

INDIGENOUS ENTREPRENEURIAL ORIENTATION AND ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS OF MICRO-BUSINESSES IN EBONYI STATE

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Abstract

This study determined the relationship between indigenous entrepreneurial orientation and economic competitiveness of micro-businesses with a focus on the nature of the relationship between knowledge adaptability component of indigenous entrepreneurial orientation and value creation as well as customer services variables of business economic competitiveness. A resource-based theory of the firm was adopted because it is believed that through the use of the various resources (capital, human, social, information, and thought (orientation) at the disposal of the entrepreneur desired results are achieved. Data were generated using a questionnaire administered to the respondents selected through the judgmental (Purposive) sampling technique. Analysis was done via Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25 to generate the data frequency, percentages, standard deviation, and means while hypotheses were tested using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The study found a significant positive relationship between knowledge adaptability and value creation/customer services. Based on the findings it was concluded that trying to replicate the successes of global markets using Eurocentric orientations might not be feasible as contextual nuances affect businesses vis a viz their sustainability, growth, and success; hence adoption of indigenous entrepreneurial orientations. The study recommended that indigenous entrepreneurs' attention be focused on contextual peculiarities in their business environments to enable them to practice needful/appropriate ideologies to survive and remain economically competitive. It was also recommended that Nigerian indigenous entrepreneurs adopt, develop, and practice contextualized ideologies like knowledge and adaptability as they were found to enhance business competitiveness as well as sustainability; more so, these attributes can be utilized alongside already existing orientations adopted and found useful.

Keywords: Indigenous Entrepreneurial Orientation, Knowledge (Romance), Adaptability, Economic Competitiveness, Value Creation and Customer Service

Introduction

Globally, indigenous entrepreneurship plays a fundamental role in nurturing economic growth and driving sustainable development in every local business environment. Indigenous entrepreneurs can effectively tailor their products and services to meet the needs of their communities, by leveraging their understanding of local marketplaces, cultural inclinations, and social linkages, (Abdullahi et al., 2021). This local approach enhances customer satisfaction, fosters community support, and creates a competitive advantage for micro-businesses in the business environment. Indigenous entrepreneurial orientation encompasses various factors, including the mindset, inspirations, business practices, and innovation strategies adopted by indigenous entrepreneurs (Mohan and Krueger, 2017). It represents a unique blend of traditional knowledge, values, community interactions, and local considerations, which shape the way micro-businesses are established, run, and maintained.

Remarkably, the business environment has evolved (in a rapid and fast-paced trend) into a global (one-location-serves-all) entity such that economic and social issue(s) tend to look homogeneous world over (Jangid, 2022). Such occurrences lull entrepreneurs into seeking, studying, and adopting orientations of successful entrepreneurs around the globe without taking the necessary care to contextualize them to fit their clime or prevalent economic and social environment. These may well lead to failure because economic/political terrain, legal environment, socio-cultural inclinations, demography, and orientation of the indigenous entrepreneur differ one from the other and to a great extent affect the chances of survival of ventures (Singh, 2023). Indigenous entrepreneurial orientation (IEO) is the recognition of contextual factors that influence the mentality and behavior of indigenous entrepreneurs (Mrabure, Ruwhiu, and Gray, 2018). This goes to say that contextual orientations are of great importance to business growth, sustainability, and competitiveness as buttressed by Onodugo (2000); Al-Mansour (2007), and Oni (2008). These indigenous entrepreneurial orientations include resilience, romance (knowledge), singularity and focus, networking, competitiveness, adaptability, flexibility, insatiability, apolitical democratism, apprenticeship, and mentorship of which knowledge adaptability (KA) was studied.

