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Article abstract

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Entrepreneurial Marketing Skills and Small-Scale Business Performance: The Case of Ghana

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The development of SMEs serves as a tool for creating employment opportunities in developing countries. SME growth can be attributed to how owners and managers use entrepreneurial marketing skills in their day-to-day operations. A quantitative study was used to gain an understanding of the application of marketing skills in SMEs and the development of SMEs in Ghana. Findings indicate that entrepreneurs acquire marketing skills during their years of operation, however, these skills are not in tune with modern business trends and market competition. Establishing marketing departments and equipping business owners with marketing skills enables their ability to deal with volatile consumer demands. Likewise, requisite marketing skills enable market understanding, new marketing approaches, and the design of demand driven products and services.

1. Introduction

The economic growth of many nations, especially developing ones, has often hinged on empowering small businesses (Muriithi, 2017; Ngoasong, Paton & Korda, 2015). The emergence of small businesses in such nations gives impetus to youth employment, alleviates poverty, and encourages general socio-economic development. From diverse industries, small businesses, characterized by robust entrepreneurial skills, spring up to drive sustainable development agendas and policies of nations (Cooney, 2013; Mutalemwa, 2015; NESTA, 2011; Smith, Lang, Vorley & Barling, 2016), becoming micro contributors to the macro business environment in the areas of innovation, entrepreneurial training, and apprenticeship. Large and multinational corporations can rely on these businesses for ready labour and sources of raw materials for further business engagements (Akosile, 2017; Frederick, Kuratko & O'Connor, 2015).

The possession of marketing skills and entrepreneurial abilities in business processes contributes greatly to the development of small businesses (Burns, 2016; Deakins, Bensemann & Battisti, 2016). Within Small and Medium-scale Enterprises (SMEs), managers are able to conduct market research and development, enhance operational efficiency and performance, and more so, to use strong analytical and conceptual skills and modern technologies such as business management software, to improve dilapidated operational systems, and to improve competitiveness (Chang, 2016).

Traditionally, marketing has been perceived as distinct from an entrepreneur's expected functions. Some classical schools of thought have in fact postulated the difference between these two constructs in business (Burns, 2016; Lam & Harker, 2015), emphasizing that entrepreneurs should focus solely on business as well as product and service creation and development (Burns, 2016; Tukker & Tischner, 2017). This school of thought asserts that most owners of small businesses do not have the expertise to undertake marketing and can only perform such functions after they have attained growth and maturity in the industry (Goffee & Scase, 2015; Resnick, Cheng, Simpson & Lourenço, 2016).

Within Sub-Saharan Africa, most countries are in the process of developing their markets, and this is driven by entrepreneurs (Adom, 2015; Brixiová, Ncube & Bicaba, 2015; Gough & Langevang, 2016). Devoting time and purpose to their market offerings, these entrepreneurs have been able to harness desired firm profitability and have increased performance (Baker, 2016; Day, 2015).

Relying on the traditional marketing approach (i.e., with a focus on selling) for driving business growth has not led to the attainment of desired market share. Leveraging entrepreneurial marketing skills and strategies therefore becomes key to entrepreneurial survival and development (Baker, 2016; Burns, 2016). It is thus important to fully understand the concept of entrepreneurial marketing and the entrepreneurial orientation of small businesses, and how this affects small businesses, especially within developing Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) economies like Ghana.

2. Entrepreneurial Marketing

In business literature, entrepreneurial marketing (EM) is a modern approach to marketing in an SME business environment. By adopting an entrepreneurial marketing approach, businesses are able to rebrand and reposition their market offerings and gain a competitive advantage as well as develop new markets for their products and services. EM provides the leverage for businesses to increase their market share (Burns, 2016).

EM is a theoretical construct at the nexus between marketing and entrepreneurship (Baker, 2016; Day, 2015). The theoretical framework underlying this study will attempt to highlight the interconnectedness of the relevant concepts by covering entrepreneurship, marketing, and, finally, EM, while emphasizing its role in the management of SMEs. Firm-level concepts, such as the orientation of the firm, will be central in this theory, as the actions of the firms themselves are of interest to this study (Baker, 2016; Burns, 2016).

