

Entrepreneurial Networking and the Performance of Women Entrepreneurs in the North Eastern Nigeria: The Role of Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

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Abstract: *This study investigated the relationship between entrepreneurial networking and the performance of women entrepreneurs in the north eastern Nigeria: the role of entrepreneurial ecosystem. Mentorship and advisory networks, strategic partnerships and alliances as well as continuous learning and personal development were used as dimensions of the independent variable. The study adopted the cross-sectional survey in its investigation of the variables. Primary source of data was generated through self-administered questionnaire. The population of this study comprises of three hundred (300) women entrepreneur under the Development Exchange Center, DEC North East Zonal Office. The sample size of the study of one hundred and sixty nine (169) was drawn from the target population using the Krecije and Morgan sample determination table. Descriptive and inferential statistics was used to analyze the data collected using the SPSS software. The hypotheses were tested using the Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Statistics. The tests were carried out at a 95% confidence interval and a 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that entrepreneurial networking had significant relationship with the performance of women entrepreneurs. Similarly, the dimensions adopted for this study all had significant relationships with the study's dependent variable. Entrepreneurial ecosystem significantly moderated the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The study recommends that a comprehensive survey or qualitative interviews should be conducted with women entrepreneurs to gather insights into their experiences with mentorship programs and advisory networks. Additionally, longitudinal studies can be conducted to assess the long-term impact of mentorship on business performance indicators such as revenue growth, profitability, and market expansion.*

Keywords: *Continuous Learning and Personal Development, Entrepreneurial Ecosystem, Entrepreneurial Networking, Mentorship and Advisory Networks, Performance of Women Entrepreneurs as well as Strategic Partnerships And Alliances*

INTRODUCTION

Building and keeping connections with other business owners, investors, and sector specialists is a crucial part of entrepreneurial networking. According to Gupta, Rubalcaba, Gupta, and Pereira (2022), successful entrepreneurial networking can give business owners access to information, chances, and tools that can help them grow their companies. However, specific obstacles that prevent women business owners in Nigeria's North Eastern area from engaging in efficient entrepreneurship networking (Adikaram & Razik, 2022). For women entrepreneurs, the North Eastern region of Nigeria offers a number of difficulties due to its extreme marginalisation and history of war. (Shallangwa & Wilson, 2022). Despite these obstacles, the area has a sizable number of

female business owners who are fostering economic growth. Foleu, Menzepo, and Bema Priso (2022) claim that these female business owners work in a range of industries, including production, retail, and agribusiness.

Women entrepreneurs in Nigeria's North Eastern area encounter significant obstacles that hinder their success. These difficulties include restricted financial access, societal and cultural barriers, and constrained networking possibilities. (Abd El Basset, Bell & Al Kharusi, 2022). The expansion and viability of women-owned companies in the area may be constrained by a lack of access to financing. Women's access to resources and chances is also restricted by cultural and societal barriers, and they have less opportunity to network and build relationships with other business owners, investors, and industry specialists. According to Dabi, Dana, Nziku, and Ramadani (2022), the entrepreneurial ecosystem can be crucial in tackling these issues and fostering the success of women business owners in Nigeria's North Eastern area. The entrepreneurial ecosystem consists of different players and tools that encourage entrepreneurship, such as laws, banks, services for developing businesses, and incubators and startups. (Kansheba, Marobhe & Wald, 2022). The effectiveness of women business owners in Nigeria's North Eastern area can be greatly impacted by the power of the entrepreneurial environment.

It is impossible to overstate the significance of women's business because it can have a significant impact on Nigeria's North Eastern region's economic progress and development. However, the region's female business owners encounter numerous obstacles that hinder their success. (Fattah & Al Halbusi, 2022). The entrepreneurial ecosystem must be reinforced to give women business owners in Nigeria's North Eastern area the tools and assistance they need to overcome these obstacles. The entrepreneurial environment can assist women entrepreneurs in overcoming obstacles and fostering their success by giving them access to these tools. (Ojo, Mafimisebi & Arndt, 2022).

