

ROLE OF NETWORKING AND PARTNERSHIPS IN ENHANCING BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES FOR TOURISM ENTREPRENEURS IN JALINGO METROPOLIS, TARABA STATE, NIGERIA

¹Dr Olabosinde Samuel Taiwo; ²Mr Akintunde Sunday Emmanuel and ³Iwuzor Odili Markanthy, Ph.D

¹ Department of Business Administration Federal University, Wukari. Taraba State. Nigeria

²Departement of Business Administration

University of Abuja, Abuja, Nigeria

¹olabosinde@yahoo.com. Telephone: +2348034934134

²sundayakintunde@yahoo.com

³iwuzor.odili@uniabuja.edu.ng;.

ABSTRACT

Tourism entrepreneurship plays a vital role in economic growth, particularly in regions with abundant cultural and natural attractions. Despite Jalingo Metropolis' proximity to major tourist destinations, the sector remains underdeveloped due to challenges such as poor infrastructure, limited market access, and inadequate stakeholder collaboration. This study examines the role of networking and partnerships in enhancing business opportunities for tourism entrepreneurs in Jalingo Metropolis. Utilizing Crompton's Push-Pull Theory, the research explores the impact of collaborative networks, public-private partnerships, financial partnerships, and market access on business sustainability. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, employing both quantitative data collection methods. The study sampled 180 respondents, including 150 tourism entrepreneurs and 30 government officials and stakeholders, selected through stratified random sampling. Data were gathered using structured questionnaires. Descriptive statistics and regression analysis were applied to analyze the relationship between networking, partnerships, and business performance. The findings reveal that frequent networking positively correlates with business growth, with 60% of engaged entrepreneurs experiencing improved market reach and revenue. Additionally, partnerships significantly enhance financial sustainability, as 70% of partnered entrepreneurs reported higher revenue growth. Market access was also found to be a critical factor in business visibility, with 55% of entrepreneurs in larger tourism networks experiencing increased bookings and customer satisfaction. The study concludes that strategic networking and partnerships are crucial for overcoming barriers in tourism entrepreneurship. Recommendations include fostering stronger industry networks, improving infrastructure, enhancing access to funding, and implementing policies that support tourism entrepreneurship. These measures will contribute to the sustainable development of the tourism sector in Jalingo Metropolis and promote regional economic growth.

Keywords: *Tourism entrepreneurship, networking, partnerships, business opportunities, sustainable development*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a globally recognized catalyst for economic growth, contributing significantly to global GDP and providing employment opportunities for millions (UNWTO, 2022). The industry offers unique entrepreneurial opportunities, particularly in regions with rich cultural heritage and natural attractions. However, in an increasingly interconnected global economy, tourism entrepreneurs face mounting challenges that demand innovative strategies for success. Strategic networking and partnerships have emerged as critical mechanisms for overcoming these challenges and fostering growth. Cooper & Hall (2020) define networking as the establishment and maintenance of relationships with stakeholders to achieve mutual benefits. In the tourism sector, these networks enable businesses to share resources, expand market reach, and drive innovation. Similarly, Ashley & Mitchell (2020) describe partnerships as collaborative arrangements that bring together businesses, governments, and organizations to pool resources and expertise, thereby enhancing operational capacities.

Sub-Saharan Africa holds immense potential for tourism due to its abundant natural resources, diverse wildlife, and cultural richness. However, the region faces significant barriers, such as inadequate infrastructure, limited financial resources, and weak networks among stakeholders (Rogerson & Visser, 2018). Networking and partnerships have proven effective in addressing these issues. Novelli (2021) emphasizes that strategic alliances in the tourism sector empower entrepreneurs by granting access to knowledge, resources, and broader markets. Such collaborations not only enhance visibility in international markets but also improve service delivery, thereby fostering business growth and sustainability.

In Nigeria, the tourism sector has shown significant potential for growth, driven by the country's rich cultural heritage, historical landmarks, and natural attractions. However, tourism entrepreneurs encounter numerous obstacles, including poor infrastructure, insufficient government support, and limited access to financing (Ekechi & Uzundu, 2021). Networking and partnerships have thus become indispensable strategies for navigating these challenges. Olaniyi & Akinwale (2020) highlight that effective networks among entrepreneurs, government agencies, and international stakeholders can unlock access to funding, training, and technical expertise, all of which are critical for success.

