



## Entrepreneurial Networks and the Performance of Small and Medium Enterprises in the South-South of Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

The research looked at small- and medium-sized business performance in South-South Nigeria as well as entrepreneurial networks. Based on the study's unique aims, three research hypotheses were developed. The contribution of social networking to small and medium-sized business performance was explained by the social network entrepreneur theory. The study employed a quantitative approach that used a survey method with a questionnaire to implement a cross-sectional research design. The Taro Yamane sample size formula was utilized to adopt a sample consisting of 399 SMEs. The SMEs that took part in the survey were chosen using a multi-stage sampling technique. The structured questionnaire was used by the study to obtain data. The respondents' level of acceptance was gauged using a five-point Likert scale that ranged from strongly agree to disagree. The study tested the assumptions using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation method. The study discovered a substantial association between the performance of small and medium-sized businesses in South-South Nigeria and entrepreneurial networking in the development of skills through training, orientation, and social capital. In order to improve performance and enable them to compete with their counterparts in Nigeria as a whole, it was suggested that small and medium-sized businesses in the South-South be encouraged to participate in entrepreneur

networking programs that focus on skill acquisition, entrepreneurial orientation, and the acquisition of social capital.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurial Networks, SME Performance, Business Collaboration, Social Capital in Business and Business Growth.

### I. Introduction

With so many platforms available for sharing and connecting with one another through technology, information, and resource sharing, networking is becoming an increasingly crucial part of running a business in today's globalizing world. With performance metrics in place, this has given business owners tremendous chances for expansion and development. Social media resources can help business owners survive and even overcome obstacles (Drummond, McGrath & O'Toole, 2018). Financial capital, physical assets, information technology, and other resources can be quickly and cheaply accessed through social networks. According to Diane-González and Camello-Ordaz (2019), social networks facilitate access to timely and relevant information for entrepreneurial companies and external organizations, resulting in improved performance and rapid expansion. Business networking, according to the writers, is a social process of cooperation where value, expertise, and knowledge are brought together to create an



activity that adds value. According to Das and Goswami (2019), small businesses require resources and help from external parties, such as other businesses, organizations that provide support, family members, and friends.

In the words of Crowley, McAdam, Cunningham, and Hilliard (2018), networking is often regarded as a crucial tool for SMEs to combat their relative disadvantage through the utilization of resources and knowledge. An entrepreneurial network might consist of several companies networking together under one roof or it can be established on a professional, same-business basis. As opined by Tehseen and Ramayah (2015) and Kurtulmuş, Katrinli, and Warner (2020), small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) contribute to the economic growth of nations, optimize the output and efficiency of economic structures, and enhance the nation's income distribution levels. Also, Helmat and Campo-Rembado (2016), stressed that business networks, relationships, and connections are diverse and allow companies to collaborate in order to accomplish shared strategic objectives (Battistella, De Toni, De Zan, & Pessot, 2017). These strategic goals increase the capacities of SMEs to be more competitive and dynamic. For SMEs to succeed in the marketplace, they must develop their business networks, particularly their network capability, which helps them recognize opportunities in the external market.

Entrepreneurial SMEs can improve their ability to detect and seize market opportunities as well as reduce market dangers by utilizing network capabilities (Acosta et al., 2018). This can also increase their potential to change current operational procedures. Research has shown that an organization's network capability can affect a variety of organizational prospects, including firm performance (Cenamor et al., 2019), knowledge management (Abbas et al., 2020), learning sustainable performance (Anser et al., 2020), creativity, and cognitive processes—all of which are lacking in the majority of small and medium-sized businesses in developing nations like Nigeria.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the South-South region of Nigeria have not been performing up to par for a while, which has prevented them from contributing as much as they should to the country's economic development and improvement (Ubini, 2022). Nigerian SMEs are confronting a number of challenges, despite the government's turn to SMEs as a means of economic development and unemployment relief (Aghoju, 2022), inadequate funding, a lack of appropriate and adequate managerial and entrepreneurial investment,

widespread corruption, and harassment of SMEs by some government agencies over unjustified charges and levies that have negatively impacted the performance of SMEs in the nation (SMEDAN, 2019). Entrepreneurial small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) face challenges in surviving, despite their intrinsic value to the growth of any economy. According to earlier studies, SMEs that fail to get off the ground have a 40% failure rate (Hashim et al., 2018).