The adoption of a business strategy rests on how entrepreneurial business managers apply robust marketing skills and strategies within their respective business environments. The orientation to business is often determined by the manager's orientation, and this forms the concept of entrepreneurial orientation. Entrepreneurial orientation considers the propensity of the individual manager (or business owner) to act single-handedly, assume risk in the market, become proactive, and use aggressive steps to deal with competitors (Chaston, 2015; Kallmuenzer & Peters, 2017).

Through an EM approach, SMEs can better create focused business conditions (Franco, de Fátima Santos, Ramalho, & Nunes, 2014), achieving a competitive advantage by incorporating up-to-date marketing and entrepreneurial approaches (cf., Chaston, 2015; Miles et al., 2015). Via an EM orientation, SMEs may design ways to reach a particular segment of an industry. The literature supports the contention that EM promotes the creation of quality service that meets the needs of the consumer (Baker, 2016; Burns, 2016; Chaston, 2015).

3. The Context of Developing Economies

SMEs in the developing economies, including Ghana, are confronted by several constraints. These constraints include low marketing education levels, consumer preferences for foreign products, low patronage of local products and services, and relatively high costs of production. There is also the high cost of credit, lack of storage facilities, lack of scientific preservation methods, high cost of transport, insufficiency of packaging materials, application of inappropriate technology, and low volumes of personal savings (Adom, 2015; Muriithi, 2017; Mutalemwa, 2015).

Abor and Biekpe (2006) indicated that about 70% of Ghanaian SMEs struggle to operate, manage, and improve their businesses efficiently, and struggle to consistently deliver quality products and services on time. A study by Amoah-Mensah (2013) further highlights the failure of SMEs to succeed, finding that some 40% of SMEs fail in their operations. A more recent study conducted by Acheampong (2015), also confirmed that 40% of SMEs failed in their operations.

The weakness in SME operations in Ghana was identified by Ackah and Vuvor (2011) to the extent that these SMEs are managed by family members who have little to no technological skills or business management skills. Some researchers, business executives, and managers of SMEs have also attributed the failure of SMEs in Ghana and Africa to owners'/managers' inability to access credit (Asah, Fatoki, & Rungani, 2015; Muriithi, 2017).

Although it is recognized that marketing deficiencies constitute one of the critical characteristics of the small business in general (Julien, 2018), the importance of the application of proper marketing skills by local entrepreneurs has for years been overlooked by both governments and businesspeople (Pato & Teixeira, 2016; Rogerson, 2018). Thus, to operate in today's challenging business environment, the small business owner must endeavour to increase his or her marketing skills. Garwe and Olawale (2010) assert that a high proportion of small firms susceptible to failure can trace the roots of their condition to inadequacies in marketing. Though it is noted and accepted that marketing is not an elixir to cure all the business problems of small-scale firms, and that it has limitations, it has an important role to play in assisting the large and growing number of small businesses by reducing their vulnerability through increasing their marketing capability (Hastings, 2016; Wind, 2015).

4. SMEs Defined and their Characteristics

In different jurisdictions there are different factors which influence the categorization or the definition of businesses into SMEs. The definition of SMEs in the Ghanaian context can be traced to the Venture Capital Fund Act, 2004 (Act 680). This Act, just like many other jurisdictions, stresses the use of employee size and asset base for defining SMEs. The Act stresses that, for a firm to be categorized as an SME, it should have an employment base of not more than 100, with a total asset base not more than one million dollars in value. For total asset base computation, land and building values are excluded.

Empirical evidence indicates that SMEs are structured fundamentally differently from large business organizations (Asafo-Adjei, 2015; Boateng, Boateng & Bampoe, 2015). While small-scale businesses have relatively simple, less rigid, and less bureaucratic settings, large business entities do not have it so easy. A fundamental difference, however, is that the owners and managers of SMEs have an effective presence in the businesses (Berisha & Shiroka, 2015; Page & Söderbom, 2015).

In any SME setting, owners and managers are often those who carry out the day-to-day managerial function of the firm (Asafo-Adjei, 2015; Boateng, Boateng & Bampoe, 2015), and thus their visions are often regularly embedded into the organizational characteristics as well as the business operations (Boateng, Boateng & Bampoe, 2015).

