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Entrepreneurial Network Competencies And Social Entrepreneurial Intentions: Evidence From Fresh Graduates In South-East Nigeria

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Abstract

This study seeks to determine how Entrepreneurial Networking Competencies (ENC) influence Social Entrepreneurial Intentions (SEIs) among young graduates in South-East Nigeria. Specifically it examines the moderating effect of Empathy (EMP), Self-efficacy (SE), Perceived Social Support (PSS) as well as Moral Obligation (MO) in this relationship. Little is known on the effect of networking competences in enhancing SEIs with limited resources, notwithstanding rising awareness of SEIs as a necessity for inclusive development. Employing purposive sampling technique and using a cross-sectional survey approach, 364 National Youth Service Corps members were selected from all the states in South-East Nigeria. Data collected from the participants were analysed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with Smart PLS 3.2.9. Analysis shows that Cronbach's alpha calculated value ranges between .74 and .99, CR value also ranges between .83 and .88 while Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value exceeds 0.60, which indicates that the instrument has a high reliability and validity. Results highlight that entrepreneurial networking competencies positively and significantly influenced SEIs ($t = 8.433$, $\beta = 0.637$, $p < 0.001$). Result further presents the value of moderate predictive accuracy as ($R^2 = 0.406$) while the value of relevance as ($Q^2 = 0.122$). Accordingly, the relationship was enhanced through the moderating effect of MO, SE, EMP and PSS, which indicates that SEIs among graduates is not just influenced by networking competencies but also by MO, SE, EMP and PSS. The study therefore concludes that for social entrepreneurship of young graduates to be improved in developing countries, there should be enhanced networking competence as well as enabling psychosocial factors. By incorporating the moderating variables in illustrating the effect of ENC on SEIs through these findings, thus planned behaviour theory is expanded.

Keywords: *empathy; perceived social support; entrepreneurial networking competencies; social entrepreneurial intentions; self-efficacy; moral obligation; fresh graduates*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Over the years, entrepreneurship has changed from its central purpose of profit maximization to a larger perspective known as social entrepreneurship. This development underlines the increasing perception of the critical role of entrepreneurship in alleviating socio-economic problems such as unemployment, inequality and poverty, particularly in emerging economy such as Nigeria. Social entrepreneurship has emerged as a road map for sustainable development through the combination of pursuit of social value with market based innovative strategies (Zulkifle and Aziz, 2023), inclusion and community development over profit (Mair and Noboa, 2006). Central to this paradigm shift is networking competence which is the capability of the individual to maneuver, create and benefit from existing networks or partnerships. Entrepreneurs are empowered through networking competence to generate intangible as well as tangible resources, disseminate information and work together as a team (Ritter and Gemünden, 2003; Batistič and Tymon, 2017).

Networking competencies are critical for entrepreneurial resource, particularly, in Sub-Saharan Africa where there are dominant systemic challenges and limited financial resources to create and sustain valuable networks. Therefore, for fresh graduates penetrating the Nigerian precarious labour force, networking competence has emerged as alternative to lack of financial capital, facilitating mentoring, access to funding,

partnerships and social credibility, which are critical resources necessary for social consciousness transformation into implementable entrepreneurial initiatives. Despite extensive scholarly interest on the nexus between Entrepreneurial networking competencies (ENC) and Social entrepreneurial intentions (SEIs), the question on the specific modalities and contextual factors under which social entrepreneurial intentions (SEIs) thrives remains unresolved. Therefore, the study examines the nexus between ENC and SEIs among fresh graduates in South-East Nigeria while also investigating the moderating role of certain psychological and social factors such as moral obligation (MO), self-efficacy (SE), empathy (EMP) and perceived social support (PSS) in this association. Accordingly, it is therefore imperative to examine these moderators in order to explain the varying outcomes of networking competences, where some individuals are able to transform robust networks into social entrepreneurship, while these networking competencies remain unleveraged for others.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Link between ENC and SEIs

Entrepreneurial networking competence is the individual`s ability to build and sustain effective interpersonal relationships that facilitate the sharing of information and resources (Ritter and Gemünden, 2003) which includes skills like collaboration, communication and conflict resolution (Batistič and Tymon, 2017). In an entrepreneurial innovation network system, networking competence facilitates access to social capital, improves collaboration and enhances opportunity recognition which are necessary for successful entrepreneurship. Networking competence functions in two ways in the realm of social entrepreneurship. It not only enhances access to critical external resources such as funding, knowledge and institutional legitimacy which are relevant for sustainable social entrepreneurship, but also through interactions with like-minded individuals and organizations, improves the dissemination of social values and ethical orientations which invariably foster social entrepreneurial intentions (SEIs). SEIs measure an individual's motivation and cognitive disposition to undertake entrepreneurial activities geared towards creating social value (Mair and Noboa, 2006; Hockerts, 2017). Networking competencies can be conceived as critical link between entrepreneurial intention and social awareness among fresh graduates with lack of employment opportunities. However, the link between social entrepreneurial intention and networking competence is not deterministic but moderated by psychological and contextual variables which include MO, EMP, SE and PSS.

2.2 Moderating Roles of MO, EMP, SE and PSS.

Moral obligation is the individual`s adopted ethical urge to act according to the societal norms and moral standards (Alsaad et al., 2020). Within social entrepreneurship domain, moral obligation has become primary motivational force for social entrepreneurs, which encourages them to pursue business that targets social value creation that transcends personal or financial gains (Tan et al., 2021; Yiu et al., 2014). A strong sense of moral duty helps individuals to leverage their networks not just for personal gain, but to address social challenges as such moral obligation tends to improve the positive impact of networking competence on SEIs by blending the social partnerships with categorical imperatives that will produce meaningful social values.

Self-efficacy which has emerged as another critical moderating factor in the context of entrepreneurial and social innovation is the confidence that an individual will be able to successfully perform actions and accomplish desired outcomes (Bandura, 1986). Arguably, (Mahasneh and Alwan, 2018) emphasized that individuals with improved self-efficacy will take charge of their entrepreneurial activities as well as encounter fewer challenges. In the same vein, (Santos and Alliprandini, 2023) further argue that fresh graduates with high level of self-efficacy have tendency to mobilize resources, encourage teamwork and transform relational networks to social innovative values. However, low self-efficacy can negatively affect individuals by hindering them from leveraging available resources to exploit valuable networking opportunities.