Microbusinesses are not only major providers of employment/income for the populace but also breeding grounds for entrepreneurship capacities; technological skills cum innovation and managerial competencies for the development of the domestic private sector. Accordingly, in Ebonyi State, the entrepreneurial prowess of indigenous individuals and their micro-businesses have become essential drivers of economic competitiveness (Ofoegbu et al., 2022). Ebonyi is a state located in south-eastern Nigeria and is renowned for its rich cultural legacy, natural resources, and lively entrepreneurial environment. The state's micro-business sector, which is made up of small-scale enterprises, has emerged as a significant contributor to economic growth, employment generation, and poverty reduction (Okonkwo and Eze, 2019). Nevertheless, to effectively harness the potential of these micro-businesses and improve their competitiveness, it is crucial to understand the indigenous entrepreneurial orientation displayed by local entrepreneurs. Moreover, the economic competitiveness of micro-businesses in Ebonyi State is influenced by various contextual factors, such as value creation and customer services. Understanding the relationship between these factors and indigenous entrepreneurial knowledge adaptability is essential for developing targeted interventions and policies that can strengthen the competitiveness of micro-businesses and promote inclusive economic growth.

In addition, economic competitiveness is a factor-based measurement/comparison between key players using a similar set of indicators (institutions, policies, and factors) to determine the level of performance in terms of acquisition of market share, profitability, long-term stability, and growth used to upgrade the welfare and level of comfortable living enjoyed by people (Cann, 2016). This

means that real potentials/capabilities leading to the birth of economic and societal achievers are harnessed on a competitive platform with components like value creation (VC), customer service (CS), technology acquisition, restricting of internal workings, and staff training meant for maintaining and staying on the edge created (Ingram, 2023). Value creation is the additional worth cum benefits given by a business to its stakeholders in exchange for money to ensure continued patronage (Pahwa, 2023); while customer service is the assistance/support rendered to clients by a representative or agent of a business organization based on unclarity or issue(s) with any of the organization's products and services (Rodgers and Mckinney, 2023).

Regrettably, entrepreneurial orientation is used in our clime (Nigeria) as at best Eurocentric, that is, scholarly ideologies of Western or developed countries' entrepreneurs. In such developed economies the adage "Dream it and have it" may have smooth sailing because the necessities to power innovations were provided. Such may not hold sway for a developing economy where almost everything operates under the "Trial and error" orbit. The practicalities of wholly adopting these Westernized orientations pose serious operational problems for any economy with different technicalities and terrain than the originating economy(ies), more so, the success and competitiveness of the micro businesses. Thus, despite the important contributions of micro-businesses and indigenous entrepreneurship to the economic competitiveness of Ebonyi State, some gaps hinder their full potential. While indigenous entrepreneurs possess unique knowledge, skills, and resources rooted in the local culture, there is a lack of comprehensive research on how these factors influence the competitiveness of micro-businesses in the region. Arising from this, most micro businesses in Ebonyi State tend to fail at the teething stages.

Given the above, there is much need to contextualize orientations/ideologies to suit economies where they are to be adopted and practiced for the best results to be attained concerning the socioeconomic environment. This necessitates an alignment/realignment of the foreign ideologies against the philosophies and orientation of indigenous (Nigerian) entrepreneurs if business (those on the micro level not excluded) competitiveness is to be achieved and maintained. Hence the need for this present study on knowledge adaptability components of indigenous entrepreneurial orientation and value creation cum customer services factors of competitiveness of micro-businesses in Ebonyi State.

Objectives of the Study

Generally, this study sought to ascertain the relationship between the indigenous entrepreneurial orientation and the economic competitiveness of micro-businesses in Ebonyi State. Specifically, the study sought to

- i) Determine the relationship between knowledge adaptability and value creation of micro-businesses in Ebonyi State
- ii) Ascertain the relationship between knowledge adaptability and customer service of micro-businesses in Ebonyi State

Research Questions

- i) What is the relationship between knowledge adaptability and value creation of micro-businesses in Ebonyi State?
- ii) What is the relationship between knowledge adaptability and customer service provision of micro-businesses in Ebonyi State?

Research Hypotheses

- H₀₁: Knowledge adaptability has no significant relationship with the value creation of micro-businesses in Ebonyi State
- H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between Knowledge adaptability and customer service provision of micro-businesses in Ebonyi State

Significance of the Study

This study will help indigenous entrepreneurs to identify those ideologies relevant to their clime(s) as well as adopt them as part of their business strategies for survival and sustainability. It will assist business consultants with knowledge of the contextual ideologies that aid indigenous businesses survive their environmental dynamism for better guidance to entrepreneurs seeking their professional assistance. The study will also serve as additional reference literature and a source of knowledge for scholars and researchers in the field of entrepreneurship.

