Entrepreneurial networking and performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms in Kenya

American Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities
Vol. 10, No. 1, 90-108, 2025
e-ISSN: 2226-4809/p-ISSN: 2304-6945

(Corresponding Author)

Ruth Niva Ongachi[1]
Peter Maku Ngatia[2]
Elizabeth Nambuswa Makokha[3]
Julius Miroga[4]

[1]*Doctor of Philosophy in Entrepreneurship of Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, (JKUAT), Kenya.*
[1]*Email: ongachir@gmail.com*
[2,3,4]*School of Business and Entrepreneurship, JKUAT, Kenya.*
[2]*Email: Pngatia@jkuat.ac.ke*
[3]*Email: enambuswa@jkuat.ac.ke*
[4]*Email: juliusmiroga@jkuat.ac.ke*

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of entrepreneurial networking on performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms in Kenya. The study population were 437 small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms in Kenya. Structured questionnaires were employed for data collection using two ways: drop and pick method and emailing survey. Pearson R correlation and multiple regression models were used to quantify the association entrepreneurial networking and performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms. Study findings established that entrepreneurial networking aspects that include entrepreneurial opportunity, diffusion knowledge and entrepreneurial culture have positive and significant influence on performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms. The study concluded that entrepreneurial networking has a positive and significant influence on performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms. The study recommends the need for small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms to collaborate with peers in the market, participate in project workshops and events with aim of improving entrepreneurial networking. Additionally, there is need for sensitization from the ministry of trade and industry using various platforms which include shows, exhibitions, trade fairs, digital and mobile applications.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial networking, Performance of small and medium paper, Wood manufacturing firms.*

DOI: 10.55284/ajssh.v10i1.1449
Citation | Ongachi, R. N. ., Ngatia, P. M. ., Makokha, E. N. ., & Miroga, J. (2025). Entrepreneurial networking and performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms in Kenya. *American Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, 10*(1), 90-109.

Funding: This study received no specific financial support.
Institutional Review Board Statement: The Ethical Committee of the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agricture and Technology, Kenya has granted approval for this study on 18 June 2024 (Ref. No. NACOSTI/P/24/36781).
Transparency: The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.
Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.
Authors' Contributions: All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.
History: Received: 8 April 2025/ Revised: 16 June 2025/ Accepted: 18 June 2025 / Published: 20 June 2025
Publisher: Online Science Publishing

Highlights of this paper

- This study emphasizes the importance of entrepreneurial networking within the manufacturing sector in Kenya.
- It aimed to examine the impact of entrepreneurial networking on the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises within the paper and wood manufacturing sectors.
- The study findings are significant for practice, policy, and future research activities.

1. INTRODUCTION

In high-income nations, SMEs account for 49% of the official GDP (Algan, 2019). According to OECD (2019) SMEs make up between 95 and 99 percent of all businesses in its member states and account for two-thirds of all private sector jobs in OECD nations. Studies by Abor and Quartey (2010) and Chodokufa (2009) note that 90 per cent of private enterprises in Africa are SMEs contributing about 50 per cent of GDP and employment opportunities. In the majority of African nations, SMEs account for more than 50% of GDP and employment. Thus, researchers and policymakers continue to pay close attention to the performance, expansion, and survival of SMEs due to their enormous contributions to the economy of many countries (Quartey, 2023).

In order to make SMEs competitive, several economies have implemented systems to help them perform better, promote productive growth, and establish a favourable business environment through innovations, technology and networking. Innovation represents the search for novelty that enables small enterprises to increase their competitiveness and face competition (Fatoki, 2021). The ability to engage in entrepreneurial and technological innovation is viewed as critically importance in promoting the performance of enterprises and consequently their growth. However, due to their restricted capabilities, small businesses have difficulty obtaining financial and technological resources, which restrict their performance (Indrawati, 2020). Innovations are among the main sources of a competitive advantage and they are essential for enterprise growth. Due to the SME significant importance to the economy, there is need to understand what the drivers of entrepreneurial resources among small enterprises are.

Entrepreneurial resources are the tangible and intangible assets firms use to exploit competitive imperfections in markets (Alvarez & Barney, 2014). Entrepreneur resources include an entrepreneur's own resources and abilities (Wu, 2007). According to Olugbola (2017) entrepreneurial resources include financial resources, physical resources and technological resources. Hayter (2013) entrepreneurial resources comprise knowledge, financial resources, physical resources and networking resources. This study investigates how scarce resources influence manufacturing SME performance in Kenya.

Globally, SMEs in Germany contribute 54.4% of its GDP and 63.7% of total employment (European Commission, 2019). Germany's manufacturing and non-financial sectors had a 17.9% increase in SME value added overall between 2014 and 2018, with small businesses providing the largest increase at 21.1%. Germany remains influencer in skills, innovation, internationalization and access to finance by manufacturing SMEs compared to other European Union counterparts (European Commission, 2019). Entrepreneurial and technological innovations are highly ranked as the drivers of the performance and growth of German SMEs (Fonger, 2016). In the paper and wood manufacturing, Germany leads the way in the consumption and paper production (Birkner, 2022).

SMEs make up over 95% of businesses in Sub-Saharan Africa. As such, SMEs are a major contributor to economic growth in Africa, accounting for an estimated 80% of all jobs on the continent. SMEs in Africa contributes 40% to the Africa's GDP 9 (World Bank, 2020). Nearly all of the 44 million micro, small, and medium-sized businesses in Sub-Saharan Africa are micro (Runde, 2022). Manufacturing has been identified as a growth driver for nations in sub-Saharan Africa. However, manufacturing only makes up over 13% of the GDP in Sub-

Saharan Africa (Zhou & Victor, 2021). Despite the potential of SMEs manufacturing to the economy in Africa, many manufacturing SMEs in Africa face hurdles related to inadequate access to financing, technological and innovation capabilities and limited global networking. In addition, bureaucratic regulatory policies undermine the growth of numerous manufacturing SMEs in Africa.

Locally in Kenya, manufacturing industry is a significant yet underdeveloped sector of the economy. Kenya's manufacturing industry is crucial to the country's economic growth since it creates jobs and contributes to exports and national output. According to KAM (2019) the manufacturing sector's share of Kenya's GDP has historically remained stable at about 10%, falling from 9.2% in 2016 to 8.4% in 2017. The Vision 2030 sees to transform Kenya into a middle income industrialized country is anchored on the manufacturing industry. In addition, the Kenya Big Four Agenda incorporates manufacturing as one of the key pillar in attaining this noble goal. In the quest of expanding manufacturing industry in Kenya, the manufacturing SMEs have been touted to be critical in achieving this. According to Wakiaga (2020) SMEs are critical in growth of manufacturing sector in Kenya. Despite the significance of manufacturing to the economy, the contribution of manufacturing to Kenya has been declining compared to aggregate contribution in Sub-Saharan Africa.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Small and medium manufacturing firms in Kenya may be experiencing challenges in accessing entrepreneurial resources that are critical in their operations. To be specific, the small and medium wood and paper manufacturing firms in Kenya could be experiencing difficulties in accessing resources such as row materials, finances, innovative skills, tools, equipment, machineries and skilled human resources among others. These entrepreneurial resources are critical for their production operations and consequently their overall performance.

