



ENTREPRENEURIAL NETWORKING AND WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS' CONTRIBUTION TO EMPLOYMENT CREATION IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between entrepreneurial networking and women entrepreneurs' contribution to employment creation in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study adopted a cross sectional survey design to solicit responses from women entrepreneurs in Rivers state, using simple random. The target population of Women Entrepreneurs in Rivers State was 329 obtained from the 2017 Directory of the Rivers State Ministry of Women Affairs and Rivers State Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The sample size was 181 using the Taro Yamen's formula. After data cleaning, only data of 153 respondents were finally used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics and Spearman's rank correlation were used for data analysis and hypothesis testing. Findings revealed that entrepreneurial networking has a significant relationship with women entrepreneurs to employment. The study thus concluded that entrepreneurial networking bears a positive and significant influence on women entrepreneurs' contribution to employment creation. We recommend that women should be engaged in entrepreneurial education to develop right competencies, skills and needed entrepreneurial capacities.

Contribution/Originality: This study sought to empirically examine the impact of the entrepreneurial networking (EN) construct and its impact on women entrepreneurs in Rivers State, Nigeria. This is because there has been paucity of empirical works that has examined the predicting impact of (EN) on the contribution of women entrepreneurs to employment creation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Women entrepreneurship has a great potential to contribute massively to employment generation and economic growth in Nigeria. However, women entrepreneurs face different issues depending on the stage of their present life cycle, region, legislation and industry. One thing however stands out, that the entrepreneurship space in Nigeria remains a traditionally male-dominated territory. Nigerian women entrepreneurs operate in an unfavourable business environment, characterized by various challenges ranging from infrastructural deficiency, low access and high cost of finance, weak institutions and many barriers to formal economic participation. Despite the crucial role of women entrepreneurs in the economic development of their families and countries, it is however discovered that women entrepreneurs have low business performance when compared to their male counterparts

(Akanji, 2006) women are largely concentrated in the informal, micro, low growth and profit areas where competition is intense. This abysmal performance could be traceable to limited education, rudimentary skills, low household and business income, lack of savings and social networks, not possessing the required professional relationships, lack of mentorship, inadequacy of relevant experience, Limited access to support services which includes loan levels suited to their business needs, technical and managerial training. These problems arises from limited capacity outreach of existing institutions as well as the inability of women entrepreneurs to pay for such services. The low level of performance is further accentuated by gender- related discriminations occasioned by socio-cultural factors which pose a hindrance to their entrepreneurial activities. Such discrimination is in the area of social wealth, non-acceptance and negative perception of women in business, lack of the ability to gain the confidence of stakeholders (creditors, debtors, and employees) and the inability to balance family with work life and low level of level of entrepreneurial networking.

The concept of network in entrepreneurial study has been heavily researched in recent years. Social networks are now considered a crucial feature in entrepreneurship (Chell and Baines, 2000; Hoang and Antoncic, 2003; Jack, 2010; Slotte-Kock and Coviello, 2010). They are referred to as all the relationships or ties an entrepreneur establishes around him or herself. They are useful in obtaining resources (Casson and Giusta, 2007) and gaining information such as market strategy and competitors (Steier and Greenwood, 2000) and these informed entrepreneurs' decision making. Social networks are not only considered important in the process of business formation (Johannisson, 1986) but also function to support business growth and the development process (Elfring and Hulsink, 2003; Hite, 2005). Discussions on networks centre on the network ties which can be strong or weak.

Entrepreneurship has been of great interest to many academic researchers, business practitioners, governments, and policy makers; witnessed by the bulk body of related studies chronicled in the literature (Jack *et al.*, 2010). One main reason for the interest is that entrepreneurship is viewed beneficial to a nation's economic growth and development since it creates both employment and wealth for the country. Approaches to the study of entrepreneurship vary based on topics to be examined. In addition to the personality traits and socio-cultural approaches, Aldrich and Zimmer (1986) suggested a new approach which they termed "Networks Approach to Entrepreneurship", in order to illustrate the reason why certain entrepreneurs are more successful than others in starting up and continuing their businesses, building their suggestion on resource dependence theory. The networks approach to entrepreneurship is basically based on premise that entrepreneurs build relations with the external environment, and need a speedy yet economical means for the access of different information, in order to define potential business opportunities, and obtain required resources to start-up and continue their businesses successfully.

