

ENTREPRENEURIAL ORIENTATION AND MARKET SUSTAINABILITY OF MSMEs IN THE SOUTH EAST, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study ascertained the association between entrepreneurial orientation and market sustainability of MSMEs in the South East, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to: determine the association between innovativeness and product acceptance of MSMEs in South East, Nigeria, and ascertain the association between pro-activeness and product acceptance of MSMEs in South East Nigeria. survey research design was adopted for the study. A sample of 386 MSMEs was used by the study. Data collected through questionnaires that was distributed to the respondents were analyzed with descriptive analysis and the hypotheses were tested with Regression analysis via SPSS version 20. From the results, it was revealed that innovativeness and pro-activeness have a positive and significant effect on the product acceptance of MSMEs in South East, Nigeria. Based on the findings, the study recommended among others, that MSMEs must constantly launch new products and use high innovation in product marketing operations because the innovation dimension drives new business opportunities.

Introduction

The Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises MSMEs accounted for 43.31% of Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product, (GDP) and 6.21% of employment according to a 2022 survey conducted by SMEDAN (Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency) in collaboration with the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (Oluwale, 2022). According to Kippa (2022) a Nigeria, fintech Startup revealed that 51% of MSMEs are located in the Southwest region of the country. This is because the majority of the small businesses in Nigeria are in the Southern part of the country while there is a fewer number in the North. This is attributed to several factors which include the fact that businesses in the South have more access to technology to manage their business. Also identified is insecurity as a major setback for businesses in the North. The South-South and South West accounted for 11.5% and 8.7% of the MSMEs in Nigeria respectively. But the Northern region, the North Central accounted for 15.4%, the North West 10.6%, and the North East 5.6% of the MSMEs. One of the reasons for the lower performance of the North is that the North has a lesser rate of technological adoption and research reports have attributed it to insecurity, banditry, terrorism, and kidnapping in the region, which destabilized residents and their businesses (Akin, 2022).

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Entrepreneurial orientation is critically considered as the process of organization that gives contribution to a firm's survival and performance. Entrepreneurial orientation is the main aspect of running a business because, in its process, innovation renewal could affect a firm's life, survival, and sustainability, without any change the firm would be eroded by changes from environmental forces (Utami & Wilopo, 2018). Entrepreneurial orientation is seen as the ability to distribute creative innovation in business with added value that pave way for MSME sustainability in a dynamic and competitive business environment. MSMEs should obtain more talent to conduct autonomy, innovation, risk-taking, pro-activeness, and competitive aggressiveness to gain sustainable competitive advantage and higher performance than rival firms in the environment (Utami & Wilopo, 2018). One cannot exaggerate the effect of entrepreneurial orientation on MSME's sustainability because of its significant impact on business growth and development. The prior study discovered that the contribution of every entrepreneurial orientation dimension to MSMEs' performance and survival is varying, and in reality, autonomy, competitive aggressiveness, creativity, risk-taking, and autonomy impact MSMEs' success and survival positively (Utami & Wilopo, 2018). The MSMEs' sustainability depends mostly on their economic sustainability which necessitates the business use site works efficiently and responsibly so that it can operate sustainably.

Therefore, literatures reviewed indicated that there has been inadequate work and studies on entrepreneurial orientation and business sustainability in Nigeria, and the eastern part in particular. As a result, massive MSMEs failures in eastern Nigeria are evident. Therefore, gap is identified since entrepreneurial orientation and sustainability of MSMEs study is yet to be available to help in addressing the rapid failures and collapse of MSMEs in the region. That some papers reviewed on entrepreneurial orientation relationship with sales turnover, profitability, competitive advantage and pollution controls were theoretical not empirical in nature, they cannot adequately offer a scientific finding on the entrepreneurial orientation relationship and MSMEs sustainability in the South East Nigeria. It is against these backdrops that this study intends to establish the relationship that exists between the different variables of entrepreneurial orientation and the market sustainability of micro, small, and medium enterprises in South East Nigeria. The broad objective of this study is to ascertain the relationship that exists between entrepreneurial orientation and market sustainability of MSMEs in the South East, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the association between innovativeness and product acceptance of MSMEs in South East, Nigeria.
2. Ascertain the association between pro-activeness and product acceptance of MSMEs in South East Nigeria.

Review of Related Literature

Entrepreneurial Orientation

Entrepreneurial orientation was considered the critical process of organization that offers reinforcement for MSMEs' survival and sustainability in a competitive and dynamic business environment. Entrepreneurship orientation is the main aspect of operating MSMEs because, in its process, innovation renewal could influence MSMEs' life, without any positive change the business would be distracted by macro-environmental changes. Anastuti and Suhar Yono (2018), emphasized that entrepreneurial orientation is the ability to distribute creative innovation in SME business with added value. Firms strive to get adequate talent and compete aggressively so to gain competitive advantage which ensures high performance and sustainability in a long run. The concept of entrepreneurial orientation has emerged as a paramount concept in the survival of MSMEs over the past two decades. Etim, Adabu and Ogar (2017), opined that entrepreneurial orientation has been seen as the means of decision-making activities used by entrepreneurs that provides support for business programs and as well act as the strategy-making that provides MSME with a basis for entrepreneurial decisions.