It is a matter of concern that the paper and wood manufacturing industry in Kenya has been struggling overtime. Large paper and wood manufacturing in Kenya Webuye Paper Mills collapsed and now light paper and wood processing industries are in existence. The paper industry once produces around 80% of Kenya's market demand for paper and paper board to many paper-convertors, nonetheless, the demand for wood and paper products is still unsatisfied warranting some importation. Paper and paper board imports to Kenya stood at 542 tons worth$1,812,000 in 2020, while wood furniture imports were71,356 items worth$3M in 2021 (wits.world bank.org) Moreover, paper priced locally are more expensive than those ones imported. Kenya exports just 2% of its total paper and wood output because of the significant domestic demand for paper. It is not clear why the existing firms are unable to perform well enough by satisfying demand, export products, create employment, achieve high profits, expansion and diversification, hence the need for this study. The SMEs are not sufficiently contributing to GDP, and economy to help alienate poverty and improve peoples' livelihood.

In addition, the government does not have a clear policy for the growth of the paper industry. Despite the paper and wood manufacturing SMEs playing significant role in the manufacturing sector, their optimal potential has been constrained by access to entrepreneurial resources and support from the government. Manufacturing sector in Kenya is one of the cornerstones of the (2030) economic growth and Big Four Agenda.

In Vision 2030, the manufacturing sector's duty is to generate jobs and long-term wealth for the Kenyan people. As envisioned in Vision 2030, the sector's overarching objective in the Medium Term Plan (MTP) is to raise its GDP contribution by at least 10% annually. In accordance with the Big Four Agenda, the government aims to enhance the ease of doing business, boost foreign direct investment, generate employment annually, and raise the manufacturing sector's share of the GDP from 9.2% to 15% by 2025 (KAM, 2019). This performance target may be far-fetched given that 2025 is around the corner and the GDP gap to fill is quite big. In (2019), manufacturing

industry contributed approximately 7.54 percent to the GDP which is far from projected 15% by (2022) and 30% by (2030) (World Bank, 2020).

It is argued that entrepreneurial resources are key to the survival and high performance of SMEs in all economies globally and consequently the growth of a nation's economic status. Ademiluyi (2019) opined that consolidation of entrepreneurial resources such as human, finance, innovative skills and technology offers advantages over competitors and is thus viewed as critical for a firm to survive in the turbulent business environment Somwethee, Aujirapongpan, and Ru-Zhue (2023) argued that entrepreneurial resources have positive influence on enterprise performance. Despite studies acknowledging that entrepreneurial resources are critical to the performance of enterprises, the studies did not conceptually narrow down to entrepreneurial resources like access to finance, networking, entrepreneurial innovation and technological innovation that are deemed critical to the operational performance of manufacturing firms (Khan, Rathore, & Sial, 2020; Khan, Salamzadeh, Kawamorita, & Rethi, 2021). The local studies by Murimi, Ombaka, and Muchiri (2021) and Dushime (2022) did not elaborate the role of regulatory environment and entrepreneurial networking on the performance of manufacturing firms. It is against these that this research sought to establish the influence of entrepreneurial networking on performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing SMEs in Kenya.

2. THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL REVIEW OF THE STUDY

The section reviewed theory and empirical studies that underpinned the study.

2.1. Theoretical Literature

Dynamic-Capabilities Theory, developed by Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997) as an improvement of the resource-based perspective theory of the firm, served as the foundation for the study. While the RBV puts emphasis on resource choice or selection of appropriate resources, dynamic capabilities emphasize reconfiguration of resources and renewal (Teece, 2014). The dynamic-capabilities theory looks at how businesses combine, develop, and reorganise their internal and external firm-specific skills to create new ones that fit the unpredictable and quickly evolving business environment. The idea assumes that firms with more dynamic capabilities will perform better than firms with less dynamic capabilities, according to Wang, Senaratne, and Rafiq (2015).

The dynamic capabilities theory, which adopts a process approach and serves as a buffer between firm resources and the evolving business environment, aims to close these gaps (Teece, 2014). Dynamic resources enable a firm to modify its mix of resources, preserving its competitive advantage, which would otherwise be rapidly diminished (Wheeler, 2002). Kim, Song, and Triche (2015) claim that resources can exhibit many characteristics of dynamic capabilities, making them especially valuable for business enterprises operating in quickly evolving environments. However, examining several research papers in this subject, such as Schreyögg and Kliesch-Eberl (2007); Salvato (2021) and Zahra, Sapienza, and Davidsson (2006) reveals discrepancies, overlapping definitions, and inconsistencies in the way dynamic skills are distinguished from other capabilities. According to Zahra and George (2002) dynamic capabilities are the ability of a firm to adapt to changing customer needs and rival strategies, not its skills or procedures.

Nonetheless, this theory is applicable in this study in informing the need for human resource capabilities for growth of firms. The human resource capabilities include entrepreneurial networking and management skills required in the management of paper and wood manufacturing small and medium enterprises. The ability of paper and wood manufacturing small and medium enterprises to reconfigure its human resource capabilities is essential in driving the objectives of an enterprises. Dynamic capabilities impact the resource base of the firm which in turn is

the source of the firm's competitive advantage. The Dynamic-Capabilities Theory anchored the objective one to establish the influence of entrepreneurial networking on the performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms in Kenya.

2.2. Empirical Review

Business networking is the process by which managers and/or owners of businesses use their personal and professional networks to generate a steady flow of new business for their enterprises (Surin, Edward, Hussin, & Ab Wahab, 2016). It is a social-economic activity by which groups of like-minded entrepreneurs recognize, create or act upon opportunities. They may offer different kinds of resources to start or improve business projects. According to (Abbas, Raza, Nurunnabi, Minai, & Bano, 2019) the entrepreneurial business network is a platform that facilitates the development of business relationships, the identification, development, or action of economic opportunities, the sharing of information, and the search for possible business partners for initiatives. Additionally, according to Sendawula, Kisubi, Najjinda, Nantale, and Kabbera (2023) entrepreneurial networks as a resource help businesses seek, attract and acquire significant resources which are essential to their performance and growth. For Löfsten, Isaksson, and Rannikko (2023) entrepreneur's network is viewed as a source of social capital or resource that promote firm performance.

The term entrepreneurial networking is the process of learning the skills needed to assume the risk of establishing a business venture through others. In order to integrate people, money, and resources to meet a demand and so produce wealth, entrepreneurs must combine their creative and original ideas with management and organisational skills. It can also mean that a person is willing and able to look for investment opportunities, start a business, and successfully manage it (Abu-Rumman, Al Shraah, Al-Madi, & Alfalah, 2021).

Entrepreneurs must prioritize networking skills to build and maintain relationships with others, fostering mutual respect, trust, and social capital (Mlotshwa & Msimango-Galawe, 2020). Yueng (2016) emphasizes the role of networking in increasing job satisfaction for business managers. To fully benefit from networking, entrepreneurs must acknowledge its importance and establish strategic relationships. One of the most important talents to acquire in order to help the business succeed is networking. Since starting a successful business requires a lot of time and work, it makes sense to have a network of partners and business partners from which to draw (Zahra & Wright, 2016). Additionally, interacting with people who have similar passions and approaches to goal-achieving increases the likelihood that entrepreneurs will take the initiative and succeed. In addition business networking enhances skills, learns from success, attracts customers, and promotes businesses, while entrepreneurship skills are crucial for small-scale enterprise growth and survival (Zahra & Wright, 2016).

Communication is a way of interacting with people, it is a component of networking. Entrepreneurs strive to enhance their communication skills to effectively share ideas, present them clearly, and collaborate with staff, team members, clients, and colleagues (Al Mehrzi & Singh, 2016). These skills are crucial in project explanations, elevator pitches, presentations, and training, making them a fundamental requirement for entrepreneurs (Jung & Sung, 2017). Similarly, in an exploratory study among entrepreneurs by Odewale, Abd Rani, Migiro, and Adeyeye (2019) they affirm that communication skills affect entrepreneurial success. Audretsch, Lehmann, and Paleari (2015) acknowledge that communication is essential for an entrepreneur to interact inoffensively with stakeholders such as potential customers and investors. Zhou and Xu (2015) maintain that communication skills play a significant role in entrepreneurial activities. Challenges faced by entrepreneur could be lack of interpersonal, managerial, communication and innovative skills.

