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Influence of Entrepreneur's Personal Characteristics in Entrepreneurial Networking on Growth of SMEs in Trans Nzoia County, Kenya

Albert Njibwakale Wanambisi

Ph.D. Candidate, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Nairobi, Kenya

Gregory Simiyu Namusonge

Professor, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Nairobi, Kenya

Dr. Elizabeth makokhanambuswa

Lecturer, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Nairobi, Kenya

Abstract:

The growth of SMEs increases their potential of creating jobs, poverty alleviation, creating enterprising culture and economic growth rate. However, the growth of SMEs has been a concern to many stakeholders worldwide including government, scholars, SME operators and employees. In Kenya, majority of SMEs collapse before their third anniversary and those that remain majority collapse after five years. Thus there is a need to address low growth and high failure rate among SMEs. Entrepreneurial networking is one strategy that may influence growth of SMEs. This study was not only informed by low growth among the SMEs in various sectors but also by mixed results and contentious debate on effects of entrepreneur's personal characteristics in entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs. The objective of the study was to determine the influence of entrepreneurs' personal characteristics in entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs. This study was guided by entrepreneurship theory and entrepreneurial networking theory. The study employed a mixed research design: quantitative and qualitative approaches. Stratified and simple sampling techniques were employed to obtain 363 SMEs from 2,354 SMEs registered by Trans Nzoia County in Kenya. The SMEs were distributed in the following subsectors of whole trade, retail trade, manufacturing services, restaurant and agriculture. The data collection instruments were questionnaires. The questionnaires were self-administered to SME operators in Trans Nzoia county Kenya. Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) was used to analyze data. Descriptive statistics was used to summarize data. Inferential statistic (regressions) was employed in analysis. The study revealed that entrepreneurs' characteristics (entrepreneurial orientation, education, age and networking skills) in entrepreneurial networking had positive significant influence on growth of SMEs. The study recommends entrepreneurs should embrace entrepreneurial orientation elements in networking to enhance growth of SMEs.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial networking, entrepreneur's characteristics and growth of SMEs

1. Introduction

The Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are acknowledged world over as important drivers of economic development in terms of new job creation, contribution towards GDP and promoting entrepreneurial culture (Ruchkina, Melnichuk, & Mental, 2017). The study further noted that SMEs account for 60-70 percent of new jobs in Japan, Italy, United States of America and Netherlands. In developed countries, SMEs account for 90 percent of the total enterprises. According to Kenya Economic Survey of 2018, the SMEs contributed to 80 percent of the new jobs and 20 percent of GDP (Republic of Kenya, 2018).

However, there is no universal accepted definition of SMEs world over. The definitions various from continent to continents, region to region and countries and even within the country. According to OECD (2019), the common criteria used to define SME is the number of employees and turnover. In United State of America and Canada, SMEs are defined as enterprises that have less than 500 employees (Karadag, 2016). In European Union (EU), SMEs refer to small enterprises employing less than 50 employees with not more than 7 million Euro annual turnover and medium enterprise SMEs have less than 250 employees with not more than 40 million Euro annual turnover SMEs (Raczynska, 2019). In Kenya, SMEs are defined as SMEs as enterprises having 10-99 employees and annual turnover of between Kenya shillings 500,000 and maximum having annual turnover of between Kenya shillings 500,000 and maximum 800 million (Nelima, Namusonge & Sakwa, 2016).

Despite the important roles played by SMEs in economies of many countries, their growth has been a concern. Brand, Croonen and Leenders (2018) observed that SMEs are exposed to many challenges that emanated from their small size, highly dynamic competitive business environments, frequent change of technology and globalisation of economies that inhibit their growth. However, SMEs in subsaharan countries Kenya included face many challenges than their counterpart developed countries that hinder growth of SMEs. Linguli and Namusonge (2015) observed that the growth of

SMEs has been a concern as three out of five SMEs in Kenya fail within the first three years of inception, and those that continue 80 percent fail before fifth year. If this trend of low growth rate and low survival of SMEs is not addressed soon it may derail the contribution of SMEs in socioeconomic development, contribution to GDP, job creation and realization of Kenya Vision 2030. There is a need of measures that may address low growth and high failure rate among SMEs in Kenya. (Tehseen, Qureshi, & Ramayah, 2018)

Entrepreneur's personal characteristics in Entrepreneurial networking has been acknowledged as an important strategy that can mitigate challenges of SMEs to enhance the survival and growth of SMEs in highly competitive dynamic business environments (Tehseen, Qureshi, & Ramayah, 2018). The study further noted that entrepreneur's networking competence impact selection of networking partners, absorption of networking resources and information that address SMEs' inadequacy resources to enhance growth of SMEs. Entrepreneurial networking strategy combines aspects of entrepreneurship and business networking that can be used by Small and medium enterprises to mitigate challenges and obstacles facing them to create competitive advantages that can enhance their growth (Abbas, Raza, Nurunnabi & Minai, 2019).

