

Entrepreneurial Competencies and Competitiveness of Manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises in North Central Nigeria

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Abstract: *This study examined the effect of entrepreneurial competencies on competitiveness of manufacturing SMEs in North Central Nigeria. The study specifically examined the effect of relationship competence and networking competence; on competitiveness of manufacturing SMEs in North Central Nigeria. The study adopted survey research design and questionnaire was utilized for data collection from the respondents. Data were collected from 335 respondents (owners/managers) of the organization. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while regression analysis was employed as tool to test the hypotheses using t-statistic from the regression. Findings showed that relationship competence ($t = 4.88$, $B = 0.801$, $p = .001$), and networking competence ($t = 4.99$, $B = 0.791$, $p = .003$), had significant and positive effect on competitiveness. The study concludes that entrepreneurial competence (relationship competence and networking competence) can be considered a potent factor in manufacturing small and medium enterprises competitiveness (in terms of business understanding, organizational responsiveness and market share) as they have potentials for enhancing the firms competitiveness through creating a conducive atmosphere for identifying opportunities across the marketplace and develop viable opportunities. The study recommends, amongst others, that manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises management should be decisive in the resolve of encouraging networking competence by manipulating inter organizational relationship, as this will help improve business understanding and thus create a steady state of enhanced competitiveness.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The world has over the years developed into an entrepreneurial economy for creating businesses that are new and unique and also entrepreneurs are applauded for being heroes in developing new economics and industries that are competitive. As a result of new technologies, digital businesses are playing out globally where very small businesses have turned into global ones and local players into world players. This reality no doubt has collapsed all the business bricks and walls and consequently changed the rules of the business game globally. Managers and business owners who desire to establish a sustainable business venture, grow it, and survive in the global business market must think, calculate, and be competently qualified to face the global business jungle (Umar, 2018; Anoke *et al.*, 2022). Entrepreneurial competencies are seen as the skills required to carry out duties as expected, motives to drive and attitudes required by managers in a competitive and dynamic business environment today to succeed as a person and grow a business successfully (Abel, 2019; Kaigama *et al.*, 2023).

All successful businesses derive strength from entrepreneurial competencies of managing a given firm (Oyakhire and Makpor, 2021). Thus small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are universally recognized as seedbeds for economic growth and development. In Europe, SMEs create 70% of employment openings and contribute about 50% to 60% of global productivity (Ibidunni *et al.*, 2021). In Nigeria, SMEs are the largest employers of labour and contribute significantly to the development of the economy (Danibrahim *et al.*, 2022). Small and medium enterprises achieve these laudable contributions despite their small sizes and limited entrepreneurial competencies. Afolabi *et al.* (2021) observe that while entrepreneurial competencies are necessary for business success, the lack of such competencies significantly hampers SME performance in Nigeria.

It is believed that the possession of these competencies enhances business competitiveness by enabling SMEs to identify and pursue opportunities, create value, and compete effectively in the market. The combined utilization of these competencies affords manufacturing SMEs some measure of competitive advantage as well as the chance to survive, thrive and achieve high organizational responsiveness and business understanding (Danibrahim *et al.*, 2022). Entrepreneurial competencies assist SME owners in recognizing industry opportunities, marshalling resources and delivering products and services effectively and efficiently (Ibidunni *et al.*, 2021). Thus, the enhancement of the competency of entrepreneur will better equip the entrepreneur to tackle various challenges either from the immediate or external environment (Akhigbe and Onuoha, 2020). Competencies of an entrepreneur are the bedrock which enhances the success of firms.

The relationship between entrepreneurial competencies and firm competitiveness has been investigated but with varying outcomes and much divergence. However, several researchers (Stam *et al.*, 2014; Kar *et al.*, 2017; Randerson *et al.*, 2020) attribute the divergence to contextual factors informing the entrepreneurs' attitudes, knowledge, and skill. Nevertheless, the importance of competencies (such as strategic, learning, opportunity, relationship, networking and operational competencies) in business success is generally recognized in the literature, especially on SMEs. Thus, Bužavaitė and Korsakienė (2021) reported that the knowledge and skills of the business owner are fundamental to achieving business objectives. Also, Kovid *et al.* (2021) study confirm that an SME owner must demonstrate entrepreneurial behaviour to identify opportunities successfully, start up a business, and apply managerial skills to succeed. In view of this, the current study seeks to revisit the entrepreneurial competencies–SME competence relationship to confirm and provide further evidence on the contested relationship in North Central Nigeria.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

