

The Influence of Entrepreneurial Human Relations on Organizational Sustainability of SMEs in Edo State

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Abstract

The study aimed to evaluate the influence of entrepreneurial human relation on organizational sustainability of SMEs in Edo State. Specifically the study examined the impact of entrepreneurial innovativeness and entrepreneurial competitive aggressiveness on organizational sustainability of SMEs in Edo State. The study adopted the cross-sectional survey research design and data were primarily sourced through administered questionnaires. A sample of one hundred and fifty (150) respondents was conveniently selected for the study. The well filled and retrieved questionnaires found usable for the study were 149 copies out of a total of 150 copies administered. The STATA 16 statistical software was used for analysis of the variables as well as correlation of the variables and regression analysis carried out to test the stated hypotheses. The findings from the multivariate survey linear regression analyses revealed that entrepreneurial innovativeness (Coef. = 0.102, $t = 1.77$ and $P > 0.05$) has no significant effect on organizational sustainability of SMEs in Edo State. However, the study discovered that the variable of entrepreneurial competitive aggressiveness (Coef. = 0.562, $t = 7.97$ and $P < 0.05$) has a positive significant effect on organizational sustainability of SMEs in Edo State. Based on the empirical findings, we therefore concluded that only the variable of entrepreneurial competitive aggressiveness amongst the explanatory variables can significantly improve organizational sustainability of SMEs in Edo State. Thus, the study recommended that entrepreneurs should continue to explore various training and development programmes that will help develop creative and innovative ideas that instill efficient performance and organizational sustainability. The SMEs should intensify innovative and aggressive competitive effort by working smart, carrying workforces along, active and effective bench marketing, and proper

monitoring of operational activities by regulatory bodies as these will ensure sectorial best practices and upsurge level of market share of the SMEs in Edo State, Nigeria.

Keywords: Aggressiveness, Entrepreneurial, Human relations, Innovativeness, Sustainability

Introduction

In Nigeria, SMEs are growing the economy. Small and medium scale entrepreneurs have contributed significantly to the national objective of generating employment opportunities, training entrepreneurs, generating income and providing a source of livelihoods for the bulk of low income households within the country (Nwanji, 2017). Despite the high levels of resilience exhibited by the SME sector as evidenced by job creation abilities in an exceedingly tough environment additionally as substantial contribution to GDP, over 40% SME still face serious challenges that hamper their growth (Viffa, 2019). SMEs suffer because of lack of legal framework that protects interests, harassment from local authorities, unresponsive tax regime and exposure to corruption (Muriithi, 2017). The second reason is lack of adequate access to credit. SMEs have little access to finance, which thus prohibit their emergence and eventual growth. It has not been easy for SMEs owing to the stringent credit terms offered by financial institutions (Eric, 2016). Most SMEs do not have access to finance because of lack of minimum requirements from commercial banks, and these banks are hesitant in lending to SMEs based on lack of collateral, plan, credit history, and banking history (Kauffmann, 2018). The major sources of finance for SMEs in Africa are retained earnings, family capital, borrowings from friends and informal savings, which are unpredictable, not very secure and have little scope for risk sharing. Access to finance is poor due to the high risk of default among SMEs and owing to inadequate financial facilities (Kauffmann, 2018). In Nigeria, SMEs have not performed creditably well. They have fallen below expectations as regards their role in improving the extent of economic activity (Onugu & Uzodu, 2015). The SMES sector has made some contribution to the economic development of the state, but the contribution is way below the extent achieved by countries like India, Dubai and also the United States of America. Despite that, SMEs in Nigeria employ about 60% of the labour force, they contribute only 35 % of industrial output and account for 10 % of industrial exports (Akintokunbo, 2018). Eniola and Entebang (2015) believed that SMEs in Nigeria are plagued with high rate of failure and underperformance because of

inadequate funding. Hence, government consciousness needs be stirred to align with the fact undermining the actualization of the complete economic potentials of this sector.

