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Research Article

# Intermediary Level Drivers and Sustainability of MSE's in Kenya

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## Abstract

Medium-sized enterprises (MSEs) account for 90 percent of businesses operating in Kenya, contributing up to 60% of total employment and up to 40% of GDP in emerging economies. MSEs have more flexibility to quickly adapt and change to meet necessary environmental and social targets. Thus, with the right strategy, MSEs can offer both economic prosperity and environmental protection. It raises an important question: What drives MSEs to consider sustainability in their practices? The study conducted empirical research to establish the Influence of intermediary-level drivers on the sustainability of MSEs in Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional research design. The unit of analysis was the MSEs registered by KAM with standard regulations classified as MSE, which are distributed in the s economic regional blocs. A simple random sampling technique and a probabilistic sampling technique were used to select 298 respondents, forming the observation unit. The data collection instrument was a semi-structured questionnaire. Ordinary Least Square regression was used to analyze data. Before conducting the regression analysis, data was pretested to check for reliability using the internal consistency method, and construct validity was tested using the Bartlett Test of Sphericity and Kaiser Meyer Olkin test of sampling adequacy. The model fit was statistically significant. The study rejected the null hypothesis. In conclusion, Intermediary-Level Drivers play a crucial role in MSE sustainability. The study recommends that SMEs embrace digital transformation and social media marketing to nurture Intermediary-Level Drivers. Government and industry associations should offer training and resources to help MSEs develop digital marketing skills.

## Keywords

Intermediary Level Drivers, Sustainability, Medium Sized Enterprises

## 1. Introduction

Globally, SMEs play an important role in economies in European countries, the US, and other industrialized countries such as Japan, Australia, Germany, France, and Canada. These enterprises are essential to economic growth and technological progress [5]. Various studies have been carried out on factors affecting the sustainability of SMEs. Still, none of the studies have focused on entrepreneurial drivers on sustainability as well as in medium-sized enterprises [10] on

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leading determinants for sustainability of SMEs in Bangladesh: Multiple Cases Studies of large SMEs found challenges such as employees' rights, entrepreneurial attitude of the employees and management to be the significant challenges inhibiting SMEs sustainability in Bangladesh [1]. A study towards identifying the multilevel determinants of SMEs' sustainability profiles established that the three multilevel determinants (macro-level drivers, institutional level drivers, and personal level drivers) do not prevent SMEs from sustainable development as they do not affect profitability and that SMEs can be profiled into four contexts using the three multilevel determinants; that is reactive, traditional, activist and strategic. The study focused on profiling SMEs using multilevel determinants without considering how the levels affect sustainability on their own, and his crucial measure was profitability, avoiding other aspects of sustainability, which the current study will include [4].

SMEs have also contributed to improving competition, innovation, and aggregate productivity, being the primary vehicle for new entrepreneurs to provide the economy with continuous ideas of innovation and skills. Their relevance to the economic development of countries was also pointed out, and their importance for the business fabric is a recurrent topic in academia because they have constituted a component of the strategic development of many countries [19]. Much research has been done on the various aspects of multilevel drivers independently and collectively. Descriptive research design was considered in their study of the effects of entrepreneurial values and entrepreneurial orientation, which are personal-level drivers of environmental dynamism and resource availability variables on financial performance and its impacts on firms' future intention: empirical evidence from Indonesian state-owned enterprises. The study was conducted in 81 state-owned institutions, and CEOs and CFOs responded to the questionnaires. A purposive method was considered to determine the unit of analysis. Environmental dynamism and resource availability moderated the association between entrepreneurial values, entrepreneurial orientation, and financial performance. The study established that entrepreneurial values and orientation positively correlate with economic performance. However, with the introduction of environmental dynamism and resource availability in the relationship between predictors and response, the adjusted R square reduced, meaning that the moderators weakened the relationship. The study recommends that the government recruit entrepreneurial-driven CEOs to direct and instill entrepreneurial values corresponding to creativity and innovativeness, thus improving business growth, profitability, and sustainability [21]. A Kenya National Bureau of Statistics survey released early this year indicates that approximately 400,000 micro, small, and medium enterprises still need to celebrate their second birthday. Few reach their fifth birthday- leading to concerns about the sustainability of this critical sector [11]. Although the World Bank lauds the country for making progress in making it easier to start a business, significant issues remain in smoothening the process. In Kenya, starting a business involves seven procedures, takes 22 days, and costs 21.1 percent of income per capita for both men and women [6].

