

INNOVATION ATTRIBUTES AND COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE OF FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS IN DELTA STATE, NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of innovation attributes on the competitive advantage of female entrepreneurs in Delta State. It specifically determined the effect of innovation conviction, creed and mindset of the female entrepreneurs on their competitive advantage. Descriptive survey research design was employed, and data were collected from 150 female entrepreneurs through structured questionnaires. Frequency and percentages was used to analysis the demography of respondents while regression was used to test the formulated hypothesis. The findings revealed that both innovation conviction ($\beta = 0.335$; $p = 0.022$) and innovation creed ($\beta = 0.624$; $p = 0.000$) have significant positive effects on competitive advantage, while innovation mindset ($\beta = 0.222$; $p = 0.125$) does not have a significant impact. These results validate the RBV by highlighting the importance of internal resources and capabilities in achieving competitive success. They also support the diffusion of innovation theory by emphasizing the necessity of adopting and diffusing innovative practices. The study extends the entrepreneurial orientation theory by identifying specific innovation attributes that contribute to competitive advantage. Practical recommendations include female entrepreneurs invest in continuous learning and development programs focused on innovation; establishing clear and measurable innovation goals can help entrepreneurs stay focused and committed to innovation. These goals should align with the overall business strategy and be regularly reviewed and updated; and Ensuring that adequate resources—such as time, money, and personnel—are dedicated to innovation activities is essential. This can include setting aside a portion of the budget for research and development and investing in new technologies.

Keywords: Female entrepreneurs, competitive advantage, innovation conviction, innovation creed.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, female entrepreneurship has gained considerable attention as a key driver of economic growth and development. Female entrepreneurs contribute significantly to global job creation, innovation, and economic diversification, thereby enhancing the resilience and competitiveness of economies (Abrar, Haq, Victor, & Akram, 2021; Omolekan, & Alli, 2020). Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) 2020/2021 reports that Nigeria has one of the highest rates of female entrepreneurship globally, with about 40% of women engaged in entrepreneurial activities. These female entrepreneurs require competitiveness to survive in the business environment. Competitive advantage refers to the attributes that allow an organisation to outperform its competitors (Fazal, Mamun, Ahmad, & Masud, 2022). Attributes such as cost leadership, differentiation and sustainability form the foundation of a firm's competitive strategy and determine its ability to achieve and maintain a superior market position. Cost leadership entails optimising operations ahead of rivals (Dyer, Godfrey, Jensen & Bryce, 2020). Differentiation is

concerned with attaining superiority in offerings (Dess & Picken, 2020). while sustainability is the maintenance of competitive edge overtime (Wang, Chiu, & Chen, 2019). Studies argue that innovation is a critical lever that female entrepreneurs can pull to enhance their competitive standing (Ahmad, 2024; Fazal, et al., 2022). Innovation involves the application of new ideas, the introduction of novel products, and the improvement of business processes. These innovative practices can significantly (Yadav, & Unni, 2016) impact an entrepreneur's ability to gain and maintain a competitive advantage by fostering efficiency, enhancing customer satisfaction, and opening new market opportunities.

The innovative capability of female entrepreneurs is a reflection of their innovation conviction, creed, and mindset. Innovation conviction refers to the strong belief in the importance and potential of innovation to drive business success. Innovation creed encompasses the values and principles that guide an entrepreneur's commitment to innovative practices. Lastly, the innovation mindset is the predisposition to continuously seek and implement new ideas and solutions. This study aims to examine the effect of female entrepreneurs' innovation on their competitive advantage in Delta State.

In Nigeria, traditional gender roles have long confined women to caregiving responsibilities, limiting their participation in entrepreneurial activities. Women who venture into entrepreneurship are often over-represented in the smallest, informal, and low-growth sectors. These businesses typically face intense competition and rivalry, making it challenging for female entrepreneurs to thrive. Innovation conviction, creed, and mindset are critical factors that can influence the success of female entrepreneurs (Fazal, Mamun, Ahmad, & Masud, 2022). Without innovation conviction, female entrepreneurs may be less likely to pursue innovative strategies that could enhance their competitive advantage. Innovation creed is often undermined by cultural and societal expectations that discourage women from taking risks and experimenting with new ideas. The innovation mindset is crucial for adapting to market changes and staying ahead of competitors. However, the lack of support and resources can stifle this mindset among female entrepreneurs in Nigeria.

