

# Entrepreneurial orientation and Female SME Performance: Proactiveness perspective

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**Abstract-** *This study was conducted to assess the influence of entrepreneurial orientation particularly, proactiveness perspective on performance of female owned small and medium scale enterprises in Akwa Ibom State. Survey research design was adopted for this study. Population of the study was 418 registered SMEs in Uyo. Sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan table for sample size determination, the figure was gotten as 196. Primary data was the main source of data. Instrument for data collection was a structured Likert scale questionnaire. Descriptive and Inferential statistics were employed for data analysis. Specifically, simple linear regression statistical tool was the inferential statistics. Findings of the study revealed proactiveness had positive significant influence on female owned SMEs in Uyo. It was concluded that cultivating entrepreneurial orientation among female SME owners represents a viable pathway toward improving business performance, empowering women economically, and contributing to sustainable development in Akwa Ibom State. As recommendation, Stakeholders should encourage and train female SME owners to be more proactive by identifying market opportunities ahead of competitors. This can be achieved through market research training, opportunity recognition programs, and networking events that promote first-mover initiatives in the Uyo business environment.*

**Keywords:** *Entrepreneurial orientation, Proactiveness, SMEs, Performance*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs) have been given more attention globally over the years. It unquestionably contributes significantly to economic development and growth, from the creation of jobs to the reduction of poverty. Men are typically seen as the only participants in this field, with little regard for women. It is also generally accepted that women entrepreneurs have enormous potential to significantly boost Nigeria's economy and create jobs.

However, despite their significance, Nigerian SMEs continue to face obstacles that impede their expansion and sustainability, such as restricted access to capital, poor infrastructure, unstable government policies, and fierce market competition. To overcome these obstacles, SMEs must build internal strategic capabilities to improve competitiveness and long-term survival; among these internal factors, Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) has emerged as a critical determinant of business performance, influencing how firms identify opportunities, manage risks, and navigate competitive environments (Ezenne and Islam, 2025).

Over the past two decades, entrepreneurial orientation has grown in importance in the literature on entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial orientation, according to Mostafiz et al. (2022), is the idea that characterizes how businesses deal with uncertainty, take advantage of market possibilities, and maintain competitive advantages. It represents a company's strategic stance toward risk-taking, innovation, autonomy, proactiveness, and competitive aggression and has been extensively examined in entrepreneurship research (Lumpkin and Pidduck, 2021). The proactive aspect of entrepreneurial attitude is the main emphasis of this study. The ability of people or businesses to anticipate future possibilities and difficulties is referred to as proactiveness. Not just this, but also taking the initiative in addressing them before they emerge. This characteristic is distinguished by a forward-thinking approach that involves actively shaping the environment, rather than passively responding to external stimuli (Sofik et al., 2023).

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) play a vital role in economic development by generating employment, fostering innovation, and contributing to national income. Female-owned SMEs, in

particular, have become increasingly significant in promoting inclusive economic growth and reducing poverty. Despite their growing importance, many female-owned SMEs continue to experience low business performance, reflected in limited sales growth, profitability, market expansion, and business sustainability. These performance challenges are often attributed to financial constraints, limited access to business networks, inadequate managerial capabilities, and a rapidly changing business environment.

Business environment is largely volatile, unstable and very dynamic (Efi et al., 2017), hence the need for entrepreneurial orientation. Entrepreneurial orientation has been widely recognized as a strategic resource that enhances firm performance through dimensions such as innovativeness, risk-taking, and proactiveness. Among these dimensions, proactiveness enables firms to anticipate future market trends, identify emerging opportunities, and take initiative ahead of competitors. A proactive entrepreneurial posture allows businesses to respond effectively to environmental changes, develop innovative products and services, strengthen customer relationships, and achieve sustainable competitive advantage. However, female entrepreneurs frequently encounter social, institutional, and resource-related barriers that may constrain their ability to adopt proactive business behaviors, thereby limiting the performance potential of their enterprises.