SMEs can be deemed sustainable if they adopt multilevel entrepreneurial drivers from the four levels (personal, institutional, intermediary, and macro) and are supported by different stakeholders within the business Environment. In their research, the study concluded, among other things, the importance of various multilevel entrepreneurial drivers to the sustainability of SMEs [4, 7, 9, 14, 21].

Despite Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) accounting for 90 percent of businesses operating in Kenya, 20 percent are not self-sustainable. Sales have been on a downward spiral, with 44 percent of SMEs reporting low sales and 19 percent needing help accessing credit to boost the business [6]. However, the increasing closure trend from 15 percent to 26 percent in 2020 affects SDG 9 on fostering innovation and promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization [21]. Dealing with the challenges facing SMEs in Kenya requires a collective effort. Much research has focused on the economic aspect of the enterprise's sustainability, with little attention given to the human, environmental, and social aspects. Also, most research has focused on sustainability factors independently without operationalizing them at their different levels within the business environment.

On a global scale, SMEs account for the majority of the companies in the world. They generate between 50 percent and 60 percent of value added. In a strange twist of fate, these SMEs barely contribute to up to 45 percent of total employment and only contribute to 33% of the GDP in emerging economies such as Kenya [17]. Some more disturbing facts are that SMEs are responsible for around 60% of all carbon dioxide emissions and 70% of global pollution [2]. Such complexities and multi-disciplinary approaches provide an obscured lens to an empirical approach to the sustainability of SMEs.

Consequently, such a phenomenon presents an excellent research void that can be filled. In light of the above, this study seeks to demystify the extant knowledge on two essential concepts: multilevel entrepreneurial drivers and the sustainability of SMEs. The study proposes to conduct an empirical analysis using a quantitative approach to the cause and effect of Multilevel Entrepreneurial Drivers on the Sustainability of SMEs.

Accordingly, extant literature has conceptualized and contextualized sustainability and business performance as an emergent research area. More so, previous empirical evidence is earmarked by heterogeneous investigation of the sustainability domain concerning the research methodologies adopted and the scope of the ingredients of sustainability, conspicuously neglecting the multilevel entrepreneurial drivers and their nexuses to the sustainability of SMEs. It will enable the government to develop prudent policies on SMEs, solve the continuing mystery of unemployment, which has increased to 26 percent in recent years, and contribute to the body of knowledge [13].

## 2. Literature Review

A study was conducted on factors influencing the sustainability of women-owned small and medium enterprises in the Imenti South sub-county. The parameters employed were technological know-how know-how, funding sources, entrepreneurial training, and networking opportunities. A descriptive research design was used, and questionnaires were administered to 286 owners of small and medium enterprises. Data collected was analyzed with the help of a statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) and revealed a significant relationship between technological know-how, source of funding, entrepreneurial training, networking opportunities, and sustainability of women-owned small and medium enterprises. The study concluded that social networks and funding sources for a business play a critical role in improving profits and sustainability. The study recommended seminars and conferences to improve small business owners' entrepreneurial capacity and ways of boosting business through various sources of capital to enhance their competitive edge against competitors. On the other hand, the study recommends a platform to establish networks and information networks [14].

A descriptive survey research design was employed in a study on the Influence of network structure on the financial performance of medium-sized enterprises in Kenya. The study was conducted in medium-sized enterprises using multi-stage, systematic, and purposive methods. Questionnaires were administered to 255 respondents and analyzed through SPSS. The regression model revealed a significant nexus between network structure and financial performance. The study opined on social network theory, in which the study supported an increase in one network structure unit influences financial performance positively. The study concluded that social networking and partner collaborations improve SMEs' performance. The study recommends that SMEs look for resourceful partners and invest in networking to enhance firm performance. The study should have considered other multilevel entrepreneurial drivers, such as personal, institutional, and macro levels, where the current study intends to fill the gap [9].

