

THE INFLUENCE OF INNOVATIVENESS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN ELDORET TOWN, KENYA

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ABSTRACT: *The study investigated the influence of entrepreneurial intensity on performance of small and medium enterprises in Eldoret town, Kenya. Based on the study this paper examines how innovativeness influences the performance of SMEs in Eldoret town. The study adopted an ex-post facto research design. It targeted all the SMEs in Eldoret town. Systematic sampling technique was adopted to select a sample of 100 SME owners/managers to be involved in the study. The collected data was analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics was presented in form of percentages, frequencies, pie charts and graphs. Pearson correlation was employed to test the hypotheses of the study. The findings showed that innovativeness as a dimension of entrepreneurial intensity had strong positive correlation with the performance of SMEs in Eldoret town. Therefore, it was recommended that the government should play a role in offering short courses to induct the business owners and expose them to advanced techniques in innovation.*

KEYWORDS: Innovativeness, Performance, Small, Medium Enterprises, Eldoret Town, Kenya

INTRODUCTION

The increase in the number of small and medium businesses compels entrepreneurs to establish new strategies for competitive advantage. In Kenya, the devolution of governance has encouraged SMEs to leverage their resources and skills by expanding into existing or new markets. Counties are an important route through which new and small ventures can realize their growth potential (Pangarkar, 2008). This is particularly vital for the continued growth and development of new and small ventures in emerging economies. To this end, the development of expansion activity is viewed as an attractive mode of venturing into new market opportunities and is indeed an entrepreneurial act, consisting of identifying and exploiting new business opportunities in a new market (Sánchez-Peinado, Pla-Barber & Hébert, 2007).

Of the several studies conducted on entrepreneurship intensity, most pertain to developed economies. There is need for more empirical evidence pertaining to entrepreneurial intensity and its influence on SMEs in developing economies in Africa and more so in Kenyan new set up counties. In emerging economies such as Kenya where growth is often the primary goal of organizations, entrepreneurship is expected to fuel economic growth. In the midst of globalization, countries such as Kenya need to improve their competitiveness which underpins the survival and growth of businesses and hence economic growth of the country. Therefore, it is against this background that the study investigated the influence of entrepreneurial intensity on performance of SMEs in Eldoret town.

Influence of Innovativeness on performance of Small and medium Enterprise

The innovativeness dimension of entrepreneurship reflects a tendency of a firm to engage in and support new ideas, novelty, experimentation, and creative processes, thereby departing from established practices and technologies, and leading to new products, services, or technological processes (Lumpkin & Dess, 2005). The foundation for this concept can be traced back to the writings of entrepreneurship scholar Joseph Schumpeter who postulated that the entry of innovative new combinations into a marketplace enabled societal progress through economic development. Innovative entry disrupts existing market conditions and stimulates new demand, thereby enacting Schumpeter's process of "creative destruction" (Schumpeter, 1942). Venkataraman (2004) advocates that several necessary factors that must accompany risk capital for the Schumpeterian entrepreneurship to flourish. These are access to novel ideas, role models, informal forums, region-specific opportunities, safety nets (against entrepreneurial failure), access to large markets and executive leadership.

A study was carried out by Hacıoglu *et al.* (2012) to investigate the effects of entrepreneurial marketing on firms' innovative performance in Turkish SMEs. In the study, calculated risk-taking was positively related to innovative performance and innovativeness was positively related to innovative performance. The study established that pro-activeness, innovativeness, customer intensity, resource leveraging dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing were positively related with innovative performance. The findings implied that small and medium sized Turkish firms attached a great importance to consumers to reach higher innovative performance. The study recommended that businesses should be proactive and emphasize on the importance of innovativeness to improve on their performance.

Kemp, Foulering, Dejong and Wubben (2003) have investigated innovations and performance differences between the small and medium enterprises using a survey of 3081 small and medium enterprises in Dutch. The study specifically examined the relationship between innovation and firms' performance and also to differentiate between the small and medium enterprises. Kemp *et al.* (2003) established that national subsidies, continuous innovation, market research and product innovation had a positive and significant relationship with performance for both small and medium enterprise. In relation to turn-over, the study established that turn over had a negative relationship with innovation and performance of the firms.