Although previous studies have established a positive relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and SME performance, much of the existing literature treats entrepreneurial orientation as a multidimensional construct without sufficiently examining the independent contribution of proactiveness to the performance of female-owned SMEs. Furthermore, empirical findings remain inconsistent across different contexts, with some studies reporting significant positive effects while others find weak or insignificant relationships. These inconsistencies suggest that the influence of proactiveness may vary depending on contextual factors such as institutional environment, industry characteristics, and the unique experiences of female

entrepreneurs. Additionally, there is limited empirical evidence focusing specifically on female-owned SMEs in developing economies, where entrepreneurial challenges differ markedly from those in developed countries.

## II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The major objective of this study is to assess the influence of entrepreneurial orientation and performance of female owned small and medium scale enterprises in Akwa Ibom State. The specific objective includes to:

- i. examines the influence of proactiveness on the performance of female owned small and medium scale enterprises in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.

## III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research question was asked in order to guide the study

- i. How does proactiveness influence the performance of female owned small and medium scale enterprises in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State?

## IV. HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

Hypothesis for this study were formulated in a null form

H01: Proactiveness does not significantly influence the performance of female owned small and medium scale enterprises in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State

## V. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Imagha et al. (2023), every organisation has a complex and diverse work environment as such having orientation may increase its performance Entrepreneurial Orientation's relationship with firm performance remains a subject of debate. Some studies holds that EO nurtures business growth, market expansion, and profitability (Soares and Perin, 2019). However, others argue that its impact is

context-dependent, as external factors such as financial constraints, industry regulations, and market competition can moderate the effectiveness of EO strategies (Lumpkin and Pidduck, 2021; Nasir et al., 2017). While Innovativeness and Proactiveness have been consistently linked to improved firm performance (Iqbal et al., 2021; Waibe et al., 2018), the roles of Risk-taking and Autonomy remain inconclusive, particularly in emerging markets where SMEs face high financial volatility and regulatory hurdles (Gomes et al., 2022). Competitive Aggressiveness, although beneficial in dynamic industries, can lead to unsustainable competition if not strategically managed (Waibe et al., 2018).

Despite widespread research on EO, many studies treat it as a single construct, failing to differentiate the contributions of each dimension (Diandra and Azmy, 2021). However, emerging research suggests that these dimensions function independently, with varying levels of influence depending on business environments (Lumpkin and Pidduck, 2021). Given the limited empirical evidence in Nigeria, an in-depth analysis of individual EO dimensions is crucial for understanding their distinct effects on SME performance.

#### VI. PROACTIVENESS AND FIRM PERFORMANCE

Proactiveness refers to a firm's ability to anticipate market trends, identify opportunities, and act before competitors (Diaz and Sensini, 2020). Firms caught off guard may spend a great deal of time and energy playing catch up (Efi, et al., 2018). Proactive firms monitor industry changes, leverage market intelligence, and adopt forward-thinking strategies to maintain a competitive advantage (Waibe et al., 2018). Research suggests that proactive SMEs perform better than reactive firms, as they can mitigate risks, drive innovation, and secure first-mover advantages (Iqbal et al., 2021).

However, proactiveness requires strategic foresight and financial commitment. Firms that fail to assess market conditions accurately may overextend resources or misjudge customer demand, leading to financial strain (Hossain et al., 2022). The resource-

based view (RBV) highlights that proactiveness is most effective when coupled with strong financial and operational capabilities (Hossain et al., 2022).

Empirical studies indicate a strong positive relationship between proactiveness and SME performance (Iqbal et al., 2021; Waibe et al., 2018) just as Efi and Imagha (2016) opine that employees are an integral part of any organisation. Ebieme et al. (2024) opine that performance (sometimes also called work performance) is a widely used tool and metric in management, however, organisations rarely address what it really is, which dimension it includes, and in which area of work it becomes important. However, findings vary based on market conditions, with some research showing insignificant effects in less competitive sectors (Adegbe, 2017). These differences underscore the need for context-specific proactiveness strategies that align with industry dynamics and resource availability.