In Jalingo Metropolis, the capital of Taraba State, tourism entrepreneurship remains underdeveloped despite its proximity to major attractions such as the Mambilla Plateau and Gashaka-Gumti National Park. Local tourism entrepreneurs face challenges including limited market visibility, insufficient funding, and weak collaborative networks. Yusuf & Abubakar (2019) assert that business opportunities in tourism are closely tied to favorable market conditions and strategic collaborations. In Jalingo, the lack of strong partnerships among entrepreneurs, government agencies, and international tourism organizations has stymied the sector's growth. Addressing these challenges through strategic networking and partnerships could provide entrepreneurs with the resources and market access needed to capitalize on the region's tourism potential.

This study aims to explore the role of networking and partnerships in enhancing business opportunities for tourism entrepreneurs in Jalingo Metropolis. By addressing gaps in existing networks and fostering collaborations among key stakeholders, the research seeks to contribute to the sustainable growth and competitiveness of the local tourism industry.

Hypotheses of the Study

In order to guide the study, the following null hypotheses were formulated:

HO₁: Collaborative networks have no significant effect on tourism entrepreneurs in Jalingo Metropolis

HO₂: Public-private partnerships have no significant impact on tourism entrepreneurs in Jalingo Metropolis

HO₃: Financial partnerships have no significant influence on tourism entrepreneurs in Jalingo Metropolis

HO₄: Market accesses have no significant impact on tourism entrepreneurs in Jalingo Metropolis

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Concept of Networking

Networking is a fundamental aspect of business development, particularly in the tourism industry, where building relationships with stakeholders is crucial for success (Singh & Prasad, 2018). According to Morrison (2019), effective networking enhances access to market information, financial resources, and operational strategies, enabling entrepreneurs to adapt to the dynamic tourism landscape. Networking fosters knowledge sharing, enabling businesses to learn best practices and improve service quality (Zeng, 2020).

In tourism, networks with government bodies and international organizations offer avenues for funding, capacity building, and policy support, essential for small-scale entrepreneurs to overcome resource limitations (Chen & Xiao, 2016). Despite these advantages, challenges such as trust-building and goal alignment among stakeholders remain significant hurdles (Liu & Shi, 2020).

Concept of Partnership

Partnerships represent collaborative arrangements between entities working toward shared objectives. Tourism partnerships – ranging from public-private collaborations to joint ventures – play a pivotal role in resource pooling, risk-sharing, and business expansion (Alegre & Cladera, 2016). For example, partnerships with governmental agencies can enhance access to public funding and technical guidance, fostering competitive advantages for tourism entrepreneurs (Rodriguez & Williams, 2019). Additionally, partnerships promote sustainable practices by aligning business goals with community welfare and environmental conservation (Garay & Font, 2021). However, challenges such as differing objectives and trust deficits among partners underscore the need for clear communication and shared visions (Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2022).

Collaborative Networks

Collaborative networks, defined as interconnected entities working toward shared goals, are critical for tourism entrepreneurship (Smith, 2018). These networks facilitate innovation, cost reduction, and market access, enabling businesses to navigate resource constraints (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2016). For instance, tourism entrepreneurs can leverage networks to share market insights, adopt sustainable practices, and align with community needs, fostering inclusivity and environmental stewardship (Bramwell & Lane, 2019). Strong networks built on trust,

communication, and shared visions significantly enhance the competitiveness of tourism businesses (Baggio & Cooper, 2017).

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)

PPPs involve collaborative ventures between public entities and private businesses to achieve mutual benefits and community welfare. In tourism, PPPs address large-scale infrastructure needs, promote destination marketing, and provide capacity-building opportunities (Yang, Hou, & Wang, 2017). Notable examples include PPP initiatives in South Africa and Ghana that enhanced cultural and natural tourism assets, driving economic growth and community engagement (Pillay, 2015; Addison, 2017). However, ensuring equitable benefits and transparent governance remains critical to PPP success (Roehrich, Lewis, & George, 2014).

Financial Partnerships

Financial partnerships provide tourism entrepreneurs access to capital and financial expertise, enabling business growth (Roehrich, Lewis, & George, 2014). These partnerships encompass loans, equity investments, and grants that support infrastructure development, marketing, and innovation (Malhotra & Singh, 2018). For instance, tourism entrepreneurs in developing economies often rely on financial partnerships to overcome barriers to capital access (Agaba & Onwe, 2019). Challenges, such as stringent financial requirements, underscore the need for inclusive financing solutions tailored to entrepreneurs' needs (Jones & Kalu, 2020).

