



ANTECEDENTS OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND PERFORMANCE OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN FITNESS SECTOR IN NAIROBI COUNTY

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Abstract

This study sought to establish antecedents of entrepreneurship and their effects on performance of SMEs in fitness sector in Nairobi County. The predictor variables were entrepreneurial training, networking, technology adoption and financial access and the dependent variable was performance of SMEs. The research adopted a descriptive research and a sample of all the 118 fitness SMEs that are formally registered by Nairobi City County licensing office and operating in Nairobi County. The study administered survey questionnaires to the owners or managers of the fitness firms who have been in the service for approximately three years or more with inferential statistics used to determine the relationships among variables. The analysis showed that financial access has the strongest positive influence on firm performance in addition; networking is positively correlated to firm performance. Entrepreneurial training and technology adoption showed a strong relationship with firm performance. The study recommends that firms should

seek after networks to share ideas, relevant knowledge, skills and unique resources to succeed in a competing environment. These networks provide a platform through which gyms/health clubs should harness what they don't possess to better their operations.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial training, networking, technology adoption, financial access, performance of SMEs

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurs contribute significantly towards economic growth of any nation since they maximize the use of the factors of production for the benefit of society, create jobs, foster innovation, raise living standards, and develop underdeveloped areas (Bula, Taigha & Muruku, 2014). Antecedents of entrepreneurship included those factors considered key to development of entrepreneurship in terms of their personal development as well as the performance involving their businesses (Azim & Kahtani, 2014). The important role played by entrepreneurial activities in economic development and growth includes expanding per capita yield and income through establishing changes in the way modern businesses should be managed (Huka, Mbugua & Njehia, 2015).

The concept of Entrepreneurship and the related factors and its relationship to enterprise performance has gained considerable traction in research in the last few decades and the debate is not conclusive. Bula, Taigha and Muruku (2014) argues that such antecedents of entrepreneurship includes; entrepreneurial training, networking, technological adoption as well as financial access. Entrepreneur training is the process or arrangement of identifying and exercising plans to empower entrepreneurs and business minded individuals to create skill, knowledge, information, and understanding which permit a wider scope of issues to advance their performance levels in their businesses (Azim & Kahtani, 2014). Entrepreneurial Training therefore is key as it explores creativity in the domain of skills and knowledge of entrepreneurs as well as, providing insights into gaining competitive advantage by building stronger pool of opportunities that translates into business growth (Azim & Kahtani, 2014).

According to Aarakit and Kimbugwe (2015), networking is an association where the entrepreneurs connects with other groups that they deem resourceful for their businesses to tap the necessary resources that they in turn use to grow their businesses. Networking if well utilized will improve the financial performance and increase in market share of a firm through identification of new business opportunities, ensure skills transfer and gain good ratings in the sector. This therefore means that SMEs need to intensify their networks if they are to improve performance and hence the need to understand the effect of such networks to SME's if any.

Several authors have emphasized the relevance of networks and networking for SMEs, with networking contributing to performance of SMEs. According to Stam, Arzlanian and Elfring (2014) the resources bundled up in an entrepreneur's network play an important role in the performance of that firm. Networking if well utilized will improve the financial performance and increase the market share of SMEs through identification of key partners by allowing SMEs to access resources that would have been difficult to access on their own (Armanios, Eesley & Eisenhardt, 2012).

For some organizations, the most widely recognized explanations behind technology adoption are to give a way to overcome the associated challenges in terms of survival as well as growth so as to remain competitive (Ndikubwimana, 2016). SMEs adopt technology for various reasons, including dynamism in customer expectations and market trends (Ghimire & Abo, 2013). The need for value creation, attaining entrepreneurial goals, improved firm processes and competitive positioning has made entrepreneurs to invest on competent technologies. This practice will also requires entrepreneurs to be equipped with technological knowledge and skills to enable them understand the role of technology adoption related to decisions concerning growth of the firms (Yayla & Hu, 2014).

