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The Sustainability of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises in Jos Metropolis, Nigeria

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Abstract

As the world becomes increasingly competitive and growth-oriented, entrepreneurship has become an efficient strategy with which to enhance small and medium scale enterprises' (SME) sustainability. The study was set to determine the factors that trigger the sustainability of small and medium scale enterprises in Jos metropolis. This is anchored on the premise that SMEs are known to have contributed immensely to the economies of both developed and developing nations. The study followed a descriptive survey where quantitative approach was employed. 250 questionnaires were administered to the operators of SMEs in Jos metropolis. The correlation tool of analysis was employed to test the hypotheses and the results showed that innovation and knowledge influence SMEs' sustainability. Also social networks moderate the relationship between innovation and sustainability of SMEs. Based on the results, we recommended that efforts must be put in place to sustain the operations of these businesses and at the same time necessary mechanisms be stepped up to stem the tide of these unpleasant forces by adequately scanning the business environment.

Keywords: *Innovation, Knowledge, Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs), Social Networks, Sustainability, socio-economic forces.*

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Background to the Study

Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs) are catalysts for economic development. They are critical to the growth and developmental needs of both developed and developing economies especially after the global economic meltdown of 2008 which climaxed with disturbing job losses arising from the collapse of blue chip companies around the world. Statistically in UK, Small businesses accounted for 99.3% of all private sector businesses at the start of 2015 and 99.9% were small or medium-sized (SMEs). Total employment in SMEs was 15.6 million; 60% of all private sector employment in the UK. The combined annual turnover of SMEs was £1.8 trillion (N513 trillion), 47% of all private sector turnover in the UK (Department for Business Innovation & Skills, 2015).

In developing economies like Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda where there is heightened trend of unemployment, poverty and the collapse of existing industries, SMEs are necessary alternatives. Giving this scenario, scholars have identified a number of factors that trigger SMEs' sustainability. These factors include: resilience, entrepreneurial intellectualism (Khalique & Isa, 2014; Chang and Hsieh, 2011), innovation (Dakung, 2009), knowledge, relational capital (networks and support), good management, socio-economic environment among others (Oncioiu, 2013; De Wit, Kruger & Ramdass 2007; Kim, Hon and Crant, 2009; Nejati, Shahbudin & Amran, 2010).

As a result, remarkable breakthrough in small scale business came about through the indigenization Decree of 1972 and later The Nigeria Enterprises Promotion Act of 1977. Additionally, 2013 became the watershed period for SMEs operations in Nigeria when The African Development Bank (AfDB) signed an agreement to provide two sovereign-guaranteed multi-tranche lines of credit (LoCs) of 700 million US dollars (N 143 billion) to support export-oriented small and medium enterprise expansion in Nigeria. A critical assessment of the impact of SMEs on the economy of Nigeria indicates that there has been an insignificant contribution of the sub-sector. Their failures are manifested in the areas of their survival rate which is put at 5%, contribution to industrial employment generation put at 31%, capacity utilization, 30% (Oghojafor & Kuye, 2011).This is also reflected in the significant increase of the unemployment figures that have steadily risen (2010-21.1%; 2011-23.9%; 2012-24.3%; 2013-29.5%) peaking at 30% in 2014 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2015). The problems advanced by scholars include poor financing, managerial incompetence, skill deficits, technological problems, and entrepreneurial intellectualism. Hence, few of the early wealthy families (SMEs owners) have been able to sustain (Yusuf & Dansu, 2013; Oghojafor & Kuye, 2011).

Today, managing change is a challenge that requires resilience – the capacity of an organization to survive, adapt and sustain the business in the face of turbulent change. Similarly, scholars (Yusuf & Dansu, 2013; Suh, 2010) posit that the SMEs sector is worst affected by the socio-cultural factors such as crises (cases in Maiduguri, Yobe, Adamawa and Plateau states in Nigeria). By implication, this has weakened them in terms of business plan, management structure and decision making (Dakung, 2009; Kelkar, 2008). In addition, SMEs are characterized by inability to absorb most uncertainties confronting them and as such impact negatively on their performance and ability to achieve sustainability. Sustainability is a fundamental characteristic of a dynamic, evolving system. Indeed, long

term sustainability will result not from movement along a smooth trajectory, but rather from continuous adaptation to changing conditions. Therefore, a business that is sustainable should be based on a dynamic world view in which growth and change are inevitable (Starr, Newfrock, & Delorey, 2003, Christopher and Peck 2004).