Scope of the Study

As stated in the specific objectives, the study focused on the knowledge adaptability construct of IEO against value creation and customer service components of the economic competitiveness of micro businesses. The location for the study population was limited to the semi/urbanized towns in Ebonyi State as they are where this micro business that had lasted for the number of years/period required is mostly found. The number of years in operation (businesses that have survived at least one change of government, that is, 4 years and above benchmark) is not limited if any can be found. The stratification was based on the knowledge that Ebonyi has a dearth of businesses that survive a reasonable length of time and those are mainly located in the few semi/urbanized dwellings in the State. Forty-eight participants were selected using Judgemental (Purposive) sampling technique due to the dearth of businesses that survive a reasonable length of time in the state plus the limiting factors of time and distance of the locations.

Limitations of the Study

Constraints are features unavoidable in any worthy venture; hence, conducting this study experienced its fair share. The limitations to this work included accessibility to distant research locations, accessibility to the respondents when needed, and refusal to participate by some of the potential respondents approached. Despite these challenges, the researcher was still able to persevere and get responses and data used to carry out this study. These were achieved by repeat visits to the locations bearing in mind the periods the respondents would be easily reached as well as confidentiality assurances that none of the information provided would be disclosed, linked to, or used against them at any point in time.

Literature Review

Indigenous Entrepreneurial Orientation (IEO)

Indigenous Entrepreneurial Orientation (IEO) are the distinct practices, approaches, mentality, behaviors, and abilities exhibited by domestic entrepreneurs formed through contact with local environmental factors that influence the success and extent to which the organization grows (Mrabure, Ruwhiu, and Gray, 2018). In recognition of the importance of context-based entrepreneurial orientation (EO), Lexi Noviste, of Acuity Venture Partner opined that “doing business in the Nigerian context is far different from the US”. She asserted that the culture and behavior of the Nigerian markets are unique; hence, trying to replicate (verbatim) successes of global markets using Eurocentric EOs might not be the solution as more contextual models are needful. These perceived missing ingredients/support strategies were x-rayed by Beyene (2002) to include environmental and economic factors combined with entrepreneurial competence and orientations in ensuring that

businesses compete favorably rather than expect success from what works elsewhere. The IEOs include – romance (knowledge), adaptability, apprenticeship, mentorship, resilience, singularity, focus, networking, competitiveness, flexibility, insatiability, and apolitical democratism; of which the first two were studied.

Romance (knowledge) – This is deeper knowledge about all that concerns a quest, journey, or venture at a level such that the highs and lows associated with it can be navigated, more so, business romance transcends to the understanding of all that pertains to the business such that objectives, methods, and strategies are in alignment (Hoffman, 2019 and Volini 2022).

Adaptability – This is the ability (for individuals/teams) to respond effectively, efficiently, quickly cum flexibly adjust, align/realign, learn/unlearn and maintain a bend easily as well as modify strategies to the demands of changing external forces promptly to enable survival and achievement of objectives (Herrity, 2020; Wheatley, 2021 and Enache, 2022).

Competitive Leadership (Competitiveness)

Competitiveness is the sustainable position of a company to proactively perceive market trends ahead of competitors and adjust supply according to the anticipation to meet the forces of competition in a given business sector and hence overcome rivals in long-term profitability (Dresch, Collato, and Lacerda, 2018). It is described by IGI Global (2023) as the ability of an organization to produce cum offer quality goods and services at the same or lower prices (from the competition) while maximizing the return on investment of resources utilized to carve a niche for superior economic performance. Again, Indeed (2023) defined it as the ability to balance the price of products and services with quality to provide the optimal value to customers and at the same time generate more sales than the competition. In the views of Indeed (2023) and Ingram (2023), it is not only about carving a niche and staying ahead of others; they recognize the importance of maintaining and staying the edge created. Hence, these five components were highlighted:

- i. Creating a value proposition – this can be achieved by making a list of the organization’s areas of competence or competitive edge to be used as the foundational rock or selling points of the business
- ii. Commitment to continuous/better ways to reach out to or engage with customers such that their value base keeps drawing them back
- iii. Striving to know about and acquire new technologies meant to aid in the generation of quick results in a cost-effective way
- iv. Reviewing and restructuring the internal workings of the organization for better communication and growth through additional staffing and energy injection where needed.
- v. Improving new intake training and orientation for distinct company culture and values that will enhance image and goodwill.