A study conducted by Yoo, Sawyerr and Brazeal (2015) investigated the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance in technology-based SMEs. The study was guided by two research objectives, namely: to investigate the dimensionality of entrepreneurial orientation (EO) and to measure the impact of innovativeness, pro-activeness, and risk-taking and firm performance in terms of financial and non-financial performance measures. The study established that entrepreneurial orientation had a positive effect on maximization of profits, gaining market share, creating niche markets and adding value for stakeholders. The study also established that large firms tend to follow incremental rather than revolutionary ideas. An innovation orientation may be an effective response by SMEs to overcome the liabilities associated with smallness, especially in situations of resource scarcity, market entry and when facing more established and resourceful incumbents. Much of the pressure to innovate is due to external forces, including the emergence of new and improved technologies, the globalization of markets, and the fragmentation of markets, government deregulation, and dramatic social change. Innovativeness is aimed at developing new products, services, and processes, and firms that are successful in their innovation efforts are said to profit more than their competitors (Certo *et al.*, 2009).

The services sector, given their intangible nature and the ease with which service concepts can be replicated, lend themselves to continuous (incremental) innovation and improvement (Morris *et al.*, 2005). Process innovations include innovative production techniques, distribution approaches, selling methods, purchasing programs, and administrative systems (Morris *et al.*, 2005). Highly innovative companies tend to have a systematic and well-defined innovation strategy comprising cross-functional teams (Morris *et al.*, 2005).

In a study, Scheepers, Hough and Bloom (2007) have also examined entrepreneurial intensity among established companies in South Africa. The purpose of the study was to compare the entrepreneurial intensity (EI) of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) companies with that of listed JSE companies (excluding ICT listings). The study established that ICT companies were more entrepreneurial than JSE companies. Additionally, the size of a company shows no relation to EI, but age is negatively correlated to EI. By implication, the older the company, the less entrepreneurial it becomes. The findings suggest that organizational factors influence EI and that EI is industry specific. The managerial implication for companies that want to become more entrepreneurial is that they should create organizational conditions conducive to the development of corporate entrepreneurship.

Arshi (2012) has investigated the entrepreneurial intensity in the corporate sector in Oman, with the elusive search for creativity and innovation. Entrepreneurial firms were attributed with the key characteristic of creativity and innovation which are among the most intriguing competencies that have generated substantial interest for academicians and practitioners and have received considerable attention in scholarship. Creativity and innovation have been elevated to this pedestal by the virtue of its ability to enable firms to achieve the necessary competitive advantage in contemporary chaotic market place. Ironically creativity and innovation are elusive commodities and many firms particularly of the larger species struggle to display this competency.

This study investigated the dimensions that promote or impede the concentration of creativity and innovation, measured through entrepreneurial intensity in the corporate sector in Oman. The study sought to answer three research questions: what factors impede or promote the development of entrepreneurial intensity in the corporate sector in Oman? Does entrepreneurial architecture promote the development of entrepreneurial intensity and enhances creativity and innovation in the corporate sector in Oman? What can be done to enhance entrepreneurial intensity in the corporate sector in Oman? The findings indicated that 52% of the relationships between organizational characteristics and creativity and innovation were explained by entrepreneurial architecture dimensions. At the same time, 55% of the relationships between organizational climate and creativity and innovation were explained by entrepreneurial frequency dimensions. Finally, 43% of the relationships between macro-economic conditions and creativity and innovation are explained by entrepreneurial degree dimensions. Further, a general linear model explains 56% of the relationship between entrepreneurial architecture and entrepreneurial intensity dimensions (EF and ED). The findings are quite conclusive, indicating that there is a strong relationship between organizational characteristics, organizational climate, macro environmental conditions and creativity and innovation.

A study conducted by Erasmus and Scheepers (2008) examined the relationship between entrepreneurial intensity and shareholder value creation. Innovation and entrepreneurship have long been regarded as sources of value and wealth creation. Previous research has shown that there is a positive relationship between enterprises' levels of entrepreneurship and their

financial performance. However, little research has hitherto focused on measuring the relationship between entrepreneurship and shareholder value creation.

Statement of the Problem

Entrepreneurship is usually associated with small businesses in general. These businesses have been accredited with qualities which many times reflect the entrepreneurial characteristics of the entrepreneurs themselves (Poettschacher, 2005). These characteristics include opportunity seeking, risk-taking, creativity and innovation, persistence, and resource management, among others (Burns, 2011). Some businesses are more creative and innovative than others, some believe in radical innovations, while others have faith in continuous incremental innovations. Thus each type of business displays entrepreneurial intensity in their own way.