Despite clear understanding of entrepreneur's personal characteristics in entrepreneurial networking to enhance growth of SMEs in developed and Asian countries. There is no clear understanding of roles played by entrepreneur's personal in entrepreneurial networking in mitigating the challenges faced by SMEs to enhance growth of SMEs in Kenya. This was evident from limited studies that have investigated influence entrepreneur's personal characteristics in entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs yielded mixed results. Secondly, many studies that have investigated influence of entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs in Kenya did not integrate entrepreneur's personal characteristics with networking dimensions (Maina, Marwa, & Riro, 2016; Kariuki, Oloko, & Mureithi, 2015). According to Schumpeter (1934) in Entrepreneurship theory holds that entrepreneur is at center of business organisation and innovations.

Kariuki and Iravo (2015) examined effects of gender (women) in networking on performance of SMEs. the study found that entrepreneurial networking had positive effects on performance of SMEs. the current study attempted to contributed to academic discourse by extending scope of previous studies done in Kenya by incorporating entrepreneurial orientation of entrepreneur's and entrepreneur's networking skills among other entrepreneur's characteristics. Thus, it was significant to conduct the current study not only due to contradiction from previous study results but also because of the need to address concerns of SMEs growth in Kenya. The growth of SMEs have multiple effects: achieving Vision 2030 which is the Economic blue Print, promoting entrepreneurial culture and expanding contribution of SMEs towards GDP.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The SMEs contributed 80 percent of the new jobs and 14 percent of GDP (Republic of Kenya, 2018). Despite important roles played by SMEs in socioeconomic development of Kenya, their growth has been a concern to many stakeholders including the government policy makers, scholars, SME operators and employee unions among others. Statistics indicate that three out of five SMEs in Kenya fail within the first three years of inception and those that continue 80 percent fail before the fifth year (Linguli & Namusonge, 2015). If this trend of low growth rate of SMEs is not addressed soon it may derail the contribution of SMEs in socioeconomic development, promotion of enterprising culture and realization of Kenya Vision 2030 which is anchored on high growth rate of SMEs. Thus, there is an urgent need of measures that will address low growth and high failure rate among SMEs in Kenya.

Entrepreneurial networking is one of the strategies that can be adopted by SMEs in dynamic business environment to address low growth rate and high failure rate of SMEs. Despite the clear understanding of the role played by entrepreneurial characteristics in entrepreneurial networking in selection of networking partners, identification and adoption of networking resources that eventually enhanced growth of SMEs in developed economies, in Kenya there is little understanding about the influence of entrepreneur's personal characteristics in entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs. Thus the current study was imperative to create insight of influence of entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs in Kenya.

The limited previous studies that investigated the influence of entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs in Kenya omitted the role of entrepreneur's characteristics in entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs and they yielded mixed results (Kariuki Oloko & Mureithi, 2015; Katambo & Okatch, 2016; Maina et al., 2016, Kiprotich, 2014). Many studies that investigated influence of entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs by incorporating entrepreneurs' characteristics and networking dimensions were done in developed and Asian countries and yielded conclusive results that entrepreneurial networking influenced growth of SMEs (Khan, Li, Safdar, Khan, 2019; Brand, Croonen and Leenders, 2018; Burt, 2018). However, there is no guarantee that their findings can be generalized in Kenya since Kenyan SMEs experience different economic conditions and operate under different legislations. Thus the current study was worthwhile as it considered the influence of entrepreneur's characteristics in entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs using integrated model in Kenya. The study was important to fill literature gaps on influence of entrepreneur's personal characteristics in entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs in Kenya.

1.2. Research Objective

To examine the influence of entrepreneurs' personal characteristics in entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs in Trans Nzoia County Kenya

1.3. Research Question

What are the influences of entrepreneurs' personal characteristics in entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs?

