

Entrepreneurial Locus of Control and Competitive Advantages of SMES in Rivers State, Nigeria

Ifeoma Regina Ohazulumeh¹ and B. Chima Onuoha²

¹Doctoral Student, Department of Management, University of Port Harcourt

²Professor of Management, Department of Management, University of Port Harcourt

Abstract: *This study determined the relationship between entrepreneurial locus of control and competitive advantage of SMEs in Port Harcourt. The aim of the study was to examine the relationship between entrepreneurial locus of control and competitive advantage of SMEs in Port Harcourt. A total of four hundred (400) copies of questionnaires were distributed, out of which three hundred and ten (355) copies were regarded valid for analysis. The Spearman rank correlation coefficient tool was used with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 23.0). The findings revealed that entrepreneurial locus of control significantly relates with competitive advantage. It was concluded that entrepreneurs should develop high sense of internal locus of control and also possess some element of external source of responsibility as such will help them boost the level of competitiveness of the organization. The study recommended that the entrepreneur should develop a high sense of internal locus of control as such will help enhance their innovativeness.*

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial Locus of Control, Competitive Advantage, Internal locus of control, External locus of control, Innovativeness, Differentiation.*

1.0 Introduction

The goal of entrepreneurship is to create employment opportunities and become a global economic rival. Entrepreneurship's benefits can help the economy grow by making life better, creating new jobs, boosting sector productivity, boosting economic growth, making it easier for people to move up the social ladder, and so on. Rotter (1966), the concept of locus of control (LOC) refers to a person's belief that they have power or influence over the occurrences in their life. The findings of Holt et al. (2001), locus of control is a predictor of behavior. Rotter's (1966) research, there are two levels of locus of control both inside and outside According to Graffeo and Silvestri (2006), people with internal locus of control attribute their ability to control events to aspects of themselves, such as emotions and behaviors. A person having an external locus of control, on the other hand attributes controls to external factors like their environment (Graffeo and Silvestri, 2006). According to Khan et al., (2014) the diversity of low locus of control has a negative correlation with entrepreneurial team effectiveness and efficiency. According to Carland et al., (1984) people who want to work as entrepreneurs possess an internal locus of control more frequently (rather than an external one and are more willing to take moderate risks). According to Kebaili et al., (2015) innovativeness is characterized as observing and utilizing a novel business strategy. Similar studies have been carried out on locus of control and performance (Chen, et. al. 2016; Zaidi, &

Mohsin, 2013). Hence this serves as our gap in literature and therefore opens up for our point of departure.

Research Problem

Small and medium-sized businesses now face increased levels of competition resulting from the shift in the competitive nature of the marketing environment (Olannye & Eromafuru . 2016). Numerous academics, business owners, and employees of entrepreneurial companies are increasingly concerned about the necessity for a reasonable comprehension of the entrepreneurial locus of control and its application to such businesses. The competitive advantage of small and medium-sized businesses has been diminished on account of inadequate attention paid to entrepreneurial practices like proactiveness, prudent risk-taking, ingenuity, utilising resources, concentrating on the consumer, focusing on opportunities, and creating value.

While numerous researchers have investigated the ways in which the dimensions of entrepreneurial locus of control can be used to strengthen small and medium-sized firms' ability to compete, virtually no one has explained or linked the contributions of each entrepreneurial locus of control dimension to the competitive advantage of Small and medium-sized businesses in River State. As a result, the primary goal regarding this study is to answer the question of how much the entrepreneurial locus of control affects the competitive advantage of Small and Medium-sized businesses in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to ascertain the empirical relationship between entrepreneurial locus of control and competitive advantage of SMEs in Rivers State. However, the specific objectives are;

- i. Ascertain the relationship between internal locus of control and competitive advantage
- ii. Know the relationship between external locus of control and competitive advantage

Research Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between internal locus of control and innovativeness of SMEs in Rivers State

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between internal locus of control and differentiation of SMEs in Rivers State

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between external locus of control and innovativeness of SMEs in Rivers State

H₀₄: There is no significant relationship between external locus of control and differentiation of SMEs in Rivers State