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) is defined as a business with annual sales between KES 500,000 –KES 1,000,000 or has 10-50 employees (GoK, 2019). The SMEs sector contributed KES 3,371.7 billion to the GDP representing 33.8% and generated approximately 14.9 million jobs (GoK, 2015) yet there is scanty documentation on their performance (Okeyo, 2019). In Kenya, the importance of the sector is evidenced by the legislation and operationalization of the Kenya Micro and Small Enterprises Act, 2012 by the Government of Kenya. The sector is recognized in Vision 2030, the Kenya Government blue print for economic development, as an important driver of the economy. Under this Act, SMEs enterprise is defined as having an investment of less than KES 5 million, sales of less than KES 500,000 per year or has 1-9 employees.

Regardless of this, the SME part has kept on encountering a few limitations such as constrained access to other business sectors; inhibitive legitimate and administrative condition; deficient training and innovation; prevalence of low quality products and services, insufficient business abilities; restricted access to data; absence of institutional structure; and constrained linkages with huge and established enterprises, (National Baseline Survey, 2019).

Small and medium companies (SMEs) have progressively become a potent engine for economic growth and development in today's fast rising and competitive global economy (Islam, Khan, Obaidullah & Alam, 2011). Most governments in a number of growing economies around the world have recognized the critical role that SMEs play in achieving long-term growth, job

creation, and reducing poverty (Swerczek & Ha, 2003). The importance of the fitness sector in Kenya is envisioned under National Physical Activity Action Plan 2018-2023. Nairobi (Kenya) has gradually become an attractive market for the fitness business due to a raise in middle class group, an attractive environment for fitness business, growing influence of western culture and diets and also the prevalence of underlying health conditions that can be controlled through planned and supported physical activities. The entrepreneurs are now keen on these developments and therefore the current study is keen to study the antecedents of entrepreneurship and how they influence performance of these fitness firms.

Statement of the Problem

Matching entrepreneurship to performance strategy has long been a cornerstone of entrepreneurship research (Khalid, Ahmed, Tundikbayeva & Ahmed, 2019). The basic premise underlying this body of research is that different factors pose different entrepreneurship challenges that, in turn, require systematically different skills and experiences to succeed.

Fitness sector plays important role in making the population enjoy comparatively good health with reduced prevalence of chronic disease. With a growing middle class, increase in urbanization, an alarming increase in obesity and other lifestyle diseases, the general populace within Nairobi County is increasingly becoming aware of the need to live a health and active lifestyle. The positive impact of these fitness firms on the socioeconomic and health welfare of the people will only be attained and sustained if these firms records good performance evidenced by profitability, sustainability and satisfaction levels to the owners.

Every day, more people are becoming aware of the importance of living a healthy lifestyle. As a result, fitness centers are more driven to concentrate on these revenue sources. Therefore, it is critical for these businesses to learn how to delight customers in order to gain customer loyalty, as customers are continually looking for better alternatives to meet their needs (Das & Goswami, 2019). Most fitness firms must understand that firms cannot keep customers long lasting just by luck, but by continuous improvement through trainings, networking, acquiring new technologies on the market and also keeping financial muscles for smooth operations.

Previous studies have been conducted to examine the effect of several variables such as entrepreneurial training (Khalid, Ahmed, Tundikbayeva & Ahmed, 2019), networking (Das & Goswami, 2019), technological adoption (Kabanda & Brown, 2017) and financial access (Ndikubwimana, 2016) on performance of SMEs in different sectors. However, there is limited research done in fitness sector. The purpose of this study is to provide an understanding of the antecedents of entrepreneurship and how they affect fitness firms to run profitably while reaching the unhealthy Kenyans that are being faced by some busy schedules at their work

places and unhealthy diets and lifestyles. Essentially this paper explores whether or not is it possible to do well by practicing entrepreneurship - How can SMEs, specifically fitness firms, secure a profitable foothold in serving their clients?