Entrepreneurial orientation is seen as a set of decision-making styles, processes, practices, rules, and norms in line with which MSME makes decisions to enhance its innovativeness, pro-activeness, and risk-taking ability

(Etim et al, 2017). Furthermore, it has also been contended that entrepreneurial orientation is the willingness of SMEs to innovate, search for risk, take self-directed actions, and be more proactive and aggressive which leads to new market opportunities. Asad, Sharif and Hafeez (2016), assert that entrepreneurial orientation entails the identification, and evaluation exploitation of opportunities to introduce novel foods and services to the market with a view to remaining relevant and sustainable in a competitive arena. Entrepreneurial orientation has been described as a tradition, norm, and value used by seasoned entrepreneurs for the management of micro small, and medium enterprises toward sustainability.

Okeyo, Semrau, Ambos, and Kraus (2016), pointed out that an entrepreneurial oriented firm is able to undertake uncertain and risky investments and proactively reach the market(s) ahead of rivals and competitors, thereby reaping high returns that ensure survival and sustainable growth. It is a crucial tool that plays a role in aligning MSME to market demand and performance. Montoya, Martins, and Ceballo, (2017), opined that EO is the entrepreneurial attitude and the spirit of looking for new business opportunities that provide ample advantages for achieving high performance which ensures sustainable growth for the MSMEs. The first entrepreneurial attitude for SMEs' survival lies in innovativeness, and risk-taking and innovativeness are the predispositions of SMEs to engage in creativity via technological leadership.

Olubiyi, Egwakhe, Amos and Ajayi (, 2019), opined that entrepreneurial orientation deals with the process of innovativeness, risk-taking attitude, and pro-activeness that leads to permanent business survival. It is a total self-directed business-oriented strategy and mindset towards undertaking risky ventures that lead to MSMEs. This orientation described the bold strategic management actions taken by SMEs by venturing into the unknown market environment by committing significant resources to ensure growth, sustainability and survival. Entrepreneurial orientation is a disposition exhibited by managers of MSMEs that is capable of stimulating growth and ensure survival of business in a long run.

Innovativeness and Product Acceptance

Innovativeness involves the process of products, services, business concepts, and work processes, it generally reflects a firm's predisposition to be involved in activities that supports adoption of new ideas, business concept and/or marketing strategy that stem out of research, originality and creative processes (Nwekpa, Onwe & Ezezue, 2017). This enables them to depart from established practices, innovation and technologies because innovation can serve many purposes for a small scale business firms, for example, innovation can help a small scale business enterprise to meet the variety of needs and demand of larger group of customers in a dynamic and competitive market segment, improve on firm's competitiveness and also achieve better performance which could serve as a mechanism for sustainable operation (Nwekpa, Onwe & Ezezue, 2017). They further lamented that a high rate of technological and/or innovativeness on product market operation as implied by innovativeness dimension, can be used by the small-scale business enterprises to pursue new business opportunities. Innovativeness is related to providing support for renewal, the creative process and the development and growth of new ideas via experiment (Timotius, 2021). This is more related to the increase in the probability that an organization will benefit from first movers or innovators, innovation has become the most significant factor used to characterized entrepreneurship, and contribute to the profitability and growth of entrepreneurial business organizations (Timotius, 2021).

Mamum, Muhammed and Ismail (2017) stressed that the first entrepreneurial attributes for small scale and medium scale enterprises to survive and to be sustainable is innovativeness. Therefore, innovativeness is regarded as the catalyst for micro small scale and medium scale business survival and sustainability in a dynamic and flexible business environment. Innovation is regarded as a key business process that MSMEs are utilizing to accomplish competitive advantage. Innovations are currently a fundamental prerequisite of competitiveness (Ariguzo, Abimbola & Egwakhe, 2018). Further buttressed that innovativeness covers a wide range of capability

that micro small-scale business firms possess to engage in and support novel, new ideas, experiment, and creative processes that are directed toward ensuring growth sustainability among the micro small-scale business firms in dynamic arena. Olubiyi et al (2019) opined that successful micro small-scale business firms are currently the ones that implements innovative strategies, invests in research development and innovations. The basic precondition for the creation and uses of innovation in the enterprises is a well formulated and implemented innovative strategy. Presutti and Odoriki (2018) stressed that innovativeness is a central component in an entrepreneurial process and/or element that champions creative destruction by which wealth is created when existing market structures were disrupted by the introduction of novel ideas, business concepts as well as goods and services reallocating resources from existing business concerns to new business organization and growth.

