

Entrepreneurial Networking and Resilience of SMES in Abia State, Nigeria

Amaka Anna Iyke¹ and B. Chima Onuoha²

¹Doctoral Student, Department of Management, University of Port Harcourt

²Professor of Management, Department of Management, University of Port Harcourt

Abstract: *The study investigates the relationship between entrepreneurial networking and resilience of SMEs in Abia State, Nigeria. A cross-sectional survey was used. A sample of 291 was drawn from a population of 1240 small and medium enterprises in Abia State using the Krejcie Morgan 1970 table. A structured questionnaire was used to collect the data. In order to determine the relationship between entrepreneurial networking and resilience, the Spearman rank correlation was used in the analysis. The findings show that entrepreneurial networking is related to the resilience of SMEs in Abia State, Nigeria. The study recommended that organizations should embrace entrepreneurial networking to be resilient, agile and adapt to new changes.*

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial Networking, Relationship Skills, Coordination, Resilience, Adaptability, Agility.*

1.0 Introduction

Small and medium-sized firms (SMEs), especially micro SMEs, form the foundation of global, national, and local markets, as they are recruiter of one out of every three people (OECD 2019). When calamity occurs, SMEs are hurt harder, as they suffer more losses, and recover more slowly than bigger companies. If the global community intends to have mutual relationship and coordinate to enhance people's lives and livelihoods in emerging and developing economies, risk, agility, adaptability to changes by the SMEs must be addressed. Hence the need to strengthen SMEs' resilience to different hazards, and allowing SMEs to be more sustainable and competitive in the long run by minimizing catastrophe risks, with a particular emphasis on (United Nations, 2016; United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2020).

The process and effect of successfully adapting to harsh or hard life situations, particularly via mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal pressures, and being agile is referred to as resilience (American Psychological Association, 2023). To be resilient, a firm must be able to survive market collapse, agile, have a superior supply chains, provide competent labor force, and succeed in sectors, supply networks, and talent marketplaces where success and survival standards are vague and always meeting up with global changes. According to psychological studies, increased resilience may be built and exercised through how individuals perceive and engage with the environment, the availability and quality of social resources, and specialized coping methods (American Psychological Association, 2023). Great entrepreneurial

networking is required for SMEs to successfully respond in personal and leadership resilience, developing resilient organizations, resilient revenue, resilient finance, and operational resilience.

Networking is beneficial to business professionals and entrepreneurs because it may lead to vital chances, information, and support, which can be beneficial and be the difference between a successful and unsuccessful endeavor (Cote, 2022). Businesses run by entrepreneurs may prosper or fail depending on the caliber and strength of their network. It's crucial to consider the goal of joining a network before committing to any community. One of an entrepreneur's most essential resources is a solid network. An entrepreneur can build a network that opens doors, cooperate, coordinate and provides support as the business expands, look for networking activities that match their specialization, and keep relationships (Cote, 2022). A solid network may assist to acquire finance, connect with the right employee, attract board members, get much-needed advice, and give support when the weight of operating a business gets too great. It is essential to establish what you want to achieve, the specific business goal in mind, the solution to a problem, why you want to connect with other SMEs in the industries before joining a network. (Kiesh,2022).

The most recent Covid-19 study highlighted discrepancies between large corporations and SMEs in terms of success, as high-capitalized SMEs have fared better than cash-strapped SMEs in weathering the storm, the shock to SMEs has been severe; some have survived and even prospered, while others have collapsed, however, it is still not too late for others to embrace the strategies used by those organizations who were successful in a chaotic environment (Allas, T., Birshan, M., Imprey, A., Mischke, J., & Woetzel, J. (2021). The most successful large businesses and higher-performing SMEs were those that were financially resilient, had organizational capabilities, made strategic investments, adjusted during the crisis, engage in accelerated digitization, including automation and shifts to online channels and remote or hybrid work; reorganized and retrained for operational efficiency; and became more agile, increasing the pace of both product and business model innovation and engage in network entrepreneurship.

In today's globalizing environment, networking is critical for business (Leevi, 2015). According to Toivola (2005), business networking is a social process in which information, know-how, and value are blended into a value-adding action. Small enterprises require resources and assistance from other sources, such as other firms, support institutions, and family and friends (Das & Goswami, 2019). According to Crowley, McAdam, Cunningham, and Hilliard (2018), networking is commonly seen as a critical tactic for SMEs to exploit their comparative disadvantage.

Although several researches have been undertaking on resilience, and few on entrepreneurial network, the dearth of empirical study on entrepreneurial networking and resilience of SMEs, necessitates enhancing entrepreneurial networking to address risk in SMEs, increase their resilience to various hazards, and enable them to remain sustainable and competitive in the long run by lowering catastrophe risks and placing a particular emphasis on prevention.

Statement of Problems

A small firm can be started with tremendous success, but it faces more challenges as it expands. SMEs owners frequently seek help from other business owners in their network to address these obstacles (Tradegecko, 2018). To compete and prosper in their commercial pursuits, small businesses in developing nations require network assistance (Abeka, 2011). The goal of any firm

is to do better than competitors in the sector to which it belongs. The biggest challenge for SMEs is to be agile, have good relationship skills, good coordination, survive and grow in the current competitive business environment (Tehseen, Qureshi, & Ramayah, 2018; Tehseen and Sajilan, 2016) and be resilient. However, many lacks the necessary competencies, technology, capital, and appropriate knowledge, agility, adaptability and information needed to run their business more successfully.