According to the networks approach to entrepreneurship, entrepreneurs may possess some ideas and skills. But, for the purpose of starting up and continuing a business, entrepreneurs further need to obtain most resources from outside or his/her external environment through the entrepreneur's networks. Accordingly, entrepreneurial process involves gathering of scarce resources from external environment. Entrepreneurs usually obtain these resources through their networks (Dodd *et al.*, 2002). Existing literature suggests that networks of entrepreneurs are really an opportunity set, which helps entrepreneurs to access both tangible and intangible resources. Building on the above researchers exhibited an increasing appreciation of the utility, application, and importance of entrepreneurial networks. An established stream of research emerges from studies that have investigated many aspects of entrepreneurial networks. Essentially, studies reflect a consensus that entrepreneurial networks are important because they provide entrepreneurs with an abundance of diverse information and access to large pool of resources, business opportunities, and markets.

A careful review of the related literature on the subject of entrepreneurial networks revealed that the most cited entrepreneurial network types are: social network, business network, and inter-organizational strategic network (Butler and Hansen, 1991). Furthermore, Jack (2010) asserted that the entrepreneurial networks are important and

beneficial to many businesses and business owners. Nonetheless, still there is paucity in studies at the present times dealing with the impacts of entrepreneurial networks usage on the contribution of women entrepreneurs to employment creation and is deemed among the most important justifications of the current study.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. Underpinning Theoretical Framework

The initial studies on networks in organizational context were based on theoretical perspectives of resource dependence theory. Resource dependence theory (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978) proposes that businesses purposely act in response to demands posed by important resource providers. Resource dependence theory also suggests that businesses are competent to attempt managing their dependencies on resource providers through strategies that adapt with the control of the resource providers that have over the businesses. Two methods are possible for managing these dependencies: 1) businesses can acquire control over critical resources, as a result lessening their dependencies upon others, and 2) businesses can acquire control over critical resources that other need, thus increasing others' dependence upon the focal business. The "others" upon whom a business can be resource-dependent include any individual or business they depend on for the required resources. "The resource providers may be: creditors, suppliers, competitors, or any other entity in a business's external environment" (Bluedorn *et al.*, 1994). The argument of resource dependence, for why and how networks are capable of helping businesses manage their resource dependencies, is basically that businesses establish network relationships with businesses that control critical resources, and/or other dependent businesses. These actions are taken in hopes of lessening the relative power of the businesses upon which the focal business is dependent (Bluedorn *et al.*, 1994). As discussed earlier, the study of networks within organizational context developed primarily of premises derived from resource dependence theory. Therefore, it is quite relevant to state that the study utilized a resource dependence theory for the aim of building its theoretical framework.

2.2. Entrepreneurial Networks

The field of entrepreneurship has seen a remarkable increase in studies focusing on networks and relations. Given that networks provide business owners with access to business opportunities, markets, ideas, information, advice, and other resources (Hoang and Antoncic, 2003; Shaw, 2006; Farr-Wharton and Brunetto, 2007; Lee and Jones, 2008). To a certain extent, entrepreneurs are, dependent on their networks of personal relationships when making decisions solving and problems (Taylor and Thorpe, 2004; Shaw, 2006). The development of social capital is one consequence of networking which essentially consists of the "resources individuals obtain from knowing others, being part of a network with them, or merely being known to them and having a good reputation (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). The result is that networks are associated to the growth and survival of businesses (Brüderl and Preisendörfer, 1998).

According to Anderson *et al.* (2007) it could even be argued that it is through social relations, social interaction and networks that entrepreneurship is actually carried out." Entrepreneurial Networks are the key to open and gaining access to other resources as they ease communication among people with network ties (Anderson *et al.*, 2007). Granovetter (1973) categorized network ties as either weak or strong based on the frequency of contact, which was itself related with reciprocity. Relationships with friends and family were classified as strong ties because of frequent contact and emotional closeness. In contrast, ties between business associates, consultants, and other such contacts were categorized as weak ties because of less frequent contact. Granovetter also contended that "the strength of weak ties" was associated to diversity in sources of knowledge and advice in that "individuals with few weak ties will be deprived of information from distant parts of the social system and will be confined to the provincial news and views of their close friends" 1973:106). Nebus (2006) asserts that the most favorable situation is

one in which social contacts also occur to be experts because social contacts are easier to access and more likely to willingly communicate.