#### VII. RESOURCE BASED VIEW THEORY

Resource Based View Theory of the Firm (RBV) is one of the theories of strategic Management. The theory was developed by Penrose in 1959. It was however, developed further and made popular by Wernerfelt (1984). Further refinements on the theory have lately been done by Prahalad in 1990 and Barney in 1991, as cited in Adudu, Asenge, and Torough (2020). According to this theory, the competitive advantage of a firm as well as its superior performance can be sourced from the concerned firm-specific resources and capabilities. These resources are costly to imitate by competitors; the resources are also said to be valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable, and non-substitutable. This theory is concerned with the resources of an organization that are focused on assisting the organization in the achievement of sustained competitive edge over competitors in the sector.

As used in the present study, the Resource Based View theory emphasizes the need for companies to have the capability to adapt to changing business times and realities. According to this theory, the firm would be able to adapt, and formulate new strategies in line with development in the business space given that it has the needed human and other resources. The

implication of this is that the success of an organization in adjusting its actions and strategies is anchored on organizational skills and capabilities which are embedded in organizational processes. Thus, entrepreneurial orientation should support organizations in adapting to change with ease in order to achieve effectiveness in goal attainment.

Awusie and Okoro (2024) conducted a study to determining the effect of entrepreneurial orientation on small and medium enterprises (SMEs) sustainability in North Central Nigeria. A survey research design was adopted and the study population comprised of 350 selected SMEs operating in the North central region. Data which was gathered through primary source were presented and analyzed using descriptive statistics such as tables and percentages. The hypotheses were tested using multiple regression analysis and the results show that all the dimensions, pro-activeness, innovation and risk taking have positive significant effect on liquidity, profitability and diversification of SMEs ( $p < 0.05$ ) for all the measures. The study concluded that entrepreneurial innovation has effect on SMEs sustainability. The study recommended amongst others that Small and Medium Enterprises should be consistent in being pro-active, innovative and risk taking in all business endeavours. This will enable them to gain liquidity, be profitable, diversify, gain sustainability and become strong market competitors. This study was on sustainability while the current study is on female SMEs performance.

Imagha and Jackson (2023) conducted a study to assess the relationship between entrepreneurial education and the development of entrepreneurship amongst tertiary institution students in Akwa Ibom State. Survey research design was adopted for the study. Population for the study was 331 registered student entrepreneurs from the various tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State. 180 was arrive at as sample size. This was gotten using Taro Yamene's formulae for sample size determination. Data was majorly from primary source in which questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistical tool was used in analyzing the study. Findings revealed that human relations, planning skills and financial plans all had strong positive significant relationship with

entrepreneurial development amongst tertiary institution students in Akwa Ibom State. As conclusion and recommendation, for proper development of entrepreneurship, there is need for the student entrepreneurs to develop their managerial skills while policy makers strive to encourage entrepreneurial spirit among students in tertiary institutions in the state. This may help reduce unemployed graduates in the state and country.

Apere (2024) carried out a study that emphasis on the empirical relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and market responsiveness in the Nigerian telecommunications industry. The study is quantitative in nature with a cross-sectional research design. Twenty-eight (28) management level employees were inclusive to form the study participants from different downstream telecom firms in Bayelsa state. Structured questionnaire was established as the primary instrument for data collection, and the collected data was analysed inferentially using spearman rank correlational coefficient with the aid of SPSS software. From the analytical perspective, the result shows that there is a significant relationship between entrepreneurship orientation as a practice and market responsiveness. It was also revealed that all dimensions of the independent variable as a significant correlation with market responsiveness in the telecom firms. It was recommended that the studied firms need to find new market possibilities and gain domination, management of telecommunications companies must encourage innovation. This study considered entrepreneurial orientation on market responsiveness while the current study considered entrepreneurial orientation on performance of female SMEs operators.

## VIII. METHODOLOGY

The survey research design was adopted since it is a method that requires data collection through the administration of questionnaire and personal observation. The research was carried out in Uyo metropolis, Akwa-Ibom state. The population of the study was made up of four hundred and eighteen (418) registered and operational SMEs in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. This figure was gotten from Corporate

affairs commission, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State (as at September, 2024). From the population, the sample size was derived using Krejcie and Morgan table (1970). From the table, the sample size is given as 196.