1.4. Research Hypothesis

- H_{01} there is no statistically significant relationship between entrepreneurs' personal characteristics in entrepreneurial networking and growth of SMEs

1.5. Justification of the Study

For the SMEs to be able to perform key functions for economic growth and development, their growth is imperative. Thus, it is important to understand strategies that can influence the growth of SMEs. First, the previous studies conducted in Kenya on influence of entrepreneur's personal characteristics in entrepreneurial networking have yielded mixed findings. Secondly, those previous studies did not consider the effects of entrepreneurs' characteristics in entrepreneurial networking in their studies though the entrepreneurs are responsible to make decisions whether to network or not. It was imperative to conduct the current study since as it was among the first in Kenya to use integrated model including entrepreneurs' personal characteristics in entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs. Lastly, the study aimed at contributing to academic discourse of entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs.

1.6. Scope of the Study

The scope of the study defines the boundaries of coverage and limits the study to relevant areas of concern. The study was conducted among small and medium enterprises that were in operation for three years in Trans Nzoia County in Kenya. SMEs in Kenya are classified into manufacturing, wholesaling, retailing, agriculture, restaurant, servicing and others. The study targeted to collect data on entrepreneurs or SME operators (managers) who were responsible for making strategic decisions whether to network or not. The franchise SMEs or subsidiary companies operating in the study area were excluded because local managements depend on decisions made in head offices. The study confined itself to influence of entrepreneur's characteristics in entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs.

1.7. Limitation and Delimitation of the Study

The study made certain methodological assumptions that arose from the survey design used in the study. The methodology relied on standardization forcing the researcher to develop general questions that were minimally appropriate to all respondents, possibly missing what was most appropriate to many respondents. Besides, survey is inflexible and requires initial design to remain unchanged throughout the data collection.

2. Theoretical Framework

Schumpeter (1934) observes that entrepreneurship is a catalyst that disrupts the stationary circular of the economy and thereby initiates and sustains the process of economic development through innovations. According to Schumpeter, entrepreneurship brings forth forces that disrupt market equilibrium thereby creating changes, which results into new opportunities and economic development. Schumpeter entrepreneurship theory holds that innovations introduced by entrepreneurs in economy results into economic development. He argues that entrepreneurship is the process of creating successful enterprises. In essence entrepreneurship is not only inventing products or put up enterprises original formations, but establishing innovativeness in products and businesses in terms suppliers, buyers, processes, combinations or managements. These new combinations in enterprises according to Schumpeter bring forth forces that disrupt market equilibrium by creating changes and entrepreneurial opportunities (Bwisa, 2011). The enterprises reorganizations in form of entrepreneurial networking is form of entrepreneurship as it disrupts initial (Burt, 2017). Thus entrepreneurial networking among SMEs is an innovation arrangement that entrepreneurs move from existing arrangements and they organize businesses processes outside business boundaries. Stam, Arzlanian and Elfring (2014) observed that entrepreneurs can engage in networking if they envision that execution of enterprises activities require support of other entities. This means that entrepreneurs move away from existing arrangements of business activities within the hierarchy and establish new ones without firm boundaries. Michorori and Fatoki (2014) observed that entrepreneur's networking competences and entrepreneurial orientation can affect identification of networking partners during different phases of SMEs growth. Burt, Ronald and Buryznska, (2017) observed that new organisation of business activities at outside firm's boundary provides shortcut for entrepreneurs to reap maximum benefits.

2.1. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework model shows diagrammatically the relationships between independent and dependent variables in the study (Kothari, 2004). The study's independent variable comprised of entrepreneur's personal characteristics in entrepreneurial networking and dependent variable was growth of SMEs measured by both financial and non-financial indicators. The financial measures used were sales and profitability changes, while non-financial growth used was the number of employees' changes.