This study aims to examine the role of the entrepreneurial ecosystem in promoting entrepreneurial networking among women entrepreneurs in the North Eastern region of Nigeria and its impact on their business performance. By exploring the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in the region and the support provided by the entrepreneurial ecosystem, this study aims to provide insights into how to promote the success of women entrepreneurs in the North Eastern region of Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Women entrepreneurs are essential to the process of fostering economic growth and development, which is largely due to the fact that entrepreneurship is one of the most important drivers of economic growth and development. Nevertheless, despite the growing number of women entrepreneurs in Nigeria, they continue to encounter a great number of obstacles, specifically in the country's North Eastern Region. (Alozie & Ekumankama, 2022). Women business owners in the region experience significant challenges in gaining access to the information, resources, and support they need to develop their companies. One of these challenges is the difficulty of effectively networking with other business owners. Entrepreneurial networking, as described by Orrensalo, Ghorbanian Zolbin, and Nikou (2022), is regarded as an essential component of the success of a business due to the fact that it enables business owners to gain access to important information, resources, and opportunities. Nevertheless, there are significant

obstacles standing in the way of successful networking for female businesspeople in Nigeria's North Eastern Region.

It is essential that the environment for entrepreneurs play a part in both the promotion of entrepreneurship and the facilitation of networking opportunities for entrepreneurs. However, the entrepreneurial environment in the North Eastern Region of Nigeria is both underdeveloped and fragmented, which creates significant difficulties for women who want to start their own businesses. The region's ongoing security concerns have resulted in substantial economic upheaval and societal upheaval, both of which have contributed to the ecosystem's underdevelopment, which has been made worse by these factors. Women business owners in this region encounter a number of obstacles, many of which are made more difficult by the fact that they do not have access to the types of supportive infrastructure that would otherwise be available to them, such as funding, markets, or business development services. Given the region's difficult environment and underdeveloped entrepreneurial ecosystem, the problem that needs to be solved is how to encourage entrepreneurial networking among women business owners in Nigeria's North Eastern Region. It is necessary to gain an understanding of the obstacles that women entrepreneurs experience when it comes to networking and the ways in which the entrepreneurial ecosystem can be harnessed to find solutions to these obstacles.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study would be to examine the relationship between entrepreneurial networking and the performance of women entrepreneurs in the North Eastern Nigeria: The role of entrepreneurial ecosystem. Specifically, the study objectives would include:

- . To determine the relationship between mentorship and advisory networks and the performance of women entrepreneurs in the North Eastern Nigeria
- . To evaluate the relationship between strategic partnerships and alliances and the performance of women entrepreneurs in the North Eastern Nigeria
- . To investigate the relationship between continuous learning and personal development and the performance of women entrepreneurs in the North Eastern Nigeria
- . To determine the role of entrepreneurial ecosystem on relationship between entrepreneurial networking and the performance of women entrepreneurs in the North Eastern Nigeria

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

Network Theory

Network theory, also known as social network theory, is a framework that emphasizes the significance of social networks and relationships in enabling entrepreneurial activity. Network theory was developed by social network theorists. (Kane, Alavi, Labianca & Borgatti, 2014). According to the theory of networks, businesspeople who have access to a wide variety of supportive networks are more likely to be successful than their counterparts who do not. (Godwin, Stevens & Brenner, 2006). This theory proposes that an entrepreneur's standing within a network, in addition to the structure of the network itself, can have a substantial influence on the ability of the entrepreneur to gain access to resources, opportunities, and support. According to Smith and Lohrke (2008), the fundamental premise of network theory is that social relationships are a crucial resource

for business owners and businesspeople. Entrepreneurs who have access to robust and diverse networks can leverage those relationships to gain access to knowledge, experience, and other resources that are important to starting and developing a successful business. These networks can consist of a wide variety of individuals, including but not limited to other business owners, investors, teachers, advisers, and industry specialists. The composition of the network is another important factor that influences the results of entrepreneurial endeavors.

