

## Social Skills and Innovation of Car Servicing Firms in Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigated the relationship between social skills and innovation of car servicing firms in Nigeria. Social perception and social adaptability were adopted as dimensions of social skills, while innovation was studied as mono-dimensional construct. A cross-sectional survey design was followed, while primary data were collected via the administration of a structured questionnaire. Copies of the questionnaire were administered to 112 owners/managers of car servicing firms. However, 89 copies were correctly filled and used for analyses. The hypothesized relationships between the variables were analysed using Kendall\_Tau correlation coefficient. The results of the analyses revealed that, there was positive and significant relationship between social perception, social adaptability and innovation. The study recommended that, the owners/managers of the firms should take steps to build effective social relationships by being observant of the feelings and motives of customers and other stakeholders.*

**Keywords:** Social Skills, Social Perception, Social Adaptability, Innovation, Car Servicing Firms.

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### **I. Introduction**

Innovation is an engine for economic growth of any economy (Abdu & Jibir, 2017). Thus, it is the abiding preoccupation of entrepreneurs to continue to innovate for continuity or survival and competitiveness (Volberda, 2003). Through innovation, new products and services are successfully commercialized owing to technical discoveries. Moreover, innovation guarantees a new combination of methods and the adoption and diffusion new processes that stimulate growth and profitability (Zemplinerová, 2010). Feldman (2004) mentioned that innovation is essential to economic improvement and success. The potency to create market value through bringing new products to the market, remodeling production approaches, or reconfiguring organizational practices is crucial to aggressive benefit and success for firms, industries and nations (Porter, 1996). For car servicing firms, innovation is key because it helps in developing previously unknown methods and approaches to solving customers problems. Hence, a reduction in cost of service and enhanced customers' satisfaction (DobaiKorcsmáros & SeresHuszárik, 2013).

On the other hand, personal skills are of growing importance in contemporary enterprises and one of such skill is social skill. According to Deming (2017), for the past three decades, employment growth has been tilted to jobs that relatively require more of social skill; whereby high-skilled, hard-to-automate tasks currently require social adroitness. At an individual level, research have demonstrated that people who have higher social skills get more income and return on social skill than those with lower social skills denominator (Deming, 2017).

Literature is replete with studies concerning the relationship between social skills and other constructs. For instance, Hochwarter, Witt, Treadway and Ferris (2006) studied the nexus between social skills and job performance, focusing on customers of telecommunication firms in Southern United States of America. Beheshtifar, and Norozy (2013) examined social skills and employees' success in Iran. Zařková, and Poláček (2015) studied social skills as an important pillar of managerial success in Slovakia. Also, contemporary research demonstrates the linkage between social skills (a subset of entrepreneurial skills) and other variables. For instance, there are empirical revelations that entrepreneur's social skill accounts for variances in success of succession in family firms (Yezza & Chabaud, 2017), labour market return (Deming, 2015), entrepreneurs' success (Baron & Markman, 2000), job satisfaction (Anjum, 2014), communication and collaboration effectiveness (Notari, Baumgartner & Herzog, 2014) and entrepreneurial perseverance (Lamine, Mian & Fayolle, 2014). However, it is surprising that most of the studies on social skills focused on large organisations (Witt & Ferris, 2003), while only few investigated the link between these variables within SMEs setting (Baron & Markman, 2000). Also majority of these research works implicitly connect social skill to business performance, there is scant literature on the direct relationship between social skill and non-financial measures of enterprise performance such as innovation. Additionally, there is dearth of empirical investigation on the nexus between these two constructs using SMEs in Nigeria as subjects of inquiry. Due to the scarcity of

empirical literature on SMEs in Africa regarding these constructs. Hence, this study investigates the relationship between social skills and innovation of car servicing SMEs in Nigeria.

## **II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **2.1 Social Skills**

Social skills is a set of abilities humans use to engage and communicate with one another. It might come as a result of social norms, what attitudes and behaviors are considered to be regular, acceptable and expected in a particular social scenario (Patrick, 2008). Libet and Lewinsohn (1973) defined social skill as a complicated potential that produces behaviors to be able to be undoubtedly bolstered and not produce behaviors so one can be punished through others. Consistent with Norton and wish (2001) social competencies reflects the “capability to understand interpersonal or social cues, integrate those cues with modern motivations, generate responses, and enact responses with the intention to fulfill reasons and goals” (p. 60).