Underdeveloped economies have a far greater failure rate due to adverse economic environments and political instability. Zhang and Merchant (2020) have noted that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) facing challenges including swift advancements in technology, a dynamic market, and shorter product lifecycles. For entrepreneurial SMEs to be more inventive and competitive than others in these difficult and unpredictable times, they must gather the information and tools necessary. To remain competitive, SMEs led by entrepreneurs must establish robust relationships with relevant parties. In order to generate knowledge, share information, recognize potential dangers and opportunities, and provide benefits, these relationships and linkages are therefore essential (Ardito & Dangelico, 2018; Parker, 2018). Hence, the study suggests that enhancing network capability and cultivating social capital, skills, and orientation have significant potential to boost innovation and maximize performance in the context of self-supporting techniques used by entrepreneurial SMEs.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Establishing a small business is a terrific accomplishment, but expanding one is even more difficult in the current complicated social climate, where there are many obstacles to overcome, including those related to creativity, financing, entrepreneurship, technology, and expertise. Small and medium-sized business owners usually turn to other business owners in their network for guidance in order to overcome these obstacles (Tradegecko, 2018). However, this is more prevalent in large, domestic and international corporations, where social media and technology facilitate information sharing.

This contrasts with small and medium-sized businesses, which lack startup capital as well as entrepreneur orientation, knowledge, and technology. To compete and thrive in their business endeavors, small businesses in developing nations require network support (Tehseen, Qureshi, & Ramayah, 2018). In order to grow and become



resourceful in the local context, they require training in skill acquisition and orientation. This will enable them to become innovative through collaborative platforms, which will have a positive impact on the local economy and create jobs. The South-South region of Nigeria is not exempt from the dearth of innovative business methods in SMEs, including marketing and the use of social media for performance and growth. In order to reduce uncertainty, businesses continue to work toward forging strong bonds with other stakeholders and pooling more of their resources, especially knowledge resources (Salamzadeh, Salamzadeh, & RadovicMarkovic, 2016). Networking is the key for SMEs to succeed if they are to become proficient and perform exceptionally well in this winner-take-all climate where strong multinational corporations are fierce competitors. The majority of small and medium-sized businesses will be able to thrive and grow to serve as the backbone of the country's economic growth engine wherever there is networking in technological knowledge exchange, training in skill acquisition, and usage of social media for growth. For this reason, this study looks at small- and medium-sized business performance using entrepreneurial network platform in South-South Nigeria.

### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to examine entrepreneurial networks and the performance of small and medium enterprises in South-South of Nigeria. The specific objectives are to

- i. Examine the relationship between entrepreneurial networking skills and the performance of small and medium plastics manufacturing enterprises in the South-South of Nigeria.
- ii. Determine the relationship between social capital networking and the performance of small and medium enterprises in South-South of Nigeria.

### 1.4 Hypotheses

- i. There is no significant relationship between entrepreneurial networking skills and the performance of small and medium plastics manufacturing enterprises in the South-South of Nigeria.
- ii. There is no significant relationship between social capital networking and the performance of small and medium enterprises in South-South of Nigeria.

## 2.1 Literature Review

### 2.2 Entrepreneurial Network Concept

Entrepreneurs who are formal or informal networks to boost the productivity of their members' business endeavors are referred to as "entrepreneurial network" members (Das & Goswami, 2019). Those that characterize the group's members' deeds by returning the favor. Kowo, Adenuga, and Sabitu (2019) notes that entrepreneurs utilize collective resources and also give back to the group. In order to obtain information and improve projected economic returns, mostly through innovation, businesses and organizations must engage in strategic and calculated relationships with other businesses and organizations. This is known as network capital (Okoli, Nwosu & Okechukwu, 2021). Ayiku and Grant (2021) define entrepreneurial networks as the culmination of all the connections that an entrepreneur has and that serve as a vital source of resources for their endeavors. Networks are intricate systems built with a certain set of objectives in mind. Because of their adaptability to the operating environment, they simultaneously provide unity of purpose and execution flexibility.

