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Survival Strategies of Microenterprises in Nigeria

Olatutu Olubusola Sholeye
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Olatutu Olubusola Sholeye

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Survival Strategies of Microenterprises in Nigeria

by

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MBA University of Lagos, 1981

BSc University of Ibadan, 1976

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

July 2021

Abstract

Some owner-managers of microenterprises (MEs) in Nigeria lack effective strategies to sustain their businesses beyond the first 5 years of operations. Owners of existing and new MEs would benefit from strategies to mitigate constraints for business survival because failure rates are higher among MEs. Grounded in the resource-based theory, the purpose of the current qualitative multiple case study was to explore the survival strategies some owner-managers use to sustain their enterprises in Nigeria. The targeted population was six purposefully selected ME owner-managers who survived in business for over 5 years in Lagos, Nigeria. Data were collected through semistructured interviews and a reflexive journal. Data were analyzed using Yin's 5-step thematic analysis. Three themes emerged: the need for owner-managers of MEs to practice resilience, build and leverage their relationships and networks, and develop sustainable business operations. A key recommendation is for owner-managers of MEs to implement strategies directed toward self-development of entrepreneurial resiliency to enhance survivability in a harsh environment. The positive social change implications include potentially decreasing unemployment, reducing poverty, improving wealth creation, and improving socioeconomic well-being in Nigeria.

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Dedication

To God Almighty, the core and center of my being.

To Oluwafolahanmi, the love of my life.

To all who have been there for me on my life's journey.

I am who I am because of you.

To Him be the glory evermore.

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I acknowledge the presence of God with and within me.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The survival of micro and small firms remains a phenomenon of interest to researchers because of the significance of these enterprises to the economic world order. Micro and small enterprises account for almost 90% of businesses worldwide (Gherghina et al., 2020; Zafar & Mustafa, 2017). The significance of micro and small enterprises is pronounced in less developed economies (World Bank, 2017a). Micro and small businesses are drivers of economic growth, industrialization, poverty alleviation, wealth redistribution, and job creation (Ayandibu & Houghton, 2017; National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2019a). Despite the importance of microenterprises (MEs), their operations remain largely under-researched (Gherhes et al., 2020) as MEs are usually lumped under small businesses. Grabowski and Stawasz (2017) and Welsh and White (1981) asserted that MEs are not tiny small businesses. MEs are unique and deserve separate studies.

Background of the Problem

MEs and small businesses play significant roles in the development of national and global economies. MEs create jobs, facilitate the redistribution of economic wealth, close the income gap, and alleviate poverty (Ayandibu & Houghton, 2017; Mamun, Ibrahim, et al., 2018). MEs are the largest employers of labor in Nigeria (NBS, 2019b). MEs contribute about half of the gross domestic product (GDP) of Nigeria. Even though MEs account for 99.8% of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), MEs are subsumed within the classification of SMEs. The performance of MEs, especially those in developing countries, remains under-researched (Gherhes et al., 2020; Jankulović &

Skorić, 2018; E. A. Khan & Quaddus, 2017; Sohns & Diez, 2019; Umadia & Kasztelnik, 2020; Victor et al., 2018). Because the strategic imperatives in MEs are different from those of large firms, the strategic tools and processes designed for large firms are not helpful for MEs (Gopaul & Rampersad, 2020; Grabowski & Stawasz, 2017). Most MEs in Nigeria do not survive up to 5 years of operations (see McKenzie, 2017) and do not grow to employ more than the owner-manager (NBS, 2019b). Despite the many limitations and impediments, some MEs in Nigeria thrive in the environment that Okeke and Nwankpa (2018), Onwe et al. (2020), and the World Bank (2017b) described as fragile, hostile, and turbulent. The current study was conducted to bridge the gap in the knowledge of the survival strategies of owner-managers of MEs operating in turbulent resource-constrained environments like Nigeria.

Problem Statement

Most MEs in Nigeria fail within 5 years of operations and do not grow to employ more than two persons (see McKenzie, 2017; NBS, 2019b). About 41 million MEs employ almost 60 million people and contribute approximately 50% of the GDP of Nigeria (NBS, 2019b). The general business problem was that most MEs in Nigeria lack survival strategies, have stunted growth, and fail within the first 5 years of operations. The specific business problem was that the owner-managers of MEs in Nigeria often lack the strategies to sustain their businesses beyond the first 5 years of operations.

Purpose Statement

The objective of the current qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that some successful owner-managers of MEs in Nigeria used to sustain their

businesses beyond the first 5 years of operations. The targeted population was six MEs in Lagos that had deployed successful strategies to sustain their business for more than 5 years. This population was appropriate because more than 10% of the 41 million MEs in Nigeria operate in Lagos (NBS, 2019b). The outcome of the current study might be useful to existing and aspiring owner-managers of MEs who desire to sustain and grow their businesses. The current research might contribute to positive social change because the survival of MEs may ensure stable employment for many, reduce the level of poverty, promote shared prosperity, and improve the socioeconomic well-being of Nigerians.

Nature of the Study

Researchers use three primary research methodologies: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Yin, 2018). Quantitative researchers rely on numerical data to examine the relationships and patterns between variables (Williams & Moser, 2019). The quantitative method was not suitable for the current study of the survival of MEs in Nigeria. The phenomenon is complex and multidimensional, and the pertinent information could not be reduced to numbers. The mixed methodology, which combines qualitative and quantitative approaches (Providence, 2018; Saunders et al., 2015; Yin, 2018), was also not appropriate for the current research because the quantitative method was not suitable. The qualitative approach is appropriate to obtain in-depth understanding of individual's or groups' lived experiences within their context (Cypress, 2017; Saunders et al., 2015). The qualitative method was appropriate for exploring the unique phenomenon of the survival of MEs in Nigeria.

Some qualitative designs include ethnography, phenomenology, narrative, and case study. Ethnography is the study of the way of life of a group of people and requires that the researcher spend extended periods to understand the culture or pattern of behaviors of a group of people (Cypress, 2017; Renjith et al., 2021; Voyer & Trondman, 2017). Because my interest was the strategy that selected owner-managers of MEs used to sustain their businesses, the ethnographic design was not appropriate for the current research. Phenomenology is the holistic study of people's experiences within a context (Adams & van Manen, 2017; McNarry et al., 2019). Even though phenomenology might give robust results, the design is complicated and time-consuming (see Webb & Welsh, 2019). I did not choose the phenomenological design because my interest was the strategies that the owner-managers of successful MEs used to sustain their firms and not the experiences of the managers. Given the constraints on the resources available for the current research, the ethnographic and phenomenological designs were not suitable because the methods require extended time to execute. In the narrative design, researchers study a phenomenon and construct a story from rich, multidimensional data from many sources (Cypress, 2017). I did not choose the narrative design because the focus of the current study was not on the stories of the owner-managers. I considered the case study design appropriate for exploring the survival strategies of owner-managers of ME in the hostile Nigerian ecosystem. The case study design is flexible and useful for capturing the unique experiences of individuals and investigating phenomena that are less understood (see Saunders et al., 2015; Yin, 2018). Researchers may select the single or multiple case studies design. The multiple case study design yields rich data in each case

(Mohajan, 2018; Renjith et al., 2021; Yin, 2018). The comparability of data across multiple cases enhances the reliability and validity of the research (Mohajan, 2018; Renjith et al., 2021; Yin, 2018). I elected to use the qualitative multiple case study design to understand the strategies that owner-managers of MEs use to sustain their firms in Nigeria.

Research Question

What strategies do some owner-managers of MEs in Nigeria use to sustain their businesses beyond the first 5 years of operations?

Interview Questions

1. What factors have enabled your enterprise to survive in Nigeria beyond 5 years of the start-up?
2. What were some obstacles that you had to surmount to make your business survive?
3. How did you overcome these obstacles?
4. What suggestions do you have for other owner-managers of MEs that could help them sustain their business in Nigeria?
5. What additional information would you like to share with me that would help me understand what you did to keep your business running for more than 5 years?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the current study was the resource-based view (RBV) complemented with the dynamic capabilities theory (DCT). Penrose (2009)

created the RBV in 1959. The firm is an aggregation of resources and knowledge that its leaders acquire, organize, and use to the advantage of the business (Penrose, 2009). The firm's growth depends on how the firm deploys available internal and external resources (Penrose, 2009). Barney (1991) and Wernerfelt (1984) extended the RBV to augment the static stance of the RBV. Barney (2001) expanded the RBV to include processes that relate to the abilities of the managers to exploit especially internal resources to create and sustain the unique competitive advantage of the firm.

The availability or scarcity of resources does not altogether explain the performance of an enterprise. Teece et al. (1997) developed the DCT to explain the abilities of managers to deploy the resources available to the firm to respond to challenges in the ever-changing environment. In MEs, the internal capabilities reflect the skills of the owner-manager, who is the primary resource of the ME (Fazal et al., 2019; Pansera, 2018). The dynamic capabilities of the owner-managers and the internal capabilities are resources that distinguish MEs (Fazal et al., 2019; Pansera, 2018). The RBV augmented by the DCT was an appropriate framework for understanding the strategy that owner-managers of MEs in Nigeria deploy to sustain their business beyond 5 years.

Operational Definitions

Bottom of the pyramid (BoP): BoP describes the setting where people live on scarce resources, subsisting on less than \$2.00 a day (S. Gupta, 2019).

Dynamic capability: Dynamic capability is the ability of the firm to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies to respond to changes in the environment (Krzakiewicz & Cyfert, 2017; Teece et al., 1997).

Entrepreneurial orientation (EO): EO relates to the risk-taking ability, opportunity-seeking attitude, and proactive behavior of the managers, particularly the owner-managers of the business (Martens et al., 2016).

Microenterprises (MEs): MEs are enterprises with fewer than 10 employees, including the owner-manager (NBS, 2019a).

Mind map: A mind map is the visual organization and presentation of data to promote critical thinking, problem solving, and data analysis (Choudhari et al., 2021; Seckman & Van De Castle, 2021).

National Bureau of Statistics (NBS): The NBS is the authoritative source for statistics on Nigeria (NBS, 2019b). The NBS is owned by the Federal Government of Nigeria.

Resource-Based View (RBV): RBV is the perspective that a firm's competitive advantage streams from the resources at its disposal (Barney, 1991; Penrose, 2009; Wernerfelt, 1984).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Researchers reflect on the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of their study to reduce biases. Disclosure of the researcher's perspectives enhances the credibility of the researcher and the knowledge created from the study (see Cudziło et al.,

2018; Pitard, 2017; Reid et al., 2018; Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). In the following sections I present the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the current study.

Assumptions

Assumptions are perspectives that a researcher holds as true but may not be verified (Yin, 2018). Five assumptions guided the design and execution of the current study: (a) the qualitative multiple case study was the most appropriate design to answer the research question, (b) the interview questions and protocol helped me collect data for reliable knowledge and insight about the survival of MEs in Nigeria, (c) the participants shared the success strategies in their business and provided accurate and honest responses, (d) the sample size of six MEs was an adequate and fair representation of the population, and (e) the selection criteria for the participants were appropriate for addressing the research problem.

Limitations

Limitations are the constraints within which researchers operate. Usually beyond the researchers' control, limitations might affect the quality of the research outcome and might pose a weakness in the study (Morgado et al., 2018; Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). A limitation of the current study was the scant literature on MEs. Even though there was significant literature on small businesses, the research on MEs, especially MEs in less developed countries like Nigeria, was minimal. The extant literature on the strategies of small businesses in the Western world is not relevant to the resource-constrained MEs in developing countries like Nigeria (E. A. Khan & Quaddus, 2017; Vrchota et al., 2020). Other limitations were the location of the current study and the

samples. The data collected from MEs operating in Lagos might not be fully representative of all MEs in Nigeria; therefore, the transferability of the outcome of the current study may be limited. Because case studies are contextual (see Saunders et al., 2015; Yin, 2018) and economic conditions are also not constant, the generalizability of the outcome of the current study might be limited. The phenomenon might also be country or culture sensitive (see Torres & Augusto, 2019); the business environment reflects the sociocultural setting (Yu et al., 2019), especially the interactions between the buyers and sellers in the ecosystem (Akoh, 2020; Darbi et al., 2018). Another limitation was that most MEs in Nigeria operate in the informal sector (NBS, 2019b) and might not have adequate records of their operations for 5 years. I relied on the memory of the owner-managers who had operated their businesses for more than 5 years.

Delimitations

The delimitations are the ways researchers choose to address the challenges in the research and define the boundaries of the research (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Saunders et al. (2015) cautioned that the researcher should be conscious of the resources available for their studies; Theofanidis and Fountouki advised that researchers delimit their studies to scope the research to a manageable size. Some of the boundaries in the current study related to the location and characteristics of the participants. I purposefully selected six cases that met the eligibility criteria for the current study. Participation was limited to literate owner-managers who founded their business and had operated in Lagos for more than 5 years. I purposefully selected owner-managers whom I could interview without the aid of an interpreter.

Significance of the Study

MEs are crucial to the socioeconomic life of their community. The current study might be of value to practice and academics. The study contributed to the literature on entrepreneurship and microenterprises in harsh socioeconomic environments. The outcome of the current study might provide insights into the survival strategies of MEs in Nigeria and at the BoP.