Entrepreneurial intensity is increasingly being embraced as a mechanism for considering the creation and development of new ventures. It identifies avenues that facilitate the discovery of opportunities, as well as the identification, collection and allocation of scarce resources. Coviello (2006) avers that the conduct and performance of firms can be understood by examining the relationships in which they were embedded. It has been suggested that entrepreneurs build and use networks that vary according to the phase of entrepreneurship (Jack, 2010). Pirolo and Presutti (2010) have found that strong and weak ties influence performance in different ways depending on whether the performance target is economic or innovation, and the stage in the life-cycle of the firm.

According to Pisapia (2009), for a small and medium enterprise to be competitive in an intensified global business environment, dynamic change and increasing uncertainty, they must become more innovative, must be ready to take risk and they must be proactive. SMEs are increasingly looking towards expansion as a means of creating and sustaining competitive advantage (Zahra, 2009). However, majority of the firms avoid risky activities as they have severe resources constraints which cannot enable them to divulge in entrepreneurship activities. Chepkemoi (2013) also highlights that the majority of the small and medium enterprises could not be able to engage into entrepreneurial intensity due to overlap and inconsistencies in legal and sectorial policies, lack of clear boundaries in the institutional mandates, lack of a suitable legal framework; outdated by-laws; unavailability of land and worksites for business expansion, exclusion in policy development; lack of access to credit; lack of a central coordination mechanism; lack of a devolved coordination and implementation mechanism and interference by the county government authorities.

According to the Economic Survey (2006), small and medium enterprises contribute over 50 percent of new jobs created in every year. But despite their significance, past statistics indicate that three out of five businesses fail within the first few months of operation (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2007). Amyx (2005) states that the high failure of the small and medium enterprises could be attributed to the negative perception towards SMEs. The study indicated that potential clients perceives small businesses as lacking the ability to provide quality services and are unable to satisfy more than one critical project simultaneously. Often larger companies are selected and given business for their clout in the industry and name recognition alone.

Against the high failure rate of SMEs, there is need for recognition of creativity and innovation through entrepreneurship among firms. However, it is not clear whether the entrepreneurial climate in Kenyan firms is intense enough or what the relationship between that intensity and firm performance outcomes which is referred to entrepreneurial outcomes is. Despite several

studies that have been carried out with regard to entrepreneurial intensity, most of them have been conducted in developed countries. It was therefore necessary to conduct a study in a developing country. Most of the studies concentrated on entrepreneurship orientation which is also known as the degree of entrepreneurship while excluding the frequency of entrepreneurship which forms part of the entrepreneurial intensity. This showed the incompleteness of studies in this field. This thereby depicts the complex nature of the field. Specifically, this study filled the knowledge gap in that it looked at entrepreneurship through the prism of such dimensions as degree and frequency of entrepreneurship.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed the ex-post facto research design. It targeted 1000 SMEs in Eldoret town, according to Uasin Gishu County Licensing Department. Data was collected by use of questionnaire. Systematic random sampling technique was employed to sample 100 SME owners to be involved in the study. The researcher obtained a list of all the SMEs in Eldoret town from the County Administration under the Department of Licensing in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. The research then selected every 10th SME from the list to be included in the sample. The sampling technique was deemed appropriate since it allowed equal representation in the sample. The data collected was coded to ensure completeness and accuracy of information. By coding, the researcher assigned numerals or symbols to answers so as to put responses into a limited number of categories or classes. Data was analysed using both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The results were presented in form of frequencies, percentages, mean, pie charts and graphs. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse how risk-taking, pro-activeness and innovativeness influence performance of SMEs. T-test was employed to test the hypotheses and Pearson correlation was applied to establish the nature of relationships between variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Influence of Innovativeness on Performance of SMEs

The study sought to investigate the influence of innovativeness on performance of SMEs. The findings were analyzed and presented in the Table 1 below.