Data was gotten from primary source. The primary source was from copies of administered questionnaire. Instrument for data collection was a structured Likert scale questionnaire and it was adapted from Osayande (2021); Ibojo and Mobolade (2023) with minimal modification. Simple random sampling technique was used for this study. This method was necessary to ensure that every member of the study was provided an equal chance of being selected. The descriptive and inferential statistics were used in the study. The descriptive statistics were percentage and frequency distribution tables which were used to capture respondents' demographic characteristics and frequency distribution of the responses on the study variables. Inferential statistics was simple linear regression statistical tool which was used to test the hypotheses. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 24 was used to aid the analysis. A total number of one hundred and ninety-six (196) copies of questionnaire were administered directly to the registered SMEs in Uyo.

## IX. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Table 1.1: Questionnaire Distribution/Responses Rate

| Variables                                                      | No. of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Questionnaire completed and returned                           | 150                | 76.5           |
| Questionnaire not returned or returned but not in useable form | 46                 | 23.5           |
| Total                                                          | 196                | 100            |

Table 1.1 shows that out of 196 copies of questionnaire administered, 46 copies of questionnaire representing 23.5% response were not returned or were returned but not useable form to the

researcher. While a total of 150 copies of questionnaire representing 76.5% response rate were returned in useable form. Thus, this 76% response rate now represents 100% of the instrument upon which subsequent analysis in this work is centered.

Table 1.2 Analysis of Responses on Age Bracket in Uyo

| Age bracket  | Number | Percentage (%) |
|--------------|--------|----------------|
| 18-25        | 29     | 19             |
| 26-34        | 41     | 27             |
| 35-44        | 48     | 32             |
| 45 and above | 32     | 22             |
| Total        | 150    | 100            |

The analysis in table 1.2 indicates that 29 respondents representing 19% were between the ages of 18- 25, 41 respondents representing 27% were between 26- 34 age, 48 respondents representing 32% were between 35-44 age, while 32 respondents representing 22% were 45 and above. From the above analysis, it shows that majority of the registered respondents were between the age bracket of 35-44.

Table 1.3: Analysis of responses on Educational Qualification

| Qualification | Number | Percentage (%) |
|---------------|--------|----------------|
| WASC/SSCE     | 36     | 24             |
| OND/NCE       | 27     | 18             |
| DEGREE/HND    | 60     | 40             |
| M.SC/MBA/MA   | 19     | 13             |
| PhD           | 5      | 5              |
| Total         | 150    | 100            |

The respondent's qualification as shown on table 1.3 shows that 36 respondents representing 24% are holders of WASC/SSCE, 27 respondents representing 18% had OND/NCE, 60 respondents representing 40% are Degree/HND holders, 19 respondents representing 13% had M.SC/MBA/MA while 5 respondents representing 5% had Ph.D. From this analysis, it shows that greater numbers of registered SME managers were degree/HND holders seconded by WASC/SSCE and OND/NCE respectively.

Table 1.4 Analysis of Responses on Type of Business

| Options             | Number | Percentage % |
|---------------------|--------|--------------|
| Production          | 38     | 25           |
| Services            | 47     | 32           |
| Production/services | 65     | 43           |
| Total               | 150    | 100          |

Table 1.4 indicates that 38 respondents representing 25% are involved in production, 47 respondents representing 32% were involved in services while 65 responses representing 43% were involved in production/service. This shows that a greater number of respondents are involved in production/services.

Table 1.5: Analysis of responses on the number of years

| Options      | Numbers | Percentage % |
|--------------|---------|--------------|
| 1-4          | 68      | 45.3         |
| 5-9          | 34      | 22.7         |
| 10-15        | 29      | 19.3         |
| 16 and above | 19      | 12.7         |
| Total        | 150     | 100          |

Table 1.5 indicates that 68 respondents representing 45.3% were in operation within the period of 1-4yrs, 34 respondents representing 22.7% were in operation within the period of 5-9yrs, 29 respondents representing 19.3% operated for 1-15yrs while 19 responses representing 12.7% was in operation for 16yrs and above. It therefore shows that the numbers of SMEs that have operated above 16 years are very low in Uyo.