According to Hatala (2006), network theory hypothesizes that dense networks, or networks with a high degree of connectedness, are more likely to make it easier for members of the network to share information and resources. These dense networks have the potential to foster a feeling of confidence and social capital among network members, which in turn can make cooperation and collaboration easier to achieve. (Antcliff, Saundry & Stuart, 2007). Nevertheless, network theory acknowledges the significance of variation among the nodes that make up a network. When compared to diverse networks, those that are too homogeneous may restrict an entrepreneur's access to new ideas and perspectives, whereas diverse networks may introduce entrepreneurs to a wider variety of possibilities and points of view. In addition, an entrepreneur's ability to form relationships with people who work in industries or sectors other than their own can help them gain access to new resources and information that may not be accessible within their immediate network. (Carter, Brush, Greene, Gatewood & Hart, 2003).

In general, network theory emphasizes the significance of social relationships and networks in the process of making entrepreneurial activity possible. Those business owners who can cultivate extensive and varied networks have a better chance of gaining access to the vital resources, information, and support they need to be successful. This information can be used by policymakers and support organizations to develop strategies to encourage networking among entrepreneurs and to nurture the development of entrepreneurial ecosystems that are supportive of entrepreneurial endeavors.

The Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory

According to the resource-based view (RBV) theory, a company's competitive advantage stems from its own unique resources and capabilities, rather than from exterior variables like the state of the market or the composition of the industry. (Grant, 1991). The RBV theory can be helpful to entrepreneurs in understanding the significance of leveraging their unique resources and capabilities to create a sustainable competitive advantage and flourish in the market when applied within the context of the ecosystem that surrounds them and their businesses. Entrepreneurs who operate within an entrepreneurial environment are required to have the ability to recognize and acquire the resources and competencies they need to be successful. (Zahra & Nambisan, 2012) These competencies and resources can include a wide variety of assets, such as financial resources, human capital, intellectual property, network relationships, and technological infrastructure, amongst others.

In addition, the entrepreneurial ecosystem is made up of many different players, such as startup companies, investors, accelerators, the government, institutions, and others. In this context, the RBV theory can also assist business owners in understanding how to develop relationships with other actors in the ecosystem and how to leverage those relationships to acquire additional resources and capabilities that may not be accessible internally. (Cai, Hughes, & Yin, 2014) An entrepreneur who possesses a one-of-a-kind technology, for instance, might make use of relationships with financiers to acquire financing to further develop and commercialize the technology. In a similar vein, an entrepreneur who has a robust network can leverage relationships with other players in the ecosystem to gain access to new markets or consumers by leveraging those relationships. (Spigel & Harrison, 2018).

In general, the RBV theory gives entrepreneurs a structure that they can use to recognize and make the most of the specific resources and competencies that are unique to them in order to establish a competitive advantage within the ecosystem of the entrepreneurial economy. Entrepreneurs can surmount the challenges posed by the environment and achieve success in the market if they make effective use of the resources and capabilities at their disposal.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a type of survey instrument that can take on a variety of shapes and be used in several settings. Thoughts are organized and theoretical qualifications are determined with its assistance. A reasonable structure will make suggestions about the connections between the variables that are being considered and will graphically or diagrammatically demonstrate those suggestions. (Litster, Hurst, & Cardoso, 2023). Performance is the dependent variable, entrepreneurial networking is the independent variable, and the entrepreneurial environment would serve as the intermediate variable in this study.