In contrast, experts are more likely to have valuable information, but are more difficult to access. Informal socializing can be important to building social capital and ultimately business growth (Bowey and Easton, 2007). A business owner might need to an “exploration” strategy in order to discover and contact experts with whom he or she does not already have a relationship, whereas relying on already established contacts could be considered an “exploitation” strategy (March, 1991). Obviously, the exploitation strategy is likely to be less costly in terms of time, effort and other resources. Networks that include people who are not well-acquainted with each other usually provide a wider variety of resources, ideas, viewpoints, and information than less diverse networks composed mostly of family and friends who know each other (Smeltzer *et al.*, 1991). Founders with varied networks of contacts, especially contacts with people who are themselves well connected (for example, incubator managers), are in a better position to gain information to help them overcome business development problems, thus shaping their own survival and growth (Watson, 2007; Lee and Jones, 2008) found that banks and accountants were the primary source of advice.

However, Smeltzer *et al.* (1988) found that small business managers more often used informal than formal sources. However, Brüderl and Preisendörfer (1998) found that support from strong ties was more important to start-ups’ success than weak ties. Similarly, smaller ventures have been found to use friends and family more, but banks less, than larger ventures do (Robinson and Stubberud, 2009). Birley (1985) found that the type of source accessed was related to the resources desired. When assembling raw materials/supplies, equipment, location/premises, and employees, business contacts were used most. Family and friends were also important for assembling local resources (location/premises and employees). Once these resources were obtained, business owners sought resources from banks. However, Birley’s study examined resource access, rather than access to sources of advice, in which case banks would rationally be the primary sources. It is clear from the literature that a business owner’s network can influence the success of his or her business (Brüderl and Preisendörfer, 1998; Gulati *et al.*, 2000; Hoang and Antoncic, 2003; Farr-Wharton and Brunetto, 2007).

2.3. Importance of Entrepreneurial Network

In today’s competitive landscape, firms cannot rely on internally controlled resources alone to pursue advantage-creating and advantage enhancing strategies (Giudici and Reinmoeller, 2013). They must collaborate with other firms to gain access to information, skills, expertise, assets, and technologies and thus leverage their internal resources. Different strategic tendencies create different needs, motivations and opportunities for collaboration with other market participants such as competitors, distributors, suppliers, and customers. Thus, certain regularities in firms’ strategic behavior can lead to distinctive and recognizable patterns of networking behavior, which in turn leads to predictable types of network structure (Giudici and Reinmoeller, 2013). The increased competitive pressure and the unprecedented pace of technological change in most industries today (Davis, 2007) have made collaboration with other firms a necessary condition for sustained success in the marketplace. This increased collaborative activity, strategically initiated by firms in their efforts to outcompete rivals; leads to formation of a network of inter firm relationships in the form of strategic alliances, joint ventures, and long-term agreements. Each firm in the alliance network maintains a distinct portfolio of alliances and has a distinct pattern of alliance ties with other network members, which in turn provide different potential for gaining access to network resources (Stam, 2010). Applying social network theories, researchers have shown empirically that several network positions for instance brokerage position, ego network density, centrality and configurations such as diversity of ties, proportion of strong or weak ties provide firms with advantageous access to network resources, which in turn is positively related to firms’ performance (Zaheer and Bell, 2005).

A substantial body of entrepreneurship research suggests that entrepreneurs often sense new opportunities and gain valuable ideas, information and resources from their personal networks (Teece, 2007) and (Giudici and Reinmoeller, 2013). Whereas entrepreneurs' networking behavior has often been characterized as non-intentional in nature (Saravathy and Dew, 2003) scholars have recently highlighted how entrepreneurs sense new opportunities while strategically building their strategic networks (Giudici and Reinmoeller, 2013). Scholars have long investigated how entrepreneurs can grow their firms by leveraging their portfolio of relationships (Hoang and Antoncic, 2003); (Slotte-Kock and Coviello, 2010) and the importance of network relationships in facilitating opportunity recognition and exploitation is also widely recognized (Ardichvili *et al.*, 2003).