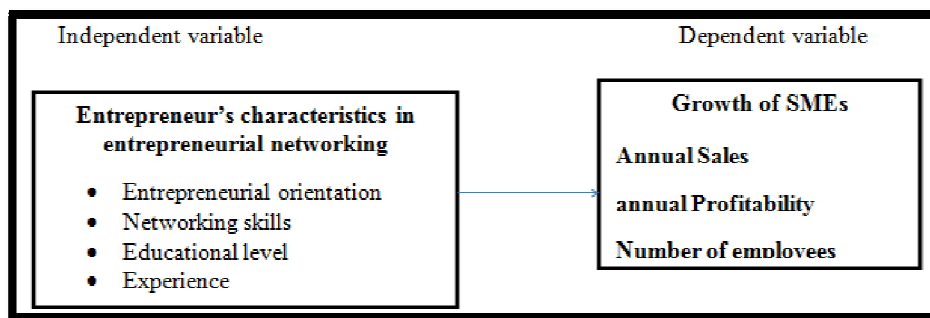


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3. Literature Review

Theoretical framework provides justification for inclusion of entrepreneur personal characteristics in entrepreneurial networking model: psychological theories/ Traits theories (Baum, Frese & Baron, 2014), entrepreneurship theory of Schumpeter (Bwisa, 2011) and entrepreneurial networking theory (Huggins & Thompson, 2015). Wang (2015) found that entrepreneur's experience, age, and entrepreneurial orientations influenced entrepreneurs in selection of networking partners that were likely to yield beneficial services to influence growth of SMEs. Schwarz (2017) found that the age of an entrepreneur had curvilinear relationships with entrepreneurial networking and venture growth. The study further revealed entrepreneurship and networking increased with entrepreneur's age before declining later in life. The study concluded that young entrepreneurs lacked experience and know-how for entrepreneurial activities, but increased in the middle years and then decreased as older individuals developed high opportunity costs or lower risking propensity. Brand et al. (2018) found that age, experiences and knowledge of entrepreneurs' influenced the identification and adoption of entrepreneurial networking resources, innovation and market information into business activities which eventually determined growth of SMEs. Kim and Lee (2018) found that entrepreneurial oriented entrepreneurs networked and absorbed networking resources and information that eventually had positive significance on growth of SMEs. Tehseen, Qureshi and Ramayah (2018) found that networking competence of entrepreneurs affected selection of networking partner and in turn growth of SMEs (Jiang, Liu, Fey & Jiang, 2018).

Turyakira and Mbidde (2015) found that networking skills and education level of entrepreneurs' influenced SMEs participation in networking. Kariuki and Iravo (2016) found that women entrepreneurs participated in business networking to enhance the growth of SMEs. Katialem, Muhanji, and Otuya, (2018) found that innovativeness, autonomy and competitiveness aggressiveness of entrepreneurs SME operators had positive significant on growth of SMEs in manufacturing sectors in Kenya. The study further found that risk taking had insignificant effects on growth of SMEs. Mwangi and Ngugi (2014) found that entrepreneurial orientation (risk taking, proactiveness and managerial competence) of MSEs operators in Kerugoya Kenya had positive significant effects on growth of MSEs. Odhiambo, Mukulu and Odhiambu, (2019) found that entrepreneurial competencies (risk taking, proactiveness, innovativeness and networking skills) had positive significant effects on survival of SMEs in Kenya.

However, Omwenga Mukulu and Kanali (2013) found that the women entrepreneurs in Kenya do not use extensive network as men entrepreneurs to grow their enterprises. The study further revealed that roles of female to take care of families, taboo and some religion beliefs limited female entrepreneurs in participation in business networks to create competitive advantages for firm's products. Similar of other studies that found gender had no effects on networking in turn growth of SMEs (Atieno, 2016; Mwangi & Namusonge, 2016).

Katambo and Okatch (2016) found that highly educated auditors participated in networking to enhance knowledge base to influence performance of auditors. The literature review on entrepreneur's personal characteristics in entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs in Kenya revealed only a few studies had investigated entrepreneur's personal characteristics in entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs. These studies have yielded mixed findings. Secondly, most of the studies did not consider effects of entrepreneurial orientation in networking on growth of SMEs.