Empathy which is a fundamental characteristic of social entrepreneurship is conceptualized by (Klimecki, 2019) as the ability to understand and share other peoples` emotions. Rooted in social cognition and affective theories, it elevates awareness to social issues and builds genuine interest in addressing societal challenges through entrepreneurial activities (Mair and Noboa, 2006; Packard and Burnham, 2021). Empathy moderates the nexus between networking competence and social entrepreneurial intentions (SEIs) by improving entrepreneur's capability of prioritizing and perceiving social needs. The increased social awareness therefore,

to a large extent strengthens the competitive advantage of networking for generating shared resources, thus increasing every probability that individuals with empathy will convert social ties into meaningful ventures that are beneficial to the society

Amidst entrepreneurial unpredictability, Perceived social support which is the conviction that material, emotional and informational assistance can always come from others, emerges as a critical factor of social entrepreneurship. Perceived social support alleviates stress and promotes resilience among individuals (Rodriguez and Cohen, 1998). Accordingly, (Iglesias and Arias, 2015) highlight that individuals of high perceived social support are prone to taking risk and leverage network opportunities for social cause. As such PSS moderates the nexus between ENC and SEIs by offering psychological reinforcement as well as the meaningful support needed through the entrepreneurial process. These social entrepreneurial moderators underscore the critical role of key psychological and contextual factors in transforming social entrepreneurial behavior to networking skills.

Research demonstrates that networking competence is a critical predictor of entrepreneurial success (Lans et al., 2015; Zhang and Leung, 2015), promoting opportunity recognition, access to resources and collaboration (Roulin and Levashina, 2019; Yang et al., 2023). Despite this extensive research, understanding how this relationship affects SEIs and the moderating effect of the psychological as well as contextual moderators in the association, particularly in the context of emerging economies like Nigeria remains underexplored. Prior studies (Hockerts, 2017; Younis et al., 2020) link moral obligation, self-efficacy and empathy to SEIs typically as direct predictors rather than moderators. Similarly, perceived social support's role in strengthening entrepreneurial resilience is established but seldom explored as a moderating factor in the link connecting ENC and SEI. This study expands the literature by empirically testing these moderators in a collectivist, resource-constrained setting.

2.3 Theory and Hypotheses development

2.3.1 Theoretical Framework

2.3.2 Social Learning Theory and Planned Behaviour (TPB) Theory

Drawing on the theories of Social Learning (Bandura, 1986) and Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), the study shed more light on the nexus between ENC and SEIs. Social Learning Theory proposes that individual`s learned behaviours and attitudes are obtained by observing and interacting with others in their social environment. Hence networking provides fresh graduates with the enabling social environment required to internalize entrepreneurial norms and develop key social entrepreneurship skills.

Planned Behaviour (TPB) theory supports this investigation by proposing that SEIs can be developed through individuals` attitudes, perceived behavioural control and subjective norms. Networking competence reinforces these factors by shaping attitudes through exposure of individuals to role models, heightens subjective norms through social validation and fortifies perceived behavioural control through increased access to support, resources and information. The four moderators in this study align with the theory whereby moral obligation fits into the concept of subjective norms, self-efficacy highlights perceived behavioural control, empathy shapes attitudes toward creation of social value and perceived social support enhances behavioural control.

2.3.3 Hypotheses Development

Building on the established theoretical and empirical underpinnings, the study argues that entrepreneurial networking competence is an influential factor of social entrepreneurial intentions among fresh graduates. Networking competence assists individuals to identify opportunities, allocate resources and build strong partnerships necessary to create social values. Evidence from previous studies consistently demonstrate that individuals with strong networking competence are better positioned to build and sustain social entrepreneurial intentions that create value (Ritter & Gemünden, 2003; Lans et al., 2015; Hockerts, 2017). However, the degree of this relationship varies among individuals. Anchoring this work on planned behavior theory and Social Learning theory proposed by (Ajzen, 1991) and (Bandura, 1986) respectively, this study recognizes the effect of the moderating psychological and contextual factors on ENC and SEIs. Typically, MO, SE, EMP and PSS are identified as key moderating elements which shape the transformation of entrepreneurial networking competencies into social entrepreneurial intentions. Moral obligation nurtures a sense of integrity in contributing to societal well-being. Self-efficacy reinforces the confidence of an individual

to be able to innovate. Empathy enhances the awareness of social challenges as well as motivates the zeal to tackle those challenges while perceived social support strengthens the tenacity required to pursue social values. Consequently these moderating factors promote conducive environment that enables the transformation of ENC to SEIs. Therefore this study hypothesises:

H_1: Entrepreneurial networking competences have significant and positive effect social entrepreneurial intentions.

H_2: Moral obligation has significant and positive moderating effect on ENC and SEIs.

H_3: Self-efficacy has significant and positive moderating effect on ENC and SEIs.

H_4: Empathy has significant and positive moderating effect on ENC and SEIs.

H_5: Perceived social support has significant and positive moderating effect on ENC and SEIs.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study utilized survey research approach which is suitable in measuring the relationship of variables at a specific time. The research design allows the investigation of the link between ENC and SEIs among fresh graduates within a contextual and time framework (Setia, 2016). The cross-sectional design enabled data to be collected through a systematic process using a robust statistical analytical tool such as structural equation model SEM in analyzing the data. This method ensures consistency and efficiency in investigating intricate behavioral relationship of variables in a specific contexts. The study participants were National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members posted to all the states in the South-East Nigeria and they are Imo, Abia, Ebonyi, Anambra, and Enugu. The choice was as a result of high concentration of fresh graduates, extensive entrepreneurial activity and strong communal ties in the states, which create enabling environment for investigating the influence of ENC on SEIs.

3.2 Area of Study and Population

The study` s population comprised 6,829 corps members purposively selected from the 2023 Batch A, Stream 2 (NYSC Permanent Register, 2023). The fresh graduates were purposively selected to participate in the study as they are at cross roads with career choice between paid employment and entrepreneurial activities. This is in consistence with (Abe and Chikoko, 2020) that such group fits best in the study of social entrepreneurial intentions. Sample size of 364 fresh graduates was determined by utilizing Krejcie Morgan (1970) formula, while Bowley` s proportional allocation formula was employed to ensure fair allocation of sample size across the selected five states in South East, Nigeria.

