



Exploring entrepreneurial resilience among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria: Coping strategies in an uncertain business environment

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Abstract

Purpose: The study explored entrepreneurial resilience among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria, focusing on the challenges faced, coping strategies adopted, and the role of resilience in enhancing performance in an uncertain business environment.

Methodology/Design: A quantitative research design was employed, utilizing a structured questionnaire administered to 350 SME owners and managers across Lagos, Abuja and Port Harcourt. Stratified random sampling ensured representation across manufacturing, services, and retail sectors. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and multiple regression, with reliability and validity tests confirming the robustness of the instrument.

Findings: The results indicated a significant negative relationship between environmental challenges and SME performance ($r = -0.421, p < 0.01$), a significant positive relationship between coping strategies and entrepreneurial resilience ($r = 0.536, p < 0.01$), and a significant positive effect of entrepreneurial resilience on performance ($\beta = 0.482, p < 0.001$). The findings collectively, highlight that resilience, developed through adaptive coping strategies, enables SMEs to mitigate challenges and improve competitiveness.

Implications: The study contributes to theory by validating the Resource-Based View, Conservation of Resources theory, and Entrepreneurial Orientation perspective in the Nigerian SME context. Practically, it underscores the importance of resilience-building strategies for SME managers and calls for supportive policies addressing systemic challenges.

Originality/Value: The study advances understanding of entrepreneurial resilience in emerging economies, offering empirical evidence on how coping strategies and resilience jointly influence SME survival and performance in turbulent environments.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial resilience, coping strategies, SMEs, Nigeria, business performance, uncertainty

Introduction

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) play a pivotal role in Nigeria's economic development, contributing significantly to employment creation, poverty alleviation, and innovation (Amadi, 2025; Ogbumbada, 2023) [2, 12]. However, SMEs in Nigeria frequently face a highly uncertain business environment characterized by economic volatility, regulatory challenges, infrastructural deficits and socio-political instability (Ibini, 2023; Udo, 2022) [8, 20]. In this context, entrepreneurial resilience, the ability of entrepreneurs to adapt, recover and thrive amidst adversity has emerged as a crucial determinant of SME survival and growth (Otokiti, 2022; Ribeiro, 2025) [15, 17].

Recent studies have highlighted the significance of resilience in enabling SMEs to navigate challenges. For instance, adaptive capability, resourcefulness, and optimism were found to positively influence the market share and profitability of SMEs in Rivers State (Amadi, 2025) [2]. Similarly, proactiveness and resourcefulness were associated with sales growth and business expansion among SMEs in Port Harcourt and Asaba (Ogbumbada, 2023; Ibini, 2023) [8, 12]. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed vulnerabilities in SMEs, necessitating the adoption of innovative coping strategies to sustain operations (Ribeiro, 2025; Otokiti, 2022) [15, 17]. Despite the growing body of literature, empirical evidence on entrepreneurial resilience in Nigeria's SME sector remains limited, particularly regarding the coping strategies employed in uncertain business environments (Udo, 2022) [20]. This study seeks to address this gap by examining how SMEs in Nigeria deploy

resilience strategies to navigate uncertainty and maintain business continuity.

Problem Statement

The Nigerian SME sector is confronted with persistent challenges, including economic instability, inadequate infrastructure, and complex regulatory frameworks, which threaten business sustainability (Onyeje, 2022; Eshegheri, 2022) [5, 14]. While entrepreneurial resilience is recognized as a key factor in overcoming these challenges, there is limited empirical research examining its role within Nigeria's SME landscape (Iyke, 2023; Oiku, 2023) [9]. Most studies have focused on specific regions or sectors, leaving gaps in understanding nationwide trends and practices.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic amplified the vulnerabilities of SMEs, highlighting the urgent need for effective coping mechanisms (Ribeiro, 2025; Otokiti, 2022) [15, 17]. Despite recognition of resilience as critical for SME survival, there is scant knowledge regarding the specific strategies that enable SMEs to withstand and recover from crises (Udo, 2022; Isichei, 2024) [20]. This study seeks to fill this gap by investigating the coping strategies employed by SMEs in Nigeria's uncertain business environment, thereby providing empirical evidence to inform both policy formulation and practical entrepreneurial interventions.