The literature review revealed that limited studies in Kenya had investigated influence of entrepreneurs' personal characteristics in entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs. However, their findings have been contradictory. Most of those studies that investigated influence of entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs in Kenya did not incorporate entrepreneurs' personal characteristics in their studies. Although entrepreneurship theory and networking theory hold that entrepreneurs make decisions whether to network or not (Abbas et al., 2019). Other studies only investigated influence of entrepreneurial orientation or personal characteristics on growth of SMEs not in networking (Odhiambo, Mukulu & Odhiambu, 2019; Katialem, Muhanji, & Otuya, 2018; Mwangi & Ngugi, 2014). The studies conducted in developed and Asian countries on effects of entrepreneur's personal (entrepreneur's entrepreneurial orientation) in entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs conclusively affirmed that entrepreneur's personal characteristics were keys for entrepreneur's participation in entrepreneurial networking and acquisition of networking resources, information and support that in turn had positive significant effects on growth of SMEs. However, their generalization of entrepreneur's personal characteristics in entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs cannot be assumed to be applicable in Kenya since Kenyan SMEs operate under different conditions. The current study was imperative to fill this gap in literature and create insight on influence of entrepreneurs' personal characteristics in entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs. Research Gaps

However, in Sub-Saharan and Kenya included the influence of entrepreneur's personal characteristics in entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs is not clearly understood and documented. Most studies that investigated influence of entrepreneurial networking only considered networking dimensions (networking structure, relations and resources) and found mixed results (Katambo & Okatch, 2016; Kariuki et al., 2015; Korir & Maru, 2014). A few studies that considered integrated to investigate model influence of entrepreneur's characteristics in entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs ignored entrepreneurial orientation and absorption capacity entrepreneurs and yielded mixed results. Thus, it was imperative to consider the influence of entrepreneur's characteristics (entrepreneurial orientation and absorption capacity in entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs. This perspective was in line with entrepreneurship theory and entrepreneurial networking theory. The study was significant in filling literature gaps as it considered an integrated model of entrepreneurial networking.

3.1. Research Design

Kothari (2004) observe that a research design is a plan outlining how a research problem under investigation will be solved. This means that the function of a research design is to ensure that evidence obtained enables the researcher to answer the research questions as efficiently as possible. The study adopted a mixed research design that is quantitative and qualitative approaches. Namusonge (2010) observes that the use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches are suitable methods for gathering descriptive information where the researcher wants to know about the attitude of people concerning one or more variable through direct query. Accordingly, quantitative data was mainly used in this study. The study design was descriptive as it aimed at finding out the influence of entrepreneur's personal characteristics in entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs without manipulating variables.

3.2. Target Population

The target population of study was all SMEs registered in Trans Nzoia County Business licensing board Directory (2015, 2016 & 2017) and operating in Trans Nzoia County. According to Maina, Marwa, Waiguchu and Riro (2016) and Katambo and Okatch (2016), they recommended a minimum duration of three years as adequate enough to measure the influence of networking on growth of firms. Accordingly, the target population composed of a total of 2354 SMEs belonging to the following industries: manufacturing, wholesaling, agriculture, retailing and restaurant (see the table 3.1 below). The study targeted entrepreneurs or SME managers of selected SMEs. The study targeted entrepreneurs, but to cater for alternative respondents the SME managers and SME operators were considered in absence of entrepreneurs.

3.3. Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Kothari (2004) defines a sample as a small portion of a target population selected for observation and analysis. This sample was carefully selected so as to represent the target population of interest. Stratified sampling and simple sampling techniques were used to select 363 SMEs from manufacturing, wholesaling, agriculture, retailing and restaurant. The stratified sampling was suitable since the target population was stratified into strata and simple sampling technique was used to select elements within the stratum. Orodho (2007) recommends that the acceptable margin of error in most educational and social research for categorical data is five percent margin of error and for continuous data a margin of three percent is acceptable. This study being categorical assumed five percent margin error.

3.4. Target Population and Sample Size

Sector	Target population	Sample size
Manufacturing	23	4
Agriculture	481	74
Wholesale	630	97
Retailing	1070	165
Restaurant	150	23
Total	2354	363

Table 1: Target Population and Sample Size
Source: Trans Nzoia County Business Directory and Study

3.5. Data Collection Instrument and Technique

The researcher used a questionnaire containing both closed and open ended questions to collect quantitative data for the study. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2004), questionnaires offer the researcher with relatively easy accumulation of data and give fairly objective data which is easy to analyze and the respondents have adequate time to give well thought answers. The questions in the questionnaire were mixture of open-ended, forced response types and matrix questions (Likert type scale). The questionnaire was used to collect responses about the influence entrepreneur's characteristics in entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs from the SME operators or entrepreneurs or SME managers.