3.3 Data Instrument

A structured questionnaire was employed in data collection to ensure internal consistency and content validity of the research instrument. The research instrument has two sections. The first part described demographics of the participants while second part contained the question items that measured the constructs of both ENC and SEIs. Questions responded by the participants were drawn from previous studies (Man, Lau & Snape, 2008; Urban & Kujinga, 2017). 5 point likert scale was employed for the measurement on a scale of 1 to 5 and strongly disagree to strongly agree respectively. To ensure validity, research instrument went through expert review for face and content validation. PLS-SEM measurement model was employed for construct validation. To ensure reliability of the instrument, a test study was carried out with 20 corps members while the instrument has a Cronbach's alpha values above the required 0.70 threshold (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994), which shows a strong internal consistency.

3.4 Data Analysis Technique

Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were both adopted in analyzing collected data. While the descriptive statistics summarized respondents' demographics, SEM PLS 3.2.9., was adopted for the Inferential analysis due to its strength in handling complex latent constructs, ordinal data and retaining accuracy with moderate sample sizes (Sarstedt et al., 2022; Hair et al., 2019). Analytical framework was done in two stages: (i) testing reliability and validity by measuring factor loadings, CR and AVE. (ii) evaluating SEM to test the hypotheses. Model decisions rely on Cohen (1988) $p < 0.05$, path coefficients (β), coefficients of determination (R^2) and effect sizes (f^2). The thoroughness of the analysis ensured the generation of replicable,

empirically sound and statistically valid findings on the influence of ENC on SEIs among fresh graduates in South-East Nigeria.

3.5 Univariate Analyses

Mean (x) and Standard deviation (Std. Dev.) aided in analyzing data in this section. These analyses assisted in understanding the data's dispersion and recognizing the patterns or trends (Hair et al., 2019). Univariate analyses are utilized to describe the dispersion of a single variable by using simple frequency tables (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2019; Field, 2018). ENC is the independent variable, SEIs is the dependent variable while MO, SE, EMP and PSS are the moderating variables. Based on the categorization of (Asawo, 2009) and (Bland & Altman, 1996), mean values were adopted. Therefore, for mean (x), 1- 2.4 = low, 2.5 - 3.5 = moderate, 3.6 – 4.5 = high while 4.6 and above = high.

4.0 RESULTS

Table 1 Questionnaire Response Rate

Item	**Frequency**	%
Distributed	364	100
Returned	251	69.0
Unreturned	113	31.0
Total	**364**	**100**

Field Survey, 2025.

The table 1 above shows that 364 (100%) copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the corps members with the aid of five research assistants. 251 (69%) were returned while 113 (31%) were not returned. Therefore 69% response rate was used for the analysis.

Table 2 Gender of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	%
Female	132	52.6
Male	119	47.4
Total	251	100.0

Field Survey, 2025.

As shown in table 2, 132(52.6%) of the participants are female and 119(47.4%) are male. Indicating more female corps members in the Region

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics on Networking Competences

Items	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Networking with others takes a lot of my time and effort while at work.	251	1.00	5.00	3.8325	.96117
At work, I am proficient in connecting with prominent people.	251	2.00	5.00	4.0406	.89354
I am well connected in my place of work and I know many relevant people.	251	1.00	5.00	3.8405	1.12360
I use my connections and network very well to initiate activities at my place of work	251	1.00	5.00	4.0406	.89354

Field Survey, 2025.

The results above in table 3 reveal the opinions of the participants as regards networking competences. Responses to the first item shows that the majority of the corps members agreed Networking with others takes much time and energy while at work. Hence this has a high mean score (μ = 3.8325, *S.D* = .96116). For the second item, the majority of the corps members responded that they are good at building relationships (μ = 4.0406, *S.D* = .89354). Similarly, the result of the third item reveals that the majority of the corps members

know they are important and well connected (μ = 3.8405, *S.D* = 1.12360). Lastly, the result of the fourth item reveals that the majority of the corps members use their connections and network very well to initiate activities at place of work (μ = 4.0406, *S.D* = .89354).

Table 4 Descriptive Statistics on Social Entrepreneurial Intentions

Items	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.
In future, I anticipate to be fully involved in starting up an organisation that targets social values.	251	1.00	5.00	3.8645	1.07218
I have social enterprise idea that I plan to work on in the future.	251	2.00	5.00	4.0159	.97557
I do not plan to be socially enterprising.	251	1.00	5.00	2.0839	.68479

Field Survey, 2025.

Results shown above in table 4 are the opinions of the participants as regards social entrepreneurial intentions. Responses to the first item show that the majority of the corps members have future plans of launching a social organisation (μ = 3.8645, *S.D* = 1.07218). Result of the second item reveals that the majority of the corps members already have an idea of a social enterprise they will establish in the future (μ = 4.0159, *S.D* = .97557). Lastly, the result of the third item, reveals that the majority of the corps members disagreed that they do not have plans to start a social enterprise, with a low mean score (μ = 2.0839, *S.D* = .68479).

4.1 Research Instrument Validity (Val.) and Reliability (Rel.)

In this study reliability of the instrument was evaluated using factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha and P_C while AVE and the correlation matrix were employed to determine discriminant validity.

4.2 Evaluation of the Main Constructs

This study`s central constructs are entrepreneurial networking competence (independent variable), social entrepreneurial intention (dependent variable) and the moderating variables which include MO, PSS, SE and EMP. Factor loadings, P_C, AVE and the square root of AVE for each latent variable aided by Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) evaluated the constructs. CFA ensured that all the constructs have satisfactory convergent and discriminant validity which ascertained the AVE and the model fit, while item with factor loadings below 0.40 was removed (Bagozzi and Yi, 2012; Bagozzi, 2010).

The study employed confirmatory approach, considering that the measurement scales were drawn from previous studies. Hence, in alignment with the study of Nunnally (1978), composite reliability threshold of 0.70. These validation and reliability tests confirmed that the measurement model is fit for the statistical and methodological requirements for non-parametric analysis using PLS-SEM.

Table 5 Reliability and Validity Test.