Market Access

Market access, the ability of businesses to connect with stakeholders and consumers, is essential for tourism entrepreneurship (Khan & Rahman, 2018). Key factors influencing market access include infrastructure, digitalization, and regulatory environments (Amankwah-Amoah, 2020). Technological advancements, such as online booking systems and social media, have revolutionized market access, enabling entrepreneurs to reach global audiences (Osei & Zormelo, 2021). However, regulatory challenges and infrastructural deficits remain barriers, particularly in developing regions (Agyeman & Mensah, 2019).

Business Opportunities

Business opportunities in tourism arise from market changes, consumer preferences, and technological advancements. Entrepreneurs who leverage local resources and heritage effectively can create unique offerings, carving out niche markets (Smith, 2015). Networking and partnerships are instrumental in identifying and capitalizing on such opportunities. Entrepreneurial skills, adaptability, and innovative thinking further enhance the ability to navigate a competitive tourism landscape (Rogerson, 2014; Falk & Hagsten, 2020).

Role of Networking and Partnerships in Business Opportunities

Networking and partnerships amplify business opportunities by providing access to resources, expanding market reach, and fostering innovation. Effective networking facilitates resource-sharing, risk mitigation, and sustainable development (Beaver & Jennings, 2019). Entrepreneurs engaged in strong networks are better equipped to adapt to industry changes and align with sustainable development goals (Jamal & Camargo, 2014; Bennett & Ayscue, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework integrates four key theories to explore the role of resources, networks, and partnerships in shaping the success of tourism entrepreneurship in Jalingo Metropolis. These theories are the Resource-Based View (RBV), Social Capital Theory, Network Theory, and their interrelations, particularly with respect to the context of tourism entrepreneurship. However, the study is underpinned by Network Theory

Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory

The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory, first conceptualized by Birger Wernerfelt (1984) and later expanded by Jay Barney (1991), asserts that a firm's competitive advantage derives from its internal resources and capabilities, rather than from external environmental factors. Barney's work identified that resources must meet specific criteria – valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) – for them to contribute to sustained competitive advantage. In tourism entrepreneurship, these internal resources can include financial capital, knowledge, human capital, and, most importantly, networks and partnerships, which act as strategic assets that differentiate successful entrepreneurs from their competitors.

In the context of tourism entrepreneurship in Jalingo, RBV highlights the importance of internal resources, specifically the ability of entrepreneurs to leverage their networks and partnerships as valuable resources. Tourism businesses can harness the power of relationships with key stakeholders, including government bodies, financial institutions, and international organizations, to secure funding, market access, and regulatory support. These networks are a source of competitive advantage, as they help businesses overcome resource constraints and access new opportunities that would otherwise be out of reach.

Despite its foundational role in understanding firm success, RBV is often criticized for its neglect of external environmental factors. The theory tends to overlook the broader market dynamics, including industry competition, macroeconomic shifts, and regulatory changes, which can significantly affect business outcomes. While RBV underscores the value of internal resources, it provides limited insights into how these resources interact with or are influenced by external market forces.

Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory, initially introduced by Pierre Bourdieu (1986), with further contributions by James Coleman (1988) and Robert Putnam (1993), posits that social networks and relationships are vital assets that enable individuals and organizations to access valuable resources. Trust, reciprocity, shared norms, and cooperation are central components of social capital, facilitating collective action and fostering economic and social prosperity. In tourism entrepreneurship, social capital can enable entrepreneurs to build connections with stakeholders, access information, share resources, and engage in joint marketing or promotional activities.

For tourism entrepreneurs in Jalingo, Social Capital Theory provides a lens to understand how local networks can provide critical resources, such as business advice, market intelligence, financial support, and opportunities for collaboration. Social relationships with fellow entrepreneurs, local governments, tourists, and community groups can facilitate knowledge sharing, increase the entrepreneur's visibility, and enhance their ability to collaborate with others

to achieve collective goals. Strong social capital enables these entrepreneurs to build a foundation of trust, enhancing business success through collaboration and joint ventures.

One limitation of Social Capital Theory is its tendency to focus on the positive aspects of social networks, often neglecting potential downsides such as exclusion or inequality within networks. Not all entrepreneurs have equal access to valuable social networks, which can lead to disparities in business opportunities. Furthermore, excessive reliance on social capital might restrict entrepreneurial innovation, as individuals or businesses could fall into the trap of group think or fail to consider new or diverse perspectives.

