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Journal of the International Council for Small Business

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/ucsb20

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To cite this article: Seone Soakimi Lolesio, Ritu Srivastava & Shital Vakhariya (30 Dec 2024): Factors influencing the success of micro- and small enterprises: Evidence from Fiji, Journal of the International Council for Small Business, DOI: 10.1080/26437015.2024.2411760

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/26437015.2024.2411760

JOURNAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SMALL BUSINESS
https://doi.org/10.1080/26437015.2024.2411760

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Factors influencing the success of micro- and small enterprises: Evidence from Fiji

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ABSTRACT

Micro- and small enterprises (MSEs) play a vital role in the economies of many countries, significantly contributing to GDP and employment. Although extensive global research exists on MSE success, there is a limited study focused on small island developing states, like Fiji. Identifying the factors contributing to the success of MSEs is essential for enhancing the development of this sector. This cross-sectional study examined the factors affecting the success of MSEs among 291 MSE owners and managers in the municipality of Nasinu, Fiji. The findings revealed that all examined variables directly influence MSE success, with significant indirect effects mediated by other factors. This study highlights that firm attributes, individual attributes, strategic factors, social factors, and enabling environment are crucial to the success of MSEs in the municipality.

KEYWORDS

Micro- and small enterprises; MSE success; small island developing states; Nasinu municipality; Fiji

Introduction

In Fiji, micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) play a crucial role in ensuring economic stability and growth. Recent reports indicate that this sector contributes over 18 percent to Fiji's Gross Domestic Product and provides approximately 60 percent of private sector employment (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise Fiji Policy Framework, 2020). Recognizing their significance, the Fijian government has recently restructured its approach to encompass micro-enterprises better. As of August 1, 2024, the Ministry of Trade, Cooperatives, SMEs, and Communication underscored a commitment to integrating micro-enterprises into the broader MSME sector, which currently includes about 82 percent in employment and 30,000 registered entities (The Fiji Times, 2024).

Despite the vital role of micro- and small enterprises (MSEs), there is a notable lack of detailed research on the factors contributing to their success in the municipality of Nasinu and across Fiji. This study aims to address this research gap by identifying the factors influencing the success of MSEs, specifically in Nasinu. As the largest municipality in Fiji by land area, Nasinu has not

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been the subject of formal research on this topic since its designation as a town in 2000. The findings from this study will provide valuable insights for policy recommendations and support the development of a robust MSE sector. Additionally, the results could serve as a model for similar research in other municipalities in Fiji and small island developing states (SIDS) throughout the South Pacific.

Study objective

The study investigates the critical factors influencing the success of MSEs in the municipality of Nasinu, Fiji. It examines five key independent variables—firm attributes, individual attributes, strategic factors, social factors, and enabling environment—and their determinants. Furthermore, the study explores the mediation effects of some variables on others concerning the success of MSEs.

Literature review

The variables

The literature review identified the success of MSEs in the municipality of Nasinu as the dependent variable. It also outlined five independent variables and 25 subvariables (determinants). The study variables, along with their descriptions and supporting articles, are detailed in Table 1.

Research framework

The research framework for this study is displayed in Figure 1.

MSEs definition

In Fiji, the definition of MSEs has been updated with the MSME Policy Framework (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise Fiji Government Policy Framework, 2020), which classifies MSEs based on annual sales turnover rather than the number of employees. This approach aligns with global practices but differs from definitions used by the International Labour Organization and World Bank, which typically focus on employee numbers (International Finance Corporation (IFC)-World Bank Group Report, IFC-World Bank Group, 2014; IFC-World Bank Group and SME FINANCE Forum, 2019). This study adopts the IFC-World Bank definition based on employees while considering the local policy framework.

Table 1. Study variables with descriptions and supporting articles.

