

EFFECT OF ENTREPRENEURIAL COMPETENCE ON THE SUSTAINABILITY OF MANUFACTURING SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN BENUE STATE NIGERIA

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Abstract: This study examines the effect of entrepreneurial competence on the sustainability of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Benue State Nigeria. The specific objectives are to determine the effect of strategic competency, ascertain the effect of opportunity competency, and to assess the effect of networking competency; on the sustainability of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Benue State. The study adopts a survey research approach, using questionnaire administration for data generation from a sample of 325 employees of the selected manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Benue State Nigeria. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The t-test from regression analysis (statistical package for social science, version 25.0) was used for test of hypothesis. Findings showed that strategic competency ($t= 7.12, p= 0.003, \beta=.755$), opportunity competency ($t= 9.13, p= 0.012, \beta=.781$), and networking competency ($t= 5.54, p= 0.004, \beta=.801$); had significant/positive effect on the sustainability of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Benue State Nigeria. The study concludes that entrepreneurial competence (strategic competence, opportunity competence, and networking competence) can be considered a viable and potent factor in manufacturing small and medium enterprise competitiveness (in terms of organizational responsiveness and competitiveness) as they have potentials for enhancing the firms sustainability through creating a conducive atmosphere for identifying opportunities across the marketplace and develop viable opportunities. The study recommends, amongst others, that management of manufacturing small and medium enterprises should focus on opportunity competences as an impetus to motivate the firms' staff in scanning and developing viable business; as this will help improve and enhance organizations innovativeness, responsiveness and boost their sustainability.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The sustainability of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and its contributions to the economic growth and sustainable development of nations is acknowledged, the world over, as they are known for their leading role in promoting grassroots economic and equitable sustainable development. The advent of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) throughout the world is noticeable and has received international attention because SMEs play a critical role in employment creation, innovation, advancement and sustainable development. In developed countries 92% or more than belong to the Small and Medium scale sector. In Japan, 80% of industrial labour force is employed by small and medium firms, 50% in Germany and 46% in USA are employed by similar businesses (Ganiyu *et al.*, 2023). The Small and Medium Scale Enterprises is considered as the engine that

drives the economy of any nation as it provides opportunities for the countless millions of unemployed people to productively engaged in one venture or the other (Yakubu *et al.*, 2021; Anoke *et al.*, 2022; Kaigama, 2023).

Due to the advent of globalization, the small and medium manufacturing business environment in Nigeria continues to experience various forms of competition geared towards sustaining the enterprise. 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 (Ganiyu *et al.*, 2023). 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).

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). Afolabi *et al.* (2021) observe that while entrepreneurial competencies are necessary for business success, the lack of such competencies significantly hampers SME sustainability in Nigeria. Many factors may account for business sustainability; however, most entrepreneurs give attention to financial performance indicators, neglecting the role of competencies (Spio-Kwofie *et al.*, 2018; Ayodele, 2018). Competencies are important determinants of firm survival. Thus, entrepreneur competencies are crucial to achieving long-term sustainability. Thus, this study seeks to examine the effect of entrepreneurial competence on sustainability of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Benue State.

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 in Benue State, 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 Benue State Nigeria. The survival of the SMEs in Benue State Nigeria has been subjects of concerns to the government, the individuals and those operators of the SMEs.

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 (key among which are strategic, opportunity and networking competencies) in their business outlay; or that these competencies may have been undermined. Hence, the dynamics of sustainability in the manufacturing small and medium enterprises sub sector leaves so much worry as to what exactly is solely responsible for it.

More so, many of past studies assessed entrepreneurial competencies in developed economies contexts (e.g., Lerner and Almor, 2002; Al-Mammun *et al.*, 2016; Faza *et al.*, 2019). Besides, we respond to the call by other researchers to evaluate entrepreneurial competencies sustainability in varying contexts (e.g., Yeh and Chang, 2018; Nwachukwu *et al.*, 2017) especially in developing countries (Coder *et al.*, 2017). In the light of this, this study examines the effect of entrepreneur competencies on sustainability of manufacturing SMEs in Benue State Nigeria.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The aim of this research is to investigate the effect of entrepreneurial competence on the sustainability of manufacturing firms in Benue State Nigeria. The specific objectives are: to

- i. determine the extent to which strategic competency has effect on sustainability of manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises in Benue State Nigeria.
- ii. evaluate the extent to which opportunity competency has effect on sustainability of manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises in Benue State Nigeria.
- iii. ascertain the extent to which networking competency has effect on sustainability of manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises in Benue State Nigeria.