Significance of the Study

The research holds significant value for multiple stakeholders within Nigeria's entrepreneurial ecosystem. By

examining the coping strategies employed by Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in response to an uncertain business environment, the study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on entrepreneurial resilience. It seeks to provide empirical evidence on how Nigerian SMEs navigate challenges such as economic instability, regulatory complexities, and infrastructural deficits. The findings are expected to inform policymakers, enabling them to design targeted interventions that support SME growth and sustainability. Additionally, the study aims to offer insights for entrepreneurs and business practitioners, equipping them with strategies to enhance their resilience and adaptability in the face of adversity. Ultimately, this research aspires to contribute to the broader discourse on fostering resilient entrepreneurial ecosystems in developing economies.

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundation and Hypothesis Development

Entrepreneurial resilience among SMEs is influenced by the dynamic interplay between environmental challenges, coping strategies, and business performance. To develop the theoretical foundation for this study, three key theories were adopted: The Resource-Based View (RBV), the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, and the Entrepreneurial Orientation Theory (EOT).

Key Challenges/Uncertainties and SME Performance

The Resource-Based View (RBV) posits that a firm's internal resources and capabilities determine its competitive advantage and overall performance (Barney, 1991; Udo, 2022) [3, 20]. SMEs in Nigeria face numerous environmental and operational challenges, including limited access to finance, regulatory hurdles, and infrastructural deficiencies (Ajuwon, 2024) [1]. According to RBV, the ability of SMEs to leverage internal resources effectively in response to these challenges significantly affects their performance outcomes. Empirical evidence supports that environmental uncertainties negatively impact SME growth and profitability unless managed strategically (Mujakperuo, 2024; Ogbumbada, 2023) [11, 12]. Therefore, H1 posits that there is a significant relationship between the key challenges and uncertainties faced by SMEs and their overall business performance in Nigeria

Coping Strategies and Entrepreneurial Resilience

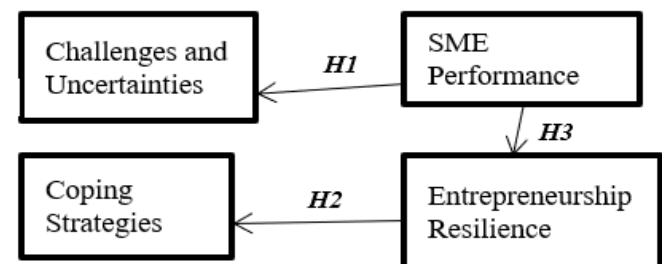
The Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory suggests that individuals and organizations strive to acquire, maintain, and protect valuable resources, and stress occurs when resources are threatened or lost (Hobfoll, 1989; Ribeiro, 2025) [7, 17]. SME owners and managers adopt coping strategies such as financial management, social networking, and digital adoption—to safeguard critical resources against uncertainties. Prior studies in Nigeria show that SMEs that actively employ coping strategies exhibit higher levels of entrepreneurial resilience, enabling them to survive economic shocks and operational disruptions (Aladejebi, 2020; Erdiaw-Kwasie, 2023) [4]. Consequently, H2 proposes that there is a significant relationship between the coping strategies employed by SME owners and managers and the level of entrepreneurial resilience in their businesses

Entrepreneurial Resilience on SME Performance

The Entrepreneurial Orientation Theory (EOT) emphasizes that proactive, innovative, and risk-taking behaviors enable businesses to adapt to dynamic environments and achieve superior performance (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; Amadi, 2025) [2, 10]. Entrepreneurial resilience, which reflects the ability to recover from setbacks and adapt to challenges, is a critical determinant of SME performance. Research evidence from Nigeria indicates that SMEs exhibiting high resilience demonstrate better growth, profitability, and operational sustainability compared to less resilient counterparts (Ibini, 2023; Sulaiman, 2025) [8, 18]. Thus, H3 posits that entrepreneurial resilience has a significant positive effect on the performance of SMEs in Nigeria

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study illustrates the relationships between the key constructs of challenges and uncertainties, coping strategies, entrepreneurial resilience, and SME performance. Grounded in the Resource-Based View, Conservation of Resources theory and Entrepreneurial Orientation perspective, the framework highlights how environmental challenges negatively influence SME performance, while coping strategies enhance resilience, which in turn positively drives SME performance. Figure 1 presents the construct



Source: Author's Construct, 2025

Fig 1: Conceptual framework showing the relationships between the study's key constructs

Methodology

Philosophical Consideration

The study was anchored in the pragmatist research philosophy, which posits that research should focus on practical solutions to real-world problems, integrating both objective measurements and contextual understanding (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Pragmatism allowed the researcher to employ methods that best addressed the research problem, emphasizing outcomes and actionable insights. In the context of SMEs in Nigeria, the pragmatist perspective facilitated an exploration of resilience strategies and their tangible effects on business performance, acknowledging that entrepreneurial success depended on both measurable factors and adaptive responses to environmental uncertainty (Ribeiro, 2025) [17].