Latent Variable	Indicators	Convergent validity			Internal consistency reliability		
		Loadings	Indicator rel.	AVE	CR ρ_c	Cronbach Alpha (CA)	
		>0.70	>0.50	>0.50	>0.70	0.70 – 0.90	
ENC	ENC_1	0.723	0.523	0.602	0.883	0.758	
	ENC_2	0.745	0.555				
	ENC_3	0.842	0.709				
	ENC_4	0.812	0.659				
	ENC_5	0.752	0.566				
SEI	SEI_1	0.733	0.537	0.618	0.829	0.567	
	SEI_2	0.855	0.731				
	SEI_3	0.766	0.587				

MO	MO_1	0.803	0.645	0.612	0.863	0.9999
	MO_2	0.775	0.601			
	MO_3	0.762	0.581			
	MO_4	0.788	0.621			
SE	SE_1	0.750	0.563	0.644	0.844	0.741
	SE_2	0.812	0.659			
	SE_3	0.842	0.709			
EMP	EMP_1	0.761	0.579	0.626	0.834	0.741
	EMP_2	0.801	0.642			
	EMP_3	0.811	0.658			
PSS	PSS_1	0.773	0.598	0.620	0.830	0.712
	PSS_2	0.749	0.561			
	PSS_3	0.838	0.702			
Note: ENC = Entrepreneurial Networking Competence, SEI = Social Entrepreneurial Intentions, MO = Moral Obligation, SE = Self-Efficacy, EMP = Empathy, and PSS = Perceived Social Support. CA = Cronbach Alpha, P_C = Composite Reliability, AVE = Average Variance Extracted						

Factor loadings of constructs shown above in table 5 exceeded required minimum value of .70 which confirms convergent validity. Particularly, the value of factor loadings measuring ENC, SEIs, MO, SE, EMP and PSS ranged from .723 to .855and significant at $p < 0.000$. Also AVE values range from 0.602 to 0.644 surpassing the 0.50 threshold for convergent validity. Also, composite reliability (P_C) values ranged from 0.829 to 0.883 surpassing 0.70 threshold, which demonstrate uniformity among the measurement items. The Cronbach Alpha coefficients, ranges from 0.567 to 0.9999, additionally confirmed the reliability of the constructs.

Table 6 Discriminant Validity (Fornell–Larcker)

Constructs	**Mean**	**S.D**	**AVEs**	**ENC**	**SEI**	**MO**	**SE**	**EMP**	**PSS**
ENC	3.879	.854	**.602**	**.776**					
SEI	3.889	.852	**.618**	.212	**.786**				
MO	3.955	.948	**.612**	.318	.320	**.782**			
SE	4.146	.842	**.644**	.224	.232	**.**197	**.802**		
EMP	3.865	1.072	**.626**	.024	.328	**.**127	.324	**.791**	
PSS	4.016	.976	**.620**	.241	.011	**.**192	**.**312	**.**102	**.787**

Discriminant validity of the constructs utilised Fornell–Larcker criterion. AVE square roots values obtained shows no collinearity, indicating that the constructs were distinct from one another. This result in table 6 shows that the construct which include ENC, SEIs, MO, SE, EMP and PSS actually measured unique aspects of the research model without overlap. Accordingly, the results indicate satisfactory construct validity, which shows that the research instrument has both convergent and discriminant validity, hence reliable for testing the hypothesis.

4.3 Tests of Hypotheses

Each hypothesis was tested with SEM PLS 3.2.9. The result of the test of the path coefficients (β) and the coefficients of determination (R^2 or predictive accuracy) determines whether to accept or reject the hypotheses (Geisser, 1975). f^2 in the structural model will be used to calculate the effect size of the various paths involved in the model (Cohen, 1988). This is to determine if there is significant effect of the independent latent variable on the dependent latent variable. If f^2has values that fall between 0.020 and 0.150, it has insignificant effect, for values 0.150 and 0.350, It is a moderate effect otherwise significant effect, for values greater than 0.350 (Cohen, 1988; Geisser, 1975). Furthermore $p < 0.05$ is significant and calculated t-test greater than 1.96 is considered significant (Hair et al., 2019).

Hypothesis One

H_1: Entrepreneurial networking competences have significant and positive effect social entrepreneurial intentions.

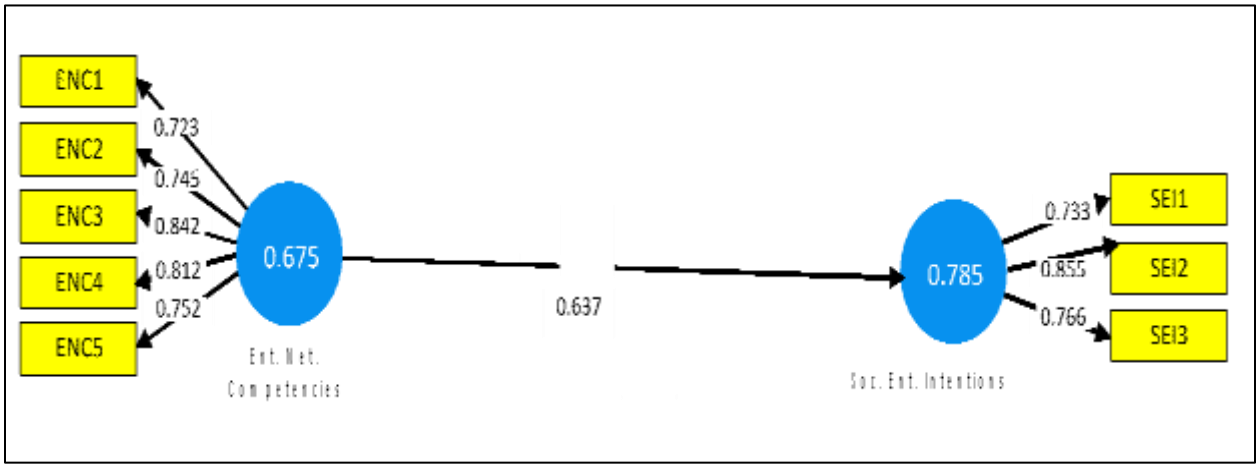

Figure1. ENC effect on SEIs

Table 7 ENC effect on SEIs

Path	Path coefficient	Standard error	T. value	P. value	Decision
NC -> SEI	0.637	0.073	8.433	0.001	Supported
Note: ENC = Entrepreneurial Networking Competence, SEI = Social Entrepreneurial Intentions. t > 1.96 , p < 0.05					

The result shown above in Figure1 and Table 7 shows ENC effect on SEIs. The result shows significant path between entrepreneurial network competence and social entrepreneurial intentions ($\beta = 0.637$; $t = 8.433$; $p < 0.05$). Thus hypothesis one was supported. Also, table 7 reveals r^2 and q^2 as well as the effect size of entrepreneurial networking competence on social entrepreneurial intentions (endogenous constructs), with f^2 value of 0.15 which represents a moderate effect.