2.3. Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework visually represents the relationships between variables in a study, providing a quick overview of proposed relationships through graphic or diagrammatic representation. A conceptual framework, according to Varpio, Paradis, Uijtdehaage, and Young (2020) is a diagrammatical or graphical model that presents the link between the variables in the study. In order to find solutions to the issues brought up by the research topics, the study plans to follow this road map. A variable, according to Leshem and Trafford (2007) is a measurable characteristic that takes on several quantitative values depending on the subject. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between variables.

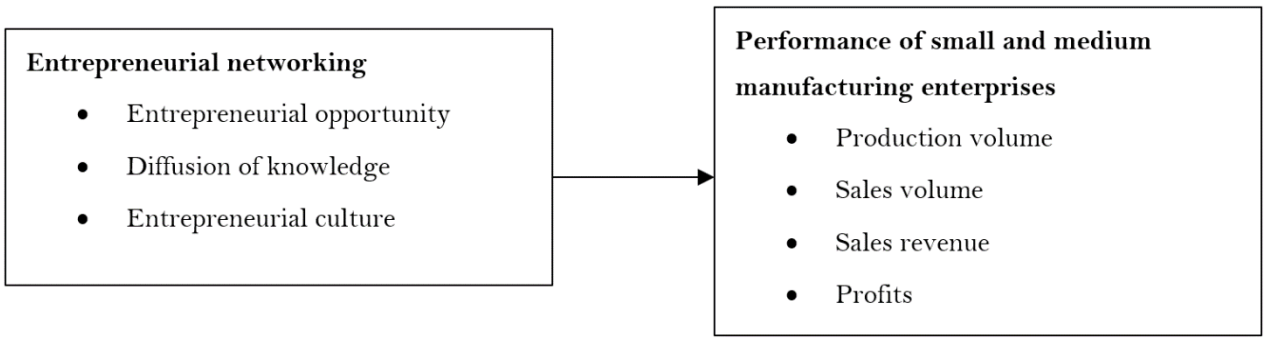

Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

From the presentation in Figure 1, the independent variable of the study is entrepreneurial networking. The dependent variable is performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms. It is expected that entrepreneurial networking may have a positive influence on the performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Positivism was adopted in this study. Research philosophy forms the basis of knowledge where significant assumptions and predispositions of the study are made. Positivism was used because it brings about a quantitative approach to study, arguing that there exist reality which can be measured numerically (Furrer, Thomas, & Goussevskaia, 2007). With the positivist approach, the results was also analyzed scientifically to give logical results (Collis & Hussey, 2014). With the positivist research philosophy, only the factual information gained through observation can be trusted. Therefore, the role of the researcher is to collect quantitative data, analyze and interpret the information.

The study adopted the descriptive survey design. Descriptive survey design aids researchers in effectively summarizing and organizing data by describing statistical observations and reducing information to an understandable form. Mugenda and Mugenda (2008) define descriptive research as the procedure for data collection so as to test hypothesis and answer questions on the area under study. The study utilized a descriptive research design to understand group characteristics, offer ideas for further investigation, and aid in decision-making (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

A population is a group of elements from which the study inferences can be made. Satishprakash (2020) refer to population as the collection of subjects for drawing a sample. The unit of analyses were the small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms. Thus, the study population were 437 small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms operating in Nairobi Metropolitan including Nairobi Main, Kiambu, Machakos and Kajiado

regions in Kenya (KNBS, 2023; Wresearch, 2022). These regions comprise a substantial number of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms. The unit of observations were the operations managers for small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms. Thus, the target population were 437 operations managers for small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms. Thus operations managers formed the unit of observation, while the unit of analysis were the wood and paper manufacturing firms

Sampling involves selecting individuals to provide data from larger groups, with sample size being a key factor in determining the representation of the population. Sampling is choosing a few elements in a population that can act as a representative of the whole population. The justification to this is that the sample helps to come up with generalized conclusion on the entire population. As pointed out by Kothari (2017) a good sample size should adequately represent the population under study. Slovin's formula, simplified formula was employed in calculating a sample size of 209 small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms.

Data collection involves gathering raw data for analysis, using research instruments like questionnaires, interviews, standard tests, and observation forms in social research (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Structured questionnaire were employed to collect data. The study utilized an open-ended structured questionnaire, which is suitable for both quantitative and qualitative data collection, making it affordable and easy to analyze and replicate.

Collection of data involves a procedural method of information gathering related to the research problem, making use of interview, participant observation, focus group discussions, narratives and case histories (Lim, 2024). The administration of questionnaires was through two ways: drop and pick method and emailing survey. This improved the response rate, confidentiality and anonymity were assured. The units of observation were operations managers for small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms. They informed the importance of the study and their consent were sought for those willing to take part in the study. The anonymity of participants was maintained; their names did not appear anywhere in the study.

Piloting is a crucial process that ensures the clarity and understanding of research questions, as well as the validity and reliability of data collection instruments. To enhance validity, the opinion of experts in the area understudy is sought to check the accuracy of data used in measuring the performance of SMEs in Kenya. The questionnaires were piloted to 21 small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms in Ngong and Machakos County. These small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms were not included in the final study. Reliability ensured the internal consistency of the study instrument. Validity and reliability allowed adjustment of the questionnaires for purposes of data collection. Content validity was ensured by review of comments.

SPSS version 27 was used to analyze data using multiple regression models to determine the impact of independent variables on the dependent variable. Multiple regression models were utilized to measure the correlation between study variables and to establish any causal relationship through multiple linear regression analysis (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2008). Gujarati (1995) emphasized that causation models are best explained through linear regression analysis, and the study utilized linear regression results for each variable; SPSS version 27 was employed in the data analysis.

3.1. Regression Model

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + e$$

Where Y is the outcome variable (Performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms).

X_1 is entrepreneurial networking.

β_0 is the constant of the model.

β_1 is the beta coefficient of X_1 depicting the change in Y.

e is error term.

4. RESULTS

Results and discussion of findings are undertaken in this section.

4.1. Performance of Small and Medium Paper and Wood Manufacturing Firms

These assessed the performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms in Kenya. The variable was examined by production volume, sales volume, sales revenue and profits. Respondents were asked to record their opinions on a scale of agreement and disagreement with specific measurements borrowing from Likert scale that is Scale; 1-strongly disagree (SD), 2-disagree, 3-moderate, 4-agree, 5-strongly agree (SA) as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Findings of the performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms.