Objective of the Study

The general objective of this study was to establish the antecedents of entrepreneurship and their effects on performance of SMEs in fitness sector in Nairobi County.

Research Questions

In order to address the above research objectives, the study was guided by the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between entrepreneurial training and performance of SMEs in fitness sector in Nairobi County, Kenya?
2. How does networking influence performance of SMEs in fitness sector in Nairobi County, Kenya?
3. How does technology adoption influence performance of SMEs in fitness sector in Nairobi County, Kenya?
4. How does financial access influence performance of SMEs in fitness sector in Nairobi County, Kenya?

THEORETICAL AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The study was grounded upon three theories, namely; Human Capital Theory (Garibaldi, 2006), Social Networking Theory (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011) and Diffusion of Innovation Theory (DoI) (Rogers, 1962). Human Capital Theory explains how entrepreneur's skills and stock of knowledge contributes to his or her entrepreneurial productivity suggesting that education increases the productivity and earnings of entrepreneurs and their value to their businesses. Social Networking Theory depends on the reason that individual and person to person communication connections and binds offer some incentive to associations in a system by permitting them to take advantage of the assets installed inside the system to their advantage. Diffusion of Innovation Theory provides an avenue of the role of technology adoption by explaining how, over time, an idea or product gains momentum and diffuses through a specific population or social system where entrepreneurs, as part of a social system, adopt a new idea, behavior, product or technology to perform a certain business process differently than what they had previously like purchase or use a new technology.

The impact of entrepreneurial training on performance, as well as the effect of networking and technological adoption, has been studied. In a study by Boothby, Dufour and Tang (2018) on technology adoption, training, networking and productivity performance using panel data regression equation found that a training module containing technological adoption elements influences firm performance significantly. The study further argued that technologies which are advanced enhances entrepreneurs' skills to perform better with a conclusion that through networking firms are able to acquire and combine technologies depending on the training that are commonly adopted and undertaken by firms to significantly improve their performance. The paper further concludes that when firms keenly invest in technological adoption and training through networks, performance in terms of productivity is inevitable. Another study by Das and Goswami (2019) on how networks of entrepreneurs enables the firms acquire technologies and necessary knowledge especially on small firms leads performance using empirical studies in the context of Kamrup, a district of Assam found that support given by other firms in a network including skills and knowledge coupled with technological advancement enables firms gain new ways of doing business thus superior performance.

Another study by Khalid, Ahmed, Tundikbayeva and Ahmed (2019) in empirical evidence focusing on entrepreneurship as a concept that requires networks and know-how and how this could lead to firm performance found that those firms that are well networked are able to learn new ways of doing things especially through acquisition of knowledge which significantly impact on their revenues and overall success. Further Rosli and Mahmood (2013) on how human resource management through networks moderate firm's entrepreneur training and innovation to influence firm performance especially in small businesses found that when management networks, they are able to bring skills through training which is coupled with innovations through technological adoption to bring about better performance.

Leiva, Monge and Alegre (2014) in their review of existing literature on the influence of entrepreneurial learning through networks and innovation results to superior performance argued that innovative nature of the firm is through trainings from expertise in entrepreneurship which are acquired by networking within and without various business undertakings. This will significantly result to better performance as firms will acquire the technical know-how and apply in those crucial areas of performance aspects. The study further reveals that when firms have well established themselves in a network, they are able to seek financial assistance that are key to acquiring new technologies which will improve the processes for firms to gain competitiveness and outperform others in the same industry.

Essel, Adams and Amankwah (2019) studying how entrepreneurship coupled with characteristics at institutional level in Ghana firms at small scale level using a technique of

multiple regression of multivariate level found that factors of demographics like education as well as those of institution like trainings and also characteristics in the firm like advancement in technology conjointly in a significant state influence performance of SMEs. The study further gives an indication that those entrepreneurs with requisite training acquire skills which are key to networking and eventually acquisition of necessary technologies that foster performance.