Studies have highlighted the importance of innovative practices in achieving competitive advantage among female entrepreneurs in various contexts. Ahmad (2024) demonstrated the positive effect of product innovation on female entrepreneurs' success in Saudi Arabia, emphasizing the need for policy support to overcome challenges faced by women entrepreneurs. Similarly, Maziriri, Nyagadza, and Chuchu (2024) found that innovation conviction, mindset, and creed significantly impact the need for achievement and entrepreneurial success in South Africa, with entrepreneurial education playing a crucial moderating role. Hasniati, Pratiwi Indriasari, Sirajuddin, and Karim (2023) underscored the significant influence of personality factors and contextual elements on the entrepreneurial decisions of women in Makassar City, Indonesia, highlighting the importance of socio-cultural support. Omolekan and Alli (2020) further revealed the critical role of product and process innovation in enhancing the market share and business reputation of women-owned businesses in Nigeria.

Despite these insights, there is a significant gap in the literature concerning the context of Delta State, Nigeria. While the challenges and opportunities in this region are unique, no study has specifically examined how innovation among female entrepreneurs affects their competitive advantage in Delta State. This research aims to fill this gap by investigating the effect of female entrepreneurs' innovation conviction, creed, and mindset on their competitive advantage in Delta State. This study will provide region-specific insights and recommendations that can help female

entrepreneurs in Delta State enhance their innovative capabilities and achieve greater business success.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to determine the impact of the innovation of female entrepreneurs on their competitive advantage in Delta State. The specified objectives are to:

- i. Examine the effect of female entrepreneurs' innovation conviction on their competitive advantage in Delta State;
- ii. Determine the relationship between female entrepreneurs' innovation creed and competitive advantage in Delta State; and
- iii. Ascertain the connection between the female entrepreneurs' innovation mindset and the competitive advantage in Delta State.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study

- i. Female entrepreneurs' innovation conviction does not significantly affect their competitive advantage in Delta State;
- ii. Female entrepreneurs' innovation creed has no significant relationship with their competitive advantage in Delta State; and
- iii. Female entrepreneurs' innovation mindset has no significant connection with their competitive advantage in Delta State.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Female Entrepreneurs

The concept of female entrepreneurs has been examined and defined by various scholars, each bringing unique perspectives that highlight different aspects of women's entrepreneurial activities. According to Yadav and Unni (2016), female entrepreneurs are women who organize and manage businesses, navigating unique gender-specific challenges and leveraging their distinct skills to succeed in the business world. Yadav and Unni emphasize the importance of understanding the socio-cultural contexts that shape women's entrepreneurial journeys, pointing out the dual roles that female entrepreneurs often play in balancing family and business responsibilities. In their study, Sarfaraz, Faghil, and Majd (2014) define female entrepreneurs as women who create and manage enterprises driven by a combination of economic necessity and the desire for independence. They argue that female entrepreneurship is often motivated by the need to provide for their families and achieve personal and financial autonomy. Sarfaraz et al. also point out that female entrepreneurs frequently operate in less formal sectors and face systemic barriers such as limited access to finance and support networks.

Welter, Brush, and De Bruin (2014) offer a more comprehensive definition, describing female entrepreneurs as women who initiate, organize, and run businesses, often innovating in ways that reflect their unique perspectives and experiences. They highlight the importance of innovation and adaptability in female entrepreneurship, noting that women entrepreneurs often bring new ideas and approaches to the business world. Welter et al.'s definition underscores the creative and transformative potential of female entrepreneurs.

Connecting these perspectives, it becomes evident that female entrepreneurs are defined not only

by their role in creating and managing businesses but also by the unique challenges and motivations that differentiate them from their male counterparts. Yadav and Unni (2016) focus on the dual roles and balancing act required of female entrepreneurs, Sarfaraz et al. (2014) emphasize the motivations and systemic barriers, and Welter et al. (2014) highlight the innovative aspects of female entrepreneurship. These definitions collectively illustrate that female entrepreneurs operate within a complex interplay of social, economic, and personal factors. Building on these views, a more comprehensive definition of female entrepreneurs can be articulated: Female entrepreneurs are women who initiate, organize, and manage businesses, often navigating significant gender-based challenges while balancing family responsibilities and leveraging unique perspectives to innovate and drive business success. This definition acknowledges the multifaceted nature of female entrepreneurship, recognizing the interplay of traditional roles, systemic barriers, and the innovative potential that women bring to the entrepreneurial landscape.