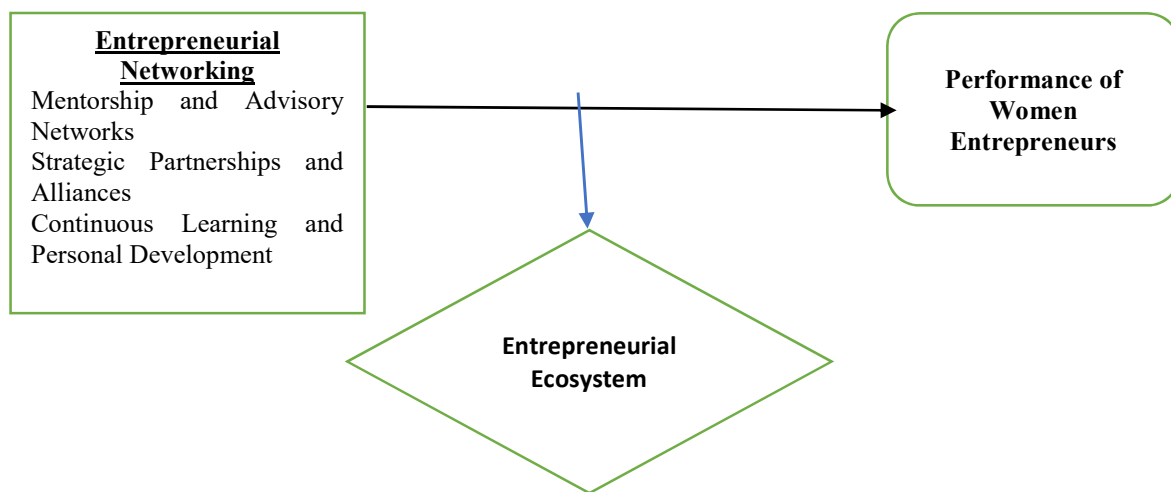


Fig.1 Conceptual Framework showing the Relationship between Study Variables
Source: Desk Research, 2023.

Performance of Women Entrepreneurs

According to Raman, Subramaniam, Nair, Shivdas, Achuthan, and Nedungadi (2022), the performance of women entrepreneurs is defined as the capacity of women-led enterprises to accomplish their intended outcomes, such as revenue, growth, market share, and sustainability. [Citation needed] In comparison to their male counterparts, women entrepreneurs experience a distinct set of challenges, such as restricted access to financial and human resources, social and cultural biases, and a dearth of support and networking opportunities. (Adikaram & Razik, 2022). According to the findings of some studies, companies run by women are more likely to bring in fewer profits and fewer investments than companies run by men; however, these companies are frequently more innovative, have a greater positive societal effect, and create more jobs (Adim, Tamunomiebi, Akintokunbo & Adubasim, 2018).

A greater degree of risk aversion and a more collaborative leadership style have been found to be associated with female entrepreneurs, both of which have been found to contribute to the success of female entrepreneurs. (Franzke, Wu, Froese & Chan, 2022). The success of female business owners can be evaluated using a number of different metrics, including revenue growth, profitability, customer satisfaction, employee retention, and societal effect. (Maziriri, Nyagadza, & Chuchu, 2022). It is possible that in order for women business owners to enhance their performance, they will need access to resources such as business training, mentoring, networking opportunities, and financial choices. Improving the performance of female entrepreneurs can have beneficial repercussions not only for individual companies but also for the economy as a whole and society as a whole by fostering gender equality, economic growth, and societal advancement.

Concept of Entrepreneurial Networking

The term "entrepreneurial networking" refers to the practise of cultivating and establishing relationships with other business owners, professionals, and organisations for the purpose of acquiring the information, support, and resources necessary to launch or expand an existing enterprise. (Olawunmi & Clarke, 2022). Networking is an essential component of entrepreneurship due to the fact that it provides business owners with the opportunity to gain access to the information, capabilities, and resources they need to be successful in their endeavours. There are many different avenues through which one can engage in entrepreneurial networking, including going to conventions, becoming a member of trade organizations, taking part in online communities, and forming partnerships with other companies. (Ren & Liu, 2022). By participating in these networks, aspiring business owners increase their chances of gaining access to important resources such as financiers, prospective consumers, and suppliers.