Companies continue to strive for close relationships with other parties in order to minimize uncertainties by mutually joining and increasing their resource levels, including knowledge resources (Salamzadeh, Salamzadeh, & Radovic Markovic, 2016), but responding to a hazardous and stressful external event, such as the recent global economic crisis, is a critical global problem for small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs), as the SMEs' continued existence and success are dependent on it. Organizations' ability to recover and move forward erodes their competitiveness and growth. This may result in consumer dissatisfaction and, as a result, a poor brand image, which will have a detrimental influence on small-scale enterprises' corporate growth.

Igbinadolor (2022) stated that, researchers and practitioners agree that SMEs are critical contributors to job creation and economic growth in both high and low-income countries, but unemployment remains extremely high, indicating that this goal has not been met. Access to foreign money, financing, and over-regulation continue to be three of the most severe obstacles for Nigeria's Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs).

The 2020 World Bank research reveals that the majority of SMEs do not expand; instead, they stabilize at their current size or shut down, with a small percentage showing a substantial increase in productivity or scale. A small number of disruptive start-ups, nevertheless, have the power to create new, more effective business models that might ultimately influence whole economies. The absence of these creative, disruptive SMEs might leave the economy permanently damaged.

Small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) are less likely to be able to obtain bank loans than large businesses; instead, they rely on internal funds or cash from friends and family to start and initially manage their businesses; roughly half of formal SMEs do not have access to formal credit. When micro and informal firms are included, the finance gap widens even more, and expanding markets and emerging countries are also substantial barriers to the development of SMEs (2023, World Bank)

According to Erumebor (2023), Nigeria Multidimensional Poverty Index (2022) shows that, in accordance with the most recent data from the National Bureau of Statistics, 56.1 percent of Nigerians experienced multidimensional poverty in 2020 as a result of rising unemployment and underemployment rates. The Nigerian economy experienced major difficulties due to reduced productivity and the slow expansion of industries with high employment elasticity. Economic growth has also not been equally distributed. Taking the myriad of problems identified above, the study therefore examines entrepreneurial networking and resilience of SMEs in Abia State, Nigeria.

Aim and Objective of the study

The study examines entrepreneurial networking and resilience of SMES in Abia state, Nigeria. Specifically it determines the relationship between:

1. Relationship skills and adaptability of SMEs in Abia State.
2. Relationship skills and agility of SMEs in Abia State
3. Coordination and adaptability of SMEs in Abia State.
4. Coordination and agility of SMEs in Abia

Research Questions

1. To what extent does relationship skills relate with adaptability of SMEs in Abia State?
2. How does relationship skills relate with agility of SMEs in Abia State?
3. What is the relationship between coordination and adaptability of SMEs in Abia State?
4. How does Coordination relate with agility of SMEs in Abia?

Research Hypothesis

- Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between relationship skills and adaptability of SMEs in Abia State.
- Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between relationship skills and agility of SMEs in Abia State.
- Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between Coordination and adaptability of SMEs in Abia State.
- Ho₄: There is no significant relationship between Coordination and agility of SMEs in Abia State.

2.0 Review of Related Literature

The variables and the dimensions for the study are examined from the viewpoint of literature in this section. Entrepreneurial Networking and Organizational Resilience are the variables and are laid out in the conceptual framework as figure 1.

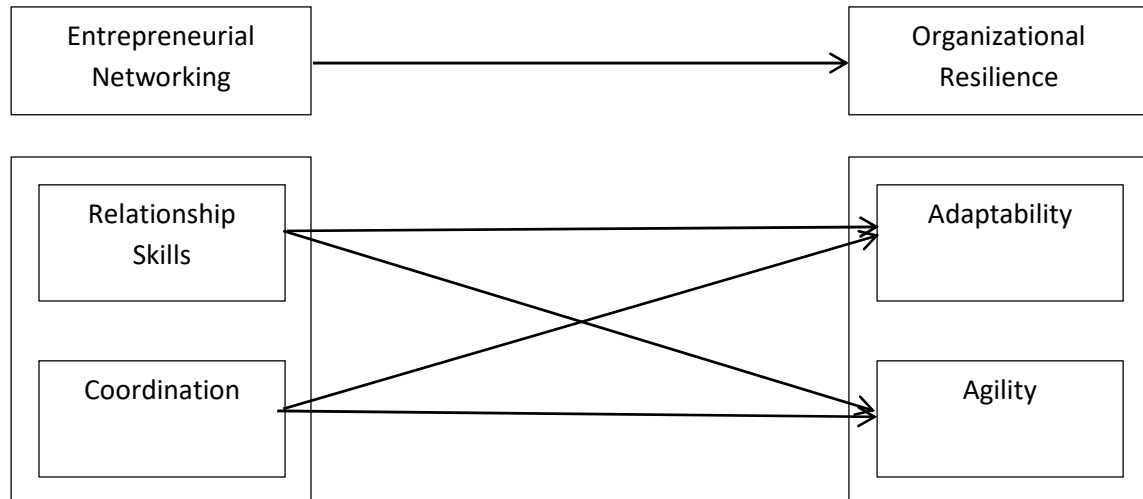


Fig. 1.1: Conceptual framework of Entrepreneurial Networking and Organizational Resilience of SMEs in Abia State

Theoretical Framework: Dynamic Capability Theory

The research is based on dynamic capability theory. Dynamic capacity is a competitive advantage hypothesis that applies to dynamically changing circumstances. The idea focuses on dynamic capacity, which is defined as an organization's ability to actively alter its resource base. Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997) describe dynamic capabilities as the firm's capacity to mix, develop, and reconfigure external and internal expertise in order to adapt to a rapidly changing environment.

