



UWS Academic Portal

Trust and West African exporting SME networks

Omeihe, Kingsley Obi; Amoako, Isaac Oduro; Gustafsson, Veronika; Khan, Mohammad Saud

Published in:

Proceedings of the Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship Conference 2019

Published: 14/11/2019

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication on the UWS Academic Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Omeihe, K. O., Amoako, I. O., Gustafsson, V., & Khan, M. S. (2019). Trust and West African exporting SME networks: uncovering contextual dimensions. In *Proceedings of the Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship Conference 2019* Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship. <https://virtual.oxfordabstracts.com/#/event/public/877/submission/94>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the UWS Academic Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact pure@uws.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Trust and West African SME Networks

Kingsley Obi Omeihe

Isaac Oduro Amoako

Veronika Gustafsson

Mohammad Saud Khan

From our viewpoint, the goal of this paper is to expose the notion that very little is known about trust and SME networks from a West African perspective. With this in mind, gaining rich and well-grounded insights into this research phenomenon assumes paramount significance. In particular, the unique and distinct applicability of this study lies in its contextual dimension. Thus, in exploring new frontiers and entrepreneurial places, this paper presents a fundamental challenge to prevalent perspectives on trust and SME networks which have been centred on a western model approach.

Aim: This paper makes a case for the examination of trust based on the notion that trust differs across contexts. This is important as a study of this nature provides a basis for uncovering new aspects of trust and SME research. Hence, this paper aims to investigate the role of trust in West African SME networks.

Methodology: This paper draws on an interpretivist approach in response to calls for more qualitative research on entrepreneurship. The empirical component is focused on multiple case studies of 42 SME owner-managers drawn through purposive sampling. The choice of the selected respondents was aimed at comparing perceptions and experiences as it relates to their particular environment. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews held at cross-border markets. Thematic analysis was used in analysing, identifying and reporting patterns within data. This was essential as it ensured the interpretation of various aspects of the data in rich detail. Lastly, the consideration for limiting bias was minimised through reflexivity of being on guard about the certain preconceptions and assumptions introduced into the study. This involved daily introspections, note-keeping, observing market relationships and informal discussions.

Contribution: Central to this paper, is its valuable contribution which highlights the importance of trust in the activities of West African SME networks. In this light, networks were found to be a source of complementary resources for SMEs and they were developed based on ties to family/kinship, religion, ethnicity and trade associations. Thus, SME owner-managers were found to gain a plethora of benefits such as access to credit, market information, and dispute resolution. In this vein, this paper provides a sophisticated contextual approach to uncovering trust and supports the growing importance of African research on SME networks. **Implications for policy:** This paper provides more first-hand policy implications. The case study of West African SMEs highlights the importance of trust and network relationships, especially in contexts where the local actors may not be able to depend on formal legal institutions. In this vein, future policy formulations should acknowledge that SMEs play an important role in West African development. Hence, these benefits must be properly harnessed. Further, a major empirical finding revealed that all the respondents interviewed for this study expressed

concerns about West African formal institutions. Thus, it becomes expedient that policy formulations must address the inefficiencies across formal institutions. Implications for practice: The practical implication of this paper demonstrates that SMEs were willing to draw on trust-based network relationships in their exporting activities, especially as it relates to contexts characterised by weak and inefficient formal institutions. The paper also indicates that SMEs operating within developing market contexts would benefit from the use of networks in bridging their psychic distance. Hence, the role of trust is found to have a great influence in enhancing the activities of West African SME