Statement	SD	Disagree	Moderate	Agree	SA	Mean	Std
The firm has new processes, operations, machines and hence high-quality products	40.4	31.5	12.9	6.7	8.4	2.41	1.17
The customers of this SMEs are satisfied with our products and services	44.4	33.7	7.9	7.3	6.7	1.90	1.16
The firm has been recording profits	42.7	32.0	9.0	6.2	10.1	2.34	1.56
The production volume for the firm has been increasing	43.8	32.0	9.6	9.0	5.6	2.49	1.20
The firm receives high return on input due to innovative practices	44.9	29.2	9.6	7.3	9.0	1.94	1.17
The sales revenue for the firm has been increasing	46.1	24.7	13.5	7.9	7.9	1.72	1.15
The customer base for this SMEs has expanded	43.3	33.1	14.0	3.4	6.2	1.97	1.01
The operating revenue for this paper manufacturing firm is sustainable in meeting firm day to day operations	33.7	36.5	12.4	10.1	7.3	2.09	1.29
The return on investment of the firm has rising steadily	37.1	36.0	12.4	6.7	7.9	2.48	1.18
Aggregate means and Std						2.15	1.21

Based on the findings of the study, it was noted that majority (71.9%) of the respondents disagreed that firm have new processes, operations, machines and hence high quality products as depicted by mean of 2.41. It was also revealed that 15.1% of the respondents agreed that firm have new processes, operations, machines and hence, high quality products. It was also found out that majority of the respondents (78.1%) disagreed that customers of the SMEs are satisfied with the products and services as depicted by mean of 1.90. However, 14% of the respondents that agreed with this statement. Moreover, it was found out that majority (74.7%) of the respondents disagreed that the manufacturing SMEs have been recording profits as depicted by mean of 2.34. Further, it was noted that 16.3% agreed that the manufacturing SMEs have been recording profits. Resources are essential for the success and high performance of SMEs include managerial resources, communication resources, production resources, marketing resources and technical resources (Udemba, 2020). Entrepreneurial resources help entrepreneurs analyze situations, opportunities, and environments, organizing and managing businesses as noted by Marus, Mwosi, Mutesigensi, and Ebong (2017). Skilled entrepreneurs have the necessary skills to achieve their goals, overcoming tough situations and lacking managerial, accounting, negotiation, and technical resources, thereby enhancing overall venture performance (Marus et al., 2017).

The findings of the study noted that majority of the respondents (75.8%) disagreed that the production volume for the manufacturing SMEs have been increasing as depicted by mean of 2.49. It was noted that 14.6% respondents agreed with statement. Moreover, most of the respondents (74.1%) disagreed that firm receives high return on input due to innovative practices as depicted by mean of 1.94. On the other hand, 14.6% of the respondents that agreed firm receives high return on input due to innovative practice. Moreover, majority of the respondents (74.1%) disagreed that the sales revenue for the firm has been increasing as depicted by mean of 1.72 while 16.3% of the respondents that agreed. Entrepreneurship resources are essential for individuals to operate small and medium paper and wood enterprises effectively in turbulent business environments. As noted by Forth and Bryson (2019) and Sagar (2024) entrepreneurial skills help consolidate innate characteristics and resources, establish businesses, generate employment, create new products, stimulate innovation, and improve performance and welfare.

It was also noted that majority of the respondents (76.4%) disagreed that the customer base for the manufacturing SMEs have expanded SMEs as depicted by mean of 1.97. Nonetheless, 9.6% of the respondents that agreed market size and customer base for this SMEs. In addition, it was noted that majority of the respondents (70.2%) disagreed that operating revenue for this paper manufacturing firm is sustainable in meeting firm day to day operations as indicated by the mean of 2.09. This was also contrasted by 17.4% of the respondents who agreed. Finally, majority of the respondents (73.1%) did not agree that return on investment of the firm has rising steadily as depicted by the mean 2.48. This was however contrasted by 14.6% who agreed that return on investment of the firm has rising steadily. The results imply that entrepreneurial resources are crucial for small-scale enterprises' growth, performance, and survival. They are acquired through training and innovation adoption, with learning and networking significantly influencing entrepreneurs' growth and performance as noted by the findings by Prasanna et al. (2019); Setyawati, Mohd Shariff, and Saud (2011) and Zahra and Wright (2016).

Further the study examined the performance trends and the findings are presented in Figure 2 and it measures production volume, sales volume, sales revenue and profits from 2015 to 2022.

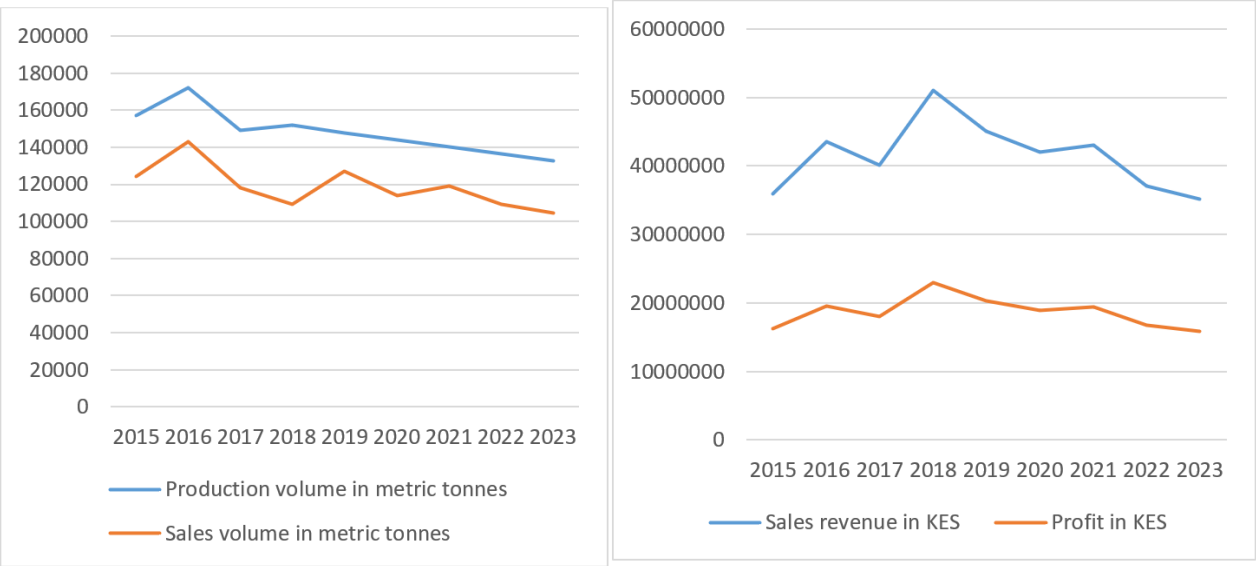

Figure 2. Trends of average production volume, sales volume, sales revenue and profits.

Source: KMA 2015-2023.

Based on the findings in Figure 2, the production volume, sales volume, sales revenue and profits have been fluctuating over time in the manufacturing sector compromising of SMEs. Production volume recorded the huge decline in 2018 and highest rise in the subsequent year and this was replicated with sales revenue that shrank

within the same period. The overall growth of production volume, sales volume, sales revenue and profits have stagnated within one digit growth or performance and thus there is a concern for policymakers in the industry and the field.

4.2. Entrepreneurial Networking and Performance of Small and Medium Wood and Paper Manufacturing Firms in Kenya

Study objective sought to establish the influence of entrepreneurial networking on the performance of small and medium wood and paper manufacturing firms. The variable entrepreneurial networking was examined using entrepreneurial opportunity, diffusion knowledge and entrepreneurial culture. Participants were asked to record their opinions on a scale of agreement and disagreement with specific measurements borrowing from Likert scale that is Scale 1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-moderate, 4-agree, 5-strongly agree as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive results of entrepreneurial networking.