Previous research has defined dynamic capacities in great detail. Eisenhardt and Martin (2000) define dynamic capacities as the process of utilizing existing resources to generate new resources capable of causing market change. Markets alter as they grow, emerge, divide, or even perish. Aside from that, dynamic capacities are the outcome of changes in resources that have been acquired, integrated, and recombined to create new strategies (Grant, 1996; Pisano, 1994). Hence, dynamic capacities are an important aspect in the development of new sources of competitive advantage (Henderson & Ceburn, 1994; Teece et al., 1997). Previous researchers perceived dynamic capabilities as a way to solve inflexibility in capabilities (Schreyogg & Kliesch-Eberl, 2007), how to utilize and make use of knowledge (Easterby-Smith & Prieto, 2008), and some even agreed that dynamic capabilities can explain how firms respond to change, particularly in the environmental context (Newey & Zahra, 2009).

Entrepreneurial Networking

Entrepreneurship is a management style that we describe as the pursuit of opportunity without regard for present resources (Birley & Muzyka, 2000). A network is the coming together of organizations and persons who can benefit others in the network with their knowledge and skills; it refers to the relationship between members of a networking club, whether they are in the same

or other trades (Aladejebi, 2020). Networks are complicated systems built around a set of goals that simultaneously assure unity of purpose and flexibility of execution.

Entrepreneurial networks (EN) are patterns of interpersonal relationships that emerge from business activity, in which the entrepreneurs interact with a number of different players in their daily operations, all of whom play key roles in the operation of their firm (Baghdiantz-McCabe, Harleftis, Pepelase, Minoglou, 2005). Entrepreneurial networks, according to Drakopoulou, Dodd, and Patra (2002), are the total of all the connections that entrepreneur makes and uses as a vital resource for their activity. Entrepreneurial networks also refer to business owners who are formally formed to boost the effectiveness of their members' commercial endeavors (Das & Goswami, 2019). To be resilient, these business owners need to be skilled at networking. Network competence, according to Ritter & Gemunden (2003), is the capacity of an organization to make use of, manage, and manipulate inter-organizational relationships. People who are connected or related in some way form networks. those who describe by returning favours extended by group members. They utilize centralized resources and provide the group their fair share as well (OECD & European Commission, 2014).

As an entrepreneur, networking is a critical skill for expanding business chances. Learning how to make the most of networking tactics can boost success and give the company more opportunities to grow. Finding ways to network with people from different industries can expand network of potential customers, mentors, and leads. Entrepreneurship networking is crucial since relationships with experts can support firm operations. Building business contacts involves connecting with other industry leaders through offline and online networking groups; these connections are helpful for finding potential customers and entrepreneurial support in the business world (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023).

Entrepreneurship networking helps in developing core competencies, gain advanced and basic skills and techniques from individuals with entrepreneurship experience, and speed up the process of learning fundamental business concepts that are essential for business growth. Additionally, networking offers financial opportunities because the contacts created may lead to potential customers or investors for the business. Building an agile communication skill, fostering personal empathy, encouraging group problem-solving, boosting confidence in front of an audience, and providing inspiration that motivates working toward the development of productive company operations are all advantages of networking (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023). Establishing a network with businesspeople who share similar interests' network with businesses in related fields, give a chance to rely on friends and family, and create mentoring connections.

As an entrepreneur, networking is one of the most important skills to master in order to establish connections, build relationships, gain insights, create opportunities, and generate possibilities that can aid in the achievement of objectives.

Relationship skills

Relationship skills is vital in entrepreneur networking because the network team may be interested in firm's product or services or know someone who would benefit from it. A network with good connection skills offers helpful advice by sharing lessons learned from successes and mistakes.

Additionally, it generates a source of finance and investments as well as customers or referrals who are interested in the company's goods or services or who are aware of someone who would profit from them. It also creates support. Entrepreneurs' sense of belonging to a larger society and humanity, as well as their personal and professional life, are all impacted by the caliber of their interactions with others (Halford, Pepping, & Petch, 2018; Murray, Ross, & Cannon, 2021; Yucel, 2018).

As a social creature, healthy connections are as essential to us, however, most of us learn these abilities through observation of our family members, other adults, and peers as we grow up rather than through any formal instruction and the family and community served as functional examples of positive interpersonal interactions, but as one matures and changes, there is exposure to many influences, it is essential to avoid being negatively impacted by dysfunctional communication and relating behaviours (Nash, 2020). Healthy connections can be created by developing communication abilities and discovering how to interact with people in a more genuine, compassionate, and forgiving way.