Variables (dependent and independent)	Description	Articles
Dependent variable: Success of MSEs (MSESF)	The success of MSEs in the municipality of Nasinu.	Alonso et al., (2022); Khalil et al., (2022), Razmus and Laguna, (2018); Tesheen et al., (2023); Wach et al., (2016), K. Wach et al., (2018), Wach et al., (2020).
Independent variables	**Subvariables (determinants)**	**Articles**
Firm attributes (FA): Characteristics specific to an individual MSE as a firm	• FA1: Market structure: Market type affecting MSE success. • FA2: Brand reputation: Well-regarded brand or reputation of the MSE. • FA3: Location: Where the MSE operates from. • FA4: Age: Years in business. • FA5: Size: Number of employees.	Al Asheq and Hossain, (2019); Alfoqahaa, (2018); Anggraeni and Selamat, (2021); Asikhia and Naidoo, (2021); Boudreaux, (2020a), (2020b); U. M. Devadas and Hettiarachchi, (2022); Dutta et al., (2022); Egere et al., (2024); Eriksson et al., (2023); Luo et al., (2019); Menicucci, (2018); Muhonen et al., (2017); Rafiki, (2020); D. A. Williams and Ramdani, (2018);
Individual attributes (IA): Characteristics specific to MSE owners/managers	• IA1: Education: Qualification from formal education pathways (for example, secondary and tertiary). • IA2: Training: Pieces for capacity building. • IA3: Experience: From previous employment. • IA4: Effort: Hard work or how much time spent in business • IA5: Motivation: Purpose of setting up and running a business.	Al-Awlaqi et al., (2021); Anshika et al., (2021); Essel et al., (2019); Forth and Bryson, (2019); Krithiga and Velmurugan, (2024); McKenzie and Woodruff, (2017); Nicoara and Kadile, (2023); Obeng, (2018); Rastrollo-Horrillo, (2021); Rayburn et al., (2021); Simba et al., (2024), Vixathep and Phonvisay, (2019).
Strategic factors (ST): Business strategies employed by MSEs	• ST1: Customer focus: Customer satisfaction main business objective. • ST2: Innovation: Best product and quality service. • ST3: Finance: Easy access to and best utilization of finance available. • ST4: Information technology (IT) use: Best use of IT available. • ST5: Supply chain management: Efficient and effective organization of supply.	Bakry et al., (2024); Canhoto et al., (2021); Chhatwani et al., (2022); D. Devadas and Jayasooriya, (2021); Foltean et al., (2019); Koporcic and Törnroos, (2019); Liu et al., (2021); Parast and Safari, (2022); Parayil Iqbal et al., (2023); Ogundana et al., (2024); Teece, (2018).
Social factors (SF): Social aspects supporting MSEs	• SF1: Network: Business, social, and political groups or contacts. • SF2: Family/friend support: Support from family and friends. • SF3: Culture/tradition: Owner/manager cultural background of doing things/business. • SF4: Property/land ownership: MSE owns land and property where the business operates. • SF5: Religious orientation: Influence of faith and religion of the MSE owner/manager.	Ashiru et al., (2022), Best et al., (2022); Blankson et al., (2018); Burt et al., (2021); Chikweche and Mohammed, (2023); Emon and Khan, (2023); Khan et al., (2022); Morić Milovanović et al., (2021); Tesheen, Deng, et al., (2023); Tesheen, Johara, et al., (2023); Wambui and Josephine, (2021); Yáñez-Araque et al., (2021).

(*Continued*)

Table 1. (Continued).

Enabling environment (EE): Business environment external factors	• EE1: Government support/policy: Central and local government support/policy • EE2: Safe/secure environment: Physical environment security. • EE3: Nongovernmental organization (NGO)/civil society support: Support from NGOs and civil societies. • EE4: Infrastructure: Utilities and IT services available • EE5: Market access: Easy access to customers.	Abba et al., (2022); Abdullah and Mansor, (2018); Adagba and Shakpande, (2017); Akinyemi and Adejumo, (2018); Asikhia and Naidoo, (2021); Baldegger et al., (2024); Chhatwani et al., (2022); Cooper, (2018); Ho et al., (2022); Ndiaye et al., (2018).