Traditionally, social skills have been evaluated from views (McCall, 1982). First, the trait technique views social talent as a long lasting personality characteristic (Friedman & Miller- Herringer, 1991; Segrin, 1998). This attitude is supported by using empirical and conceptual associations between social ability and person distinction variables, including empathy (Nezlek, Feist, Wilson, & Plesko, 2001) and extraversion (Lieberman & Rosenthal, 2001). Conversely, the molecular version (Bellack, 1983) continues that social talent promotes situation-unique behaviors that may be stronger via vicarious remark (Bandura, 1999; Topping, Bremer, & Holmes, 2000). Since social talent is partly learned (Cherniss, 2000; Segrin & Givertz, 2003), environmental elements play an important function in its use (Spitzberg, 2003). With exercise and effort, people expand a sense of whilst it is vital to use social talent and when it is satisfactory to use those abilities (i.e., selective trait activation and utilization; Stemmler, 1997).

Thorndike’s (1920) dialogue of social intelligence has served as the inspiration for a good deal of the studies inspecting social skill. Based on this work, Meichenbaum, Butler and Gruson (1981) submit that social skills reflect the understanding of knowing what to do and when to display positive behaviours. Research has proven social skill to demonstrate high associations with education efficacy (Ferris, Bergin, & Gilmore, 1986) and predominant and interactive effect on job performance (Ferris et al., 2001; Witt & Ferris, 2003).

In addition, researchers have diagnosed social skills as one of the most important personal qualities needed for achievement at the process (Ferris, Perrewe, & Douglas, 2002; Riggio, 1986; Riggio, Riggio, Salinas, & Cole, 2003; Witt & Ferris, 2003). Social capabilities also permit an individual the opportunity to explicit each fine and negative feelings in interpersonal situations without dropping social reinforcement (Hersen & Bellack, 1977).

### **Dimensions of Social Skills**

Social skills include (but not limited to) social perception (ability to correctly perceive the motives, feelings, emotions and characteristics others), and social adaptability (capacity to adjust individuals to have fit with changing social context, environment and the diverse nature of the workplace) (Jones, 1990).

### **Social Perception**

Social perception gives rise to positive outcomes in business contexts, such as positive ratings during interviews (Kacmar, Carlson, & Bratton, 2003), favorable evaluation of performance by supervisors (Hochwarter, Ferris, Gavin, Perrewe, Hall, & Frink, 2007), selection of competent suppliers, partners and employees as well as achieving success in negotiations with partners, employees, unions, venture capitalists, suppliers, customers, community and government authorities (Hochwarter et al., 2007).

Managers who are capable of recognizing motives and feelings of subordinates easily know the root causes of social maladies within the workplace. Moreover, perceptually skilled entrepreneurs readily decipher the degree of honesty of customers, employees or partners. Ability to accurately perceive people is essential for competitive advantage for entrepreneurs (Hochwarter et al., 2007).

### **Social Adaptability**

Social adaptability is a subset of social skill which is useful to entrepreneurs and managers (Ferris, Treadway, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter & Kacmar, 2005). It offers entrepreneurs the flexibility to navigate complex social contexts, and the capacity to interact and blend with employees and other stakeholders of diverse backgrounds. Thus, higher levels of social adaptability could contribute to increased variance in entrepreneurial performance and new venture success (Baron & Markman, 2003).

Social adaptability includes the capability to regulate extensive variety of social situations and to feel secure with people from diverse backgrounds (Weber & Harvey, 1994; Baron & Markman, 2000). Additionally it shows one’s potential to adjust cognitions and modify behaviours in reaction to changing situational needs and threats (Baron & Tang, 2009).