Because of the relative simplicity and less rigid structure of SMEs' settings, the management culture of SMEs is comparatively creative and much more innovative and entrepreneurial. Its typical business environment is more flexible, more adaptive, characteristically change-oriented, managerially focused on problem solving, and, more often than not, action-oriented. To a very large extent, the characteristics of SMEs are essentially influenced by the owner's and manager's management style as well as their character traits (Franco & Matos, 2015; Saasongu, 2015), such as risk-taking and visionary, opportunistic, and proactive personalities (Brustbauer, 2016; Falkner & Hiebl, 2015). This is often termed

self-marketing (Manai & Holmlund, 2015), where individuals make themselves prominent in the market environment. Self-marketing is commonly associated with self-branding (Manai & Holmlund, 2015). Though mostly, but not deliberately, planned with the needed care and details and executed with appropriate professionalism and according to a well-thought-out program, SME owners and managers often undertake self-marketing with the ultimate objective of branding their offerings and leading, finally, to product positioning (Krush Sohi & Saini, 2015).

5. Required Entrepreneurial Marketing Skills for Small Business Growth

For the purposes of growing small businesses, there must be avenues for developing the cognitive and intellectual capacity of the entrepreneurs (Adomako et al., 2016; Trequattrini et al., 2018). Additionally, there must be a concerted effort to enhance the skills of entrepreneurs. It has been advanced in the literature that entrepreneurs, just like other managers of companies, must also possess technical and entrepreneurship skills (Cooney, 2013; Furlan, Grandinetti & Paggiaro, 2014; NESTA, 2011; Garwe & Olawale, 2010). The ability to possess such skills depends on an individual's capacity to learn (Cooney, 2013; NESTA, 2011; Olawale & Garwe, 2010). The complexities of developing markets require an entrepreneur to possess requisite marketing skills (Mutalemwa, 2015; Tehseen & Ramayah, 2015). For instance, the pricing of products should not only take into account the cost of production, but also the competition within the market, the psychological dimensions of the customers, and other external factors. Even knowing how to plan market offerings is important (Jobber & Lancaster, 2015; Roylance, 2016). Communicating such market offerings too is key to harnessing the needed profitability. In recent times, where technology is guiding business operations and growth, the entrepreneur needs such technological skills to withstand existing market competition and growth.

The sections that follows discusses five skills that entrepreneurs should have in order to bolster growth and development. Albeit an incomplete inventory of the domain of entrepreneurial marketing skills, the skills discussed here have been identified in the literature.

5.1. Marketing Communication Skills

Communication is at the heart of every marketing activity. Until the art of communicating market offerings is mastered by entrepreneurs, it is impossible to reach the desired levels of revenue and profit. Customers require information about the product in order to make informed decisions. The onus, thus, lies on the entrepreneur to communicate such product and service information to the customer. More often than not, SMEs do not have established procedures to inform how marketing communications should be done. Since markets possess their own unique characteristics, entrepreneurs that possess marketing communication skills stand to benefit significantly (Luxton, Reid, & Mavondo, 2015; Vernuccio & Ceccotti, 2015).

5.2. Marketing Planning and Surveying Skills

To serve customers in the market, businesses must undertake steps such as segmenting and targeting. These processes are often imbedded in the marketing planning phases. Thus, at this stage and function, the entrepreneur must demonstrate a vast knowledge of the market that is to be segmented. The ability to be analytical at this stage demonstrates the entrepreneur's planning skills. Without planning, it is difficult to attain any objective and, thus, the possessing of marketing planning skills becomes key to gaining a niche market and, in the future, harnessing a large market share for the business (Jobber & Lancaster, 2015; Roylance, 2016). The current trend in market segmentation and targeting requires that businesses and entrepreneurs possess skills in creating market surveys and other tools such as interview guides (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010).

5.3. Collaborative Skills

As businesses grow, there is a need for them to strengthen their engagement with the supply chain. Specifically, distributors need to be motivated and collaborated with to improve the time it takes to serve customers in the market. The ability of the business to strategically align with distributors is key to achieving higher performance and competitive advantage in the market. As the entrepreneur demonstrates good faith and trust in business engagements, he or she stands the chance of attracting the best of distributors to the firm. The inability to maintain highly connected distributors will lead to delays in business operations and will limit the business's capability to produce value to all customers. (Gumboh & Gichira, 2015; Hidalgo & D'Alvano, 2014).