Effective business networking requires not only the formation of relationships but also the cultivation of confidence, cooperation, and the promotion of both parties' interests. Because networking is a two-way process, business owners should look for ways to contribute worth to the lives of others in addition to soliciting assistance from their peers. (Kwon & Namkung, 2022). This can be accomplished by providing others in their network with business guidance, encouraging collaboration among those enterprises, and sharing resources. The ability to access resources and assistance for one's business can be particularly difficult for women and members of underrepresented groups in business,

making networking an especially vital activity for these types of business owners. Putting together a robust entrepreneurship network can be of great assistance to these business owners in overcoming some of these obstacles and gaining access to the resources they require to be successful. (Gupta, Rubalcaba, Gupta & Pereira, 2022).

In general, networking is a useful method for entrepreneurs to obtain information, support, and resources for their businesses, and it can contribute to the success of their businesses over the long term.

Concept of Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

The term "entrepreneurial ecosystem" alludes to the interconnected network of individuals, resources, and organisations that foster the birth and expansion of new enterprises. (Ianioglo, 2022). Entrepreneurs, financiers, government agencies, educational institutions, research organizations, and support organisations such as incubators, accelerators, and mentorship programmes are some of the numerous stakeholders that make up the entrepreneurship ecosystem. An entrepreneurship ecosystem that is healthy provides an environment in which aspiring business owners have access to the resources, skills, and networks that are necessary for their success. (Ianioglo, 2022). This includes having access to funding, having a mentor, receiving instruction for running a business, conducting research and development, and having assistance for complying with regulatory requirements.

According to Henn, Terzidis, Kuschel, and Alsua (2022), a well-functioning entrepreneurship environment can promote creativity, economic development, and the creation of new jobs. In addition to this, it has the potential to contribute to the growth of a thriving and diversified business community by luring and maintaining individuals with entrepreneurial ability. An entrepreneurship ecosystem is not constrained by physical borders and can function on many different levels, including the local, regional, national, and international levels. (Daniel, de Villiers Scheepers, Miles & de Klerk, 2022). It is common practise to determine the success of an entrepreneurial environment by looking at metrics such as the number of new businesses that are launched, the expansion of established businesses, the amount of investment, and the calibre of the available labour force.

The various stakeholders in an entrepreneurship ecosystem need to work together and synchronise their efforts in order to foster the growth of new businesses. This will allow the ecosystem to become more robust. (Bertello, Battisti, De Bernardi & Bresciani, 2022). This can involve aligning policies, strategies, and programmes to create an environment that is conducive to entrepreneurship; fostering a culture that encourages creativity and risk-taking; and providing access to the necessary resources and support.

Empirical Reviews on the Relationship between Entrepreneurial Networking and the Performance of Women Entrepreneurs: The Role of Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

There have been several empirical studies examining the relationship between entrepreneurial networking and the performance of women entrepreneurs, with a focus on the role of the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Here are a few examples:

Jha and Alam, (2022) investigated the relationship between entrepreneurial networking, access to resources, and the performance of women entrepreneurs in developing countries. They found that access to resources mediated the relationship between

entrepreneurial networking and performance, and that the strength of the entrepreneurial ecosystem played a significant role in determining access to resources. Saleem, Lodhi and Asif, (2022) examined the relationship between entrepreneurial networking, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, and the performance of women entrepreneurs. The researchers found that both networking and self-efficacy were positively related to performance, and that the strength of the entrepreneurial ecosystem moderated the relationship between networking and self-efficacy.

Silvano and Mbogo, (2022) examined the role of social networks in the performance of women entrepreneurs in the United States. The researchers found that the size and diversity of a woman entrepreneur's social network positively influenced their performance, and that the strength of the entrepreneurial ecosystem played a significant role in facilitating the formation of strong and diverse networks. Babajide, Obembe, Solomon and Woldesenbet, (2022) examines the role of entrepreneurial networking and access to resources in the performance of women entrepreneurs in developing countries, and finds that the strength of the entrepreneurial ecosystem plays a significant role in determining access to resources.