There is little doubt that entrepreneurs can use their networks of professional and personal ties (Giudici and Reinmoeller, 2013) to gain access to a rich array of ideas, information, and tangible and intangible resources (Grossman *et al.*, 2012; Ferriani *et al.*, 2013; Phillips *et al.*, 2013) which can enhance their ability to sense new opportunities and improve on firm performance (Teece, 2007). According to Giudici and Reinmoeller (2013) network configuration can be defined as the pattern of relationships involving direct and indirect ties with different external actors. A literature review study by Pittaway *et al.* (2004) found that there is considerable ambiguity and debate within the literature regarding appropriate network configuration for competitiveness.

Networking with downstream partners mainly involves direct customers. Customers are central actors when it comes to value creation as understanding their needs and expectations can lead to market success (Jacob, 2006). Studies have shown that downstream networks are the most common form of collaboration for driving innovativeness as firms develop products that are commercially viable. Close interaction with key business customers and users not only allows firms to learn about existing market needs, but may also lead to discovery of future needs before their competitors (Santos and Eisenhardt, 2009). Due to intimate relations with their customers, firms may hence exploit a flow of rich information regarding emerging opportunities which can allow them to take calculated risks and initiate proactive actions. Networking with horizontal partners has to do with firms and organizations which are not part of a firm's value chain, such as competitors, universities, and government agencies. Compared to vertical configurations, networking with horizontal partners is initiated more carefully and willfully. New ventures and small firms can achieve higher performance through combining forces with competing firms to share costs of development, joint market products, and for knowledge sharing and joint procurement (Pittaway *et al.*, 2004).

Studies have accordingly shown that network relations can be a source for achieving a higher degree of EO and performance. However, there is a lack of understanding of which type or kind of network configurations are most valuable for new ventures and existing firms (Pittaway *et al.*, 2004). Although firms may lack internal resources, they may be representing different phases of an organizational life cycle. Taken together, the effects from networking with different actors, customers or suppliers can be driven by different motives and may lead to different outcomes for new ventures as compared to established.

2.4. Women Entrepreneurs Contribution to Employment Creation

Igbodalo (1990) observes that women had to resign their appointment if they wanted to go on maternity leave. The global economic recession and the gulf between job creation and the growth in the numbers of job seekers have worsened the employment situation for women and men alike. But women face greater vulnerabilities in the labour market because of their relative lack of education and training, the tendency to channel women into certain occupations, and the continuous heavy burdens of unpaid domestic work, child-bearing and child-care, which restrict the time and energy available for income-earning activities. Women's participation in the formal sector employment in Nigeria is low. The pattern of relative distribution of the Nigerian modern sector workers by industrial sector shows that female participation is highest in the services sector and lowest in building and construction sector, more specifically, female empowerment is concentrated in the trades, restaurants and hotels

sectors, and community social and personal services all of which fall under the informal sector. The Federal Office of [Federal Office of Statistics \(2003\)](#) Annual Reports indicate that the informal sector employs about 46 per cent of the female labour force, mainly in petty trading and home-based processing and manufacturing, where they have little access to official sources of credit or information.

Women's participation in the labour force in Nigeria can generally be discussed from three perspectives. First is agriculture, the mainstay of the economies of most African countries in which a large number of women participate. An International Labour Organization (ILO) Report reveals that in 1996 in the African region, agriculture offered the highest employment opportunity for women (33 percent), services (27 percent) and industries (16.9 percent). Second is the formal sector also known as the "modern" sector or the "organized" sector. It covers the public sector and medium /large private sector enterprises that recruit labour on a permanent and regular basis for fixed rewards. Its main features include difficult entry, large-scale operation, regulated market and possession of formal education. These features account for the predominance of women in the informal sector. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), women are two-thirds less likely than men to get waged employment; only 3 out of 10 women in the labour force in sub-Saharan Africa are paid employees. The UNDP reports that in 2005, about 5 per cent of the female labour force worked in industry, 20 per cent in services, 23 per cent in sales, and only 6 per cent in professional, technical, administrative or managerial positions.

