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**Influence of Innovation on Performance of Small and Medium-Sized  
Enterprises in Kinshasa City**

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## **Influence of Innovation on Performance of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Kinshasa City**

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### **Abstract:**

#### **Introduction:**

This study investigates the influence of innovation on the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Kinshasa City. In an increasingly competitive business environment, innovation is considered a critical driver of efficiency, growth, and sustainability. Despite the recognized importance of SMEs in economic development, limited empirical evidence exists on how innovation affects their performance within the Kinshasa context, thus necessitating this research.

#### **Methodology:**

The study adopted a descriptive research design targeting 290 SMEs, with 1,643

respondents comprising directors, chief executive officers, financial managers, and marketing managers. A stratified random sampling technique, guided by the Taro Yamane formula, yielded a sample size of 322 respondents. Data were collected using structured questionnaires administered both electronically and physically. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were employed, with results presented in tabular form. A regression model was used to examine the relationship between innovation and SME performance.

### **Findings:**

The results revealed that innovation has a positive and statistically significant effect on SME performance. The regression analysis produced an  $R^2$  value of 0.399, indicating that 39.9% of the variation in performance is explained by innovation. Additionally, the model was statistically significant ( $F = 189.685$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and the beta coefficient ( $\beta = 0.612$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) confirmed a strong positive relationship between innovation and performance.

### **Conclusion:**

The study concludes that innovation is a key determinant of SME competitiveness and growth in Kinshasa City. It recommends increased investment in innovative practices and supportive policy frameworks to enhance SME performance.

**Keywords:** *Innovation, SMEs, Performance, Kinshasa City, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises*

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## **1. Introduction**

The need for innovation is critical in enabling organizations to navigate through the complex competitive environment. Innovation helps firms to create and maintain a competitive advantage by enabling firms to differentiate themselves in the market (Soomro et al., 2021). The need for innovation has become increasingly important in the highly globalized market that is characterized by intense competition. Innovation enables firms to adapt rapidly in the changing market conditions and the changes in the customer preferences, ensuring that the firms ensure sustainability in the highly evolving markets (Singh et al., 2021). Furthermore, innovation enables firms to refine their operations and increase operational efficiency which is critical for better organizational performance. Firms realize better performances through innovative techniques because innovation enables them to reduce waste, leading to increased savings which is critical for better financial performance.

According to Agustina and Arganata (2023), innovation is the implementation of new techniques in an organizations' practices with an aim of improving performance. Innovation may entail restructuring how the organization's operations are done and how decisions are carried out. Innovation in an organization can take several forms such as restructuring of the operations use of new management practices and change of the organizational structure. Singh et al. (2022) identifies several forms of innovations such as product innovation, new methods of production, new markets, new supply sources, and new ways of business organization. Innovation enables a firm to create a competitive edge in the market by gaining access to non-tradeable knowledge which is critical for ensuring customer satisfaction.

Innovation has helped firms in different sectors to compete effectively by adapting to the changing business environment. For instance, small and medium enterprises have leveraged on innovations to ensure they remain relevant in the face of changing customer needs (Issau et al., 2022). The innovation pursued by SMEs have enabled them to contribute effectively towards economic growth and development. A healthy SMEs contributes towards economic growth through job creation, generation of higher production volumes and contributes towards exports. SMEs have also been critical in introducing innovations in the markets which is critical towards better customer satisfaction.

SMEs in the USA have leveraged on new innovations to create sustainable business models that respond to the specific needs in the market. For instance, the use of salesforce in the USA SMEs have enabled them to increase sales through better management of cashflows (Demirkan et al., 2022). These firms can explore new sales channels that align with the specific needs in the market. In the UK, SMEs have leveraged on several innovations to cut costs and increase their revenues. For instance, the use of simplified VAT filing process helps firms to reduce the costs of filing tax (Almeida & Wasim, 2023). The use of these paperless tax filing is less time-consuming, allow the businesses to focus more on growth. The firms have leveraged on these innovations to focus on product innovations and market expansions.