Contribution to Business Practice

The outcomes of the current research may contribute to the understanding of strategic management. The extant literature on the operations of MEs in developing countries is sparse (E. A. Khan & Quaddus, 2017), and the operations of these MEs are not well understood (Gherhes et al., 2020; Reynoso & Cabrera, 2019). The current study enriched the existing literature and may narrow the gap in the knowledge of strategic management of MEs in developing countries like Nigeria. In the current study, I did my best to enhance the understanding of the strategies that support the performance and survival of MEs in resource-constrained environments. The owner-managers of MEs might use the identified strategies to sustain their firms beyond 5 years. MEs are essential links between local resources and medium-size and large firms; MEs are also hubs of local innovation and industrialization (Jamak et al., 2017; NBS, 2019b). The improvement in the survival rate of the MEs might lead to a more vibrant local business environment.

Implications for Social Change

The current study has implications for poverty alleviation, employment generation, and inclusive wealth redistribution in Nigeria. As more owner-managers of MEs practice the strategies identified in the current research, the survival rate of the MEs in Nigeria may improve. The level of unemployment in Nigeria may decrease, the level of poverty might reduce, and the overall well-being of Nigerians might improve. With the improved survival rate of MEs, many people might have sustainable employment, higher income from taxes may accrue to the government, and the country's prosperity may increase. The consultants, educators, and development and donor agencies in Nigeria might find the strategies helpful in designing relevant curricula for the development and training of entrepreneurs in Nigeria. Governments and the regulatory agencies might use the results to promote policies that spur the survival and growth of MEs in Nigeria.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The objective of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that some owner-managers of MEs in Nigeria implement to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. Researchers review the literature to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, identify gaps in the knowledge, and justify the need for their study (Renjith et al., 2021). The current study contributed to the literature on the survival strategies of MEs in developing economies in general and MEs in Nigeria.

I reviewed more than 480 peer-reviewed scholarly articles, professional journals, government and international institutional publications, and books to broaden my knowledge of MEs in general and MEs at the BoP in developing and less developed

economies. Some of the databases included ABI INFORM Collection, Academic Search Complete, Emerald Management, ProQuest Central, Sage, Science Direct, and Web of Knowledge. Other sources included dissertations in the Walden Library and ProQuest Dissertation, authoritative information on the Nigerian environment from the databases of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), the Small and Medium Enterprise Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), and the NBS. Google Scholar was also a helpful search engine.

Some of the keywords were *small businesses, microenterprises, survival at the bottom of the pyramid, resource-based view, survival of small firms, failures of MEs, and business strategy in small businesses*. Some other keywords were *entrepreneurial orientation, entrepreneurial success, entrepreneurial failure, entrepreneurship theory, and self-employment*. To gain a broad understanding of the phenomenon, I read various literature, papers, and reports on small businesses in general and then modified and narrowed the search to MEs in developing countries and at the BoP. Consistent with Walden University's requirements, more than 85% of the materials that I cited were peer reviewed and published not earlier than 2017. The study included 278 references; 264 (95%) were published in or after 2017 (see Table 1).

Table 1*Source of Data for Literature Review*

Source	Total	Total published in or after 2017	Percentage published in or after 2017
Peer-reviewed journals	270	257	95%
Books	3	1	33%
Non-peer-reviewed publications	7	7	100%
Total	280	265	95%

Organization of the Review

In this review, I cover some of the resources that affect success of MEs, especially those operating in economies like Nigeria. I explore the concept of the owner-manager as the critical human resource in the ME. The success or failure of the business reflects the capabilities and disposition of the owner-managers (Coetzer et al., 2019; Hanafiah & Yousaf, 2016; Teece et al., 1997). I explore entrepreneurial orientation, risk-taking, environmental scanning, entrepreneurial growth, firm performance, firm success, and failure, especially in developing countries.

The literature review was iterative. As I progressed through the research, I reviewed and explored literature for new knowledge on the research topic: the strategies that MEs use to survive in less developed countries (LDCs), especially in Nigeria. I also searched the literature on the themes and strategies that emerged from the outcome of the current study. Johnson et al. (2020) and Renjith et al. (2021) recommended that researchers connect the research outcome to extend the conceptual framework. I reviewed the literature for fresh insights on the RBV, the conceptual framework for the current research. The literature search indicated gaps in the knowledge of the strategies that drive

the success of MEs, which justified the need for the current research. The current study contributed to the understanding of the survival strategies of MEs in developing economies, at the BoP, and in Nigeria. The outcome of the current research enhanced the literature on strategic management.

Micro and Small Businesses

Countries are not aligned in their categorizations of enterprises. Even within the same country, categorization might differ by industry or nature of the business (Elseoud et al., 2019). For example, in Malaysia the limit for small businesses in the manufacturing sector is 200 employees, whereas the threshold for small businesses in the service sector is 75 employees (Ng & Kee, 2018). In Pakistan, enterprises with fewer than 250 employees are classified as small businesses (Zafar & Mustafa, 2017). In Ghana the upper limit for employees in small firms is 10 (Baah-Mintah et al., 2018). The United States has nine industry classifications by employee size, ranging from 100 to 1,500 employees (US Small Business Administration, 2017). Apart from MEs, small enterprises, and medium enterprises, South Africa has another group termed *survivalists* (du Toit et al., 2020). These survivalists operate informally and earn below the poverty income level; the NBS (2019b) classified survivalists as the underemployed in Nigeria. The classification of enterprises reflects the industrial or economic imperatives of each country. The different bases for categorization make comparing across nations difficult.

The classification of MEs varies across countries. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development categorization, MEs have one to four employees, whereas the cutoff for MEs by the World Bank is fewer than 10 employees

(Elseoud et al., 2019). In Australia, Malaysia, South Africa, and the United States, enterprises employing fewer than five persons are classified as MEs. The upper limit in Ghana is six employees (Baah-Mintah et al., 2018). In Europe, MEs are firms with fewer than 10 employees, including the business owner. In Europe, firms with an asset base of less than €2 million are MEs; in the United States, the asset base is \$500,000, and in Nigeria the asset base is N5,000,000 (the equivalent of about \$10,000). Whereas the start-up capital of MEs in the USA is \$35,000 (US Small Business Administration, 2017), the start-up capital for MEs in Nigeria is N50,000, or approximately \$100 at the current exchange rates (NBS, 2019b). In the United States, the limit for small businesses is 500 employees; in Nigeria, the limit is 50, and in Ghana, the limit is 10 (Ajuwon et al., 2017). By asset size, a ME in the United States is a large firm in Nigeria. Whether classified by asset size or number of employees, a small business in one country might be a large business in another country.

MEs and small businesses are categorized by financial metrics such as sales volume and asset size, and nonfinancial metrics such as number of employees. There are wide variations in the categorization; the categorization reflects the focus of the various countries (Elseoud et al., 2019). The use of different national currencies for classification makes comparisons difficult. The number of employees is a widely used criterion (Abdallah, 2017); the upper limit for MEs in most countries is 10 employees, including the owner-manager.

Businesses in Nigeria are categorized by asset size and number of employees (NBS, 2019b; see Table 2). If the two criteria overlap, the number of employees takes

precedence over the asset size (NBS, 2019b); MEs and small businesses in Nigeria are valued for the employment generation. Irrespective of the size of the firm's operations or revenue, the NBS would classify a firm with fewer than 10 employees as an ME.

Table 2

Micro-, Small-, and Medium-Size Enterprises in Nigeria

<i>Size</i>	<i>Number of employees</i>	<i>Assets (excluding land & buildings)</i>	
<i>Micro</i>	<i>Fewer than 10</i>	<i>N 5 million</i>	<i>< \$ 10,000</i>
<i>Small</i>	<i>10 to 49</i>	<i>N 5 - 50 million</i>	<i>< \$ 100,000</i>
<i>Medium</i>	<i>50 to 199</i>	<i>N 50-500 million</i>	<i>< \$1,000,000</i>

Note. (1). NGN- Nigeria naira. (2). Conversion rate of N 500 to 1 US dollar.

Adapted from National Bureau of Statistics (2019a).

The classification by asset size might be relevant for manufacturing firms but not for service enterprises. Labor-based service companies, for example, may not require much investment in assets. Many intangible assets that enable the performance of a business do not show on the financials of the firm (see Arnold et al., 2018; Sanjay et al., 2020; Teece et al., 1997). Another challenge is that the asset size reflects the discretionary financing decision adopted by the owner-managers to rent, lease, or own their assets. Asset size may not be an accurate reflection of the scale of operations of the business.

The focus in Nigeria is on the importance of MEs and small enterprises for employment generation and poverty alleviation, which explains the preference for classification of the businesses by number of employees over asset size. The implication

for the current study is that MEs in Nigeria are heterogeneous. The MEs operate in diverse industries with different asset sizes and levels of operations.

Conceptual Framework

The framework for the current study was the RBV. The DCT complemented the RBV framework for explaining the performance of a firm (see Barney, 1991; Teece et al., 1997; Wernerfelt, 1984). The two frameworks are useful to study the strategies that the firms deploy (Barney, 2001). The RBV and DCT were appropriate conceptual lenses that framed the current qualitative multiple case study that explored the survival strategies of MEs in a resource-constrained environment such as Nigeria.

In organizational studies, the classical study of strategies revolves around products and services and the markets. Researchers such as Penrose (2009), Wernerfelt (1984), and Barney (1991, 2001) espoused the importance of resources as the driver of the strategy that produces the products and services: Resources are inputs for products; products are outputs of resources. The products of the firm depend on the available resources. The available resources influence the strategic options available to the firm (Barney, 2001; Wernerfelt, 1984). The resources influence the choice of products, markets, and the strategic objectives of the firm.

Penrose (2009) set the tone for the RBV of a firm. Penrose's work has been a source of inspiration for scholars and researchers interested in the performance of enterprises (Ferreira et al., 2016). In the RBV, the firm is a heterogeneous aggregation of resources, knowledge, and capabilities. These resources could be internal or external and could be tangible or intangible (Sanjay et al., 2020; Teece et al., 1997). The managers in

the company acquire, organize, and use resources to the advantage of their business (Barney, 2001). Penrose posited that the resources of a firm are valuable only to the extent that the managers combine and manage the resources to provide distinct services. Penrose further distinguished between entrepreneurial and managerial activities in the firm.

Activities in the firm could be entrepreneurial or managerial. Entrepreneurial activities relate to innovation and creativity, whereas managerial functions include planning, utilizing, allocating, monitoring, and controlling the resources to achieve the desired entrepreneurial objectives (Teece et al., 1997). Teece et al. viewed entrepreneurial and managerial activities as internal capacities within the organization. The abilities of the owner-managers (internal capacity) to drive the entrepreneurial and organizational activities of the enterprises influence the survival of their business.

Managers combine resources to give the firm a competitive advantage in their environment. Barney (1991) distinguished between competitive advantage and sustainable competitive advantage. Even though some resources provide a firm with an immediate competitive advantage, the competitive advantage might be sustainable only if the resources are unique, rare, difficult to imitate, and non-substitutable (Barney, 2001). Barney cautioned that a firm's competitive advantage might be eroded or eliminated by changes in the economic environment. Krzakiewicz and Cyfert (2017) also noted that competition could undermine short-term benefits derived from price and quality. A sustainable competitive advantage would derive only from those rare internal capabilities that are not readily substitutable.

Scholars have extended the knowledge of resources and the performance of the firm. Nason and Wiklund (2018) and Sanjay et al. (2020) submitted that many internal and external resources enable a firm's performance. To remain competitive and viable, the managers must develop strategies to use the firm's internal capabilities (strengths) to exploit the opportunities available in their environment. In the DCT, Teece et al. (1997) explained that managers deploy the resources available to a firm to respond to the ever-changing challenges in the environment. The differences between firms stem from the heterogeneous internal resources, especially the organizational resources such as knowledge, experience, and self-efficacy of the managers rather than the external resources available to all firms in the environment. Kevill et al. (2017), in their study of MEs, concluded that self-efficacy influences the capability of the owner-managers; owner-managers convinced of their ability to successfully run their business are likely to succeed. The managers use internal resources to harness and control all internal and external resources to generate entrepreneurial profit. To sustain the competitive advantage of the enterprise, the capabilities within the firm must be dynamic.

Competitive advantage may be transient or sustainable. Barney (2001) distinguished competitive advantage from sustainable competitive advantage. Competitive advantage derives from resources. The internal capabilities that are rare (not readily substitutable) lead to sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 2001). Because the internal and external environments are not static, the firm's internal capabilities must be dynamic to sustain its competitive advantage. For example, a firm's competitive advantage could be eliminated by the difficulties in the economy (Penrose, 2009) or

changes in technology (Barney, 2001). The abilities of managers to respond and adapt (dynamic capabilities) are resources for the sustainability of the business.

The differences between the resource and capability constructs are not apparent. Some researchers see DCT as extending the RBV. Researchers such as Barney (1991, 2001), Kay (2018), Olthaar et al. (2019), and Sanjay et al. (2020) used the two constructs interchangeably. Kevill et al. (2017) concluded that the self-efficacy of the managers is a resource and a dynamic capability. The dynamic capabilities in small enterprises drive the renewal, success, and sustainability of the businesses (Kevill et al., 2017). Dynamic capabilities are the links between the resources and the firm's performance (Hashim et al., 2018; Jayeola et al., 2018). In the current study, I used the terms resource and capability interchangeably, where dynamic capability is a resource of value in the firm.