Competitive Advantage

Competitive advantage is a fundamental concept in business strategy, referring to the attributes that allow an organization to outperform its rivals. From different viewpoints, competitive advantage can be defined and understood in various ways. Dess and Picken (2020) note that firms achieve competitive advantage by continuously innovating and adapting to market changes faster than their competitors. This view emphasizes the importance of flexibility, creativity, and responsiveness in maintaining a competitive edge in dynamic markets. Dyer, Godfrey, Jensen, and Bryce (2020), highlight the significance of unique business models and customer-centric strategies. They argue that firms can achieve competitive advantage by developing distinctive business models that deliver superior value to customers through personalization, convenience, and enhanced customer experiences. This approach underscores the role of customer insights and tailored solutions in outperforming competitors. From a resource-based view, studies emphasize the role of knowledge management and intellectual capital. For example, Wang, Chiu, and Chen (2019) suggest that competitive advantage arises from effectively leveraging intellectual capital, including human, structural, and relational capital, to create unique value propositions. This perspective highlights the importance of knowledge resources and organizational learning in sustaining competitive advantage.

Features of Competitive Advantage

Competitive advantage is characterized by several key features that distinguish successful firms from their competitors. One of the primary features is differentiation, which involves creating products or services that offer unique attributes valued by customers. Differentiation can be achieved through various means, such as superior quality, innovative design, advanced technology, or exceptional customer service. By differentiating their offerings, firms can command premium prices and build customer loyalty (Dess & Picken, 2020).

Another critical feature is **cost leadership**, where a firm aims to become the lowest-cost producer in its industry. This strategy involves optimizing operations, achieving economies of scale, and controlling costs more effectively than competitors. Firms that successfully implement cost leadership can offer lower prices to customers, attract price-sensitive buyers, and achieve higher profit margins even in competitive markets (Dyer et al., 2020). A third key feature is **sustainability**, which refers to a firm's ability to maintain its competitive advantage over time. Sustainable competitive advantage is often achieved through barriers to entry, such as strong brand reputation, proprietary technology, exclusive access to resources, or regulatory protection. Firms

with sustainable competitive advantages are better positioned to fend off competitors and adapt to market changes (Wang, Chiu, & Chen, 2019). Sustainability also involves continuous innovation and the ability to respond to evolving customer needs and market conditions, ensuring long-term success.

Female Entrepreneurial Innovation

Female entrepreneurial innovation has been explored by various scholars, each providing unique insights into how women entrepreneurs leverage innovation to drive their businesses forward. According to Sullivan and Meek (2017), female entrepreneurial innovation involves the creative application of new ideas, products, and processes by women in business, often overcoming significant gender-related barriers. They emphasize that women entrepreneurs tend to innovate out of necessity, driven by the need to differentiate their businesses in competitive markets and navigate systemic challenges such as limited access to capital and networks. Robb and Coleman (2019) define female entrepreneurial innovation as the process by which women entrepreneurs introduce new and improved products or services to the market. They argue that innovation among female entrepreneurs is often characterized by a high degree of resilience and adaptability, reflecting their ability to respond to market demands and exploit new opportunities. Robb and Coleman also highlight that women's unique perspectives and experiences can lead to distinct and valuable innovations that might not emerge in male-dominated environments.

Welter, Brush, and De Bruin (2019) offer a more nuanced view, describing female entrepreneurial innovation as the intersection of gender, context, and entrepreneurial activity that results in new value creation. They propose that women's innovation is influenced by their social and economic contexts, which shape how they identify and pursue opportunities. Welter et al. (2019) stress that female entrepreneurs often innovate by integrating their personal values and community-oriented goals into their business strategies, leading to socially responsible and sustainable innovations.

Connecting these perspectives reveals that female entrepreneurial innovation is multifaceted, encompassing creativity, resilience, adaptability, and contextual sensitivity. Sullivan and Meek (2017) highlight the necessity-driven nature of female innovation, while Robb and Coleman (2019) emphasize resilience and adaptability, and Welter et al. (2019) focus on the contextual influences and value-driven aspects. Collectively, these definitions illustrate that female entrepreneurial innovation is not merely about introducing new products or services but also about how women leverage their unique perspectives and navigate their specific challenges to create value.

Building on these views, a comprehensive definition of female entrepreneurial innovation can be articulated: Female entrepreneurial innovation is the creative and contextually driven process by which women entrepreneurs introduce new or improved products, services, or processes, leveraging their unique perspectives, resilience, and adaptability to overcome gender-specific barriers and create value. This definition acknowledges the complex interplay of necessity, context, and personal values in driving innovation among female entrepreneurs.