With specialized skills and abilities needed to navigate the business environment, projects entrepreneurial competencies as veritable tool. It is observed that in spite of its mention among manufacturing small and medium enterprises, there are observed underutilizations of its gains. Despite the efforts of the government and nongovernmental organizations over the years, there are yet observed failures and shut down of the manufacturing small and medium enterprises, making them even unable to survive over five years of its existence, and the same is said of in North Central Nigeria. The survival of the SMEs in Nigeria has been subjects of concerns to the government, the individuals and those operators of the SMEs.

Despite the significant contributions by manufacturing small and medium enterprises, these businesses are unable to put forward adequate level of performance; thus, they experience failures. Every business owner is expected to relate to their business environment that requires a high level of entrepreneurial competencies at various stages such as relationship competency and networking competency and ability to participate in high competitiveness.

Observations are that, despite the financial provision and other efforts made by governments and nongovernmental organizations in providing some essential services to manufacturing small and medium enterprises to aid their enterprises, yet the manufacturing small and medium enterprises still find it implausible to survive. Thus, it then call for reasoning that; are these manufacturing enterprises ignoring entrepreneurial competencies (relationship and networking competencies) in their business outlay; or that these competencies may have been undermined. Hence, the dynamics of competitiveness in the manufacturing small and medium enterprises sub sector leaves so much worry as to what exactly is solely responsible for it. In the light of this, this study examines the effect of entrepreneur competencies on competitiveness of manufacturing SMEs in North Central Nigeria.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine the effect of entrepreneurial competencies on competitiveness of manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises in North Central Nigeria, The specific objectives are: to

- i. assess the extent to which relationship competency has effect on competitiveness of manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises in North Central Nigeria.
- ii. ascertain the extent to which networking competency has effect on competitiveness of manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises in North Central Nigeria.

1.4 Statement of Hypotheses

The following hypotheses stated in the null form are tested in this study.

H₀₁: Relationship competency has no significant effect on competitiveness of manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises in North Central Nigeria.

H₀₂: Networking competency has no significant effect on competitiveness of manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises in North Central Nigeria.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Entrepreneurial Competency Theory

The competency theory was propounded by Boyatzis (1982) with contributions from Bird (1995) Lau *et al.* (1999); was developed based on the idea that there are certain clusters of skills and attitudes (also called capabilities/competencies) entrepreneurs require in order to enable them reap superior performance and competitiveness. At the rudimentary state, such skills that could foster enterprise success could be communication and oral presentation skills, human relations skills, and the ability to construct and defend a business plan before a large audience (Vesper and McMullan, 1988). Theory of Entrepreneurial Competency by Boyatzis (1992), says that entrepreneurs are very

cautious of investing more into the business until they are sure of their competencies, using the due diligence modulator. If there is a signal that the start-up will fail, the due diligence modulator alerts the entrepreneur to go back to stage one (formulation stage). The theory further posits that entrepreneurs who may not have competences internal to the firm can enlist complementary competencies/capabilities through strategic alliances. The growth and competitiveness and success of the business largely depend on the effectiveness and velocity of deployment of the competences via these stages (Mishra and Zachary, 2014). Thus, this theory encapsulates this essence of having competencies as the basis for survival and sustenance of an enterprise. Emphasizing that competency spurs competitiveness as the live line for small and medium manufacturing enterprises existence.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

2.2.1 Concept of Entrepreneurial Competencies

Competence is the integration and combination of knowledge and skills that can be observed and measured which contributes to enhanced performance, and ultimately lead to entrepreneurial success (Al Mamun and Fazal, 2018). Entrepreneurial competence can be viewed as components that are rooted deeply in one's background and can be acquired from experience (Man and Lau, 2005). The need to possess the required competence such as strategic competence, opportunity competence, organizing competence, relationship competence, networking competence, learning competence and conceptual competence; are recognized as equally important to entrepreneurs in enhancing entrepreneurial success (Seabela and Fatoki, 2014; Umeze and Ohen, 2015). Entrepreneurial competencies are components for entrepreneurial activities, which are seen as behavioral elements (Umar *et al.*, 2018). Despite the increase in the interest of entrepreneurship in Nigeria, experience has shown that traits alone do not often lead to high entrepreneurial performance without taking full advantage of entrepreneurial competence (Agumadu *et al.*, 2022).