Operational framework

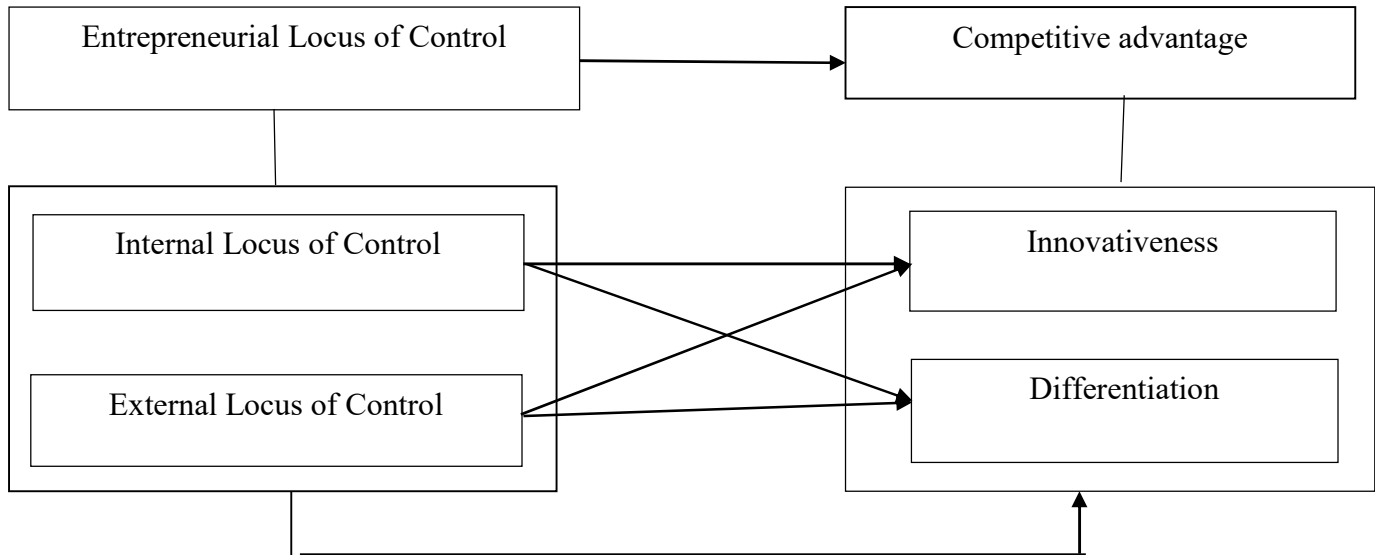


Fig. 1.1 Operational Framework of Entrepreneurial Locus of Control and Competitive advantage

Source: Researchers operationalization

2.0 Review of Related Literature

The theory underpinning this study is the resource-advantage theory. According to Almansour (2012), Resource-Advantage Theory is an evolutionary process theory of competition in which each company in a sector is a distinct entity in both time and space due to its history. Organizational culture, knowledge, and competencies are all included in the theory's broad definition of resources, and it argues that many of these non-economic resources are replicable rather than scarce (Aliyu, 2014). It is a theory that clearly allows entrepreneurship as well as conventional marketing strategies. Entrepreneurship can facilitate firms' ability to create new resources and greatly enhance the productivity of existing resources (a) through the various leveraging approaches mentioned earlier and (b) by championing innovation in the form of new combinations of resources, which is consistent with the dynamics of competition under R-A theory. The R-A theory of competition is centered on sustainable innovation, which suggests that marketing plays a role in leading and supporting an organization's innovation portfolio (Aliyu, 2014). Product, service, and process innovations of this kind make up a portfolio that reflects varying degrees of risk and innovativeness. In addition, one of the most significant roles of marketing within the framework of R-A theory would be the continuous search for new markets in which the company's resources provide a comparative advantage. In addition, according to R-A theory, when resource portfolios place businesses at a competitive disadvantage, they must first learn and then adjust.

Entrepreneurial Locus of Control

Locus of control plays a crucial role in determining how someone views their surroundings. Although locus of control has a tendency to motivate people, it also has other benefits (Zigarmi et al., 2018). Locus of control is more interested in who or what is in charge of a person's outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 1985). People who have an internal locus of control have a high tendency to believe that their actions influence rewards or outcomes (Mueller & Thomas, 2001). As such, people are more inclined to adhere to their skills, effort, and abilities. Such people tend to face problems and obstacles positively by using constructive solutions (Luthans, Avey, Avolio, Norman, & Combs, 2006). They, therefore, show higher levels of achievement and exhibit the enthusiasm to acquire and enhance their knowledge and capabilities (Hsiao et al., 2016). It follows then, that this belief in their effort or abilities (Mueller & Thomas, 2001) to influence outcomes will make them more proactive and alert to entrepreneurial opportunities. In contrast, those with an external locus of control think their rewards are beyond them. (Hsiao et al., 2016). As a result, people frequently attribute personal successes or results to outside forces like luck (Ng et al., 2006). Hence, their ability to recognize opportunities may be impeded by their belief in luck rather than effort. Therefore, we argue that locus of control will have a significant impact on how aspiring entrepreneurs look for opportunities. This is because aspiring entrepreneurs who recognize themselves as having control demonstrate alertness, confidence and persistence in pursuit of goals (Ng et al., 2006). These are critical elements that were demonstrated to be very important in the OR process (Ardichvili et al., 2003).