Innovation Creed

Innovation creed refers to the set of values and principles that guide an entrepreneur's commitment to innovation. It encompasses the belief systems and ethical frameworks that drive an entrepreneur to prioritize and embed innovation within their business practices. According to Sullivan and Meek (2017), an innovation creed often stems from an intrinsic motivation to create value and make a

positive impact through novel solutions. For female entrepreneurs, this creed can be particularly influential as it shapes how they perceive and approach challenges and opportunities. A strong innovation creed encourages female entrepreneurs to pursue continuous improvement, embrace creativity, and maintain a commitment to ethical and sustainable practices. This guiding belief system not only fosters a culture of innovation within their enterprises but also influences how they engage with stakeholders and the broader community.

Innovation Conviction

Innovation conviction refers to the strong belief in the importance and potential of innovation to drive business success. It is the unwavering confidence that innovative practices are essential for achieving competitive advantage and long-term sustainability. Robb and Coleman (2019) highlight that for female entrepreneurs, innovation conviction often arises from firsthand experiences of overcoming significant barriers and achieving success through novel approaches. This conviction is crucial as it fuels persistence and resilience in the face of challenges. Female entrepreneurs with high innovation conviction are more likely to invest in research and development, seek out new technologies, and continuously explore ways to improve their products, services, and processes. This strong belief in the power of innovation not only propels their businesses forward but also inspires and motivates their teams to adopt an innovative mindset.

Innovation Mindset

Innovation mindset refers to the predisposition to continuously seek and implement new ideas, solutions, and approaches. It is characterized by openness to change, curiosity, and a proactive attitude towards exploring opportunities for improvement and growth. Welter, Brush, and De Bruin (2019) argue that an innovation mindset is crucial for female entrepreneurs as it enables them to adapt to changing market conditions, anticipate customer needs, and stay ahead of competitors. This mindset involves a willingness to experiment, take calculated risks, and learn from failures. For female entrepreneurs, developing an innovation mindset is particularly important as it helps them navigate the complexities of balancing business and personal responsibilities. An innovation mindset empowers female entrepreneurs to leverage their unique perspectives and experiences, fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptability within their organizations.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on the resource based view, diffusion of innovation and entrepreneurial orientation theories. The theories are discussed below.

Resource-Based View (RBV): The Resource-Based View (RBV) as proposed by Barney (1991) posits that an organisation's competitive advantage is derived from its unique resources and capabilities that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN). The main assumptions of RBV are that resources and capabilities are heterogeneous and immobile across firms. RBV is applied to understand how firms can leverage their internal strengths to achieve a competitive edge. The strength of RBV lies in its focus on internal resources, providing a framework for analyzing a firm's potential for sustained competitive advantage. However, its weakness is its limited consideration of the external environment and dynamic changes. RBV fits into the study by emphasizing the unique innovative capabilities of female entrepreneurs as key resources that can drive competitive advantage.

Innovation Diffusion Theory: Innovation Diffusion Theory was proposed by Rogers (1962). This theory explains how, why and the rate at which new ideas and technology move through societies as well as how they are spread within cultures. The theory's main assumptions are that diffusion involves people communicating to one another through time, social systems, and characteristics of innovations. In organizations and communities, the theory is applied in order to understand how innovation is adopted. It provides a good background for understanding how innovations are adopted. Nevertheless, it fails many times to consider the role of individual variation and extraneous factors that influence adoption. Moreover, this theory helps explain how innovative practices by female entrepreneurs are adopted and spread within Delta State; thereby impacting their competitive advantage in this study context.

Entrepreneurial Orientation Theory: Entrepreneurial Orientation Theory, articulated by Lumpkin and Dess (1996), focuses on how entrepreneurial behavior at the firm level is characterized by autonomy, innovativeness, risk-taking, proactiveness, and competitive aggressiveness. The main assumptions are that these dimensions influence a firm's ability to identify and exploit opportunities. This theory is applied in examining how firms with strong entrepreneurial orientation can achieve superior performance. Its strength is in providing a clear framework for assessing entrepreneurial practices within firms. However, it may not fully address the complexities of different business environments and cultural contexts. This theory is relevant to the study as it highlights how the entrepreneurial orientation of female entrepreneurs in Delta State can drive their innovative practices and thus their competitive advantage.

A combination of these theories suggests the need for the female entrepreneur to possess requisite conviction, creed and mindset for competitive advantage. The RBV reflects innovation conviction by emphasizing the importance of unique, valuable, and inimitable resources, underscoring the belief that such innovations are critical for sustained competitive advantage. Innovation Diffusion Theory corresponds to innovation creed by illustrating the process through which innovative ideas and technologies are adopted within a social system, emphasizing a collective belief in the value of innovation. Entrepreneurial orientation theory aligns with innovation mindset by focusing on the behavioral traits of innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking that drive entrepreneurial activities, highlighting an ingrained attitude towards embracing and implementing new ideas. Together, these theories illustrate how conviction in the value of innovation, a collective belief in its adoption, and a proactive mindset towards entrepreneurial practices contribute to competitive advantage among female entrepreneurs in Delta State.