Meanwhile, Feurer and Chaharbaghi (1994) on their part recognized customer and shareholder values as well as the ability to act or react within a competitive environment as part of the factors used to measure competitiveness, discovering (harnessing) real potentials, capacities; at the same time birthing achievers who propel the economy and society. Igboji and Okonkwo (2014) thought that a firm’s competitive advantage is an outcrop of its ability to accumulate intangible assets, that is, types of knowledge, brands, reputation, technology, decision and a problem-solving system that generates a market for her products. Some benefits attributable to competition as garnered from this study include such as relationship building mastered through interactions and engagement in healthy competitive opportunities. Others include refusing to quit by turning challenges into springboards; being prepared to think, predict as well as act before others, and focusing on the targeted achievement of set goals through persistence, determination, and well-built management

skills. It should be noted that competition aids resilience as there may be external issues working against business endeavors at intervals be they political, legal, social, economic, or even environmental, hence, without that inbuilt doggedness (determination to win/succeed no matter) giving up becomes the next best step and plan of action.

Value creation (VC)

Value creation is a quest to discover customer convenience as well as enjoyable experience drivers; turning those desirable into sought-after value and striving to consciously/strategically make them available such that expectations are exceeded (Boyles (2022), Pahwa (2023) and Wells (2023)). Notably, Pahwa (2023) opines that it is what a business offers to stakeholders to sustain its continuous existence as well as the total of the benefits customers get in exchange for prices paid for products in monetary terms and the entire degree of satisfaction derived from consuming a product. Again, Pahwa (2023) and Wells (2023) posit that value creation becomes a possibility if the gaps between organizational purpose, business model, resources/process utilization, cost, prices, and willingness to sell and pay are closed as well as synchronized. This achievement they maintain, will lead to secured customer patronage, delight, satisfaction cum loyalty; securing the firm's margin, employee satisfaction, and suppliers surplus. Other benefits to the firm as highlighted by Wells (2023) are improved production/all-around efficiency; optimization/maximization of internal/external resources; provision of durable interactions leading to repeat purchases and socially responsible induced visibility and approval.

Customer service (CS)

Customer service is the assistance/support rendered to clients by a representative or agent of a business organization based on unclarity or issue(s) with any of the organization's products and services (Rodgers and Mckinney, 2023). The importance of customer service is that it either comes before or after dealings with the organization while aiding the client's satisfactory, easy, and enjoyable experience with the organization. Customer service to Ghalayini (2019) aims at creating and enhancing the values offered to customers thereby leading to their continued patronage, loyalty, retention, and recommendation as collaborated by Rodgers and Mckinney (2023). Other benefits according to these authors include increased revenue from repeat/new clientele purchases; reduced expenses incurred in the bid to attract new customers; provision of overall better service .

Micro Business

Microenterprise was given an upgraded definitional base in the National Policy for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) as any enterprise operating with any amount less than N10 million which also employs less than 10 workers (Aganga, 2014). This definition is in terms of employment and assets excluding land(s) and building(s) belonging to the enterprise – meaning that lands and buildings are not included in the less than N10 million asset base.

Furthermore, a micro business is mainly operated by a sole proprietor but may also include a partnered business provided the employment and asset base falls within the definitional criterion. Also highlighted in the policy for the avoidance of doubt and conflict was that an enterprise with an asset/capital base over N10 million is still categorized under micro if the employment base is below 10. This is based on the reasoning that employment gives a more stable definition than assets which tend to be affected by prevailing inflationary trends per time.