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this research is to assess the factors that trigger the sustainability of small and medium scale enterprises in Jos metropolis while the specific objectives include to:

i. Evaluate the effect of innovation on sustainability of SMEs in Jos metropolis;
ii. Examine the impact of knowledge on sustainability of SMEs in Jos metropolis;
iii. Assess the effect of socio-economic factors on sustainability of SMEs in Jos metropolis;
iv. Assess how social networks moderate the relationship between innovation and sustainability of SMEs in Jos metropolis.

Statement of the Problem

Despite Nigeria's natural endowments, a population of about 170 million and the largest economy in Africa, its economy is a bundle of extreme contradictions such as rampant crises, unemployment, poverty (70%) and depressing macroeconomic indicators and human development indices. Poverty and unemployment is endemic and more than 54% of its population lives on less than $1.25 per day. The bulk of the problem has been Nigeria's overdependence on oil and gas exports in the last five decades, with little attention to the non-oil sector (especially entrepreneurship), which floundered in a climate of policy negligence and inadequate financial and technical support (Dakung, Danladi & Maklu, 2014; htt://entrepreneurship, 2010).

The key problem facing most Small and Medium-Scale Enterprises is sustainability. Bulk of the challenge is the short sightedness in terms of innovation and knowledge on the part of the operators of SMEs as well as the socio-economic forces. The negative bias against SMEs is demonstrated in their slow growth rate and failures as manifested in the areas of their survival rate which is put at 5%, contribution to industrial employment generation put at 31%, capacity utilization, 30% (Oghojafor & Kuye, 2011). This is seen to be translated into rising unemployment - 2010-21.1%; 2011-23.9%; 2012-24.3%; 2013-29.5%; 30% in 2014 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2015), poverty and economic stagnation.

Moreover, although there are researches analyzing the relationship between innovation, knowledge, socio-economic factors (poverty and crisis) and sustainability of SMEs (Nejati, Shahbudin & Amran, 2010; Oncioiu 2013; De Wit et al, 2007; Kim, Hon & Crant, 2009; Hmieleski & Corbett, 2006), to the best of our knowledge, no research has tested the moderating effect of networks on the innovation-sustainability relationship. To respond to the above gaps in the literature, this paper develops a research model, grounded on the conservation of resources and social capital theories to analyse the key factors that trigger SMEs sustainability.

Research Hypotheses

Stemming from the research problem and objectives, the following hypotheses are postulated:

i. H1: There is a significant positive relationship between innovation and sustainability of SMEs
ii. H2: There is a significant positive relationship between knowledge and sustainability of SMEs
iii. H3: Socio-economic factors (crisis and poverty) significantly influence SMEs' sustainability
iv. H4: Social Networks moderates the relationship between innovation and sustainability of SMEs

Literature Review

Sustainability of SMEs

The aim of an average entrepreneur (SMEs, owners in particular) extends beyond profit-making. Business growth and expansion constitute key objectives of SMEs. However, in a study conducted by Idemobi (2014), it was revealed that over 70% of SMEs die within five years of establishment. This means that less than 30% of SMEs can survive various business challenges. The concept of sustainability as used here has got to do with the ability of businesses to being committed continuously and ethical in their contribution to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce, their families, the local and global community as well as future generations. Sustainability is often considered as a possibility for large enterprises than SMEs because of variations in size and ability to overcome challenges in the business environment.

Innovation – Sustainability Relationship

Globalisation of the markets and increasing international competition force SMEs to search for new, innovative, flexible and imaginative ways to survive (Casals, 2011). Therefore, the statement provides a relationship between innovation and SMEs' survival. In the World Bank report (2009), innovation has been viewed as vital in ensuring competitive advantage by organizations and long term loyalty. The importance of innovation as a key factor of economic growth and development was also highlighted by Joseph Schumpeter in his Theory of economic development (1912) who considered the entrepreneur's task and capacity to realize new combinations of the production factors i.e innovation, as the basis of his theory.

Empirical studies on innovation as quoted Atalay, Anafarta and Sarvan (2013) opine that firms which continuously introduce new innovative products are capable of achieving sustained profitability over a time period. This was supported by Oncioiu (2013) who discovered innovation as an important ingredient in this knowledge based society in SMEs sustainability.

An important issue facing SMEs worldwide is continuous improvement. In today's markets the inputs of customers and their fast changing needs make it imperative that enterprises continuously improve the way business is conducted, for example, improving production costs, delivery schedules, manufacturing skills, supplier relationship and productivity in all practices (De Wit et al, 2007).