Network Theory

Network Theory, primarily developed through Mark Granovetter's (1973) seminal work on "The Strength of Weak Ties," explores the role of relationships in providing access to resources, information, and opportunities. Granovetter's work emphasized that both strong ties (close relationships) and weak ties (more distant connections) are crucial for business success. Further developments by Ronald Burt (1992) and Brian Uzzi (1997) highlighted the importance of structural positions within networks, such as centrality and bridging positions, which determine an actor's access to valuable resources and influence.

Network Theory is highly relevant to tourism entrepreneurship, especially in the case of Jalingo's entrepreneurs who rely on both local and external networks. Local relationships (strong ties) with governmental bodies, suppliers, and other entrepreneurs provide the trust and support necessary for daily operations. Meanwhile, external connections (weak ties), such as partnerships with international organizations, tourism boards, or cross-border collaborations, can help these entrepreneurs access wider markets, attract foreign investment, and secure global partnerships. Through strategic positioning in networks, tourism entrepreneurs can leverage a diverse array of resources to enhance business success.

Network Theory, while valuable in explaining the role of relationships in business success, is not without its criticisms. The theory lacks specificity in identifying which types of relationships are most beneficial in different contexts, and not all networks are equally advantageous. Additionally, an over-reliance on weak ties could lead to a lack of commitment or long-term stability, which may undermine the reliability of certain network relationships. Furthermore, Network Theory does not fully account for external factors, such as market competition and macroeconomic trends, which can significantly impact business outcomes, irrespective of network structure.

Among the three theories discussed, Network Theory is the most pertinent for this study. The theory provides the most comprehensive framework for understanding the dynamics of networking and partnerships in tourism entrepreneurship. By emphasizing both strong and weak ties, Network Theory captures the complex nature of relationships that tourism entrepreneurs in Jalingo rely on to secure resources, access markets, and foster innovation. The theory also highlights the importance of network positioning, which can significantly influence business success by granting entrepreneurs access to valuable information, resources, and opportunities across local, national, and international levels.

Empirical Literature Review

This section presents a review of empirical studies examining the role of business networks, partnerships, and market access in the growth and performance of tourism businesses. These studies span different geographical contexts, including developed countries, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Nigeria, offering valuable insights into the varying impacts of these factors on tourism entrepreneurship.

McDonald & Dunbar (2016) conducted a qualitative study in the United Kingdom to explore the role of business networks in tourism development. Through semi-structured interviews with 30 participants, including tourism entrepreneurs, government officials, and network facilitators, the study identified the key role of networks in market access, resource sharing, and innovation within the tourism sector. Entrepreneurs involved in networks experienced enhanced success in customer base expansion and service offerings. The study emphasized the importance of collaborative business networks in ensuring the competitiveness and sustainability of tourism businesses, especially in developed countries. The authors recommended the creation of more structured networking platforms to promote cooperation and knowledge exchange.

Harris & Morgan (2018) conducted a mixed-method study in Australia, examining the role of partnerships in boosting business opportunities for tourism entrepreneurs. Surveys and interviews were used with 150 respondents, including business owners and public officials. The study's regression analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between partnerships and business performance, particularly in financial growth, market reach, and innovation. Businesses engaged in public-private and private-private partnerships showed more growth than those operating independently. The study concluded that strategic partnerships are crucial for tourism enterprises to maintain competitiveness, advising businesses to invest in long-term partnerships for greater resource access and market penetration.

In Kenya, Njoroge & Kibera (2017) used a quantitative approach to study the impact of networking on tourism business performance. By distributing structured questionnaires to 200 tourism entrepreneurs in Nairobi and the coastal region, the study applied multiple regression analysis to examine the relationship between networking and business success. The findings showed that networking positively influenced market expansion, financial access, and operational efficiency. Entrepreneurs participating in formal networks were more likely to secure government contracts and form beneficial private sector partnerships. The study highlighted networking as a key driver of business success and recommended increased participation in networking events and industry associations.

Kiggundu & Nabatanzi (2019) explored the effect of public-private partnerships on tourism growth in Uganda, conducting a quantitative study across major tourist destinations. The study included 120 participants and utilized logistic regression analysis to assess the impact of partnerships on tourism business performance. The results revealed that public-private partnerships played a significant role in infrastructure development and marketing efforts, leading to increased tourist arrivals and improved profitability. The study concluded that fostering strong public-private collaborations is vital for sustainable tourism development, recommending the establishment of a government-led framework to encourage such partnerships.