Workplace relationships can greatly enhance your ability to succeed in your profession. The development of your current abilities as well as the acquisition of new ones can all be facilitated by solid professional partnerships and it can be crucial to cultivate these skill sets in order to advance in your job because good relationship-building can necessitate a blend of several soft talents. An ideal network is made up of people you can advocate for, and who advocate for you (Robinson, Smith, & Segal, (2023)). The key to creating these kinds of networking groups is to build relationships based on knowing, liking & trusting. People you know, like and trust are those you have regular communication with, shared understanding, alignment of values, good rapport, and integrity. With this foundation, one will advocate for people in your network, and they in turn are willing to advocate for you (Robinson, Smith, & Segal, (2023)).

Coordination

The Latin word for organization and putting everything in order, *cum ordinare*, is where the word coordination derives from. The term emphasizes a certain kind of coordinated organizing action (Gulati & Singh, 1998:782). In order to create value in an alliance, it is essential to coordinate the pooling of resources, the division of labor among partners, and the eventual integration of the scattered operations (Hoetker & Mellewigt, 2009: 1026). In order to complete a group of tasks, several organizational components must be integrated or linked together (Briscoe & Rogan, 2016: 2392; citing Van de Ven, Delbecq, & Koenig, 1976: 322).

In order to accomplish desired results, work must be coordinated across roles, disciplines, organizations, and sectors. Work is becoming more complicated, specialized, and interconnected and according to the relational coordination theory, relationships based on shared objectives, knowledge, and respect support frequent, timely, accurate problem-solving communication and vice versa, allowing stakeholders to successfully coordinate their work across geographical boundaries. (Bolton, Logan, & Gittell, 2021).

Organisational Resilience

The ability of a company to respond to short-term shocks, such as natural disasters or large changes in market dynamics, as well as to shape itself to meet long-term difficulties is referred to as organizational resilience. Resilience is essential because organizations' viability and sustainability are constantly being tested in a world that is changing rapidly. Many organizations are realizing that traditional corporate strategies do not shield them from unforeseen events, so they need to be able to absorb an event that requires change, adapt, and keep their competitive edge and profitability (Australian Government Department of Home Affairs. 20023).

All highly effective businesses have created processes for carrying out their tasks. The task may be as difficult as hiring a rival or as straightforward as completing a time sheet, but if you look carefully, you'll discover a solid procedure to get you through it. In stable times, these habits are frequently taken for granted, however, they frequently fail when a business must act rapidly in a crisis or when there is a lot of ambiguity, hence the need to consider how to be resilient (Suarez & Montes, 2020).

According to Renjen (2021) in the 2021 Deloitte Global Resilience Report, five traits of resilient organizations are preparedness, adaptability, collaboration, trustworthiness, and responsibility, which enable and promote nimble strategies, adaptive cultures, and the implementation and effective use of cutting-edge technology that helps businesses bounce back from unexpected challenges.

Resilient organizations do not simply recover from adversity or change; instead, they go forward, absorb the shocks, and transform them into opportunities for long-term, inclusive growth. When challenges happen, resilient leaders and teams quickly assess the situation, refocus, double down on what works, and abandon what doesn't. Cultivating such organizational resilience is difficult, especially in these days when business leaders, frontline workers, and business units are being buffeted by multiple disruptions such as wars, market declines, the global pandemic, and talent attrition, and increased evidence of climate change and economic downturns frequently coincided with talent shortages, but the reality is that change has no shelf life and no expiration date (Maor, Park, & Weddle, 2022). More change, push quick outcomes requires cultivating organizational resilience

Adaptability

Companies need to think differently about how teams are built and managed in order to build organizational resilience and assure adaptation, as adaptable leaders enable organizational agility and team empowerment, and ultimately set the tone for resilience, hence the importance of identifying the characteristics that distinguish leaders, incorporate them into performance evaluation processes, and promote the work that these leaders do. There firm must recognize the leaders distinguish traits, highlight the leaders works and include them in performance evaluation procedures. entrepreneurial Therefore, organizations will need to rethink how teams are organized and managed in order to foster organizational resilience and assure flexibility.

Adaptable leaders enable organizational agility and team empowerment, and ultimately set the tone for resilience, which is why it's critical for businesses to identify the characteristics that

distinguish leaders, incorporate them into performance evaluation processes, and promote the work that these leaders do. Companies will need to think differently about how teams are built and managed in order to build organizational resilience and assure adaptation, as being an adaptable leader entails accepting that they may not have all the answers and being willing to ask a lot of questions, as well as embracing workplace paradoxes rather than viewing everything as either right or wrong (Maor, Park, & Weddle, 2022). Adaptability entails finding the lessons in a crisis, find solutions and constantly coaching and encouraging individuals to adapt new solutions.

Adaptable leaders are more likely to spot opportunities where others see challenges because they have a systems mentality and look for patterns and linkages. They can establish a course without knowing exactly where they're going. They spend time developing a cultural behavioural code that informs how decisions are made, priorities are established, and work is completed, through listening tours to learn what employees require at various phases of their careers. They also use pulse surveys and other feedback tools to gather real-time feedback on changes to operations, staffing, external communications, or other company activities and introduce new practices that are not only effective during crises but can also be adapted to address everyday business challenges and establish a strategic direction that is based on purpose and outcomes execution.