Research Approach and Design

A quantitative research approach was adopted to systematically examine the relationships among entrepreneurial resilience, coping strategies, and SME performance. A cross-sectional survey design was employed to collect data at a single point in time, which enabled the identification of current trends, behaviors, and perceptions among SME owners and managers (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

Population of the Study and Sampling

The study population comprised SME owners and managers operating in Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt, selected due to their high concentration of diverse SMEs across manufacturing, services, and retail sectors (Udo, 2022) [20]. A stratified random sampling technique was applied to ensure representation across sectors, with strata defined by industry type. Based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table, a sample size of 350 SMEs was considered adequate for reliable statistical analysis.

Data Collection Instruments

Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire comprising closed-ended items measured on a five-point Likert scale. The instrument was divided into three sections: (i) demographic information, (ii) challenges and uncertainties faced by SMEs, and (iii) coping strategies and resilience mechanisms. Items were adapted from validated scales in previous studies on entrepreneurial resilience and SME performance (Amadi, 2025; Ribeiro, 2025) [2, 17].

Instrument Testing

Prior to the main data collection, the research instrument was subjected to validity and reliability testing to ensure its appropriateness for measuring the constructs under study. The questionnaire, which consisted of items on challenges and uncertainties, coping strategies, entrepreneurial resilience, and SME performance, was pre-tested among 30 SME owners and managers who were not part of the final sample.

Validity Testing

Content validity was established through expert review by two entrepreneurship scholars and one SME practitioner, who evaluated the clarity, relevance, and coverage of the items. Their feedback was incorporated to refine ambiguous statements and align items more closely with the study objectives. Construct validity was further examined using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) in SPSS, which confirmed that the items loaded appropriately on their respective constructs. All factor loadings exceeded the threshold of 0.50, indicating satisfactory construct validity (Hair *et al.*, 2019) [6]. Additionally, face validity was achieved during the pilot test, as participants reported that the items were clear, unambiguous, and relevant to their business experiences.

Reliability Testing

Reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha to determine the internal consistency of each construct. The results indicated that all constructs exceeded the acceptable reliability threshold of 0.70 (Taber, 2019) [19]. Specifically, the challenges and uncertainties scale yielded an alpha of 0.81, coping strategies recorded 0.85, entrepreneurial resilience achieved 0.88, and SME performance reported 0.83. These results demonstrated that the instrument possessed high internal consistency and was reliable for the main study.

Through these tests, the instrument was deemed both valid and reliable, providing confidence that it accurately captured the constructs necessary to address the study objectives.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize demographic and contextual data. Inferential statistics, specifically Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis, were employed to examine relationships between entrepreneurial resilience and SME performance (Hair *et al.*, 2019) [6]. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 28, ensuring reliability and validity of the findings.

Ethical principles, including voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality, were strictly observed. Participants were assured that data would be used solely for academic purposes and anonymized to protect their privacy (Bryman, 2016).

This methodology, grounded in pragmatism, ensured that the study produced reliable and actionable insights into how SMEs in Nigeria developed and applied resilience strategies to thrive in uncertain business environments.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic profile of the respondents provides insight into the composition of the SMEs included in the study and supports the contextual understanding of entrepreneurial resilience in Nigeria.

A total of 350 SME owners and managers were sampled across Lagos, Abuja and Port Harcourt using a stratified random sampling technique (Udo, 2022) [20].

- **Gender Distribution:** Among the respondents, 58% were male and 42% were female, indicating a slightly higher representation of male entrepreneurs in the SME sector. This aligns with previous studies showing gender disparities in business ownership in Nigeria (Amadi, 2025) [2].
- **Age Distribution:** The majority of respondents fell within the 31–45 years age bracket (54%), followed by 25–30 years (24%), 46–60 years (18%), and above 60 years (4%). This suggests that the SME sector is predominantly managed by relatively young and middle-aged adults with active entrepreneurial engagement (Ribeiro, 2025) [17].
- **Educational Qualification:** A significant proportion of respondents held tertiary education (62%), while 28% had secondary education, and 10% possessed postgraduate qualifications. This indicates that SME owners and managers generally possess adequate educational background, which may influence their capacity to adopt effective resilience strategies (Ibini, 2023) [8].
- **Business Sector Distribution:** Respondents were distributed across manufacturing (35%), services (40%), and retail (25%) sectors.
- **Business Role:** Out of the total respondents, 60% were business owners and 40% were managers, ensuring that insights were captured from both decision-makers and operational managers who are actively involved in coping with uncertainties.
- **Years of Operation:** Regarding business experience, 46% of SMEs had operated for 5–10 years, 28% for