In the contemporary world, human relations of an entrepreneur play a strategic role in achieving the decision-making requirements of stakeholders for organizational sustainability. An entrepreneur must frequently work together on projects, communicate ideas and provide motivation to get things done (Hughes & Morgan, 2007). Employees' creativity is often dependent on their ability to communicate with other employees and share ideas. Without quality workplace relationships, employees are less likely to be able to develop and share the solutions that a business needs to survive. An entrepreneur who maintains good human relations with customers, employees, suppliers, creditors and the community are much more likely to succeed in his business than the individual who does not practice good human relations. Entrepreneurial human relations (also referred to as tactfulness) in business are the process of training employees, addressing their needs, fostering a workplace culture and resolving conflicts between different employees or between staff and management. Furthermore, severing ties with old workforces can sometimes be challenging, particularly if the circumstances are not on the whole amicable (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). Unfortunately, due to economic concerns, entrepreneurs as owners of small and medium sized businesses focus on fundamental business issues and overlook one of their most potentially serious and costly issues of human relations and human resources. However, if entrepreneurs of small business focus on human relation management, this will lead to a sustainable development of the organization.

Nevertheless, entrepreneurial human relation has received substantial conceptual and empirical attention, representing some of the few areas in research into entrepreneurship and organizational sustainability in which a cumulative body of knowledge is developing. It is remarkable that past research has concentrated only on the evaluation of the direct effect of entrepreneurial human relation on organizational productivity or on the effect of other variables on one or two dimensions of entrepreneurial human relation. Some of these studies include Lumpkin and Dess (2001), Ahlin, Drnovsek and Hisrich (2014), and Asmat-Nizam and Farid (2016), all of which provide unsatisfactory picture, especially in the case of SMEs in developing nations such as Nigeria. Many more studies in Nigeria and other African countries (Mayaka, 2006; Miring'u & Muoria, 2011; Mang'unyi, 2011; Ongore, K'Obonyo & Ogutu, 2011; Mokaya, 2012; Lwamba, Bwisa &

Sakwa, 2014) have been conducted to find the factors that influence productivity of enterprises; however, none of these studies has focused on SMEs. Therefore, this study is necessary to explore the influence of entrepreneurial human relationship on organizational sustainability of small and medium scale enterprises in Nigeria. As a result, the study seeks to determine the impact of entrepreneurial innovativeness and entrepreneurial competitive aggressiveness on organizational sustainability of small and medium scale enterprise in Benin City.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: literature review is in section 2, section three deals with the methodology, result and discussion is in section four. Finally, conclusion and recommendation is explained in section five.

Literature Review

Concept of Organizational Sustainability

The common definition of sustainability, according to Colbert, Kurucz, and Wheeler (2007), is to "keep the business continuing." Another phrase that is widely used in this context refers to "future proofing" companies. Sustainability is defined by Boudreau and Ramstad (2005) as "reaching success now without compromising the requirements of the future." Focusing on sustainable growth, the Ford Board of Directors' Charter of Sustainability Committee described it as "the capacity to satisfy the needs of current customers while taking into account the requirements of future generations" (Ford & Ford, 2012). A business model that creates value in line with the long-term preservation and improvement of financial, environmental, and social capital is a key component of sustainable growth. The essence of sustainability in an organizational context is "the principle of improving the societal, environmental and economic systems within which a business operates". This introduces the concept of a three-way focus for organizations striving for sustainability. This is reflected also by Colbert *et al.* (2007), who state that sustainability "implies a simultaneous focus on economic, social, and environmental performance".

A corporate organization's sustainability is also inextricably related to the natural ecosystems from which all productive materials are extracted and within which all material wastes must be disposed. Energy that enters, circulates, and recycles through Earth's natural ecosystems is ultimately what gives everything economic value. Businesses either draw from the environment or discharge into it, which has an impact on the environment as a whole and eventually has an impact on the long-term viability of the firm (Omigie & Kubeyinje, 2022).