Knowledge based innovation is seen as a superstar of entrepreneurship orientation, and it requires careful analysis of all the necessary factors and clear focus on the strategic position which entails developing systems approach, market focus and occupying the strategic position for effective business performances towards growth sustainability (Olubiyi et al, 2019). Ajani and Oluyemi (2016) further lamented that innovativeness is the key tool towards entrepreneurial orientation and a source for business sustainability, it is considered as the entrepreneurial behaviour of an enterprise to generate new ideas that are very industrious and profitable to the micro small medium scale businesses in an ever-changing business environment. Ajani and Oluyemi (2016) also state that innovation to an entrepreneur is an everyday activity that leads them towards the accomplishment of their aims, objective and business goals. The creation of new business and novel market and product concepts are directed toward ensuring successful growth and achieving business sustainability among existing businesses. Therefore, the creation of new business venture has particularly been examined via the lens of disruptive innovation theory (Steven, David, Jiang & John, 2020). Lamented that major markets created in recent decades by disruptive microcomputers such as notebook computers; other portable information technology devices, which have grown to move more than ten times that of the previously dominant mainframe computers market.

The disruptive innovation of the microcomputer opened up major new markets for computing not only directly via job creation and improved business opportunities but also by bringing inexpensive and uncomplicated computing products to increasing numbers of new users, which has in turn has seeded numerous businesses (Steven et al, 2020). Many such possibilities of entrepreneurs and firms exist at the lower end of the world markets, where many earn less than \$1,500 annually but are starting to demand some of the goods and services previously available only to wealthier people and organization (Ahlshrom, 2010). Consider the circumstances that lead to the success of a disruptive innovation. The business concept or technological creativity must be a weak substitute for an existing product, one that initially is not as good but is more accessible in terms of price, convenience, or simplicity. Thus, disruptive innovation can develop well in new or less demanding application, often among customers and application outside of the mainstream or in developing economies (Ahlshrom, 2010). However, disruptive innovation helps entrepreneurs and micro small scale business managers grow in the less developed arena through the creation of new business, subsistence entrepreneurship and the development of new product and services, and if innovation also assists poor individuals to find and develop potential markets and customers, while providing users with important products previously out of reach (Ahlshrom, 2015).

Pro-activeness and Market Expansion

Pro-activeness is related to risk taking and innovativeness (Gilbert, 2021). Pro-activeness relates to forward looking, first mover advantage seeking efforts to shape the competitive business environment by utilizing new products/services and novel business concept ahead of the competition. Gilbert (2021) further observes that the development and growth of MSME depends largely upon the capacity of pro-activeness of the innovation line in which it operates and/or participate as a competing partner. The author also stressed that proactive micro small

and medium scale businesses perform much excellent and positively than competing partners, because MSMEs respond to market challenges and dynamism and become leaders in a given industry. Yu Ming et al (2018) stressed that entrepreneurial orientation has positive influence in the survival rate of MSMEs and most vital is the proactiveness influence on the growth and survival of business firms in a competitive marketplace. Furthermore, management and customer relationships, which are components of proactive orientation, influences organization performance in terms of shorter end-to-end pipeline time, total costs and shorter time. Gilbert (2021) stressed also that higher levels of customer-oriented supply chain practices will have a positive influence on customer oriented organizational performance outcomes.

Proactivity is the tendency of a firm to introduce new product and services. It is an extent to which a firm and its management take the initiative and earn the first-mover advantages in a market (Khurram et al, 2017). In a competitive market arena, proactivity not only allows MSME in capturing opportunities better than other business firm but also become the basis for developing and sustaining competitive advantage (Sok et al, 2017). They also stressed that proactivity is as important as innovation in the management of business. Further, opined that the underlying reason is that over different stages of MSMEs life cycle, firms need to innovate and launch novel product and services that match to requirement of the markets. Proactivity is the ability of an organization and its management in deciding whether to launch a new product or not. Proactivity is a foundation for innovative behaviour and serve as a tool for competitive business operation in a given industry. MSME that are proactively oriented, possesses the chance of moving ahead of the competing sister firms in a dynamic environment. The underlying rationale for this is that, proactivity or proactive firms become demanding and may ask employees to innovate. It may lead to harmful stress among employees, and they may get demotivated. This demotivation may lead to lower level of productivity that may ultimately minimize the level of organizational performance (Mirza et al, 2017). Additionally, pro-activeness is seen as an attitude of anticipating and believing according to the potential need of the market (Megha & Priyadarghini, 2017). Therefore, first movers can have strong influence on the market by ruling the distribution channel members. A competitive proactive MSMEs are usually the more concrete surviving and sustainable ventures with original Mideas and with firms that are risk oriented (Mthanti and Ojah, 2017). Coming up with differences in a business concept, goods and services and/or innovative products do not define pro-activeness but an easy and relevant response to the current situation in the market. Okoli et al (2021) further elucidated that in many areas of MSMEs operation and performance, learning has been found to be vital tool for survival and growth sustainability. Organization learning, therefore, expresses ways members gain the knowledge and skills needed to attain greater business performance, which has a tradition of analyzing the decisions surrounding investing in lucrative and viable ventures in a given business arena. Yu-ming et al (2018) once again enumerated that pro-activeness is the tendency for MSME to take the positive marketing strategy and business policies, business concept and proactive action as well as leading strategy to launch a novel product, novel business processes, new technologies, new services in an attempt to transcend the competitors. In an attempt to gain the competitive advantage, proactive business enterprises tend to take advantage of the market opportunities ahead of competitors, and take the leadership status in launching new product and services in a dynamic, flexible market situation.