In terms of its underlying traits, Ployhart and Bliese (2006) put up that “character adaptability represents a person’s capacity, ability, disposition, willingness, and/or motivation, to exchange or match distinct assignment, social, and environmental features” (p. 13). It is the ability to behave greater or much less dominant and friendly depending on the state of affairs (Paulhus & Martin, 1988), align with a brand new reporting structure inside a the business enterprise (Kozlowski, Gully, Nason, & Smith, 1999), and modify one’s interpersonal disposition to shape the alternatives of customers and needs of stakeholders (Spiro & Weitz, 1990). As a consequence, Adaptability is an individual quality essential in managing ambiguity, handling uncertainty and pressure, and in operating outdoor conventional temporal and geographic limitations (Pearlman & Barney, 2000).

## **2.2 Innovation**

Many academics define innovation as the adoption of new or considerably better goods, services, processes, marketing, and organizational strategies, and/or the combination of any of these by businesses in order to achieve a competitive edge (Goedhuys, Janz, & Mohnen, 2014; Makanyeza & Dzvuke, 2015). Innovation inside the Schumpeterian angle is referred to as a creative destruction implying that new ways of manufacturing, organisational management and products are being churned out rendering old ones obsolete (Okumu, Bbaale & Guloba, 2019). Simmonds (1986) defined it as new thoughts that encompass a new services or products, a brand new market, or a brand new way of making use of existing services or products. Evans (1991) defined innovation because the capability to find out new relationships, seeing things from a new angle, and forming new combos or connections of present concepts; whilst Marques (2014) taken into consideration innovation to be an “on-going system of getting to know, searching, and investigating, which leads to new objects, new techniques, new forms of affiliation and new markets” (p.27). In addition, Egbetokun, Richmond, Oluseye, and Edward (2016) described innovation widely inside the contexts of developing nations to include adoption of recent processes and technologies developed elsewhere and viable adjustments made to existing products.

Consequently, innovation entails the advent of recent output or fundamental improvement made to the present products/services to fulfill dynamic clients’ needs (Jeroen & Patrick, 2006; Barasa, Knobens, Vermeulen, Kimuyu, & Kinyanjui, 2017). Innovation encourages monetary increase and performs a key function that paves the manner for the advancement of most nations inside the universe (Mowery & Oxley, 1995). Productiveness, employment level, and annual sales increase tend to be always higher for nations with greater innovators (Rupert, Jordi, Jacques, & Bettina, 2014). In keeping with Crespi and Zuniga (2011), innovation assures firms’ overall performance in both growing and advanced international locations because it stimulates competitiveness.

Tamer (2016) reaffirmed the identical opinion pronouncing that new services, production strategies, marketing and organizational strategies, if brought, might boom competitive gain and performance of businesses. Innovation and new thoughts come from elements outside and inside an enterprise (Chen, Duan, Edward & Lehaney, 2006; Chong, Chong & Gan, 2011). In terms of company factors, thoughts, new imaginations, and innovation come from the switch of information among workers, irrespective of their obligations inside the unit (Argote & Ingram, 2000; Distanont, Haapasalo, Rassameethes, & Lin, 2012).

## **2.3 Empirical Review**

Studies on the nexus between social skill and performance of Micro-enterprises and SMEs abound. Some established positive associations between social skill and performance (e.g., Baron & Tang, 2008); others reveal a non-significant linkage between the constructs (e.g. Mamun, Fazal & Muniady, 2019). Below are selected studies on the variables:

Hochwarter, et al (2006) did a study on the interactive “effect of social skill and organizational support on job performance”, using two samples in United States, whereby sample 1 consisted of 136 retail sales representatives and sample 2 were 115 customer service employees of a telecommunications firm. Results of hierarchical moderated multiple regression analyses on data indicated that social skill explained a significant variation on job performance in both samples (Sample 1:  $\beta = 0.21$ ,  $p\text{-value} < 0.01$ ; Sample 2:  $\beta = 0.20$ ,  $p\text{-value} < 0.05$ ). The study further revealed that “the relevance of social skill to job performance may be dependent on contextual cues such as perceived organizational support”.