1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions are stated in line with the objectives of the study:

- i. What effect does strategic competency has on sustainability of manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises in Benue State Nigeria?
- ii. What is the effect of opportunity competency on sustainability of manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises in Benue State Nigeria?.
- iii. What effect does networking competency have on sustainability of manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises in Benue State Nigeria?

1.5 Statement of Hypotheses

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

H₀₁: Strategic competency has no significant effect on sustainability of manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises in Benue State Nigeria?

H₀₂: Opportunity competency has no significant effect on sustainability of manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises in Benue State Nigeria?

H₀₃: Networking competency has no significant effect on sustainability of manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises in Benue State Nigeria?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Framework

The relevant concepts and their dimensions/processes as relating to this study are carefully defined and reviewed.

2.1.1 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). Entrepreneurial competencies are components for entrepreneurial activities, which are seen as behavioral elements (Umar, 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) defined 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).

Entrepreneurial competencies considered the most vital aspect of the survival, continual growth, and success of the business organization (Klyver and Arenius, 2020; Sakib and Shohoz, 2020). The literature is well-enriched in determining the competencies of an entrepreneur (Ibidunni *et al.*, 2021; San-Martin *et al.*, 2021; Ferreras-Garcia *et al.*, 2021; Hussain *et al.*, 2022). Entrepreneurial competencies can be described as intrinsic qualities, such as specialized knowledge, motivations, self-images, qualities, motivations, social positions, and abilities that contribute to the establishment, survival, and growth of businesses (Bird, 2019; Sedeh *et al.*, 2021). Muzychenko and Saeed, (2004) distinguished clearly between innate and learned components of competency. The intrinsic elements of competency include the entrepreneur's attitudes, characteristics, self-image, and social role (Chen *et al.*, 2022). Simultaneously, learned features include factors gained on the job through various theoretical and practical training, such as skills, experience, and knowledge, which are sometimes referred to as internalized components (Man and Lau, 2005; Peschi *et al.*, 2021). Internalized competency factors were found by Barlett and

Ghoshal (1997), whereas externalized competence components were included by the researchers (Muzychenko and Saeed, 2004). Innate or natural elements of competency are not easy to change, but appropriate training and education programs can alter the externalized shape of a competency (Peschi *et al.*, 2021).

2.2.2 Dimensions of Entrepreneurial Competencies

Due to the relatively chosen manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises sector in the Benue State, this study focuses on the strategic competency, opportunity competency, and networking competency. Hazhina-Ahmad *et al.* (2010) opined that there is much scope for identifying several entrepreneurial competency domains and for testing the impacts on the success of SMEs. Having examined the earlier literature on entrepreneurial competencies (Man and Lau, 2005; Khana and Sakib, 2020; Abey *et al.*, 2021; Ferreras-Garcia *et al.*, 2021; Ibidunni *et al.*, 2021; Salveyra *et al.*, 2021) identified six entrepreneurial competencies which the study has decided to isolate in this study as follows-

i. Strategic Competency

A strategic competency is the competency of a business organization to achieve and sustain a competitive advantage. Strategic competence is the ability of organizations (or more precisely their members) to acquire, store, recall, interpret and act upon information of relevance to longer-term survival and well-being of the organization (Zaia and Al-Mamun, 2018; Agbenyegah and Mahohoma, 2020). Competencies reflect the organization's strategy; that is, they are aligned to short term missions and goals (Baylie and Singh, 2019).

ii. Opportunity Competency:

According to Man *et al.* (2002), opportunity competency refers to the ability to recognize the opportunities in the market through various means. And is operationalized by measuring various behaviours such as identifying the services or products needed by the customers, perceiving unmet needs of the customers, looking for beneficial product and services for the customers, and availing the best opportunities. De koning (2003) linked the opportunity development with the entrepreneur's ability to seek, explore, develop and assess better existing opportunities in markets. One of the main characteristics of the entrepreneur is that they can see or recognize the opportunities where others cannot do so. It is related to the ability of entrepreneurs to identify and evaluate ideas for new products, processes, practices or services in response to a particular pain, problem or new market need (Oyakhire and Makpor, 2021).