Innovation attributes of female entrepreneurs

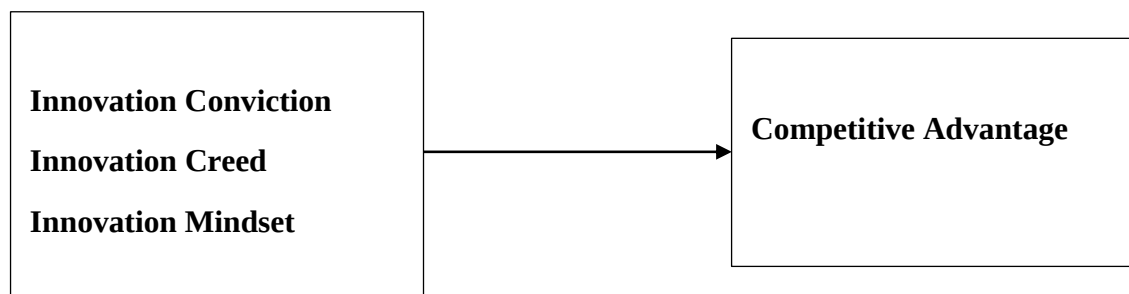


Fig. 1: Relationship between innovation attributes of female entrepreneurs and competitive advantage

Source: Researcher's construction (2024)

Figure 1 shows that there is the possibility that the innovation attributes can have positive correlation with competitiveness. This will be validated in this study.

Empirical Review

Lai et al. (2010) embarked on an assessment concerning the impact of innovation on the prosperity of female entrepreneurs in Malaysia. The adopted methodology comprised a survey research design, with questionnaires serving as the primary instrument administered to the chosen respondents. The amassed data underwent analysis using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The study's outcomes indicated a correlation between innovation mindset, innovation creed, and innovation conviction with the need for achievement among female entrepreneurs within the study locale. The conclusion drawn emphasized the necessity for entrepreneurs to embrace innovation to ensure the success of their ventures. Ojo et al. (2017) conducted an analysis to ascertain the effect of innovation on entrepreneurial success. The researchers employed both questionnaires and interviews to gather data from 216 respondents. The data were subjected to correlation and regression analysis, revealing a significant positive relationship between innovation and financial performance in business. The conclusion of their study pointed out that the competitiveness of a firm is contingent on the proprietor's creativity and innovative prowess. However, while their study concentrated on competitiveness, the current study pivots towards examining the survival of women-owned businesses, specifically through parameters of market share and business reputation.

Omolekan and Alli, (2020) assessed the impact of innovation on women-owned enterprises' survival in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. The study's objectives are to ascertain how market share is affected by innovative products and services and investigate how process innovation affects a company's reputation. A standardized questionnaire was given to women company owners, and a multistage sampling technique was employed to determine the sample size. Ordinary least squares regression was used to evaluate the data, and the results showed that process innovation has a large impact on business reputation and product/service innovation has a big impact on market share. The statistical importance of all variables analyzed leads the study to the conclusion that inventive actions are statistically relevant for the survival of women-owned firms. Abrar et al (2021) investigates what drives Indian women entrepreneurs to lead prosperous enterprises and support economic growth. The study found nine important predictors of business success using factor analysis on data from 80 female entrepreneurs. The results point to the necessity of ongoing

initiatives to support and collaborate with female entrepreneurs while creating laws to advance women in the business sector. In order for women to continue to succeed in business, they must also change with the times.

Fazal, et al (2022) examined the impact of entrepreneur' competences on the competitive edge of small businesses in Malaysia is examined in this study. In Peninsular Malaysia, quantitative data was gathered from 300 randomly chosen respondents using a cross-sectional research approach. According to the study, relational competency had a negative impact on competitive advantage, but organizational and commitment abilities had a large beneficial impact. Policymakers and socio-developmental organizations in Malaysia can benefit greatly from these findings in terms of promoting micro-entrepreneurship and reducing poverty among lower-class populations. Hasniati, et al (2023) looked at how sociocultural variables, contextual factors, and personality traits affect women's business decisions in Makassar City. Using a mixed-approaches methodology, the study included three key informants chosen by purposive sampling and collected 382 respondents from a community of 8,756 individuals. AMOS was used to examine structural equation modeling (SEM), and descriptive analysis was done on the qualitative data. The findings show that contextual factors have a substantial impact on entrepreneurial decisions and personality factors have a considerable impact on the traits of female entrepreneurs. These results demonstrate how crucial leadership, future orientation, drive for achievement, adaptability, and innovation are to fostering economic transformation and family sustainability.