Pospisil and Zavodna, (2022) examines the use and impact of business networks among male and female entrepreneurs in Ghana, and finds that women entrepreneurs benefit less from their networks than men, largely due to differences in the strength of the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Zhao, Lin, Knerr-Sievers, Lu and Mardani, (2023) examines the role of entrepreneurial networks in the performance of women entrepreneurs in Ethiopia, and finds that the government can play a positive role in strengthening the entrepreneurial ecosystem and facilitating access to resources.

Tuan, (2023) examines the relationship between entrepreneurial networking, gender, and firm performance in Vietnam, and finds that women entrepreneurs benefit more from their networks than men, particularly in terms of access to knowledge and information. Khuong, Anh, Quyen and Thao, (2022) examines the relationship between entrepreneurial networking, gender, and innovation among women entrepreneurs in India, and finds that networking positively influences innovation among women entrepreneurs.

Setini, Yasa, Supartha, Giantari and Rajiani, (2020) examines the role of social networks in the performance of women entrepreneurs in developing countries, and finds that strong and diverse networks can help women entrepreneurs overcome gender-related barriers and improve their performance. Coleman, Henry, Orser, Foss and Welter, (2019) compares the networking behaviors and growth trajectories of women entrepreneurs in the United States and Ireland, and finds that access to resources and the strength of the entrepreneurial ecosystem play a significant.

Ikechukwu, James, Usman and Ekwutoziam, (2021) examined the relationship between entrepreneurial ecosystems and performance of women entrepreneurs in Development Exchange Centre (DEC) Bauchi office-Nigeria and found that entrepreneurial ecosystems has a positive and significant relationship with innovativeness and task accomplishment as measures of performance.

The study had the following hypotheses

H01: There is no significant relationship between mentorship and advisory networks and the performance of women entrepreneurs in the North Eastern Nigeria

H02: There is no significant relationship between strategic partnerships and alliances and the performance of women entrepreneurs in the North Eastern Nigeria

- H03: There is no significant relationship between continuous learning and personal development and the performance of women entrepreneurs in the North Eastern Nigeria
- H04: Entrepreneurial ecosystem does not play a significant role on relationship between entrepreneurial networking and the performance of women entrepreneurs in the North Eastern Nigeria

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out using the cross sectional research design. The population of this study comprises of three hundred (300) women entrepreneur under the Development Exchange Center, DEC North East Zonal Office. The sample size of the study of one hundred and sixty nine (169) was drawn from the target population using the Krecije and Morgan sample determination table. The study made use of primary data collection (questionnaire) which was administered to the respondents by the researchers. Descriptive and inferential statistics was used to analyze the data collected using the SPSS software to analyze the questionnaire statements and test the hypotheses.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The Spearman rank order correlation tool was used to analyze the primary data with a 95 percent confidence level. The tests specifically address the null forms of hypotheses H01, H02 and H03, of which were bivariate. To conduct the analysis, we used the Spearman Rank (ρ) statistic. The probability of accepting the null hypothesis at ($p > 0.05$) or rejecting the null hypothesis at ($p < 0.05$) is determined by the use of the 0.05 significance level as the criterion.

Table 1 Correlation Matrix for Entrepreneurial Networking and Performance of Women Entrepreneurs

| | | | Performance of Women Entrepreneurs | Mentorship and Advisory Networks | Strategic Partnerships and Alliances | Continuous Learning And Personal Development |
|--------------------------------------|---|-------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Spearman's rho | Performance of Women Entrepreneurs | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000 | .876** | .740** | .578** |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | .000 | .000 | .000 |
| | | N | 136 | 136 | 136 | 136 |
| | Mentorship and Advisory Networks | Correlation Coefficient | .876** | 1.000 | .730** | .478** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | . | .000 | .000 | |
| | N | 136 | 136 | 136 | 136 | |
| Strategic Partnerships and Alliances | Strategic Partnerships and Alliances | Correlation Coefficient | .740** | .730** | 1.000 | .755** |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | . | .000 |
| | | N | 136 | 136 | 136 | 136 |
| | Continuous Learning And Personal Development | Correlation Coefficient | .578** | .478** | .755** | 1.000 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | .000 | . | |
| | N | 136 | 136 | 136 | 136 | |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output