In Nigeria, SMEs are critical in job creation and economic diversification thus dealing with the issues of unemployment. The SMEs in Nigeria have used a wide range of innovations to improve

their operations and increase efficiency in operations (Odio et al., 2021). For instance, SMEs in different sectors have leveraged on digital payment solutions such as Flutterwave to receive and make payments. Besides, SMEs in the agricultural such as Farmcrowdy have leveraged on new technologies to revolutionizing the Agribusiness sector. Farmcrowdy can connect small scale farmers with the available investors in the market, thus improving agribusiness productivity (Okoli, Nwosu, & Okechukwu, 2021). In South Africa, SMEs leverage on innovations to improve customer satisfaction and increase sales. For instance, SMEs are leveraging on digital marketing strategies such as SEO to increase online visibility. For instance, Colley flowers has witnessed an 18 % increase in online visibility through their digital ads' strategies (Matekenya & Moyo, 2022). These strategies help the firms to remain competitive while at the same time differentiating themselves from their competitors.

The SMEs in Congo have been critical in economic growth, job creation and driving innovation in the country. A recent program by the World Bank injecting \$100 million in the SMEs has supported over 6,000 new SMEs and created at least 15000 jobs in Kinshasa and Goma (Avouba, Douniam, & Ondze, 2024). These SMEs have been critical drivers to the economic growth and development in Congo through their innovative business models that are focus on the local needs. The use of innovation in the economy helps these businesses to overcome the institutional failures that have plagued the business environment in Congo. Importantly, the SMEs in Congo have been identified as critical for poverty reduction, economic development, and job creation (Kalumendo, 2022). In this regard, innovation has been identified as a critical tool in enabling the SMEs to achieve their goals of economic growth and development. Consequently, SMEs have leveraged on various innovations to keep up with the market needs and stay relevant in the highly changing competitive landscape.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The SMEs in Kinshasa operate in a vibrant and dynamic environment that makes it impossible for any firm to survive without innovations. The SMEs are critical in driving innovations, economic growth, and job creation across all sectors of the economy (Mwenga, 2021). Through the World Bank financed programs, SMEs in Congo have made significant innovative breakthrough sin agriculture, finance, healthcare, and education, enabling them to transform the business environment in the country. The SMEs have leveraged in innovative solutions to address the local challenges and enable them meet the specific needs in the market. Some of the innovations used by SMEs in Congo include Shoolap, which serves about 400 schools. Other innovative products such Sivi Malukisa produces peanut butter and chili sauces from natural ingredients.

Despite the huge role of innovation in the SMEs in Congo, they are not enough to meet the real market demand. The few innovations available are only concentrated in the agricultural and the fintech sector (Kambana, 2025). Other sectors such as manufacturing, mining and trade have very limited use of innovation, implying that the country is still not leveraging on innovations in SMEs. Some of the studies have revealed that innovation is only manifest in just few sectors, at only 19%, leading to a very huge gap. Whereas several studies have focused on the innovation in other African countries such as Estébanez, Grande, and Espada (2022) who focused on Kenya, there is limited research on the role of innovation om organizational performance in Kinshasa. Another study by Bekata and Kero (2025) focused on the role of innovation strategies on the performance

of SMEs in Ethiopian banking sector. These studies were done in other countries, creating a research gap which this study seeks to fill by focusing on the Influence of Innovation on Performance of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Kinshasa City.

## **Theoretical Review**

### **Resource Based View (RBV)**

This model was introduced by Penrose in 1959 and sought to address how firms can leverage on their resources to create a competitive advantage in the market (Lubis, 2022). This theory sought to explain how firms can use their unique resources to grow and diversify in the market. The study by Penrose explained that internal managerial resources can be a driver or hinderance for organization's growth and expansion in the market. The theory was later expanded later several researchers, on the backdrop pf diversification and firm expansions (Sugiarno & Novita, 2022). This theory identifies the role of firm-specific resources such as managerial competences, customer relationship, innovation, and brand reputation. The theory also states that a firm's resources is not same as the competencies or capabilities; a firm will therefore need access to resources and ability to ensure its resources are utilized effectively. This theory states that SMEs can achieve competitive advantage by leveraging on resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-replaceable (Lukovszki et al, 2021). In the context of SMEs in Kinshasa, firms can leverage on strategic capabilities such as human capital, technological resources, and knowledge of the market to develop innovations that respond to the market.

This theory is used in the study to explain how form scan leverage on market innovation to create and sustain a competitive advantage. Critical to this theory is the role of organization's resources such as managerial competences, human resource, and knowledge of the market to innovate (Kambana, 2025). This theory identifies the need for market understanding and the use of internal resources to differentiate SMEs in Kinshasa. The use of this theory will help the SMEs to innovate and create superior value to their customers which is essential for sustainable performance. The use of unique resources to drive innovation and respond to the market needs will enable the SMEs to achieve better performance in the wake of intense competition from other global layers in the Kinshasa market.