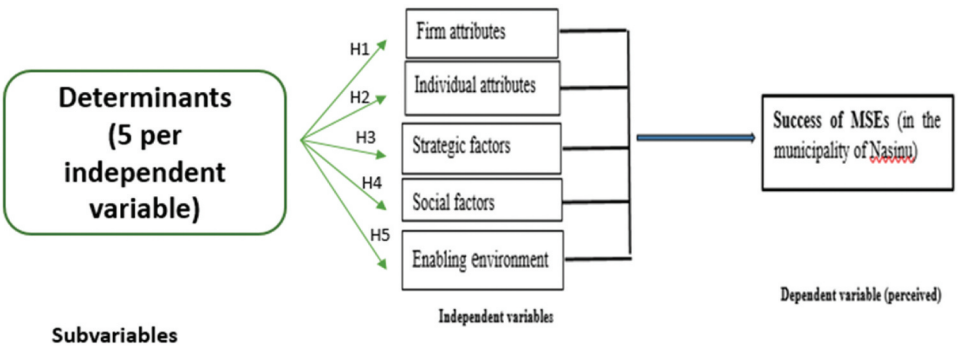

Figure 1. The research framework for this study.

Business success

The concept of business success in MSEs is multifaceted and context-dependent (Khalil et al., 2022; Razmus & Laguna, 2018). While traditional metrics often emphasize financial criteria like profitability and employee numbers (Duarte Alonso & Kok, 2021), this view may not fully capture success in community-oriented MSEs, where nonfinancial outcomes can be prioritized (Badini et al., 2018; Duarte Alonso & Kok, 2021). For example, MSEs in remote areas might measure success through social impact rather than profit (Tesheen, Deng, et al., 2023; Tesheen, Johara, et al., 2023). Duarte Alonso and Kok (2021) advocated for a holistic success measure, including both financial and nonfinancial goals, such as customer loyalty and social impact (Demirbag et al., 2006a, 2006b; Walker & Brown, 2004). Simpson et al. (2012) highlighted that success is closely tied to achieving goals and performance metrics.

Critical success factors (CSFs)

The concept of CSFs has been extensively explored in the literature, with J. J. Williams and Ramaprasad (1996) providing a taxonomy of CSFs across different levels and attributes. Originally introduced by Daniel (1961) in management information contexts, CSFs have been broadened to include various business settings, including MSEs (J. J. Williams & Ramaprasad, 1996). Recent research emphasizes that CSFs include both internal factors (for example, management capabilities and financial resources) and external factors (for example, economic conditions and regulatory frameworks; Ahmed & Kim, 2020; Aquilani et al., 2017).

The success of MSEs in the municipality of Nasinu

The success of MSEs in the municipality of Nasinu is influenced by a range of factors, which can vary based on local economic conditions and industry specifics. This study aims to identify these CSFs, categorized into firm attributes (FA), individual attributes (IA), strategic factors (ST), social factors (SF), and enabling environment factors (EE). Understanding these factors is essential, as they contribute to MSEs addressing challenges to their survival (Bushe, 2019).

Methodology

This study utilized a deductive approach and an embedded mixed-methods design, employing cross-sectional data.

Data sources

Both primary and secondary data sources were employed. The primary data were collected through face-to-face surveys, with MSE owners/managers, ensuring confidentiality and adherence to ethical guidelines. Slovin's formula was used for sample size selection and stratified sampling for choosing the MSEs from each ward for the survey. Slovin's formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+Ne^2}$$

where N = 1,086 (total MSEs) and e = 0.05 (margin of error); the calculated sample size is approximately 292. An adjusted sample size of 330 was chosen for added reliability. Stratified sampling was used, dividing Nasinu into its seven wards (strata), with sample allocation proportional to the number of MSEs per ward. Approval to carry out the research in the municipality was obtained from the Nasinu Town Council Office. Two enumerators assisted with the conducting of the

survey, especially with translations (survey questions were in English), and administered printed questionnaires. A pilot study was conducted with 50 respondents from Nasinu-Laqere Market to test and refine the survey instrument. Feedback from 18 completed pilot surveys led to adjustments before the main survey, which ran from late April to mid-July 2023. Two hundred and ninety-one completed surveys after cleaning, were used for the statistical analysis.