Table 8 Predictive Accuracy, Predictive Relevance and Effect sizes (f^2)

Path	Correlation coefficient (r)	Predictive Accuracy r^2	Adjusted r^2	Effect Size f^2	Predictive Relevance Q^2
ENC -> SEI	0.637	0.406	0.402	0.15 Medium	0.122
Note: ENC = Entrepreneurial Networking Competence, SEI = Social Entrepreneurial Intentions. r^2, 0.19 = weak; r^2, 0.33 = moderate; r^2, 0.67 = substantial, Chin (1988). Effect size (f^2) of 0.02 = small; 0.15 = medium, while 0.35 = large effect. $Q^2 > 0$ = satisfactory predictive relevance					

For any exogenous construct to have predictive relevance for the endogenous construct, Q^2 values of the endogenous construct must be greater than zero (>0) (Hair, Howard, & Nitzl, 2020). The result of this model in Table 8 shows that Q^2 has value of 0.122 indicating that ENC has predictive relevance for SEIs. Furthermore, the r^2 (predictive accuracy) indicates a moderate predictive accuracy of entrepreneurial network competence on social entrepreneurial intentions. Thus, it could be interpreted that higher levels of entrepreneurial network competence leads to increase in SEIs. Which indicate that an increase in ENC suggests a corresponding increase in units of SEIs. Ultimately, the result suggests that entrepreneurial network competence influences social entrepreneurial intentions among the selected young graduates showing f^2 (effect sizes) value as 0.15.

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Hypothesis Two

H_2: Moral obligation has significant and positive moderating effect on ENC and SEIs.

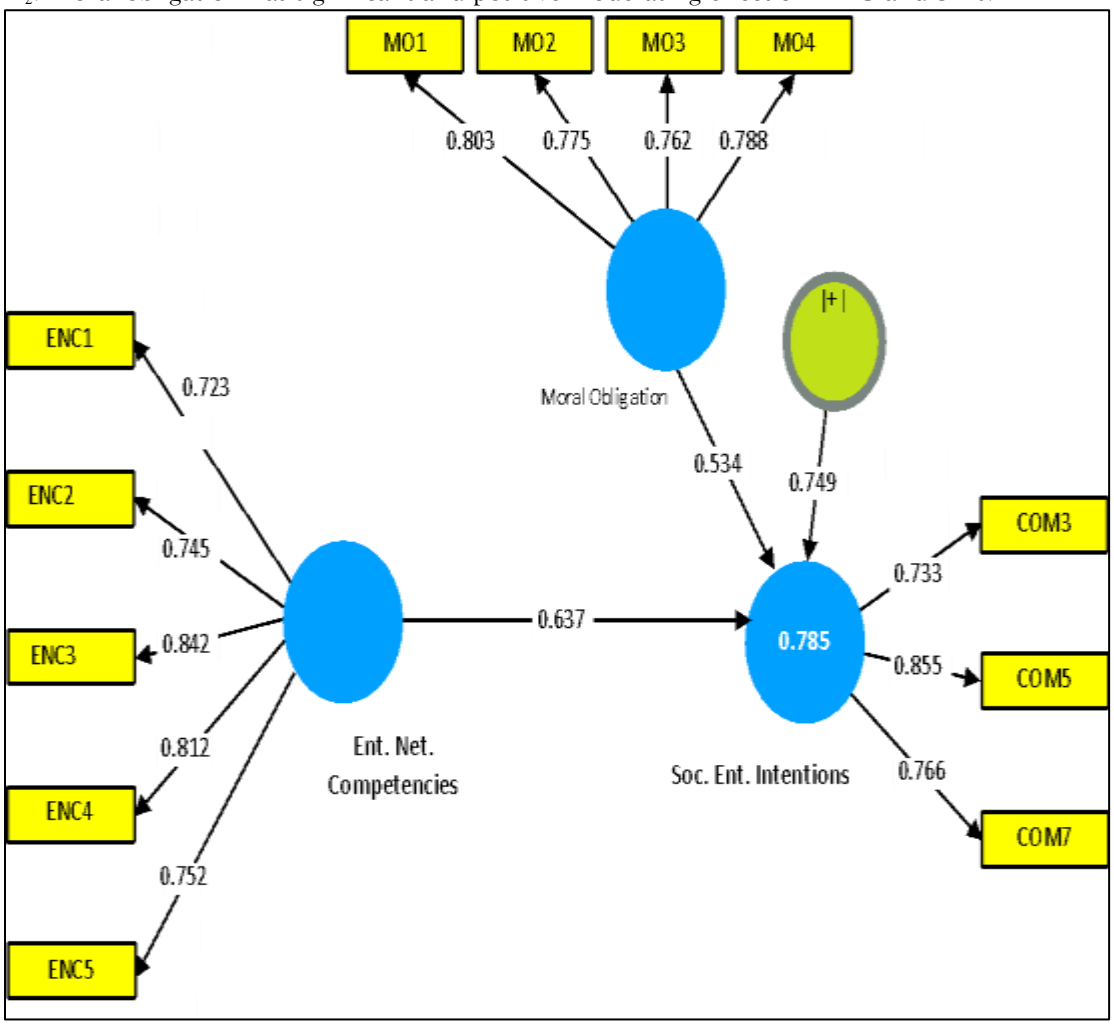

Figure2 Moral obligation has significant and positive moderating effect on ENC and SEIs..

Table 9 Moral obligation has significant and positive moderating effect on ENC and SEIs.

Paths	β	t-values	P. Values	Decision
ENC -> SEI	.637	8.433	.000	Accepted
MO -> SEI	.534	11.558	.001	Accepted
Mod. Eff. 1 -> SEI	.749	15.243	.000	Accepted
Note: ENC = Entrepreneurial Networking Competence, MO = Moral Obligation, SEI = Social Entrepreneurial Intentions. t > 1.96 , p < 0.05				

The results presented in Figure 2 and table 9 show that Moral obligation has significant and positive moderating effect on ENC and SEIs. This result underscores moderating function of moral obligation in the structural connection between the ENC and SEI which is in line with (Hair et al., 2019). Also, result in Table 9 shows that statistically and significantly entrepreneurial network competence is positively correlated to social entrepreneurial intentions with (β = 0.637, t = 8.433 and p < .05). This result further highlights the moderating effect (Eff. 1 -> SEI) of moral obligation in strengthening the link where (β = 0.749, t = 15.243, p < .05), therefore (H2) was accepted.

Hypothesis Three

H3: Self-efficacy has significant and positive moderating effect on ENC and SEIs.