iii. 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)

2.1.3 Concept of Sustainability

Organizational sustainability as described by Wales (2013) is a process through which management of an organization keeps its business activities running. In the same vein, Chukwuka and Eboh (2018) averred that sustainability is the achievement recorded by an organization in meeting its current needs (customer response) without compromising its future needs. Genty (2021) asserted that organizational sustainability implies having in place the right leadership style, talents, global awareness/intuition and the action plan required in combating threats being faced by modern organizations. The above position is in agreement with Chukwuka and Eboh (2018) where the authors opined that one of the major ways by which firms contribute towards sustainability is through their mode of operation and practices.

2.1.4 Measures of Sustainability

A sustainable business would focus on all three realms of sustainability (economic, social and environmental), which have often been referred to as “triple bottom line” (Don-Baridam and Diri, 2022). For this study, organizational sustainability is measured by competitiveness and organizational responsiveness: which are subsumed in the three realms of sustainability (that is environmental, economic and social sustainability). Also, these measures have also been used by different authorities at different times, such as Mesigo *et al.* (2022), as well as Fapohunda *et al.* (2022).

i. Competitiveness

Competitiveness is seen as a state in which organizations address dynamism in the external environment and continue to provide satisfactory products/services to customers which are better than the products offered by other players in the industry (Li and Liu 2014; Kaur and Metha, 2016). It has been propounded that competitive advantage is achieved only by those organizations which successfully mobilize their strategic capabilities (Chahal and Bakshi, 2015). Competitiveness is the ability of a company to surpass its competitors in terms of superior products and services. To Berdine (2008) a company’s competitiveness is defined as a condition which enables a firm to operate in a more efficient or otherwise higher quality manner than its competitors, and which results in benefits accruing.

ii. Organizational Responsiveness

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). An organization’s sustainability paradigm is often determined by its ability to respond quickly to changes in the business environment. Responsiveness enables organizations to detect market changes quickly, reconfigure their processes to meet new market requirements, share information across organizational units, take maximum advantage of information processing systems, and adopt new product and process technologies ahead of competitors (Hoyt *et al.*, 2007).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The following theories are carefully reviewed as related to this study; they include the resource-based view theory and entrepreneurial competency theory.

2.2.1 Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory

The resource-based view theory put forward by Barney (1991) suggests that a firm can create sustainable competitive advantage only if it possesses valuable, rare, and inimitable resources (Barney, 1991). Resource based view theory has been used to explain the relationship between entrepreneurial competencies and firm success. Entrepreneurial competencies are linked to a manager's knowledge, skills, capabilities and valuable resources that can lead to a firm's sustainable competitive advantage (Tehseen and Ramayah, 2015). In this context, entrepreneurs' competencies are resources that can enhance innovativeness, business understanding and firm responsiveness. Additional value creation is connected to the ability of managers to optimize resources (Tehseen and Ramayah, 2015; Barney, 1991; Grant, 1991). Competitive advantage depends on competitive behaviour and strategic resources possessed by a firm (Nwachukwu and Chládková, 2019). Manufacturing small and medium enterprises success depends on how well they use their capabilities and resources (such as strategic, operational, opportunity, relationship, learning and networking competencies).

Entrepreneurs with strong competencies can sense and seize market opportunities (Nabiswa and Mukwa, 2017; Wade and Hulland, 2004) 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; Gerli *et al.*, 2011). Arguably, entrepreneur competencies are valuable and intangible resources that accounts for the success of firms Consistent with the resource-based view, it has been used to explain the relationship between entrepreneurial competencies and firm competitiveness. Entrepreneurs with strong skills and personality can exploit opportunities and/or neutralize threats facing their firms. From the resource-based perspective, entrepreneurial competencies are intangible assets that can drive business understanding and innovativeness.

2.2.2 Entrepreneurial Competency Theory

The competency theory was propounded by Boyatzis (1982) with contributions from Bird (1995) and 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).

Moreover, such desirable entrepreneurial characteristics - such as traits, entrepreneur's self-image or social role, cluster of knowledge or skill (Boyatzis, 1982) - are meant to last very long for the delivery of sustainable performance and success. Generally, competencies are used interchangeably with skills, knowledge, traits, abilities, acumen

and experience applied in various contexts (Lau *et al.*, 1999). Furthermore, competences are classified based on those that are required to: (i) start a new venture, (ii) sustain the business, and (iii) grow the business (Man *et al.*, 2002).