In an environment that is competitive and flexible, and an industry that is turbulent, pro-activeness plays a critical influence in shaping, obtaining and maintaining the competitive advantage of the small and medium scale business. Similarly, business organizations that are proactive in nature tend to find novel market opportunities more easily and take swift action on those abundant opportunities, and then bring positive innovative operation on small and medium scale enterprises (Kim & Lui, 2015). Further assert that MSMEs with pro-activeness are more likely to have faster environmental scanning speeds and stronger market opportunities, recognition ability

and mindset, discovery talent than other business ventures. In the aspect of potential development opportunities, business establishment will act in advance to swiftly generate vital information resources from the external stakeholders (customers, competitors channel members, investors, debtors, creditors etc). With a high absorptive capacity, business organizations can understand these information resources quickly and accurately, and promote the transformation of new knowledge (Yu-ming, 2018). The efficiency of transforming these knowledges into novel business concept-ideology, new product and service increases, which can improve business organization survival, growth and sustainability in business (Synder, Witell, Gustafsson, Fombelle & Kristensson, 2016). The authors also assert that pro-activeness covers a business organization taking initiatives that will help shape the market situation to the firm's own advantage. It is the firm's response to market place opportunities, and absolutely reflects a business posture of anticipating and acting on future demands and needs in the market arena, thereby establishing first mover advantage over competitors. Gilbert (2021) observed that the development and growth of MSME depends largely upon the capacity of pro-activeness of the innovation line in which it operates and/or participate as a competing partner. The author also stressed that proactive micro small and medium scale businesses perform much excellent and positively than competing partners, because MSMEs respond to market challenges and dynamism and become leaders in a given industry.

Proactivity is a foundation for innovative behaviour and serve as a tool for competitive business operation in a given industry. MSME that are proactively oriented, possesses the chance of moving ahead of the competing sister firms in a dynamic environment. The underlying rationale for this is that, proactivity or proactive firms become demanding and may ask employees to innovate. Muslim (2017), sees that pro-activeness was related to market opportunities in the process of new entry, seizing of initiative and acting opportunistically in order to shape the business environment with a view to over perform the rivals. Pro-activeness is also seen as a high level of opportunity seeking firms that ideally are ahead of competitors and successfully anticipate future clients demand (Engelen et al, 2014).

Market Sustainability

Market sustainability in business refers to an organization's strategy to reduce negative environmental impact resulting from their marketing operations in a particular market. There are four factors of sustainability, the Human Sustainability, Social Sustainability, Economic Sustainability and Environmental Sustainability, aspired that a business uses its resource efficiency and responsibly. So that it can operate in a sustainable manner, consistently producing operational profit and maintain the capital intact. It aims to improve the standard of living. But, in the context of business, it refers to the efficient use of assets to maintain company market profitability overtime according to UK government (Annual Report 2000, January, 2001). Maintaining high and stable level of market economic growth is one of the key objectives of sustainable development. Abandoning market economic growth is not an option but sustainable development is more than just economic growth. However, market performance is a foundation for business sustainability, it is a measure of success level of a company in achieving its long-term goals and objectives. The success level can be seen from financial, marketing, operational and human resources performance. Business performance will be able to increase stakeholders' prosperity, MSME sustainable performance is also relating to growth and functionality of various functional departments and units that are operating well in a business establishment (Sugeng et al, 2021).

Positive market performance of MSMEs ensures the growth and sustainable life of the operating MSMEs. A growth approach is recommended to use in measuring MSMEs market performance, small enterprises are usually not transparent and difficult to interpret (Miles et al, 1978, cited in Sugeng et al, 2021). Furthermore, the enumerated MSMEs can only be sustainable if the MSMEs are capable to achieve high market growth in terms of both subjective performance measurement and objective performance measurement that serve as a tool for

sustainable operational measurement for the MSMEs. Example of the market performance are satisfaction level of customers, service quality, working condition of the employees, measurement of an objective, sustainable market performance is generally based on financial performance and marketing, such as profitability, market share, competitiveness etc. (Nuryakin & Retnawati, 2016). Business sustainable performance is measured by total market performance (sales growth, market expansion growth, profitability, return on investment) at sustainable level as well as new product success. Sustainable competitive advantage and survival is determined by the level of the firm market performance indices, in terms of product acceptance, profit, market share, customer responsiveness, customer satisfaction and orientation (Adamu, 2020). Performance of MSMEs is the outcome of all of the organization's operation and strategies that determine successes and sustainable growth and survival of the MSMEs. MSMEs market performance is the appraisal of prescribed indicators or standards of effectiveness, efficiency and environmental accountability such as productive-cycle and acceptable time, product acceptance and waste reduction, customer loyalty and customer orientation, of which is the major determinants of firm's sustainability in operation, growth, expansion, leadership and competitive advantage accomplishment (Ajike and Nwakoby, 2017). Therefore, MSMEs sustainable life depends on how well the SMEs are performing in accordance with how product acceptance, profit, market share, customer satisfaction, market expansion, customer satisfaction and loyalty are adequately accomplished toward consolidating on successes that make MSMEs to be sustainable. MSME market sustainability has been defined as a "company's ability to achieve its business goals and objectives and increase long term shareholder value by integrating economic, environmental and social opportunities into its operation and entire business strategies (Rahman Khan & Arman, 2018). The authors further stressed that MSME sustainability can be used to mean meeting the need and goals of a business without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own need in a business dimension. It is seen as having a long term, durable, sound and systematic business performance and operation. Achieving the foregoing, implies that MSMEs becomes profitable, attractive, competitive, autonomous and socially responsible as well as environmentally friendly.