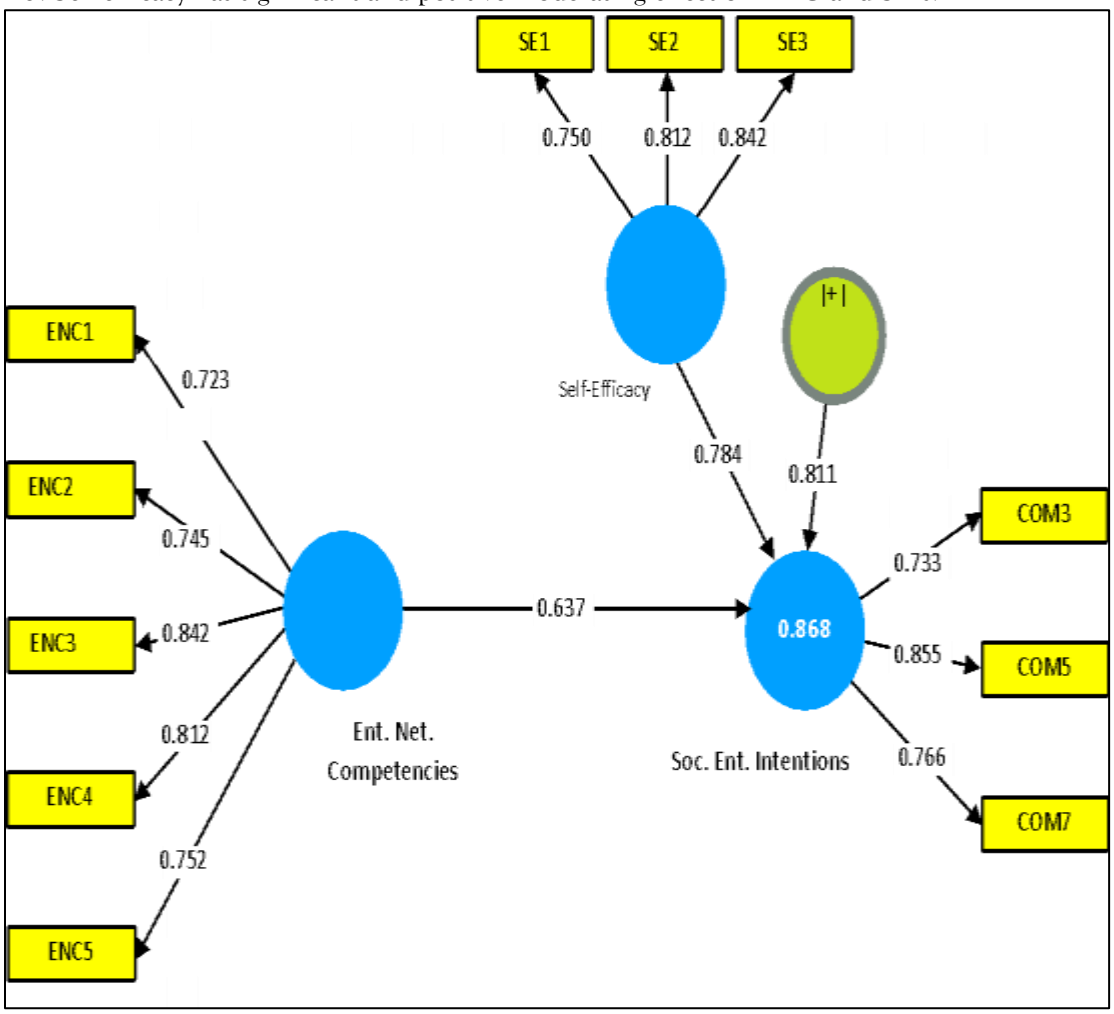

Figure 3 Self-efficacy has significant and positive moderating effect on ENC and SEIs.

Table10 Self-efficacy has significant and positive moderating effect on ENC and SEIs.

Paths	B	t-values	P. Values	Decision
ENC -> SEI	.637	8.433	.000	Accepted
SE -> SEI	.784	16.568	.000	Accepted
Mod. Eff. 1 -> SEI	.811	18.423	.000	Accepted
Note: ENC = Entrepreneurial Networking Competence, SE = Self-Efficacy, SEI = Social Entrepreneurial Intentions. $t > 1.96$, $p < 0.05$.				

The results presented in Figure 3 and table 10 shows that SE statistically significantly moderates the link between ENC and SEIs. This result underscores that Self-efficacy has significant and positive moderating effect on ENC and SEIs which is also in line with (Hair et al., 2019). The findings presented in Table 10 also highlights that statistically and significantly entrepreneurial network competence is positively correlated to social entrepreneurial intentions with $\beta = 0.637$, $t = 8.433$ and $p < .05$. Result further highlights the moderating effect (1 -> SEI) of Self-efficacy in strengthening the relationship where $\beta = 0.811$, $t = 18.423$, $p < .05$, therefore hypothesis (H_3) was accepted.

Hypothesis Four

H_4: Empathy has significant and positive moderating effect on ENC and SEIs.