According to Luthans and Youssef (2007), those who exercise internal locus of control frequently uphold positive values and are committed to self-improvement. People who have an internal locus of control use their skills and knowledge to solve problems on their own when they face obstacles. According to Seligman (1998), people who have an internal locus of control typically believe that effort leads to success and that they can control the future. As a result, individuals who have an internal locus of control actively cultivate competencies and skills to enhance their human capital. Increasing human capital can have a positive impact on entrepreneurship because difficulties and challenges are common during the entrepreneurial process (Stuetzer et al., 2013).

According to Bygrave & Zacharakis (2009), skilled and competent entrepreneurs have access to a significant amount of resources that enhance their entrepreneurial performance and competitive advantages. According to these assertions, individuals with an internal locus of control are more motivated to achieve than individuals with an external locus of control. People who have an internal locus of control focus their efforts on learning when they encounter a challenge; enhancing their existing skills, experiences, and knowledge; and enhancing their human resources. According to Brandstatter (2011), human capital that is, experience, knowledge, and ability is a substantial factor in the promotion of entrepreneurship.

Competitive Advantage

According to Bateman and Snell (2004), businesses acquire an edge over others by performing valuable services for their clients at a higher level than their rivals. There are numerous ways to define competitive advantage. For instance, according to Porter (1985), "competitive advantage" is the market's comparative positional advantage that enables a company to outdo its competitors.

In contrast, Rothaermel (2013) defines competitive advantage as the manner in which a company develops and implements a strategy that results in superior performance in comparison to other businesses operating in the same sector. According to Thompson (2001), a company's ability to provide greater value to more clients than its rivals places it in a stance of relative advantage. Companies can, however, adopt one of two strategies to gain a competitive advantage: differentiation of their products or cost leadership to develop products and services of higher quality or to meet customer needs at a lower cost (Gathenya, 2012; Otieno, 2012) According to Gebauer, Fischer, and Fleisch (2010), higher service quality can be achieved by placing a strong emphasis on service differentiation. However, the vast majority of customers are oblivious of the actual production cost of the goods they purchase. They simply have an internal sensitivity about the value of particular products for them. As a result, the customer's desire to spend money on a good or service ultimately depends on how much they value it. It makes sense to say that competitive advantage is a company's developed strategy to provide additional superior value that best meets consumer needs, giving the company an advantage over other competitors.

Innovativeness

According to Santas-vijande & Alvavez (2001), the term "innovativeness" refers to proactive businesses that look for new opportunities rather than merely focusing on their existing strengths. As a result, it appears that innovativeness is a necessary component of an innovative effort that is capable of exceeding the expectations of customers. Innovation, as described by Lumpkin and Dess (1996), includes the cultivation of a creative spirit, the encouragement of research and development, experimenting, the creation of novel procedures, the introduction of novel goods and services, and technological leadership. The company is able to give attention to concepts that produced fresh markets, products, or processes through innovation-oriented marketing actions. Employees, including salespeople, to a greater extent adopt and incorporate innovative practices into their sales processes in companies with high levels of innovation (Hogan & Coote, 2014; Matsuo, 2009). A collective knowledge structure emerges within an organization on account of constantly pursuing novel approaches. This structure ultimately aids employees in absorbing this knowledge and applying it when necessary (Chen & Huang, 2010). According to Cui & Wu (2016), customers of highly innovative businesses also begin to anticipate frequent innovations and more inclined to participate in the innovation process. According to Banbury & Mitchell (1995), businesses with high levels of innovativeness therefore frequently have the ability to diversify into new markets and increase sales by developing new products and services that increase sales among existing customers. As a result, we anticipate significant sales growth for highly innovative businesses.