Moyo & Phiri (2020) conducted a case study in Zimbabwe on the role of financial partnerships in enhancing tourism entrepreneurship. Through in-depth interviews with 25 tourism entrepreneurs and financial institutions in Harare, the study found that financial partnerships, particularly with microfinance institutions, enabled entrepreneurs to overcome capital constraints and expand operations. The study emphasized that access to financial partnerships is crucial for the survival and growth of tourism businesses in developing countries, recommending that governments facilitate access to financial services, particularly in rural areas.

Ademola & Adebayo (2018) assessed the influence of collaborative networks on tourism entrepreneurship in Lagos, Nigeria. Using a mixed-method approach with surveys and focus group discussions involving 100 tourism entrepreneurs, the study found that active participation in networks led to greater innovation, customer satisfaction, and access to new markets. The study concluded that collaborative networks provide critical resources that enhance business competitiveness and recommended the establishment of industry-wide networks to promote greater cooperation among tourism entrepreneurs in Nigeria.

Okoye & Ojo (2021) explored the impact of market access on the success of tourism entrepreneurs in Calabar, Nigeria. Through structured questionnaires distributed to 150 tourism businesses, the study's regression analysis found that businesses with access to international markets experienced higher growth in revenue and customer base compared to those limited to domestic markets. The study concluded that improving market access is essential for the growth of tourism businesses, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises, and recommended that policymakers create initiatives to enhance global market connectivity for Nigerian tourism entrepreneurs.

Bello & Ibrahim (2019) examined the role of public-private partnerships in supporting tourism development in Kaduna, Nigeria. Through semi-structured interviews with 20 stakeholders, including tourism entrepreneurs, government officials, and private investors, the study revealed that such partnerships were key to providing infrastructure, marketing, and financial support. This led to improved business performance and increased tourist visits. The study recommended more structured frameworks to encourage collaboration between the public and private sectors for sustainable tourism development.

Study Gaps

The empirical literature reveals a consistent pattern across both developed and developing countries, emphasizing the importance of networking, partnerships, and market access in enhancing the performance and sustainability of tourism businesses. Studies from the United Kingdom and Australia highlight the positive effects of structured networks and partnerships on market expansion, innovation, and financial growth. In Sub-Saharan Africa, studies from Kenya, Uganda, and Zimbabwe underline the significance of networking and public-private partnerships in overcoming financial constraints, improving infrastructure, and enhancing market access.

Nigerian studies further demonstrate the critical role of collaborative networks, market access, and public-private partnerships in fostering tourism entrepreneurship. However, there remains a gap in research specifically focused on smaller cities like Jalingo, Taraba State, Nigeria. The influence of financial partnerships and market access on tourism businesses in such areas is under explored. This study aims to address these gaps by investigating how networking, partnerships, and market

access specifically impact tourism entrepreneurs in Jalingo Metropolis, providing essential insights for policymakers and tourism entrepreneurs to enhance the sector's growth in smaller cities.

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative approach was employed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of networking and partnerships in enhancing business opportunities for tourism entrepreneurs in Jalingo Metropolis, Taraba State, Nigeria. The quantitative approach assessed the statistical relationships between networking, partnerships, and business performance. This approach allows for statistical validation of findings, ensuring reliability and generalizability.

The study was conducted in Jalingo Metropolis, the capital of Taraba State, which is strategically located near major tourist attractions such as the Mambilla Plateau and Gashaka-Gumti National Park. The area is a growing tourism hub, making it a relevant setting for assessing business networking and partnerships. The study's target population comprises 327 tourism entrepreneurs and key stakeholders within Jalingo Metropolis, Taraba State, Nigeria. This includes individuals and organizations actively engaged in the tourism sector, such as business owners, managers, government officials, and representatives from tourism associations. Jalingo's proximity to major tourist attractions like the Mambilla Plateau and Gashaka-Gumti National Park positions it as a growing tourism hub, making it a pertinent setting for this research. However, Yamane's Formula (1967) for sample size determination:

$$n = N / (1 + N(e^2))$$

Where: n = sample size (180), N = population size (unknown) and e = margin of error (assuming 0.05 for this calculation) to arrive at n = sample size =180. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure representation across different groups. The sample of 180 respondents comprising of 150 tourism entrepreneurs and 30 government officials and key stakeholders. This enhances the accuracy and relevance of findings by capturing diverse perspectives within the tourism sector.