Many theories and concepts could have been used to frame the study of the survival of MEs in Nigeria. Apart from the RBV and DCT, other competing theories could have framed the research of the strategies that owner-managers of MEs in Nigeria use to survive. Researchers might use other theories and approaches to explain the performance and the survival of the enterprise. Some conceptual frameworks that researchers could use to study the performance of enterprises include systems theory, role theory, traits theory, population ecology theory, behavioral theory, adaptive systems theory, and transaction cost theory. The RBV is the most developed and the most widely used lens for reviewing the growth of the firm (Burvill et al., 2018; Nason & Wiklund, 2018). Theories relating to strategy, entrepreneurship, and organization management and growth could also have framed the survival of the MEs in Nigeria.

The adaptive systems theory may be an insightful framework for understanding the strategy of successful MEs. Grassroots entrepreneurs, to survive, must be adaptive and responsive to the realities of the firm's existence. Hashim et al. (2018) found that the dynamic capabilities of small firms drive their performance. In complex systems where changes are unpredictable, the complex adaptive system lens could frame the study of the operations and survival of the MEs in a resource-deprived environment (see Roundy et al., 2018). The study of the complex adaptive systems could be at the firm level or the ecosystem. Under the RBV lens, the adaptive capabilities of the firm are resources.

The organizational life cycle theory, which relates to the changing needs and challenges that a venture faces through its life cycle (Visser et al., 2019), is also a viable framework for evaluating the survival of the firm. The entrepreneurs' goals attainment theory (EGAT) is appropriate for understanding the firm's performance: the motivation of the owner-manager influences the performance of the ME and the sustainability of the business (see Barrios et al., 2019; Hanafiah et al., 2016; Mustapha et al., 2018).

The theory of planned behavior has been used as a framework to evaluate the growth of small businesses. Hanifzadeh et al. (2018), using the theory of planned behavior, found a correlation between the entrepreneurs' desires to grow their business and their actions in driving the performance of their ventures. Because MEs operate within broader sociocultural environments, researchers could also use the situational strength theory (see Morales et al., 2019) to frame the study of the survival strategies of MEs in Nigeria.

The RBV of the firm's strategies aligns with Pansera's (2018) position that linked innovation with the firm's resources. The resources, skills, and personnel within firms

drive the creative process of innovation in the enterprise. The theories on innovation are also appropriate for framing the study of the survival of MEs. Researchers may use the compositional-based view of the firm could be used to frame the study of the survival of the MEs that have common rather than rare resources (Tehseen et al., 2019). The resourcefulness of the owner-managers in combining the limited resources is an advantage.

Researchers have also combined the RBV with other conceptual frameworks. Mamun, Subramaniam, et al. (2016) combined RBV with the theory of planned behavior and the human capital theory to explore the performance of MEs. Kücher et al. (2020) integrated the RBV with the ecology theory to investigate the firm's performance at different stages in the life cycle of the firm. The RBV and contingency theories framed the study of entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance in Nigeria by Onwe et al. (2020). Wyne and Hafeez (2019) framed their study of small businesses in Pakistan with RBV, DCT, and contingency theory. Similarly, Safari and Saleh (2020) integrated the contingency theory with the RBV and DCT to study the export performance of SMEs in Vietnam.

E. A. Khan and Quaddus (2017), using the RBV and DCT lenses, concluded that the sustainable growth of MEs was a function of the resources and the capabilities of the firm. Salder et al. (2020) posited that the development and performance of the firm is a process, and the DCT should complement the RBV. In the current study, I combined the RBV with the DCT to augment the static view of resources. Dynamic capability is a resource.

In the RBV, the competitive capabilities of the firm derive from the resources available to the firm. The assumption is that firms are heterogeneous; the firms differ in how they deploy their resources (Barney, 1991). Olthaar et al. (2019) found that MEs at the BoP exercised their dynamic capabilities differently even when using similar resources. Tehseen et al. (2019) contended that for the effective operations of the firm, the combination of resources may be more important than the individual resources available to the firm.

The premise on the heterogeneity contrasts with Michael Porter's "*five forces*," which implied that firms within an industry are similar in how the firms experience their environment (Porter, 1980). Even though Porter's *five forces* could compare the operations and attractiveness of firms across different industries, the theory does not explain the differences within firms in the same industry. The firm was the unit of analysis in the RBV and DCT that framed the current study.

Despite the usefulness, the RBV is not without limitations. A limitation of the RBV is the difficulty in assessing the resources available to the firm. Wernerfelt (1984) contended that products are visible, and the effects of such products on the firm's performance are easy to assess. The resources and capabilities in a firm are challenging to identify; individual and collective valuation of the resources and capabilities within the firm are also difficult and subjective (Baluku et al., 2018; Olthaar et al., 2019; Salder et al., 2020). Even within the same firm, the value of resources and capabilities vary across systems and divisions. Researchers have not found the empirical nor practical definition of resources (Salder et al., 2020; Tehseen et al., 2019). Neither have scholars agreed on

the approach for prioritizing resources (Baluku et al., (2018). Because the RBV focuses on the firm as the unit of analysis (Barney, 2001), cross-comparisons are difficult under the RBV.

Another limitation is that the RBV is contextual. The internal and the external environments in which firms operate influence the management of the firm (Barney, 2001; Salder et al., 2020; Tehseen et al., 2019). Resources are heterogeneous, and the settings are constantly changing (Teece et al., 1997). Tehseen et al. maintained that because the resources available to resource-constrained small firms are usually common palace and not rare, the RBV might not be ideal for studying the growth of small enterprises and MEs.

Despite the limitations, the RBV is the most developed and widely used conceptual framework for reviewing and understanding the strategic management of the firm (Burvill et al., 2018; Ferreira et al., 2015; Olthaar et al., 2019), especially small firms in the informal sector (Darbi et al., 2018). Hashim et al. (2018) submitted that dynamic capability is the link between resources and performance. The RBV augmented by the DCT was appropriate for exploring the strategies that successful owner-managers of MEs employ to sustain their business in the adverse Nigerian environment.

Resources

Under the RBV lens, the firm is a collection of resources. The resources and the distinct competencies in the firm are heterogeneous (Krzakiewicz & Cyfert, 2017). Resources could be tangible or intangible. Tangible resources include financial capital (e.g., equity capital, debt capital, and retained earnings) and physical capital (e.g.,

machinery and buildings). Intangible resources comprise entrepreneurial competencies, knowledge, skills, experiences, organizational procedures, and reputation, among others (see Baluku et al., 2018; Eniola & Entebang, 2017; Martin et al., 2018). MEs, especially those at the BoP, usually have limited physical resources. In the resource constrained environment, the owners rely on intangible assets to drive the success of their business (Baluku et al., 2018). Even though resources are distinct from competencies, competencies might also be viewed as valuable resources to the firm. The dynamic capabilities of the owner-managers are valuable resources in MEs.

Activities in the firm may be entrepreneurial or managerial. Entrepreneurial activities relate to the firm's opportunity-seeking operations, whereas managerial activities are associated with the running of the firm. Penrose's managerial services are akin to Krzakiewicz and Cyfert's (2017) organizational competencies that drive the unique operations of the firm. Organizational competencies and managerial capabilities include intangible resources such as in-depth knowledge of the market and strategic decision-making skills that the managers use to recognize and respond to the opportunities and challenges in their environment (Krzakiewicz & Cyfert, 2017; Olthaar et al., 2019). The business environment is becoming more and more complex, and the MEs are not exempt. Dynamic capabilities in the firm are the abilities of the managers to configure and redesign the internal processes, structures, and systems of the firm while maintaining the alignment with the ever-changing requirements of the stakeholders, especially the customers and the employees (Chen, 2017; Hashim et al., 2018; Krzakiewicz & Cyfert, 2017). Entrepreneurial competencies and dynamic capabilities are

critical resources for the survival of MEs in the ever-changing business environment, especially in resource-constrained settings at the BoP.

The performance of the enterprise is dependent on the resources that the managers exploit within and outside the firm. Sustainable enterprises use the available resources to create value for customers and to generate profit for the firm (Majama & Magang, 2017). Barney (1991) contended that only the valuable, rare, not easy to copy, and non-substitutable resources give a firm its comparative advantage. Teece et al. (1997) maintained that the managers' capabilities to deploy the firm's resources drive the sustainable performance of the firm. In the current study, I combined the two perspectives, the RBV and the DCT, to evaluate the survival of MEs in a resource-constrained and fragile environment such as Nigeria; the management capabilities are resources.

Resources in the firm exist on a continuum, from lack (constraint) to slack (more than enough). Resources may facilitate or constrain the operations of the firm (Eniola & Entebang, 2017). Although some scholars reported that resource constraints impede the firm's performance, others found that resource constraints enhanced the firm's creativity in responding to the needs in its environment (see Pansera, 2018; Woschke et al., 2017). The lack nor the abundance of resources is not necessarily the determinant of the performance of a firm.

MEs in resource-constrained economies respond creatively to the needs in their environment, Jamak et al. (2017), Pansera (2018), and Saunila (2017) contended that innovation and innovativeness in small businesses at BoP differ from what obtains in the

developed economies and large firms. The lens used for assessing innovativeness in emerging markets must evaluate and account for crucial factors in the environment; (Pansera, 2018). Many owner-managers of MEs engage in entrepreneurial innovation to co-create solutions and value in their environment (see Darbi et al., 2018; Pansera, 2018; Reynoso & Cabrera, 2019; Roundy et al., 2018). Technology might not drive innovation at the BoP; small businesses at the BoP innovate creatively (see Pansera, 2018; Parwez & Shekar, 2019; Sharma, 2017). Innovation activities in the MEs are usually across products, processes, people, and marketing (Sharma, 2017). Grassroots entrepreneurs in LDCs creatively use their traditional knowledge and skills and their understanding of their socioeconomic settings to provide solutions that address the challenges in the environment (Pansera, 2018). Such solutions are within the customers' means and the limits of the context (Akoh, 2020; Pansera, 2018; Stephan & Pathak, 2016). The traditional knowledge and skills of the owner-managers are resources and capabilities that compensate for the lack of other tangible resources.

The link between innovativeness and performance is inconclusive. Asenge et al. (2018) established a direct correlation between innovation and firm performance, but Rosca et al. (2017) maintained that innovation would not sustain a business. Rosca et al. found that innovation did not lead to better performance, especially in small businesses that lacked the resources to commercialize such innovations. Sinfield and Solis (2016) also posited that the MEs in LDCs might be more preoccupied with the ongoing risk of surviving than indulging in risky innovations. Pansera (2018), Parwez and Shekar (2019), and Sharma (2017) noted that the MEs in the turbulent LDCs innovate even though

constrained by resources. The innovation by the poor and marginalized people at the BoP has been termed - necessity (Jamak et al., 2017), grass-root (S. Gupta, 2019; Parwez & Shekar, 2019), frugal (Pansera, 2018), and much more. BoP entrepreneurs innovate and must continue to innovate to survive. Innovativeness alone would not sustain the firm.

Resources drive the strategy of the firm. Baluku et al. (2018) and Yohanes et al. (2017) found that social capital influences the strategy that owner-managers of MEs implement. Mazzei et al. (2017) established that the firm's managerial capabilities are critical to maintaining the required balance between the entrepreneur's opportunity-seeking behavior and the need to keep the firm's competitive advantage. Martin et al. (2018) and Warren and Szostek (2017) emphasized the importance of relational skills in small businesses. At the BoP, intangible resources such as hope, efficacy, resilience, resourcefulness, and opportunism of the owner-managers drive the business outcome (Baluku et al., 2018; Fatoki, 2018; Gherhes et al., 2020; Wall & Bellamy, 2019). Rosca et al. (2017) recommended that researchers should study different sustainability frameworks for small enterprises. The current study was about strategies that owner-managers of successful MEs use to survive in hostile environments such as Nigeria.

Strategy at the Bottom of the Pyramid

As the business environment becomes increasingly complex, the competitive landscape becomes precarious. Yesterday's wonder becomes irrelevant today, as product lives become shorter and shorter (Vrchota et al., 2020), and managers must evolve strategies and tactics to sustain their businesses and grow their markets. MEs exist with small businesses and other larger organizations within the local ecosystem and beyond.

MEs face and must respond to threats from the bigger firms with more resources and access to resources and capabilities to respond to the vagaries in the market. To survive, the owner-managers of MEs, as the main actors, must respond to the challenges in their dynamic ecosystem and the threats from other firms.

The imperatives in strategic thinking and planning in MEs and small businesses differ from those in large firms. The mindsets of the owner-managers of MEs, especially at the BoP, are different from those of managers in developed countries (Pansera, 2018). Because of the deprivation in their environment and the limited resources and capabilities, the owner-managers of MEs at the BoP take calculated risks to sustain their firms (Gupta, 2017). The owner-managers of small businesses rely on intuition and experience to navigate their business (Eijdenberg et al., 2017; Gopaul & Rampersad, 2020; Majama & Magang, 2017). The owner-managers of MEs find creative ways to avoid head-on competition with larger corporates (Winterhalter et al., 2017).

The formal strategic planning tools and processes used in the western world are not relevant in the LDCs, because the environmental and sociocultural realities are different (Reynoso & Cabrera, 2019; Russell, 2004; Safari & Saleh, 2020; Sanjay et al., 2020). The strategic processes used in large firms are inappropriate in MEs at the BoP because the owner-manager, the central employee and the driver of strategy, usually lacks the necessary skills, tools, and resources (Gopaul & Rampersad, 2020). Reynoso and Cabrera noted the need for scholars to develop frameworks to understand the operations of the MEs at the BoP. The strategic imperatives in MEs are unique.