Chege, Wang and Suntu (2020) studying innovation in technology information and the impact it creates to a firm using a modeling of structural equation in a 240 enterprises in SMEs indicated that adoption of technology creates a network to the firm which creates a synergy for firms to acquire entrepreneurship knowledge which significantly and positive add to the value of a firm. The study enabled the understanding of how a firm can use technology adoption like centers of ICT that are aimed at supporting businesses and their involved processes. The study therefore gives a green light to firms especially those in SMEs to acquire innovativeness through entrepreneurial training for them to compete effectively.

Kocak, Carsrud and Oflazoglu (2017) in examining how orientations in entrepreneurship and technology adoption affect performance and also innovativeness of firms especially in SMEs found that entrepreneurial training enhances entrepreneurship orientation in terms of aggressiveness, innovativeness and this gives firms' ability to network for more technologies that fit their processes. The study also found that market reactivity leads to radical innovations leading to significant improvement in performance.

Gronum (2015) studying how technology adoption, competencies in entrepreneurship and breadth in innovation creates an innovative firm found that technology adoption is significantly related to firms' innovativeness thus leading to high performance. The study further found a significant interconnectedness between networking and firm performance due to dynamics in technology adoption which creates ability for the firm to network through marketing channels and also business communication channels. The study therefore gives recommendations for firms to combine factors like networking, adoption of technology and trainings on entrepreneurial related activities to gain competitive edge and perform exemplary.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research adopted a descriptive research and quantitative research to indicate the characteristics of the population. In the current study, the researcher's population of focus (target population) was the fitness SMEs that are formally registered by Nairobi City County licensing office and operating in Nairobi County. This study considered all the 119 fitness SMEs as the sample for this study; it was a census survey. The respondents in this study are the gym owners and gym managers. The study used questionnaire to collect data. This was achieved

through emailing the concerned respondents and making follow up through voice calls since some were closed due to COVID 19 pandemic. The relationships between variables were determined using inferential statistics such as multiple regression and Pearson correlation coefficients. Ordinal and nominal scales will be used to measure continuous and categorical variables. P-value was used to ascertain the significance of each construct in the regression model. The variables were taken to be statistically significant if the $p\text{-value} \leq 0.05$. The regression model that the researcher used was expounded as follows;

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \varepsilon$$

Where Y= Firm performance

X₁= Entrepreneurial training

X₂= Networking

X₃= Technology adoption

X₄= Financial access

β_0 –Constant

$\beta_1, 2, 3, 4$ - Beta coefficients

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Response Rate

All 119 gyms and health clubs in Nairobi County were included in the study. Only 96 of the 119 questionnaires were filled out and returned by the respondents. An 80.67 percent favorable response rate was achieved. The remaining 19.33 percent remained unresponsive despite several follow-ups and reminders.

Correlation Analysis

The degree of relationship between the variables under examination was measured using Pearson correlation i.e. predictor variables (entrepreneurial training, networking, technological adoption and financial access) and the dependent variable (firm performance). Pearson correlation coefficients range between -1 and +1. Where a Pearson coefficient of 0.3 indicates a weak correlation, a Pearson coefficient of >0.30.5 indicates a moderate correlation, and a Pearson coefficient of >0.5 indicates a strong correlation, negative values indicate negative correlation and positive values indicate positive correlation, negative values indicate negative correlation, and positive values indicate positive correlation, Pearson coefficient 0.3 denotes a weak correlation, Pearson coefficient >0.30.5 denotes a moderate association, and Pearson coefficient >0.5 denotes a significant correlation. The findings are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Correlation Analysis Results