Empirical Review

Irikefe and Bagobiri (2022) investigated the effect of EO on the performance of small enterprises in Abuja, Nigeria. The study made use of a survey research design to target a population of 2750 small enterprises in Abuja. The questionnaires contained closed-ended questions that were rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The data was then analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple linear regression. Arising from the result, the regression model was significant at 0.000 with the calculated value greater than the critical value ($16.910 > 2.399$), hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. It was concluded that, overall, EO has a significant effect on business performance.

Alaka and Okogua (2022) examined the influence of entrepreneurial orientation and management skills on the performance of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the state of Lagos, Nigeria. Quantitative survey research design was adopted, and multiple regression method of analysis was employed for the research. The population was 11,663 registered SMEs in Lagos State. Cochran's sample sizing was used to determine the sample size of 500. From the total of 500 questionnaires distributed, 473 were completed and returned, which corresponded to a response rate of 96,6%. The data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The results show that entrepreneurial orientation practices have a positive and significant effect on profitability ($= 0,110$, $t = 1,904$, $p < 0,05$). However, management skills have a positive but not significant influence on the profitability of the selected Small and Medium Enterprises ($= 0,030$, $t = 0,532$, $p > 0,05$).

Artarina and Deni (2019) carried out study on sustainability, competitive advantage and entrepreneurial orientation in Indonesia family culinary business groups. The research used covariant based structural equation model (SEM) with thematic research support. The finding indicated that economic sustainability is indicated by

the operation of a system to support low-cost or efficient business activities and the trend of growth and profit stability is difficult to realize. Olawale F. (2019) studied on green entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance in South Africa. It was aimed to investigate the impact of green entrepreneurial orientation on the sustainable performance of firms in the context of the hospitality sector. Cross-sectional survey method was used for data collection. Questionnaire was distributed to 500 owner/managers of formal hotels and guest accommodations in South Africa, and 195 respondents were used as sample size and participated in the survey. Descriptive statistics and the structural equation modeling were used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics and structural equation modeling (MSEM) were used for data analysis, partial least square (PLS) path modeling was also employed as well as PLS smart 3.2.7 as software package was also used. The findings revealed that green entrepreneurial orientation positively influences the sustainable performance of firms in the hospital industry. Gbolamhossein and Ramezani (2016) conducted study on factors influencing sustainable entrepreneurship in SMEs in Iran food industry. The objective is to establish the social and environmental factors that influence sustainable entrepreneurship in MSME. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and several inferential analyses. However mixed method approach, using both qualitative and quantitative methods was also employed. Finding showed that the most vital factors towards sustainable performance in MSMEs in food industry are social factors, including customer orientation, as well as human resources and environmental factors, including recycling and the future of earth and concluded that, social and environmental aspect of sustainability and employing experienced staff would majorly contribute to the pursuit of sustainable entrepreneurial orientation in MSMEs of food industry. Long, Wang and Wang (2021) examined the effect of entrepreneurial decision-making logic on new venture sustainability. The paper selected a group of 259 entrepreneurs as a sample size and used logistic regression analysis as a research method where effectuation and causation were used. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis were also employed for general data analysis. Findings revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between previous experience and new venture sustainability. Also, it reveals that significant negative relationship exist between goal orientation, means orientation and new venture sustainability. Rumanko, Kozakova, Urbanova and Hudakova (2021) conducted study on family business as a bearer of social sustainability in multinationals – case of Slovakia. It is aimed at examining how family businesses operating in Slovakia apply the social aspect of their business differently, when comparing with others so as to recommend appropriately. However, the study is also aimed at identifying significant differences in applying social aspect of entrepreneurship in subsidiaries of multinational enterprises operating in Slovakia. The study used stratified randomization to tackle the sample issue. Statistical software XLSTAT was used to process and examine all the data. The hypotheses were tested using a non-parametric (Kruskal-Wallis) statistical test. The findings revealed that there is a difference between firms with different predominant gender among employees in the processing of socially sustainable activities characterized by the variables, and there is difference between family and non-family business in the processing of socially sustainable activities characterized by the variables. Adamu (2020) conducted study on the effect of entrepreneurial orientation on the performance of small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) in selected North Central, Nigeria. A survey research design was used for this study. A multi-stage sampling technique was used for the study. The population of 4,538 and a sample of 368 respondents who are the owners and managers of the SME in the study areas were used for the study. The collated data were analyzed using multi-regression analysis while the probability values of the estimate were used to test the four hypotheses of the study. The results of the study show that competitive strategy has a negative effect on SMEs performance in North Central, Nigeria and the effect is not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), innovativeness has a positive effect on the performance of SMEs in North Central, Nigeria and the effect is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). More so, pro-activeness has a positive effect on SMEs performance in North Central, Nigeria and the