The table above illustrates the test for the three previously postulated bivariate hypothetical statements.

H01: There is no significant relationship between mentorship and advisory networks and the performance of women entrepreneurs in the North Eastern Nigeria

The correlation coefficient (r) shows that there is a significant and positive relationship between mentorship and advisory networks and the performance of women entrepreneurs. The ρ value 0.876 indicates this relationship and it is significant at p $0.000 < 0.05$. The correlation coefficient represents a high correlation indicating a strong

relationship. Therefore, based on empirical findings the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between mentorship and advisory networks and the performance of women entrepreneurs in the North Eastern Nigeria.

H02: There is no significant relationship between strategic partnerships and alliances and the performance of women entrepreneurs in the North Eastern Nigeria

The correlation coefficient (r) shows that there is a significant and positive relationship between strategic partnerships and alliances and the performance of women entrepreneurs. The ρ value 0.740 indicates this relationship and it is significant at $p < 0.000 < 0.05$. The correlation coefficient represents a high correlation indicating a strong relationship. Therefore, based on empirical findings the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between strategic partnerships and alliances and the performance of women entrepreneurs in the North Eastern Nigeria.

H03: There is no significant relationship between continuous learning and personal development and the performance of women entrepreneurs in the North Eastern Nigeria

The correlation coefficient (r) shows that there is a significant and positive relationship between continuous learning and personal development and the performance of women entrepreneurs. The ρ value 0.578 indicates this relationship and it is significant at $p < 0.000 < 0.05$. The correlation coefficient represents a high correlation indicating a strong relationship. Therefore, based on empirical findings the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between continuous learning and personal development and the performance of women entrepreneurs in the North Eastern Nigeria.

Multivariate Analysis

The multivariate analysis in this section examines the perceived role of entrepreneurial ecosystem on relationship between entrepreneurial networking and the performance of women entrepreneurs. The partial correlation technique was used in testing the moderating effect.

Table 2: Correlations Matrix for Entrepreneurial Ecosystem as a Moderating Variable

| Control Variables | | | Entrepreneurial Networking | Performance | Entrepreneurial Ecosystem |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|
| -none ^a | Entrepreneurial Networking | Correlation | 1.000 | .830 | .743 |
| | | Significance (2-tailed) | . | .000 | .000 |
| | | df | 0 | 167 | 167 |
| | Performance | Correlation | .830 | 1.000 | .713 |
| | | Significance (2-tailed) | .000 | . | .000 |
| | | df | 167 | 0 | 167 |
| Entrepreneurial Ecosystem | Correlation | .743 | .713 | 1.000 | |
| | Significance (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | . | |
| | df | 167 | 167 | 0 | |
| Entrepreneurial Ecosystem | Entrepreneurial Networking | Correlation | 1.000 | .640 | |
| | | Significance (2-tailed) | . | .000 | |
| | | df | 0 | 166 | |
| | Performance | Correlation | .640 | 1.000 | |
| | | Significance (2-tailed) | .000 | . | |
| | | df | 166 | 0 | |

a. Cells contain zero-order (Pearson) correlations.

Source: SPSS 23.0 data output, 2024

The table suggests that there are positive relationships between entrepreneurial networking, performance, and entrepreneurial ecosystem. However, the relationships between entrepreneurial networking and entrepreneurial ecosystem, and performance and entrepreneurial ecosystem become weaker or even not significant after controlling for unspecified control variables. This suggests that the unspecified control variables may explain some of the relationships between these variables.