Table 1: Responses on the influence of Innovativeness on Performance of SMEs

Elements of innovativeness		N	R	S	O	VO
I introduce new brands in my business	F	3	5	39	34	19
	%	3	5	39	34	19
In my business I adopt differentiation superiority method of innovation through adoption of better quality and unique products which increase the competitiveness of my business	F	1	6	36	31	26
	%	1	6	36	31	26
My business has introduced new lines of products/services	F	2	6	32	32	28
	%	2	6	32	32	28
My business emphasizes on the technological advancement and innovation	F	3	14	23	32	28
	%	3	14	23	32	28

The changes in products/services have been drastic and innovative	F	1	12	34	29	24
	%	1	12	34	29	24
I support discovery of new ideas in my business	F	1	4	36	31	28
	%	1	4	36	31	28
I develop new market niche by developing new products/services	F	3	4	28	31	34
	%	3	4	28	31	34
I create and introduce new products/ services and technologies	F	4	4	25	39	28
	%	4	4	25	39	28

The study sought to investigate if SME owners introduced new brands in their businesses, 39% of them responded that sometimes they did, 34% often introduced new brands, 19% very often, 5% rarely and 3% never introduced new brands in their businesses. This implied that 97% of the SME owners were committed, at different levels, to introduction of new brands as a way of improving the performance of the businesses. On whether or not the respondents adopted differentiation superiority method of innovation through adoption of better quality and unique products, majority (36%) indicated sometimes, 31% said often, 26% very often 6% rarely and 1% said never.

The findings indicated that 32% of the businesses often introduced new lines of products/services, 32% sometimes introduced, 28% very often, 6% rarely and 2% had never introduced new lines of products or services. Emphasis on technological advancement and innovation, the results showed that 32% of the SME's often complied, 28% very often, 23% sometimes, 14% rarely while 3% never emphasized on technological advancement and innovation. This implied that SME's were putting for resources towards technology and innovation which leads to introduction of new lines of products/services.

The research also investigated if the changes in products/services in the SMEs had been drastic and innovative; 34% indicated that changes in products/services were sometimes drastic and innovative, 29% indicated that often, 24% very often, 12% rarely and 1% never were the products/services drastic and innovative. This implied that the changes in products had been often drastic and innovative.

The study sought to investigate whether or not SMEs supported discovery of new ideas in the businesses. On this item, 36% said they sometimes supported discovery of new ideas, 31% indicated they often supported discovery of new ideas, 28% said very often, 4% rarely and 1% never supported discovery of new ideas in the businesses. Concerning whether or not the businesses developed new market niche by developing new products/services, 34% of the respondents that they very often did, 31% often and 28% sometimes developed new market niche; 4% indicated that they rarely developed new market niche while 3% was never committed to development of new market niche by developing new product or services. The findings also showed that the SMEs often created and introduced new products/ services and technologies. The findings further showed that there was a positive correlation between innovativeness and performance of the SME's in Eldoret; this implied that improvement in the level of innovativeness results in better performance of the SMEs.

The findings concur with those of Kemp *et al.* (2003) who investigated innovations and performance differences between the small and medium enterprises. Kemp *et al.* (2003) established that innovation had a positive effect on performance. The study also established national subsidies, continuous innovation, market research and product innovation had a positive and significant relationship with performance for both small and medium enterprise.

Similarly, Yoo (2015) has investigated the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance in technology-based SMEs. The study established that entrepreneurial orientation had a positive effect on maximization of profits, gaining market share, creating niche markets and adding value for stakeholders.

Performance of SMEs in Eldoret

The study further sought to investigate the performance of SMEs as a result of various aspects of entrepreneurial intensity. The performance was evaluated in terms of profitability, market share and general expansion or growth. The findings were analyzed and presented in the Table 4.6 below. The researcher adopted a scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 represented Very Poor, 2 – Poor, 3 – Average, 4 – Good and 5 – Very Good.