effect is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). It was concluded that firms attempting to compete in today's highly competitive market environment, should above every other thing be innovative in order to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. Yu, Wan, Sang, Zhen, Yu and Quan (2018) investigated the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and SMEs technological innovation performance, which simultaneously integrates the absorptive capacity and environmental dynamics by constructing a moderated moderation model. This is to provide empirical result as a reasonable reference for improving innovation capability and performance, business management, and other aspect that ensure sustainable business management for SMEs. The paper used survey method in conducting the work, 402 SMEs were selected and formed the study population i.e. the sample size in Yangtze River Delta Region of China. However, SPSS was used for data analysis and test of hypothesis. The findings revealed that entrepreneurial orientation has significant positive relationship with enterprises innovation performance and that the absorptive capacity plays a moderating role in the relationship between entrepreneurial orientations. Gachugo and Gichira (2018) sought to establish the effects of entrepreneurial orientation dimensions on performance of business start-up among university graduates and to examine the effects of innovativeness, pro-activeness, risk taking and competitive aggressiveness on the survival and long-lasting performance of MSMEs in Kenyan, Kirinyaga County. The study was necessitated due to low rate of graduate entry into MSMEs, coupled with high mortality rate of small and start-up businesses, hence the concern over their performance and survival. It was revealed that the four variables proofed individually statistically significant collectively, the four factors of entrepreneurial orientation in the study contributed 37.3% of the sustainable performance. Chiho and He (2019) focused on the role of relative performance as a boundary condition in the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and sustainable growth of SMEs. We predict that the effect of entrepreneurial orientation on SMEs sustainable growth would differ depending on the performance feedback based on their past performance. Survey methods i.e. descriptive survey was employed. Both primary and secondary data were used. While questionnaire through face to face and email contact were used in collecting the research data. However, 239 firms were considered as the samples, in which random sampling method was employed which gave birth to a sample size of 165 SMEs. Meanwhile, regression analysis was employed for data analysis and test of formulated hypotheses. The findings of this paper advance our understanding of the factors that leads to SMEs sustainable growth. Further, it revealed evidence that SMEs achieve sales growth regardless of their level of entrepreneurial orientation when they face lower levels of performance by engaging in risky initiatives to solve the performance problems. Ni Made and I Made (2019) studied on the effect of entrepreneurial orientation variables on business performance of the SME industry context. The purpose of the study is to provide new practical and theoretical insight into how SME adjust and further develop business competencies, innovations and performance sustainability by using market orientation, learning orientation behaviours and entrepreneurial orientation. The data was collected from manufacturing SMEs of textile products that had a number of employees between 5 and 99 people in the Province of Bali, Indonesia. Simple random method was adopted in selecting the respondent. Meanwhile, questionnaire structured was adopted in gathering the data. Inferential statistical analysis techniques with path analysis approach were used to test the hypothesis. Data processing was done by path analysis approach by using Asca with second order confirmation factor analysis. Market orientation, learning orientation and entrepreneurial orientation indirectly have a significant positive effect on business performance via knowledge and innovation competencies. Gilbert (2021) carried out study on entrepreneurial orientation and the performance of youth owned funded SMEs in Chuka Town, Kenya. This study used descriptive survey design. The target population was 146 business funded and registered by Chuka youth office. Respondent were sampled from 48 youth owned SMEs which were funded in food processing with 41 who responded in Chuka town. Data was collected using a 5-point Likert Scale questionnaire to gather perception from the respondents and were analyzed

using inferential and descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that owner/managers of food performing businesses were supportive and encouraged new ways of doing business and that in the past several years, businesses had pioneered the development of innovations in the business with respondents' having introduced new product and services over the past three years implying that the businesses have not only been innovative but also risk taking. Concluded that entrepreneurship and business training is necessary before funding for the youth to acquire necessary skills and embrace innovation in their business practice.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the descriptive survey design. The descriptive survey design has the capacity to carefully describe a given phenomenon. The population of this study comprised of the Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) that operate their businesses in the selected states in southeast Nigeria. The study focused on SMEs registered and operate in Anambra, Enugu, and Abia States.

Sampling Size and Sample Techniques

Simple random sampling technique was used for this study. This sampling technique was used because it has the capacity to eliminate bias and give an equal chance to each member of the population to be selected in the sample. However, the random selection was done on the number of the MSMEs covered by each three states i.e. Anambra, Enugu, and Abia States respectively.