The [International Labour Organization \(2006\)](#) suggests that women's formal sector participation rates dropped from 57 percent in 1980 53 percent in 2006, with 2.5 million women losing their jobs between 1995 and 2000. In Nigeria, women accounted for 30 per cent of retrenched workers, although they were only 18 per cent of formal sector workers. This was due to the fact that women dominated the lower echelons of the social services sector, which faced the heaviest budget cuts. Many of such retrenched women have relocated to the informal sector. Finally there is the informal sector. Because employment opportunities as wage-earning workers often denied women as a result of family responsibilities, lack of skills, social and cultural barriers, self-employment or setting up of their own enterprise may be the only possibility for women to get access to employment and to earn an income. Consequently, in many countries, especially in developing and transition economies, women represent the majority of entrepreneurs in micro enterprises and the informal sector.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The cross-sectional survey method was adopted in the generation of data. The target population is the entire population to which the findings are applicable or can be generalised. The target population of Women Entrepreneurs in Rivers State is 329 obtained from the 2017 Directory of the Rivers State Ministry of Women Affairs and Rivers State Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The sample size was obtained using the [Krejcie and Morgan \(1970\)](#) table for determining minimum returned sample size for a given population. The sample size therefore is 181 and was used for the study. The sampling random technique was used to arrive at the study sample.

Primary data was collected through designed questionnaires distributed to women entrepreneurs.

The questionnaire was structured into different sections. Data collected from the field were edited to ensure consistency of responses. Data collected was first sorted and cleaned; it was then categorized and coded thematically and entered into the data editor of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 21.0). Descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies, tables, percentages, mean and standard deviation were used for the demographic profiles and items related to the characteristics of women entrepreneurs. To determine the strength and direction of the relationship between variables inferential statistical analysis was employed using Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Statistics.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Demographic Analysis

In this study the output of the demographic analysis are presented. These presentations would further enable the understanding of demographic distribution of the sample.

Table-1. Age Distribution of the Respondents

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 21-30 | 108 | 70.6 | 70.6 | 70.6 |
| | 31-40 | 30 | 19.6 | 19.6 | 90.2 |
| | 41-50 | 12 | 7.8 | 7.8 | 98.0 |
| | 51& above | 3 | 2.0 | 2.0 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 153 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Source: SPSS21.0 data Output, 2017

From the data in table 1, it can be observed that 108 representing 70.6 percent of the respondents fall within the 21-30 years age bracket. Also, 30 respondents representing 19.6 percent fall within the 31-40 years age bracket. Furthermore, 12 of the respondents representing 7.8 percent were observed to have fallen within the 41-50 years age bracket and finally 3 respondents representing percent of the total respondents were above 51 years and above.

Table-2 Marital Status Distribution of the Respondents

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Single | 87 | 56.9 | 56.9 | 56.9 |
| | Married | 61 | 39.9 | 39.9 | 96.7 |
| | Divorced | 1 | .7 | .7 | 97.4 |
| | Widowed | 4 | 2.6 | 2.6 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 153 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Source: SPSS 21.0 data Output, 2017

From the data in table 2, it is clearly indicated that 87 of the respondents indicating 56.9 percent of the respondents fall into the single women category while 69 of the respondents indicating 39.9 percent indicated they were married, 1 respondent representing 0.7 percent indicated that she was divorced and 4 others indicating 2.6 percent were widows.

Table-3. Educational Qualifications of Respondents

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | WAEC O LEVEL | 72 | 47.1 | 47.1 | 47.1 |
| | Diploma | 19 | 12.4 | 12.4 | 59.5 |
| | Bachelor's Degree | 52 | 34.0 | 34.0 | 93.5 |
| | None | 10 | 6.5 | 6.5 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 153 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Source: SPSS 21.0 data Output, 2017

The data in table 3 portrays the educational level and qualification distribution of the respondents. From the results above, 72 respondents indicating 47.1 percent are WAEC O'Level holders, 19 of the respondents indicating 12.4 percent were diploma holders, while 52 respondents representing 34 percent were Bachelor's degree holders and 10 respondents indicating 6.5 percent of the respondents had no educational certificate.

Table-4. Duration of Respondents Business Operation

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|--------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Less than 3 years | 76 | 49.7 | 49.7 | 49.7 |
| | 3-6 years | 38 | 24.8 | 24.8 | 74.5 |
| | 7-10 years | 24 | 15.7 | 15.7 | 90.2 |
| | More than 10 years | 15 | 9.8 | 9.8 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 153 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Source: SPSS 21.0 data Output, 2017

From the data presented in table 4 it can be observed that 76 respondents indicating 49.7 percent had operated their businesses for less than 3 years while 38 respondents depicting 24.8 percent had operated their businesses for a period between 3-6 years. Also, 24 of the respondents which indicate 15.7 percent had been in business for a period between 7-10 years and 15 of the respondents indicating 9.8 percent had been in business for more than 10 years.