Entrepreneurial Relation

Corporate entrepreneurship may be seen as a continuation of initiatives that prioritize employee involvement; deliberate efforts to instill entrepreneurial practices within businesses aim to increase the organization's flexibility in developing or acquiring new goods and services and managing the innovation process (Hitt, Ireland, Camp & Sexton, 2002). Corporate entrepreneurship offers support for the development and exploitation of one or more innovations that are considered to be strategically and financially consistent with the organization's mission (Herbert & Brazeal, 1998). Nevertheless, the concept of Entrepreneurial relation (ER) has become a primary focus in the entrepreneurship literature and a subject of more than three decades of research (Covin & Wales, 2012). Researchers consider ER to be a higher order construct with underlying dimensions (George & Marino, 2011). The three key characteristics of ER, according to Miller (1983), are innovativeness, risk-taking, and pro-activeness. Miller emphasizes that "an entrepreneurial firm is one that engages in product market innovation, undertakes somewhat risky ventures, and is first to come up with 'proactive' innovations, beating competitors to the punch." Since then, these three dimensions are frequently utilized (Kemelgor, 2002; Dimitratos Voudouris, Plakoyiannaki, & Nakos, 2011). Lumpkin and Dess (1996) argued that factors like competitive aggressiveness and autonomy should even be taken into consideration as crucial components of entrepreneurial relation (ER), in addition to the three widely utilized dimensions first proposed by Miller (1983).

Entrepreneurial Innovativeness

Lumpkin and Dess (1996) describe innovativeness as reflecting a firm's tendency to engage in and support new ideas, novelty, experimentation, and creative processes that may result in new products, to pursue new opportunities, services, or technological processes, representing a basic willingness to depart from existing technologies or practices and venture beyond the current state or norm. They argue that innovativeness is a key component of entrepreneurial relation because it reflects an important means by which firms pursue new opportunities. According to Lumpkin and Dess (1996), innovativeness is the firm's tendency to engage in and support new idea, novelty experimentation and creative processes. These may result in new products, services, or technological processes which may take the organization to a new paradigm of success (Setiyanto & Natalia, 2017). Schumpeter and Nichol (1934), points out the importance of innovation in the entrepreneurial

process and considers entrepreneurship to be essentially a creative activity and the entrepreneur as an innovator who carries out new combinations in the field of the five Ms of men, money, material, machine and management.

Schumpeter and Nichol (1934) and Schumpeter (1949) were among the first to emphasize the role of innovation in the entrepreneurial process. Schumpeter (1949) outlined an economic process of "creative destruction," by which wealth was created when existing market structures were disrupted by the introduction of new goods or services that shifted resources away from existing firms and caused new firms to grow. The key to this cycle of activity was entrepreneurship: the competitive entry of innovative "new combinations" that propelled the dynamic evolution of the economy (Schumpeter & Nichol, 1934). Thus "innovativeness" is an important factor used to characterize entrepreneurship. Innovativeness reflects a firm's tendency to engage in and support new ideas, novelty, experimentation, and creative processes that may result in new products, services, or technological processes. Although innovations can vary in their degree of "radicalness" (Hage, 1999); innovativeness represents a basic willingness to depart from existing technologies or practices and venture beyond the current state of the art (Kimberly, 1981). There are numerous methods by which to classify innovations (Downs & Mohr, 1976), but perhaps the most useful distinction is between product-market innovation and technological innovation.

Entrepreneurial Competitive Aggressiveness

Bleeker (2011) described entrepreneurial competitive aggressiveness as a greater standard managerial disposition pondered in a firm's willingness to covet, confront, and dominate competition via a mixture of revolutionary efforts and proactive actions. Competitive aggressiveness refers to how firms reply to demand developments and interact with competition already within the marketplace in phrases of aggressive orientation (Deakins & Freel, 2012; Chalchissa & Bertrand, 2017). Panjaitan, Cempena, Trihastuti and Panjaitan (2021) found that within the numerous flow of research, which seems so plenty of interrelated areas, inclusive of aggressive responses, opposition in more than one markets, and the effect of a firm's past performance, entrepreneurial competitive aggressiveness characterizes and is related to an extensive range of dimensions, inclusive of first-mover advantages of familiar Porter techniques.