Wu (2008) conducted a study on the antecedents and outcomes of social skill (social presentation, social scanning and social flexibility) in 11 organisations from various industries. Data from 442 valid responses were analyzed and hypotheses were via correlation. Social skill was also positively related with the number of mentors ( $r = .16$ ,  $p \leq .01$ ) and the amount of mentoring received ( $r = .36$ ,  $p \leq .001$ ). Results also revealed that people with stronger social skill received more social support ( $r = .16$ ,  $p \leq .001$ ) and performed more interpersonal related organizational citizenship behaviors ( $r = .13$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ).

Baron and Tang (2008) studied social skills (social perception, social adaptability expressiveness, self-promotion and ingratiation) and performance of 500 randomly selected Chinese start-ups, using a cross-

sectional survey design. After receiving 129 responses from 13 industries, the authors confirmed the psychometric integrity of the data and deployed hierarchical regression analyses to test the hypotheses. All the hypotheses on the two principal variables (except those of social adaptability and ingratiation) were confirmed as entrepreneurs' social skill was found to be positively related to enterprise performance. Specifically, social perception ( $\beta = 0.53$ ,  $p$ -value  $< 0.001$ ), expressiveness ( $\beta = 0.33$ ,  $p$ -value  $< 0.01$ ) and self-promotion ( $\beta = 0.21$ ,  $p$ -value  $< 0.05$ ) were positively and significantly related to sales and profit growth. It was concluded that entrepreneurs' social skills influence their effectiveness in obtaining crucial resources, and these resources, in turn, influence new venture performance.

Ebrahimpoora1, Zahed and Elyasic (2013) investigated the relationship between social skill - as a dimension of social intelligence - and performance of water companies. The survey sampled 164 managers and deployed Pearson's Correlation to test the hypotheses. Results indicated that social skills improves organizational performance ( $r = 0.19$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Moreover, upon regression, the result indicated a positive impact of social skill (beta =0.872,  $t = 2.27$ ,  $p = 0.014$ ) on business performance. It was recommended that in order to achieve business performance not only the managers should be trained on the technical skills, but also on the social skills to understand each other, pursue common goals and trust in each other.

Based on the above reviews, the study argued that, social skills (social perception and adaptability) has no significant relationship with innovation of the car servicing SMEs in Nigeria. Hence, the following null hypotheses were stated:

H0<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between social perception and innovation.

H0<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant relationship between social adaptability and innovation.

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted the cross sectional survey design because data were collected at single point in time (Labaree, 2009). The study population of this study comprises all car servicing SMEs in Nigeria. However, the researcher focused on car servicing firms that are operating in Bayelsa State and registered with the relevant cluster associations. Going by the records of the Bayelsa State chapters of the Nigerian Automobile Technicians Association and The Motor Mechanic Technicians Association of Nigeria, there are 381 car servicing enterprises in Bayelsa State. Thus, the population of this study is 381 car servicing firms. A sample size of 118 was determined using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling determination table.

#### **Operational Measures of Variables**

The independent variable is Social Skill. It is made up of three dimensions, namely: Social Perception, and Social Adaptability (Baron & Tang, 2009). Social Perception is described by 5 items (e.g. I can usually recognize others' traits accurately by observing their behavior). Social Adaptability has 5 indicators (e.g. I can easily adjust in just about any social situation).

The dependent variable is innovation and is observed by 7 indicators adopted from Wang and Ahmed (2004). An example of these indicators is "When we cannot solve a problem using conventional methods, we improvise on new methods". All the indicators for the variables are placed on a five-point Likert mode of 1 to 5, where 1=strongly disagree, and 5=strongly agree (see appendix 1).

#### **1. Data Analyses, Interpretation and Discussion**

The hypothesized relationships between dimensions of social skills (social perception and social adaptability) and innovation were tested using the Spearman's ranked order correlation coefficient. This choice was informed by fact that the study is a correlation study and the data obtained are ranked therefore suitable for the technique. The check for the significant relationship between variables was also performed with the probability value as the criterion for estimating important (where  $P < 0.05$ ) significant and irrelevant (where  $P > 0.05$ ).