Martina *et al.* (2012) define entrepreneurial competencies as a set of specific knowledge, abilities, skills, traits, motives, attitudes and values essential for the personal development and successful participation of each person in an organization. Rezaei-Zadeh *et al.* (2014) define it as the abilities of the person that enable him/her to demonstrate the appropriate entrepreneurial behaviour. Mitchelmore and Rowley (2013) state that identifying and developing entrepreneurial competencies, namely, idea generation, innovative skills, envisioning opportunities, risk taking and creativity possessed by entrepreneurs may support the development of potential businesses. Entrepreneurs with strong competencies can sense and seize market opportunities (Nabiswa and Mukwa, 2017) and optimize resources to create economic value. Entrepreneurial competencies are often rare and hard for competitors to develop because of the ambiguity regarding their origin and embeddedness with the specific individuals (Tehseen and Ramayah, 2015). Competency is defined as the underlying characteristic of a person that is causally linked to a higher job performance (Megahed, 2015). Likewise, UNIDO defines competency as a set of related knowledge, attributes and skills that give an individual the capability to perform an activity or task within a particular function or job (Pauliené, 2017).

2.2.2 Dimensions of Entrepreneurial Competencies

Al-Mamun and Fazal, 2018; Khana and Sakib, 2020; Abey *et al.*, 2021; Ferreras *et al.*, 2021; Ibidunni *et al.* (2021); Salveyra *et al.*, 2021 identified six entrepreneurial competencies of which this study has decided to isolate two as follows- relationship competency and networking competency

i. Relationship Competency

Relationship competency is the ability to identify required changes to technology, people, and processes and prepare the organization for the transition, so as to achieve shared results (Hashim *et al.*, 2018). It is the ability to establish, maintain, and restore healthy, supportive relationships and to navigate diverse settings (Baylie and Singh, 2019). Relationship competency is a core competency that ensures a professional is investing in relationships to best achieve shared results. Building relationships is about your ability to identify and initiate working relationships and to develop and maintain them in a healthy way that is of mutual benefit to both yourself and the other party (Baylie and Singh, 2019).

ii. Networking Competency

The term "entrepreneurial network" refers to entrepreneurs, who are organized, formally, or formally to increase the efficiency of the members' business activities (Das and Goswami, 2019). According to Ritter and Gemunden (2003), network competence is a firm's ability to utilize, manage, and manipulate inter-organizational relationships. Networks are groups of people that relate or connect one way or another. They draw on central resources and also contribute their quota to the group (OECD and European Commission, 2014). This is the entrepreneur's ability to develop and maintain relations, alliances and coalitions within and outside the organization and to use them in order to obtain information, support and cooperation (Aladejebi, 2020)

2.2.3 Concept of Competitiveness

The term competitiveness is viewed as the ability of a business or a firm to deliver better value to customers than other competitors (Hanagandi and Melo, 2018). Competitiveness linked to the organization, is seen as the ability of organizations to maintain, advance, respond and work according to the principles of business understanding, efficiency and effectiveness, to surpass the competition (Cho *et al.*, 2016). A firm will strive to create new competitive space only if it possesses competencies horizon that stretches far beyond the boundaries of its current businesses. This horizon identifies, in broad terms, the market territory the management hopes to stake out over the next decade, terrain that is unlikely to be captured in anything as precise as a business plan (Hanagandi and Melo, 2018). Competitive advantage essentially has to be one that not only merely represents better performance than that of its competitors, but also delivers genuine value to the customer, thus ensuring dominant position in the market (Toivonen, 2015; Akabike, 2021).

2.2.4 Measures of Competitiveness

The following measures/dimensions, are carefully reviewed as supported by authors/studies of Ibidunni *et al.*, (2018), Hanagandi and Melo (2018), Akabike (2021) amongst others.

(i) Organizational Responsiveness

The response capability dimension emphasizes agility in terms of change-enabling capabilities, which are embedded in organizational processes. Responsiveness refers to ability of recognizing changes and quickly taking advantage and benefiting from them (Hanagandi and Melo, 2018). Responsiveness is the ability of a firm to respond to customers' needs in terms of quality, speed and flexibility and it is characterized by combined goals such as time, quality and flexibility (Asree *et al.*, 2010).