Competitive aggressiveness refers to a company's propensity to at once and intensely mission its competition in order to gain access or advance reputé in order to outperform the opposition within the industry. As noted elsewhere, competitive

aggressiveness is critical to timely movement and outperforming the opposition in marketplace conditions. Acting aggressively within the marketplace can lead the company to take projects together with lowering prices, competitive advertising and marketing techniques or growing product capacities. Firm aggressiveness may be characterised by their willingness to be unconventional as a substitute than relying on conventional strategies of opposition via reactive or responsive behavior (Wang, 2008). Reactivity implies a direct response to a competitor's movement, e.g. A company might lower prices and sacrifice profitability to keep market place proportion as a competitor introduces a new product in the selected marketplace. Responsiveness can take the shape of head-to-head opposition or a direct attack on competition, together with whilst a company enters a marketplace in which a competitor is already present. Therefore, competitive aggressiveness is necessary to combat against acute opposition from rivals (Lumpkin, Brigham, & Moss, 2010). It is a manner of relating to one's opposition and distinguishing between firms that avoid direct opposition with other firms and people that aggressively pursue target markets of their competitors (Schillo, 2011).

The importance of this variable as a dimension of entrepreneurial relation was highlighted in a study of the entrepreneurial processes of U.S. firms in global markets, in which Dean (1993) found that competitive aggressiveness explained considerably more variance (37%) in corporate entrepreneurship than any other strategy or structural variable analyzed. Evidence of competitive aggressiveness may take several forms. The breadth and speed of new entry also may indicate an aggressive posture. A "fast-followers" approach often is used by firms to aggressively bring new products to market. This approach is accomplished by speeding up the product-development cycle time. Miller and Camp (1985) found that the most successful aggressive firms were those that did not shy away from broadly defined markets "in terms of the number, sizes, and types of their customers, as well as the breadth of their product line".

Methodology

This study target population consists of all small and medium enterprises work force in Benin City, Edo State; but the exact population of SMEs employees in Benin City could not be ascertain due its extremely large nature, paucity of data and other constrains that bothers on ethical contemplation and concealment of government reserved information. However, the researchers' conveniently draw a sample of one hundred and fifty (150) respondents for the study. This is considered suitable since convenient sampling is population elements selected for inclusion in

the sample based on ease of access (Kothari & Gaurav, 2014). The respondents encompassed of hair dress making operators, cyber cafe operators, computer centers operators, coupled with tailoring, printing and publishing shops, photography, barbing, shoe making, welding and fabrication, Agro-allied industries, food vendors and restaurants operators. Out of a total of 150 questionnaires administered, only 149 were found usable for the study. The study questionnaire was structured on a five point scale ranging from 1-5 (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=undecided, 4=agree and 5=strongly agree) respectively; there are two sections: the first section contain questions that are used to elicit information on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents while second part seeks to divulge respondents views on influence of entrepreneurial human relation on organizational sustainability of SMEs in Edo State. The STATA 16 statistical software was used for analysis of the variables as well as correlation of the variable. In addition, regression analysis was carried out to test the hypotheses after certifying that all the assumptions of regression analysis modus operandi were not violated. Such assumptions include normality of residuals, heteroscedasticity, multicollinearity and model specification. The regression model for this study is presented below as:

$$Ogsus = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{entino} + \beta_2 \text{entagg} + \varepsilon \dots \dots \dots (1)$$

Where, ogsus = organizational sustainability; entino = entrepreneurial innovativeness; entagg = entrepreneurial competitive aggressiveness; α is constant, β_1 & β_2 are coefficients to estimate, and ε is the error term.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Using both mathematical and statistical techniques this section presents the analysis of the questionnaires administered and retrieved from the sampled respondents, from which our recommendation and conclusion are drawn from. A total of 150 questionnaires were sent out to the respondents for data generation as shown in the table below:

Table 1 Analysis of Questionnaire

Questionnaires	Copies	Percentage (%)
Retrieved	149	99.33
Un-retrieved	1	0.67
Sent copies	150	100.00

Source: Author Compilation from field work, 2022

From the table above, out of the 150 questionnaires that were administered, 149 of them were retrieved. This represents 99.33% of the total questionnaires administered and used for the study. 1 out of the questionnaires could not be retrieved, representing 0.67%, which is not significant.

Table 2: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	No	Percentage (%)
Males	89	59.73
Females	60	40.27
Total	149	100.00

Source: Author Compilation from field work, 2022

From table 2 above, it is observed that 89 of the respondents were males, which represented 59.73% of the total respondents. Similarly, 60 of them were females representing 40.27% of the total respondents. This shows that most of the operators of the understudied SMEs are males.

Table 3: Age Distribution of the Respondents.

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
20 – 25	15	10.07
26 – 35	23	15.44
36 – 45	64	42.95
46 and above	47	31.54
Total	149	100.00

Source: Author Compilation from field work, 2022

Table 3 above indicates that 15 respondents were in the age bracket of 20-25, representing 10.07%. 23 respondents were in the age bracket of 26-35 accounted for 15.44% of the total respondents. 64 of the respondents were in the age bracket of 36-45, representing 42.95% of the respondents. 47 were in the age brackets of 46 and above, representing 31.54% of the total respondents. This shows that most of the respondents/ operators of the understudied SMEs are in the age bracket of 36-45 years old.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson Correlation was conducted to establish the possible association between the variables of interest as shown in the table below;

Table 4: Pearson Correlation

	ogsus	entino	entagg
ogsus	1.0000		
entino	0.2283	1.0000	
entagg	0.5678	0.4978	1.0000

Source: Author Compilation from STATA 16

Specifically, the analysis from the Pearson correlation showed that entrepreneurial innovativeness (entino) (0.2283) and entrepreneurial competitive aggressiveness (entagg) (0.5678) are positively correlated with the dependent variable i.e. organizational sustainability (ogsus). Furthermore, from the associations, there is no room to suspect the presence of multicollinearity in the estimated models.

Regression Analysis

The results obtained from the panel least square regression of the model is shown in the table below;

Table 5 Multivariate Survey Regression Estimation Result

	Linearized						
ogsus	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]		
entino	.1018602	.0575756	1.77	0.079	-.0119227	.2156431	
entagg	.5617599	.0704627	7.97	0.000	.4225092	.7010106	
_cons	2.173549	.4439699	4.90	0.000	1.29616	3.050937	

No. of obs. = 149 p-value of F-statics = 0.0000 R² = 0.3512

Source: Author Compilation from STATA 16

The study provides interpretation for survey least square regression as shown in table 5 above. The model goodness of fit as captured by the F-statistics and the corresponding probability of the F-statistics for the model shows a 5% statistically

significant level suggesting that the entire model is fit and can be employed for interpretation and possible recommendation. Also, an R^2 value of 0.3512 indicates that about 35% of the variation in the dependent variable is being explained by the independent variables in the model. This also means that about 65% of the variation in the dependent variable is left unexplained, but have been captured by the error term.

Test of Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Entrepreneurial innovativeness does not significantly affect organizational sustainability of small and medium scale enterprise in Edo state.

The regression results of organizational sustainability of SMEs model presented in table 5 reveal the result of the variable of entrepreneurial innovativeness as follows: (Coef. = 0.102, $t = 1.77$ and P -value = 0.079). Following the results above, it is revealed that the effect of entrepreneurial innovativeness on organizational sustainability of SMEs is positive and statistically insignificant at 5% or 1% level. This finding is consistent with the stated null hypothesis which leads to its acceptance. Thus, there is no significant effect of entrepreneurial innovativeness on organizational sustainability of small and medium scale enterprise in Edo State.