Collaborative skills also have to do with channel management. Key in this area is the ability of the entrepreneur to go direct to the final customer or use an indirect means of approach. Thus, the entrepreneur who has an in-depth knowledge of the distribution channel becomes a leader in the market in the effort to reach the final customer (Rahim & Saad, 2015; Kuang-Jung, Mei-Liang, Chu-Mei & Chien-Jung, 2015).

5.4. Technological Skills

Given the upsurge in information technology and the complexity of the market environment, the entrepreneur cannot be left out and unable to adapt. The complex market environment is better understood when business and entrepreneurial efforts are leveraged on existing technology. Technology, such as telemarketing and digitization, has become integral in boosting the marketing efforts and performance of small firms, allowing them to easier reach out to existing and potential customers (Luxton, Reid & Mavondo, 2015; Roylance, 2016).

5.5. Conceptual Framework

The current study conjectures that there is an association between marketing skills and SME performance. Specifically, marketing skills are independent variables; performance, on the contrary, is a dependent variable. The variables used to indicate the presence of marketing skills for this study were surveying skills, marketing communication skills, marketing planning skills, technological skills, and collaborative skills. Proxies for performance in this study are sales growth and increased customer base. The conceptual framework of the study is presented in Figure 1 below.

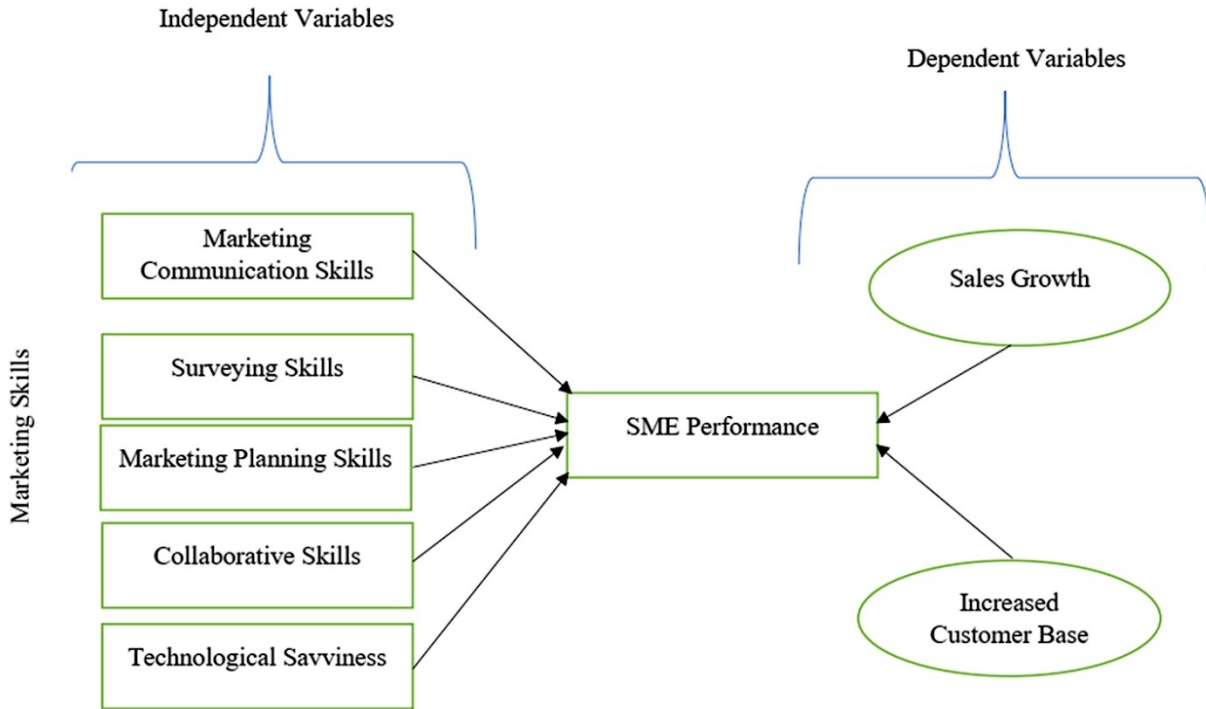


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

The sales growth of entrepreneurs, all things being equal, is expected to grow, as is the case for the size of the customer base, should entrepreneurial marketing skills be adopted. Specifically, for this analysis, sales growth and client base growth spanning five years (2010 to 2014) were the point of focus for analysis and testing.