Agility

A resilient organization is one that is agile. According to Tende and Ekanem's (2018), Agility refers to the capacity to foresee and forecast business landscape trends and take prompt, suitable action. They continued by saying that any organization's ability to survive today rests not just on its financial resources but also on its strategic capacity to react fast to environmental changes. By making and implementing choices fast, an organization can exhibit better resilience, create new opportunities, and limit risk. Arokodare and Asikhia's (2020) opine that agility is connected with an organization's ability to anticipate and predict risk and opportunity from new ventures in the environment.

Due to supply shortages, shifting consumer needs, and employees' changing expectations of what a regular work environment should look like, many firms were compelled to hastily overhaul their strategies, operations, and employee value propositions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some, but not all, want to learn from their mistakes and stay on an agile path in order to be better prepared for future problems. They acknowledge that each crisis or opportunity is unique in its own manner, necessitating the use of diverse institutions and resources delivered in different ways and at different times and beyond simply pursuing operational uptime they discovered ways to create flexible, resilient environments that allow for dynamic, efficient decision making and better time management (Maor, Park, & Weddle, 2022).

Empirical Review

Zighan, Abualqumboz, Dwaikat, and Alkalha (2022) explore operational practices that small and medium-sized organizations have either implemented or improved to promote the resilience of small and medium-sized firms in the face of coronavirus disease 2019. In Jordan, qualitative data were gathered through 43 semi-structured interviews with entrepreneurial resource suppliers,

owners, and managers of various small and medium-sized firms from various industrial sectors. According to the findings, entrepreneurial orientation has been found to transition and mobilize the resilience of small and medium-sized firms to endure large disruptions and dangers.

Fatoki, (2018) study's goal was to look into the relationship between entrepreneurial resilience and the success of South African SMEs. Both organizational and individual criteria were used to assess success. To assess entrepreneurial resilience, the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale 10 (CD-RISC 10) was applied. The survey method was used to collect data from 170 small business owners. Data was collected from participants using the self-administered questionnaire approach. For sampling, the convenience and snowball methods were utilized. Data analysis methods included descriptive statistics, confirmatory factor analysis, correlation, and regression analysis. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess reliability. The findings revealed a significant positive association between entrepreneurial resilience and individual and organizational performance.

Martín-Rojas, Garrido-Moreno, & García-Morales, V. J. (2023) study's goal was to look into the relationship between entrepreneurial resilience and the success of South African SMEs. Both organizational and individual criteria were used to assess success. To assess entrepreneurial resilience, the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale 10 (CD-RISC 10) was applied. The survey method was used to collect data from 170 small business owners. Data was collected from participants using the self-administered questionnaire approach. For sampling, the convenience and snowball methods were utilized. Data analysis methods included descriptive statistics, confirmatory factor analysis, correlation, and regression analysis. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess reliability. The findings revealed a significant positive association between entrepreneurial resilience and individual and organizational performance.

Abu-Rumman, A., Al-Shra'ah, A. E., Al-Madi, F., & Alfalah, T. (2020) studied "Entrepreneurial networks, entrepreneurial orientation, and performance of small and medium enterprises: are dynamic capabilities the missing link?" Data was acquired from a sample of Jordanian SMEs that were linked through a closed network and formed groups. The information was gathered via an electronic questionnaire, and 100 SMEs were contacted and encouraged to take part in the study using a purposive sampling method. The direct and mediated effects were identified using structural equation modelling. The data revealed that entrepreneurial networking had a negligible influence among the selected organizations, however entrepreneurial orientation has a considerable beneficial impact. Furthermore, dynamic talents had an important mediating function in both relationships. According to the findings, the sector should build strong networks and pursue strategic alliances to acquire a competitive advantage.

Methodology

To meet the study's objectives, a survey design was used. There were 1240 entrepreneurs of small and medium-sized businesses. A sample of 291 was drawn from the population using Krejcie and Morgan 1970 table. A structured questionnaire was given to each participant in order to gather information about the factors under inquiry. Each dimension and measure item were measured with five inquiry items. Entrepreneurial networking was measured with relationship skills and coordination, while organisational resilience was measured with adaptability and agility. The data from the study and test of hypotheses formulated were carried out using the Spearman rank order correlation coefficient.

Result

Out of the 291 questionnaires distributed, 280 questionnaires representing 96.21% copies were returned. The hypotheses test is undertaken at a 95% confidence interval and the decision rule is stated below.

Where $P < 0.05$ = Reject the null hypotheses

Where $P > 0.05$ = Accept the null hypotheses

Table 1: Relationship between Relationship Skills and Adaptability

Correlations				
			Relationship Skills	Adaptability
Spearman's rho	Relationship Skills	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.875**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	280	280
	Adaptability	Correlation Coefficient	.875**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	280	280

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results of the data analysis in table 1 showed a strong relationship between relationship skills and adaptability. The P-value of 0.000 demonstrates relationship existence between relationship skills and adaptability, and the rho value of 0.875 demonstrates a strong and positive association between the variables. This entails that a change in one of the variables will positively impact the other, i.e. a change in relationship skills will have an impact on the level of adaptability of the entrepreneurs. Therefore, the study between relationship skills and adaptability accepts that, a positive and significant relationship exist between relationship skills and adaptability of SMEs in Abia State. Considering the foregoing, we therefore reject the null hypothesis and accepts the alternate hypothesis which states that that there is a significant link between relationship skills and adaptability.