3.6. Pilot Study

Pilot sample comprised of 36 SMEs representing 1 percent of the sample firms. Consequently, 36 questionnaires were administered through self-delivery. A total of 27 questionnaires were returned in time for analysis, representing 75

percent of the pilot sample, which is within in the acceptable range. The Cronbach values yielded was 0.847 which was good an indication that they met the criterion.

3.7. Data Collection Procedure

Data was obtained through questionnaires administered to SME managers or entrepreneurs in selected SMEs in Trans Nzoia County Kenya. In their absence, the senior workers or persons in charge of the business filled the questionnaires. The researcher assured the participants that their response was to be accorded confidentiality and only used for the purpose of the study. The researcher booked an appointment in advance with SME managers or entrepreneurs or equivalents who were well informed about entrepreneur's characteristics in entrepreneurial networking and its influence on firm's growth. The questionnaires were then picked later for data processing and analysis.

3.8. Data Analysis

Analysis of data was done using a number of designs including descriptive statistics which include means, standard deviations, frequencies, percentages with aid of statistical package for social science (SPSS) V.20. Simple linear regression was employed to test stated research hypotheses. The regression output enabled the researcher to determine the estimated statistical models for growth of SMEs as follows:

3.9. Single Variable

$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + e$. Where X_1 = Entrepreneur's characteristics, β_1 = coefficient Entrepreneur's characteristics, β_0 = constant, e = error term, Y = growth of SMEs.

4. Data Presentation and Discussion

4.1. Response Rate

The study distributed three hundred and sixty three questionnaires to the respondents out of which, 267 were completed and returned. Thus achieving a response rate of 73.6 percent and this was considered adequate for the purpose of further analysis.

4.2. Descriptive Statistics

4.2.1. Influence of Personal Characteristics of Entrepreneur on Growth of SMEs

Employing a five-point Likert scale, the study sought to obtain entrepreneurs or equivalent responses regarding aspects of participation in networking influencing growth of SMEs. The statements were opinions which required the respondents to Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Neutral; neither Agree nor Disagree (N), Agree (A), strongly Agree (SA).

Table 4.12 summarizes the personal characteristics of entrepreneur on growth of SMEs. The findings of age of entrepreneurs or respondents in entrepreneurial networking on growth of SMEs in table 4.12 revealed that 64.3 percent strongly agreed, 13.8 percent agreed, 10 percent disagreed, 6.7 percent strongly disagreed and 5.2 percent were neutral. This means that 78.1 percent of respondents agreed that the age of the entrepreneur in entrepreneurial networking influenced networking activities and affected growth of SMEs. This was also confirmed by high mean of 4.2, an indication of agreement. While 16.7 percent of respondents disagreed that age of entrepreneurs in entrepreneurial networking activities influenced growth of SMEs.

Findings of the study on gender of respondents in networking participation on growth of SMEs revealed that 50 percent strongly agreed, 31.9 percent agreed, 9 percent strongly disagreed, 6.2 percent strongly agreed and 2.9 percent neutral. This means that 81.9 percent of the respondents agreed that the gender of entrepreneurs influenced both networking activities and eventually growth of SMEs. This was also confirmed by the high mean of 4.1. This means that 15.2 percent of respondents disagreed that age of entrepreneurs influenced participation in entrepreneurial networking that eventually influenced growth of SMEs.

The findings of the study on education qualification of the respondents influence on networking and growth on SMEs revealed that 50.5 percent strongly agreed, 33.3 percent agreed, 6.2 percent disagreed, 6.7 percent strongly disagreed and 3.3 percent were neutral. This means that 83.8 percent of the respondents agreed that education qualification of entrepreneurs influenced networking activities and growth of SMEs. This was confirmed by the high mean of 4.1. This means that 18 percent of respondents disagreed that education qualifications of entrepreneurs influenced participation in entrepreneurial networking that influenced growth of SMEs.

The findings of the study on experience of entrepreneur in identification and utilization of network resources on growth of SMEs revealed that 52.4 percent agreed, 22.9 percent strongly agreed, 10 percent strongly disagreed, 8 percent disagreed and 6.7 percent were neutral. This means that 75.3 percent agreed that entrepreneurs' experience influenced identification and utilization of entrepreneurial networking resources and eventually influenced growth of SMEs. This was confirmed by the moderate mean of 3.7. This means that 18 percent of the respondents disagreed that entrepreneur's experience influenced identification and utilization of network resources and eventually growth of SMEs.