Owner-managers choose their responses to the challenges in the business.

Boohene (2018) stated that MEs might be reactive or proactive to the rapid changes in the environment. The firms with proactive strategic orientation have better performance than the reactive counterparts (Boohene, 2018); proactive owner-managers exploit changes in the market for new opportunities to grow their business (Gupta, 2017). Yanes-Estévez et al. (2018) reviewed the typology for the strategic orientation of small businesses and concluded that the diversity of the theoretical and operational lenses used by researchers result in divergent classifications. Yanes-Estévez et al. submitted that owner-managers of small firms, exercising their adaptive capabilities, use hybrid strategies to respond to business challenges in their ecosystem. The strategic orientation of the owner-managers rather than strategic planning might be more relevant in MEs.

The owner-managers of MEs determine the strategic directions of their business. Shibia and Barako (2017) posited that most owner-managers of MEs and small businesses at the BoP lack the competencies to engage in formal traditional strategic planning activities. The deficiencies in competencies may be pronounced in environments such as Nigeria where more than half of the owner-managers of MEs are illiterate (see NBS, 2019b). The owner-managers might be preoccupied with organizing their resources to respond to their daily survival and might therefore not engage in long-range planning (Blackburn et al., 2013). The MEs at the BoP do not need complicated strategic and analytic competencies (Winterhalter et al., 2017). The owner-managers should focus on and be highly responsive to their customer's needs (Krzakiewicz &

Cyfert, 2017). Owner-managers of MEs must organize and reorganize their resources to respond to the needs in their environment.

Entrepreneurship Risk-Taking at the Bottom of the Pyramid

Risk-taking is an entrepreneurial construct. Entrepreneurs invest their resources in ventures that might or might not generate the gains that they envision. Entrepreneurs are risk-takers (Cieslik & D'Aoust, 2017; Hsu et al., 2017; Soares & Perin, 2019; Yu et al., 2019). Because entrepreneurs seek and exploit opportunities for economic and emotive reasons, over-optimism could preclude the entrepreneurs from adequately assessing the risks in their ventures (Hsu et al., 2017). Excessive optimism and overconfidence might cause entrepreneurs to gamble and take undue risks that jeopardize their ventures (Mazzei et al., 2017). Owner-managers must strike a balance between risky entrepreneurial opportunity-seeking behavior and the sustenance of their business. Entrepreneurs decide on the acceptable level of risk and loss they are willing to bear.

Risk-taking is contextual. People view circumstances through different personal lenses; some see opportunities (possibilities of gains) while others focus on the probability of losses (Hsu et al., 2017). What also seems an affordable loss to one entrepreneur might be detrimental for another entrepreneur. For example, resource-constrained MEs are more risk-averse than larger firms (Cieslik & D'Aoust, 2017). Unlike the big firms, the MEs at the BoP lack the capacity to handle risky innovations.

The attributes of the entrepreneurs also influence the level of risk that the entrepreneur can take or absorb. Martin et al. (2018) submitted that the entrepreneurial proclivity of the owner-manager depends on their resilience and psychological attributes.

Prior experience and success in previous risky situations give owner-managers the confidence to pitch for higher stakes (Hsu et al., 2017). Other factors influencing the entrepreneur's risk-taking posture include the age, gender, educational background of the business owner (see Baidoun et al., 2018; Lim & Suh, 2019; Mor et al., 2020; Shibia & Barako, 2017; Woldehanna et al., 2018). The personal traits of risk-taking and opportunity-seeking are contextual and situational.

Apart from the personal traits, the external socioeconomic ecosystem also conditions the entrepreneur's risk posture. Lindsay et al. (2014) shared that the entrepreneurs in developed countries, with supportive environments with sound legal and judicial systems, take more risks than entrepreneurs in the LDCs and at the BoP. Cieslik and D'Aoust (2017) and Matos and Hall (2020) submitted that the higher levels of uncertainties and hazards in the subsistence economies limit the entrepreneurs' risk postures. The unfavorable and unpredictable policies in LDCs push many entrepreneurs to avoid longer-term manufacturing projects. On the contrary, Hashim et al. (2018) and Tehseen et al. (2019) affirmed that small firms thrive in dynamic and turbulent ecosystems; the firms respond to the challenges in the environment with their nimble structures. The position of Hashim et al. (2018) is consistent with Onwe et al. (2020) that the hostile environment in Nigeria stimulated the development of EO in MEs. The entrepreneurs at the BoP are cautious in their risk exposure; the entrepreneurs are short-term oriented in their approach to business.

Researchers have linked culture and entrepreneurship. The level of risks that entrepreneurs take reflects the culture in their environment (Cieslik & D'Aoust, 2017;

Hsu et al., 2017; Soares & Perin, 2019; Yu et al., 2019). In their study of 44 countries, Stephan and Pathak (2016) established that national cultures influence individuals' entrepreneurial intentions or risk posture. Similarly, Yu et al. (2019) noted the effect of culture on the operations of family-owned businesses in Taiwan and the USA. For example, cultures that embrace uncertainties might indirectly support entrepreneurship. European and North American countries encourage and celebrate individualism and entrepreneurship, but that cultural orientation is not necessarily valued in other parts of the world (see du Toit et al., 2020; Russell, 2004; Stephan & Pathak, 2016; Yu et al., 2019). Cultural orientation affects EO and behavior (Laffranchinia et al., 2018; Russell, 2004; Torres & Augusto, 2019; Yu et al., 2019). The current study did not explore cultural linkages with survival strategies of the owner-managers.

Entrepreneurial Motivation

People start business ventures for various reasons. Going by the *economic goal attainment theory* (EGAT), entrepreneurs might be motivated by financial, independence, and personal goals (Hanafiah & Yousaf, 2016; Hanafiah et al., 2016). Even though the motivation for setting up an enterprise could be intrinsic or extrinsic, intrinsic motivation drives most owner-managers to set up MEs (Hanafiah & Yousaf, 2016). Some owner-managers start their ventures out of necessity to exploit the opportunities in their environment or escape from the unemployment market and meet their basic needs (Dencker et al., 2021; Hanafiah & Yousaf, 2016). Other motivators for owner-managers in developing countries include recognition, freedom, and empowerment (E. A. Khan & Quaddus, 2017). Some owner-managers are not motivated to grow their business because

growth might lead to dilution or loss of power and unacceptable lifestyle changes (de Souza & Seifert, 2018; Gherhes et al., 2016). Many owner-managers of MEs in developing countries are necessity entrepreneurs (Pansera, 2018) dealing with sustenance (Jamak et al., 2017). These owner-managers have also been termed survival or means entrepreneurs (see Cieslik & D'Aoust, 2017). These 'survival' or 'means' entrepreneurs might be content with staying out of unemployment (Jamak et al., 2017) rather than the growth of their business. de Souza and Seifert (2018) and Vasconcelos (2021) submitted that the desire to own a business might not be for financial or economic motives. Darbi et al. (2018) have called for management research into business objectives other than for economic or financial gains. The performance of the firm is linked with the motivation of the owner-manager.

The motivation of the owner-managers is contextual. Entrepreneurial motivation differs between countries and between continents; entrepreneurial motivation reflects the level of development and the culture in the environment (see Akinyemi & Adejumo, 2017; du Toit et al., 2020; Gherhes et al., 2020; Laffranchinia et al., 2018; Russell, 2004; Yu et al., 2019). Caliendo et al. (2020), shared that the motivation of regular entrepreneurs differs from the motivation of the unemployed and people in between jobs. Jamak et al. (2017) noted that people in the LDC might choose self-employment to escape unemployment and poverty. The prior experiences and success affect the entrepreneurs' motivation to start and persist in their ventures (Caliendo et al., 2020; Hsu et al., 2017). du Toit et al. (2020) and Laffranchinia et al. (2018) concluded that culture influenced the desire for self-employment. The sociocultural environment and past

experiences influence the entrepreneurial motivation of the owner-managers and the survival of the firm.

The motivation of the entrepreneur influences but does not determine the success of the firm. Jamak et al. (2017) noted that success and sustenance depend on the managers consistently creating and delivering value to the customer in a profitable manner. Warren and Szostek (2017) found that the managers' passion was critical for the sustainability of their ventures. Octavia and Ali (2017) posited that marketing skills, market orientation, especially customer orientation, are essential for the firm's growth and sustenance. Even though necessity entrepreneurs lack some managerial competencies, these entrepreneurs use the meager atypical resources to respond to their environment (Darbi et al., 2018; Octavia & Ali, 2017; Pansera, 2018). The survival of MEs ultimately depend on the owner-managers capability to meet the needs of the customers (Cieslik & D'Aoust, 2017). These 'survival' or 'means' entrepreneurs might be content with staying out of unemployment (Jamak et al., 2017) rather than growing of their business. de Souza and Seifert (2018) and Vasconcelos (2021) submitted that the desire to own a business might not be for financial or economic motives. The performance of the firm is linked with the motivation of the owner-manager.

Entrepreneurial Orientation

Entrepreneurial orientation (EO) expresses the risk-taking ability and opportunity-seeking attitude of managers, particularly the owner-manager. EO reflects the innovativeness, autonomy, and competitiveness of the managers and their firms (Gupta, 2017; R. Gupta, 2019; Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). EO is an intangible resource of the firm

(Dionysus & Arifin, 2020; R. Gupta, 2019) and a dynamic capability that is unique and not easily copied. EO drives the performance of the firm (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996); the unique attributes of EO might also be a source of sustainable competitive advantage for the firm (Barney, 2001). EO affects the performance and the sustainability of the ME.

Different scholars have investigated the dimensions of EO and their effect on the performance of the firm. Martens et al. (2016) reviewed more than 400 articles published between 1987 and 2014. They found four themes surrounding EO: performance, strategy, entrepreneurial attitude, and management. The emerging consensus was that EO is a driver of the performance of the firm (Martens et al., 2016). In their extensive literature review, Gupta (2017) found that EO dimensions supported business performance and that EO affected financial and non-financial performance. Soares and Perin (2019), in their meta-analysis of extant literature, also confirmed the link between EO and the enterprise's performance. In their studies of MEs and small businesses, Dionysus and Arifin (2020) and Mojica-Carrillo et al. (2021) found that EO enhanced the performance of the firms. Viewed through the RBV lens, EO is akin to Penrose's (2009) construct of entrepreneurial activities in the firm, which is the managers' ability to seek and seize opportunities in their environment.

The effect of EO on the firm's performance is contextual; the firm's external and internal environments affect the firm's operations. The complexity, dynamism, industry characteristics, and supportiveness of the external environment all moderate the effect of EO on the firm (Magaji et al., 2017). In their study across three nations, China, Mexico, and Spain, Basco et al. (2020) found that EO affected business performance but the

environmental context moderated the effect of EO on firm performance. Basco et al. submitted that whereas EO enhanced performance in challenging environments with growth potential, EO impeded performance in nurturing environments with growth potential. Kosa et al. (2018) and Yohanes et al. (2017) posited that EO drives the strategy and the performance of MEs and small firms. Boohene (2018) found that EO had no effect on the performance of small businesses in Ghana. In their study of small businesses in Nigeria, Onwe et al. (2020) likewise established that OE did not have direct effect on performance, but the hostile environment stimulated OE. Khan et al. (2020) observed a strong link between EO and the performance of small businesses in Pakistan. Gupta (2017) concluded that EO affected the performance of firms in India. R. Gupta (2019) and Magaji et al. (2017) found that the entrepreneurial constructs - innovativeness, pro-activeness, and risk-taking had different effects on the performance of small businesses. R. Gupta and Magaji concluded that the interplay of the constructs of EO moderated the firm's performance. The effect of EO on performance is inconclusive.

Even within the same economic environment, location influences the EO of the firm and the owner-manager. Kosa et al. (2018) concluded that firms in urban areas outperformed the firms in rural settings; the limited opportunities in their environment constrained small businesses in rural areas (Gherhes et al., 2020). As in many developing countries, the institutional framework and infrastructure in Nigeria are inadequate and disabling for the MEs (Jayeola et al., 2018; Onwe et al., 2020). In challenging environments, the owner-managers' determination and resilience propelled by EO drive

the growth of small firms (Al Issa, 2020). The environment influences the performances of MEs.

Internal factors affect the performance of the firm. R. Gupta (2019) posited that owner-managers must back EO with other resources to stimulate and sustain small businesses' growth. Campos (2017) found that managers' entrepreneurial passion drives EO and the performance of the firm. Owner-managers must identify and focus on the construct of EO that would enhance the performance of the enterprise.

Even though researchers have linked EO with the growth of small businesses, the relationship between EO and growth is not straightforward. Basco et al. (2020) and Fazal et al. (2019) reported that the managerial and other entrepreneurial competencies moderate the performance of small businesses. Soares and Perin (2019) found that EO is vital for the firm's success but is not independent of the owner-managers skills and capabilities. Innovation and learning, self-efficacy, and creativity of the owner-manager moderated EO and the firm's performance (Soares & Perin, 2019). Blackburn et al. (2013) posited that age and size strongly influence the firm's growth and might be more important than the strategy and the EO of the enterprise. de Souza and Seifert (2018) and Gherhes et al. (2016) posited that not all ME owners have growth aspirations. The effect of EO on the growth of the firm is inconclusive. The intention to grow or not grow the MEs depends on the motivation of the owner-managers.