2.3 Review of Related Empirical Studies

Kaigama (2023) examined the influence of entrepreneurial competencies on the sustainable 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. Ganiyu *et al.* (2023) investigated the moderating role of religiosity in the relationship between entrepreneurial competencies and the performance of MSMEs in Adamawa State. Given the results obtained from statistical analysis of the moderation relationships, 1 of the 3 null hypotheses was rejected while 2 were supported. Hence, religiosity was found to have significant moderating role between entrepreneurial technical competency and performance of MSMEs in Adamawa State while the moderating role on personal competency and ethical competency were empirically insignificant, suggesting a significant relationship between entrepreneurial competencies and performance of MSMEs.

NurHardiyah *et al.* (2022) determine the determinants of entrepreneurial competencies consisting of innovation competencies, leadership competencies and network competencies, their influence on business success in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) with various types of businesses. . The results of the study show that innovation competence has a positive and significant impact on the survival of SMEs; leadership competence has a positive and significant influence on the survival of SMEs; network competence has a positive but not significant effect on the survival of SMEs. 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 s entrepreneurial competence and SME performance is significant

Sakib *et al.* (2022) study empirically tested the impact of entrepreneurial competencies on the sustainable performances of SMEs in Bangladesh. The results reveal that the organizing and leading, learning, relationship, and commitment competencies of entrepreneurs have a meaningful impact on SME performance. Akabike (2021) examined the effect of functional competencies on competitive advantage of pharmaceutical firms in South East Nigeria. Findings from the study shows that decision making competency had a significant positive influence on the competitive advantage of pharmaceutical firms in South East Nigeria, production competency also had a significant effect on competitive advantage of pharmaceutical firms in South East 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. The outcome disclosed that all dimensions of entrepreneurial competence significantly relate with the performance of SMEs. Agbenyegah and Mahohoma (2020) study determined the impact of the three competencies to understand their impact on small business performance in Durban-South Africa. The outcomes of the study showed that entrepreneurial competencies such as personal, opportunity and strategic are crucial for small business performance. Adamu (2020) examines the effect of entrepreneurial competencies on the performance of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises in Benue State, Nigeria. Findings of the study revealed that strategic competencies, conceptual competencies and opportunity competencies have significant effect on the performance of SMEs in Benue State.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

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

The population of this study comprised of owners/ managers of manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises operating in Benue State Nigeria. All manufacturing SMEs engaged in one form of manufacturing were part of this study registered in Benue State Ministries of Industries, Trade and investment; SMEDAN and/ or Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture which gave a total of 335 manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises.

Since the population 335 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 experts in the area of management entrepreneurship and sustainability 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 managers (top level, middle level and lower level managers) of a manufacturing firm that was not part of the original study.

A pilot test was carried out on thirty management staff of a manufacturing SME which was not part of the main study, in Makurdi. Cronbach alpha (1951) was used for test and re-test to ensure reliability of the instrument. The test-and re-test method is used to test the dependent and independent variables used in the study. The reliability coefficient is

a numerical value that can range from zero to one, and the close it is to one the more reliable it is (Cresswell and Cresswell, 2018).

Table 1: Result of Reliability Test

Reliability and Validity Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Mean Score Based on Standardised Items	No. of Items
0.767	70.02	30

Source: Computed result using SPSS version 25.0

The result of the reliability test of the research instrument shows that the Cronbach Alpha value for the questionnaire is 0.767. This means that the questionnaire was reliable enough for the conduct of this research as it has Cronbach Alpha statistic of above 0.7 as opine by Pallant (2007), that a Cronbach alpha value of 0.7 and above imply that the data is reliable and can be used for analysis. It thus showed that 76.7 % on the scale can be considered reliable with our sample.

Table 2: Reliability Test Results Per Construct

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Strategic Competency	0.783
Opportunity Competency	0.811
Networking Competency	0.723
Sustainability	0.750
Average Reliability	0.767

Source: SPSS Output, 2024.

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 sustainability in manufacturing SMEs in Benue State.