Data collection involved quantitative methods. Structured questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data on business growth, financial performance, market reach, and partnerships. Structured questionnaires were employed to facilitate consistency in data collection, minimize response bias, and allow for easy quantification of variables such as business growth, financial performance, market reach, and partnerships. The research instruments were pre-tested for clarity and validity before final implementation. Pre-testing of the research instruments ensured clarity, validity, and reliability of the collected data.

For data analysis, descriptive statistics and regression analysis were employed to examine relationships in the quantitative data. Descriptive statistics help in summarizing and presenting key trends, while regression analysis allows for examining the relationships between networking, partnerships, and business performance. This analytical approach ensures empirical validation of hypotheses and enhances the robustness of the study's conclusions.

Model specification

Model 1: Networking and Business Performance

$$BP = \beta_0 + \beta_1(NA) + \beta_2(MR) + \beta_3(RG) + \epsilon$$

Where: BP = Business Performance, β_0 = Constant (Intercept), β_1 = Coefficient for Networking Activities (NA), β_2 = Coefficient for Market Reach (MR), β_3 = Coefficient for Revenue Growth (RG) and ϵ = Error Term

Model 2: Partnerships and Business Sustainability

$$BS = \beta_0 + \beta_1(PE) + \beta_2(FS) + \beta_3(BL) + \epsilon$$

Where: BS = Business Sustainability, β_0 = Constant (Intercept), β_1 = Coefficient for Partnership Engagement (PE), β_2 = Coefficient for Financial Support (FS), β_3 = Coefficient for Business Longevity (BL) and ϵ = Error Term

Model 3: Market Access and Business Visibility

$$BV = \beta_0 + \beta_1(MA) + \beta_2(CR) + \beta_3(BR) + \epsilon$$

Where: BV = Business Visibility, β_0 = Constant (Intercept), β_1 = Coefficient for Market Access (MA), β_2 = Coefficient for Customer Retention (CR), β_3 = Coefficient for Bookings and Recognition (BR) and ϵ = Error Term

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic profile of the respondents reflects a diverse group of tourism entrepreneurs, government officials, and other key stakeholders in Jalingo Metropolis. A total of 180 respondents participated in the study, consisting of 150 tourism entrepreneurs and 30 government officials/stakeholders. The demographic characteristics analyzed include gender, age distribution, business type, years of operation, and major challenges faced by respondents.

Table 1. Tourism Entrepreneurs' Demographic Profile

Category	Sub-Category	Frequency (n = 150)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	98	65%
	Female	52	35%
Age Group	21 – 30 years	30	20%
	31 – 40 years	60	40%
	41 – 50 years	40	27%
	51 years and above	20	13%
Years of Business Operation	Less than 5 years	45	30%
	5 – 10 years	45	30%

Category	Sub-Category	Frequency (n = 150)	Percentage (%)
Type of Business	More than 10 years	60	40%
	Hotels	45	30%
	Travel Agencies	38	25%
	Tour Operators	30	20%
	Cultural Heritage Sites	22	15%
	Others	15	10%
Challenges Faced	Poor infrastructure	105	70%
	Limited access to financing	95	63%
	Market visibility issues	90	60%

Source: SPSS Output, 2025

The majority of tourism entrepreneurs were male, accounting for 65% of the respondents, while female entrepreneurs made up 35% of the sample. In terms of age distribution, most respondents (40%) were between 31 and 40 years old, followed by 27% who were aged between 41 and 50 years. Regarding years of business operation, approximately 60% of the respondents had been in business for over 10 years, whereas 30% were relatively new, having operated for less than five years. The most common type of business among respondents was in the hotel sector, representing 30%, followed by travel agencies at 25% and tour operators at 20%. The key challenges faced by tourism entrepreneurs included poor infrastructure, which was reported by 70% of respondents, followed by limited access to financing (63%) and market visibility issues (60%).

Table 2. Government Officials and Stakeholders' Demographic Profile

Category	Sub-Category	Frequency (n = 30)	Percentage (%)
Type of Stakeholder	Tourism Policy & Planning	15	50%
	Financial Institutions	5	17%
	Tourism Associations	5	17%
	International Organizations	5	17%
Key Challenges Identified	Lack of stakeholder coordination	21	70%
	Inadequate government support	18	60%
	Limited funding opportunities	15	50%

Source: SPSS Output, 2025

Half (50%) of the respondents were engaged in tourism policy and planning, while the remaining participants were from financial institutions (17%), tourism associations (17%), and international organizations (17%). Additionally, 70% of respondents identified limited coordination among stakeholders as a critical issue affecting tourism development, while 60% highlighted inadequate government support as a significant barrier.