Ahmad (2024) assessed the influence of innovative products on the achievement of female entrepreneur in Saudi Arabia. Data was gathered quantitatively by means of survey questionnaires from 256 female entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia. The analyses were done with PLS-SEM and SmartPLS. The findings show that product innovation generally has a favorable impact on female entrepreneurs' plans for their businesses. The report offers actionable advice for the Saudi government and female entrepreneurs alike, outlining topics for further research and offering legislative changes to provide long-term assistance to female entrepreneurs. Maziriri, et al (2024) explored how believing in innovation (conviction), having an innovative way of thinking (mindset), and valuing innovation (creed) influence the ambition (need for achievement) and success of female entrepreneurs in South Africa. It also examines how business startup education affects this relationship. The study surveyed 304 women entrepreneurs and found that these innovation factors all contribute positively to their ambition, and when combined with business education, lead to even greater success. Interestingly, the education also strengthens the connection between ambition and success.

4. METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey research design was employed in the study. The population of the study comprises female-owned SMEs in Delta State, Nigeria. Multi-stage sampling was used to select female-owned SMEs. First stratified sampling was done. The female entrepreneurs were grouped into the three senatorial districts in Delta State. One local government from each of the 3 senatorial districts was purposively selected. They include Ughelli North LGA from Delta Central senatorial district, Oshimili North LGA from Delta North senatorial district and Warri South LGA from Delta South senatorial district. Consequently, snowball sampling technique was used to identify a total of 141 female-owned SMEs. The breakdown of the female-owned SMEs across the three LGAs include Oshimili North- 45, Ughelli North- 46, and Warri South- 50.

The main data collection tool was the questionnaire. The technique for collecting the data was snow ball sampling technique. The questionnaire was administered online. The respondents were made to refer other female-owned SMEs to the researcher. The structured questionnaire consists of two sections labelled A and B. Section A deals with demographic constructs, while section B deals with the dependent and independent variables. In all the sections, the respondents were required to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statements. The statement in the questionnaire is rated based on the 5-point Likert scale measurement such as strongly agree (5), agree (4), undecided (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1). The respective values represent the weight of each of the scales. They were constructed based on their conceptualization in the reviewed literature. To ensure that the questionnaire was valid and reliable for this study, the questionnaire was presented to the researcher's experts. This was to ensure face and content validity. He reviewed and criticized the items in the questionnaire. This has helped in the modification of the statements in questionnaire. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse the data, Frequency and percentages used for the demography of respondents while Regression analysis was to test the hypotheses.

5. RESULTS

104 responses were recorded from the online questionnaire that was administered. This made up 74% response rate. Table 1 shows the demographic distribution of the respondents.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

S/N	Variable	Attribute	Frequency	Percent%
1	Business category	Hospitality	14	13.5
		Healthcare	17	16.3
		Fastfood	13	12.5
		Telecome	23	22.1
		Garment	9	8.7
		Private education	12	11.5
		Others	16	15.4
		Total	104	100.0
2	Years in operation	0.5 years	17	16.3
		6-10 years	39	37.5
		10 above years	48	46.2
		Total	104	100.0
4	Position	Proprietor	42	40.4
		Manager	51	49.0
		Admin	11	10.6
		Total	104	100.0
5	Weekly sales	N0-150,000	9	8.7
		N151-200,000	50	48.1
		N201,000-N250,000	30	28.8
		N251,000 and above	15	14.4

			104	100.0
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Source: Fieldwork 2024

Table 1 shows that 22% of the respondents were telecom business operators. This was followed by healthcare (16%) and others (15%). This distribution indicates that the respondents cuts across various sectors of the economy, and that the study was not streamlined to a particular sector. Hence it provides a more diverse view of the business operators. Those who have operated their business for 10 years and above had the highest participation (46%). This was followed by those who had operated for 6 to 10 years (38%). The distribution shows that the respondents were experienced business operators having operated for a reasonable number of years. Moreover, 49% of the respondents were managers, 40% were proprietors, while 11% were assistant managers. This distribution indicates that respondents were the true targeted individuals for the study. Furthermore, 48% of the respondents had an average weekly sales revenue of N151,000 to N200,000.. This was followed by those who earned N201,000 to N250,000. This further indicated that the respondents had a moderate weekly sales revenue.