Business Understanding

Business understanding is viewed as consisting of a precise specification of the problem together with the methods of evaluating the achievement of the goal (Mardiros, 2011). For successful business performance, it needs to build employees' competency around a sound strategic understating of an organization's business to enable them know how to deliver timely, relevant, complete, accurate, and useful services to the customers (Owen, *et al.*, 2001).

2.3 Review of Related Empirical Studies

Kaigama (2023) examined the influence of entrepreneurial competencies on the performance of small business by developing causal model using data obtained from small business in north-eastern Nigeria. The outcomes indicate that entrepreneurial competence plays an influential role in influencing small business performance. Specifically, five out of the seven competencies areas that is relationship competencies; conceptual competencies; organizing competencies; strategic competencies; commitment competencies, and learning competencies; positively influence small business performance. Danibrahim *et al.* (2022) carried out a study to test the direct influence of entrepreneurial competencies on the performance of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) operating in Northwest Nigeria. The results of the linear regression analysis surprisingly revealed that the relationships between skills ($B = 0.18$, $SE = 0.19$, $p = 0.36$), attitude ($B = -0.09$, $SE = 0.16$, $p = 0.57$), and age ($B = 0.03$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = 0.11$) are not significant. However, the relationship between knowledge and SME performance is significant ($B = 0.77$, $SE = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$), and also accounted for 65% of the variance in firm performance.

Ukata and Silas-Dikibo (2022) study investigated contemporary entrepreneurial competencies among undergraduates in Rivers State Polytechnics. Findings revealed that the level of self-management competencies acquired by undergraduates was at low level and the level of self-management competencies acquired by undergraduates in Rivers state polytechnics were based on (funding, self-management experience and education). Babayayi *et al.* (2021) examines the competencies required for SME performance, as influenced by strategic, organizing and opportunity competency in North East Nigeria. Findings showed that engaging in core competencies aids in identifying and taking advantage of business opportunity. Oyakhire and Makpor (2021) empirically studied the influence of entrepreneurial competencies on organizational performance of SMEs (fast food and bar enterprises) in Edo State. The results of this study indicate that the entrepreneurial competence variables (risk-taking, persistence, innovation and opportunities) have a significant influence on organizational performance.

Yakubu *et al.* (2021) established the effect of entrepreneurial skills on financial performance of listed manufacturing industries in Nigeria. Findings indicated that creativity and leadership skills had significant effect on financial performance of manufacturing firms in Nigeria. Yasir (2021) examines the effect of entrepreneurial competencies (innovation, leadership, networking and risk-taking) on the survival of SMEs in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The findings reveal that entrepreneurial competencies (innovation competency, leadership competency, networking competency and risk-taking competency) of the SME owners/managers (entrepreneurs) have a positive and significant effect on the survival of SMEs in KSA. Akhigbe and Onuoha (2020) examined the relationship amongst entrepreneurial competence and performance of SMEs in

Rivers State, Nigeria. Centered on the bivariate analysis, the outcome disclosed that all dimensions of entrepreneurial competence significantly relate with the performance of SMEs.

Aladejebi (2020) examined the effect of entrepreneurial competency of network on the growth of SMEs business in Lagos, Nigeria. The results of the analysis showed a generally positive overview of SME networking in Nigeria. The respondents mostly agree across both groups that networking is of great benefit to their businesses. Muhammed (2016) investigated the effect of entrepreneurial competencies on the performance of small and medium scale enterprises in Kaduna state. The findings revealed that entrepreneurial skills and entrepreneurial characteristics have significant positive effect on the performance of SMEs in the state. It was also found that entrepreneurial motives have insignificant effect on the performance of SMEs.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes the survey research design. The data were collected in order to establish the effects of the independent on the dependent variables.

The study area is North Central Nigeria, comprising of Benue State, Kogi State, Kwara State, Nasarawa State, Niger State, Plateau State and the Federal Capital Territory. The population of this study comprised of owners/ managers of manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises operating in North Central Nigeria (that is, those engaged in foods and beverages and agro-processing). All SMEs from each State and FCT engaged in one form of manufacturing were part of this study registered in North Central States Ministries of Industries, Trade and investment; SMEDAN and/ or Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture which gave a total of 364 manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises.