The findings of the study on growth oriented entrepreneurs seeking network partners on growth of SMEs revealed that 47.6 percent strongly agreed, 38.1 percent agreed, 6.2 percent disagreed, 3.8 percent strongly disagreed and 4.3 percent were neutral. This means that 85.7 percent agreed that oriented entrepreneurs sought entrepreneurial networking

partners to grow the enterprise of SMEs. This was confirmed by high the mean of 4.2. This means that 10 percent of respondents disagreed that growth oriented entrepreneurs participated in entrepreneurial networking to access resources that influenced growth of SMEs.

The findings of the study on social background of entrepreneurs' influence on participation in networking activities on growth of SMEs revealed that 57.6 percent agreed, 20.5 percent strongly agreed, 12.4 percent were neutral, 5.2 percent strongly disagreed and 4.3 percent disagreed. This means that 78.1 percent of the respondents agreed that social background of entrepreneurs in networking influenced the growth of SMEs. This means that 9.5 percent of respondents disagreed that social background of entrepreneurs influenced participation in networking activities and growth of SMEs.

The findings of the study on relational skills of entrepreneurs on identification of quality partners to network on growth of SME revealed that 41.4 percent agreed, 39.5 percent agreed, 7.6 percent strongly disagreed, 6.2 percent disagreed and 5.3 percent being neutral. It means that 80.9 percent agreed that the relational skills of the entrepreneurs influenced selection of network partners that eventually influenced growth of SMEs. This means that 13.8 percent of the respondents disagreed that relational skills of the entrepreneur's influenced selection of network partners that eventually influenced grow of SMEs.

The findings of the study on effects entrepreneurs' objective influence on participation in entrepreneurial networking and eventually utilization of networking information on growth of SMEs revealed 41.8 percent strongly agreed, 30 percent agreed, 12.9 percent being neutral, 11 percent disagreed and 4.3 percent strongly disagreed. This means that 71.8 percent of respondents agreed that objectives of entrepreneurs influenced participation in entrepreneurial networking to utilize networking information to grow businesses. This was also confirmed by the high mean of 3.9. while 13.3 percent of respondents disagreed that objectives of entrepreneurs influenced utilization of network information to grow.

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	M
Age of the entrepreneur influences participation in networking activities and growth of SME	14 (6.7)	21 (10)	11 (5.2)	29 (13.8)	135 (64.3)	4.2
Great gender disparity in membership of networks influences growth of SMEs	13 (6.2)	19 (9)	6 (2.9)	67 (31.9)	105 (50)	4.1
Education qualifications of entrepreneur influences identification and utilization of network resources and its growth	14 (6.7)	13 (6.2)	7 (3.3)	70 (33.3)	106 (50.5)	4.1
Experience of entrepreneur influences identification and utilization of network resources and its growth	21 (10)	17 (8.0)	14 (6.7)	110 (52.4)	48 (22.9)	3.7
Growth oriented entrepreneur seeks network partners to grow the enterprise	8 (3.8)	13 (6.2)	9 (4.3)	80 (38.1)	100 (47.6)	4.2
Social background of entrepreneur influences participation in networking activities and its growth	11 (5.2)	9 (4.3)	26 (12.4)	121 (57.6)	43 (20.5)	3.8
networking skills of entrepreneur influences identification of quality partners to network growth of SME	16 (7.6)	13 (6.2)	11 (5.3)	87 (41.4)	83 (39.5)	4.0
Objectives of entrepreneur influences on utilization of network information to grow business	9 (4.3)	23 (11)	27 (12.9)	63 (30)	88 (41.8)	3.9

Table 2: Effects of Personal Characteristics of Entrepreneur on Growth of SMEs

4.3. Testing of Hypothesis

The study hypothesized that H_{01} there is no statistically significant relationship between entrepreneurs' personal characteristics in entrepreneurial networking and growth of SMEs in Trans Nzoia County. It means that in H_{01} : $\beta = 0$. To test the relationship between the entrepreneurs' characteristics and growth of SMEs, the regression model was fitted statistical equation: $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + e$. Where Y = growth of SMEs, X_1 = personal characteristics. The survey results analyzed revealed that $\beta_1 = 0.205$, $\beta_0 = 18.284$, p value < 0.001 . The survey data fitted a regression model

$$Y = 18.284 + 0.205 X_1$$

Where: Y = growth of SMEs, X_1 = entrepreneurs' personal characteristics in entrepreneurial networking