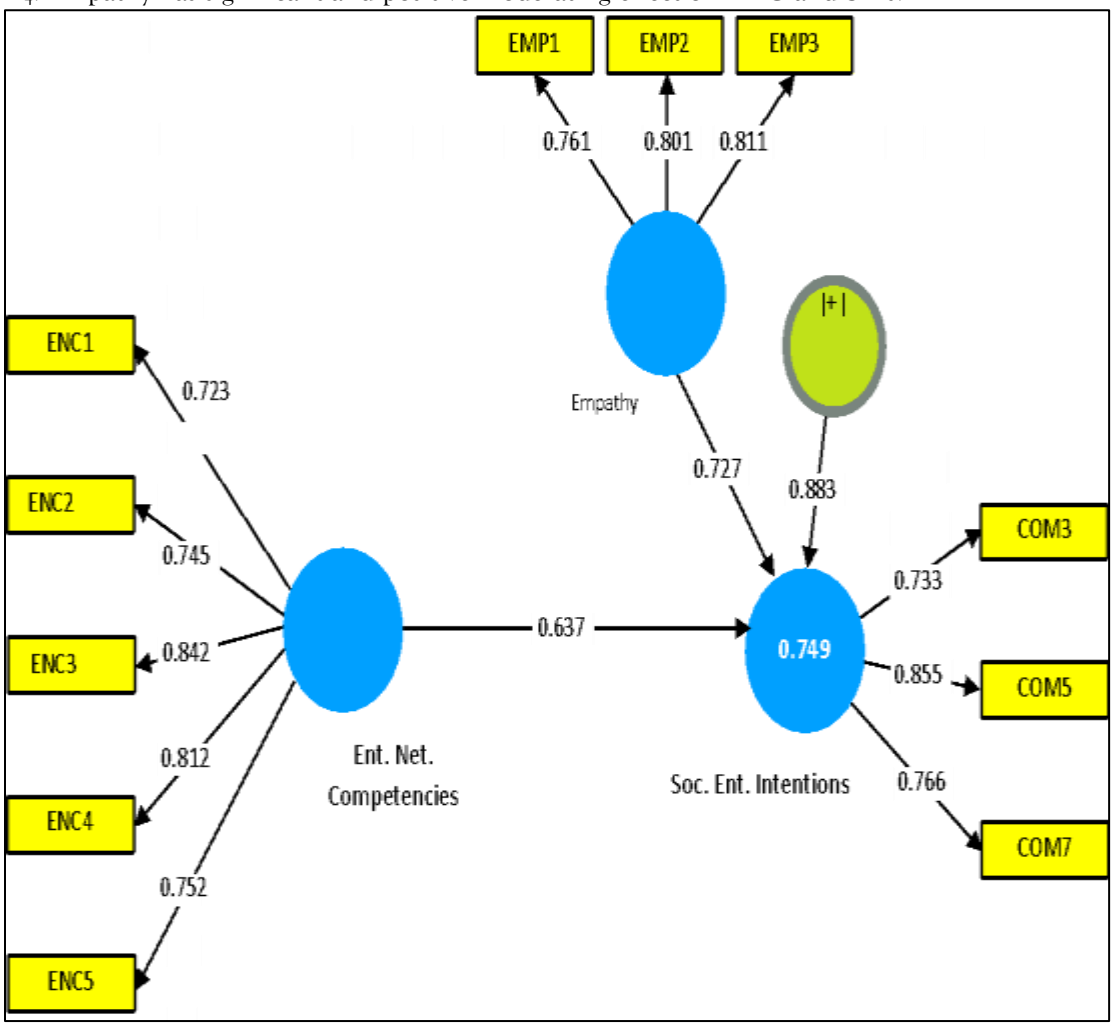

Figure 4 Empathy has significant and positive moderating effect on ENC and SEIs.

Table 12 Empathy has significant and positive moderating effect on ENC and SEIs

Paths	B	t-values	P. Values	Decision
ENC -> SEI	.637	8.433	.000	Accepted
EMP -> SEI	.727	14.862	.000	Accepted
Mod. Eff. 1 -> SEI	.883	16.522	.000	Accepted
Note: ENC = Entrepreneurial Networking Competence, EMP = Empathy, SEI = Social Entrepreneurial Intentions. $t > 1.96$, $p < 0.05$.				

The results presented in figure 4 and table 12 show that Empathy has significant and positive moderating effect on ENC and SEIs. With regards to Hair et al. (2017), this findings underscore the moderating effect, empathy has in the structural connection between the ENC and SEI. The result in Table 12 also shows that statistically and significantly entrepreneurial network competence is positively correlated to social entrepreneurial intentions with $\beta = 0.637$, $t = 8.433$ and p-value < .05. The result further highlights the moderating effect (1 -> SEI) of empathy in strengthening the link where $\beta = 0.883$, $t = 16.522$, $p < .05$, therefore hypothesis (H4) was accepted.

Hypothesis Five

H_5: Perceived social support has significant and positive moderating effect on ENC and SEIs.

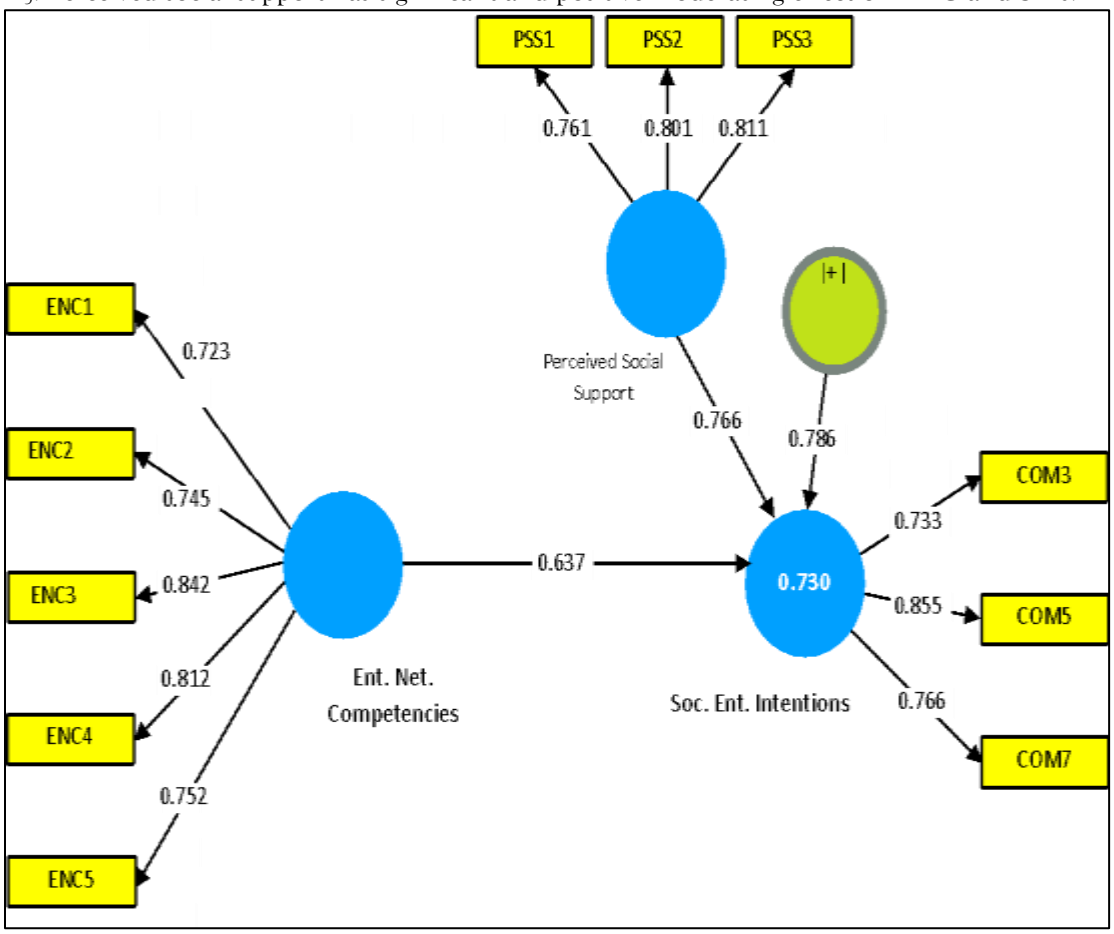

Figure 5 Perceived social support has significant and positive moderating effect on ENC and SEIs.