1: Breakdown of the Population of the Manufacturing SME per State

S/N__	States	Total Number of Manufacturing SMEs
1	Benue	47
2	Kogi	49
3	Kwara	57
4	Nasarawa	48
5	Niger	61
6	Plateau	63
7	FCT	39
	TOTAL	364

Source: States Ministries of Industries, Trade and investment; SMEDAN and/ or Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture.

Since the population (364) is of a manageable size, all the population served as sample size for this study; thus, census sampling was adopted as all the population serves as the sample for the study.

The data for this study was collected through questionnaire administration. Structured questionnaire was designed to collect responses from the respondents. The questionnaire is divided into two sections (Section A and section B) for ease of administration and convenience. Section A is based on personal data of the respondents while section B contains questions on

the study variables using five-point Likert-scale (Likert, 1932) which constitutes strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree.

The researcher made use of the content and construct validity for this study. Content validity was effected by evaluation of the variables by management scholars and other experts in the area while factor analysis was used for construct validity test. Pilot Test (test-retest; that is pre-test method) method was used whereby 30 questionnaires were administered in the first instance, two weeks after; another copies of the questionnaire were administered to employees of some manufacturing SMEs in Abuja Municipal Area Council that are not part of the original study.

Cronbach alpha (Cronbach, 1951) was used for test and re-test to ensure reliability of the instrument. The test-and re-test method was used to test the dependent and independent variables used in the study. The result of the reliability test (0.763) shows that all the variables were internally consistent and reliable for this study.

Primary sources of data for this study were obtained mainly by means of questionnaire. The structured questionnaire was the chief instrument design and was used to collect data on entrepreneurial competencies as the basis for promoting competitiveness in manufacturing SMEs in North Central Nigeria.

The model employed for this study is multiple regression analysis model which involves the independent variable (entrepreneurial competencies), and the dependent variable (firm competitiveness). Therefore the following model specifications to test the formulated hypotheses are as follows:

The model for this research is given as

$$FC = f(ECO) = (REL, NET)$$

Where

FC = Firm Competitiveness

ECO = Entrepreneurial Competencies

REL = Relationship Competency

NET = Networking Competency

The regression model, thus is given as

$$FC = x + \beta_1 REL + \beta_2 NET + e \dots\dots\dots (1)$$

Where

x = Intercept of the regression

$\beta_1 - \beta_2$ = parameter estimates

e = error term

Descriptive and inferential statistics was used to analyze data to evaluating the effect among the variables. Inferential statistics used is regression analysis, to analyze data in order to determine the effect of entrepreneurial competencies on competitiveness of SMEs in North Central Nigeria.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of three hundred and sixty four (364) questionnaires were distributed to respondents in the manufacturing small and medium enterprises in North Central Nigeria, out of which three hundred and thirty five (335) were successfully filled and returned in analyzable form, recording a 92.0 % return rate.

4.1 Regression Analysis and Hypotheses Testing

The model used to test the hypotheses designed for this study, explores the effect of entrepreneurial competence on firm competitiveness in North Central Nigeria.

Table 2: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adj.R Square	Std. Error of Estimate	Durbin Watson
1	.891 ^a	.794	.790	0.866	2.00

a: Predictors (constant), Relationship Competence, Networking Competence,

b. Dependent variable: Firm Competitiveness

Source: SPSS printout (Version 25.0 for windows output), 2023

Table 3: Regression Coefficient Result

Model	Beta	T	Sig
1 (Constant)	1.2334	11.37	.000
Relation. Comp.	.801	4.88	.001
Network. Comp.	.791	4.99	.003

Dependent variable: Firm Competitiveness

Source: SPSS regression print out (version 25.0 for windows output), 2023.

Table 4: ANOVA^b for the overall significance of the model

Model	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig
Regression	123.976	2	61.988	18.09	.000 ^a
Residual	217.460	332	0.655		
Total	341.436	334			

a. Predictors: (constant); REL, NET.

Dependent variable: FC

4.2 Regression Model Explained

In the model, Relationship Competence and Networking Competence; were used to predict the firms' competitiveness.

The F-statistics of regression model showed that the result is significant, as indicated by a value of the F-statistic, 18.09 and it is significant at the 5.0 percent level.