6. Influence of Entrepreneurial Marketing Skills on Sales Growth

Firm performance is a complex construct that, in financial and general business literature, has required different models of explanation. Some have argued that both financial and non-financial indicators should be applied. Other schools of thought have opined that, since financial measures are relatively objective and highly measurable, they should be continually used, as opposed to non-financial measures (Haldma, Näsi, Grossi, Hernaus, Bach & Vukšić, 2012; Prieto & Revilla, 2006). The literature has concentrated on the financial measures of performance. Specifically, sales and profit levels are commonly used as proxies for entrepreneurs' performance (Agostini et al., 2015; Olaru, Pirnea, Hohan & Maftai, 2014). In a study conducted by Hoque and Awang (2019) where the focus was on ascertaining the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between EM and SME performance, it was found that a direct significant relationship existed between EM and firm performance. Based on the preceding empirical study, it is therefore posited that:

H₁: There is a positive relationship between entrepreneurial marketing skills and sales growth.

7. Influence of Entrepreneurial Marketing Skills on Customer Base

As asserted in the literature, performance of a business can be examined from the point of view of customer-base concentration and product performance (Amin et al., 2016; Mason et al., 2015). From the

perspective of product performance, sales volume and values are ascertained at the end of the period or at regular intervals to determine market share over the same period. When performance is viewed from the stance of the customer, it focuses on how the business is able to attract customers within the market space, the degree to which these customers are sustained or retained, and the rate at which customers make repeated purchases for a considerable period of time. To say business performance has been appreciable means that product performance and customer performance have been at optimal levels within the business environment. Hughes and Morgan (2007) found a positive association between innovativeness, product performance, and customer base performance. At this introductory stage, increasing sales volumes through innovativeness is paramount to a business's survival (Amin et al., 2016; Mason et al., 2015). Generally, as a firm becomes innovative with its product offerings, it attracts more customers. Based on the foregoing stance, this study posits that:

H₂: There is a positive relationship between EM marketing skills and customer base growth.

8. Methodology

A quantitative research design was used to provide an objective understanding of the issues raised (Kothari, 2017; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2015). For the sample frame, the Registrar General's Department indicated that there were 950 small enterprises within the Greater-Accra Metropolis. The 950 registered enterprises therefore constituted the accessible population for this study (Registrar General's Department, 2018). Simple random sampling was adopted as a form of probability sampling to select the Greater-Accra Metropolis entrepreneurs. Particularly, the sample came from Ledzekuku-Krowor, Ga South, and Ga Central. Using random sampling, each individual within the population had an equal chance of being selected. This process helped to reduce elements of bias.

Out of the 950 registered entrepreneurs, 282 questionnaires were sent to various SMEs. There were 135 questionnaires returned with all fields completed. Ten questionnaires were not completely filled, thus were removed from data analysis.

The main instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire. The key constructs for the study were sales growth (Expósito & Sanchis-Llopis, 2019; Khan et al., 2014), increased customer base (Asheq & Hossain, 2019), surveying skills, marketing communication skills, collaborative skills (Agostini et al., 2015; Kotler & Armstrong, 2010; Tan & Sousa, 2015), and technology savviness (Prajogo & Oke, 2016). These measurement items were carefully adapted from previous studies. The presence of these constructs was measured using a five-point Likert Scale developed by the researchers (Very High=5, High=4, Average=3, Low=2, and Very Low=1).

9. Reliability and Validity

To ensure the internal validity of the test items, a senior researcher reviewed and made minor modifications to the questionnaire. Subsequently, the questionnaire was reviewed by senior personnel of the existing SME associations within Ghana. To determine the reliability of each entrepreneurial marketing-skill scale, Cronbach's Alpha, as depicted in Table 1 below, was assessed.

