



Effect of Innovation on Small and Medium Scale Enterprises' Performance in Gombe State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The broad objective of the study is to examine the effect of innovation on performance of MSMEs in Gombe state, Nigeria. Data were, collected from 355 SMEs out of 379 sample, from the population of 642 registered SMEs operating in Gombe state. Among the innovation variables, three were chosen to be included in the study: marketing innovation, product innovation and organization innovation. Regression analysis was utilized for the examination of the effect of innovation and MSMEs performance. The results indicated that product and marketing innovation were positively and significantly related to SMEs performance, while organization innovation was found to have a strong negative effect on SMEs performance. The study recommends that SMEs need to focus on improving their innovative capabilities and the need to develop new methods to manufacture products more efficiently and effectively to sustain the significant impact of product innovation on their performance.

Keywords: Innovation, Organization Performance, Product, Marketing,

1.0 Introduction

The role of small and medium enterprise performance to the national development cannot be overemphasized (Omowole *et al.*, 2024). According to Le *et al.* (2023), small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) are recognized major contributors to national development due to their inherent potentials of advancing the economic productivity and at the same time, enhance human welfare. Even in highly industrialized economies, SMEs play pivotal roles in their economic growth by accounting for over fifty percent of the employment levels and economic output (Svobodova, *et al.*, 2024). More so, high-performing SMEs contribute significantly to job creation, poverty reduction, and economic diversification (Abisuga-Oyekunle *et al.*, 2020). Despite their importance, the performance of SMEs in Gombe State has remained relatively low and inconsistent. Many SMEs struggle with challenges such limited funding, lack of technical expertise and skilled personnel, weak institutional support, inadequate infrastructure, resistance to change, low productivity and limited market reach (SMEDAN, 2023).

In addressing these challenges, innovation has emerged as a critical driver of SME performance (Ayoko, 2021). This is because innovation enables SMEs to introduce new or improved products and services that adapt to market changes and gain a competitive advantage over larger firms. More so, innovation also enables SMEs can develop unique products, streamline operations, and explore new markets (Saunila, 2020; Ramdani *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, innovation in this study, encompasses of product innovation, process innovation, and market innovation (Alkhalaf and Al-Tabbaa, 2024; Molina-García *et al.*, 2025; Haug *et al.*, 2023; Hammad *et al.*, 2023). Product innovation involves the introduction of new or significantly improved goods or services, enabling SMEs to meet changing customer needs and gain competitive advantage (Haug *et al.*, 2023). Process innovation refers to the adoption of

improved production or delivery methods, which can enhance efficiency, reduce costs, and improve overall operational performance (Molina-García *et al.*, 2025). Market innovation, on the other hand, focuses on new marketing strategies, market expansion, and improved customer engagement approaches that can help SMEs penetrate new markets and strengthen their market position (Hammad *et al.*, 2023).

However, prior literatures have largely focused on examining the effect of innovation on small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) performance on, manufacturing sector pharmaceutical firms and insurance companies in other countries (Issau *et al.*, 2021; Muharam *et al.*, 2020; Abdilahi *et al.*, 2017) with only a few in SMEs (Abdilahi *et al.*, 2017). This posed a gap that the study seeks to address. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the effect of innovation on the performance of small and medium scale enterprises in Gombe State, Nigeria.

The remaining part of the study is structured as follows. Section two provides the literature review of the variables considered for this study. Section three provides the methodology adopted for this study. Section four provides results and discussion, while, the last section contains conclusion and recommendations.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual review

Innovation is a new or improved product or process that differs significantly from previous products or processes and that has been made available to potential users or has been put into use by the production unity (OECD/Eurostat, 2018). According to Rena (2023), innovation in SMEs can be defined as the introduction of a new or significantly enhanced product or process, a creative organizational approach to company procedures, or a unique marketing strategy. Aires *et al.* (2022) state that innovation is intimately associated with the idea of rebirth, notable advancements, and reconfigurations in physical, relational, or virtual aspects of business. Innovation can manifest in different forms, Product innovation, which introduces new or enhanced goods or services to the market (Ramadani *et al.*, 2019), process innovation, which emphasizes streamlining internal processes and operations (Schallmo *et al.*, 2018); marketing innovation, which focuses on creative ways to effectively reach and engage customers (Adamu *et al.*, 2020); and organizational innovation, which includes modifications to management procedures and structures to improve performance and adaptability (Kesavan, 2021). Effective innovation is a critical area of interest for academics, policymakers, and SMEs owners because it is essential for boosting SMEs' growth and competitiveness.