Information exchange between two or more people is, at its core, networking, and it's a function that we all perform on a daily basis. Meeting new people broadens our social circle and opens our eyes to a world of untapped opportunities. In the submission of Cham Das and Goswami (2019), a network is an extended cooperative partnership between two or more businesses. In order to build and maintain relationships and achieve mutually beneficial community and business-focused outcomes through collaboration, a formal business networking group is one that was established to support the networking of independent members (Batjarga et al., 2019). As several industrialized countries have shown (Garba, 2019; Gumel, 2019), networking has become a vital source of SME expansion. The strength of a network might also vary among the firms that comprise it. While weak links are less intense and non-affective, meaning that network members are not closely related, strong ties involve emotional closeness and intensity; members of the network know each other well (Tehseen, Qureshi & Ramayah, 2018). In Crowley, McAdam, Cunningham, and Hilliard (2018) observation, there is a correlation between strong relationships and growth during the early phases of the business and later stages where weak ties are more important for growth.

Considered to be a necessary component for a network to form and endure throughout time is



trust. When someone is willing to be vulnerable to the acts of another, it shows that they trust that other person enough to expect them to carry out a certain activity that is required, regardless of their ability to monitor or control that other party. In order to effectively network, reciprocity and trust are essential. Networks depend on cooperation since it benefits each component, including small and medium-sized businesses through networking (Gumel, 2019).

### 2.3 Overview of Small and Medium Business

SMEs are classified as businesses that employ up to fifty people for paid work and have a total investment (excluding land cost but including capital) of no more than 750,000 Naira, according to the Federal Ministry of Commerce and Industry (2015). The following standards were used by SMEDAN (2019) to define SMEs: Small-scale firms employ between ten and forty-nine people and generate five to forty-nine million Naira in revenue annually. On the other hand, medium-sized businesses employ between fifty and ninety-nine people and generate between fifty and four hundred and ninety-nine million Naira annually. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria report that as of 2017 there were 41,543,028 MSMEs (SMEDAN, 2019). Of this total, 71,288 entities (or 0.17 percent) were small businesses, while 1,793 entities (or 0.004 percent) were medium-sized businesses. As a result, manufacturing accounts for 68.7% of SMEs, which total 73,081 entities. Based on the above information, Nigeria produced around 411,000 tons of plastic. Due to their enormous potential for creating jobs, advancing local technology, diversifying output, encouraging indigenous entrepreneurship, and advancing forward integration with large-scale industries, SMEs in Nigeria are acknowledged as being essential to the growth of the country's economy (Agwu, 2018). Since SMEs are the backbone of most local firms and serve as a conduit to larger industries, it is imperative that they continue to expand and develop. This is supported by the definition of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

### 2.4 The Idea of SMEs' Effectiveness

Within the realm of entrepreneurship, the performance of SMEs has been deemed a significant construct. Nonetheless, there is disagreement among scholars over the proper performance metric. According to Nee, Liu, and DellaPosta (2017), prior research indicates that financial and growth metrics

are crucial performance indicators for small and medium-sized businesses. A few studies (Abeh, 2017; Ebitu, Basil & Alfred, 2016; Fang, 2023) have employed non-financial metrics of SMEs success, such as customer and product performance, customer satisfaction, and employee turnover. The definition they provided identified nine crucial factors that are frequently used to measure the success of a business: profit, innovation and growth, longevity or firm survival, giving back to the community, individual satisfaction, stakeholder satisfaction—particularly that of customers and employees—achievement of work-life balance, and public recognition. The firm's ability to survive and succeed is thought to be largely dependent on its financial metrics (Ocho, 2022). Additionally, Adunu (2023) divided the measurement of the performance of SMEs into four categories: (i) profit, which includes return on assets, return on investment, and return on sales; (ii) growth, which includes sales, market share, and wealth creation; (iii) stakeholder satisfaction, which includes employee and customer satisfaction; and (iv) competitive position, which includes overall competitive position and success rate in launching new product. The performance of SMEs was measured in this study using profit, sales growth, innovation, and years of survival that were taken from the literature.