### **Empirical Review**

Studies have found that innovation has a positive impact on performance in different contexts. For instance, Yusuff et al. (2022) investigated the influence of innovation on the performance of manufacturing firms in Malaysian. The study focused on 150 SMEs operating in the Malaysian manufacturing sector where data was obtained through a survey. Multiple regression was used in the data analysis whereby the results were presented in charts and graphs. SPSS was used in the data analysis where both quantitative and qualitative techniques were used. The results revealed that innovation has a positive impact on the performance of SMEs in Malaysia. However, this study was conducted in Malaysian manufacturing sector which is different from the SMEs in Kinshasa. Consequently, the results from this research cannot be used to make a generalized conclusion on the current study.

Baporikar and Shikokola (2020) investigated the influence of innovation on SME performance in Namibia. Specifically, the study focused on how improving innovation adoption boosts the performance of SMEs in Khoma region, Namibia. The study's primary data was collected using open and close-ended questionnaires. The questionnaires were given out to SME owners using a purposive sampling method. The study used content analysis to understand the key theme of the study. The findings noted that innovation is an important element of SMEs' performance. Innovative SMEs were noted to have better performance and better growth. The main limitation of this study is that it focused on SMEs in Namibia, which have a different economic and social environment compared to Kinshasa. Consequently, the findings of the study cannot be generalized in the context of SMEs in Kinshasa.

Herlinawati and Machmud (2020) explored the effects of innovation on SMEs performance in Indonesia. The study was motivated by the critical role of SMEs in Indonesian economy. An explanatory quantitative survey method was used to target about 230 000 SMEs in the manufacturing sector in Indonesia. A sample size of 345 respondents was obtained through random sampling method, where a Likert scale questionnaire was employed. The results showed innovation has a positive impact on SMEs performance. The results further revealed that SMEs can improve their performance through product innovation, process innovation and distribution innovation. The main limitation of this study is that it focused on market innovation only and did not consider the other types of innovations, which are equally important. Consequently, the results from this study cannot be used to make generalized conclusions on the research topic.

Hazem and Yunhong (2020) studied the impacts of innovation capabilities in SMEs' performance. Specifically, the study focused on product, process, marketing, and organizational innovation and their impacts on performance. The study focused on Chinese firms whereby a qualitative research design was employed. In-depth interviews were used targeting 8 managers of SMEs in the manufacturing sector in China. The results revealed that product and market innovation have a positive impact on SME performance in China. It was also noted that process and organizational innovation has a positive impact on operational performance. The study also noted that the main elements of innovation capabilities in a firm include sufficient organizational resources, entrepreneurial orientation, and business market information. The main limitation of this study is that it was done in China which has a different economic and social environment compared to Kinshasa. Consequently, the results from this study cannot be used to make a generalized conclusion on the research topic.

Muparangi and Makudza (2020) assessed how innovation influences the performance of SMEs in the informal sector in Zimbabwe. The study employed the open theory of innovation while the data was obtained using structured questionnaires. The research targeted 174 SMEs in the informal sector operating in different industries. A causal quantitative method was employed in the data collection. The data was analyzed using SPSS whereby regression models were used to show the associations between the variables. The study noted that SMEs innovating can be achieved through product innovation or marketing innovation on the informal sector. The study also noted that product innovation, process innovation and marketing innovation have a very strong impact on performance. Organizational innovation was also noted to have very strong impact on SME performance in the informal sector. It was concluded that process innovation, marketing innovation and process product innovation are critical for the performance of SMEs in Zimbabwe.

However, the results from this study were done in Zimbabwe which has a positive effect regulatory and economic environment compared to Congo. As such, the results from this study cannot be used to make generalized conclusions on the case of SME innovation in Kinshasa.

## 2. Methodology

This study applied a descriptive research design to help the researcher answer the question of what? Which? Why? About the study, in this case what was the effect of innovation on performance of small and medium-sized enterprises in Kinshasa City? The study targeted 290 SMEs, with unit of observation as 1643 including directors, financial managers CEOs, and marketing managers. The study applied stratified-random sampling along Taro Yamane formula to arrive at a sample size of 322. Data for the study was collected using questionnaires that were administered both electronically and in person. Once data was collected it was analyzed through descriptive and inferential analysis and results presented in tables. Model for the study was follows:  $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + e$ . Where Y represents performance of the SMEs,  $\beta_0$  represents constant  $\beta_1$  represents coefficient for the innovation and  $X_1$  is the innovation while e is the error term in the model.