Discussion of Findings

This study using inferential statistical methods examined the relationship between entrepreneurial networking and the performance of women entrepreneurs in the north eastern Nigeria: the role of entrepreneurial ecosystem. The findings revealed a positive

significant relationship between entrepreneurial networking and the performance of women entrepreneurs and that entrepreneurial ecosystem moderated the relationship between them. The findings of this study are in line with the study of Jha and Alam, (2022) who found that access to resources mediated the relationship between entrepreneurial networking and performance, and that the strength of the entrepreneurial ecosystem played a significant role in determining access to resources. Saleem, Lodhi and Asif, (2022) also found that both networking and self-efficacy were positively related to performance, and that the strength of the entrepreneurial ecosystem moderated the relationship between networking and self-efficacy.

Silvano and Mbogo, (2022) found that the size and diversity of a woman entrepreneur's social network positively influenced their performance, and that the strength of the entrepreneurial ecosystem played a significant role in facilitating the formation of strong and diverse networks. Babajide, Obembe, Solomon and Woldesenbet, (2022) concluded that the strength of the entrepreneurial ecosystem plays a significant role in determining access to resources. Pospisil and Zavodna, (2022) found out that women entrepreneurs benefit less from their networks than men, largely due to differences in the strength of the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study delving into entrepreneurial networking and its impact on the performance of women entrepreneurs in North Eastern Nigeria underscores the pivotal role of the entrepreneurial ecosystem in shaping the success trajectories of women-led businesses. Through an examination of networking dynamics within the region's entrepreneurial landscape, it becomes evident that women entrepreneurs face unique challenges and opportunities influenced by the broader ecosystem in which they operate. By elucidating the intricate interplay between entrepreneurial networking and performance outcomes, the study highlights the importance of fostering supportive environments, facilitating access to resources, and promoting collaborative relationships among women entrepreneurs to catalyze their growth and resilience in the face of socio-economic constraints and adversities.

Furthermore, the findings underscore the imperative for policymakers, business support organizations, and stakeholders to prioritize the development of inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems that empower and enable women entrepreneurs to thrive. By fostering a conducive environment that fosters networking, mentorship, and knowledge exchange, North Eastern Nigeria can harness the untapped potential of its women entrepreneurs, driving economic growth, social empowerment, and sustainable development in the region. As such, investing in initiatives that enhance entrepreneurial networking capabilities and address systemic barriers faced by women entrepreneurs is not only imperative for advancing gender equality and women's economic empowerment but also essential for unlocking the full potential of the region's entrepreneurial ecosystem and driving inclusive growth.

The following recommendations were made:

- i. A comprehensive survey or qualitative interviews should be conducted with women entrepreneurs to gather insights into their experiences with mentorship programs and advisory networks. Additionally, longitudinal studies can be conducted to

- assess the long-term impact of mentorship on business performance indicators such as revenue growth, profitability, and market expansion.
- ii. Conduct case studies with women entrepreneurs who have engaged in strategic partnerships or alliances. These studies can explore the motivations, challenges, and outcomes of forming such partnerships, as well as the impact on business performance metrics such as market share, innovation, and competitive advantage.
 - iii. Design surveys to assess the extent of women entrepreneurs' engagement in continuous learning activities such as workshops, training programs, and professional development opportunities. Longitudinal studies can be employed to track changes in business performance metrics over time in relation to the level of investment in continuous learning and personal development initiatives.
 - iv. Conduct quantitative analyses using structural equation modeling or regression techniques. Surveys can be administered to women entrepreneurs to measure their networking activities, perceptions of the entrepreneurial ecosystem, and business performance outcomes. Additionally, qualitative research can be conducted to gain deeper insights into the contextual factors shaping the relationship between entrepreneurial networking, the entrepreneurial ecosystem, and business performance among women entrepreneurs in the region.

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