A study on factors affecting sustainability of small and medium scale enterprises in Addis Ababa Ethiopia. Management factors, marketing, technological, financial, work-related, and political-legal factors were employed to determine the nexus. The study used a survey-based research method, distributing questionnaires to 258 respondents. Kaiser Mayer Olkin and internal consistency were considered to measure validity and reliability, which paved the way for the regression model. The regression model established that the management and technological factors have an inverse nexus on small and medium-scale enterprises' sustainability. However, marketing, financial, and work-related and political-legal factors positively affect small and medium-scale enterprises' sustainability. The study recommends government intervention to reduce bank interest rates and abolish bureaucratic procedures in banks and businesses to create a conducive environment with the stakeholders [20].

A study was carried out on factors affecting the financial performance of small and medium-sized manufacturing enterprises in Kenya. The study was based on credit from banks, technology costs, employee costs, gross domestic, and growth in several small and medium enterprises. A descriptive research design was considered in the study, where questionnaires were administered to 150 respondents. A regression model was used in analyses and revealed a positive association between credit from banks, technology costs, employee costs, gross domestic, growth in several SMEs, and performance. The study recommended government intervention to ensure that SMEs can access external finance to boost business, which employs more than 80 percent of Kenyans. The study was carried out in manufacturing SMEs, and on the other hand, the study did not consider variables such as personal level, institutional, or intermediate level. Therefore, this raises a need for a survey in all sectors of medium-sized enterprises to determine the effect of individual level, institutional, or intermediate level on sustainability [18].

A study based on trade-off theory, pecking order theory, financial growth lifecycle theory, and agency theory. Equity financing parameters were loans, trade credit, owner financing, and informal financing. The study was opined by positivist philosophy and descriptive research design, where questionnaires were administered to 384 business owners. Validity and reliability tests were carried out using Kaiser Meyer Olkin and Cronbach alpha, which paved the way for regression analysis. The study concluded that the firm strengthened the relationship between equity finance and financial performance.

Consequently, the regression revealed a significant association between loans, trade credit, owner financing, informal financing, and economic performance. The study recommended that SMEs consider other business finance methods, such as loans, trade credit, etc., to foster growth. The study was conducted in micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises. The findings cannot be generalized to medium-sized enterprises as they follow set procedures and laws. For instance, micro-enterprises do not pay corporate tax, which is mandatory for medium-sized enterprises [15].

A study on the effect of digital financial services on the growth of SMEs in Kenya was conducted, and digital financial services, digital skills and values, digital content, and innovation-driven entrepreneurship were used to measure digital financial services. The study employed simple random sampling, where 180 respondents responded to the questionnaires. SPSS was used to analyze data and establish that digital financial services, digital skills and values, digital content, and innovation-driven entrepreneurship positively correlate with SME growth. The study recommended that SMEs adopt digital financial services and online marketing to improve sales and profits [3].

A study was conducted to determine the effect of networking on the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises within Kiambu Kiambu County in Kenya. Networking was measured through social media networking, partnerships, and business referrals. The study employed a descriptive cross-sectional design and convenience sampling, where 216 respondents responded to the questionnaires. Regression analysis revealed that networking and SME performance are significant nexus. The study further revealed that business referrals positively affect SMEs' performance. However, the regression model further revealed that partnership and social media networking have an inverse relationship with SME performance. The study recommends that SMEs create trust. It will lead to SMEs having more customers and more sales. The study employed convenience sampling, which has a possibility of bias during data collection and cannot generalize the study findings. Therefore, there is a need for a study using convenient methods such as purposive sampling, which selects respondents with the required information or the study content [16].