### 2.5 Skill Set for Entrepreneurship Networking and Small and Medium-Sized Business Performance

Given the importance of SMEs in the Nigerian economy, developing entrepreneurial skills is important to promoting the growth of SMEs (Omolara, 2019). Many scholarly works have pointed out that one of the main obstacles to the expansion of SMEs in Nigeria is a lack of entrepreneurial skills (Makdissi & Tannous, 2019). No matter the size of the company, having entrepreneurial abilities is essential to its survival. Makdissi and Tannous (2019) highlight the importance of entrepreneurial abilities such as creativity and communication skills in the development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria. According to Ayiku and Grant (2021) entrepreneurs in Nigeria are expected to require a plethora of entrepreneurial abilities and, to some extent, networking in order to provide SMEs with a chance to survive. Makdissi and Tannous (2019) came to the conclusion that entrepreneurial abilities could act as a catalyst for enhancing the self-assurance of newly founded businesses in Nigeria as well as established ones.





Olaolu and Obaji (2020) attribute the slowing growth of SMEs to a variety of issues, including competition, low entrepreneurial skill sets, bad attitudes, and financial difficulties. One of the main obstacles to improving the performance of SMEs in Nigeria, according to published works, is a lack of entrepreneurial skills. Any firm, regardless of size, has been said to depend on entrepreneurial abilities (Abdul, 2018); SMEs that lack these skills in the start-up stage struggle. The author suggested that networking has emerged as a viable instrument for enhancing and utilizing entrepreneurial abilities. Teirlinck (2018) illustrated how the success of small and medium-sized business (SMEs) owners in LAGOS State, Nigeria, is significantly correlated with their experience as entrepreneurs. Getting the required abilities results in experience building that can be shared with other like-minded businesses. In comparison to other emerging economies, Nigeria has historically demonstrated a lack of commitment to developing a robust SME networking and/or cooperating sector due to its inability to establish access to finance and financial incentives, basic and technological infrastructure, an adequate legal and regulatory framework, and a commitment to develop domestic expertise and knowledge (Olaolu&Obaji, 2020). SMEs have not fully realized their potential for expansion in this area, and as a result, their predicted share of GDP has not been substantially increased.

## 2.6 The Performance of Small and Medium-Sized Businesses and their Entrepreneurial Attitude

Entrepreneurial networks have become increasingly important since the advent of social media and online networking, and management research has begun to pay more attention to them (Barroso-Méndez et al. 2015). According to Cho and Lee (2018), entrepreneurial networks and entrepreneurial attitude are both thought to have a big influence on attaining improved performance. Nonetheless, a number of writers have attempted to investigate if, from a theoretical standpoint, the benefits of entrepreneurial networks exceed the drawbacks in the literature; however, the outcomes aren't always consistent. Organizational operations and the surrounding environment have an entrepreneurial orientation. Having an entrepreneurial mindset is seen to be essential for improving performance. Businesses with an entrepreneurial mindset are better able to differentiate their offerings and increase adoption of environmentally difficult solutions (Shah & Ahmad 2019). Consequently, one's capacity to contend in volatile market conditions is weakened.