Table 2: Responses on the Performance of SME's in Eldoret

Factors		VP	P	A	G	VG
Introduction of new products/services	F	1	1	21	45	32
	%	1	1	21	45	32
Carrying out high-risk projects in my business	F	2	7	20	35	36
	%	2	7	20	35	36
Encouraging creativity and new ideas	F	1	2	16	40	41
	%	1	2	16	40	41
Development/obtaining unique products or services	F	3	3	14	42	38
	%	3	3	14	42	38
Introducing new brands ahead of my competitors	F	1	3	21	34	41
	%	1	3	21	34	41
Adopting new methods of production	F	1	4	13	44	38
	%	1	4	13	44	38
Venturing into new markets	F	1	7	14	40	38
	%	1	7	14	40	38
Radical decision making in my business	F	1	4	16	34	45
	%	1	4	16	34	45
Implementation of new business strategies several times	F	2	3	19	33	43
	%	2	3	19	33	43

The findings in Table 2 above show that in regard to performance of the SMEs as a result of introduction of new products or services, 45% of the respondents rated the performance as good, 32% as very good, 21% as average, 1% as poor and 1% as very poor. On carrying out high-risk projects in the business, 36% rated the performance of their business as very good, 35% as good, 20% as average, 7% as poor and 2% as very poor.

The study also sought to investigate the performance of SMEs with regard to encouraging creativity and new ideas in the business: 41% rated as very good, 40% rated good, 16% rated as average, 2% rated as poor and 1% rated as very poor. The study also sought to investigate the performance of SMEs with regard to development of unique products or services, 42% rated as good, 38% rated as very good, 14% rated as average, 3% rated as poor and 3% rated as very poor. This implied that the performance of their businesses improved in terms of profitability, market share and business growth when the encouraged creativity and new ideas which leads to development of unique products or services.

When asked about the performance of the businesses based on introduction of new brands ahead of competitors, 41% of the respondents rated the performance as very good, 34% as good, 21% as average, 3% as poor and 1% as very poor. On adoption of new methods of production, 44% of the respondents rated the performance of their businesses as good, 38% as very good, 13% as average, 4% as poor and 1% as very poor. Regarding performance of the businesses as a result of venturing into new markets, 40% rated as very good, 38% rated as good, 14% rated as average, 7% rated as poor and 1% rated as very poor.

The study also sought to examine how radical decision making in the business resulted in good performance: 45% rated as very good, 34% rated as good, 16% rated as average, 4% rated as poor and 1% rated as very poor and with regard to implementation of new strategies several times in the business, 43% rated as very good, 33% rated as good, 19% rated as average, 3% rated as poor while 1% rated as very poor. This implied that making radical decisions and implementations of new strategies in SME's resulted in good performance of the business.

The findings implied that SME owners rated the performance of their businesses as good in relation to entrepreneurial intensity; the performance was evaluated in terms of profitability, market share and general expansion or growth. A few of the respondents rated the performance of their businesses as either poor or very poor; this implied that not all strategies worked in the same way in all the businesses. Besides entrepreneurial intensity, the few businesses could explore other factors that would hinder their performance.

Rauch *et al.* (2009) have also investigated the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and business performance; their analysis showed that the magnitude of the correlation between orientation and performance is significantly different across studies and their relationship is complex. The findings are also in agreement with the results obtained by Todd and Javalgi (2010) who confirmed that entrepreneurial orientation is positively related to firm performance; accordingly, entrepreneurial orientation is essential for firms to discover entrepreneurial opportunities in foreign markets.

The findings further support those of Obino (2014) who carried out the study was to determine the effects of entrepreneurship intensity and performance of the oil manufacturing firms in Kenya. Obino (2014) found that corporate entrepreneurship was a common phenomenon in the edible oil manufacturing firms with consequent positive effect on performance. The study further revealed a strong and positive correlation between corporate entrepreneurship strategies and organizational performance with a correlation coefficient of 0.661. All the major corporate entrepreneurship practices in both firms received above average rating with resource availability and management support receiving highest rating. The study revealed a strong and positive correlation between corporate entrepreneurship practices and organizational performance at 0.686.

Test of Hypothesis

It was hypothesized that there is no significant relationship between innovativeness and performance of SMEs in Eldoret municipality. The results showed that the p-value for innovativeness was 0.001 which was less than 0.05 and, therefore, the researcher did not accept the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative hypothesis. This implied that there was relationship between innovativeness and performance of Small and Medium Enterprises in Eldoret town. A correlation coefficient of 0.60 indicated that there was a positive correlation

between the variables, meaning that improvement in the level of innovativeness results in better performance of the SMEs.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of research led to the conclusion that there is a strong positive correlation between innovativeness and performance of the SMEs in Eldoret. This implies that improvement in the level of innovativeness results in better performance of the SMEs. Therefore, it is recommended that the government should play a role in offering short courses to induct the business owners and expose them to advanced techniques in innovation.

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