Table 2: Relationship between Relationship Skills and Agility

Correlations				
			Relationship Skills	Agility.
Spearman's rho	Relationship Skills	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.855**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	280	280
	Agility	Correlation Coefficient	.855**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	280	280

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 results showed a strong relationship between relationship skills and agility. The P-value of 0.000 demonstrates relationship existence between relationship skills and agility, and the rho value of 0.855 demonstrates a strong and positive association between the variables. This entails that a change in one of the variables will positively impact the other, i.e. a change in relationship skills will have an impact on the entrepreneurial agility. Therefore, the analysis revealed a positive and significant relationship between relationship skills and agility of SMEs in Abia State. Considering the foregoing, we therefore reject the null hypothesis and accepts the alternate hypothesis which states that that there is a significant link between relationship skills and agility.

Table 3: Relationship between Relationship Skills and Agility

Correlations				
			Coordination	Adaptability
Spearman's rho	Coordination	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.835**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	280	280
	Adaptability	Correlation Coefficient	.835**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	280	280

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results of the data analysis in table 3 showed a strong relationship between coordination and adaptability. The P-value of 0.000 demonstrates relationship existence between coordination and adaptability, and the rho value of 0.835 demonstrates a strong and positive association between the variables. This entails that a change in one of the variables will positively impact the other, i.e. a change in coordination will have an impact on the level of adaptability of the entrepreneurs. Therefore, the study revealed that, a positive and significant relationship exist between

coordination and adaptability of SMEs in Abia State. Considering the foregoing, we therefore reject the null hypothesis and accepts the alternate hypothesis which states that that there is a significant link between coordination and adaptability.

Table 4: Relationship between Coordination and Agility

Correlations				
			Coordination	Agility.
Spearman's rho	Coordination	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.825**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	280	280
	Agility	Correlation Coefficient	.825**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	280	280

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 results showed a strong relationship between coordination and agility. The P-value of 0.000 demonstrates relationship existence between coordination and agility, and the rho value of 0.825 demonstrates a strong and positive relationship between the variables. This entails that a change in one of the variables will positively impact the other, i.e. a change in coordination will have an impact on the entrepreneurial agility. Therefore, the analysis revealed a positive and significant relationship between coordination and agility of SMEs in Abia State. Considering the foregoing, we therefore reject the null hypothesis and accepts the alternate hypothesis which states that that there is a significant link between coordination and agility.

Discussion of Findings

Relationship Skills and Adaptability

The results of the data analysis showed a strong relationship between relationship skills and adaptability. The P-value of 0.000 demonstrates relationship existence between relationship skills and adaptability, and the rho value of 0.875 demonstrates a strong and positive link between relationship skills and adaptability. Thus, it can be deduced that for firms that wants to have adaptability as a measure of effectiveness, they must ensure effective entrepreneurial relationship skills. The result of the study agrees with Fatoki, (2018) findings that resilience enhances the entrepreneurial success of South African SMEs, and the finding also shows a significant positive association between entrepreneurial resilience and individual and organizational performance. the study also confirms Maor, et al., (2022) thought that adaptable leaders enable organizational agility and team empowerment, and ultimately set the tone for resilience,

Relationship Skills and Agility

The results of the data analysis carried out in table 2, showed a strong relationship between relationship skills and agility. The P-value of 0.000 demonstrates relationship existence between

relationship skills and adaptability, and the rho value of 0.855 demonstrates a strong and positive link between relationship skills and agility. Thus, it can be inferred that agility in the firm requires effective entrepreneurial relationship skills. The result of the study agrees with Abu-Rumman, Al-Shra'ah, Al-Madi, & Alfalah, (2020) studied whose findings reveals that entrepreneurial networks, entrepreneurial orientation, relates with performance of small and medium enterprises. It also agrees with Australian Government Department of Home Affairs (2023) maintaining a high relationship skills will enhance resilience in events that requires change, agility, adaptability, and keeping their competitive edge and profitability

Coordination and adaptability

The result of hypothesis three demonstrated a significant connection between coordination and adaptability. The P-value of 0.000, and the rho value of 0.835 shows that there is a strong relationship between coordination and adaptability. This shows that a change in any of the variable will affect the other. Furthermore, when there is coordination, it enhances entrepreneurial adaptability. The result aligns with the study of Martín-Rojas et al., (2023) whose findings revealed a significant positive association between entrepreneurial resilience and individual and organizational performance. It also agrees with. Bolton, et al., (2021) that entrepreneurial successful coordination of work across geographical boundaries enhances resilience in the organisation.

Coordination and Agility

Results of the fourth hypothesis shows that coordination significantly relates with agility. This shows that the coordination through networking can enhance the entrepreneurial agility of SMEs. The coefficient value of 0.825 shows that a change in the coordination will affect agility. Thus, it is inferred that coordination enhances the level of firm's agility. The findings agree with the study of Zighan, Abualqumboz, Dwaikat, and Alkalha (2022) entrepreneurial orientation coordination has been found to change and organize the resilience of small and medium-sized firms to endure large disruptions and dangers. It also confirms Hoetker & Mellewigt, 2009 findings that to create alliance value, coordination is essential to the pooling of resources, resilient and for integration of the scattered operations.