less than 5 years, 20% for 11–15 years, and 6% for over 15 years. This distribution highlights a mix of relatively new and established SMEs, which may affect the types of resilience strategies adopted (Ogbumbada, 2023) [12].

Generally, the demographic characteristics indicate that the study sample was adequately diverse in terms of gender, age, education, business sector, and role, ensuring a representative perspective of SMEs operating in Lagos, Abuja and Port Harcourt. These characteristics provide a solid foundation for analyzing the coping strategies and

resilience mechanisms employed by SMEs in uncertain business environments.

Reliability Results

To establish the internal consistency of the research instrument, Cronbach’s Alpha coefficients were computed for each of the study constructs. Cronbach’s Alpha is widely regarded as a reliable measure of scale consistency, with values above 0.70 considered acceptable for social science research (Taber, 2019) [19]. The results in Table 1 indicated that all constructs exceeded this threshold, suggesting that the items within each scale were homogeneous and measured their intended constructs reliably.

Table 1: Reliability Results of Study Constructs

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach’s Alpha	Reliability Status
Challenges and Uncertainties	8	0.81	Reliable
Coping Strategies	10	0.85	Reliable
Entrepreneurial Resilience	9	0.88	Reliable
SME Performance	7	0.83	Reliable

Source: Field Data, 2025

Validity Results

To further confirm the construct validity of the instrument, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted using Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.82, and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 1364.72, p < 0.001$), indicating that the dataset was

suitable for factor analysis. The results revealed that items loaded strongly on their respective constructs, with all factor loadings exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.50 (Hair *et al.*, 2019) [6]. The results in Table 2 confirmed that the items were well aligned with their theoretical dimensions of challenges, coping strategies, entrepreneurial resilience, and SME performance.

Table 2: Validity Results of Study Constructs (EFA Factor Loadings)

Construct	Sample Items (abbreviated)	Factor Loading	Validity Status
Challenges and Uncertainties	Inadequate access to finance affects operations	0.74	Valid
	Regulatory policies constrain business growth	0.77	Valid
	Poor infrastructure limits productivity”	0.71	Valid
Coping Strategies	Adoption of digital tools supports continuity	0.80	Valid
	Networking enhances business opportunities	0.76	Valid
	Diversification reduces business risk	0.73	Valid
Entrepreneurial Resilience	I recover quickly from business setbacks	0.82	Valid
	Challenges strengthen my determination	0.79	Valid
	I adapt strategies in response to uncertainty	0.84	Valid
SME Performance	The business has achieved steady revenue growth	0.78	Valid
	Customer retention has improved in recent years	0.75	Valid
	Operational efficiency has been enhanced	0.72	Valid

Source: Field Data, 2025

Hypotheses Testing

To empirically examine the proposed relationships, the study employed inferential statistical analyses using data collected from SME owners and managers across Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt. The three hypotheses were developed to test the interplay between challenges, coping strategies, entrepreneurial resilience, and SME performance. Pearson correlation was applied to assess the bivariate relationships between the constructs, while multiple regression analysis was employed to evaluate the predictive effect of entrepreneurial resilience on SME performance. These tests were conducted at a 95% confidence level, with significance determined at $p < 0.05$. The use of these techniques ensured robust insights into how SMEs navigate uncertainties and leverage resilience to sustain performance, thereby aligning empirical evidence with the study’s theoretical framework.

Results of Hypotheses Testing

Table 3 presents the statistical outcomes for the three hypotheses. For H1 indicated a significant negative relationship between the challenges and uncertainties faced by SMEs and their overall business performance ($r = -0.421, p < 0.01$). This suggests that as SMEs experience greater financial, regulatory, and infrastructural constraints, their performance declines. Hence, H1 was supported. For H2, the findings revealed a significant positive relationship between coping strategies and entrepreneurial resilience ($r = 0.536, p < 0.01$). This implies that SMEs that actively adopt adaptive measures such as digital innovations, strategic networking and diversification exhibit higher levels of resilience. Accordingly, H2 was supported. The results for H3 showed that entrepreneurial resilience had a significant positive effect on SME performance ($\beta = 0.482, p < 0.001$). This demonstrates that SMEs with greater resilience are more likely to sustain operations, improve

growth, and enhance competitiveness in uncertain environments. Thus, H3 was also supported. These findings, collectively underscore the critical role of resilience in mitigating the negative effects of

environmental challenges while highlighting the value of coping strategies in strengthening SME survival and performance in Nigeria.