Hence this definition under the policy took into cognizance all possible factors among which were international comparisons and peculiarities of various sub-sectors and enterprises. The number of micro-businesses has been pegged at about 37 million with an estimated employment base of about 58 million cutting across different sectors of business endeavors (Aganga, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the resource-based theory of the firm developed by Barney J. B. in 1991, as reviewed by Dontigney (2018). It is through the use of the various resources (capital, human, social, information as well as thoughts/orientation) at the disposal of the entrepreneur that desired results are achieved. Most times, especially at inception and other critical periods of market crunch and innovativeness, it is the intangible aspects like orientation that come in most handy to provide the distinct edge needed to maintain competitive lead. The resource-based theory of the firm was chosen for this study because IEO is one of the intangible resources at the disposal of an entrepreneur, which can be utilized in the bid to push an enterprise to success, as such it is deemed fitting to hinge the study on.

Empirical Reviews

Al-Swidi and Al-Hosam (2012) conducted a study of Islamic banks in Yemen on the effect of entrepreneurial orientation on organizational performance using the partial least squares approach and adopted entrepreneurial orientation to include innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking. They found and agreed that entrepreneurial organizations overweigh their rivals in exploring and exploiting business opportunities and creating a competitive advantage towards a better strategic position in the marketplace than others. However, they opined that due to many growing challenges in the global business environment, all organizations have to adopt localized/domestic/indigenous entrepreneurial strategies to keep pace with the speedy changes and rapid challenges.

Using a survey method to research 362 Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) across Kano, Kaduna, and Sokoto of North-western Nigeria on the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation, market orientation, learning orientation, technology orientation and SMEs performance in Nigeria, Aminu and Mohd Shariff (2014) found through Partial Least Squared-Structural Equation Method (PLS-SEM) that entrepreneurial orientation though found to be positively significant to SMEs performance may not serve well in the long run if not combined with learning additional attributes from the environment in developing countries like Nigeria.

Arisi-Nwugballa, Elom, and Onyeizugbe (2016) employed the survey method while conducting their study on evaluating the relevance of entrepreneurial orientation to the performance of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Results of the study showed that innovativeness and proactiveness were significant to customer performance, competitive aggressiveness showed significance to both product and customer performance while risk-taking and autonomy had no significant correlation with any of the performance measures used. Hence, the study deduced that these five dimensions of EO had no universal relevance thereby supporting the contextualization or improvement of the EOs.

Watson, Dada, Wright, and Perrigot (2019) studied the effect of five dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation (risk-taking, innovativeness, proactiveness, autonomy, and competitive aggressiveness) on 378 franchise organizations from Australia, France, India, South Africa, and the United Kingdom with particular focus on the countries' national culture. They adopted the analysis of covariance in examining the relationship between the variables to find the overall EO significant to performance but dependent on the country too. In furtherance, when going by dimensions, proactiveness was found to be insignificant to performance.

Nera (2021) in his survey study on entrepreneurial orientation and performance of SMEs in Nigeria: the roles of managerial experience and network ties used SEM and regression analytical tools to analyze responses obtained from 310 SMEs in Nigeria to find that innovativeness and proactiveness were positively significant to firm performance while risk-taking was not.

Irikefe and Bagobiri (2022) studied the effect of entrepreneurial orientation on the performance of small enterprises in Abuja, Nigeria. They studied 349 small enterprises via survey research methods and after analyses of data through descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis found that EO components proved significant at $16.910 > 2.399$ when studied wholly but singly autonomy proved insignificant while innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking were significantly related.

Ulo and Sunday-Nwosu (2022) in their study on entrepreneurial orientation and the performance of auto spare parts and machinery dealers association in Lagos State Nigeria employed the descriptive survey research design on 260 business owners/managers of spare parts/machinery in Lagos, Nigeria. Their study found resilience and competitive aggressiveness (which are also components of IEO) to be positively significant to the performance of the Auto Spare Parts/Machineries businesses studied at $r=0.649$, $p<0.001$, and $r=0.533$, $p<0.001$ respectively. Hence they recommend that these orientations need to be utilized by business persons as they provide additional insight that aids entrepreneurs respond proactively to the ups and downs within the business environment to attain optimal performance.