Conclusion

Many SMEs sometimes has destructive start-ups, operational challenges and low productivity but nevertheless, they have the power to create new, more effective business models that might ultimately influence whole economies though effective entrepreneurial networking. The entrepreneurial networking can help the entrepreneurs of small and medium-sized enterprises to open up a new emotional value range, create good relationship skills, cooperation, and effective coordination, and positively affecting their value creation, competitive advantage, agility and organizational adaptability that promotes entrepreneurial resilience, which do not simply makes the SMEs recover from adversity or change alone, but go forward, absorb the shocks, and transform them into opportunities for long-term inclusive growth. Conclusively entrepreneurial networking influences the organisational resilience of SMEs.

Recommendations

1. The management of SMEs should engage in networking to have the capability to absorb changes, adapt, and keep their competitive edge and profitability.
2. The SMEs should take advantage of an entrepreneurial network with good connection skills that offers helpful advice and has the ability to share lessons learned from successes and mistakes to be resilience to challenges.
3. The SMEs should engage in entrepreneurial networking to strengthen their resilience to against uncertainty.
4. The SMEs should strive for close relationships with other parties in order to minimize uncertainties by mutually joining and increasing their resource levels and knowledge.

REFERENCE

- Abu-Rumman, A., Al Shraah, A., Al-Madi, F., & Alfalah, T. (2021). Entrepreneurial networks, entrepreneurial orientation, and performance of small and medium enterprises: are dynamic capabilities the missing link? *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, 10(1), 1-16.
- Aladejebi, O. (2020). Hybrid entrepreneurship: Combining employment and self-employment in Nigeria. *Archives of Business Review-Vol*, 8(7).
- Aladejebi, O. (2020). The impact of entrepreneurial networks on the performance of small business in Nigeria. *Archives of Business Research*, 8(3), 281-293.
- Allas, T. , Birshan, M., Imprey, A., Mischke, J., & Woetzel, J. (2021). Lessons on resilience for small and midsize businesses. *Harvard Business Review*, <https://hbr.org/2021/06/lessons-on-resilience-for-small-and-midsize-businesses>
- American Psychological Association (2023). Resilience. *Apa.Org*, <https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience/>
- Arokodare, M. A., & Asikhia, O. U. (2020). Strategic agility: Achieving superior organisational performance through strategic foresight. *Global Journal of Management and Business Research, Administration and Management*, 20(3), 7-16.
- Australian Government Department of Home Affairs (2023). Organisational Resilience. <https://www.organisationalresilience.gov.au/#:~:text=Organisational%20Resilience>
- Baghdiantz-McCabe I, Harleftis G, Pepelase Minoglou I (eds) (2005) *Diaspora entrepreneurial networks: Four centuries of history*. Berg, Oxford/New York
- Birley, S., & Muzyka, D. F. (2000). Mastering entrepreneurship. Prentice Hall.
- Bolton, R., Logan, C., & Gittell, J. H. (2021). Revisiting relational coordination: A systematic review. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 57(3), 290-322.
- Briscoe F., Rogan M. 2016. Coordinating complex work: Knowledge networks, partner departures, and client relationship performance in a law firm. *Management Science*, 62, 2392-2411.

- Cote, C. (2022). Networking for entrepreneurs: 5 tips & strategies. *online.hbs.edu*, <https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/networking-for-entrepreneurs>
- Crowley, C., McAdam, M., Cunningham, J.A. & Hilliard, R. (2018). Community of practice: A flexible construct for understanding SME networking roles in the Irish artisan cheese sector. *Journal of Rural Studies* 64, 50–62. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2018.08.014>
- Das, M., & Goswami, N. (2019). Effect of Entrepreneurial Networks on Small Firm Performance in Kamrup, a District of Assam. *Journal of Global Entrepreneurship Research*, 9, 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40497-018-0122-6>
- Dodd, S. D. & Eleni, P. (2002). National differences in entrepreneurial networking. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development* 14(2) 117-134.
- Easterby-Smith, M. E., & Prieto, I. (2008). Dynamic capabilities and knowledge management: an integrative role for learning? *British Journal of Management*, 19(3), 235-249.
- Eisenhardt, K., & Martin, J. (2000). Dynamic capability: What are they? *Strategic Management Journal*, 21, 1105-1121.
- Erumebor, W.(2023). Nigeria in 2023: Bridging the productivity gap and building economic resilience. *Brookings.Edu*, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2023/02/06/nigeria-in-2023-bridging-the-productivity-gap-and-building-economic-resilience/>
- Fatoki, O. (2018). The impact of entrepreneurial resilience on the success of small and medium enterprises in South Africa. *Sustainability*, 10(7), 2527.
- Grant, R. M. (1996). *Toward a knowledge-based theory of the firm*. *Strategic Management Journal* 17, 109-122.
- Gulati R., Singh H. 1998. The architecture of cooperation: Managing coordination costs and appropriation concerns in strategic alliances. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 43, 781-814.
- Halford, W. K., Pepping, C. A., & Petch, J. (2018). *Promoting healthy relationships*. In A. L. Vangelisti & D. Perlman (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of personal relationships* (2nd ed., pp. 579–590). Cambridge University Press.
- Henderson, R., & Cocburn, I. (1994). Measuring competence? Eploring firm effects in pharmaceutical research. *Strategic Management Journal*, 15(1), 63-84.
- Hoetker G., Mellewigt T. 2009. Choice and performance of governance mechanisms: Matching alliance governance to asset type. *Strategic Management Journal*, 30, 1025-1044.
- Igbinadolor, N. (2022). Threats to SMEs growing in Nigeria. *Bussines Day of January 24, 2022*, <https://businessday.ng/big-read/article/threats-to-smes-growing-in-nigeria/>
- Indeed Editorial Team (2023). 10 Networking Tips for Entrepreneurs (With Benefits). *.Indeed.Com*, <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/entrepreneurship-networking>