Description of Variables

The different items used in measuring the research variables were described using mean. The mean scores were calculated by assigning 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 to strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree and strongly disagree respectively and later divided by the total number of respondents. In interpreting the mean score, it is assumed that values that are above 3 show that majority of the respondents “agreed” with the statements while values that fall below 3 show that majority of the respondents “disagreed” with the statements. The results are presented in Tables 4.1 to 4.7.

Regression Analysis Results

In this section, multiple regression analysis was performed to establish the relationship between innovation and competitive advantage of female entrepreneurs in Delta State. The results are shown in the Tables below:

Table 2: Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	8.562	1.904		4.497	.000
1 Innovation conviction	.335	.144	.189	2.320	.022
Innovation creed	.624	.125	.488	4.992	.000
Innovation mindset	.222	.143	.141	1.547	.125

$R = 0.684$; $R^2 = 0.469$; $Adjusted\ R^2 = 0.453$; $F\text{-statistic} = 29.164$; $Sig. = 0.000$

a. Dependent Variable: Competitive advantage

Table 2 above shows that when the innovation variables were regressed on competitive advantage, a coefficient of determination (R^2) value of 0.469 was obtained, with Adjusted R^2 of 0.453. This indicates that the innovation variables jointly explain 46.9% of the variation in the competitive advantage of the female entrepreneurs. The F-statistic of 29.164 is significant at $p < 0.05$. This means that there is a statistically significant relationship between innovation variables and

competitive advantage as a group. Table 2 also reveals that competitive advantage is significantly related to two innovation attributes such as innovation conviction ($\beta = 0.335$; $p = 0.022 < 0.05$), and innovation creed ($\beta = 0.624$; $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Also, competitive advantage is not significantly related to innovation mindset ($\beta = 0.222$; $p = 0.125 > 0.05$).

Hypotheses Testing and Discussion of Findings

The study found that a significant positive relationship exists between innovation conviction ($\beta = 0.335$; $p = 0.022 < 0.05$, $t = 2.320$) and the competitive advantage of female entrepreneurs in Delta State. The null hypothesis that states that "female entrepreneurs' innovation conviction does not significantly affect their competitive advantage in Delta State" was therefore rejected. This underscores the pivotal role of innovation in influencing the competitive advantage of female entrepreneurs. This finding is consistent with those of Lai et al (2010), who found that innovation conviction significantly enhances the competitive advantage of small businesses by fostering unique value propositions and differentiating them in the market. Similarly, Omolekan and Alli (2020). highlighted that a strong conviction in innovation is crucial for women entrepreneur survival.

The finding of a significant relationship between innovation creed ($\beta = 0.624$; $p = 0.000 < 0.05$, $t = 4.992$) and the competitive advantage of female entrepreneurs in Delta State, indicates the importance of innovation creed in influencing competitive advantage. The null hypothesis that states that "female entrepreneurs' innovation creed has no significant relationship with their competitive advantage in Delta State" was rejected. This result aligns with the research conducted by Maziriri et al (2024), which demonstrated that a strong innovation creed is critical for maintaining and enhancing the competitive edge of entrepreneurs by encouraging continuous improvement and adaptation. Moreover, Hasniati et al (2023) asserted that a well-established innovation creed promotes a culture of innovation within organizations, which is essential for achieving and sustaining competitive advantage.

The finding that there is a non-significant relationship between innovation mindset ($\beta = 0.222$; $p = 0.125 > 0.05$, $t = 1.547$) and the competitive advantage of female entrepreneurs in Delta State, indicates that although the innovation mindset can positively influence the competitive advantage, the effect is not significant. The null hypothesis that states that "female entrepreneurs' innovation mindset has no significant connection with their competitive advantage in Delta State" was not rejected. This suggests that while having an innovative mindset is beneficial, it may not independently drive competitive advantage without other supportive innovation attributes. This finding is supported by the work of Tidd, Bessant, and Pavitt (2001), who noted that an innovative mindset alone is insufficient to guarantee competitive advantage without the necessary implementation and support structures. Additionally, Dyer, Gregersen, and Christensen (2009) found that an innovative mindset needs to be complemented with strategic actions and resources to significantly impact competitive advantage

Theoretical Implications

The study's findings reinforce the RBV by demonstrating that innovation conviction and innovation creed are valuable resources that significantly contribute to the competitive advantage of female entrepreneurs. According to RBV, resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable provide a sustainable competitive advantage. The positive relationship between these

innovation attributes and competitive advantage suggests that innovation conviction and creed are critical resources that female entrepreneurs can leverage to achieve a superior market position. This validates the RBV's assertion that internal resources are crucial for competitive success.