Table 2: Selected States in the Northwest Nigeria

States	Registered MSMEs in respect of the State
Anambra	5,021
Enugu	2,122
Abia	3,900
Total	11,043

Given the population of 11,043 of the registered MSMEs operating in the 3 selected states, which fall in different economic sectors, including trading, manufacturing, services i.e entertainment/recreation, constructions, transportation etc. The selection of the state is based on condition that many and substantial number of MSMEs are registered with the government agencies and ministries, the MSMEs will be access and are located where insecurity will not be a major obstacle to gain access to and lastly are willing to given answers to questions and operate within relatively formally system.

However, the sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's (1967) formula for sample size determination, because the population is known, accessible and finite in nature. The formula is given below:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where

n = sample size

N = the finite population

e = Level of significance (or limit of tolerance error)

1 = Unity (constant)

Given that the finite population (N) will be 11,043 and the level of significance € will be 0.05

$$n = \frac{11,043}{1 + 11,043 (0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{11,043}{1 + 11,043 (0.0025)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{11,043}{1 + 27.6075}$$

$$n = \frac{11,043}{28.6075}$$

$$n = 386.02$$

$$n = 386$$

This will be used as the sample size.

Having arrived at the proposed sample size of the study, the researcher proceeded to share the proposed obtained sample size between the study area i.e. Anambra, Enugu, and Abia States respectively. The researcher made use of Raugan Kamaisan Proportional Allocation or Distribution Method to allocate questionnaires to the study areas. The purpose is to ensure equal representation and to minimize bias. This was carried out via the following formula:

$$n_s = \frac{NPXM}{N}$$

Where n_s – Sample size allocation

NP = Population size

n = total sample size

N = total population size

However, sample allocation to each state will be:

Anambra State will be $5,021 \times 386 \div 11,043 = 176$

Abia State will be $3,900 \times 386 \div 11,043 = 136$

Enugu State will be $2,122 \times 386 \div 11,043 = 74$

Method of Data Collection

The required data for this study will be collected via primary source.

Primary Source of Data

Questionnaire will be employed for the purpose of collecting primary data. The questionnaire will be administered to a statistically determined sample size from the entire population of the study.

Model Specification

The researcher formulated the following regression equation can be derived from the model.

$$Y = X_1 + X_2$$

Where

Y = Market Sustainability

X_1 = Innovativeness

X_2 = Proactive

β_1 = Regression Weights Coefficients

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \mu$$

Where:

Y = Market sustainability (dependent variable)

X = Entrepreneurial orientation (explanatory/independent Variable)

β_0 = constant term (intercept)

β_1 - β_2 = Coefficients of Entrepreneurial orientation

μ = Error term (stochastic term)

Explicitly, the equation can be defined as:

Market sustainability = f (Entrepreneurial orientation) + μ

Representing the equations with the variables of the construct, hence the equations below are formulated:

$$PRA_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 INN_{it} + \mu_{it} \quad - \quad - \quad - \quad - \quad - \quad - \quad i$$

$$MKE_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_2 PRO_{it} + \mu_{it} \quad - \quad - \quad - \quad - \quad - \quad - \quad ii$$

Where:

β_0 = Constant term (intercept)

β_{it} = Coefficients to be estimated for firm i in period t

μ_{it} = Error term/Stochastic term for firm i in period t

PRA_{it} = Product acceptance i in period t

MKE_{it} = Market expansion i in period t

INN_{it} = innovativeness i in period t

PRO_{it} = Proactive i in period t

Instrument for Data Collection

This work is survey in nature, and was administer structured questions to the respondents to elicit responses. However, the instrument was coded in a five-point Likert scale format. The code such as strongly agreed (5), Agree (4), Undecided (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1) were employed. Therefore, the instrument will be mainly used to elicit information from the study respondents.

Method of Data Analysis

Data generated from primary source were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Some of the questionnaire instrument which was structured using the Five- point Likert's scale response scale was ranked as follows: Strongly Agree = 1, Agree = 2, Undecided = 3, Strongly Disagree = 4, Diagree = 5.

To test the significant effect and the relationship between the dependent variable and independent variables, Regression analysis was used to test the formulated hypotheses with the aid of SPSS version 20. 0. at 5% level of significance.

Decision Rule

The decision for the hypotheses is to accept the alternative hypotheses if the p-value of the test statistic is less or equal to the alpha at 5% and to reject the null hypotheses if the p-value of the test statistic is greater than alpha at 5% significance level.

Data Analysis and Results

Data Analysis

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
INN	5	10.00	406.00	200.4000	178.39927	.052	.913
PRO	5	2.00	441.00	202.2000	187.53853	.132	.913
PRA	5	8.00	412.00	200.4000	181.38440	-.034	.913
Valid N (listwise)	5						

Source: SPSS 20.0 output, 2024

Interpretation

The descriptive statistics for the dependent variables, product acceptance (PRA), and independent factors innovativeness (INN), Proactive (PRO).. The mean is used to establish a baseline. The central tendency is taken

by the median, which re-ranks. The maximum and minimum numbers, on the other hand, aid in the detection of data problems. The variation from the mean is represented by the standard deviation. It is a risk indicator; the greater the standard deviation, the greater the risk. The standard deviation is a metric that expresses how much each item in a dataset deviates from the mean. It is the most reliable and extensively used metric. The standard deviation in the enterprises is 178.40, 187.54 and 181.38, for INN, PRO, and PRA respectively. The table shows that, all the variables have positive value or skewed.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

Ho₁: Innovativeness does not significantly influence the product acceptance of MSMEs in South East Nigeria.