Daniel and Chukwuemeka (2023) in their study on entrepreneurial orientation and performance of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria studied 352 entrepreneurs across Lagos, Kano, Aba, and Abuja. They used the field survey method with factor analysis, regression analysis, and structural equation model (SEM) analytical methods to find only innovation, proactiveness, and competitive aggressiveness to be positively significant to the performance of SMEs in Nigeria at 0.168, 0.120, and 0.132 respectively. They further opined that a holistic application of EO constructs with the assumption that all are beneficial to the Nigerian context may be misleading to business people and suggested that focus be placed on those that matter in conjunction with other factors.

Most of the works reviewed lent credence to the fact that not all established EO dimensions aid the performance of micro-businesses in climes other than the ones they originated from (Nigeria inclusive) due to some extant contextual dynamics that should be taken into consideration by indigenous entrepreneurs vis a viz the development and adoption of IEOs. Insight from the IEOs reviewed shows they are needful ingredients for entrepreneurs to survive, grow, and compete favorably in the light of the contextual environment. Few of the empirical works were carried out in Western environments with others in Nigeria but their focus was mostly on EOs and performance and found some of the constructs not to be significantly relevant contextually. Again, the existing literature on indigenous entrepreneurship in Ebonyi State is relatively scarce and fragmented, with few recent studies focusing specifically on the economic competitiveness of micro-businesses. Given the dearth of literature on IEOs versus competitiveness and the gaps perceived from these, this study was conceived.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a survey (field study) research design to determine the opinions of respondents on the relationship between IEOs and the economic competitiveness of micro-businesses in Ebonyi State.

Population of the Study

The research work was conducted at the sub-national level with the target population being entrepreneurs drawn from across Ebonyi State. Using a Judgemental (Purposive) sampling technique forty-eight entrepreneurs were selected from the three Senatorial Zones. Participants were entrepreneurs who have been in operation and survived more than one governmental administration with their peculiar business and environmental policies. The participants were chosen to suit the type of research work, density, and presence of the diverse categories of micro businesses matching the

inclusion criteria; time constraints also played a deciding role. The entrepreneurs include (tailors /fashion designers, mini store/supermarket operators, barbers, and restaurateurs): two of each from two locations in each of the three senatorial zones (making 48 respondents). The locations are Abakaliki/Ezzamgbo representing Ebonyi North; Ikwo/Onueke representing Ebonyi Central and Afikpo/Okposi representing Ebonyi South Senatorial zones. The study used complete enumeration since the total number was not large enough to warrant sampling.

Method of Data Collection

Data were sourced primarily and gathered from respondents through structured instruments to enable precise answers. A total of 24 scale items were used; the first sixteen (16) sought to evaluate the various components of indigenous entrepreneurial orientation while the remaining eight (4 each) were for value creation and customer service constructs of economic competitiveness of micro business respectively.

Validity of the Instrument

This is to ensure that the research instrument measures what it is meant to; to this effect, face and content validity were used to authenticate the questionnaire by subjecting it to evaluation for necessary corrections before distribution.

Reliability of the Instrument

Twenty-five (25) percent of the research instrument retrieved was randomly selected and used to test the reliability of the result using Cronbach’s Alpha (α). The reliability information is as clearly shown in Table One.

Table 1: Reliability statistics

Cronbach’s Alpha	N of Items
.943	9

This result shows a reliability ratio of 0.9 which according to McMillan and Schumacher (1997) confirmed that it is above the acceptable level of 0.5, thereby deemed reliable.

Method of Data Analysis

Data were analyzed via the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 to generate frequency tables, percentages, standard deviation, and mean using the weights attached to the modified five points Likert scale thus–Strongly agree (5), Agree (4), Undecided (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly disagree (1). Pearson Moment Correlation was used to test the hypotheses at 0.01 significant levels

Decision Rule

A decision point of 3.0 (mean weight after analysis) was chosen, hence where it is equal to or greater than, it was accepted as positive; otherwise, negative. Also, Pearson Moment Correlation was used to test the hypotheses at 0.01 significant levels, hence any result greater than that will be accepted and the alternate rejected.