		Entrepreneurial training	Networking	Technology adoption	Financial access	Firm performance
Entrepreneurial training	Pearson. Correlation.	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
	N.	96				
Networking	Pearson. Correlation.	.402**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000				
	N.	96	96			
Technology adoption	Pearson. Correlation.	.102	.394**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.321	.000			
	N.	96	96	96		
Financial access	Pearson. Correlation.	.597**	.740**	.497**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		
	N.	96	96	96	96	
Firm performance	Pearson. Correlation.	.635**	.742**	.564**	.828**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N.	96	96	96	96	96

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

According to Table 1, financial access has the greatest beneficial impact on company performance (Pearson correlation coefficient =.828 and P0.05), showing that the link is statistically significant. Furthermore, company performance is positively connected with networking (Pearson correlation coefficient =.742 and P0.05), signifying a statistically meaningful and strong association. Further entrepreneurial training had a substantial and statistically significant link to business performance (Pearson correlation coefficient =.635 and P0.05). Finally, there was a strong and statistically significant association between technology adoption and company performance (Pearson correlation coefficient =.564 and P0.05). As a result, the findings suggest that all variables have a role in explaining gym/health club success in Nairobi.

Regression Analysis

The impact of each independent variable (entrepreneurial training, networking, technological adoption, and financial availability) on the dependent variable was investigated using multiple regression analysis (firm performance). Correlations (R), coefficients of determinations (R²), F-Statistic values (F), and beta values (β) were all taken into account in the interpretation of the data and subsequent discussions at a 95 percent confidence level ($\alpha=0.05$). When R² was determined, the change in the dependent variable was explained by the change in the independent variables. Furthermore, the more significant the model was, the higher the F-Statistic was. The beta (β) sign indicated whether the independent variable had a positive or negative impact on the dependent variable (either negative or positive). The R-value denotes the strength of the link between the variables, and the t-values denote the relative relevance of the variables. The findings are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.901 ^a	.811	.803	.12499

a. Predictors: (Constant), Financial access, Technology adoption, Entrepreneurial training , Networking

The independent variables are shown in Table 2 (Entrepreneurial training, networking, technological adoption and financial access) combined influences firm performance as the dependent variable by 81.1% as shown by the value of coefficient of determination ($R^2=.811$). Further the results shows that all the variables combined relate to firm performance at .901 as shown by correlation coefficient of $R=.901$. This depicts high influence of independent variables to firm performance and therefore key in decision making if performance is to be realized.

Table 3: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	6.103	4	1.526	97.675	.000 ^b
	Residual	1.422	91	.016		
	Total	7.525	95			

a. Dependent Variable: Firm performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Financial access, Technology adoption, Entrepreneurial training , Networking

Because the value of significance (p-value) is less than 0.05 at the 95 percent confidence level, the processed data, which is the population parameters, had a significance level of 0.000, indicating that the data is excellent for forming a conclusion on the population's parameter, as shown in Table 3. The F value was high an indication that independent variables (entrepreneurial training, networking, technological adoption and financial access) combined significantly influence firm performance.

Table 4: Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
		Coefficients		Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.430	.195		2.199	.030
	Entrepreneurial training	.205	.038	.320	5.393	.000
	Networking	.226	.051	.298	4.383	.000
	Technology adoption	.250	.050	.275	5.029	.000
	Financial access	.237	.072	.280	3.281	.001

a. Dependent Variable: Firm performance

The results in Table 4 indicates that the contribution of each independent variable (entrepreneurial training, networking, technological adoption and financial access) on firm performance. The significant relationship is manifested by the β and t-values in the coefficient table. Entrepreneurial training ($\beta=.205$, $t=5.393$, $p<0.05$), Networking ($\beta=.226$, $t=4.383$, $p<0.05$), technology adoption ($\beta=.250$, $t=5.029$, $p<0.05$) and financial access ($\beta=.237$, $t=3.281$, $p<0.05$). This therefore depicts that these variables contributes positively and significantly to firm performance and thus are key in determining performance of gyms/health clubs in Nairobi County. The results support previous literature; for instance Mayuran (2016) found a significant relationship between entrepreneurship training and company performance. Networking if well utilized will improve the financial performance and increase the market share of SMEs through identification of key partners by allowing SMEs to access resources that would have been difficult to access on their own (Sangi, Shuguang & Sangi, 2018). Vilaseca (2013) contends that there is need for organizations to improve technologies, redistributing of innovation is getting reasonable and is rising as an effective variable for some SMEs. Khandker, (2013) contends that finance not only supports market access, expansion of enterprises and reduction of risk, it also supports entrepreneurial activity, innovation and investment in high-return investment projects