Resource dependency theory has also drawn more attention to the literature on entrepreneurial networks (Abu-Rumman 2018); nevertheless, because their role is not clearly defined, the literature on entrepreneurial networks and their effects is ambiguous and diverse. According to Jiang et al. (2018), there are differences and some contradictions in the findings regarding firm performance. The literature demonstrates even more varied outcomes when looking at closed entrepreneurial networks. Closed interorganizational ties, sometimes referred to as closed entrepreneurial networks, encompass the entirety of social interaction within the firm's network, taking into account both the network's diversity and strength (Zaheer et al. 2017). As a result, a closed network is one in which all of the SMEs in the group are linked to each other. These types of entrepreneurial networks are highly contentious because, although they can offer new opportunities, inventive ideas, and tacit knowledge (Mikalef et al., 2020), they also make it difficult to find and access fresh concepts because of lock-in, myopia, and inertia. These drawbacks can have a big impact on a company's performance.

Organizations, it is believed, need tools to use entrepreneurial orientation to attain high performance by using the information gained through closed networks. Dynamic skills have been more and more important during the past 20 years (Bitencourt et al. 2020). The ability of the company to integrate, develop, and reconfigure internal and external competences in order to face the difficulties posed by the dynamic environment is referred to as dynamic capabilities (Wu et al. 2016; Asad, Chethiyar& Ali, 2020). Thus, it stands to reason that dynamic capabilities aid businesses in accomplishing their strategic goals, thereby enhancing their competitive edge. As a result, it is proposed that both closed entrepreneurial networks and entrepreneurial attitude and company performance are linked by dynamic capabilities.

Al-Abbadi et al. (2019) asserted that entrepreneurial networks facilitate the acquisition of external information and its subsequent conversion into internal skills, a crucial process for the creation of novel products and services. Therefore, the thesis put forth here is that, provided they foster the growth of dynamic capacities, entrepreneurial networks may prove beneficial in generating substantial returns. Second, this study adds dynamic capacities, exploring the missing link that creates ambiguities in relationships (Mikalef et al. 2019). This approach takes into account the suggestion made by Jiang et al. (2018) to reconsider



entrepreneurial orientation along with network resources.

### 2.7 Social Capital and Small- and Medium-Sized Business Success

The resource-based view has served as the main paradigm for guiding research into the causes of entrepreneurship in recent years (Li, 2019). According to Kiyabo and Isaga (2020), the resource-based view (RBV) hypothesis, a firm's unique resources and capabilities are the source of its competitive advantage and superior performance. Valued, scarce, and non-substitutable resources are known as RBV strategic resources, and they have been recognized as the primary differentiators between organizations that have advantages and those that do not (Kellermanns et al., 2016). By emphasizing a firm's resources as a crucial factor in determining its level of competitive advantage in its market, the RBV strategy does just that. Based on the idea that a company needs to interact with other businesses in its industry to obtain the resources necessary to set itself apart from rivals, resource dependence theory (RDT) was developed (Orakwue&Iguisi, 2020). It says that gaining access to the resources that stakeholders have is one of the driving forces for a company's efforts to cultivate connections with them. In line with the RBV and RDT, social capital theory (SCT) highlights how crucial it is for SMEs to get and hold onto important and uncommon resources in order to achieve a competitive edge.

Kanini and Muathe (2019), argued that a firm's degree of access to entrepreneurial networks has a significant impact on social capital, which is an essential component of entrepreneurial activity. Accordingly, the RBV, RDT, and SCT all suggest that network competency is essential for SMEs to successfully acquire the vital resources they require (Tehseen&Sadilan, 2016).

A number of variables affect the performance of SMEs, such as financial availability, entrepreneurial and market orientation, supply chain management, quality control, staff training (Almomani et al. 2019), entrepreneurial networking (Li et al. 2015), and many more. In order to enable small and medium-sized businesses to cooperate with larger, more technologically solid companies, social capital plays a critical role in the development of entrepreneurs. Because of the relationships and cooperation, it is possible for the others to step in and offer the help that SMEs need when they are operating below capacity. Social capital creates a partnership between the member groups in which