Hypothesis 2: Entrepreneurial competitive aggressiveness does not significantly affect organizational sustainability of small and medium scale enterprise in Edo state.

The regression results of organizational sustainability of SMEs model presented in table 5 reveal the result of the variable of entrepreneurial competitive aggressiveness as follows: (Coef. = 0.562, $t = 7.97$ and P -value = 0.000). Following the results above, it is revealed that the effect of entrepreneurial competitive aggressiveness on organizational sustainability of SMEs is positive and statistically significant at 1% level. This finding is inconsistent with the stated null hypothesis which leads to its rejection. Thus, there is a significant effect of entrepreneurial competitive aggressiveness on organizational sustainability of small and medium scale enterprise in Edo State.

Discussion of Findings

In this study we document a positive insignificant effect of entrepreneurial innovativeness on organizational sustainability. Slima and Prakash (2021) results does not support the research outcome as their empirical result shows that entrepreneurial innovativeness significantly affects business performance/

sustainability. Lumpkin and Dess (1996) describe innovativeness as reflecting a firm's tendency to engage in and support new ideas, novelty, experimentation, and creative processes that may result in new products, to pursue new opportunities, services, or technological processes, representing a basic willingness to depart from existing technologies or practices and venture beyond the current state or norm. They argue that innovativeness is a key component of entrepreneurial relation because it reflects an important means by which firms pursue new opportunities.

However, we find that there is a positive significant effect of entrepreneurial competitive aggressiveness on organizational sustainability. This result validates the outcome of Slima and Prakash (2021) whose findings indicates competitive aggressiveness affects business performance which is geared towards organizational sustainability. This implies that entrepreneurial competitive aggressiveness significantly improves organizational sustainability. The importance of this variable as a dimension of entrepreneurial relation was highlighted in a study of the entrepreneurial processes of U.S. firms in global markets, in which Dean (1993) found that competitive aggressiveness explained considerably more variance (37%) in corporate entrepreneurship than any other strategy or structural variable analyzed. Miller and Camp (1985) found that the most successful aggressive firms were those that did not shy away from broadly defined markets "in terms of the number, sizes, and types of their customers, as well as the breadth of their product line". Conversely, Olayemi, Dosunmu and Ikpefan (2015) opine that competitive aggressiveness does not have a significant role to play in improving organizational processes as it is seen as a greedy move by organizations to stay above each other in the business landscape.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study sought to ascertain the impact of entrepreneurial innovativeness and entrepreneurial competitive aggressiveness on organizational sustainability of small and medium scale enterprises in Benin City, Edo State. The independent variables are entrepreneurial innovativeness and entrepreneurial competitive aggressiveness, while the dependent variable is organizational sustainability. The findings from the multivariate survey linear regression technique revealed that entrepreneurial innovativeness (Coef. = 0.102, $t = 1.77$ and $P > 0.05$) has no significant effect on organizational sustainability of SMEs in Edo State. However, the study discovered that the variable of entrepreneurial competitive aggressiveness (Coef. = 0.562, $t = 7.97$ and $P < 0.05$) has a positive significant effect on organizational sustainability of SMEs in Edo State. Based on the empirical findings

of this study, we concluded that only the variable of entrepreneurial competitive aggressiveness amongst the explanatory variables can significantly improve organizational sustainability of SMEs in Edo State.

Based on the empirical evidences from this study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Entrepreneurs should continue to explore various training and development programmes that will help develop creative and innovative ideas that instill efficient performance and organizational sustainability.
- ii. The SMEs should intensify innovative and aggressive competitive effort by working smart, carrying workforces along, active and effective bench marketing, and proper monitoring of operational activities by regulatory bodies. These activities if well executed will ensure sectorial best practices and upsurge level of market share of the SMEs in Edo State, Nigeria.

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