Statement	SD	Disagree	Moderate	Agree	SA	Mean	Std
The firm is able to effectively plan for a schedule for networking activities	16.9	7.9	11.3	39.2	24.7	3.77	1.38
I encourage the firm employees to attend networking activities	9.6	8.4	21.3	35.4	25.3	3.58	1.22
I am able to identify opportunities through networking activities	12.9	7.3	19.7	37.1	23.0	3.50	1.28
The firm goals of networking are clearly communicated to the employees	15.7	11.8	14.6	31.5	26.4	3.41	1.40
The organization has a number of new innovative ideas annually gained from networking	6.9	8.4	13.5	49.3	21.9	3.61	1.37
The firm's sales revenue has grown due to networking efforts	13.5	6.7	18.5	36.0	25.3	3.53	1.31
The networking activities of the firm are geared toward expanding the market niche for our products	15.7	3.9	15.7	36.5	28.1	3.57	1.36
The entrepreneurial business networks has help this manufacturing SME to become more dynamic, innovative and competitive	11.8	10.1	10.8	42.6	24.7	3.68	1.29
Through entrepreneurial business networking, the firm has been able to create a platform to build business relationships, share information and seek potential business partners for ventures	9.6	11.8	13.5	38.2	27.0	3.61	1.26
Aggregate means and Std						**3.58**	**1.32**

Based on the findings in the study it was revealed that majority of the respondents (63.9%) of the respondents agreed that firms are able to effectively plan for their schedule for networking activities and this is backed by a mean of 3.77. In addition, 24.8% of the respondents disagreed with the findings and 11.3% were neutral on this proposition. On the other hand, it was revealed that many of the respondents (60.7%) agreed that firms encourage their employees to attend networking activities and this is indicated by the mean of 3.58. Moreover, 18% of the respondents disagreed that firms are doing enough to encourage their employees in venturing on networking activities. The entrepreneurial networking is a crucial process of getting skills needed to assume the risk of establishing a business venture through others. Entrepreneurship involves combining creative ideas with management and organization skills to create wealth by combining people, money, and resources to meet a specific need as noted by Abu-Rumman et al. (2021).

The findings of the study established that many of the respondents (60.1%) agreed that they are able to identify opportunities through networking activities. This was signified by the mean of 3.50. Likewise, 20.2% of the respondents disagreed that they have the ability to identify opportunities through networking. The outcome of the study indicated that majority of the respondents (57.9%) agreed that firm goals of networking are clearly communicated to the employees as indicated by mean of 3.41. In addition, 27.5% of the employees disagreed that firm goals of networking are properly communicated to employees and 14.6% of the respondents were neutral.

The study deduced that many of the respondents (71.2%) agreed that organization has a number of new innovative ideas annually gained from networking as depicted by the mean of 3.61. This was evident as 15.3% of respondents disagreed that their organization has number of new innovative ideas annually gained from networking and 13.5% remained neutral. On the other hand, many of the respondents agreed that (61.3%) their firm's sales revenue has grown due to networking efforts as depicted by mean of 3.53. It was also found that 20.2% of the respondents disagreed that their firm's sales revenue has grown due to networking efforts and 18.5% of the respondents were neutral. Entrepreneurs rely heavily on networking skills, which involve building and maintaining relationships with others.

Networking relationships foster successful business practices, mutual respect, trust, and social capital (Mlotshwa & Msimango-Galawe, 2020). Yueng (2016) emphasizes the importance of trust and respect for business managers, boosting job satisfaction. Entrepreneurs must recognize networking's importance and establish strategic relationships to fully benefit from it, as it takes time and effort to create a successful firm (Madzimure, 2019). Business networking is crucial for enhancing entrepreneurial skills, learning from others' successes, attracting new customers, and promoting businesses, as they are vital for the growth and survival of small-scale enterprises (Zahra & Wright, 2016).

The findings of the study established that many of the respondents (64.6%) agreed that networking activities of their firms are geared toward expanding the market niche for our products and this was depicted by mean of 3.57. In addition, it was also revealed that 19.6% of the respondents disagreed that networking activities of their firms are geared toward expanding the market niche while 15.7% were neutral. It was revealed that many of the respondents (67.3%) agreed that entrepreneurial business networks has helped this manufacturing SME to become more dynamic, innovative and competitive as depicted by the mean 3.68. In addition, 21.9% of the respondent disagreed that entrepreneurial business networks has helped this manufacturing SME to become more dynamic, innovative and 10.8% of the respondents were neutral. Further, it was established that majority of the respondents (65.2%) agreed that entrepreneurial business networking, the firm has been able to create a platform to build business relationships, share information and seek potential business partners for ventures and this was supported by mean of 3.61. Moreover, it was noted that 21.4% of the respondents disagreed that entrepreneurial business networking, the firm has been able to create a platform to build business relationships, share information and seek potential business partners for ventures and only 13.5% of the respondents were neutral. Communication is key in interacting with people, it is a component of networking.

Al Mehrzi and Singh (2016) suggest that entrepreneurs enhance their communication skills to effectively share ideas, present them, and collaborate with staff, team members, clients, and colleagues. As noted by Jung and Sung (2017) good communication skills are crucial for entrepreneurs in project explanation, elevator pitches, presentations, training, and other face-to-face interactions. Abbas et al. (2019) identify communication skills as one of the fundamental skills required by entrepreneurs. Likewise, in an exploratory study among entrepreneurs by Odewale et al. (2019) affirm that communication skills affect entrepreneurial success. Audretsch et al. (2015) emphasize the importance of effective communication for entrepreneurs to engage with stakeholders like potential

customers and investors while Zhou and Xu (2015) maintain that communication skills play a significant role in entrepreneurial activities.

On aggregate, the mean aggregate was 3.58 and standard deviation of 1.32. The findings signify that majority of the respondents were of the view that entrepreneurial networking has influence on the performance of small and medium manufacturing firms. Thus, networking relationships foster successful business practices, mutual respect, trust, and social capital, which are crucial for the success of networking efforts in a business.

4.2.1. Correlation Analysis

This study examines the relationship between entrepreneurial networking and performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms in Kenya using Pearson correlation. This statistical technique is essential for regression analysis, examining the strength and direction of associations as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Correlation analysis results.

Variable	Performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms	Entrepreneurial networking
Performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms	1	0.422**
	0.000	0.000
Entrepreneurial networking	0.422**	1
	0.000	

Note: *** statistically significant at 1% and 5%.

Based on the findings in Table 3, correlation results findings revealed that entrepreneurial networking had a moderate, positive and significant association with performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms (r=0.422, p=0.00<0.05). In addition, according KII 12 '*SMEs have put in place strategies that help in enhancing innovation for instance the emergence of youthful generation products marketed through online marketing platform. The products manufactured by SMEs have been tailored towards youthful generation preferences characterized by high level of innovation and creativity. The designer of most of these goods are undertaken after market intelligence survey by some of Manufacturers to reflect the reality on what many users perceive to be good for them.*'

4.2.2. Regression Analysis

Based on the diagnostic tests undertaken by the study. It was appropriate for the regression analysis to be conducted by the study since the data was fit and did not violate ordinary least square methods of estimation. Regression analysis is considered the most appropriate tool of estimating relationship of variables. The study adopted regression analysis to estimate the influence of entrepreneurial resources on performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms in Kenya. The regression analysis involved the use of R square to determine the proportion of performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms explained by entrepreneurial networking. The empirical analysis to establish the relationship between entrepreneurial networking and performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms, Kenya was conducted. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Regression findings of entrepreneurial networking and performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms in Kenya.

Outcome variable	Arrow showing direction of relationship	Predictor variables	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
Performance of SMEs	<---	Entrepreneurial opportunity	0.229	0.053	4.348	***
Performance of SMEs	<---	Diffusion of knowledge	0.225	0.047	4.836	***
Performance of SMEs	<---	Entrepreneurial culture	0.208	0.048	4.322	***
Squared correlation		0.357				

Note: *** statistically significant at 1% and 5%.

Y=0.229Entrepreneurial opportunity+0.225Diffusion knowledge+0.208Entrepreneurial culture.

The study assessed the indicators of entrepreneurial networking as parameter of measuring its influence on performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms in Kenya. The coefficient of determination indicated that 35.7% of the variation in performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms is attributed to entrepreneurial networking that is made up of entrepreneurial opportunity, diffusion knowledge and entrepreneurial culture.