one provides what is needed and receives what it needs from the other, making it a true tool for growth. Many entrepreneurs, particularly those in emerging economies, have failed due to a lack of social capital. The preponderance of research indicates that social capital and entrepreneurial networking play a critical role in enhancing performance (Jiang et al. 2018). Many SMEs are still in the background as a result of the lack of social capital in connection creation and building. A SME may be forced to stay in one place for an extended period of time if they lack the proper knowledge, which is why information is a crucial tool for growth and change. The SME's resources may be sufficient for its size to grow, but the absence of social capital could hinder its ability to obtain information, leading it to adopt dated and uninteresting tactics (Sari, Junita, Anugerah&Zenita, 2019). Social capital creates a network of growth and profit partnerships by connecting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with other resource firms that require the products produced by the SMEs. It also facilitates the sharing of ideas among SMEs (Priyono, Nursyamsiah&Darmawan, 2020). Even despite the lack of sufficient funds to buy the necessary commodities and materials, supplies can be made available through social capital. Developed economies have a social capital-driven partnership network framework that gives small businesses a platform to expand.

Building relationships that are vertical in nature is the fastest path to MSE development and sustainable success. One area that is driven by innovation is this (Kiyabo&Isaga, 2020). For small and medium-sized businesses, it is crucial to be able to predict what will be advantageous to larger companies with robust financial, technological, and human capital resources. Opportunities for growth and development are created by the identification of resources of significance and the understanding of how to best utilize them to the advantage of a developing SME (Hernández-Linares et al., 2019). Resources are available everywhere; the only thing missing is the connectivity to access some of them. For this reason, the development and effectiveness of small and medium-sized businesses heavily depends on social capital (Bitencourt et al., 2020).

### 2.8 Theoretical Framework

This study used the social network entrepreneurship theory, which was put forth by Granovetter in 1973. This idea holds that an important part of the possibility for entrepreneurs is that they be integrated into a broader social network structure. According to research on this idea, those



with closer social relationships to resource providers are better able to obtain resources and are more likely to take advantage of opportunities (Agwu, 2018). According to some researchers (Usman &Tahir, 2018; Makinde&Agu, 2020), it is critical for aspiring entrepreneurs to have access to business owners in their social network because of the expertise these individuals possess, which can be used by nascent ventures to identify opportunities.

The social network plays a major role in the entrepreneurial process, as entrepreneurs are motivated by opportunity-seeking behavior rather than just a desire to invest money (Vismara, 2016). According to Batjargal et al. (2019), entrepreneurs are constantly searching for methods to maximize their profits, and the only way they can do this is by seizing and profiting from any possibilities that present themselves. Using one's social network—which is defined as a group of people who are connected to each other through a variety of links—is one method of identifying and seizing chances. Individuals' or businesses' economic actions and behaviors are infused with social relations. This idea explains the connection between the expansion of SMEs and entrepreneurial networking abilities. Stronger social networking abilities enable entrepreneurs to create social networks that facilitate the exploitation of market possibilities and the expansion of their businesses (Alnujaidi, 2017). The performance of SMEs is greatly impacted by the networks of ongoing social relationships that are ingrained in entrepreneurship in domains like social capital and direction. Entrepreneurship is either facilitated or restricted by a complex web of relationships between entrepreneurs, resources, and opportunities that impact the expansion of businesses (Ayiku& Grant, 2021).

Thus, this theory clarifies the process by which entrepreneurs become into performance-driven individuals. As per the notion, the creation of social networks presents them with possibilities to obtain knowledge, information, direction, social capital, and skill enhancement. In order to promote

growth and performance, these networks are made to exchange knowledge and other intangible resources that might not always be available at one end.