The results of the study align with the Diffusion of Innovation theory, which posits that the adoption of innovative practices leads to competitive benefits. The significant impact of innovation conviction and innovation creed on competitive advantage suggests that the diffusion of these innovative attributes within female-owned enterprises is essential for gaining a competitive edge. This implies that the process of innovation diffusion—whereby innovation is communicated and adopted over time among members of a social system—is critical for the success of female entrepreneurs. The non-significant impact of innovation mindset, however, indicates that merely adopting an innovative mindset is not enough without actual implementation and support mechanisms. The study also extends the Entrepreneurial Orientation theory by highlighting the specific innovation attributes that contribute to competitive advantage in the context of female entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurial Orientation theory emphasizes the importance of innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking in entrepreneurial success. The findings that innovation conviction and innovation creed are significant predictors of competitive advantage suggest that these dimensions of innovation are particularly important for female entrepreneurs. This implies that fostering a strong entrepreneurial orientation, with a focus on these innovation attributes, can enhance competitive performance. The study thus adds to the body of knowledge by specifying which aspects of innovation are most impactful in the entrepreneurial process

Practical Implications

The significant positive relationship between innovation conviction and competitive advantage suggests that female entrepreneurs should focus on developing and strengthening their conviction towards innovation. Practical steps can include continuous learning and training on innovative practices, seeking mentorship from successful innovators, and creating an organizational culture that values and rewards innovative thinking. By fostering a strong innovation conviction, female entrepreneurs can enhance their ability to differentiate their businesses and achieve a sustainable competitive advantage.

The finding that innovation creed significantly influences competitive advantage highlights the need for female entrepreneurs to cultivate a strong belief and commitment to innovation within their enterprises. This can be achieved by setting clear innovation goals, allocating resources specifically for innovation activities, and establishing processes that support the implementation of innovative ideas. Entrepreneurs can also benefit from creating a shared vision of innovation among their team members, which can drive collective efforts towards innovative outcomes. This commitment to innovation creed can help businesses remain competitive in dynamic markets.

Although the study found a non-significant relationship between innovation mindset and competitive advantage, it suggests that having an innovative mindset alone is insufficient without supportive actions and resources. Female entrepreneurs should adopt a holistic approach to innovation by not only fostering an innovative mindset but also ensuring that it is backed by practical implementation strategies and adequate resources. This can include investing in research and development, collaborating with other innovative firms, and continuously evaluating and improving innovation processes. By integrating an innovative mindset with tangible support mechanisms, entrepreneurs can more effectively translate innovative ideas into competitive

advantages

6. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the relationship between innovation attributes and the competitive advantage of female entrepreneurs in Delta State, with a focus on innovation conviction, innovation creed, and innovation mindset. The findings revealed that both innovation conviction and innovation creed significantly enhance the competitive advantage of female entrepreneurs.. However, the study also found that innovation mindset did not have a significant impact on competitive advantage, suggesting that while beneficial, an innovative mindset alone is not sufficient to achieve competitive superiority without practical implementation.

The study's findings have significant theoretical implications. The validation of the RBV theory underscores the importance of internal resources, such as innovation conviction and creed, in achieving a sustainable competitive advantage. Additionally, the support for the diffusion of innovation theory emphasizes the necessity of adopting and effectively diffusing innovative practices within enterprises to maintain competitiveness. Furthermore, the study extends the entrepreneurial orientation theory by identifying the specific innovation attributes that contribute to competitive advantage, thereby providing a nuanced understanding of how innovation drives entrepreneurial success.

In practical terms, the results suggest that female entrepreneurs should prioritize developing a strong conviction towards innovation and cultivate a robust innovation creed to enhance their competitive advantage. This can be achieved through continuous learning, setting clear innovation goals, and fostering a supportive organizational culture. Moreover, while having an innovative mindset is beneficial, it must be complemented with strategic actions and resource allocation to be effective. By adopting a holistic approach to innovation, female entrepreneurs in Delta State, can better position themselves for long-term success and market differentiation. Future research should explore additional factors that may influence the effectiveness of innovation and further examine the mechanisms through which these innovation attributes translate into competitive advantages.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following are suggested:

1. Female entrepreneurs should invest in continuous learning and development programs focused on innovation. This includes attending workshops, seminars, and training sessions that enhance their understanding and application of innovative practices.
2. Establishing clear and measurable innovation goals can help entrepreneurs stay focused and committed to innovation. These goals should align with the overall business strategy and be regularly reviewed and updated.
3. Ensuring that adequate resources—such as time, money, and personnel—are dedicated to innovation activities is essential. This can include setting aside a portion of the budget for research and development and investing in new technologies.

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