Some owner-managers of MEs are not motivated to grow their businesses. Not all owner-managers are growth-oriented, and some owner-managers are not driven by economic or financial gains (see de Souza & Seifert, 2018; Gherhes et al., 2016;

Vasconcelos, 2021). The growth of an enterprise reflects the owner-managers' desires and motivation for setting up the business. For example, owner-managers of MEs who had set up business ventures to escape from unemployment, might be content with their sustenance (Boohene, 2018; Caliendo et al., 2020; Jamak et al., 2017). Some owner-managers deliberately keep the operations small to retain control of the firm and to sustain their lifestyles (de Souza & Seifert, 2018). Some of these owner-managers might not be growth-oriented because of the institutional and regulatory challenges that come with growth. The owner-managers of MEs must have EO and the desire and skills to operate and sustain their business.

Firm Performance, Firm Success

Researchers have reviewed the performance of MEs through different theoretical frameworks. Fazal et al. (2019) concluded that the success or failure of MEs depends on the internal and external dimensions. In their study of MEs in Malaysia, Fazal et al. established that managerial capabilities were crucial for the firm's success. Fazal et al. and Pansera (2018) found that the success of the business depended on the capabilities of the owner-managers of MEs to deploy the limited resources. Owner-managers influence all aspects of the operations of the firm (Coetzer et al., 2019). Mustapha et al. (2018) established that the attributes of owner-managers influence the sustainability of their business. Martin et al. (2018) and Warren and Szostek (2017) found that the psychological capital and the owner-managers relational skills affect the performance of MEs. Khan and Quaddus (2017) also linked the growth of the business to the human

capital available within the firm. The emerging theme from the various studies was that factors in the internal and external environments drive the performance of MEs.

Researchers use different metrics to assess the performance of the MEs. Abdallah (2017), Boohene (2018), and Nason and Wiklund (2018) maintained that growth is a multidisciplinary, multifaceted construct with many indicators. Sanjay et al. (2020) and Tunberg and Anderson (2020) also submitted that growth is a process and not an outcome. Researchers have measured the business performance using different yardsticks, financial and nonfinancial. Some financial measures include profitability, increases in sales, profitability, balance sheet, and asset size (Heinicke, 2018). Financial measures are historical and are not necessarily the best indicators of the sustainability of the venture (see Arnold et al., 2018; Boiral et al., 2019). MEs in the LDCs, especially those in the informal sector, do not always keep good financial records (Darbi et al., 2018; Dionysus & Arifin, 2020; Reynoso & Cabrera, 2019). Financial measures are industry sensitive. Comparability of standards across different countries and their currencies is a challenge.

Some researchers have also used nonfinancial and socioeconomic measures such as the number of employees, customer orientation, and market share. Blackburn et al. (2013) opted for the increases in sales as metrics of the firm's growth because of its simplicity and acceptability. Boohene (2018) used subjective measures that related to the objectives of the owner-managers of the business. Some emotive goals included freedom, empowerment, and social recognition (E. A. Khan & Quaddus, 2017). Penrose (2009) stressed that internal factors and not the environmental context are the drivers of the

firm's performance. Nason and Wiklund (2018) maintained that industry size and firm age moderate performance. Fatoki (2018) submitted that performance at the firm level is different from the performance at the entrepreneurial level, and the assessment of success should combine performance at both levels. Salder et al. (2020) and Sanjay et al. (2020) posited that growth is not an outcome but a process. Scholars differ on the definition and metrics for the performance of the firm, especially MEs.

Accurate information on the financial performance of MEs in LDCs is not readily available. In these environments, many MEs operate informally (see Mor et al., 2020; NBS, 2019b; Williams & Kedir, 2017) and generally do not keep good records of their operations (Boohene, 2018; Bushe, 2019; Mor et al., 2020). Researchers have adduced reasons for large numbers of small businesses operating informally. Williams and Kedir (2017) maintained that the weak structural support in the LDC drove most of the MEs in these environments to operate informally. Other researchers have concluded that MEs, especially in many LDCs, operate informally to avoid taxation and other institutional bureaucracy (see Akoh, 2020; Matos & Hall, 2020; Mor et al., 2020). In their study of unregistered businesses in Turkey, Williams and Kedir (2017) found that the firms operating in structurally weak environments performed better than the registered companies because the unregistered businesses were shielded from taxation, challenges of navigating an unstructured and unsupportive structural and regulatory environment. Abdallah (2017), in the study of another LDC, Tanzania, found that firms in the informal sector thrive better than those in the formal economy. In the LDC, there is no incentive and no advantage to operating in the formal sector.

The performance of MEs reflects the motives of the owner-manager. The performance and survival of the firm depend on the motivation of the owner-manager (Caliendo et al., 2020; Golla & Rao, 2019; Hanifzadeh et al., 2018; Mamun, Noorshella Binti, et al., 2018). Jamak et al. (2017) established that not all owner-managers have growth aspirations. The socioeconomic priorities of the owner-manager sometimes override the economic gains of the business (de Souza & Seifert, 2018; Vasconcelos, 2021). For example, necessity entrepreneurs might be more preoccupied with their sustenance and other personal motives than with the growth of the business (Boohene, 2018; Jamak et al., 2017). The owner-managers determine the strategic direction and growth of their enterprise.

Furthermore, Lumpkin and Dess (1996) also noted that the owner-managers might make deliberate decisions not to grow the business to retain autonomy and control. Subsistence entrepreneurs might be more interested in the survival of their enterprise than in immediate financial gains (Matos & Hall, 2020). The performance of the firm reflects the financial and nonfinancial aspirations of the owner-managers. Fatoki (2018) noted that in small firms, success at the firm level might not reflect success at the entrepreneur's level. The environment also affects the entrepreneur's satisfaction with performance. In settings where institutional trust is low the owner-managers may not be motivated to grow their firm (Song & Guo, 2020). Jamak et al. (2017) submitted that the success of MEs should be assessed against the motives of the owners. The performance of the firm should be evaluated against the motivation, aspiration and satisfaction of the owner-managers.

Scholars have established the effect of the capabilities and competencies of the owner-managers on the performance of MEs. Bushe (2019), Hashim et al. (2018), and Teece et al. (1997) asserted that the dynamic entrepreneurial and managerial skills of the owner-managers influence the sustenance of the firm. Similarly, Roman et al. (2016), in their phenomenological study of managerial capabilities in small businesses in Nigeria, concluded that the performance of the firm depended on the competencies and the level of accountability of the managers. Scholars such as Agyapong and Attram (2019), Rankhumise and Letsoalo (2019), and Yusoff et al. (2018) also established that the level of financial literacy of the owner-managers moderated the performance and growth of the business. Financial and management accounting capabilities are essential for the operations of small businesses.

The survival strategies of MEs, especially in developing countries, are under-researched. Baidoun et al. (2018) and Gherhes et al. (2020) noted the gap in the knowledge of the growth and survival of small businesses. Sohns and Diez (2019) highlighted the paucity of research on MEs in developing economies. Rahman et al. (2015) and Reynoso and Cabrera (2019) emphasized that the operations of MEs at the BoP was not understood. The gap in knowledge of the performance of MEs, especially MEs in sub-Saharan Africa, is wider (Akinyemi & Adejumo, 2017; Martens et al., 2016). E. A. Khan and Quaddus (2017) and Safari and Saleh (2020) maintained that the literature on MEs in the developed economies was not relevant to MEs in developing countries. Entrepreneurship has a cultural undertone (Laffranchinia et al., 2018; Russell, 2004). The current research into the survival strategies of MEs in Nigeria bridged the gap

in knowledge of the survival strategies of MEs in developing countries, especially in resource-deprived sub-Saharan Africa.

Entrepreneurial Failure, Mortality of the Firm

Success and failure are different sides of the same coin; the outcome of any event is either success or failure. Entrepreneurs taking risks either succeed or fail. The knowledge of the causes of failure, especially at the early stages of the life of the firm, might improve the chances of survival of MEs.

Scholars have different interpretations of failure or success in business. Bushe (2019) and Li et al. (2021) asserted that there is no consensus amongst scholars and researchers on the phenomenon of failure. The entrepreneurs are also not in agreement on the metrics of success (Song & Guo, 2020). Entrepreneurs take risks setting up their businesses in environments that is constantly changing and increasingly competitive (Ayala & Manzano, 2014). Whether opportunity-seeking or necessity-driven, entrepreneurs face the chances of failure regarding the desired objectives of the venture. Filho et al. (2017) and Li et al. (2021) also distinguished between entrepreneurial failure and enterprise demise. The exit of a firm or the closure of an enterprise might not signify business failure (Caliendo et al., 2020; Filho et al., 2017; Lattacher & Wdowiak, 2020). The owner-managers decide to exit or persist in a line of business.

Owner-managers may exit a business for various reasons. He et al. (2017) and Li et al. (2021) distinguished entrepreneurial failure from the owner-manager's voluntary exit. Some owner-managers voluntarily close down, sell or merge with another business (Murphy et al., 2019). Necessity entrepreneurs who set up firms for sustenance might

voluntarily close the enterprise when the economic or industry conditions present better options or paid employment opportunities (Caliendo et al., 2020). Opportunity-seeking entrepreneurs might also move on to ventures with better prospects (Murphy et al., 2019). The exit of a firm might not mean business failure.

Failure could be at the level of the firm or the entrepreneur. The owner-manager, the entrepreneur, is the critical determinant of the performance of MEs. Separating failure at the firm level from failure at the entrepreneurs' level might be difficult (Caliendo et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021). Failure or success of the firm relates to the owner-managers objectives and their strategy for achieving these objectives. Failure or success is subjective.

Beyond the failed firms that have exited, another phase of failing is the underperforming firms that the owner-managers keep alive for reasons other than economics. Golla and Rao (2019) referred to these inefficient firms as having industrial sickness. Entrepreneurs might persist in businesses that are not viable because the entrepreneurs believe that the situation would be temporary or hope for a better future (Caliendo et al., 2020; Murphy et al., 2019). Owner-managers could also develop emotional attachments to failing or failed courses (Khelil, 2016), especially in the LDCs, where social stigma and psychological trauma might accompany failure. The firm's survival is not necessarily a measure of the firm's success; that a firm has not wholly failed does not mean that the business is prospering. In the current study, MEs that have operated for more than 5 years were viewed as successful.

Impediments to the Survival of MEs

Entrepreneurial failure is a multifaceted, complex phenomenon. Failure may range from “*total*” to “*zero*”; total failure is the demise of the firm, and zero failure is the absence of failure (Khelil, 2016). Total failure is the demise of the firm, and zero failure is the absence of failure. In the study of the typology and taxonomy of entrepreneurial failure. Khelil identified three lenses that researchers and scholars used to investigate the failure of small businesses: i) external factors, ii) the choices of the entrepreneurs, and iii) satisfaction of the entrepreneurs with their personal goals. Li et al. (2021) submitted that researchers and scholars investigating the failure of small businesses should focus on the entrepreneur, environmental factors, and the business. Campos (2017) and Song and Guo (2020) linked the success or failure to the personal goals of the owner-managers. Golla and Rao (2019) concluded that the choices that entrepreneurs make are responsible for the failure of the firm. Atsan (2016) surmised that the impediments to the success of the firm could be due to internal or external factors. Congruent with Atsan, Visser et al. (2019) established that internal factors and the challenges in the external environment caused firms to fail within the first 3 years of operations. The impediments to the success of the enterprise could be due to internal and external factors (see Bushe, 2019; Khelil, 2016; Sohns & Diez, 2019).

Firms may fail at different stages in their life cycle. The triggers and reasons for failure vary with the stages of development of the enterprise (Kücher et al., 2020). Ahmad and Atniesha (2018) and Filho et al. (2017) identified four stages in the life cycle of the enterprise: i) genesis, ii) existence, iii) survival, and iv) growth. Tunberg and

Anderson (2020) questioned the linear view of growth. Tunberg and Anderson posited that the growth of small firms is complex and does not follow the natural organic logic. Different factors cause success or failure at various points in the life of the firm (Visser et al., 2019). Kücher et al. (2020) found that small businesses at the nascent stage fail because of the internal deficiencies in the firm. Whereas older firms might have stabilized the operations, Kücher et al. (2020) maintained that the firms to survive must be responsive to changes in their environment. The current research focused on the survival strategies of MEs that have operated for more than 5 years in Nigeria.

Even though MEs may fail at any stage, they are especially vulnerable at the start-up stage. In the start-up phase, many MEs lack human capital and other resources to drive their success (Bushe, 2019; Kücher et al., 2020). Many owner-managers, who are the primary human capital in the MEs, lack business and managerial acumen. Bushe (2019) and Eniola and Entebang (2017) noted that many owner-managers lacked the capacity to make sound decisions to solve their business problems. The owner-managers of MEs, especially in LDCs, have poor managerial and self-management skills, and many lack discipline (see Bushe, 2019; Kücher et al., 2020; NBS, 2019b; Prijadi et al., 2020). The self-estate of the owner-manager is critical at the start-up stage.