## II. Research Methods

The research methodology used in this study was cross-sectional. The respondents, who were chosen based on their capacity to offer insightful commentary on the relationship between strategic entrepreneurship and SMEs' competitiveness, were small and medium-sized enterprises in South-South Nigeria. 272424 participants were selected from states in South-South Nigeria for the study (SMEDAN, 2023). Using the Taro Yamane sample size calculation, 399 SMEs were chosen at random from the population. A multistage sampling technique was used in the selection of SMEs from the research region. The South-South region was split into three sections based on the conventional mid-west division in order to guarantee objective and proportionate sampling and to sufficiently represent every demographic category. Two components of the structured questionnaire—demographic and research issues—were used for the study. The study employed both face and content validity. A two-tailed test with a P value of 0.05 was used to evaluate the pre-test's dependability. The dependability score came out to be 0.85 when calculated using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation. For the instruments used in the data collection, this dependability score was deemed adequate. The hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation in order to ascertain whether the independent and dependent variables in the hypotheses had a linear relationship. Only 385 of the 399 copies of the administered instrument were recovered from the respondents who received the questionnaires in total. It was observed that 94% of the instruments were found, while 6% were missing. The analysis was conducted using SPSS version 29.

## III. Analysis and Discussion of Results

### 4.1 Evaluation of Respondents' Socio-Demographic Details

Table 4.1: The Respondents' Socio-Demographic Characteristics

		Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	218	56.6
	Females	167	45.4
	Total	385	100.0
Age	18-28 years	118	30.6
	29-39 years	177	46.0
	40 and above	90	23.4



	Total	385	100.0
Education	Primary education	105	27.3
	Secondary education	203	52.7
	Higher education	77	20.0
	Total	385	100.0
Occupation	Artisan	102	26.5
	Trader	130	33.8
	Farmer	92	23.9
	Private company owner	61	15.8
	Total	385	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 4.1 provides information on the sociodemographic characteristics of the survey participants. The gender distribution of the respondents showed that men made up 56.6% of the population and women made up 44.4%. 46.0% of them fell between the ages of 29 and 39, based on age distribution. Those in the 18 to 28 age range (30.6%) and the 40+ age range (34.4%) were the other age groupings. According to the table, those with secondary school certificates make up the majority of respondents (52.7%), followed by those with primary school leaving certificates (27.3%) and those with higher education (20.0%). Ultimately, the distribution of occupations among the respondents revealed that 33.8% were traders, followed by craftsmen (26.5%), farmers (23.9%), and private

business owners (15.8%). The demographic information provided by the respondents explains why most of the respondents are male, between the ages of 29 and 39, have completed secondary school, and are involved in trading. The degree of social networking in terms of social capital, skill learning, and entrepreneurial orientation required to expand small and medium-sized businesses in terms of their performance could be explained by this.

#### 4.2 Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis one

Ho: There is no significant relationship between entrepreneurial networking skills and the performance of small and medium enterprises in the South-South of Nigeria.

Table 4.2: Test of the relationship between entrepreneurial networking skills and the performance of small and medium enterprises in the South-South of Nigeria

	Entrepreneurial networking skills	Performance of small and medium enterprises
Entrepreneurial networking skills	Pearson Correlation	.987**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	385
Performance of small and medium enterprises	Pearson Correlation	.987**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	385

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The test of a significant association between small and medium-sized business success and entrepreneurial networking skills is presented in Table 4.2. The test result demonstrates that, at the 0.05 alpha level, a p-value of 0.000 is significant. The null hypothesis is disproved, according to the statistics. This suggests that entrepreneurial networking abilities and the success of small and

medium-sized businesses in South-South Nigeria are significantly correlated.

#### Hypothesis two

Ho: There is no significant relationship between social capital networking and the performance of small and medium enterprises in South-South of Nigeria.





Table 4.3: Test of relationship between social capital networking and the performance of small and medium enterprises in South-South of Nigeria.

	Social capital networking	Performance of small and medium enterprises
Social capital networking	1	.338**
Pearson Correlation		
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
N	385	385
Performance of small and medium enterprises	.338**	1
Pearson Correlation		
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
N	385	385

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4.3 displays the test of the significant association between small and medium-sized business performance in South-South Nigeria and social capital networking. Under the 0.05 significance threshold, the test result indicates that a p-value of 0.000 is significant. There is a rejection of the null hypothesis, as indicated by the statistics. The success of small and medium-sized businesses in South-South Nigeria is not significantly correlated with social capital networking, according to this data.