According to Gaither and Frazier (1999), SMEs constantly experience shortages in capital and skills to improve production capacity. Moreover SMEs' operational functions should embrace competitive priorities of low production costs, fast on-time deliveries, high quality products and customer services. SMEs that have adapted their production systems to be flexible and their costs and prices competitive will be able to compete and capture increased market share. This signifies the importance of innovation in enhancing loyalty and long term customer value. In the same vein Oncioiu et al (2013) in their study noted that innovation boosted competitiveness of SMEs in Romania.

Knowledge - Sustainability Relationship

Business sustainability is still an emerging issue. While there is some commonality around what should be done to achieve business sustainability, there is relatively little agreement on how knowledge enhances the operations of SMEs (Nejati, Shahbudin & Amran, 2010). In part, this is because business sustainability is connected to a wide range of diverse areas, including organizational behaviour, business strategy, operations management, accounting, finance, economics, environmental science, ethics, and social psychology. A more pragmatic alternative for promoting business sustainability is to develop a widely accepted and inclusive "body of knowledge" that can help guide SMEs (Pojasek, 2007, Nejati, Shahbudin & Amran, 2010). In other disciplines (such as law, medicine, and accounting), the body of knowledge resides with the practitioners and academics who apply and advance it. A business sustainability body of knowledge would include knowledge of proven traditional practices that are widely applied, along with knowledge of innovative and advanced practices that have as yet seen only limited use. Within the business sustainability field, there are a growing number of generally accepted means - knowledge and practices that are, or should be, applied uniformly in all business sustainability programmes (although, of course, the organization implementing business sustainability is always responsible for determining what is appropriate for its operational context). It is important for the operators of SMEs to develop a common lexicon within the business sustainability practice for discussing "lessons learned" and for benchmarking common elements of achievement (Nonaka & Toyoma, 2007).

Socio-Economic Factors - Sustainability Relationship

Deterioration in socio-economic status of Nigeria has considerably affected the survival of the SMEs' sub-sector. This is confirmed by The Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies (CGSPS), when it observed that Nigeria has descended to join the group of low-income countries with crises and poverty being pervasive and deep-seated in the country (Aworemi, Abdul-azeez and Opoola: 2012). Nigeria is the largest economy in Africa (This Day Newspaper, Thursday 5th February, 2015) with a GDP of 80.22 trillion US dollars. However, the country is bedeviled by civil unrest with 70% of its population living below the poverty line with an average per capital income of $300 (USAID, 2006). A look from the socio-economic perspective of the SMEs sector reveals differences in several indices that affect its performance. For example, changes in the Nigerian turbulent and rapid business environment have imposed economic pressure on the competitiveness of Nigerian SMEs and have weakened their survival. SMES must understand and anticipate the opportunities and threats the turbulent business environment presents.

Moderating Role of Social Network

An in-depth literature review indicated that 'Network position strength' is most closely related to innovation and sustainable performance for SMEs in the medical services sector (Pullen et al., 2010). Prior research has frequently considered the effect of network on innovation performance. For example, Bourgeois III (1980) concludes that a coalition of strategy makers cannot focus on alternative means without a clearly conceived set of goals in mind (Bourgeois III, 1980). Hence, for SMEs to be sustainable, their values in terms of innovation performance can be created through co-operation and knowledge sharing (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005). When the objectives and strategies of an alliance are clearly stated, a foundation of common understanding and the means to achieve and sustain the collaborative purpose is established among the partners.

Network position strength considers the structure of the network which is based on the combination of contacts a business has in relation to contacts that other businesses have (Groen, Wakkee & DeWeerd-Nederhof, 2008) and on the strength of a business' network position. This determines to a great extent its access to knowledge and other resources that are necessary for survival. The extensive body of literature concerning network characteristics repeatedly indicates the importance of the structure of the network in terms of the presence of structural holes (Burt, 1992; Haythornthwaite, 1996) and the density of the network (Burt, 1992; Borgatti, Jones & Everett, 1998; Gilsing & Nooteboom, 2005) in relation to SMEs innovation – survival performance. These items are captured in the network characteristic network position strength (Pullen, Groen, DeWeerd-Nederhof & Fisscher, 2010).

Theoretical Background

Conservation of Resources Theory (COR)

The basic tenet of COR theory is that individuals with different forms of social status strive to obtain, retain, protect and foster things that they value. These resources are valued for poverty reduction and survival even amidst crises situations. Individuals are motivated to acquire new resources (such as knowledge and innovation) and also protect their conditional resources. It adds that one of the major purposes of life is to build and protect valuable resources because they are capable of predicting changes and sustaining the society - in our case Small and Medium Enterprises.