A study was conducted on financial strategies and growth of small and medium enterprises in Keruguya town, Kirinyaga county, Kenya. Financial strategies were measured through funding, financial reporting, accounting information systems, and investment practices. In contrast, the growth of SMEs was measured through revenue growth, return on assets, and return on equity. The study was anchored on mental budgeting theory, the Grameen model, and the pecking order theory. Causal research design and simple stratified sampling were used. Questionnaires were used in data collection, and 109 business owners responded. Regression analysis revealed a positive relationship between financial strategies and SME growth. Equally, the regression model established that funding, financial reporting, accounting information systems, investment practices, and the development of SMEs have a significant effect. The study recommended that SMEs embrace business software programs for financial control [8].

Further, a study was conducted to determine the Influence of entrepreneurial networks on the financial performance of medium-sized enterprises in Kenya. Entrepreneurial networks were measured through structural holes, density, structure, ties, and centrality. Performance was measured through profit, market share, sales growth, return on investment, and assets. The study was guided by structural holes theory, social capital theory, social network theory, strength of weak ties theory, and resource-based view theory. The study was based on positivist philosophy; descriptive research design and purposive sampling were considered. Questionnaires were administered to 255 respondents and analyzed using inferential statistics. The regression analysis revealed a significant association between entrepreneurial networks and financial performance. On the other hand, the study established a positive relationship between structural holes, network density, network structure, network ties, network centrality, and the financial performance of medium-sized enterprises. The study recommended that SMEs work with the government through public-private partnerships (PPP) to improve their working conditions and encourage policies that will develop policies that may favor the business, such as tax incentives and tax laws [9, 10].

## 3. Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional research design [12]. The unit of analysis was the MSEs registered by KAM with standard regulations classified as MSE, which are distributed in the s economic regional blocs. As per the KAM directorate, 2022, there are 1173 registered Medium-Sized Enterprises in Kenya.

A simple random sampling technique and a probabilistic sampling technique were used to select 298 respondents, forming the observation unit. The data collection instrument was a semi-structured questionnaire. Ordinary Least Square regression was used to analyze data. Before conducting the regression analysis, data was pretested to check for reliability using the internal consistency method, and construct validity was tested using the Bartlett Test of Sphericity and Kaiser Meyer Olkin test of sampling adequacy.

## 4. Findings

The tables below present the results of the Influence of intermediary-level drivers on the sustainability of MSES in Kenya.

***Table 1.*** *Model Summary.*

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | .743[a] | .552 | .549 | .444 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Intermediary Level Drivers

*Table 2. ANOVAa.*

| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Regression | 52.192 | 1 | 52.192 | 264.435 | .000b |
| | Residual | 42.435 | 215 | .197 | | |
| | Total | 94.627 | 216 | | | |

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainability of MSEs in Kenya

b. Predictors: (Constant), Intermediary Level Drivers

*Table 3. Coefficients*

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | .948 | .201 | | 4.707 | .000 |
| | Intermediary Level Drivers | .783 | .048 | .743 | 16.261 | .000 |

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainability of MSEs in Kenya

The R-Square ($R^2$) value of 0.552 indicates that approximately 55.2% of the variance in the sustainability of MSEs in Kenya can be explained by intermediary-level drivers. It suggests that intermediary factors significantly influence the sustainability of these enterprises. The F-statistic of 264.435 with a p-value of 0.000 indicates that the regression model, which includes intermediary-level drivers, is statistically significant. It means that the model as a whole explains a substantial amount of variance in sustainability.

On Unstandardized Coefficients, the constant coefficient is 0.948. It represents the estimated sustainability when intermediary-level drivers are zero. In this context, it is not particularly meaningful. The coefficient for intermediary-level drivers is 0.783. It suggests that for each unit increase in intermediary level drivers, the sustainability of MSEs in Kenya is estimated to increase by 0.783 units. It was moving to Beta (Standardized Coefficients). The standardized coefficient (Beta) for intermediary-level drivers is 0.743. It indicates that intermediary-level drivers have a strong positive impact on sustainability. The t-statistic for intermediary-level drivers is 16.261 with a p-value of 0.000. It suggests that intermediary-level drivers are statistically significant in explaining the variance in sustainability.