Table-5. Number of Employees Working for the Respondents

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Less than 5 Employees | 127 | 83.0 | 83.0 | 83.0 |
| | 5-10 Employees | 22 | 14.4 | 14.4 | 97.4 |
| | 11-15 Employees | 3 | 2.0 | 2.0 | 99.3 |
| | More than 15 Employees | 1 | .7 | .7 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 153 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Source: SPSS 21.0 data Output, 2017

From the data in table 5, 127 respondents that is 83 percent indicated that they employed less than 5 employees while 22 respondents that is 14.4 percent indicated that they employed between 5-10 employees. Furthermore, 3 respondents representing 2 percent had between 11-15 employees and only 1 respondent that is 0.7 employed more than 15 employees.

4.2. Hypothesis Testing

The secondary data analysis was carried out using the Spearman rank order correlation tool at a 95% confidence interval. We have relied on the Spearman Rank (*rho*) statistic to undertake the analysis. The 0.05 significance level is adopted as criterion for the probability of either accepting the null hypotheses at ($p > 0.05$) or rejecting the null hypotheses at ($p < 0.05$)

4.3. Test of Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant relationship between entrepreneurial networking and women entrepreneurs' contribution to employment creation.

Table-6. Correlation Result for innovativeness and household sustenance

| | | | Entrepreneurial Networking | Contribution to employment |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Spearman's <i>rho</i> | Entrepreneurial Networking | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000 | .082 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | .000 |
| | | N | 153 | 153 |
| | Contribution to employment | Correlation Coefficient | .082 | 1.000 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | . |
| | | N | 153 | 153 |

Source: SPSS 17.0 data Output, 2017

From the result in the table 6, it is shown that a positive relationship exist between entrepreneurial networking and women entrepreneurs' contribution to employment creation. The *rho* value 0.082 indicates this relationship and it is significant at $p < 0.05$. The correlation value indicates that the relationship is very high and the relationship is substantial. Therefore, based on empirical findings the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected. Thus, there is a significant relationship between entrepreneurial networking and women entrepreneurs' contribution to employment creation in Rivers State.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study using descriptive and inferential statistical methods investigated the relationship between entrepreneurial networking and women entrepreneurs' contribution to employment generation. The findings revealed a significant relationship between entrepreneurial networking and women entrepreneurs' contribution to employment creation using the Spearman's rank order correlation tool and at a 95% confidence interval. The findings of this study confirmed that entrepreneurial networking has a positive effect towards performance of women-owned SMEs. This implies that the nurturing of entrepreneurial networks by women entrepreneurs enhances their ability to generate employment through micro, medium and small enterprises activities to provide a major outlet for employment creation and economic participation even though these activities can be generally categorized as low skilled with low returns. An innovative women entrepreneur has the ability to perceive new business opportunities, she is well able to respond to such and in so doing create employment opportunities for herself and others. This is because business related networks are generally driven by the need to find solutions to shared problems and therefore generate positive externalities.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Engaging in entrepreneurial activity is considered one of the ways of becoming self-employed. Becoming self-employed is seen as a means of sustaining oneself and consequently providing an income for others through employment of those with the capacity to add value to the business. From the data generated and analysed, it was empirically discovered that there is a positive and significant relationship between entrepreneurial networking and women entrepreneurs' in Rivers State. Therefore from the study sample of women entrepreneurs in Rivers State it is concluded more specifically that entrepreneurial networking significantly enhances women entrepreneurs' contribution to employment creation.

Based on the discussion and conclusion above, the following recommendations are hereby made:

1. Women entrepreneurs should increase the level of their entrepreneurial networks with other women entrepreneurs by forming useful associations and engaging in some sort of cooperative to pull resources together and make better use of business opportunities.
2. It is important to engage women in entrepreneurial networks which will help them pivotal to developing the right abilities, skills, competencies and orientation necessary for to make vital contributions through entrepreneurial ventures.

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