Table 13 Perceived social support has significant and positive moderating effect on ENC and SEIs.

Paths	B	t-values	P. Values	Decision
ENC -> SEI	.637	8.433	.000	Accepted
PSS -> SEI	.766	13.869	.000	Accepted
Mod. Eff. 1 -> SEI	.786	18.125	.001	Accepted
Note: ENC = Entrepreneurial Networking Competence, PSS = Perceived Social Support, SEI = Social Entrepreneurial Intentions. $t > 1.96$, $p < 0.05$				

The results presented in Figure 5 and table 13 show that Perceived social support has significant and positive moderating effect on ENC and SEIs. This empirical evidence underscores moderating role of PSS in the structural connection of the ENC and SEIs which is in line with Hair et al. (2017). The result in Table 13 also shows that statistically and significantly entrepreneurial network competence is positively correlated to social entrepreneurial intentions with $\beta = 0.637$, $t = 8.433$ and $p < .05$. Result further highlights the moderating effect (1 -> SEI) of perceived social support in strengthening the relationship where $\beta = 0.786$, $t = 18.125$, $p < .05$, therefore hypothesis (H5) was accepted.

5.0 DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that ENC has a positive and significant effect on SEIs among the selected fresh graduates in all the 5 states of South East in Nigeria. This result offers a great empirical insight on the

networking competence of the youth corps members. It shows that fresh graduates with high level of entrepreneurial networking competence tend towards developing social intentions by creating social values. The result highlights the relevance of social networks in exploring opportunities, driving force for entrepreneurial motivation and resource acquisition in the context of developing economy like Nigeria. The findings of this study resonate with (Nasri and Morched, 2023) that individuals with high level of networking capabilities are more inclined to produce resources and manoeuvre systemic barriers that impede the generation of entrepreneurial activities. The study of (Salamzadeh and Safari, 2020) supported this findings by highlighting that social network acts as a driving force to gain credibility, obtain knowledge as well as to innovate strategic partnerships that enhance social values. In the same vein (Kautonen et al., 2015) emphasized that networking has the ability to promote entrepreneurial intentions by increasing individual`s susceptibility to entrepreneurial opportunities for meaningful collaborations and mentorships particularly in a developing nation with poor organizational support systems.

The findings of this study also show that ENC and SEIs are positively related. Suggesting that corps members that are deeply involved in purposeful entrepreneurial networking are better positioned to believe that they possess competences which will help them start up achievable and desirable social entrepreneurship. The findings further reveal that networking competences enhance young graduates` motivation and confidence by building reliable partnerships, acquiring key knowledge, easily access funding as well as get engaged with mentors that will assist in forming and nurturing their entrepreneurial intentions. This is critical, especially in developing country like Nigeria where there is challenging structural support and lack of funding for start-ups making social networks a critical determinant for entrepreneurial growth. Additionally, the findings of this study underscore the moderating effect of MO, SE, EMP and PSS in significantly strengthening the positive relationship between ENC and SEIs. The role of these psychosocial moderating factors gives more insights on how internal and external factors influence innovation process.

Respectively, moral obligation bolsters the moral impetus of young graduates to deal with societal challenges by being enterprising. Self-efficacy builds self confidence among young graduates to create a sustainable entrepreneurship. Empathy encourages young graduates to be responsive to shared interest while perceived social support affords fresh graduates the supportive ally that will enable them transform social intentions to entrepreneurial activities. The mutual effect of the moderating factors in this study indicates that social entrepreneurship is not only propelled by competence but also reinforced by a complex interaction of individual ethical scruples and getting normative and instrumental support.

Furthermore, findings of this study resonate with (Bandura 1997) social cognitive theory that entrepreneurial Intentions are determined by self-determination and an enabling factor. When young people perceive moral obligations, are confident of their abilities, have empathy as well as perceive social support, they will probably transform their networking skills into meaningful social entrepreneurial intentions. These cohesive insights from these findings add to the entrepreneurship literature by shedding more light on the relationship between ENC and SEIs. Indicating that the relationship is synergetic and not linear which is moderated by the MO, SE, EMP and PSS. Largely, this study demonstrates that encouraging social entrepreneurship among young graduates in developing nations demands a holistic approach that combines networking competence with psychosocial development initiatives which enhance MO, SE, EMP and PSS. This strategic approach will help fresh graduates to have confidence and integrity that will enable them identify socially innovative opportunities that will make sustainable impact to the society.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The study concludes that there is a positive and significant effect of ENC on SEI among fresh graduates in South-East, Nigeria. The findings of this study have shown that entrepreneurial networking competence is a critical determinant of fresh graduates` motivation and the ability to participate in social entrepreneurship. In addition, the findings emphasized significantly the moderating effect of moral obligation, self-efficacy, empathy and perceived social support in the relationship. This highlights the efficacy of networking competence in strengthening ethical behaviours, boost confidence, develop empathy for social problem as well as build a supporting environment that drives social values. Accordingly, the relationship between entrepreneurial networking competence and the moderating factors is a very strong framework through which

individuals especially fresh graduates would rely on to transform social responsibilities to entrepreneurial intentions that are sustainable. Based on this study`s empirical evidence, this conclusion buttresses the fact that entrepreneurial social intentions thrives when there is robust entrepreneurial networking competencies and strongly moderated by moral obligation, self-efficacy, empathy and perceived social support.

7.0 Limitations of the Study

This study was affected by several factors in many ways. These include limitation in scope as regards geographical distribution, smaller sample size, and the research approach. These limitations are explained as follows:

The study is restricted to South-East Nigeria which limits the generalizability of its findings therefore requires carefulness in extrapolating the results. To avoid this challenge the study employed purposive sampling in the inclusion of corps members from different geographical areas to ensure the validity and applicability of the findings in several context.

The smaller size of the study`s sample may limit the sensitivity as well as the generalizability of the findings thereby increasing the probability of making Type II errors and prejudiced estimates. To counter this, the study employed bootstrapping using SmartPLS 3.2.9 which enhanced the validity, reliability and the general fitness of the results of this study

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