#### 4.3 Discussion of Findings

According to the first hypothesis that was investigated, there is a substantial correlation between the performance of small and medium-sized plastics manufacturing businesses in the South-South of Nigeria and entrepreneurial networking abilities. This indicates that small and medium-sized businesses in the South South of Nigeria perform better as a result of receiving training on entrepreneurial networking skills. The results of (Omolara, 2019) is in line with this finding. It proved that networking of skills and the expansion of SMEs are related. Given the significance of SMEs in the Nigerian economy, Omolara (2019) asserts that training in entrepreneurship is essential to promoting the expansion of SMEs. The viability of entrepreneurial skills networking for the expansion of small and medium-sized businesses is further supported by the works of other academics, such as Makdissi&Tannous, 2019; Makdissi&Tannous, 2019 and Ayiku& Grant, 2021. According to Abdul (2018), SMEs that lack entrepreneurial skills at the start-up stage struggle. These talents have been described as the lifeline of any firm, regardless of size. Abdul's statement supports the aforementioned premise. A noteworthy correlation was found by Teirlinck (2018) in Nigeria between the success of small and medium-sized business (SMEs) owners in LAGOS State and their experience as entrepreneurs. Conversely, Olaolu and Obaji's (2020) research

highlights several obstacles that contribute to the slowing expansion of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). These issues include, but are not limited to, inadequate capital, a lackluster mentality, and competition. By using the platform for entrepreneur networking, these difficulties can be reduced.

Finally, a substantial correlation was found between social capital networking and the performance of small and medium-sized businesses in South-South Nigeria, according to the final hypothesis that was examined. According to Almomani et al. (2019) and Jiang et al. (2018), social capital plays a crucial role in the development of entrepreneurs by enabling small and medium-sized businesses to collaborate with larger, more technologically stable companies. This supports the study findings. When SMEs are weak in capacity, the others can step in to offer the required help because of the connections and teamwork that these foster. In their research, Sari, Junita, Anugerah, and Zenita (2019) also stated that SMEs may find it difficult to get knowledge if they lack social capital, which could lead them to use dated and monotonous tactics. A network of growth and profit partnerships is established by social capital, according to Sari, Junita, Anugerah and Zenita (2019), who also claim that social capital facilitates the sharing of ideas and connects small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with resource firms who require the products the SMEs produce in order to manufacture their goods. theKiyabo and Isaga(2020) research.similarly demonstrated that building vertical relationships is the quickest path to MSE development and long-term success. A 2019 study by Hernández-Linares et al. also showed that building social capital creates potential for SME advantage and aids in the identification of resources of relevance. Although there are resources all around us, we don't always have the link to access them.

#### 5.1 Conclusion



Small and medium-sized businesses in Nigeria, especially those in the South-South of the country, should place a high priority on entrepreneurial networking because it is so crucial. According to the study, entrepreneurial skills networking provides small and medium-sized businesses in Nigeria's South-South with an unparalleled platform for optimal performance. With training, one can acquire skills that have the potential to empower oneself. The networking platform provides both online and in-person training options for learning how to do it better. According to the study, entrepreneurial networking platforms such as orientation and social capital acquisition have a favorable impact on the performance of small and medium-sized businesses in the southern region of Nigeria.

## 5.2 Recommendations

1. Small and medium-sized firms in the South should look for networking opportunities that enable them to acquire skills in areas where they are lacking in order to accelerate the expansion and success of their companies. They ought to create a system that encourages businesses to teach employees to gain new skills.
2. Last but not least, small and medium-sized businesses in Nigeria's South-South should forge solid ties with other companies. Information, technology sharing, and, in the long run, trade and cooperation for a growth platform are all important reasons to consider this, in addition to direction. The ability of small and medium-sized businesses to make profits is greatly increased by the availability of social capital, which takes the form of offered contacts, financing to support business expansion, and resources for low-interest trading.

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