Differentiation

Amonini et al. (2010) indicate that professional service companies are attempting to obtain an advantage over competitors and superior performance by distinguishing themselves through improved service quality and value, the creation of brands with solid reputations, and the establishment of long-term relationships. It has been argued that businesses that are able to provide buyers with substantial value in a way that their competitors are unable to offer a greater likelihood

to be successful at retaining customers (Kim and Mauborgne, 2005). Although differentiation is not the subject of a substantial expanse of research, it has been argued that According to Bharadway et al. (1993), differentiation is the perception of the company's customers that it consistently differs against its rivals in important attributes. Differentiation in service is crucial to the success of business relationships. In business-to-business relationships, Cannon and Omburg (2001) consider the possibility of cost-based differentiation. In accordance with Cannon and Homburg (2001), we concentrate on the significance of service differentiation in the production of significant relationship outcomes.

Empirical Review

In their study, Mohammed and Rusinah (2017) found that financing support moderated the impact of entrepreneurial orientation on competitive advantage in Iraqi SMEs. The study sought to investigate the moderated role of financial support (FNC) between the influences of entrepreneurial orientations on CMA and the relationship between entrepreneurial orientations and competitive advantage (CMA). Using survey instruments, the study took a quantitative approach. The sample size that was used was 680 managers from 3526 SMEs that were employed by the Kurdistan Region Government (KRG) in Iraq. There were 580 questionnaires that could be used. The variables' relationship was examined using structural equation modeling. The statistical result demonstrated that CMA was significantly influenced by entrepreneurial orientations. The findings also show that SMEs in the Iraqi KRG's entrepreneurial orientation and CMA were moderately influenced by FNC.

In their research, Olannye & Eromafuru (2016) looked at the impact of entrepreneurial marketing on the performance of fast food restaurants in Asaba, Nigeria's Delta State. The study looked at how fast food restaurants in Asaba, Delta State, performed as a result of entrepreneurial marketing. The survey research design method was used for the study, and 160 employees and customers of a few fast food restaurants in Asaba, Delta State, served as the sample. The research instrument they used was a 20-item validated structured questionnaire. The primary analytical methods were correlation and multiple regression. As indicators of entrepreneurial marketing, the findings demonstrated that entrepreneurial proactiveness, entrepreneurial innovation, and entrepreneurial opportunity recognition significantly improved competitive advantage. The study came to the conclusion that the development of novel markets was influenced by entrepreneurial innovation; products or procedures that aid businesses in gaining an advantage over rivals. They agree that acquiring an edge over their competitors requires innovative thinking on the part of entrepreneurs. As a result, the study suggests that businesses should exhibit both a general openness to new ideas and a special predisposition to be among the first to adopt innovation in a particular field. Companies can focus on new ideas that lead to new markets, products, and processes by being innovation-focused. According to the findings, entrepreneurial marketing is a multifaceted concept whose components directly influence fast food restaurants' competitive advantage.

In the Makurdi Metropolis of Benue State, Nigeria, Hanmaikyur (2016) investigated how entrepreneurial marketing strategies affected the performance of small and medium-sized businesses. Small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria, were the focus of the study, which looked at how entrepreneurial marketing practices affected their performance. For the study, a cross-sectional survey design was used. Organizations were the unit

of analysis, and SMEs' owners and managers were the respondents. To gather the necessary data for the study, snowball sampling, simple random sampling, and systematic sampling were used. From a population of 1101 SMEs, a sample size of 401 SMEs representing all sectors in the study area was selected. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 was used to empirically and statistically analyze the study's data using descriptive and inferential statistics. The hypotheses were put to the test with regression analysis. Return on Investment, customer satisfaction, market share, and sales growth are all performance variables. Entrepreneurial marketing practices, which included Customer Relationship Management with a p-value of 0.012, Market segmentation with a p-value of 0.038, Quality with a p-value of 0.026, and Market Promotion with a p-value of 0.031, were found to have a significant positive effect on the performance of SMEs. On the other hand, cooperation with a p-value of 0.002 was not found to be a predictor of SME performance. The study found that SMEs' performance in the study area is improved by marketing practices. The study recommended, among other things, that managers and owners of small and medium-sized businesses always use appropriate marketing strategies for their businesses. They should also make sure that the marketing strategies they use are having a positive effect on their company's performance on a regular and effective basis.

3.0 Methodology

This study employed the survey method of research, which investigates the behavior, opinion or other manifestations of a group of people by questioning them (Anyanwu, 2000). This was done through the use of questionnaire. The study focused on small and medium scales enterprises operating in Port Harcourt. According to Nigerian Directory (2020), they are one thousand and sixteen (1016) registered small and medium scale enterprises in Port Harcourt. Using the Taro Yamane sample size determination formula, a 400-person sample was chosen. Spearman Rank Order Correlation Co-efficient was used to analyze and test the formulated hypotheses.