Table 1.6: Percentage analysis of Responses on Proactiveness

| Proactiveness                                                                                                   | Extent of Agreement |             |           |            |            | Total         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|-----------|------------|------------|---------------|
|                                                                                                                 | SA                  | A           | UD        | SD         | D          |               |
| Our business is always looking ahead to capitalize on future market trends before our competitors do            | 62<br>(41%)         | 65<br>(43%) | 2<br>(1%) | 9<br>(6%)  | 12<br>(8%) | 150<br>(100%) |
| We consistently seek out new business opportunities, even if they fall outside our initial scope                | 57<br>(38%)         | 66<br>(44%) | 6<br>(4%) | 11<br>(7%) | 10<br>(7%) | 150<br>(100%) |
| In dealing with others, I typically initiate actions and set the pace rather than just responding to situations | 66<br>(44%)         | 61<br>(41%) | 2<br>(1%) | 12<br>(8%) | 9<br>(6%)  | 150<br>(100%) |

Table 1.6 shows that 62 respondents representing 41% strongly agreed, 65 respondents representing 43% agreed, 2 respondents representing 1% were undecided, 9 respondents representing 6% strongly disagreed, 12 respondents representing 8% disagreed that their business is always looking ahead to capitalize on future market trends before their competitors do. With the highest response rate being 43%, it means that their business is always looking ahead to capitalize on future market trends before their competitors do. Also, it was revealed that 57 respondents representing 38% strongly agreed, 66 representing 44% agreed, 6 respondents representing

4% were undecided, 11 respondents representing 7% strongly disagreed, and 10 representing 7% agreed that they consistently seek out new business opportunities, even if they fall outside their initial scope. Equally, it shows that 66 respondents representing 44% strongly agreed, 61 respondents representing 41% agreed, 2 respondents representing 1% were undecided, 12 respondents representing 8% strongly disagreed and 9 respondents representing 6% disagreed that in dealing with others, they typically initiate actions and set the pace rather than just responding to situations.

Table 1.7: Percentage analysis of Responses on Performance

| Performance                                                       | Extent of Agreement |             |           |            |             | Total         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|-----------|------------|-------------|---------------|
|                                                                   | SA                  | A           | UD        | SD         | D           |               |
| My firm has the ability to provide quality service to customers.  | 66<br>(44%)         | 61<br>(41%) | 2<br>(1%) | 12<br>(8%) | 9<br>(6%)   | 150<br>(100%) |
| There is reduction in administrative costs.                       | 62<br>(41%)         | 65<br>(43%) | 2<br>(1%) | 9<br>(6%)  | 12<br>(8%)  | 150<br>(100%) |
| Progressively, my organization has increased its marketing effort | 52<br>(35%)         | 71<br>(47%) | 8<br>(5%) | 4<br>(3%)  | 15<br>(10%) | 150<br>(100%) |
| There is better risk management in my organization                | 58<br>(39%)         | 67<br>(45%) | 5<br>(3%) | 11<br>(7%) | 9<br>(6%)   | 150<br>(100%) |

Table 1.7 shows that 66 respondents representing 44% strongly agreed, 61 respondents representing 41% agreed, 2 respondents representing 1% were undecided, 12 respondents representing 8% strongly disagreed and 9 respondents representing 6% disagreed that their firm has the ability to provide quality service to customers. Also, it shows that 62 respondents representing 41% strongly agreed, 65 respondents representing 43% agreed, 2 respondents representing 1% were undecided, 9 respondents representing 6% strongly disagreed, 12 respondents representing 8% disagreed that there is reduction in administrative costs. Equally, it is revealed that 52 respondents representing 35% strongly agreed, 71 respondents representing 47% agreed, 8 respondents representing 5% were undecided, 4 respondents representing 3% strongly disagreed, 15 respondents

representing 10% disagreed that Progressively, my organization has increased its marketing effort. Moreso, it shows that 58 respondents representing 39% strongly agreed, 67 respondents representing 45% agreed, 5 representing 3% were undecided, 11 respondents representing 7% strongly disagreed, 9 respondents representing 6% disagreed that there is better risk management in their organization.