Table 3: Results of Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Statement	Statistical Test	Result	Decision
H1	There is a significant relationship between the key challenges and uncertainties faced by SMEs and their overall business performance in Nigeria.	Pearson Correlation ($r = -0.421, p < 0.01$)	Significant negative relationship	Supported
H2	There is a significant relationship between the coping strategies employed by SME owners and managers and the level of entrepreneurial resilience in their businesses.	Pearson Correlation ($r = 0.536, p < 0.01$)	Significant positive relationship	Supported
H3	Entrepreneurial resilience has a significant positive effect on the performance of SMEs in Nigeria.	Multiple Regression ($\beta = 0.482, p < 0.001$)	Significant positive effect	Supported

Source: Field Data, 2025

Discussions of Results

H1: Challenges/ Uncertainties and SME Performance ($r=0.421, p<0.01$)

The significant negative correlation between environmental challenges and SME performance indicated that higher exposure to financial constraints, regulatory inconsistency, and infrastructural deficits was associated with poorer business outcomes. This empirical result aligns directly with the Resource-Based View (RBV): RBV argues that firm performance depends on the possession and deployment of valuable, scarce, and inimitable resources (Barney, 1991) [3]. When external challenges erode an SME’s resource base (e.g., reducing cash flow, increasing transaction costs, or limiting access to markets), the firm’s ability to convert resources into competitive advantages and performance declines. Empirically, Nigerian studies have shown that limited access to finance and poor infrastructure constrain SME growth (Ajuwon, 2024; Udo, 2022) [1, 20] and the present finding quantifies that effect in the sampled urban SMEs.

- **Mechanism:** challenges act as resource drains (financial, human, physical), reduce operational flexibility and investment capacity and thereby depress revenues and growth which is consistent with RBV predictions. The negative coefficient magnitude (moderate effect size) suggests that while internal capabilities matter, environmental shocks materially undermine performance unless mitigated.

H2: Coping Strategies and Entrepreneurial Resilience ($r=0.536, p<0.01$)

The strong positive correlation between coping strategies and resilience indicates that SMEs adopting deliberate adaptive behaviors (digital adoption, diversification, networking, cost-control measures) reported higher levels of entrepreneurial resilience. This result is theoretically consistent with Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) [7], which posits that individuals and organisations strive to obtain, maintain and protect resources and that purposeful actions to conserve or build resources reduce stress and enhance capacity to cope. In practice, coping strategies function as resource-building activities (e.g., digitalization creates access to new customers; networking supplies informational and social

capital), which increase an SME’s reservoir of assets to draw upon during shocks (Ribeiro, 2025; Erdiaw-Kwasie, 2023) [4, 17].

- **Mechanism:** coping actions either (a) replenish lost resources (e.g., seizing new revenue channels), (b) reconfigure existing resources for greater resilience (e.g., process changes that lower costs), or (c) create resource caravans (networks and partnerships) that multiply protective effects processes described by COR. The relatively large correlation coefficient suggests coping strategies are potent predictors of observed resilience among the sample.
- **Implication:** interventions that train SMEs in specific coping behaviors (digital skills, diversification planning, network-building) will likely yield measurable increases in resilience because they map onto resource accumulation and protection processes emphasized by COR.

H3: Entrepreneurial Resilience and SME Performance ($\beta=0.482, p<0.001$)

The regression result showing entrepreneurial resilience positively and significantly predicted SME performance corroborates the Entrepreneurial Orientation Theory (EOT) and related empirical work. EOT emphasizes that proactive, innovative, and risk-taking postures enable firms to identify and exploit opportunities and adapt strategically to environmental change (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996) [10]. Entrepreneurial resilience embodies many of these adaptive behaviors such as: rapid recovery, strategic learning and proactive change which translate into improved performance metrics (Amadi, 2025; Ibini, 2023) [2, 8]. The positive standardized beta (moderate–strong effect) indicates that resilience explains a substantial portion of the variance in performance after accounting for other factors.