2.1.1 Concept of SMEs Performance

SME performance is commonly evaluated using both financial indicators, such as profitability and sales growth, and non-financial indicators, including customer satisfaction, innovation output, and market share (Santos and Brito, 2021; OECD, 2021). This multidimensional approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of firm success. Innovation has been consistently identified as a major determinant of SME performance (Madrid-Guijarro *et al.* (2021). Firms that invest in product, process, and organizational innovation tend to achieve higher productivity and competitiveness (Saunila, 2020; Kraus *et al.*, 2020). Similarly, recent studies indicate that digital transformation and technological adoption significantly enhance SMEs performance, especially in dynamic markets (Tajudeen *et al.*, 2022; Dwivedi *et al.*, 2021). The study conceptualized firm performance as a multidimensional construct, incorporating both financial and non-financial indicators such as profitability, sales growth,

market share, customer satisfaction, and operational efficiency (Svobodova, *et al.*, 2024; Alkhalaf *et al.*, 2024). The use of these established measures allows for a comprehensive assessment of firm performance and ensures alignment with widely accepted practices in management and innovation research.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Resource Based Theory

The Resource-Based Theory was propounded by Wernerfelt (1984), who argued that a firm's internal resources are the primary determinants of competitive advantage and performance. The Resource-Based Theory (RBT) posits that a firm's competitive advantage and performance are primarily determined by its internal resources and capabilities rather than external market conditions (Ekwueme *et al.*, 2023). The theory emphasizes that resources must be valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) to generate sustained competitive advantage (Cho and Linderman, 2020). RBT assumes that firms possess heterogeneous and immobile resources, which explains differences in performance among firms (Sipos *et al.*, 2025). These resources include tangible and intangible assets such as knowledge, technology, managerial skills, organizational processes, and innovation capabilities. These innovation capabilities can be viewed as a resource which has potentials to enhance SMEs' performance (Ferreira *et al.*, 2020; Saunila, 2020).

2.3 Empirical Literature review

Issau *et al.* (2021) assesses the influence of innovation orientation dimensions on the performance of manufacturing small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Ghana. Probability sampling technique, particularly, simple random method, was used for this study. Approximately, 81% response rate was achieved from a total sample size of 346. Furthermore, PLS-SEM technique was used to determine the relationships among the study variables. The result showed that market innovation significantly predicted SMEs' performance. Conversely, non-significant positive nexus was established between process innovation and SMEs' performance as well as product innovation and SMEs' performance.

Similarly, Soares and Perin (2020) analyzed the relationship between innovativeness and firm performance through updated and extended meta-analytic review Using Pearson correlations as effect size statistics, and based on 80 independent samples from 78 studies, with a total sample size of 19,514 cases. The results reveal that there is a direct and positive impact of innovativeness on firm performance, and this effect is stronger for multi-item measures of performance and for revenue-based performance measures. Nevertheless, the focus of the study is not also on export performance.

Furthermore, Muharam *et al.* (2020) study examined the relationship between process innovation, market innovation and firm financial performance of Indonesian pharmaceutical firms. This study also intended to investigate the moderating role of disruptive technology on the relationship of process innovation and market innovation with Indonesian pharmaceutical firms' financial performance. To investigate the proposed relationship, this study collected the data from managers of pharmaceutical firms in Indonesia by using survey questionnaire. PLS statistical software was employed to analyse the data. The result of this study highlighted that there is a positive relationship between process innovation, market innovation and financial performance of firms. While, results indicated that disruptive technology moderate the

relationship of process innovation with financial performance, but it has no moderating role on the relationship of market innovation with financial performance.