Finance is a critical resource for starting an enterprise. MEs need access to financial resources to build and sustain their business (Agyapong & Attram, 2019; Caliendo et al., 2020; Chatterjee et al., 2018; Muriithi, 2017; Victor et al., 2018). The funding needs of small ventures differ significantly from those of big firms (Bushe, 2019). The funding requirements and the funding patterns of small businesses vary with

the phases of the development of the venture (Ahmad & Atniesha, 2018; Prijadi et al., 2020). The owner-managers of MEs at the BoP prefer and usually provide the initial capital to signal the founder's commitment to the project (see Ahmad & Atniesha, 2018; Darbi et al., 2018; Lawal et al., 2018). Access to the right kind of finance is critical for the survival of the enterprises. The MEs face different challenges funding the various stages of their evolution (see Prijadi et al., 2020).

MEs are constrained to accessing the right kind of finance due to external and internal factors. Akinyemi and Adejumo (2017) and Victor et al. (2018) identified poor financial management as an impediment to the survival of small firms in LDC, especially in Africa. For example, many owner-managers are not financially literate and do not effectively manage their working capital (Agyapong & Attram, 2019). Many owner-managers of MEs in the LDCs are not literate and are not financially savvy.

The owners of MEs also have resource constraints and usually do not meet the lending or investment criteria in the formal financial sector. Because most MEs operate informally, they usually lack the financial records and information to support their bank loan applications (Agyapong & Attram, 2019; Bushe, 2019; Cotler, 2018; Prijadi et al., 2020). Banks and other traditional financial institutions avoid lending to the MEs (Bruton et al., 2017; Lawal et al., 2018) because transactions with these marginal credits are risky and unprofitable. Many owner-managers, unable to access banks and other institutions, turn to informal funding channels to run the business.

At the risky start-up phase, the owners of MEs in the impoverished LDCs rely mainly on meager personal funds and funds from their family and friends (Brau et al.,

2015; Darbi et al., 2018; Lawal et al., 2018). Even though the loans through informal channels are easier to process, these loans are expensive, the terms are restrictive, and the funds are not sustainable (Bruton et al., 2017; Cotler, 2018). In LDCs microfinance institutions and loan-sharks provide funds at exorbitant rates (Brau et al., 2015; Prijadi et al., 2020). The inappropriate funding decisions and the attendant high cost of funds jeopardize the productivity of the business and the chances of survival of the MEs (Cotler, 2018). In summary, many researchers have delved into the challenges that MEs face. In the current study, I focused on the survival strategies of MEs despite the obstacles in their deprived environment.

MEs, the Economy, and Their Environment

MEs shape their environments, and the environments affect the operations of the MEs. Some of the environmental factors that influence the operations of the firm include the institutional and regulatory frameworks, the quality of the infrastructure, the cultural mores and preferences of the people, availability, and access to the appropriate type of finance, security, and many more (see Akoh, 2020; Darbi et al., 2018; Laffranchinia et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2019). Gupta (2017) maintained that the experiences of MEs in different environments are not transferable to other environments. Saunders et al. (2015) and Yin (2018) asserted that the case study is contextual. The current research was in Nigeria, an LDC, and at the BoP, where the survival of the owner-manager and their ventures were challenging.

About 9.2% of the world's population live in abject poverty, subsisting less than \$2.00 per day (World Bank, 2020c). Many of these poor people live in LDCs or at

the BoP, where resources are scarce (Pansera, 2018; Reynoso & Cabrera, 2019). Often illiterate communities in developing and emerging economies and with limited access to essential services, these low-income people set up subsistence microbusinesses as a way out of unemployment and the poverty trap (Cieslik & D'Aoust, 2017; Jamak et al., 2017; Matos & Hall, 2020). Sustaining the MEs is of paramount importance in the LDC.

MEs and small enterprises are the backbones of most economies. Almost 90% of businesses worldwide are small businesses (Hashim et al., 2018)). About 99.9% of all firms in the United States of America are small businesses (Turner & Endres, 2017). In Europe, MEs employing fewer than 10 persons accounted for up to 95% of the total firms (Kevill et al., 2017). MEs account for more than 99% of small businesses or 90% of all firms in Nigeria (NBS, 2019b). MEs create employment and facilitate the redistribution of economic wealth in their environment, closing the income gap and alleviating poverty (Ayandibu & Houghton, 2017; Banwo et al., 2017; Cieslik & D'Aoust, 2017). MEs and small businesses are critical for economic growth, poverty alleviation, wealth redistribution, and job creation. The sustainability of MEs and other small businesses is vital for the economy of nations, especially the LDC.

In all economies and across different nations, MEs contribute to the economic activities in their environment. Entrepreneurs benefit the economy irrespective of the level of development of the society (Ayandibu & Houghton, 2017; Hashim et al., 2018). The economic condition in the environment affects the fortunes of the MEs; the firms' operations also affect the economy. Beyond creating jobs, MEs fuel local entrepreneurship, and innovation (Pansera, 2018; Reynoso & Cabrera, 2019; Sharma,

2017). The MEs rely on local resources; MEs combine local materials in creative ways to solve economic and social problems in their environment (Jamak et al., 2017; Pansera, 2018; Parwez & Shekar, 2019; Reynoso & Cabrera, 2019). The MEs provide good but affordable products and services that are relevant to their environment.

MEs drive innovation and competition, especially in developing countries. In the value chain, MEs connect with the local resources and provide the bigger businesses with the relevant resources and services (Ayandibu & Houghton, 2017; Banwo et al., 2017; NBS, 2019b). Despite the importance of MEs for economic and social wellbeing, many countries, especially the LDC, have not paid attention to this sector; the business potential at the BoP remained grossly untapped (Pansera, 2018). The contribution of the MEs to the local economy would improve if the operations of more MEs were sustainable.

Many MEs in the LDC operate in the fringes or the informal sector. The relatively low start-up capital and ease of entry encourage the low-income group to establish their subsistence firms in the informal sector (Darbi et al., 2018; Jamak et al., 2017). For example, the average start-up capital for MEs in Nigeria is about N50,000 (NBS, 2019b), equivalent to about \$100. In Nigeria, less than 4% of the 41 million MEs are formally registered (NBS, 2019b). The resource-constrained MEs cannot afford the cost of formal registration. The burdensome bureaucracy and red tape associated with the administration make official registration difficult (Abdallah, 2017; Cotler, 2018; Williams & Kedir, 2017). The low literacy level might be another reason for the MEs operating on the fringes.

The firm and its success cannot be dissociated from the reality of its environment. Small businesses, especially MEs, and their operations are a function of their settings (Banwo et al., 2017; Gherhes et al., 2020; R. Gupta, 2019; Roundy et al., 2018; Sohns & Diez, 2019; Song & Guo, 2020). The business climate affects the performance of MEs, especially those in LDC (Jayeola et al., 2018; Sohns & Diez, 2019). Some of the problems in LDCs relate to the harsh economic climate, poor infrastructure, weak institutional structure and policies, and corruption (see Agri et al., 2017; Akinyemi & Adejumo, 2018; Banwo et al., 2017; Muriithi, 2017; Okeke & Nwankpa, 2018; Shibia & Barako, 2017; Victor et al., 2018). The environment in the LDCs is not supportive of business ventures.

The economic and social challenges in the environment affect the sustenance of the MEs. Barczyk et al. (2019) established that small businesses operating in rural settings in Poland and Lithuania experienced different impediments and opportunities. In the LDC, institutional and infrastructural supports are usually weak or non-existing (Akinyemi & Adejumo, 2018; Banwo et al., 2017; Shibia & Barako, 2017), the environment might not be nurturing for MEs and small businesses (Jayeola et al., 2018). du Toit et al. (2020) and Song and Guo (2020) found that the level of trust in the ecosystem affects the initiative and satisfaction of the business owners. The external environment affects the performance of the enterprise.

Even within the same economy, the location affects the performance of the firm. Greenberg et al. (2018) and Kosa et al. (2018) found that the characteristics, performance, and strategic behavior of small businesses in urban areas were distinct from

those in rural settings. Businesses situated in urban areas had better access to resources that promoted their growth (Kosa et al., 2018). But firms in the rural settings benefited from cheaper labor and local raw materials (Banwo et al., 2017). MEs in peripheral locations may not be able to attract and retain the right level of employee and skills (Gherhes et al., 2020). Location is contextual; urban and rural settings are also relative. A rural setting in developed countries might be more advanced than the urban environment in the LDCs. Factors such as proximity to markets, the economic size of the market, and access to quality infrastructure are vital to the performance of the business (Bongomin et al., 2018; Bushe, 2019; Gherhes et al., 2020; Sohns & Diez, 2019). The location of the enterprise is essential, but the location is not the only driver of the success of the business.

MEs respond differently to changing economic conditions. In their longitudinal studies of small firms in Indonesia's tourism industry, Tulus (2019) established that small businesses showed resilience, especially in turbulent times. During the economic downturn in 2008, Jha and Depoo (2017) found empirical evidence that demonstrated that MEs stimulated the economic recovery in the US. MEs and small businesses provide stability against economic shocks in their environment (Hashim et al., 2018; Tulus, 2019; Yohanes et al., 2017). The small size of the enterprises makes them flexible and adaptable to respond and adapt during adverse economic conditions (Gherghina et al., 2020; Hashim et al., 2018; Roundy et al., 2018; Tehseen et al., 2019; Tulus, 2019). Small businesses across different settlement patterns adopt different strategic responses and behaviors to the challenges in their environment (Williams & Kedir, 2017). Williams and

Kedir found that small firms use multiple competitive strategies to cope with the adverse economic situation and grow their business.

The agile nature of MEs allows them to respond positively to the challenges in the economy. Bongomin et al. (2017) observed that turbulent business environments stimulated local entrepreneurship. Owner-managers of MEs rely on their capabilities to respond to the constraints, challenges, and complexities of their economies (Pansera, 2018; Tulus, 2019). MEs are flexible and nimble; decision-making is informal and not rigid (Gopaul & Rampersad, 2020; Reynoso & Cabrera, 2019). Despite their economic constraints, MEs are responsive to market and customer demands (Pansera, 2018). The ability to adapt and respond quickly to challenges in their ecosystem is an advantage over the large firms (Tehseen et al., 2019). Because the owner-manager makes most decision, the response time of MEs is fast.

A significant advantage that MEs have is their embeddedness in their local environment. Owner-managers of these MEs use their traditional knowledge, skills, and understanding of their sociocultural environment to creatively co-create solutions to survive in their environments. The owner-managers find novel ways to provide relevant and affordable products and services (see Akoh, 2020; Pansera, 2018; Parwez & Shekar, 2019; Reynoso & Cabrera, 2019; Sharma, 2017). The personal network, intuition, and other skills of the owner-manager compensate for the constraints imposed by the scarcity of resources in the environment (see Lim & Suh, 2019; Martin et al., 2018; Warren & Szostek, 2017; Williams & Kedir, 2017). The small size of the MEs may not altogether be a disadvantage.

Research Setting: The Case of Nigeria

The case study situates the experience of the participants; case studies are contextual (Yin, 2018). Many authors have also stressed the importance of the external environment on the performance of the firm. The survival of the firm depends on the interplay of the characteristics of the owners, the structure and capabilities of the firm, and the prevailing economic and business conditions (Bongomin et al., 2018; Victor et al., 2018; Zainol et al., 2018). The business environments in the developed economies are radically different from those in the LDC.

Researchers have also posited that the challenges in MEs and small enterprises in developing countries might be unique. The experiences of small businesses in the developed countries might not be relevant to the LDC (Banwo et al., 2017; Gupta, 2017). The survival or sustenance of the MEs reflects the distinct economic realities of their environment (Akoh, 2020; Gherhes et al., 2020; Mor et al., 2020). In this section, I provide an overview of the background, socio political, sociocultural, and economic context of the Nigerian ecosystem, the focus of the current research.

Nigeria is a highly diversified and fragile ecosystem. The landscape and weather vary: from the rainforest in the south to the mild temperate middle belt and the north's dry arid lands. Nigeria has more than 300 ethnic groups with different languages and cultures (IMF, 2018, Feb). The political landscape is also precarious; Nigeria runs a federal system with 36 autonomous states, including the Federal Capital City, Abuja. The country operates a multiparty political system, with about 68 registered political parties.

There is no clear ideological orientation in the polity (Okeke & Nwankpa, 2018). The diversity in the country could be a source of strength or could complicate the business environment.

From the RBV perspective, Nigeria is endowed with natural resources, arable land, generally temperate weather, and workforce availability. Nigeria has one of the highest GDPs in Africa. Nigeria is the largest country in Africa in landmass. With more than 200 million people, Nigeria is the most populous country south of the Sahara and the 7th globally (United Nations, 2019). Nigeria is also one of the fastest-growing populations; by the year 2024, Nigeria would have the 3rd largest population in the world (United Nations, 2019). Nigeria has the largest community of youths globally. More than half of the country's population is under 35 years old (NBS, 2018; World Bank, 2020b), but more than half of the youths are unemployed (NBS, 2018). Nigeria is rich in oil and other mineral resources: the country has at least 43 solid mineral resources such as limestone and granite in commercial quantities. The deprivation in the environment is systemic rather than natural.

The lands and waters are fertile, supporting forestry, crop production, livestock, and fishing. Some of the country's agricultural products include cocoa, rubber, groundnut, sorghum, soya bean, cassava, rice, cotton. Despite the neglect of the agricultural sector, Nigeria was the fourth largest exporter of cocoa beans in 2018 (Statista, 2020, March). Nigeria, a member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), has the tenth largest crude oil reserve and the ninth-largest

liquefied gas reserve in the world (British Petroleum, 2019; OPEC, 2020, June). The bountiful resources have not improved the economic and social wellbeing of Nigerians.