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

The model for this research is given as

$$FS = f(ECO) = (STR, OPP, NET)$$

Where

FS = Firm Sustainability

ECO = Entrepreneurial Competencies

STR= Strategic Competency

OPP = Opportunity Competency

NET = Networking Competency

The regression model, thus is given as

$$FS = x + \beta_1 STR + \beta_2 OPP + \beta_3 NET + e \dots\dots\dots (1)$$

Where

x = Intercept of the regression

$\beta_1 - \beta_3$ = parameter estimates

e = error term

A priori expectations are: $\beta_1 > 0, \beta_2 > 0, \beta_3 > 0$: it is expected that the analysis based on the model in question will help to test hypothesis H_{01} to H_{03} , answer the three research question for this study and achieve the three objectives.

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 sustainability of SMEs in Benue State Nigeria.

The hypotheses formulated for this study was tested using student t -statistics generated from the regression model. The level of significance for the study is 5%, for a two-tailed test. The decision rule was that we accept the null hypothesis if the critical/ t -value (± 1.96) is greater than the calculated value, otherwise, we reject the null hypothesis. That is, using the student t -test (t -statistic), we say that a variable is statistically significant if t^* (t -calculated) is greater than the tabulated value of ± 1.96 under 95% (or 5%) confidence levels and it was statistically insignificant if the t^* is less than the tabulated value of ± 1.96 under 95% (or 5%) confidence levels. Thus;

H_0 : $\beta_0 = 0$ (Null hypothesis)

H_1 : $\beta_1 \neq 0$ (Alternative hypothesis).

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of three hundred and fifty five (355) questionnaires were distributed to respondents in the manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Benue State Nigeria, out of which three hundred and twenty five (325) were successfully filled and returned in analyzable form, recording a 91.55 % return rate.

Table 3: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Respondents	Character	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	186	57.2
	Female	139	42.8
	Total	325	100.0
Age (years)	18-27	84	25.8
	28-37	106	32.6
	38-47	90	27.7
	48 and above	45	13.9
	Total	325	100.0
Highest Educational Qualification	SSCE	21	6.5
	OND/NCE	92	28.3
	HND/BSC	162	49.8
	Postgraduate	50	15.4
	Total	325	100.0
Marital Status	Single	98	30.2
	Married	227	69.8
	Total	325	100.0
Years of work experience	1-5	59	18.1
	6-10	86	26.5
	11-15	79	24.3
	16 and above	101	31.1
	Total	325	100.0
Position	Top Management	72	22.2
	Middle level	118	36.3
	Lower level	101	31.1
	Others	34	10.4
	Total	325	100.0

Source: Authors Computation, 2024

Regression Analysis

The model used to test the hypotheses designed for this study, explores the effect of entrepreneurial competence on firm sustainability in Benue State Nigeria.

Table 4: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adj.R Square	Std. Error of Estimate	Durbin Watson
1	.878 ^a	.771	.770	0.776	2.02

a: Predictors (constant), Strategic Competence, Opportunity Competence, Networking Competence.

b. Dependent variable: Firm Sustainability

Source: SPSS printout (Version 25.0 for windows output), 2024.

Table 5: Regression Coefficient Result

Model	Beta	T	Sig
1 (Constant)	1.3412	13.11	.000
Strategic Comp.	.755	7.12	.003
Opport. Comp.	.781	9.13	.012
Network. Comp.	.798	6.35	.013

Dependent variable: Firm Sustainability

Source: SPSS regression print out (version 25.0 for windows output), 2024.

Table 6: ANOVA^b for the overall significance of the model

Model	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig
Regression	246.048	3	41.008	19.01	.000 ^o
Residual	96.922	322	0.301		
Total	342.970	325			

a. Predictors: (constant); STR, OPP, NET

Dependent variable: FS

In the model, Strategic Competence, Opportunity Competence, and Networking Competence; were used to predict the firms' sustainability.