### **IV. RELIABILITY/VALIDITY OF THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENT**

The reliability of this study's instrument was confirmed through the use of the Cronbach Alpha. Each variable returned alpha value of at least .70, hence satisfying the criteria suggested by Nunnally (1978). On the other hand, to ensure validity of the research instrument, the statement describing the variables were adopted from previously validated studies. This ensured that face and content validities were ascertained.

#### **Test of Hypothesis One**

H<sub>1</sub>: There is significant relationship between social perception and innovation

**Table 4.1: Correlations between Social Perception and Innovation**

		Social Perception	Innovation
Social Perception	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.656**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	89	89
Spearman's rho	Correlation Coefficient	.656**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	89	89

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

Table 4.1 indicated the association between social perception and innovation. The outcome reveals that there is moderate and positive nexus between the variables ( $\rho = 0.656$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Thus, the hypothesis was accepted. Hence, it was concluded that, social perception is positively and significantly correlated with innovation.

**Test of Hypothesis Two**

**H<sub>2</sub>:** There is significant relationship between social adaptability and innovation

**Table 4.2: Correlation between Social Adaptability and Innovation**

		Social Adaptability	Innovation
Social Adaptability	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.611**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	89	89
Spearman's rho	Correlation Coefficient	.611**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	89	89

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

Table 4.2 shows the association between social adaptability and innovation. The result reveals a significant and positive correlation between the variable ( $\rho = 0.611$ ,  $P = 0.000$ ). Therefore, the hypothesis was accepted. Hence, it was concluded that there is a positive and significant relationship between social adaptability and innovation.

**Discussion of Findings**

**Relationship between Social Perception and Innovation**

Hypothesis one is centered on the relationship between social perception and innovation of the automobile servicing corporations in Bayelsa state. The outcome revealed that, the entrepreneur’s ability to properly understand the motives, emotions, emotions and attributes of others undoubtedly correlated with innovation of the firm. Revealing entrepreneur capability to understand the reasons, feelings and desires of the clients and different stakeholders, boosts innovative potential of the firm. This finding corroborates recent submission of Baron and Tang (2008), who studied social perception and organisation overall performance and concluded that “entrepreneurs’ social perception skills influence their effectiveness in obtaining crucial resources, and these resources, in turn, influence new venture performance”. In a related study, Grèzes and de Gelder (2009) submitted that social perception plays significant role in the level of innovativeness of an entrepreneur since the skill to see the actions undertaken by others is the bedrock of social life.

**Association between Social Adaptability and Innovation**

The second objective as captured with corresponding hypothesis established that social adaptability has a positive and considerable association with innovation. this could give an explanation for by using the fact that

entrepreneur's capability to alter personal behaviour and actions to have a match with dynamic social context, environment and the diverse nature of the workplace will help her or him to innovate and innovative in serving his or her customers.

The finding backed Tariq, Sohail and Aslam (2011) who investigated employee adaptability and organizational competitive advantage and submit that organisations desiring to achieve competitive advantage must be innovative and should have employees who are willing to adapt to the upcoming new challenges and scenario while performing their duties.

## V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusion

It was concluded that entrepreneur's social skills – social perception, social adaptation and impression management - have significant relationships with the measures of enterprise performance – innovation and stakeholders' satisfaction.

Precisely, the study discovered a positive and substantial association among social perception proxy of social skills and enterprise performance measures of innovation and stakeholders' satisfaction.

It was also concluded that there exist considerable and positive relationship between social adaptation as a component of social skills and enterprise performance measures of innovation and stakeholders' satisfaction. Likewise, the study concluded that impression management is extensively and positively related to enterprise performance measures of innovation and stakeholders' satisfaction.

### Recommendations

Based on the summary of findings and conclusions made above, the following recommendations were put forward to assist the car servicing SMEs in Bayelsa State achieve optimal enterprise performance;

- i. The entrepreneurs should be observant of the feelings, behaviours and motives of others. This will boost their innovative capacity, in turn enhances their enterprise performance.
- ii. The car service entrepreneurs should endeavor to frequently adjust to the current social situation, this will improve their corporate reputation and ensures innovativeness

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