Also, Rajapathirana and Hui (2018) explored the views of 379 senior managers of insurance companies and indicated that product and process innovations have a positive and statistically significant effect on firm performance, although no significant impact was found for organizational innovations.

Abdilahi *et al.* (2017) examines the impact of innovation on the performance of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Hargeisa, Somaliland. Target population of the study was 6930 SMEs in Hargeisa; a number provided by Hargeisa Local Government, and Somaliland Ministry of Trade and Investment as the two institutions issue business licenses to the small enterprises and medium enterprises respectively. A sample of 378 SMEs has been drawn from this population. The study adopted both descriptive and regression analyses to estimate the impact of innovation. Regression results of the study reveal that innovation significantly affects the performance of SMEs in Hargeisa. The study finds that the effects of product innovation, marketing innovation and organizational innovation are statistically significant among these SMEs.

Twaliwi and Isaac (2017) probe the effect of innovation on SMEs performance in Gwagwalada-Abuja. Data was collected from 348 SMEs in five consecutive years (2010 to 2015), and then carried out regression analysis by using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) Method to estimate the effect. The study reveals that innovation has a positive effect on the performance of SMEs in Gwagwalada-Abuja. It specifically finds that the (positive) effects of product innovation, process innovation and marketing innovation are statistically significant. In spite of this, the study uncovers that SMEs in Gwagwalada-Abuja do not frequently adopt innovation, and thus, recommends for these SMEs to adopt new innovation methods in order to improve their performances. Though, a lot has been done on innovation and SMEs performance, little or nothing has been done on the relationship between the three-innovation variable selected for this study in Gombe state, hence creating a gap in innovation study.

Based on this review, it is empirically proof that majority of studies are foreign base and focused on pharmaceutical firms, insurance companies and manufacturing firms. This posed that geographical and industry wise gaps exist.

3.0 Methodology

The study employed a cross-sectional survey research design (Haug *et al.*, 2023). The design allowed and enabled the researchers to collect data from relatively large, diverse and dispersed groups of SME owners across, Gombe metropolis. The study population is 642 registered SMEs from various sectors operating in Gombe state. The data were collected through a survey, administered to the owners/managers. In this study, Three Hundred and seventy-nine (379) SMEs were taken as sample using simple random sampling technique and multiple regression to test the direct relationship between the dependent and independent variables.

4.0 Results and Discussions

This section presents the findings of the current study, which includes, presentation demographic variables, Regression analysis for the examination of the effect of innovation and SMEs performance.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics**Table 1.**

	N Statistic	Minimum Statistic	Maximum Statistic	Mean Statistic	Std. Deviation Statistic
Product Innovation	355	2.00	5.50	3.7979	.59556
Organisation Innovation	355	1.00	5.00	3.4437	.62605
Marketing Innovation	355	2.00	5.00	4.1761	.31273
SMEs Performance	355	2.50	5.00	4.4366	.36755
Valid N (listwise)	355				

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 1 above provides details of descriptive study variables. The mean of the first independent variable product innovation is 3.7979, which means the majority of individuals stated agree and strongly agree that product innovation is relevant to firm performance, and the deviation from the mean is 0.59556. The mean of the organization innovation is 3.4437 means the majority agreed that firm performance is affected by the organization innovation of a company. The deviation from the mean is 0.62605. The mean of the marketing innovation is 4.1761 means respondents stated agree and the deviation from the mean is .31273. Similarly, the mean of the dependent variable firm performance is 4.4366 while its standard deviation is 36755.