Table 1. Reliability of Entrepreneurial Marketing Skills Scales.

	No of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Surveying Skills	6	0.818
Marketing Communication Skills	3	0.800
Technology Savviness	4	0.856
Marketing Planning Skills	5	0.886
Collaborative Skills	4	0.929

From Table 1, it can be seen that all the indicators used for measuring EM skills had reliability scores greater than the minimum acceptance score for reliability (that is, greater than 0.7). Thus, the items used for measurement are said to be reliable in measuring the presence of EM skills (Bonett & Wright, 2015; Heo, Kim & Faith, 2015).

10. Ethical Considerations

The essence of the research was explained to all participants so that areas of ambiguity and those that may have an unconscious negative impact were eliminated (Hair, Wolfinbarger, Money, Samouel & Page, 2015). For their privacy and anonymity, names of individual respondents were not recorded as part of the study. Their participation was solicited on a voluntary basis (Hair et al., 2015). Questionnaire instructions indicated the option for participants to opt out, if they so wished, at any time during the data administration process.

11. Influence of Entrepreneurial Marketing Skills on Performance

Assessing the influence of EM skills on performance suggests regression analyses on the data collected. The proposed relationships are depicted in Table 2 and Table 6 below.

Table 2. Model Summary for Entrepreneurial Marketing Skills on Average Annual Sales.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
1	.179 ^a	.032	.027
a. Predictors: (Constant), Collaborative Skills, Surveying Skills, Technological Savviness, Marketing Communication Skills, Marketing Planning Skills			
b. Dependent Variable: Average Annual Sales			

There was a significant positive relationship between marketing skills and sales growth. Though there is a relatively low R^2 of 3.2%, as depicted in Table 2, it could be argued that a multitude of other variables would also contribute to changes in sales performance.

Regressing survey skills on average annual sales showed a significance level of 0.048, as shown in Table 3. The insurgence of technology also impacts sales, and this was supported by a significance level of 0.000, as demonstrated in Table 3. In the works of Prajogo and Oke (2016), it was clearly posited that new technology skills have the potential to make small and medium firms increasingly innovative, and can multiply sales of the firm's products. Entrepreneurs who employ marketing planning skills also reported higher sales ($B=.329$, $r=0.000$).

Table 3. Coefficient for Marketing Skills on Average Annual Sales.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	90.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1 (Constant)	38874.126	2160.448		17.994	.000	35317.437	42430.815
Surveying Skills	356.767	180.500	.082	1.977	.048	59.615	653.919
Marketing Communication Skills	-304.610	397.475	-.039	-.766	.444	-958.963	349.743
Technological Savviness	1044.718	209.314	.218	4.991	.000	700.129	1389.306
Marketing Planning Skills	-1497.457	284.030	-.329	-5.272	.000	-1965.048	-1029.866
Collaborative Skills	301.730	277.283	.058	1.088	.277	-154.754	758.214

a. Dependent Variable: Average Annual Sales

Generally, there exist some degree of marketing skills influence on the sales of small-scale businesses (Famiwole, Lawal & Mohammed, 2014). But the degree and magnitude of this influence can vary from firm to firm and from industry to industry. As can be seen from this study, there was a rather low magnitude of influence, as indicated by the R^2 of 3.2% explanation of the model.

Table 4. H₁ Correlation Coefficients.

	Surveying Skills	Marketing Comm. Skills	Technological Savviness	Marketing Planning Skills	Collaborative Skills
Surveying Skills	1				
Marketing Com. Skills	.644**	1			
Technological Savviness	.563**	.692**	1		
Marketing Planning Skills	.642**	.749**	.658**	1	
Collaborative Skills	.554**	.653**	.598**	.824**	1

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

With the correlation coefficient estimated in Table 4, it can be seen that the independent variables had high inter-item correlation, which required a check on multi-collinearity.

Table 5. Collinearity Statistics.