#### Test of Hypothesis

H01: Proactiveness does not significantly influence the performance of female owned small and medium scale enterprises in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State

H11: Proactiveness do significantly influence the performance of female owned small and medium scale enterprises in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State

Table 1.8: Regression analysis showing result for Proactiveness on female owned SMEs' performance.

| Model Summary                           |                   |                |                   |                            |        |                   |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------------------|--------|-------------------|
| Model                                   | R                 | R Square       | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |        |                   |
| 1                                       | .882 <sup>a</sup> | .669           | .664              | .43220                     |        |                   |
| a. Predictors: (Constant), Proac        |                   |                |                   |                            |        |                   |
| ANOVA <sup>a</sup>                      |                   |                |                   |                            |        |                   |
| Model                                   |                   | Sum of Squares | Df                | Mean Square                | F      | Sig.              |
| 1                                       | Regression        | 49.445         | 1                 | 49.445                     | 62.587 | .000 <sup>b</sup> |
|                                         | Residual          | 50.576         | 149               | .790                       |        |                   |
|                                         | Total             | 100.021        | 150               |                            |        |                   |
| a. Dependent Variable: SMEs performance |                   |                |                   |                            |        |                   |
| b. Predictors: (Constant), proac        |                   |                |                   |                            |        |                   |

| Coefficients <sup>a</sup> |                             |            |                           |        |      |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|
| Model                     | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | T      | Sig. |
|                           | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |        |      |
| 1 (Constant)              | .570                        | .089       |                           | 3.430  | .000 |
| Proac                     | .766                        | .021       | .972                      | 17.127 | .000 |

a. Dependent Variable: SMEs performance

The model summary in table 1.8 shows an R- value of 0.882. The result shows positive impact of proactiveness on female owned SMEs' performance in Uyo. The R square- value of 0.664 shows that

66.4% variation in proactiveness was accounted for by variations in female owned SMEs' performance. The ANOVA table indicates that the regression model significantly predicts the dependents variable given the F- value of 62.587 and its corresponding P- value of 0.00. This implies a positive impact of proactiveness on female owned SMEs' performance. Also, the B-coefficient of 0.766 implies that holding every other thing constant, the model predicts 0.766 unit increase in proactiveness given a unit increase in female owned SMEs' performance.

#### X. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The objective of the study was to examine the influence of proactiveness on the performance of female owned small and medium scale enterprises in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. The result shows positive impact of proactiveness on the performance of female owned small and medium scale enterprises in Uyo. The R square value of 0.664 shows that 66.4% variation in knowledge application was accounted for by variations in SMEs' performance. The ANOVA table indicates that the regression model significantly predicts the dependents variable given the F- value of 62.587 and its corresponding P- value of 0.00. This implies a positive impact of proactiveness on female owned SMEs' performance. This study is supported by Omerzel (2019) who investigated the impact of proactiveness on SME growth and profitability, using a structural equation modelling. Findings revealed proactiveness significantly influences SMEs' growth and profitability in Slovenia. The difference between this study and the current study is that, this study was

conducted in Slovenia while the current study is conducted in Nigeria.

#### XI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study examined the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation (EO) and the performance of female-owned SMEs in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The findings reveal that entrepreneurial orientation particularly proactiveness has a significant positive influence on the performance of female-owned small and medium enterprises in the region. Female entrepreneurs who exhibit higher levels of EO tend to achieve better financial outcomes, market growth, and operational sustainability. Despite facing well-documented challenges such as limited access to finance, socio-cultural barriers, and infrastructural deficits, female business owners in Uyo who adopt entrepreneurial behaviors are better positioned to navigate these constraints and drive business success. This underscores the critical role of EO as a strategic resource for enhancing the resilience and competitiveness of women-led businesses in emerging economies. As recommendation, Stakeholders should encourage and train female SME owners to be more proactive by identifying market opportunities ahead of competitors. This can be achieved through market research training, opportunity recognition programs, and networking events that promote first-mover initiatives in the Uyo business environment.

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