Hypotheses Testing and Discussion of Findings

Hypothesis one:

H₀₁: Strategic competence has no significant effect on sustainability of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Benue State Nigeria

From the regression result in table 5, the calculated t-value for strategic competence (STR) is 7.12, and is greater than the critical value of 1.96, and with p-value of .003 which is less than .05. It falls in the rejection region and hence, we will reject the first null hypothesis (H₀₁). The conclusion here is that strategic competence has significant and positive effect on sustainability of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Benue State Nigeria. The findings of this investigation also agree with that of Kaigama *et al.* (2023), NurHardiyah and Rodiah (2022), Danibrahim *et al.* (2022), Adamu (2020), amongst others; who all avers that entrepreneur's capacity to track the progress of strategic goals and set work priorities that are aligned with corporate objectives by recognizing long-term issues, dangers, or opportunities, and matching present actions to strategic objectives; creates avenues for sustaining competitiveness. They also argue that matching the results to the strategic goals, redesign the business to fully fulfill long-

term objectives, and analyze the costs and advantages of strategic measures; which help in broadening business understanding and thus enhance sustainability. Therefore, this study concludes that there is a positive/significant effect of strategic competence on sustainability of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Benue State Nigeria.

Hypothesis Two

Ho₂: Opportunity competence has no significant effect on sustainability of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Benue State Nigeria.

From the regression result in table 5, the calculated t-value for opportunity competence (OPP) is 9.13, and is greater than the critical value of 1.96, and with p-value of .012 which is less than .05. It falls in the rejection region and hence, we will reject the second null hypothesis (H₀₂). The conclusion here is that opportunity competence has significant and positive effect on sustainability of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Benue State Nigeria. The findings of this investigation also agree with that of Ganiyu *et al.* (2023), Kaigama *et al.* (2023), NurHardiyah and Rodiah (2022), Sakib *et al.* (2022), Akabike (2021), Adamu (2020), Akhigbe and Onuoha (2020), amongst others; who all avers that the capacity to discover goods and services that consumers desire, to discern the unmet need of consumers, to grasp genuine opportunities, and to offer the ultimate value to consumers enhances the firms' ability to respond timely to customers' needs. They further averred that entrepreneurs' capacity to perceive opportunities amid challenges distinguishes them from others. An entrepreneur's capacity for identifying, developing, and evaluating genuine market opportunities, shows a good correlation between entrepreneurs' opportunity competency and the success of SMEs. Therefore, this study concludes that there is a positive/significant effect of opportunity competence on sustainability of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Benue State Nigeria.

Hypotheses Three

Ho₃: Networking competence has no significant effect on sustainability of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Benue State Nigeria.

From the regression result in table 5, the calculated networking competence (NET) is 5.54, and is greater than the critical value of 1.96, and with p-value of .004 which is less than .05. It falls in the rejection region and hence, we will reject the fifth null hypothesis (H₀₅). The conclusion here is that networking competence has significant and positive effect on sustainability of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Benue State Nigeria. The findings of this investigation also agree with that of Ganiyu *et al.* (2023), NurHardiyah and Rodiah (2022), Akhigbe and Onuoha (2020), Yasir (2021), 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 have been linked to business understanding and prowess for sustainability. The entrepreneurial networks provide information about markets, new products, technologies, risk, and uncertainty about their product. Hence has links to increasing innovativeness and improved organizational responsiveness; thereby positioning the firm in a sustaining posture. Therefore, this study concludes that there is a positive/significant effect of networking competence on sustainability of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Benue State Nigeria

5.1 Conclusion

This study concludes that entrepreneurial competence (strategic competence, opportunity competence, operational competence, relationship competence, networking competence and learning competence) can be considered a potent factor in manufacturing small and medium enterprises sustainability (in terms of organizational responsiveness and competitiveness) as they have potentials for enhancing the firms sustainability through creating a conducive atmosphere for identifying opportunities across the marketplace and develop viable opportunities. Entrepreneurial competence can be seen to have implications for manufacturing small and medium enterprises to be able to enhance their innovativeness, respond to customers and environmental needs swiftly and increase their competitiveness. Hence, entrepreneurial competence has positive and significant effect on sustainability of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Benue State Nigeria.

5.2 Recommendations

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

- i. Management of manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises should continuously embrace strategic competence as an enabler through establishing, evaluating and executing firm's strategies, as it will enhance their sustainability towards delivering innovative products and keep the firm in a better competitive posture,
- ii. Management of manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises should focus on opportunity competences as an impetus to motivate the firms' staff in scanning and developing viable business by identifying new ideas for new products and response to problems or new market needs; as this will help improve and enhance organizations responsiveness and boost their sustainability.
- iii. 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 responsiveness and thus create a steady state of enhanced sustainability.

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