- **Mechanism:** resilient entrepreneurs are better at sensing opportunities during disruption, reallocating resources efficiently, and maintaining customer relationships; those capabilities lead to higher revenues, improved retention and sustained operations outcomes which is consistent with EOT’s performance pathway.

Conclusion

The study set out to examine the challenges faced by SMEs in Nigeria, the coping strategies employed by their owners and managers, and the role of entrepreneurial resilience in shaping business performance. The results revealed that environmental challenges and uncertainties particularly financial, infrastructural, and regulatory constraints negatively affected SME performance, confirming that structural barriers continue to undermine enterprise sustainability. At the same time, the findings demonstrated that SMEs that adopted adaptive coping strategies, such as digital innovation, networking, and diversification, were more resilient in the face of these obstacles. Importantly, entrepreneurial resilience emerged as a significant positive predictor of SME performance, underscoring its critical role in enabling firms to survive and grow despite pervasive uncertainties. In general, the study concludes that while challenges remain pervasive in Nigeria's SME sector, resilience nurtured through deliberate coping strategies provides a vital pathway to improved performance and competitiveness. Building entrepreneurial resilience is therefore not only a survival strategy but also a performance-enhancing mechanism for SMEs operating in turbulent business environments.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study carry important theoretical, managerial, and policy implications.

Theoretical Implications

The study contributes to entrepreneurship and SME literature by empirically linking environmental challenges, coping strategies, and entrepreneurial resilience to business performance in Nigeria. By validating the Resource-Based View (RBV), the findings highlight how scarce and constrained resources weaken SME performance. The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory is also reinforced, as the study demonstrates how coping strategies enable SMEs to conserve and renew vital resources in the face of uncertainty. Furthermore, the positive role of entrepreneurial resilience in enhancing performance provides empirical support for the Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) perspective, emphasizing the value of adaptability and proactiveness in turbulent environments. These insights extend the scholarly discourse on resilience by situating it as both a mediating and performance-enhancing construct within resource-constrained economies.

Practical Implications

For SME owners and managers, the results stress the importance of cultivating resilience through deliberate coping strategies, such as investing in digital solutions, building strong networks, and diversifying business operations. These adaptive measures not only buffer firms against environmental challenges but also create pathways for sustained competitiveness.

Policy Implications

For policymakers, the study underscores the need to address systemic challenges such as limited access to finance, regulatory bottlenecks, and poor infrastructure that constrain

SME performance. Policies aimed at improving financing mechanisms, easing regulatory frameworks, and investing in supportive infrastructure will provide a more enabling environment for SMEs. Moreover, resilience-building programs, including training on crisis management, innovation, and resource optimization, could enhance SMEs' capacity to withstand shocks and contribute more meaningfully to national economic development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and implications of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

For SME Owners and Managers

Entrepreneurs should deliberately cultivate resilience by adopting adaptive coping strategies. This includes investing in digital technologies to enhance efficiency, engaging in strategic networking to access new markets, and diversifying product or service lines to reduce dependence on a single revenue source. Continuous training and capacity building in innovation, risk management, and adaptive leadership are also essential to strengthen resilience.

For Policy Makers

The government should prioritize creating an enabling environment for SMEs by improving access to finance through flexible credit facilities, reducing bureaucratic bottlenecks in business regulation, and investing in critical infrastructure such as energy and transport. In addition, targeted resilience-building initiatives, such as subsidized digitalization programs and resilience training workshops, can empower SMEs to withstand shocks and uncertainties more effectively.

For Support Institutions and Industry Stakeholders

Business development service providers, trade associations, and donor agencies should design and implement programs that support SMEs in resilience building. This could include mentorship platforms, collaborative innovation hubs, and resource-sharing networks. Partnerships between SMEs and larger corporations can also foster knowledge transfer, access to markets, and greater business sustainability.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The study was limited in scope to SMEs operating in Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt, which, although representing major business hubs in Nigeria, may not fully capture the experiences of SMEs in rural or less urbanized regions. The use of self-reported data also raises the possibility of response bias, as participants may have provided socially desirable answers. Additionally, the cross-sectional design restricted the ability to establish causality between entrepreneurial resilience and SME performance over time. Future research could address these limitations by adopting longitudinal designs to track resilience and performance dynamics over time. Expanding the study to include SMEs in other geographical regions and industries would also provide a more comprehensive understanding of resilience across diverse contexts. Furthermore, integrating qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or case studies, could enrich insights into how coping strategies are developed and operationalized in practice.

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