Data Presentation And Analyses

Research Instrument Distribution and Analyses

Results from the responses were analyzed and presented in tables under this section.

Table 2: Questionnaire Distribution and Response Rate of Micro Business Owners in Ebonyi State

Response Factor	<i>n = 48</i>	
	Frequency	Percent (%)
Questionnaire not retrieved	3	6.25
Questionnaire Retrieved	45	93.75
Total	48	100

Table 2 shows a total of forty-eight copies of the questionnaire were administered to the selected micro business owners across the three Senatorial Zones in Ebonyi State; forty-five (45) of these were retrieved and three (3) were not due to unavailability of the respondents at the time of collection. Table two reports the response rate at an approximate number of ninety-four (94%) and none was discounted enabling the utilization of all in the analysis; also, the above-average 94% response rate field outcome was deemed acceptable.

Result Presentation in Tables

Table 3: Frequency Distribution on Years of Operation of Micro Business in Ebonyi State

Number of Years	Responses	Response Rates (%)
10 – 12	29	64.4
13 – 15	10	22.2
16 – 18	3	6.7
19 – 21	0	0
22 – 24	3	6.7
Total	45	100

Table 3 depicts that twenty-nine (64%) of the respondents have been in business between ten to twelve years; ten (22%) of them have lasted between thirteen to fifteen years; three (7%) for sixteen to eighteen years while the remaining three (another 7%) have been on for about twenty-two to twenty-four years. These responses show that the businesses of the respondents have lasted upwards of ten years and operated under at least two changes of governments in the State.

Table 4: Summary Statistics of IEO Questions

Subject	Scale	Freq.	Percent%	No of Resp.	Missing	Mean	Std. Dev
KA1	U	5	11	45	-	4.44	.693
	A	15	33				
	SA	25	56				
KA2	SD	1	2	45	-	4.13	.869
	D	2	4				
	U	2	4				
	A	25	56				
	SA	15	33				
KA3	A	28	62	45	-	4.38	.490
	SA	17	38				

KA4	D	4	9	45	-	4.22	.876
	U	1	2				
	A	21	47				
	SA	19	42				

Table 4 depicts all the response results elicited from respondents for the four IEO questions cutting across romance (in-depth knowledge) and adaptability. The means were positive at 4.44, 4.13, 4.38 and 4.22 respectively. These show that most of the respondents strongly affirmed that the knowledge adaptability components of IEO were found needful by the entrepreneurs; hence they adopt and exhibit them in the course of their businesses, which has helped them a lot.

Table 5: Summary Statistics of VC Questions

Subject	Scale	Freq.	Percent%	No of Resp.	Missing	Mean	Std. Dev
VC1	SD	5	11	42	3	3.57	1.291
	D	4	9				
	U	5	11				
	A	18	40				
	SA	10	22				
VC2	SD	4	9	45	-	3.76	1.111
	D	2	4				
	U	4	9				
	A	26	58				
	SA	9	20				
VC3	SD	1	2	41	4	4.15	.989
	D	3	7				
	U	2	4				
	A	18	4				
	SA	17	38				
VC4	SD	2	4	45	-	4.33	1.066
	D	2	4				
	U	2	4				
	A	12	27				
	SA	27	60				

Table 5 depicts all the response results elicited from respondents for the four VC questions. The means for VCs 1 to 4 were positive at 3.57, 3.76, 4.15, and 4.33 means respectively. By this, it can be deduced that the respondents agreed that creating value for customers helps boost business and make it competitive and sustainable.