Social Capital Theory

It emphasizes close ties/relationships through affiliation otherwise known as 'networks'. It is based on the fundamental idea that provision of mutual trust, knowledge, shared beliefs, cultural values, social networks, information flow, valuable resources and insurance are necessary to facilitate cooperation to both the individual and the community (Coleman, 1988; Jackman and Miller, 1998; Putnam, 1993). Most entrepreneurs connect themselves with networks *to gain cooperative action and also obtain relevant information, skills, and other resources needed for their businesses.* Social capital conceptions of lifelong learning emphasize the creation of learning (knowledgeable) societies, in which continual learning enhances connections and innovations among individuals and engenders civic participation. This paper, from the conservation of resources and social capital perspectives,

studies the relationship between innovation, knowledge, socio-economic factors (crisis and poverty) and SMEs sustainability as well as the moderating effect of networks on innovation – sustainability relationship.

Methodology

This research was conducted on SMEs' sustainability in Jos metropolis, Plateau State. A total of 250 questionnaires were administered and 211 responses were received out of which5 were not included in the research for they were invalid. The 206 questionnaires that were valid were evaluated for research purposes. Questionnaire response rate was therefore 82.4% which is quite adequate. The responses were indicated on a 6-point Likert scale Scale.

The constructs/variables used in this research are categorical in nature and have irregular distributional properties. In view of that, they are measured using scales that had already been tested by scholars such as Ajzen and Fishbein (1980). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's tests show that the KMO statistics vary from 0 to 1.The rule of the thumb is that the KMO must be greater than 0.7 to be adequate. The results revealed that the KMO values for Innovation, Knowledge, socio-economic factors, Social Networks and Sustainability are 0.944, 0.879, 0.940, 0.776 and 0.865 respectively which shows that the sample is adequate and factor analysis is appropriate for the data. To proceed with the factor analysis we need to check further if there are relationships between the variables and that the original correlation matrix is not an identity matrix. Barlett's test of sphericity is then used to conduct this test. On checking the result, it is seen that the Bartlett's test is highly significant (0.000) with $p < 0.001$. This shows that the R-Matrix factor analysis is appropriate.

Data Analysis

Data was cleaned, followed by parametric assumptions and diagnostic tests. The results revealed that the parametric assumptions were met. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the sample characteristics. Correlation analysis was conducted to determine relationships among the study constructs. To test the conceptual model assumed in the current study, a regression analysis was performed. The results are presented next.

Results

Demographic characteristics of SMEs' operators that participated in this study (frequency and % distribution) are provided in the appendix (see appendix). 59.2% of the participants were males while 40.8% were females. Participants were dominantly (44.7%) at the ages between 27-30 years. With regards to the stability of business, majority (63.1%) of the respondents agreed that their businesses were stable. Finally, majority of the respondents (93.7%) were single.

Means, Standard Deviations and Correlation Coefficients of Research Variables
Table 3: Means, Standard Deviations and Correlation Coefficients of Research Variables

Variable	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5
Innovation	3.59	0.78	1				
Knowledge	3.98	0.97	0.492*	1			
Socio-econs	3.59	0.78	-0.588	-0.649	1		
Social Networks	3.76	0.81	0.412*	-0.114	0.212*	1	
Sustainability	3.80	1.08	0.685*	0.651*	-0.231	0.546*	1

**** Correlation is significant at the 0.1 level, *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level**

Perception rate of participants for social networks was fairly high at 3.76. Innovation and socio-economic factors had the lowest mean of 3.59. Knowledge had the highest mean (3.98), sustainability had closer mean of 3.80. Except for sustainability, all standard deviations were less than 1, implying that the mean is a good representation of the moderating role of social networks in the SMEs innovation-sustainability.

Table 4. Results of Tests of Hypotheses

Hypotheses		Path Coefficient	P-Value	Decision
H1	INN → SUS	0.69**	0.00	Accepted
H2	KNW → SUS	0.65*	0.01	Accepted
H3	SOCECONS →	-0.23	0.01	Rejected
H4	Moderating role of social networks between Innovation and sustainability	0.55**	0.00	Accepted

**** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level, * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level**