Model	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)		
Surveying Skills	.518	1.931
Marketing Communication Skills	.344	2.904
Technological Savviness	.464	2.155
Marketing Planning Skills	.228	4.391
Collaborative Skills	.315	3.177

The variance inflation factor (VIF) was assessed to identify the presence of multi-collinearity within the model. The rule is that any estimated VIF between 5 to 10 is considered problematic and signifies the presence of multi-collinearity (Yu, Jiang & Land, 2015; Sinan & Alkan, 2015). From Table 5, it can be observed that all the independent variables had a VIF of less than 5, and this signifies that there is no problem with the variables for the model, even though there is the presence of high correlation coefficients.

12. Influence of Entrepreneurial Marketing Skills on Customer Base

The second category of the inferential analysis focused on the customer base of the participants over time (2010 to 2014).

Table 6. Model Summary for Entrepreneurial Marketing Skills on Increased Customer Base.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
1	.812 ^a	.659	.648
a. Predictors: (Constant), Collaborative Skills, Surveying Skills, Technology Savviness, Marketing Communication Skills, Marketing Planning Skills			
b. Dependent Variable: Customer Base			

The model for marketing skills on increased customer base showed a significant association (sig=.000) as depicted in Table 6. Thus, a concentrated implementation of marketing skills on business operations will result in an increased customer base for entrepreneurs. Table 6 above provided an R² of 65.9% of the model being explained. This relatively high R² bolsters the case of marketing skills influencing the increase in the customer base of SMEs in Ghana. The individual proxies are indicated in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Coefficients for Entrepreneurial Marketing Skills on Increased Customer Base.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.	Collinearity Statistics
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T		
(Constant)	798.973	16.919		47.225	.000	
Surveying Skills	1.144	1.385	.034	.826	.409	.517
Marketing Com. Skills	3.134	3.061	.053	1.024	.306	.342
Technological Savviness	4.320	1.613	.119	2.678	.008	.460
Marketing Planning Skills	3.156	2.235	.091	1.412	.158	.216
Collaborative Skills	9.372	2.841	.236	3.299	.001	.176
a. Dependent Variable: Customer Base						

Table 8. H₂ Correlation Coefficients.

	<i>Surveying Skills</i>	<i>Marketing Communication Skills</i>	<i>Technological Savviness</i>	<i>Marketing Planning Skills</i>	<i>Leadership Skills</i>	<i>Collaborative Skills</i>
Surveying Skills	1					
Marketing Communication Skills	0.644	1				
Technological Savviness	0.563	0.692	1			
Marketing Planning Skills	0.632	0.750	0.648	1		
Leadership Skills	0.555	0.676	0.621	0.810	1	
Collaborative Skills	0.554	0.653	0.598	0.790	0.894	1

From Table 7, it is clear that leveraging entrepreneurial efforts in technology results in an increase in the customer base ($B=0.119$, $\text{sig}=0.008$). These findings affirm the statement made by D'Auria (2006) that any person or firm that possesses strong technological knowledge can take advantage of the market, thereby growing their customer base. Collaborative skills also assumed a significant relationship with an increase in the customer base ($B=0.236$, $\text{sig}=0.001$). Therefore it can be said that the degree to which entrepreneurs successfully collaborate with members of their supply chain has positive implications for growth potential.

The study found that entrepreneurial marketing skills, in fact, significantly influence sales growth of small-scale businesses. The magnitude of this influence, however, is dependent on the type of firm as well as the industry in which the SME owner is operating. Simply, as firms increase their marketing skills, they can expect to see growth in the size of their customer base. Through the deployment of social media marketing efforts, the business will be able to reach out to a large customer base. This engagement further translates into increased sales for the business.

13. Discussion

The application of marketing skills by local entrepreneurs has been overlooked by governments and businesspeople over the years. It is recognized that marketing deficiencies constitute one of the critical characteristics of the small business in general (Berisha & Shirokab, 2015). The study found a positive significant association between entrepreneurial marketing skills and sales growth, making a case for the use of entrepreneurial marketing skills to drive sales growth for SMEs. Also, the relationship between entrepreneurial marketing skills and customer base growth was found to be significant.