## 3. Results and Discussion

Response Rate: a total of 288 participants returned fully filled questionnaires representing a response of 89.5%.

### Descriptive statistics on Innovation

Descriptive statistics on innovation showed that the mean range was between 3.56 and 3.80 which demonstrated that participants agreed with the statements on innovation, for instance participants agreed that “A continuous product improvement is crucial for the success of our business” as shown by a mean score of 3.58 , in addition participants agreed with the statement “ Our SMEs focus on creating unique and distinctive for its products against the competitor” as shown by a mean of 3.56 , further participants agreed that “Our company is open to integrating new technological features that enhances products efficiency and quality” as shown by mean of 3.57 . Lastly participants agreed that “Our company emphasizes on research and development to create competitive products” as shown by mean of 3.80.

*Table 1: Descriptive statistics on Innovation*

Statement on Innovation	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
A continuous product improvement is crucial for the success of our business	288	1	5	3.58	1.056
Our SMEs focus on creating unique and distinctive for its products against the competitor	288	1	5	3.56	1.143
Our company is open to integrating new technological features that enhances products efficiency and quality.	288	1	5	3.57	1.060

Our company emphasizes on research and development to create competitive products	288	1	5	3.80	1.017
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### Descriptive statistics on Performance

Results of the descriptive statistics on performance showed a mean range of between 3.73 and 3.84 which implied that participants agreed with statement on performance of small and medium-sized enterprises in Kinshasa city, for instance participants agreed that “Our net profits have increased in past few years”, as shown by a mean of 3.83. In addition, participants agreed that “Our business have increased its market share consistently” as showed by mean of 3.83. Besides, participants agreed that, “Our business has increasing sales revenues growth in recent past” as shown by mean of 3.73. Lastly, participants agreed that “The number of employees in our organization has grown increasingly in the past few years” as showed by mean of 3.84.

*Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on performance*

Statement on performance	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Our net profits have increased in past few years	288	1	5	3.83	.882
Our business have increased its market share consistently	288	1	5	3.83	1.025
Our business has increasing sales revenues growth in recent past	288	1	5	3.73	1.030
The number of employees in our organization has grown increasingly in the past few years.	288	1	5	3.84	.902

### Inferential Analysis

Results of regression revealed an R-square of 0.399 which implied that 39.9% of the changes in performance was as a result of innovation. Results also showed an F-ratio of 189.685 and a p-values of 0.000 which implied that the statistical model was statistically significant. Finally results of regression showed a beta coefficient of 0.612 and a p-value of 0.000 which implied that innovation had a statistically significant influence on performance of small and medium-sized enterprises in Kinshasa city. The study findings are concurrent with previous research, for instance, Yusuff et al. (2022) found a positive link between innovation and SME performance in Malaysia’s manufacturing sector, reinforcing the current study’s results though in a different economic setting. Similarly, Baporikar and Shikokola (2020) observed that innovation adoption improves SME growth in Namibia, supporting the notion that innovative firms outperform non-innovative ones. Herlinawati and Machmud (2020) also reported that various forms of innovation particularly product and process—significantly boost SME performance in Indonesia. Additionally, Hazem and Yunhong (2020) established that product, process, and organizational innovations positively influence SME operational outcomes in China.

**Table3: Regression between Innovation and Performance**

Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.631 <sup>a</sup>	.399	.397	.67344		
ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	86.027	1	86.027	189.685	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	129.709	286	.454		
	Total	215.736	287			
Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.584	.166		9.541	.000
	Innovation	.612	.044	.631	13.773	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Performance of SMEs						

a. Dependent Variable: Performance of SMEs

b. Predictors: (Constant), Innovation

#### 4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that innovation plays a significant and positive role in enhancing the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises in Kinshasa, as evidenced by the strong statistical relationship. It is recommended that SME owners and managers in Kinshasa invest more in developing and adopting innovative strategies such as product, process, and organizational innovation to improve productivity and sustainability. Additionally, government agencies and development partners should provide supportive policies, funding, and training programs that foster an innovation-driven SME sector.

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