Table 2: Correlations Analysis

		FP	PI	OI	MI
FP	Pearson Correlation	1	.317**	-.217**	.391**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	355	355	355	355
PI	Pearson Correlation	.317**	1	-.189**	.062
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.246
	N	355	355	355	355
OI	Pearson Correlation	-.217**	-.189**	1	.046
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.384
	N	355	355	355	355
M	Pearson Correlation	.391**	.062	.046	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.246	.384	
	N	355	355	355	355

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

Correlation analysis reported in table 2 above represents the degree of association among study independent and dependent variables. There is a significant positive degree of association between the independent variable product innovation and the dependent variable firm performance ($r=0.317$, $p<0.05$). This means product innovation is a considerable factor in influencing firm performance. The correlation between the second independent variable organization innovation and firm performance is negative and significant ($r=-0.217$, $p<0.05$). Marketing innovation is significantly related to the firm performance ($r=0.391$, $p<0.05$). From the table below, it can be seen that the correlation between all the variables is less than 0.5 which means there is no multi-collinearity among the variables.

4.2 Regression Analysis Result.

TABLE 3 - Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.522 ^a	.272	.266	.31489

a. Predictors: (Constant), MI, OI, PI

Table 3 shown R^2 of 0.272, which implies that 27.2% of the variation in SMEs is explained by the independent variables included in the model, while the remaining 73.4% of variation in overall SMEs performance could be explained by other variables not incorporated in the current study. The adjusted R^2 of 0.266 confirms that the model maintains explanatory power after adjusting for the number of predictors.

TABLE 4: Regression Result

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	
1	(Constant)	2.326	.263		8.841	.000
	PI	.159	.029	.258	5.557	.000
	OI	-.109	.027	-.186	-4.012	.000
	MI	.451	.054	.383	8.389	.000

a. Dependent Variable: TFP

Discussion of Findings

The regression results indicated that product innovation (coefficient = 0.029; $p = 0.000$) and marketing innovation (coefficient = 0.054, $p = 0.000$), are leading factors affecting the firm performance of SME while organization innovation (coefficient -0.109, $p = 0.000$) is negative and significant. In the entire sector under study, marketing and process innovation are the critical variables that played a significant role in determining a firm's performance. According to scholars, the reason behind this is that innovation helps firms take advantage of being first to satisfy customers' needs. This means that quality products enhance the firms' competitive advantage, thereby contributing to firms' performance. This finding supports the work of Oduro (2019), Ukpabio *et al.* (2019), Ekwueme *et al.* (2023) and Dian *et al.* (2021). The study also indicated that organizational innovation had a significant negative effect on firm performance, with a coefficient of -0.109. This finding was not consistent with the views of Ndesaulwa and Kikula (2016) and Makó *et al.* (2015) who identified organizational innovation could encourage robust organizational learning and skills processes which in turn influences the performance of MSMEs.

On the other hand, this finding was consistent with the work of Atalay *et al.* (2013), who argued that no significant and positive link exists between organizational innovation and firm performance. Furthermore, marketing innovation significantly and positively affected firm performance with a coefficient of 0.054. This means that if MSMEs use market innovation through the exploitation of new markets or segments would result in higher performance. This result is similar to the finding of Issau *et al.* (2021), Ukpabio *et al.* (2019) and Oduro (2019). Overall, the study found a strong relationship between the dependent and independent variables.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations.

In this study, the empirical analysis of innovation's effect on the performance of small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) in Gombe state, Nigeria was conducted using primary data collected from 355 SMEs. The results of multiple regression analysis revealed that firm innovation was statistically significant in explaining the performance of SMEs in Gombe state. The result of the study also shows that product and marketing were positively and significantly related to firm performance, while organization innovation was found to have a strong negative effect on the dependent variable firm performance. Hence, firms which have a strong orientation towards process and marketing innovation have better performance in the study area. This study explores the effect of innovation on firm performance of small and medium scale enterprises. Three independent variables of innovation (organization, product and marketing) on the firm performance.

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

- i. The significant negative impact of organization innovation on MSMEs innovation reveals that, for organizations to sustain in the competitive environment, organization needs to focus on improving its innovative capabilities to sustain.
- ii. Product innovation is positive and significantly impacts the MSMEs performance. MSMEs need to develop new methods to manufacture products more efficiently and effectively.
- iii. The significant positive impact marketing innovation have on MSMEs performance means that MSMEs need to be aggressive in their marketing to sustain this positive significant relationship.

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