- Irving, M. (2023). Stay Connected: Why is networking important for entrepreneurs? *Advancedbusinessabilities.Com*, <https://advancedbusinessabilities.com/why-is-networking-important-for-entrepreneurs/>
- Kiesh, K. (2021). 18 Networks all entrepreneurs should consider joining. <https://blog.hubspot.com/sales/entrepreneur-networks>
- Leevi, S. (2015). *Networks in the internationalization of SMEs. Case: Jykes international services*. Bachelor's thesis. Degree Programme in International Business Social Sciences, Business and Administration. JAMK University of Applied Sciences.
- Maor, D., Park, M. & Weddle, B. (2022). Raising the resilience of your organization. *Mckinsey.Com*, <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/raising-the-resilience-of-your-organization>
- Martín-Rojas, R., Garrido-Moreno, A., & García-Morales, V. J. (2023). Social media use, corporate entrepreneurship and organizational resilience: A recipe for SMEs success in a post-Covid scenario. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 190, 122421.
- Murray, C. E., Ross, R., & Cannon, J. (2021). The happy, healthy, safe relationships continuum: conceptualizing a spectrum of relationship quality to guide community-based healthy relationship promotion programming. *The Family Journal*, 29(1), 50–59.
- Narayan, J. (2023). The importance and benefits of networking as an entrepreneur. *Linkedin.Com*, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/importance-benefits-networking-entrepreneur-jatin-narayan/>
- Nash, J. (2020). Building healthy relationships with 40 helpful worksheets. *Positivepsychology.Com*, <https://positivepsychology.com/healthy-relationships-worksheets/>
- Newey, L., & Zahra, S. A. (2009). The evolving firm: how dynamic and operating capabilities interact to enable entrepreneurship. *British Journal of Management*, 20(1), 81-100.
- OECD (2019), *OECD SME and Entrepreneurship Outlook 2019*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/34907e9c-en.#>
- Pisano, G. P. (1994). Knowledge, integration, and the locus of learning: an empirical analysis of process development. *Strategic Management Journal* (15), 85-100.
- Renjen, P. (2021). Building the resilient organization. 2021 *Deloitte Global resilience report*, <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/topics/strategy/characteristics-resilient-organizations.html>
- Ritter, T., & Gemünden, H. G. (2003). Network competence: Its impact on innovation success and its antecedents. *Journal of business research*, 56(9), 745-755.
- Robinson, L., Smith, M. & Segal, J. (2023). Building a healthy relationship. *Helpguide.Org*, <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/relationships-communication/relationship-help.htm>

- Schreyogg, G., & Kliesch-Eberl, M. (2007). How dynamic can organizational capabilities be? Toward a dual-process model of capability dynamization. *Strategic Management Journal*, 28(9), 913- 933.
- Suarez, F. F. & Montes, J. S. (2020). Building organizational resilience. *Harvard Business Review*, <https://hbr.org/2020/11/building-organizational-resilience>
- Teece, D. J., Pisano, G., & Shuen, A. (1997). Dynamic capabilities and strategic management. *Strategic Management Journal*, 18(7), 509-533.
- Tende, F. B., & Ekanem, I. S. (2018). Strategic agility: An intervention prescription to competitive advantage of small businesses in Nigeria. *International Journal of Business Systems and Economics*, 6(4), 1401-1423.
- Toivola, T. (2005). *Yrittäjyys verkostotaloudessa (Entrepreneurship in a network Economy)*. Doctoral Dissertation. University of Vaasa, Business Administration
- United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (2020) Resilience of SMEs, *UNDRR.Org*, <https://www.undrr.org/publication/resilience-smes>
- Van de Ven A. H., Delbecq A. L., Koenig R. Jr. 1976. Determinants of coordination modes within organizations. *American Sociological Review*, 41: 322-338.
- World Bank, (2023). Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) Finance: Improving SMEs' access to finance and finding innovative solutions to unlock sources of capital. *Worldbank.Org*, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/smefinance>
- Yucel, D. (2018). The dyadic nature of relationships: Relationship satisfaction among married and cohabiting couples. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, 13, 37–58.
- Zighan, S., Abualqumboz, M., Dwaikat, N., & Alkalha, Z. (2022). The role of entrepreneurial orientation in developing SMEs resilience capabilities throughout COVID-19. *The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, 23(4), 227-239.