Despite the endowment in many natural resources, the country depended mainly on the exportation of crude oil. The exportation of crude oil accounted for more than 90% of the national foreign exchange earnings and contributed more than half of total government revenues (International Monetary Fund, 2019; Manasseh et al., 2019; World Bank, 2020b). Nigeria's situation as a mono-product economy is precarious, more so because the economy is highly import-dependent. The fortunes of the country depend on the vagaries in the international crude oil market (Orukpe & Omoruyi, 2017). For example, the country went into deep economic depression due to the sharp decline in oil prices caused by the economic depression between 2015 and 2016 (Agri et al., 2017).

The Nigerian economy is fragile and unstable (Okeke & Nwankpa, 2018). As the demand for crude oil softens in the international market, the situation might become more precarious. The western world is developing alternative energy sources to oil - shale, gas, geothermal, solar, nuclear, and alternative energy sources (British Petroleum, 2019; Van de Graaf, 2016; World Bank, 2020b). Nigeria should diversify its economy.

Apart from the vagaries on the demand side, many challenges plagued crude oil production in Nigeria. Some problems in the Nigerian oil industry included political instability, insecurity in the oil-producing areas, human and environmental rights controversies. Youth-restiveness, kidnapping for ransom, destruction, and vandalization of oil pipelines are but some of the social ills that plagued the environment (Ebhotu & Tabakov, 2018; Manasseh et al., 2019; NBS, 2018). Many of the big multinational

companies are cutting down on their operations in the country. Many have reduced their stakes in the Nigerian oil industry (IMF, 2019, April). The sociopolitical problems in the country, especially in the oil-producing regions of the country, have adversely affected the petroleum industry in Nigeria.

MEs dominate the Nigerian economic ecosystem. With more than 41 million MEs employing about 60 million persons, these MEs provide 99% of the employment in the private sector (NBS, 2019a). More than 99% of manufacturing firms in the country are MEs. MEs contribute almost 50% of the country's GDP, whereas the "black gold"- crude oil and the entire petroleum sector contribute just about 10% of Nigeria's GDP (World Bank, 2020b). The MEs are the backbone of the Nigerian economy.

The level of illiteracy in Nigeria is high. Nigeria has the highest number of children out of school (IMF, 2019, April). The World Bank (2020b) estimated that more than 80% of Nigerian youths could not read. NBS (2019b) also submitted that more than 94% of the owner-managers of MEs in Nigeria are illiterate or have minimal education. The low literacy level has negative implications for skills acquisition (Barros et al., 2019; World Bank, 2020b). Scholars and researchers such as Watson and McGowan (2019) stressed that the utility of the business plan was overrated. In their longitudinal study of participants in business plan competition, Watson and McGowan (2019) found that the business plan was more for the external users than nascent entrepreneurs. Others researchers such as Basco et al. (2020), Fazal et al. (2019), and McKenzie (2017) have also stressed the importance of managerial capabilities of the owner-managers for the successful operations of the firm. Financial literacy is a critical factor for attracting the

external financing needed to support the business (Agyapong & Attram, 2019; Rankhumise & Letsoalo, 2019). The low level of literacy has substantial implications for business venturing in Nigeria.

The level of poverty in Nigeria is high. Even though global poverty is declining, Nigeria's poverty level is increasing; more than three-quarters of the population live in abject poverty, subsisting on less than \$3 per day (World Bank, 2017a). Half of the world's most destitute are in Sub Saharan Africa; Nigeria is the largest country by size and population in the region (World Bank, 2017a, 2020b). The impoverished environment does not bode well for business because of the high poverty level that limits people's buying power (Akoh, 2020). The social vices linked with poverty and unemployment include insurgencies in the northern part of the country, youth restiveness in the Niger Delta area in the south, high rate of kidnapping and demand for ransoms, thuggery, stealing, and various economic crimes and fraud (NBS, 2019a; Okeke & Nwankpa, 2018; World Bank, 2020b). The survival of MEs would keep more persons, especially the youths, employed.

Infrastructure, including electricity, road networks, portable water, communication, and technology in Nigeria, is inadequate. The country generates less than 5% of the estimated power required to sustain the economy (Okeke & Nwankpa, 2018). Only about half of the populace in the urban areas and almost a third in the rural area are connected to the national electricity grid (Adhekpukoli, 2018). Consequently, the electricity supply is, at best, unreliable and unstable. The insufficient power supply, voltage fluctuations, and long periods of blackouts affect new firms' formation, curtail

existing firms' productivity, and make the local firms and products uncompetitive (Akoh, 2020; Mensah, 2018; Orukpe & Omoruyi, 2017). The communication system is inadequate, connectivity is low, and there is a digital divide between the urban centers and the rural areas (Tayo et al., 2016). Communication challenges include inadequate and obsolete infrastructures stretched beyond capacity, inadequate electricity supply, and insufficient funding. Potable water is in short supply; even in the cities, the citizens rely on wells and other unwholesome water sources. Businesses are compelled to provide their security, generate their electricity, and produce fresh, safe water. MEs, significantly, are adversely affected by the infrastructure deficiencies because the MEs lack the resources to provide the infrastructure to support their enterprises.

Road transportation is the main form of transportation of man, goods, and services in Nigeria. The road networks are sparse, and the existing roads are poorly maintained; most of the streets, especially in the rural areas, are not motorable (Nwafor & Onya, 2019; Orukpe & Omoruyi, 2017). The poor communication and transportations systems limit access to market and hamper the distribution of goods and services. The deplorable state of the country's infrastructure exacerbates the cost of doing business (Jayeola et al., 2018; Nwafor & Onya, 2019). Transportation within the country is tedious, unsafe, and expensive. Even though the negative effect of poor infrastructure is widely accepted, in the study of small businesses in southwest Nigeria, Mensah (2018) concluded that the poor managerial skills of the owner-managers and inadequate financing were more damaging to the enterprises than the state of the infrastructure.

The business climate in Nigeria is not conducive to the sustainability of MEs. Onwe et al. (2020) classified Nigeria as an environment hostile to business. By the World Bank's ranking, Nigeria is one of the world's worst places to do business. In the ease of doing business, Nigeria ranked 168 out of 180 countries surveyed in 2017 (World Bank, 2017a). The two factors impeding business in Nigeria were corruption and the lack of finance (World Bank, 2017a). A national survey conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the NBS revealed that most Nigerians would either give or receive bribes; a third of public officers demanded and received bribes (NBS, 2019a). Even though the ease of doing business in Nigeria improved, in 2019, the country still ranked 138 out of 190 countries surveyed (World Bank, 2020a). The difficulties in doing business have implications for the survival of MEs in Nigeria.

The inflation rate in Nigeria is high. The inflation rate remained double-digit, about 17.3% in 2021 (NBS, 2021). The high rate of inflation on food, at over 21% (NBS, 2021), has grave implications for the poor people who spend most of their income on food. Hyperinflation slows down economic growth and development (Ha et al., 2018). The rising price levels escalate the cost of doing business and make the business environment unpredictable, unstable, and hostile (Onwe et al., 2020). The high level of inflation in the rising cost environment does not augur well for the survival of MEs.

Access to funding is insufficient; the financial inclusion rate in Nigeria is weak. Fewer than half of Nigerians have access to banking and other financial services (Eniola & Entebang, 2017). The poor or lack of financial literacy hinders financial inclusion, and the negative attitude of the owner-managers to financial literacy may also be a reason for

financial inclusion (Agyapong & Attram, 2019; Eniola & Entebang, 2017). The poor financial literacy and the negative attitude maybe fall out of the high level of illiteracy of owner-managers of MEs in Nigeria.

Finance is a significant challenge for the development of MEs and small businesses in Nigeria. In Nigeria, as in many low-income and developing nations, poor access to funding impedes small enterprises' growth, especially during the nascent stage (NBS, 2019b; World Bank, 2017a). The national currency (the Naira) is nonconvertible; the US dollar is the intervention currency, and the Naira - dollar exchange rate is the cross-reference for transactions in other currencies. The CBN is the regulator and the primary supplier of foreign exchange into the Nigerian market (CBN, 2018). Businesses in the country are exposed to foreign exchange risks - rate risk and availability risk. The CBN does not adequately supply the foreign exchange needs of the market. The CBN regulations preclude many businesses, especially MEs and small firms, from access to the official market (Dada et al., 2020). The parallel foreign exchange market where free transactions occur, albeit at rates higher than the CBN official rates, continues to thrive.

The cost of funds in Nigeria is high. Banks' lending rates are double-digit and can be as high as 35% (CBN, 2018). Lending rates by nonbanks, including microfinance institutions, are also as high as 72 - 80% per annum. The MEs, unable to access funds from the formal sector, resort to loan sharks and other informal lenders where rates might exceed 100% per day (Brau et al., 2015). The high cost of borrowing increases the cost of doing business in Nigeria and is a disincentive to business activities.

The Nigerian economy is highly dependent on importation. The Naira has depreciated sharply in value in the last 5 years, from N180 to N500 to the US dollar, with attendant negative effects on the economy, triggering inflation and unemployment (see Ehikioya, 2019). The depreciation of the local currency fuels inflation and increases the cost of doing business in the country. The cost of living and doing business also continue to rise because the country is import-dependent. Despite the government's various policies to promote made in Nigeria products, Nigerians prefer foreign goods (Awoniyi et al., 2020). The demand for used foreign products, from used motor vehicles to used undergarments, is enormous (Awoniyi et al., 2020; Okeke & Nwankpa, 2018). Apart from the drain on the country's foreign exchange reserves (Awoniyi et al., 2020), importation creates severe competition for MEs and the local products.

Most MEs in Nigeria would not meet the lending criteria of formal institutions such as commercial banks. To encourage funding for this vital sector of the economy, the CBN developed and instituted several initiatives. Many of these initiatives were far from auspicious (Abioye et al., 2017; Awoyemi & Makanju, 2020; Ugwu-oju et al., 2020). Some of the efforts included the National Economic Recovery Fund (NERFUND) to stimulate exportation of made in Nigeria products; the Small and Medium Enterprises Equity Investment (SMEEI) scheme to develop the SME sector. Under the SMEEI program, Nigerian banks contribute 10% of their net profit after taxes to the SMEEI pool; 50% of the funds are reserved for equity investment in MEs (Awoyemi & Makanju, 2020). The CBN, in 2005, established the framework for microfinance institutions (MFI) in Nigeria. Even though eligible MFIs obtained funds at subsidized rates, the contribution

of the MFIs was marginal (Babajide et al., 2017; Ugwu-oju et al., 2020). MEs in Nigeria did not have access to formal sustainable funding.

Nigeria is the most populous country in Sub-Saharan Africa. The country is endowed with many natural resources but the majority of the people live in abject poverty. In line with Pansera (2018) the scarcity in the environment is man-made and systemic; for indeed the country is not poor yet the majority of its people live in abject poverty. More than half of the people are unemployed or underemployed. MEs make up 99.8% of SMEs in Nigeria. MEs are the crucible for the inclusive and sustainable development of the country. Most MEs do not survive up to 5 years in the hostile, fragile and turbulent; environment that World Bank (2020a) ranks as one of the worst places globally to do business. In the current study, my purpose was to unearth the survival strategies that some successful owner-managers have used to sustain their business beyond 5 years.

Transition

The current research was about the survival strategies of MEs in Nigeria. MEs account for more than 99% of the small enterprises in Nigeria. Most MEs do not grow, and many failed before 5 years of start-up. The research question was, “what strategies do some owner-managers of MEs use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years of their start-up?” The presentation was in three sections.

Section 1 covered the background to the problem and highlighted the purpose of the research, the problem statement, the research question, and the interview questions that guided the study. The section included the conceptual frameworks that formed the

foundation of the research design. The literature review connected the new knowledge to the old based on the conceptual framework.

Section 2 focused on the project. The section included the purpose of the study, the researcher's role, the participants, the research method, and the design. I discussed the population and sampling, data collection techniques, analyses of the data. I presented some of the measures that assured the reliability and validity of this research.

In Section 3, I presented the outcome of the study, which included the identified themes and strategies. The relevance of the findings to professional practice and the contribution to positive social change were reviewed and presented. Section three also had recommendations for future actions and opportunities to extend knowledge through further research. I concluded and ended with my reflections on the study.

Section 2: The Project

The objective of this multiple case study was to explore the survival strategies of some MEs in Nigeria. My review of professional and academic literature revealed a gap in the knowledge of the survival strategies of MEs in LDCs, especially in Nigeria. The conceptual framework, RBV, provided a lens to understand the resources and capabilities that drive the survival strategy of MEs in a resource-constrained environment. Owner-managers of MEs in Nigeria and other LDCs might use the outcomes of the current study to develop models for their survival strategies.

In this section, I present the (a) purpose statement, (b) role of the researcher, (c) selection process for the participants, (d) rationale for the research method and design, and (e) population and sampling methods. The section also includes (a) ethical considerations in the research, (b) data collection methods, (c) data organization techniques, and (d) data analysis techniques. I conclude the section with a discussion of the strategies used to ensure reliability and validity of the study.