Table 2: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.997 ^a	.995	.993	15.30795

a. Predictors: (Constant), INN

Table 2 model summary shows that R square and the adjusted R square are 0.995 and 0.993. This implies that almost all the variation (100%) experienced in product acceptance within the period under observation was explained by innovativeness. This indicates that the remaining all the variation in product acceptance was captured in model by innovativeness.

Table 3: ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	130898.200	1	130898.200	558.598	.000 ^b
	Residual	703.000	3	234.333		
	Total	131601.200	4			

a. Dependent Variable: PRA

b. Predictors: (Constant), INN

Table 4: Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-2.808	10.990		-.256	.815
	INN	1.014	.043	.997	23.635	.000

a. Dependent Variable: PRA

It was observed from Table 3 (ANOVA Table) that innovativeness is statistically significant to predict product acceptance in MSMEs in Northwest Nigeria since the probability value obtained (p-value), that is 0.000, is less than 0.05 ($P < 0.05$). This was further confirmed in Table 4 where the coefficient of innovativeness indicated a positive ($t = 23.635$) influence on product acceptance. The study therefore, accepts the alternate hypothesis therefore uphold that innovativeness has contributed significantly to product acceptance of macro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in South East, Nigeria.

Hypothesis Two

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship exists between the pro-activeness and product acceptance of MSMEs in Northwest Nigeria.

Table 5: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.996 ^a	.992	.990	19.02465

a. Predictors: (Constant), PRO

Table 5 model summary shows that R square and the adjusted R square are 0.992 and 0.990. This implies that 99% variation experienced in product acceptance within the period under observation was explained by pro-activeness. This indicates that the remaining 1% of the variation in product acceptance was explained by other factors not captured in model.

Table 6: ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	141429.388	1	141429.388	390.757	.000 ^b
	Residual	1085.812	3	361.937		
	Total	142515.200	4			

a. Dependent Variable: PRA

b. Predictors: (Constant), PRO

Table 7: Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-2.336	13.326		-.175	.872
	PRO	1.003	.051	.996	19.768	.000

a. Dependent Variable: PRA

It was observed from Table 5 (ANOVA Table) that pro-activeness is statistically significant to predict product acceptance in MSMEs in Northwest Nigeria since the probability value obtained (p-value), that is 0.000, is less than 0.05 ($P < 0.05$). This was further confirmed in Table 6 where the coefficient of pro-activeness indicated a positive ($t = 19.768$) influence on product acceptance.

The study accepts the alternate hypothesis therefore uphold that pro-activeness has contributed significantly to product acceptance of macro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in South East, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

From the analysis and the data tested, hypothesis one revealed that innovativeness has a positive effect on the product acceptance of MSMEs in Northwest Nigeria, and this effect was statistically significant, hence, the p-value is less than the 0.05. This result is in line with Olubiyi et al (2019) who opined that successful micro small-scale business firms are currently the ones that implements innovative strategies, invests in research development and innovations. The basic precondition for the creation and uses of innovation in the enterprises is a well formulated and implemented innovative strategy. Also Oluyemi (2016) who documented that innovation to an

entrepreneur is an everyday activity that leads them towards the accomplishment of their aims, objective and business goals.

Hypothesis two shows that pro-activeness has a positive and statistically significant relationship with product acceptance of MSMEs in Northwest Nigeria. This was in conformity with Gilbert (2021) who observes that the development and growth of MSME depends largely upon the capacity of pro-activeness of the innovation line in which it operates and/or participate as a competing partner, and also the finding of Mthanti and Ojah, (2017), who reported that competitive proactive MSMEs are usually the more concrete surviving and sustainable ventures with original Mideas and with firms that are risk oriented

Conclusion

This study ascertained the relationship that exists between entrepreneurial orientation and market sustainability of MSMEs in the South East, Nigeria. Data collected through questionnaires distributed to the respondents were analyzed with descriptive analysis and the hypotheses were tested with Regression analysis via SPSS version 20. From the results, it was revealed that innovativeness and pro-activeness have a positive and significant effect on the product acceptance of MSMEs in South East, Nigeria. This means that the improvement on entrepreneurial orientation can positively facilitate market sustainability in the country. Entrepreneurial orientation is an attitude expressed by SME managers that can stimulate growth and ensure the long-term survival of the company.

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the followings were recommended.

1. SMEs must constantly use high innovation in product marketing operations because the innovation dimension drives new business opportunities.
2. SMEs must innovate and launch new products and services that meet the demands of their market.

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