The secondary data were sourced from academic articles (Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) 2020/2022; Journal Quality List (JQL) ranking) and annual reports to provide context and foundational support.

Proposed hypotheses

There were two types of hypotheses to be tested: direct effects and indirect effects through mediation.

(1) Direct effects (H1–H5): Assessing the impact of various factors on the success of MSEs.

H1: *FA significantly impact the success of MSEs.*
H2: *IA significantly impact the success of the MSEs.*
H3: *ST significantly impact the success of the MSEs.*
H4: *SF significantly impact the success of the MSEs.*
H5: *EE significantly impact the success of MSEs.*

(2) Mediating effects (H6–H15): Examining how various factors mediate relationships between other variables and MSE success.

H6: *FA is mediated by IA for the success of MSEs.*
H7: *FA is mediated by ST for the success of MSEs.*
H8: *FA is mediated by SF for the success of MSEs.*
H9: *IA is mediated by ST for the success of MSEs.*
H10: *IA is mediated by SF for the success of MSEs.*
H11: *SF is mediated by ST for the success of MSEs.*
H12: *EE is mediated by FA for the success of MSEs.*
H13: *EE is mediated by IA for the success of MSEs.*
H14: *EE is mediated by ST for the success of MSEs.*
H15: *EE is mediated by SF for the success of MSEs.*

Mediation effects were tested using the Sobel *z*-test, categorized as (a) complementary mediation: both mediated effect and direct effect are significant and point in the same direction; (b) competitive mediation: mediated effect and direct effect are significant but point in opposite directions; (c) indirect-

only mediation: only the mediated effect is significant; (d) direct-only mediation: only the direct effect is significant; (e) noneffect and nonmediation: neither effect is significant (Zhao et al., 2010).

The Sobel z-test thresholds (Zhao et al., 2010): (a) One-tailed test: The absolute value of the z-value should be greater than 1.645 (that is, $|z| > 1.645$) to be considered significant at the .05 alpha level; (b) Two-tailed test: The absolute value of the z-value should exceed 1.96 (that is, $|z| > 1.96|$) to be significant at the .05 alpha level. The 291 completed surveys collected exceed the minimum of 30 required for robust Sobel z-test results.

Statistical tools: Techniques and software

Partial least squares–structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to analyze relationships among MSE success factors using Advanced Analysis of Composites (ADANCO) 2.3.3 software, exploring the relationships between the success of MSEs (MSESF) and independent variables.

Results

Profile and demography of respondents

The survey collected data on various demographic and business characteristics of respondents. Table 2 summarizes this information.

Table 2. Profile and demography of the respondents.

Profile/demography	Group	Male (percentage)	Female (percentage)	Percentage
Age	18–30 years	28.0	36.0	
	30–40 years	42.0	40.0	
	40–60 years	30.0	23.0	
	>60 years		1.0	
Ethnicity	Itaukei (Indigenous Fijian)			20.0
	Indo-Fijian (Fijian of Indian descent)			78.0
	Others (Chinese, Pacific Islanders, etc.)			2.0
Year of operation	More than 5 years			27.0
	Almost 5 years			17.0
	3 to 4 years			24.0
	Less than 2 years			23.0
	Just started			9.0
Type of business	Retail shop			42.0
	Construction/manufacturing			22.0
	Restaurant			10.0
	Market vendor			7.0
	Kava shop			6.0
	Others (including hair salons, bakeries, car washes, rental cars, pharmacies, and so on)			13.0
Role in MSE	Owner			71.0
	Owner/manager			22.0
	Others (long-serving, trustworthy employees, and so on)			7.0
Number of employees	1–10 employees			82.0
	Only the owner (including family members)			11.0
	11–50 employees			7.0
MSE category	Micro enterprises			93.0
	Small enterprises			7.0