The beta coefficient of entrepreneurs' personal characteristics in entrepreneurial networking on growth of SME was ($\beta_1 = 0.205$, $t = 3.651$, p value < 0.001) was positively significant. It means that a unit change in entrepreneurs' personal characteristics results in 20.5 percent increase in growth of SMEs. The null hypothesis (H_{01}) was rejected and accepted alternate hypothesis: H_1 : there is statistically significant relationship between entrepreneurs' personal characteristics in

entrepreneurial networking and growth of SMEs, p-value <0.001 and conclude that entrepreneurs' personal characteristics in entrepreneurial networking (X_1) influence growth of SMEs (Y).

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.505 ^a	.256	.252	4.690
a. Predictors: (Constant), personal characteristics				

Table 3: Model Summary

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	291.948	1	291.948	13.272	.000 ^a
	Residual	4553.507	209	21.998		
	Total	4845.455	210			
a. Predictors: (Constant), personal characteristics in entrepreneurial networking						
b. Dependent Variable: Growth of SMEs						

Table 4: ANOVA^b

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	18.284	1.942		9.416	.000		
	Personal characteristics	.205	.252	.245	3.651	.000	1.000	1.000
a. Dependent Variable: Growth of SMEs								

Table 5: Coefficients

5. Discussion of Findings

The descriptive statistics revealed that age, entrepreneurial orientation elements (growth oriented, risk taking and Proactiveness), educational level and networking skills had high means indicating that they influenced networking activities and eventually explained growth of SMEs. While entrepreneur's experience, social background and objective had low means had low influence on entrepreneurial networking and eventually growth of SMEs.

The regression analysis of the study revealed that entrepreneur's personal characteristics in entrepreneurial networking had positive statistically significant influence on growth of SMEs in Trans Nzoia County Kenya. The findings of the study were supported by those of Abbas, Raza, Nurunnabi and Minai (2019) who found that entrepreneurs' personal characteristics are valid predictors of entrepreneurial business networking model and that entrepreneurs' personal characteristics were critical in identification of key networking partners and absorption of networking resources that positively and significantly influenced growth of SMEs.

Stam, Rosenbusch, Unger and Frese (2014) found that entrepreneurs' personal characteristics determined utilization of networking that significantly influenced growth of SMEs. Katambo and Okatch (2012) found that educated entrepreneurs highly networked to access innovation and resources to enhance growth of SMEs. Katialem et al. (2019) found that entrepreneurial orientation (risk taking, Proactiveness and aggressive competitiveness) of entrepreneurs' influenced growth of SMEs. However, the findings of the study contradicted those of Omwenga Mukulu and Kanali (2013) who found no significant relationship between entrepreneurs' personal characteristics in networks on growth of SMEs. Atieno (2016) found that personal attributes had insignificant effects on participation in business networks on growth of SMEs.

6. Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

The descriptive statistics further revealed that entrepreneurs' personal characteristics including entrepreneurial behavior, education qualifications, growth oriented, alertness by entrepreneur, and age were agreed to influence participation in entrepreneurial networking activities and eventually influenced growth of SMEs. However, social background and gender of entrepreneurs' were disagreed to influence participation in entrepreneurial networking and growth of SMEs and eventually the growth of SMEs.

The study concluded that entrepreneurs' personal characteristics in entrepreneurial networking had positive significant influence on growth of SMEs in Trans Nzoia County Kenya. It means that entrepreneurs' personal characteristics play pivotal roles in entrepreneurial networking activities and growth of SMEs. The study concludes that entrepreneurs or business owners make decisions whether to network or not, identifies network partners and formulates strategies to utilize network resources, innovations and knowledge into business processes to grow the SMEs.

6.1. Recommendation

From the study, it is evident that entrepreneur personal characteristics are fundamental; it underscores the critical role played by entrepreneurs in making decisions to network or join business linkages. The study therefore recommends that entrepreneurs require knowledge and networking skills to be proactive in formulation of strategy to

select network partners that yield beneficial outcomes to the enterprises. Lastly, the study recommends that government agencies such as SMEs department in the County Governments of Kenya should organize workshops and seminars to create awareness of benefits of networking in both current and potential SME operators this will eventual create enterprising culture.

7. References

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