The coefficient findings of the indicators of entrepreneurial networking (entrepreneurial opportunity, diffusion of knowledge and entrepreneurial culture) have positive and significant influence on performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms in Kenya. This is evident as the p values were statistically significant at 1% and 5% significance level. Therefore, this study rejected the null hypothesis that anticipated that entrepreneurial networking does not significantly influence the performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms in Kenya concluding that entrepreneurial networking affect performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing. The results indicate that improvement in entrepreneurial opportunity, diffusion knowledge and entrepreneurial culture will strengthen performance of manufacturing SMEs in Kenya.

In addition, based on the KI3 "The SMEs has several entrepreneurial opportunities in the sector, the use of technology and innovation in some of the manufacturing start-ups are Key. The exploitation remains in areas where we have raw materials and we are still importing them for instance the agricultural products and products such as wears that require a simple innovation to guarantee successes. The new technology and innovation has benefited many of the operations of our businesses for instance the use of Fintech in business operations.

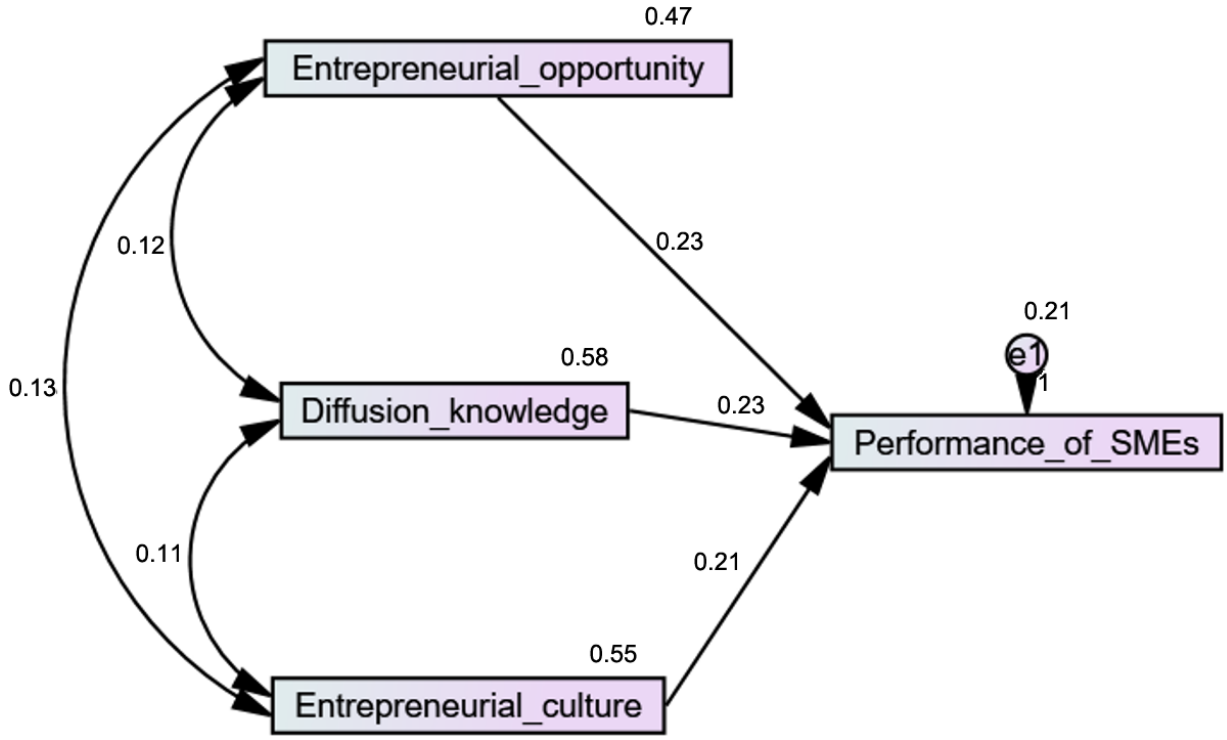

Figure 3. Structural equation modeling on relationship between entrepreneurial networking and performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms in Kenya.

Figure 3 illustrates the influence of entrepreneurial networking on performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms in Kenya. Figure 3 illustrates that entrepreneurial networking aspects that include entrepreneurial opportunity, diffusion knowledge and entrepreneurial culture have positive and significant influence on performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms.

Entrepreneurship is an important virtue in enhancing business performance and it is made up of several components that include entrepreneurial opportunity, knowledge and entrepreneurial culture. This entrepreneurial networking contributed significantly to the success of business performance and thus crucial in enhancing performance of business. The development of entrepreneurship networking is key in creating and beguiling social and business networks. The process of entrepreneurial networking commences on how effective entrepreneurs develop their plans that give roadmap on how activities are implemented and executed. This involves creating networks where entrepreneurs get more ideas on how develop and strengthening their existing systems to attain the desired performance. The entrepreneurial networking is a crucial process of getting skills needed to assume the risk of establishing a business venture through others. Entrepreneurship networking further help bring together creative and innovative ideas, combining them with management and organization skills in order to combine people, money and resources to meet an identified need and thereby create wealth via business growth.

Additionally, networking is key in identifying the strategic decisions that are important in business management that form the cornerstone of success in many of the small and medium enterprises. There are various resources required to enhance the needed work in the administration and this include how business is managed and employee team work in an organization. The process require clarity in assigning employees duties and responsibilities within an organization to avoid duplication and any other inconveniences that may derail work flow within the organization.

Networking is also crucial in gaining new ideas and innovations which are required to drive business progress in an organization. This has been instrumental in solving problems that have prevailed in the organization in the

previous periods and also improving systems in an organization. It's also through the networking that businesses are able to allow for successful business practices and the development of mutual respect, trust and social capital, which contribute to the success of networking efforts in a business. The tenet of trust is crucial in running business since it fosters job satisfaction of many customers in the society. Further, entrepreneurship networking revolves around outstanding communication skills that is key in enhancing flow of information in business. It aids information sharing and ideas that are essential building a cohesive in the working environment. There is a suggestion that while communication skill is important to achieving SME performance, creativity plays far more significant task and thus is critical in influencing superior SME performance.

The findings of the study agreed with a study by Talukder (2012) and Surin et al. (2016) opined that entrepreneurial networking has been essential in management aspect of business and thus foster performance of an organization. According to Abu-Rumman et al. (2021) has insignificant impact on business performance. A study by Abdullah, Hadi, and Dana (2018) noted that digital literacy has the greatest direct and indirect influence on the performance of SME entrepreneurs; this shows the essential contribution of digital literacy in developing business and marketing network. Other studies such as Obaji, Olaolu, and Jumbo (2019); Majdouline, El Baz, and Jebli (2020) and Juliana, Hui, Mintah, Solomon, and Elvis (2021) argued that creative thinking and innovative ability, as well as technological advancement although negatively estimated on entrepreneurship development. This indicates that technological advancement is support for creativity and innovation. This on aggregate foster organization performance.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

The study concluded that entrepreneurial networking aspects such as entrepreneurial opportunity, diffusion knowledge and entrepreneurial culture have a positive and significant influence on performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms in Kenya. The null hypothesis that entrepreneurial networking does not significantly influence the performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms in Kenya was rejected. Therefore, it can be projected that entrepreneurial networking is a critical enabler of performance of small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms in Kenya. This is because networking through avenues such as proper planning of a schedule, encouraging firm employees in attending networking activities, identifying opportunities, new innovative ideas annually, market growth, networking activities geared towards expanding the market, dynamic, innovative and competitive and building business relationships, sharing information and seeking potential business partners for ventures and adequate communication is key in enhancing performance in an organization.