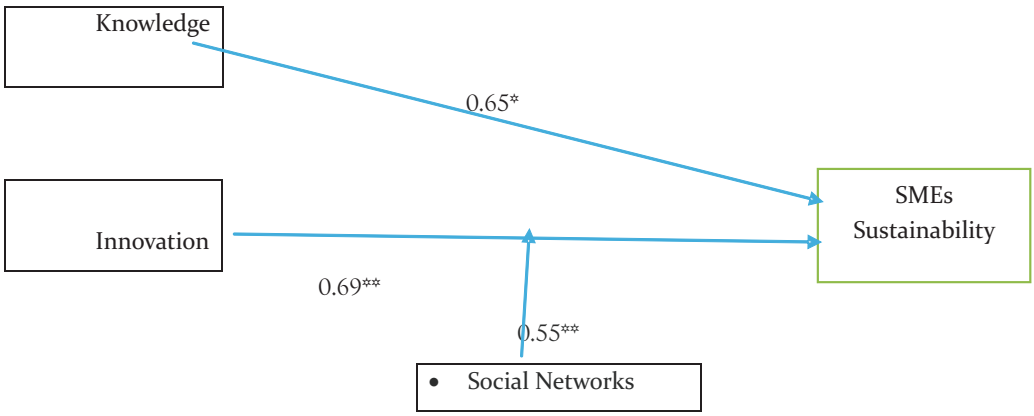

Figure 2. Supported Research Model

Discussion of Results

The robustness of the concept of sustainability among SMEs was investigated by testing the moderating role of social networks on the relationship between innovation and sustainability of SMEs in Plateau State. Also, we tried to establish the relationships between knowledge, socio-economic factors and sustainability. Table 4 and figure 2 above provide the hypotheses results of the influence of innovation, knowledge, socio-economic factors and social networks on sustainability of SMEs. Our result revealed a positive relationship (ß = 0.36**, p<0.01) between innovation and sustainability. The result confirms the findings of scholars (Oncioii, 2003; De Wit et al, 2007; Gaither & Frazier, 1999). For H2, knowledge is positively related (ß = 0.65**, p<0.01) to sustainability. The result supports the findings of scholars (Nejati, Shahbudin & Amran, 2010) which revealed a very strong influence of knowledge on sustainability. Socio-economic factors-sustainability was tested and the result revealed negative insignificant relationship (ß = -0.23; p>0.05). This result is in line with the submission of some scholars (Jull, 2006) who documented that that socio-economic forces such as crisis and poverty are not in any way related to business sustainability. This is in view of the fact that that rather than promoting businesses, the forces are seen In addition, the result for H4 is accepted since it reveals significant positive moderating effects of social networks (ß = 0.54*; p<0.05) on the relationship between innovation and sustainability of SMEs. This result is in tandem with the previous findings of scholars (Kim, Hon and Crant, 2009; Hmieleski & Corbett, 2006; Krueger, Reily & Carsrud 2000).

Understanding the robustness of sustainability of SMEs is crucial. This is anchored largely on recognition of the impact of entrepreneurship activities particularly on job creation of graduates as well as the economic growth of countries across the world and Nigeria in particular. Hence, the major result from our findings revealed that social networks moderate the relationship between innovation and SMEs sustainability.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Majorly, the managerial implication of this study focuses on the application sustainability in the field of entrepreneurship. In this 21st century, experts (government, practitioners and academicians) in Nigeria may want to employ and train would be entrepreneurs as well as practicing entrepreneurs on how best to sustain their businesses. Another managerial implication relates to providing an enabling environment that fosters lifelong learning for existing owners of SMEs. From the foregoing, we observed that understanding how innovation predicts sustainability of SMEs depends on their social networks. Hence, there ought to be emphasis on sensitizing SMEs' operators on how best to network in order to sustain their businesses.

Suggestion for Further Study

The study is only restricted to Jos metropolis of Plateau State. Further research could be conducted to cover all the seventeen (17) local government areas of the state. Also, this study employed the cross-sectional approach. A longitudinal approach should be employed to study the trend over a period of at least three (3) years. Finally, just focusing on factors such as innovation, knowledge, socio-economic and social networks in predicting SMEs' sustainability may not be sufficient enough in explaining the phenomenon. In view of that,

there will be need to explore other factors that may contribute in influencing SMEs sustainability that were not part of this study.

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Table 2: Demographic characteristics, frequencies and percent distributions

Characteristics	F	%	Characteristics	F	%
Gender			**Age**		
Male	122	59.2	16-20 years	73	34.9
Female	84	40.8	21-26 years	30	14.5
Total	**206**	100	27-30 years	92	44.7
			31 years & Above	11	5.9
			Total	**206**	100
Type of Business			**Business Stability**		
Provisions	93	45.1	Not Stable	72	36.9
Welding	55	26.7	Stable	130	63.1
Tailorings	37	17.9	**Total**	**206**	100
Hair Dressing	21	10.3			
Total	**206**	100			
Marital Status					
Single	193	93.7			
Married	13	6.3			
Total	**206**	100			