In summary, the regression analysis demonstrates that intermediary-level drivers have a statistically significant and robust positive influence on the sustainability of MSEs in Kenya. These intermediary factors can explain approximately 55.2% of the variability in sustainability, implying that intermediary factors are crucial in determining the sustainability of MSEs in the Kenyan context.

The above-illustrated findings align with an empirical study that revealed a significant relationship between technological know-how, funding source, entrepreneurial training, networking opportunities, and sustainability of women-owned small and medium enterprises. The study concluded that social networks and funding sources for a business play a critical role in improving profits and sustainability. These findings are consistent with the broad conclusions of a study that established that an increase in one unit of network structure positively influences financial performance and concluded that social networking and collaborations between partners improve SMEs' performance [9, 14].

The study findings are more so consistent with a study on factors affecting the sustainability of small and medium-scale enterprises in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The regression model established that management and technological factors have an inverse nexus on small and medium-scale enterprises' sustainability. However, marketing, financial, and work-related and political-legal factors positively affect small and medium-scale enterprises' sustainability [20].

$H_{03a}$: Intermediary-level drivers have no statistically significant influence on the sustainability of medium-sized enterprises in Kenya.

The null hypothesis was that Intermediary-level drivers have no statistically significant influence on the sustainability of medium-sized enterprises in Kenya. Results indicate that the p-value (0.000) was less than the conventional p-value (p= 0.05). It demonstrates that Intermediary-level drivers statistically influence the sustainability of other medium-sized and medium-sized Kenya. Otherwise, the role of Intermediary level drivers in determining the sustainability of medium-sized enterprises in Kenya must be addressed. In conclusion, we reject the null hypothesis $H_{o3a:}$ Institutional Level Drivers have no significant influence on the sustainability of medium-sized enterprises in Kenya.

## 5. Conclusion

Intermediary-level drivers, including social media marketing, market competition, and other organizations' collaboration, are crucial in MSE sustainability. MSEs that adapt to modern business practices, effectively compete in the market, and engage in collaborative efforts tend to exhibit higher levels of sustainability. It highlights the importance of agility, market awareness, and partnerships in the MSE sector.

To nurture Intermediary Level Drivers, MSEs should embrace digital transformation and social media marketing. Government and industry associations should offer training and resources to help MSEs develop digital marketing skills. Additionally, MSEs should actively participate in industry collaborations and associations to stay competitive and access complementary assets. Policymakers should create an enabling environment for cooperation by offering incentives for partnerships and promoting fair competition.

## 6. Recommendations

To nurture Intermediary Level Drivers, MSEs should embrace digital transformation and social media marketing. Government and industry associations should offer training and resources to help MSEs develop digital marketing skills. Additionally, MSEs should actively participate in industry collaborations and associations to stay competitive and access complementary assets. Policymakers should create an enabling environment for cooperation by offering incentives for partnerships and promoting fair competition. The study further recommends that future researchers should conduct a longitudinal study.

## 7. Limitations

Since the study was cross-sectional, it was not able to determine trends.

## 8. Areas for Further Research

Although the study is cross-sectional, future researchers should consider undertaking a longitudinal study on the study variables to tease out the long-term effects of the multilevel entrepreneurship drivers and the sustainability of manufacturing firms. Further, a comparative study on the interplay between these multilevel entrepreneurial drivers and sustainability across different sectors and regions and the manufacturing sector is paramount.

## Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| CEO | Chief Executive Officer |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| KAM | Kenya Association of Manufacturers |
| KMO | Kaiser Meyer Olkin |
| NACOTI | National Council of Science, Technology and Innovation |
| OECD | Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development |
| OLS | Ordinary Least Square |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goals |
| SMEs | Small and Medium Enterprises |
| SPSS | Statistical Package for Social Sciences |
| SSA | Sub-Saharan Africa |

## Ethical Considerations

The researcher sought consent to collect data from both the University and the National Council of Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), as well as study participants. When considered together, these have a potentially synergistic effect.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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