These findings support the study carried out by Sharma and Kharub (2015), where the focus was on the relationship between a lack of planning and strategy-making, and product performance. Surveying skills also had a significant association ($B=0.082$, $\text{sig}=0.048$) with sales growth. This affirms the assertion made by Dacko (2006) that entrepreneurs need to become analytical through assessment of survey data. In a typical business case, a market survey would encompass critical analysis of the entrepreneur's market. This finding, therefore, bolsters the need for entrepreneurs to develop their surveying skills.

14. Managerial Implications

The application of marketing skills by SMEs is crucial due to increasing levels of competition and constant changes in customer behaviour and preferences. There is the need, therefore, for every SME to continually increase their marketing expertise, especially with the entrepreneurs' responses to key indicators for possessing marketing planning and surveying skills, which were average. The application of marketing skills, on the other hand, was also very low, especially with technological skills, as indicated in the study. The study reveals that, despite the increased penetration of mobile phone users in Ghana (Achampong, 2012), the application of telemarketing skills in the various sectors where SMEs operate is very low (Cant & Wiid, 2016; Siebu, 2019).

The significant feature that distinguishes any company, especially an SME, from another is the development and implementation of specific skills such as distribution and collaboration (Gumboh & Gichira, 2015; Hidalgo & D'Alvino, 2014). These skills will help focus on the marketing of products and services in a proper form, time, and place. These activities must be balanced with the other marketing factors to stimulate the efficient functioning of the distribution channel in any SME.

The success of every small-scale operation depends, to a large extent, on the application of appropriate marketing skills. In the case of technological skills, every operator needs to have some practical knowledge, especially in an era when most businesses are digitized. Most business processes, such as delivery channels, payments, customer service and relationships, sales, and negotiation help to meet the needs and aspirations of customers. Channels of distribution are being customized to suit customer segments based on their needs and wants. In Ghana, for instance, mobile platforms such as Tonaton, Tisu, Hello Foods, and their global competitors such as Jumia, Amazon, and Alibaba are forms of digitalized tools for marketing.

Marketing communication by SME operators needs to be integrated in order to send the right information about goods and services to their customers. Due to the intensity of competition, entrepreneurs need to employ personal selling approaches and ensure that they communicate the value of their goods and services. Every SME operator requires creativity (putting innovation to work), as well as identification of early customers in the sales cycle, applying the right marketing efforts for each segment, and ensuring the use of referral marketing.

The application of appropriate marketing skills helps SMEs to acquire and grow their customer base but is often stifled by the lack of knowledge, fear of cost, as well as issues related to measurement of returns on investment, especially if they intend to achieve their target and have a competitive advantage in the market. The generation of market leads through focusing on the message and the target is key to increasing an SME market share, as well as being sustainable and being able to scale up if needed (Adegbuyi et al., 2015; Burns, 2016; Kotler & Armstrong, 2010).

15. Limitations, Recommendations for Further Research, and Conclusions

It is important to highlight a limitation of the EM theory on which this study is based; that being, as the above overview of EM suggests, the constructs of EM are relatively new with undefined parameters (Franco et al., 2014; Miles et al., 2015). Likewise, attempts have been made to position EM in different contextual and geographical settings but there persist vast points of divergence on the body construct (Lodish et al., 2015; Miles et al., 2015). What constitutes the entirety of EM is still being argued (Nijssen, 2017; Toghraee et al., 2017; Whalen & Akata, 2016), and this makes its application very difficult, especially in emerging economies where institutions are not well developed. This furthers the suggestion in the literature that further research needs to move towards a generally accepted definition for EM.

Likewise, marketing skills, as discussed earlier, are not limited to the domain of the five skills investigated in this study. The vastness of marketing skills brings the challenge of adoption (Junge, Severgnini & Sørensen, 2016; Miles et al., 2015; Royle & Laing, 2014). Also, what constitutes high proficiency of marketing skills in one country may be different in another. Determining the proficiency of an entrepreneur's marketing skills requires further enquiry and further development of scales to assess these skills.

In conclusion, relying only on the experience of the entrepreneur to forecast market changes will only result in failure and loss of profitability. The application of marketing skills by SMEs is a promising route for future research. There are, no doubt, many promising research investigations that could advance the findings of this study such as investigations in comparable settings and comparative studies. Such efforts promise to advance our knowledge and ability to improve the development of SMEs and serve to enhance sustainability and positive economic development in developing countries.

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