Location

The study focused on MSEs within the municipality of Nasinu, which is divided into seven wards. According to the Nasinu Town Council Annual Report (2010), the municipality serves approximately 11,819 ratepayers. However, ratepayers should be increased by 2017, as, according to the 2017 Fiji Census, the total population residing at Nasinu was 92,040 (United Nations Economics and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), 2017).

The measurement model

The measurement model evaluated the relationship between variables and their indicators (Henseler, 2017, 2018, 2020; José, 2021). The key aspects assessed include construct reliability, scale validity, indicator multicollinearity, and interconstruct correlations. *Construct reliability*: Measures how consistently a tool assesses the intended construct. It ensures stable reflection of the construct across different instances. The Dijkstra Henseler's rho (ρA; Henseler et al., 2014), composite reliability, and Cronbach's alpha measured the construct reliability. The ADANCO output confirmed that the model meets the construct reliability criteria. *Scale validity*: Confirmed through validity tests ensuring the constructs measure what they intended to. All validity tests (discriminant validity and cross-loading) were satisfactory. *The indicator multicollinearity*: Assessed using variance inflation factor. Values below 5, with many below 3, indicate minimal multicollinearity. Multicollinearity was not observed in the model of this study. *Interconstruct correlations*: Correlations above 0.5 support the validity of the structural model and suggest meaningful mediation effects. All correlation values exceed 0.5, confirming mediation effects and validating the model.

The structural model

SEM was used to test hypotheses on the relationships among variables affecting the success of MSEs. Path loadings indicated the strength and direction of these relationships (Byrne, 2013; Pavlov et al., 2021). The model included five independent variables and accounted for mediation effects. The reliability and validity of the constructs were confirmed, ensuring the robustness of the model. The goodness of fit (estimated model) was also tested with the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) test. The SRMR value of 0.0931 indicates an acceptable model fit (below the 0.10 threshold; Henseler, 2017; Maydeu-Olivares, 2017). And the coefficient of determination (R^2) value of 0.761, indicates that 76.1 percent of the variance in the dependent variable (MSESF) is

explained by the independent variables (FA, IA, ST, SF, and EE). The adjusted R^2 value of 0.7568, confirms a good model fit (Henseler, 2017). The study's results support the validity of the measurement and structural models, with robust goodness of fit and significant explanatory power of the model.

Significance testing

The study used *t*-tests and *p*-values to assess the significance of relationships between constructs, with significance levels set at 1 percent, 5 percent, and 10 percent (corresponding to confidence intervals of 99 percent, 95 percent, and 90 percent). These levels or confidence intervals yield consistent results regardless of terminology.

Effects on the success of MSEs

The analysis demonstrated significant direct impacts from all independent variables on the success of MSEs, with nine mediation effects identified. For FA, we focused on four determinants: FA1 (market structure), FA2 (brand reputation), FA3 (location), and FA4 (age), excluding FA5 (size) due to insufficient loading. Brand reputation (FA2) emerged as the most influential factor, followed by location (FA3), market structure (FA1), and age (FA4) as the least influential. H1 confirmed the significant impact of FA on the success of MSEs, while H6, H7, and H8 affirmed mediation effects by IA, ST, and SF.

In examining IA, we analyzed IA1 (education), IA2 (training), IA3 (experience), and IA4 (effort), excluding IA5 (motivation) due to insufficient loading. Training (IA2) was found to be the most influential, followed by experience (IA3), education (IA1), and effort (IA4) as the least influential. H2 confirmed IA's significant impact on the success of MSEs. H9 showed no significant mediation by ST, while H10 confirmed significant mediation of IA's impact by SF.