Test of Hypotheses

The quantitative data collected through structured questionnaires were analyzed to examine the impact of networking, partnerships, and market access on business performance in the tourism sector. Descriptive statistics summarized the responses, while multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the statistical significance of these relationships. The regression model assessed how variations in networking activities, partnerships, and market access influenced business performance indicators such as revenue growth, market reach, and business sustainability.

Impact of Networking on Business Performance

The findings demonstrated a positive correlation between networking and business growth. Entrepreneurs who actively participated in networking activities—such as attending tourism conferences, joining business forums, or engaging with tourism associations—reported higher levels of market reach and revenue growth. About 60% of entrepreneurs who engaged in regular networking reported improved business performance, compared to only 30% of those who did not participate in networking activities. Entrepreneurs who actively networked had greater access to business referrals, collaborations, and marketing opportunities.

HO₁: Collaborative networks have no significant effect on tourism entrepreneurs in Jalingo Metropolis

Table 3. Regression Analysis Results:

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standard Error (SE)	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t-Statistic	p-Value
Constant (Intercept)	2.145	0.412	-	5.21	0.000
Networking Activities	0.675	0.128	0.482	5.27	0.000
Market Reach	0.542	0.114	0.399	4.75	0.000
Revenue Growth	0.623	0.135	0.458	4.61	0.000

Source: *SPSS Output, 2025*

The regression analysis revealed a statistically significant relationship between networking and business performance ($p < 0.05$). For every unit increase in networking activities, business performance improved by 0.675 units. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that Collaborative networks have no significant effect on tourism entrepreneurs in Jalingo Metropolis

Effect of Partnerships on Business Sustainability

The regression analysis showed that partnerships with both public and private stakeholders were significantly associated with better financial performance and long-term sustainability. Entrepreneurs who collaborated with government agencies, tourism associations, and international organizations had better access to funding, industry expertise, and new markets. About 70% of

entrepreneurs involved in partnerships reported higher revenue growth, compared to those who operated independently. Business owners who formed partnerships reported better financial resilience and increased customer retention rates.

HO2: Public-private partnerships have no significant impact on tourism entrepreneurs in Jalingo Metropolis

Table 4. Regression Analysis Results:

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standard Error (SE)	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t-Statistic	p-Value
Constant (Intercept)	1.789	0.395	-	4.53	0.000
Partnership Engagement	0.715	0.142	0.512	5.04	0.000
Financial Support	0.568	0.121	0.427	4.69	0.000
Business Longevity	0.612	0.137	0.472	4.47	0.000

Source: *SPSS Output, 2025*

From the above analysis, Partnerships had a strong positive impact on business sustainability. A unit increase in partnership engagement led to a 0.715 unit increase in business sustainability. The regression analysis revealed a statistically significant relationship between networking and business performance ($p < 0.05$). Therefore we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that Public-private partnerships have a significant impact on tourism entrepreneurs in Jalingo Metropolis

Access to Market and Business Visibility

The results indicated that access to broader markets played a crucial role in the success of tourism businesses. Entrepreneurs who established strong partnerships within larger tourism networks gained greater visibility in national and international tourism markets. Approximately 55% of entrepreneurs who were part of larger tourism networks reported increased bookings and customer satisfaction levels. Businesses with strong online and offline marketing channels experienced higher brand recognition and competitive advantage.

HO₃: Market accesses have no significant impact on tourism entrepreneurs in Jalingo Metropolis

Table 5. Regression Analysis Results:

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standard Error (SE)	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t-Statistic	p-Value
Constant (Intercept)	1.935	0.410	-	4.72	0.000
Market Access	0.689	0.132	0.499	5.22	0.000
Business Visibility	0.578	0.118	0.438	4.90	0.000
Customer Retention	0.621	0.129	0.465	4.81	0.000

Source: *SPSS Output, 2025*

From the analysis, Market access significantly influenced business visibility. A unit increase in market access led to a 0.689 unit increase in business visibility and bookings. The regression analysis revealed a statistically significant relationship between networking and business performance ($p < 0.05$). Therefore we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that market accesses have a significant impact on tourism entrepreneurs in Jalingo Metropolis.