The coefficient of determination (R-square), indicates that the model is reasonably fit in prediction, that is, 79.4 % change in small and medium enterprises competences was jointly due to Relationship Competence and Networking Competence, while 20.6 % unaccounted variations was captured by the white noise error term. It showed that Relationship Competence and Networking Competence; had significant effect on competitiveness of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in North Central Nigeria.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

1. Examine the effect of relationship competence on competitiveness of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in North Central Nigeria.

The analysis of research question one was to examine the effect of relationship competence on competitiveness of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in North Central Nigeria. From table 2, the (R^2) statistic was 0.794. Taking into the record the contribution of the explanatory variable in competitiveness, from table 3, the beta value for relationship competence was 0.801. The beta value apparently indicated that the predictor variable of relationship competence had a positive effect on competitiveness (t -computed 4.88 > t -critical 1.960, $p=0.001 < .05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

The findings of this investigation also agree with Kaigama *et al.* (2023), Danibrahim *et al.* (2022), Ishola and Shittu (2022), Babayayi *et al.* (2021), Yakubu *et al.* (2021), Oyakhire and Makpor (2021), Akhigbe and Onuoha (2020) amongst others; who all avers that building of trustworthy relationships with suppliers, consumers, workers, rivals, government officials, and other stakeholders, enhances potentials of broadening business understandings. They further argue that small and medium businesses rely heavily on a trusted network of stakeholders, such as government agencies, attorneys, accountants, and consultants, which a proper management and utilization, leads to enhanced firm competitiveness. Furthermore, they explained that entrepreneurs use this relationship competency to obtain resources to boost their business and relationship-building abilities. Therefore, this study concludes that there is a positive/significant effect of relationship competence on competitiveness of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in North Central Nigeria.

2. Assess the effect of networking competence on competitiveness of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in North Central Nigeria

The analysis of research question two was to assess the effect of networking competence on competitiveness of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in North Central Nigeria. From table 18, the (R^2) statistic was 0.794. Taking into the record the contribution of the explanatory variable in competitiveness, from table 19, the beta value for networking competence was 0.791. The beta value apparently indicated that the predictor variable of networking competence had a positive effect on competitiveness (t -computed 4.99 > t -critical 1.960, $p=0.003 < .05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

The findings of this investigation also agree with that of Aladejebi (2020), Akhigbe and Onuoha (2020), Yasir (2021), Agumadu *et al.* (2022), Ukata and Sila-Dikibo (2022), Muhammed (2016), amongst others; who all avers that business networking group facilitate the networking of independent members so that relationship building and relationship maintenance can take place with a view to delivering mutually beneficial community and business-focused outcomes through working together. They argue that developing and maintain relations, alliances and coalitions within and outside the organization and to use them in order to obtain information, support and cooperation has been linked to business understanding and prowess for competitiveness. The entrepreneurial networks provide information about markets, new products, technologies, risk, and uncertainty about their product. Hence has links to increasing market share, business understanding and improved organizational responsiveness; thereby positioning the firm in a competitive posture. Therefore, this study concludes that there is a positive/significant effect of

networking competence on competitiveness of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in North Central Nigeria

5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

The summary of the findings are presented according to the six objectives and research hypothesis of the study as follows:

- i. Relationship competence have significant and positive effect on competitiveness of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in North Central Nigeria (Beta = .801, T = 4.88, P = .001).
- ii. Networking competence have significant and positive effect on competitiveness of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in North Central Nigeria (Beta = .791, T = 4.99, P = .003).

5.2 Conclusion

This study concludes that entrepreneurial competence (relationship competence and networking competence) can be considered a potent factor in manufacturing small and medium enterprises competitiveness (in terms of business understanding, organizational responsiveness and market share) as they have potentials for enhancing the firms competitiveness through creating a conducive atmosphere for identifying opportunities across the marketplace and develop viable opportunities.

5.3 Recommendations

Sequel to the findings and conclusions above, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises management should be decisive in the resolve of encouraging networking competence by manipulating inter organizational relationship, as this will help improve business understanding and thus create a steady state of enhanced competitiveness.
- ii. Manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises management should create an environment for relationship competence to thrive among staff and among industry players by identifying and maintaining constructive working alliance with clients; as this can contribute in better understanding of environmental/customers' needs and better ways of satisfying them, thus enhancing competitiveness.

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