networks for effective performance. Poor networking can make many business owners, managers and staff, fail to trust other people or not knowing how to hold the trusted individuals responsible, who contributed to their failure or make

business enterprises not to survive. In line with this, the present study supported [23] that content of network ties matters crucially for effective firm performance. Accordingly, the present study is in line with [15] who also emphasized quality of strategy on networking capabilities on marketing performance as being very critical when they investigated isolating mechanism as a means to improve performance of SMEs, of Batik in Central Java, Indonesia.

9 Conclusion

Entrepreneurial personal networks if well-developed can positively and significantly influence performance of SMEs in Kano state, Nigeria. The results of this study serves as reference to anyone who is interested in establishing his personal business which will provide insight into networking in starting a business and also for any organization that is interested in achieving profitability or continue sustaining effective business to achieve growth and sustainable development. Entrepreneurial personal networks were strong guarantee for business deals, at the conception stage, they enabled extensive formal networks with various authorities, investors, business incubators and so on; at the early stages of a new venture development, highly developed entrepreneurial environment and the availability of different products/services from business supporting organizations and SMEs owners, managers and staff.

9. Recommendation

Entrepreneurial personal networks should be encouraged by ensuring that operators participate vigorously in networking activities such as being members in the local chamber of commerce; local business groups to share ideas about their product/services; sharing e-newsletters to

their existing customers /getting contacts from customers, staff and friends and so on, where these activities are sustained and continuous, the operators' capabilities will be enhanced which will continue to positively influence performance of their SMEs as the findings showed a robust effect.

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