One of the pillars of entrepreneurial networking is effective communication. There has been concern on nature and robustness of the communication deployed by manufacturing firms. There is need to develop a robust and effective communication that will improve entrepreneurial networking. This can be attained by increasing awareness campaigns among the staff on the importance of entrepreneurial practices. More awareness will improve the communication and ultimately result in networking. The awareness campaigns should be undertaken periodically on the need basis to ensure that the required information is disseminated to the right people. The study also recommends the need for small and medium paper and wood manufacturing firms to collaborate with peers in the market, participate in project workshops and events with the aim of improving entrepreneurial networking. Additionally, the study recommended for intervention from the ministry of trade and industry, in the form of sensitization on the importance of networking. This can be done using various platforms which include shows, exhibitions, trade fairs, digital and mobile applications.

Additionally, small and medium manufacturing firms should actively participate in industry associations, trade fairs, and business forums to build valuable connections and gain market insights. Leveraging digital platforms and industry-specific networks can facilitate collaborations with suppliers, distributors, and potential clients. Engaging in mentorship programs and forming strategic partnerships with other businesses can open opportunities for knowledge sharing and resource pooling. Additionally, collaborating with universities, research institutions, and government agencies can provide access to innovation support and funding. By fostering strong relationships within the industry and beyond, firms can enhance competitiveness, drive innovation, and access new market opportunities.

REFERENCES

Abbas, J., Raza, S., Nurunnabi, M., Minai, M. S., & Bano, S. (2019). The impact of entrepreneurial business networks on firms' performance through a mediating role of dynamic capabilities. *Sustainability, 11*(11), 3006. https://doi.org/10.3390/su11113006

Abdullah, N., Hadi, N. U., & Dana, L.-P. (2018). The nexus between entrepreneur skills and successful business: A decompositional analysis. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business, 34*(2), 249-265. https://doi.org/10.1504/ijesb.2018.092029

Abor, J., & Quartey, P. (2010). Issues in SME development in Ghana and South Africa. *International Research Journal of Finance and Economics, 39*(6), 215-228.

Abu-Rumman, A., Al Shraah, A., Al-Madi, F., & Alfalah, T. (2021). Entrepreneurial networks, entrepreneurial orientation, and performance of small and medium enterprises: Are dynamic capabilities the missing link? *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, 10*(1), 1-16.

Ademiluyi, L. F. (2019). Institutional inhibitions to female entrepreneurship in Nigeria: Implications for entrepreneurship education. *Business Education Innovation Journal, 11*(2), 92–99.

Al Mehrzi, N., & Singh, S. K. (2016). Competing through employee engagement: A proposed framework. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management, 65*(6), 831-843.

Algan, N. (2019). *The importance of SMEs on world economies.* Paper presented at the Proceedings of International Conference on Eurasian Economies, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

Alvarez, S. A., & Barney, J. B. (2014). *Entrepreneurial resources. In C. L. Cooper (Ed.), Wiley encyclopedia of management.* Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Audretsch, D. B., Lehmann, E. E., & Paleari, S. (2015). Academic policy and entrepreneurship: A European perspective. *The Journal of Technology Transfer, 40*, 363-368.

Birkner. (2022). *Paper consumption in Germany - a brief outline.* Retrieved from https://www.paper-world.com/en/newsdetail/paper-consumption-in-germany. [Accessed 28th October 2022]

Chodokufa, K. (2009). An analysis of the business relationship between SMEs and insurance companies in the Nelson Mandela metropolitan area. *A Dissertation Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Masters of Commerce Programme in Business Management and Commerce at the University of Fort Hare.*

Collis, J., & Hussey, R. (2014). *Business research: A practical guide for undergraduate & postgraduate students* (4th ed.). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dushime, E. (2022). *Entrepreneurial innovation and performance of small and medium enterprises in Bujumbura, Burundi.* Masters Dissertation, Kenyatta University.

European Commission. (2019). *Past & future SME performance. Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs. Brussels: European Commission.* Retrieved from https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/91410eaf-aedc-11eb-9767-01aa75ed71a1/language-en

Fatoki, O. (2021). Innovative behavior and firm competitive advantage: The moderating effect of environmental dynamism. *Foundations of Management, 13*(1), 159–170.

Fonger, J. (2016). Dynamic capabilities and growth of German small and medium sized enterprise. *Journal of Business and Economics, 7*(10), 1704-1715.

Forth, J., & Bryson, A. (2019). Management practices and SME performance. *Scottish Journal of Political Economy, 66*(4), 527-558. https://doi.org/10.1111/sjpe.12209

Furrer, O., Thomas, H., & Goussevskaia, A. (2007). The structure and evolution of the strategic management field: A content analysis of 26 years of strategic management research. *International Journal of Management Reviews, 10*(1), 1-23.

Gall, M. D., Gall, J. P., & Borg, W. R. (2007). *Educational research: An introduction. AE Burvikovs, Red* (8th ed.). USA: Pearson.

Gujarati, D. N. (1995). *Basic econometrics* (4th ed.). New York: United State Military Academy.

Hayter, C. S. (2013). Conceptualizing knowledge-based entrepreneurship networks: Perspectives from the literature. *Small Business Economics, 41*, 899-911. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-013-9512-x

Indrawati, H. (2020). Barriers to technological innovations of SMEs: how to solve them? *International Journal of Innovation Science, 12*(5), 545-564.

Juliana, N. O., Hui, H. J., Mintah, C., Solomon, E. N., & Elvis, O. K. (2021). The impact of creativity and innovation on entrepreneurship development: Evidence from Nigeria. *Open Journal of Business and Management, 9*(4), 1743–1770.

Jung, K.-H., & Sung, C.-S. (2017). The effects of entrepreneurship education, individual environmental factor and individual trait on university student's career decision self-efficacy. *Journal of Digital Convergence, 15*(6), 179-187.

KAM. (2019). *The focus on SMEs is a welcome intervention.* Retrieved from https://kam.co.ke/the-focus-on-smes-is-a-welcome-intervention/. [Accessed 29th October 2022]

Khan, M. A., Rathore, K., & Sial, M. A. (2020). Entrepreneurial orientation and performance of small and medium enterprises: Mediating effect of entrepreneurial competencies. *Pakistan Journal of Commerce and Social Sciences, 14*(2), 508-528.

Khan, R. U., Salamzadeh, Y., Kawamorita, H., & Rethi, G. (2021). Entrepreneurial orientation and small and medium-sized enterprises' performance; does 'access to finance'moderate the relation in emerging economies? *Vision, 25*(1), 88-102.

Kim, M., Song, J., & Triche, J. (2015). Toward an integrated framework for innovation in service: A resource-based view and dynamic capabilities approach. *Information Systems Frontiers, 17*, 533-546.

KNBS. (2023). *Economic survey.* Retrieved from https://www.knbs.or.ke/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/2023-Economic-Survey.pdf

Kothari, C. (2017). research methodology methods and techniques by CR Kothari. *Published by New Age International (P) Ltd., Publishers, 91.*

Leshem, S., & Trafford, V. (2007). Overlooking the conceptual framework. *Innovations in education and Teaching International, 44*(1), 93-105. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703290601081407

Lim, W. M. (2024). What is qualitative research? An overview and guidelines. *Australasian Marketing Journal*, 14413582241264619. https://doi.org/10.1177/14413582241264619

Löfsten, H., Isaksson, A., & Rannikko, H. (2023). Entrepreneurial networks, geographical proximity, and their relationship to firm growth: a study of 241 small high-tech firms. *The Journal of Technology Transfer, 48*(6), 2280-2306.