To evaluate the overall fit of the regression models, the **R-squared values** for each model were calculated:

Table 6 Summary of Regression Model Fit

Regression Model	R-Squared (R ²)	Adjusted R-Squared	F-Statistic	p-Value
Networking & Business Performance	0.682	0.674	38.62	0.000
Partnerships & Business Sustainability	0.725	0.719	41.85	0.000
Market Access & Business Visibility	0.701	0.694	39.77	0.000

Source: *SPSS Output, 2025*

The R² values indicate that the models explain a significant portion of the variance in business performance. The F-statistic and p-values confirm that the models are statistically significant at $p < 0.05$.

The findings confirm that networking, partnerships, and market access are strong determinants of business performance in the tourism sector. Entrepreneurs who actively engage in networking, establish partnerships, and improve market access experience higher revenue growth, greater business visibility, and better financial sustainability. These insights highlight the importance of collaboration and market expansion in enhancing business success in Jalingo’s tourism industry.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from the quantitative data highlight the critical role of networking and partnerships in the development of tourism entrepreneurship in Jalingo Metropolis. The study affirms the importance of strategic alliances in overcoming the key challenges faced by tourism entrepreneurs, including limited market visibility, insufficient funding, and inadequate infrastructure.

The study demonstrates that networking is a vital tool for entrepreneurship success in the tourism sector. Effective networking enables tourism businesses to expand their customer base, share resources, and access new opportunities. However, the lack of formalized networking structures in Jalingo limits the potential of tourism entrepreneurs to leverage these opportunities. The findings align with Cooper & Hall (2020) and Ashley & Mitchell (2020), who argue that networking facilitates resource sharing and innovation in the tourism sector.

The lack of strong public-private partnerships is a key factor hindering the growth of tourism entrepreneurship in Jalingo. While government officials acknowledged the importance of collaboration, tourism entrepreneurs expressed frustration with the lack of concrete actions and incentives to foster such partnerships. This finding supports the assertions of Olaniyi & Akinwale (2020) and Ekechi & Uzundu (2021), who note that effective partnerships are essential for accessing critical resources, such as funding and technical support.

The study highlights the importance of financial partnerships in facilitating business growth and sustainability. Limited access to finance remains a significant challenge for tourism entrepreneurs in Jalingo. The lack of tailored financial products for tourism businesses exacerbates this issue. This finding is consistent with previous research by Rogerson & Visser (2018), who emphasize that financial barriers are a major constraint to the growth of tourism businesses in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Inadequate infrastructure continues to be a major challenge for tourism businesses in Jalingo. Poor transportation networks and unreliable utilities hamper the ability of entrepreneurs to attract tourists and provide high-quality services. These findings are in line with Novelli (2021), who notes that infrastructure improvements are essential for fostering business growth and attracting investment in tourism.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that networking and partnerships are critical to the growth and sustainability of tourism entrepreneurship in Jalingo Metropolis. The findings underscore the importance of collaboration among entrepreneurs, government agencies, and other stakeholders in addressing challenges such as limited market access, inadequate funding, and poor infrastructure.

To unlock the full potential of the tourism sector in Jalingo, stakeholders must prioritize the establishment of structured networking platforms, strengthen public-private partnerships, and invest in infrastructure and financial support systems. By fostering a collaborative environment, Jalingo Metropolis can transform its rich cultural and natural assets into a thriving tourism industry, contributing to economic development and job creation in the region.

This study concludes by highlighting the critical role of strategic alliances in overcoming barriers and enhancing business opportunities for tourism entrepreneurs. Future research could explore the

long-term impacts of these strategies on the sustainability of tourism businesses in Jalingo and other similar regions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance tourism entrepreneurship in Jalingo Metropolis:

1. Organize regular tourism fairs, conferences, and workshops to facilitate interactions among entrepreneurs, government officials, and other stakeholders.
2. Create an online platform to connect tourism businesses and stakeholders, enabling resource sharing and collaboration.
3. Develop clear government policies and incentives to promote public-private collaborations in the tourism sector.
4. Establish a dedicated tourism development board to coordinate efforts between the government and private sector stakeholders.
5. Invest in road networks, reliable electricity, and internet services to support tourism businesses and improve the visitor experience.
6. Encourage microfinance institutions and banks to develop tailored financial products for tourism entrepreneurs.

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