For ST, we analyzed ST1 (customer focus), ST2 (innovation), ST3 (finance), and ST5 (supply chain management), excluding ST4 (IT use) due to insufficient loading. Innovation (ST2) was identified as the most influential, followed by finance (ST3), supply chain management, and customer focus (ST1). H3 confirmed a significant direct impact of ST on the success of MSEs, with no mediation effects tested.

In assessing SF, we focused on SF1 (network), SF2 (family/friend support), SF3 (culture/tradition), and SF4 (property/land ownership), excluding SF5 (religious orientation) due to insufficient loading. Family/friend support (SF2) emerged as the most influential, followed by network (SF1), culture/tradition (SF3), and property/land ownership (SF4). H4 confirmed

SF's significant direct impact on the success of MSEs, and H11 confirmed significant mediation of SF's impact by ST.

For the EE, all five determinants were analyzed, confirming their significance. Market access (EE5) was the most influential, followed by a safe/secure environment (EE2), government policy/support (EE1), nongovernmental organization/civil society support (EE3), and infrastructure (EE4) as the least influential. H5 confirmed a significant direct effect of EE on the success of MSEs, while H12, H13, H14, and H15 confirmed significant mediation of EE's impact through FA, IA, ST, and SF.

The SEM analysis validated 14 hypotheses, illustrating significant direct and indirect relationships between the independent variables (FA, IA, ST, SF, and EE) and the success of MSEs. Key findings indicate that ST has the strongest direct impact on the success of MSEs, while EE has the weakest. The most significant indirect effects were observed for EE through ST, FA through IA, and EE through SF, with the least significant being FA through SF. Although EE's direct impact is weak, its effectiveness is enhanced through interactions with ST, FA, IA, and SF. Fourteen hypotheses were supported, highlighting the multifaceted influences on the success of MSEs in the municipality of Nasinu.

Conclusion

The study aimed to achieve two primary objectives: (a) to examine how independent variables (FA, IA, ST, SF, EE) impact the success of MSEs through their determinants, testing five hypotheses (H1–H5); and (b) to explore how mediation influences this success by testing 10 additional hypotheses (H6–H15).

The findings confirm that all variables— FA, IA, ST, SF, and EE—significantly influence the success of MSEs. This aligns with global research highlighting the importance of these factors in MSE development. Recommendations for MSE development in Nasinu include enhancing brand reputation, providing ongoing training, fostering innovation, leveraging social support, and improving market access.

The study identified nine significant mediation effects: (a) FA strengthened by IA, ST, and SF; (b) IA enhanced by SF; (c) SF amplified by ST; and (d) EE boosted by FA, IA, ST, and SF. Notably, the mediation effect of IA by ST was not significant, suggesting that ST does not enhance IA's influence on the success of MSEs. This raises questions about whether IA mediates ST's impact on the success of MSEs, warranting further investigation.

It is recommended to design comprehensive support programs addressing various aspects of MSE development, alongside robust monitoring and

evaluation frameworks. By focusing on these areas, the success and sustainability of MSEs in Nasinu can be significantly improved.

Limitations and scope for future research

The study lacks detailed insights into how individual determinants impact the success of MSEs and does not specifically address women's entrepreneurship. Factors such as political stability, cybersecurity, and other risks beyond a safe/secure environment were not considered. Additionally, the study is confined to one municipality in a single SID and excludes informal and nonregistered MSEs.

Future research should focus on (a) investigating the direct impact of individual determinants on MSE success, focusing on innovative strategies; (b) exploring the challenges and contributions of women entrepreneurs in SIDS; (c) examining the effects of political stability, cybersecurity, and other risks; (d) conducting comparative studies across municipalities in Fiji and other South Pacific SIDs; and (e) include informal and nonregistered MSEs for a broader understanding of the sector. Addressing these gaps in future research can offer valuable insights for policy making and enhance MSE performance and development in the municipality of Nasinu and Fiji overall.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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