Madzimure, J. (2019). The influence of strategic networks and logistics integration on firm performance among small and medium enterprises. *The Southern African Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management, 11*(1), 1-7. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajesbm.v11i1.282

Majdouline, I., El Baz, J., & Jebli, F. (2020). Entrepreneurship orientation and innovation linkage: The case of Moroccan firms. *Projectics/Proyéctica/Projectique*, *25*(1), 27-45.

Marus, E., Mwosi, F., Mutesigensi, D., & Ebong, C. D. (2017). The role of entrepreneurial skills in the performance of SMEs in Nebbi District, West Nile Region, Uganda. *Journal of Entrepreneurship*, *5*(1), 1–15.

Mlotshwa, S. H., & Msimango-Galawe, J. (2020). The risk of overvaluing networking on small and medium enterprises performance in Gauteng province, South Africa. *The Southern African Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management*, *12*(1), 78-109.

Mugenda, O. M., & Mugenda, G. (2008). *Theory and principles. Social science research.* Nairobi: ACT.

Murimi, M. M., Ombaka, B. E., & Muchiri, J. (2021). Strategic resources, a driver of performance in small and medium manufacturing enterprises in Kenya. *International Journal of Business and Economic Sciences Applied Research*, *14*, 43-57.

Obaji, O., Olaolu, D., & Jumbo, D. (2019). *Entrepreneurial skills as catalyst for sustainable SME performance.* Paper presented at the 16th iSTEAMS Multidisciplinary Research Nexus Conference, The Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro, Ogun State, Nigeria.

Odewale, G., Abd Rani, S., Migiro, S., & Adeyeye, O. (2019). Does communication skills matter to a nascent entrepreneur? *Journal of Contemporary Management*, *16*(1), 209-225.

OECD. (2019). *Strengthening SMEs and entrepreneurship for productivity and inclusive growth: OECD 2018 ministerial conference on SMEs*: OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/c19b6f97-en.

Olugbola, S. A. (2017). Exploring entrepreneurial readiness of youth and startup success components: Entrepreneurship training as a moderator. *Journal of innovation & Knowledge*, *2*(3), 155-171. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jik.2016.12.004

Prasanna, R. P. I. R., Jayasundara, J. M. S. B., Gamage, S. K. N., Ekanayake, E. M. S., Rajapakshe, P. S. K., & Abeyrathne, G. A. K. N. J. (2019). Sustainability of SMEs in the competition: A systemic review on technological challenges and SME performance. *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity*, *5*(3), 100.

Quartey, S. H. (2023). Business sustainability in SMEs: Towards an Afrocentric research agenda. In *A Research Agenda for Sustainability and Business* (pp. 153-166). Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Runde, D. F. (2022). *Accessibility refers to the ability of SMEs to access finance.* Retrieved from https://www.csis.org/analysis/supporting-small-and-medium-enterprises-sub-saharan-africa-through-blended-finance. [Acessed 28th October 2022]

Sagar, S. (2024). Entrepreneurship: Catalyst for innovation and economic growth. *Entrepreneurship: Catalyst for Innovation and Economic Growth*, *9*(1), 12.

Salvato, C. (2021). Dynamic capabilities and routine dynamics. *Cambridge Handbook of Routine Dynamics*, 460-480.

Satishprakash, S. (2020). Concept of population and sample. *Gujarat University. ResearchGate.*

Schreyögg, G., & Kliesch-Eberl, M. (2007). How dynamic can organizational capabilities be? Towards a dual-process model of capability dynamization. *Strategic management journal*, *28*(9), 913-933. https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.613

Sekaran, U., & Bougie, R. (2016). *Research methods for business: A skill building approach* (7th ed.). New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Sendawula, K., Kisubi, M. K., Najjinda, S., Nantale, H., & Kabbera, S. (2023). The efficacy of entrepreneurial networking and innovation in fostering the performance of small businesses in Uganda. *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, *12*(1), 88. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13731-023-00358-0

Setyawati, S. M., Mohd Shariff, M. N., & Saud, M. B. (2011). Effects of learning, networking and innovation adoption on successful entrepreneurs in Central Java, Indonesia. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, *2*(5), 149-156.

Somwethee, P., Aujirapongpan, S., & Ru-Zhue, J. (2023). The influence of entrepreneurial capability and innovation capability on sustainable organization performance: Evidence of community enterprise in Thailand. *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity*, *9*(2), 100082. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joitmc.2023.100082

Surin, E. F., Edward, O. T., Hussin, M. H. F., & Ab Wahab, I. (2016). Recognising the importance of strategic business Network on business performance of SME manufacturing firms in Malaysia: Analysing the moderating influence of human capital and business environment. *International Journal of Arts & Sciences*, *9*(4), 31.

Talukder, M. (2012). Factors affecting the adoption of technological innovation by individual employees: An Australian study. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *40*, 52-57.

Teece, D. J. (2014). A dynamic capabilities-based entrepreneurial theory of the multinational enterprise. *Journal of International Business Studies*, *45*(1), 8-37.

Teece, D. J., Pisano, G., & Shuen, A. (1997). Dynamic capabilities and strategic management. *Strategic Management Journal*, *18*(7), 509-533. https://doi.org/10.1002/(sici)1097-0266(199708)18:7<509::aid-smj882>3.0.co;2-z

Udemba, E. N. (2020). Mediation of foreign direct investment and agriculture towards ecological footprint: a shift from single perspective to a more inclusive perspective for India. *Environmental Science and Pollution Research*, *27*(21), 26817-26834.

Varpio, L., Paradis, E., Uijtdehaage, S., & Young, M. (2020). The distinctions between theory, theoretical framework, and conceptual framework. *Academic Medicine*, *95*(7), 989-994.

Wakiaga, P. (2020). *SMEs critical in attaining manufacturing dream*. Retrieved from https://kam.co.ke/smes-critical-in-attaining-manufacturing-dream/. [Accessed 29th October 2022]

Wang, C. L., Senaratne, C., & Rafiq, M. (2015). Success traps, dynamic capabilities and firm performance. *British Journal of Management*, *26*(1), 26-44. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12066

Wheeler, B. C. (2002). NEBIC: A dynamic capabilities theory for assessing net-enablement. *Information Systems Research*, *13*(2), 125-146.

World Bank. (2020). *Financing African SMEs*. Retrieved from https://help.ovhcloud.com/csm/en-gb-web-hosting-website-not-installed-diagnosis?id=kb_article_view&sysparm_article=KB0040992

Wresearch. (2022). *Kenya Pulp market (2020-2026)*. Retrieved from https://www.6wresearch.com/industry-report/kenya-pulp-market-2020-2026. [Accessed 12th November 2022]

Wu, L.-Y. (2007). Entrepreneurial resources, dynamic capabilities and start-up performance of Taiwan's high-tech firms. *Journal of Business Research*, *60*(5), 549-555. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2007.01.007

Yueng, R. (2016). *The rules of networking*. London: Cyan Communications.

Zahra, S. A., & George, G. (2002). The net-enabled business innovation cycle and the evolution of dynamic capabilities. *Information Systems Research*, *13*(2), 147-150. https://doi.org/10.1287/isre.13.2.147.90

Zahra, S. A., Sapienza, H. J., & Davidsson, P. (2006). Entrepreneurship and dynamic capabilities: A review, model and research agenda. *Journal of Management Studies*, *43*(4), 917-955. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2006.00616.x

Zahra, S. A., & Wright, M. (2016). Understanding the social role of entrepreneurship. *Journal of Management Studies*, *53*(4), 610-629. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12149

Zhou, H., & Victor, G. (2021). Key performance drivers of small enterprises in the manufacturing sector in KwaZulu Natal province, South Africa. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship*, *25*(3), 1–12.

Zhou, M., & Xu, H. (2015). A review of entrepreneurship education for college students in China. *Administrative Sciences*, *2*(4), 82-98.