4.0 Results

A total of four hundred (400) copies of questionnaire were distributed to entrepreneurs in Port Harcourt, Out of which 355 respondents, corresponding to 88.8 % copies were completely filled, retrieved and useful, which were used for analysis while 45 corresponding 11.2% were not retrieved.

Statistical testing of Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between internal locus of control and innovativeness of SMEs in Rivers State

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between internal locus of control and differentiation of SMEs in Rivers State

Correlation between internal locus of control and competitive advantage

			Internal Locus of Control	Innovativeness	Differentiation
Spearman's rho	Internal Locus of Control	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.843**	.851**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	355	355	355
	Innovativeness	Correlation Coefficient	.843**	1.000	.821**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	355	355	355
	Differentiation	Correlation Coefficient	.851**	.821**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	355	355	355

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

The test of hypothesis one and two, as shown in the table above, the SPSS output reveals that Significant level (Sig) = 0.000 which implies that (Sig<0.01) while Spearman Correlation coefficient (rho) = (0.843, 0.851) also indicates that internal locus of control has strong and positive correlation with competitive advantage. We therefore reject the Null hypotheses and accept the alternative hypotheses which state that there is a significant relationship between internal locus of control and competitive advantage of SMEs in Rivers State.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between external locus of control and innovativeness of SMEs in Rivers State

H₀₄: There is no significant relationship between external locus of control and differentiation of SMEs in Rivers State

Correlation between external locus of control and competitive advantage

			External Locus of Control	Innovativeness	Differentiation
Spearman's rho	External Locus of Control	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.743**	.937**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	355	355	355
	Innovativeness	Correlation Coefficient	.743**	1.000	.867**

		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	355	355	355
	Differentiation	Correlation Coefficient	.937**	.867**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	355	355	355

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

The test of hypothesis three and four, as shown in the Table above, the SPSS output reveals that Significant level (Sig) = 0.000 which implies that (Sig<0.01) while Spearman Correlation coefficient (rho) = (0.743, 0.937) also indicates that external locus of control has strong and positive correlation with competitive advantage. We therefore reject the Null hypotheses and accept the alternative hypotheses which state that there is a significant relationship between external locus of control and competitive advantage of SMEs in Rivers State.

5.0 Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study indicate a significant relationship between entrepreneurial locus of control and competitive advantage of SMEs in Rivers State. This section sought to discuss various findings as regards to analysis of data and findings. Hypothesis one, two, three and four aimed to examine the significant relationship between entrepreneurial locus of control and competitive advantage of SMEs in Port Harcourt. The hypothesis was tested using Spearman Rank. The analysis revealed a positive and very strong significant influence of entrepreneurial locus of control on competitive advantage (Rho=0.843, 0.851, 0.743, 0.937). Furthermore, the null hypothesis was rejected because, the probability value (Pv= 0.000) was less than the level of significance (0.05) that is, Pv<0.05. This reveals a significant relationship between entrepreneurial locus of control and competitive advantage of SMEs in Port Harcourt. The study conforms to the findings of Hanmaikyur (2016); Olannye & Eromafuru (2016). Their findings agree with the use of entrepreneurial strategies as a means to competitiveness or creating a competitive advantage among firms in the business environment.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

Considerable literatures have been developed on entrepreneurial locus of control and competitive advantage, but the relationship between entrepreneurial locus of control and competitive advantage of SMEs in Port Harcourt has not been fully examined. This study evolved to fill the existing gap in literature. Therefore, entrepreneurs should develop their entrepreneurial skills to improve their performance in their various SMEs. In conclusion, entrepreneurs should develop high sense of internal locus of control and also possess some element of external locus of control as such will help them boost the level of competitiveness of the organization. Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, it was discovered that there is a positive correlation between entrepreneurial locus of control and competitive advantage;

- i. The entrepreneur should develop a high sense of internal locus of control as such will help enhance their innovativeness.
- ii. The entrepreneur should develop a mindset of self-reliance as such will enhance their capability to boost the competitiveness of the firm.
- iii. Entrepreneurs should develop an internal locus of control and reinforce it through learning and experiences as such will help enhance their differentiation ability and boost their competitiveness.
- iv. The entrepreneurs should also have some element of external locus of control as such will enable them focus on innovativeness and then enhance their competitiveness.

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