Table 6: Summary Statistics of CS Questions

Subject	Scale	Freq.	Percent%	No of Resp.	Missing	Mean	Std. Dev
CS1	D	3	7	45	-	4.27	.780
	A	24	53				
	SA	18	40				

CS2	D	1	2	43	2	4.33	.644
	U	1	2				
	A	24	53				
	SA	17	38				
CS3	SD	3	7	45	-	3.91	1.258
	D	5	11				
	U	4	9				
	A	14	31				
	SA	19	42				
CS4	D	1	2	45	-	4.22	.670
	U	3	7				
	A	26	58				
	SA	15	33				

Table 6 depicts all the response results elicited from respondents for the four CS questions. The means for CS 1 to 4 were positive at 4.27, 4.33, 3.91, and 4.22 means respectively. This shows that going beyond the norm expected to render services to your customers has a long way to impact the growth, competitiveness cum sustainability of businesses as deduced from the responses of the research participants.

Testing of Hypotheses

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics of the Research Variables

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
KA	17.18	2.699	45
VC	15.20	5.066	45
CS	16.53	3.603	45

The mean results of the research variables at 17.18, 15.20, and 16.53 as depicted in Table 7 for KA, VC, and CS respectively were positively affirmed by the respondents.

Table 8: Correlative Results of Hypotheses One and Two

		KA	VC	CS
KA	Pearson Correlation	1	.921**	.967**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	45	45	45
VC	Pearson Correlation	.921**	1	.929**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	45	45	45
CS	Pearson Correlation	.967**	.929**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	45	45	45

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

Table 8 shows that knowledge adaptability was positively significant with value creation at 0.921 hence necessitating the rejection of null hypothesis one that knowledge adaptability does not have a significant relationship with value creation of micro-businesses in Ebonyi State and acceptance of the

alternate. In the same vein, the second hypothesis result also showed a significantly positive relationship between knowledge adaptability and customer services at 0.967; thereby the null that knowledge adaptability does not have a significant relationship with customer services provision of micro-businesses in Ebonyi State was rejected and the alternate accepted.

These results depicted that as the IEOs of the entrepreneurs studied increased, so did their capacity to create more value and attend to the needs of their customers, and by so doing their ability to stay competitively sustained is enhanced.

Discussion of Findings

Test of hypotheses using Pearson's Moment Correlation revealed that a strong significant relationship exists between knowledge adaptability dimensions of IEO and the value creation component of economic competitiveness in Ebonyi State. A strong significant relationship was also found in existence between knowledge adaptation dimensions of IEO and the customer services component of economic competitiveness in Ebonyi State. This means that contextual cum environmental dictates need not be overlooked by indigenous entrepreneurs to enable the discovery of distinct avenues to maneuver existing markets, competencies as well as unique capabilities that can generate the desired economic competitiveness for business growth and success. It further aligns with the suggestions of Al-Swidi and Al-Hosam (2012) that businesses should adopt indigenous entrepreneurial strategies to keep pace with the speedy global changes and rapid challenges. In the same vein, it buttresses the findings of authors whose works were reviewed that EO dimensions have no universal positive effect on the success of businesses (those in Ebonyi State inclusive) demanding a contextualization if competitive advantage and business success are to be attained (Al-Swidi and Al-Hosam, 2012; Aminu and Mohd Shariff, 2014; Arisi-Nwugbala, Elom and Onyeizugbe, 2016; Watson, Dada, Wright and Perrigot, 2019; Nera, 2021; Irikefe and Bagobiri, 2022; Ulo and Sunday-Nwosu, 2022 and Daniel and Chukwuemeka, 2023)

Summary of Findings

i. Results showed that knowledge adaptability has a significant relationship with value creation as well as economic competitiveness of micro-businesses in Ebonyi at 0.921 necessitating the acceptance of the alternative for hypothesis one.

ii. Alternate hypothesis two that knowledge adaptability has a significant relationship with customer services of micro-businesses and their competitiveness as well as their survival in Ebonyi State was also accepted given the correlation result of 0.967.

Conclusion

Based on the findings obtained in this research work, it was established that trying to replicate the successes of micro-businesses in Ebonyi using Eurocentric EOs might not be feasible as contextual nuances affect businesses vis a viz their sustainability, growth, and success, hence adoption of IEOs. Hence the study affirms the existence of a strong significant relationship between the knowledge adaptability dimensions of IEO and the value creation component of economic competitiveness in Ebonyi State.

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