The regression model that the researcher used was expounded as follows;

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4 + \varepsilon$$

Based on the results, the regression model is substituted as follows:

$$Y = 0.430 + .205X_1 + .226X_2 + .250X_3 + .237X_4$$

Where Y= Firm performance

X₁= Entrepreneurial training

X₂= Networking

X₃= Technology adoption

X₄= Financial access

Firm performance is 0.430 in the absence of all independent factors, according to the model. The model further implies that independently, a unit change in entrepreneurial training, networking, technological adoption and financial access leads to .205, .226, .250 and .237 change in firm performance which are all significant at 0.05 statistical levels.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The predictor variables were entrepreneurial training, networking, technological adoption and financial access and the dependent variable was firm performance. According to the findings, financial access has the most positive impact on firm performance. However, networking, entrepreneurial training and technology adoption also shown a statistically strong relationship with firm performance. The results further shows that the independent variables (entrepreneurial training, networking, technological adoption and financial access) combined influences firm performance as the dependent variable by 81.1% as shown by the value of coefficient of determination ($R^2=.811$). Further the results shows that all the variables combined relate to firm performance at .901 as shown by correlation coefficient of $R=.901$. This depicts high influence of independent variables to firm performance and therefore key in decision making if performance is to be realized.

The study therefore recommends that firms should consider these factors for better identification of viable opportunities and translating such opportunities to profitable firms. Further technology has basically become irreplaceable apparatus for everyday activities of business operations. Gyms/health clubs should consider putting noteworthy measure of resources in innovation to reinforce their competitive positions because of high utilization of technology among SMEs, they have been subjected to few risks associated with manual and traditional form of operations thus increasing their returns Earlier studies on technology appropriation in SMEs show that technologies have increased the efficiency of SMEs necessary for survival and growth.

The study likewise infers that firms should seek after networks to share ideas, relevant knowledge, skills and unique resources to succeed in a competing environment. These networks provide a platform through which gyms/health clubs should harness what they don't possess to better their operations. The study emphasized the importance of networks with an argument that those firms in relevant networks performs better since they are able to use networks strengths to solve their impeding challenges and seek more opportunities to widen their scope of operation through sharing unique resources and technologies to innovate in to better and efficient ways of operations.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The study encountered several limitations of which efforts was made not to influence the study negatively. First, the research aimed towards the manager or owner who might not always be available and have the time to respond. This brings in individual perception on the variables rather than a uniform generalization of the overall health clubs in Kenya. The use of different conceptualized sub-variables on performance was with the assumption that those measures had not changed and that performance reflected the outcome of entrepreneurial factors dimension adopted. The other limitation was the study's focus which was only on health clubs. The study did not consider the role played by other health care facilities as part of the context. The data that was sought was through questionnaires and only one respondent was targeted on voluntary basis. The respondents were not obligated to provide the data and this lead to delays and affected the response rate.

The study recommends future investigations that it believes will contribute to future research knowledge. It is recommended that other studies should be done there using other popular measures of performance like improved financial performance since this study used only entrepreneurial satisfaction levels as performance measures. These studies can further be disaggregated by industry among SMEs apart from fitness industry to offer more in-depth insight and should not presume linear relationships and a different form of relationship like a curvilinear relationship. Other studies on the factors influencing entrepreneurship and performance like market efficiency may also be important to evaluate their effect on entrepreneurship potential which should be considered in future.

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