Purpose Statement

The objective of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that some successful owner-managers of MEs in Nigeria used to sustain their business beyond the first 5 years of operation. The targeted population was six owner managers of MEs in Lagos who had deployed successful strategies to sustain their business for more than 5 years. This population was appropriate because more than 10% of the 41 million MEs in Nigeria operate in Lagos (NBS, 2019b). The outcome of the current study might help existing and aspiring owner-managers of MEs who need to learn the strategies to

sustain and grow their businesses. This research might contribute to positive social change because the survival of MEs may ensure a stable employment for many, reduce the level of poverty, promote shared prosperity, and improve the socioeconomic wellbeing of Nigerians.

Role of the Researcher

Role of the Researcher in the Data Collection Process

To accurately define the research problem, researchers should be familiar with the literature on the phenomenon of interest. Researchers have the responsibility to review literature extensively to (a) generate and refine the research ideas and problems, (b) develop the theoretical or conceptual framework for the research idea, and (c) ensure that that the study would contribute authentic knowledge (Saunders et al., 2015; Yin, 2018). The researcher developing new knowledge must also connect the old to the new (Kraus et al., 2020). The research problem and the conceptual framework influence the nature of the data collection. The data analysis and the identification of new knowledge also depend on the researchers' integrity and capability (Kalu & Bwalya, 2017; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I embedded myself in the old and new literature on the survival of MEs and small businesses. I elected to use the RBV to explore the survival strategies of MEs in Nigeria.

Qualitative researchers should have the appropriate strategy to access the participants who can provide data to answer the research problem. In most MEs in Nigeria, the owner-manager is the only employee (NBS, 2019b) and the repository of knowledge. I determined that the owner-managers would provide data needed to answer

the research question. I purposefully selected six cases that met the eligibility criteria for the study. I had the necessary level of access to the owner-managers of the selected MEs. I conducted face-to-face semistructured interviews guided by the interview protocol (see Appendix A). Researchers use the interview protocol to ensure the consistency and comparability of data collected across the cases (Fusch & Ness, 2019; Yin, 2018). My research committee members, peers, and Walden University IRB reviewed the research protocol and gave suggestions and feedback that enhanced the research process. I used unbiased interview techniques by asking open-ended questions and listening intensely to the participants. I maintained a neutral but friendly disposition during the interview processes.

Prior Relationship With the Topic, Participants, or Research

I am familiar with the operations of MEs in Nigeria. I founded and comanaged two MEs in Lagos. I am also familiar with entrepreneurial or business failure. I worked in three institutions that eventually failed; the institutions were not MEs or small firms by the Nigerian classification because the firms employed more than 50 persons. I also volunteer in two organizations engaged in the training and development of nascent and emerging entrepreneurs. I have conducted interviews, and others have interviewed me on many occasions. I was familiar with the context of the current case study.

Ethics and The Belmont Report Protocol

Qualitative research involves human interactions, which leave the researcher and the participants open to potential ethical issues. The Belmont protocol, established by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and

Behavioral Research in 1979, provides a framework for the ethical conduct of research involving humans as participants (Miracle, 2016). The Belmont protocol protects the participants and the researcher (Miracle, 2016). Three principles guide the Belmont Protocol: (a) respect for the person, (b) protection from harm and risks (beneficence), and (c) justice (fairness). Chan et al. (2017) argued that researchers should develop and use research protocols approved by the relevant Institutional Review Board (IRB) to protect the participants. I obtained the approval of the Walden University IRB, approval number 11-16-20-0676529, before proceeding with the data collection. To show respect for the participants, I explained the essence of the study and obtained the informed consent of the participants in writing. To protect the participants from harm, I observed the COVID-19 regulations in Nigeria. During face-to face interviews, the participants and I observed the physical distancing requirement; we kept a safe distance of 2 meters apart. We wore appropriate face masks throughout the duration of the interview. I carried hand sanitizers and additional face masks for each interview. To enhance confidentiality, I used alphanumeric labels PP1 to PP6 to identify the participants and the relevant data. The data from participants were used only for the current study. In line with the requirements of Walden University, I will keep the study documents private and destroy them after 5 years.

Mitigating Bias

I am embedded in the MEs' situation in Nigeria. I live in Nigeria, and I am familiar with the sociocultural environment, especially the Lagos metropolis, where I selected the cases. I had worked in MEs and had set up and managed MEs; some had

survived for more than 5 years. I had also worked in large firms, some of which failed within 5 years of start-up. I was also involved in the development of aspiring and emerging entrepreneurs. Although prior experience might provide broad knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation, the expertise leaves researchers open to possible biases (Fusch et al., 2018; Reid et al., 2018). Researchers might unwittingly influence the participants, especially during the face-to-face interview.

To increase the reliability of the current study, I identified and purposefully selected MEs that did not have any prior business relationship with me. The participants were also not from the financial services industry where I had worked. Also, I did not consider the enterprises that the owner-managers had been in my training sessions. Because most MEs (almost 90%) in Nigeria operate informally (NBS, 2019b), I selected MEs operating in the less formal segment of the economy.

The biases, preconceptions, and values of the qualitative researcher might affect the validity of their study. By practicing reflexivity, researchers might discover some personal hidden assumptions and prejudices about the phenomenon under study (see Adams & van Manen, 2017; Barros et al., 2019; Renjith et al., 2021; Skukauskaite et al., 2021). Researchers practice reflexivity to reduce the influence of biases in their study (Barros et al., 2019; Kalu & Bwalya, 2017; Langtree et al., 2019; McNarry et al., 2019; Reid et al., 2018; Renjith et al., 2021). Researchers enhance the quality of their studies by evaluating their reflections at every stage of the research (Adams & van Manen, 2017; Clark & Vealé, 2018; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lazard & McAvoy, 2020). I reflected on my possible biases and presented my assumptions before starting the research.

I was interested in the survival of MEs because of their criticality to the corporate existence of the Nigerian state. MEs are the largest employers and account for over half of the country's GDP (NBS, 2019b). I was reflexive about my values, background, and prior business experiences. Even when I thought I understood what the participants said, I cross-checked with the participants. I asked probing questions to ensure that I captured the meaning as participants wished I would. I kept a journal of my reflexive learning to maintain high ethical standards in all aspects of the study.

I audio-recorded the interviews, transcribed the audio recordings, and shared the transcripts with the participants to ensure that the data reflected their points of view. Even though prior knowledge of the subject matter can influence the data collection and interpretation (Fusch et al., 2018), bracketing helps researchers focus on the phenomenon expressed from the participants' perspectives (McNarry et al., 2019). To mitigate the effect of biases, I bracketed possible preconceived ideas and notions about the phenomenon of interest by being reflexive. Having worked and consulted for many years in large firms where strategic planning, budgeting, and monitoring were norms and rituals, I was careful not to use my personal lens in understanding or evaluating the participants' point of view. I also did not use the word "strategy" and other management terms that could be subject to multiple interpretations. I reflected on my analysis of the data at every stage of the research. Yin (2018) posited that member checking and transcript review reduce errors and biases. I did member checking during all the initial and follow up interviews. The participants also validated the transcripts of their initial interviews.

Rationale for an Interview Protocol

The primary data collection technique was the semistructured face-to-face interview. Researchers using semistructured interviews develop the predetermined interview protocol to align the interview questions to the research questions (see Fusch & Ness, 2019; Yin, 2018). The research questions were open-ended so that participants can express themselves. Researchers follow up with probing member-checking questions to explore the experiences of the participants (Fusch & Ness, 2019; Yin, 2018). A well-crafted interview protocol improves the researcher's chances of consistently collecting quality data from the interview processes (Fusch & Ness, 2019; Yin, 2018). Walden University approved the research process and the interview protocol for the current study. I followed the same interview protocol for the six cases.

The interview protocol enhanced the consistency in the collection and analysis of the data. The interviews with the six participants were conversational but explorative. I used the interview protocol to ensure that the questions addressed the research problem were covered. The use of the interview protocol ensured consistency across multiple contexts and cases and facilitated comparison of the data across different sources. By using the interview protocol, I enhanced the validity of the data collection and analysis processes and the research outcome of the current study.

Participants

The six cases in the current were from Lagos, Nigeria's economic center and home to almost four million MEs (NBS, 2019b). The sample size of six cases was adequate for the current exploratory multiple case study. Purposive sampling was

appropriate for the current qualitative case study. Researchers using purposive sampling identify participants who might provide relevant data to answer the research question (Yin, 2018). Purposive sampling allows the researcher to focus on the phenomenon under investigation (Ames et al., 2019). I purposefully selected the cases using the following eligibility criteria:

1. MEs that employed fewer than 10 persons (including the owner-managers).
2. MEs that had been managed by the owner-managers since the start-up.
3. MEs that had operated continuously for more than 5 years in Lagos.
4. MEs in which the owner-managers could communicate with me without the need for an interpreter.

Strategies for Gaining Access to Participants

The quality of qualitative research depends on the participants who provide answers to the research question. Chan et al. (2017) noted that researchers develop strategies for selecting the participants. Yin (2018) argued that researchers should enhance rigor in all aspects of their study. Careful selection of appropriate samples from a large population enhances the credibility of the data and the research outcome (Asiamah et al., 2017). Ayala and Manzano (2014) and Yanes-Estévez et al. (2018) posited that because the owner-managers in MEs are engrossed in the day-to-day running of their enterprises; the owner-managers dictate and drive the firm's strategy. Most MEs in Nigeria employ fewer than two employees (see McKenzie, 2017; NBS, 2019b). The owner-managers were critical resources and vital sources of data on the strategies that have sustained their businesses. I purposefully selected six owner-managers who

provided insight into the strategies that sustained their MEs for more than 5 years in Nigeria.

Cultural diversity in Nigeria could pose a challenge to gaining access to the participants. Nigeria has more than 350 ethnic groups with diverse cultures (see Adeyemi et al., 2019; Wright, 2019). Azungah (2018) contended that cultural differences, even within a nation, could pose a problem in face-to-face interviews. For example, some persons might choose not to participate in the current study because of their religious or cultural inclinations. To mitigate cultural concerns, I identified and purposefully selected six owner-managers who did not pose ethical, social, religious, or cultural challenges to the data collection process in the current study.

Researchers should have the appropriate level of access to the relevant data. Nigeria, as many LDCs, does not have a credible database for the MEs operating in the country (Abioye et al., 2017). More than 98% of the MEs in Nigeria operate informally, and over half of the owner-managers are illiterate (NBS, 2019b). The owner-manager is often the only employee and the custodian of the resources and capabilities in the ME (NBS, 2019b). Therefore, the owner-managers were the appropriate sources of relevant data that addressed the research problem-the survival strategies of the MEs in Nigeria.

The literature and the data base about MEs and small businesses operating in Nigeria were minimal. I conducted an initial minisurvey through word of mouth to identify potential participants for the study. I asked friends, colleagues, and bystanders to nominate MEs and owner-managers who had been in business for more than five years. I selected the MEs and owner-managers in Lagos who fulfilled the eligibility criteria for

the current study. From the 26 eligible participants, I narrowed the selection to 10 owner-managers who could communicate with me in English. Four potential participants declined participation, three for reasons related to convenience, and one who was not comfortable with the voice recording of the interview. Six owner-managers consented and participated voluntarily in the study.

Strategies for Establishing a Working Relationship With Participants

The relationship between participants and researchers affects the data collection process and the quality of the data. Yin (2018) stressed that trust and rapport are essential for developing good working relationships in qualitative case studies. I conducted a minisurvey to identify potential participants who met the eligibility criteria for the current study. With the assistance of friends, neighbors, and colleagues, I got a pool of 26 MEs and purposefully selected 10 MEs and owner-managers who fulfilled the eligibility criteria. I approached each potential participant in person. Saunders et al. (2015) and Yin (2018) stressed the need to get willing participants to provide credible answers to the research question. I used the initial contact with the potential participants to assess their willingness to be interviewed and to have the interview recorded.

The quality of the data and the research outcome depend on participants who truthfully and willingly share their experiences. In line with the Belmont protocol, which requires that researchers recognize and respect the participant (Miracle, 2016), I invited the participants to participate in the study. I explained the content of the consent form and the interview process. I informed the owner-managers that their participation in the

current research was voluntary, and I offered no incentive. I thanked the four potential participants who were unable to participate and moved on to the next case.

I gave two copies of the invitation and informed consent form to the six willing potential participants. The participants and I agreed on the date for the collection of the signed consent form. The participants had 2 to 3 days to review and sign the consent form (see Appendix B). I returned at the agreed times to collect the signed consent form. The participants retained a copy of the signed consent form.

Six participants signified their willingness to participate by signing the consent form. The participants selected the date, venue, and mode of the initial interview. Five participants opted for the face-to-face interview. One participant chose the telephone interview for the initial interview but consented to a face-to-face interview for the follow-up interview. The six participants nominated the dates and times that were convenient for their telephone or face-to-face interviews. The face-to-face interviews were on the premises of the participants, and at times when disruptions to their operations of the participants were minimal.

At the beginning of the interviews, I thanked the participants for their willingness to participate in the research. I reminded the participants of their right to stop the interview or withdraw their participation at any point should they wish to do so. I obtained the permission of the participants to record the audio of the interviews and take handwritten notes. I assured them that the data collected in the current research would be used only by me to understand the survival strategies of MEs in Nigeria.

I conducted the follow-up interviews to validate the data from the initial interview. Johnson et al. (2020) and Thomas (2017) maintained that transcript review and member checking improve the validity and reliability of the research data. Within 3 to 5 days of the initial interview and at agreed times, I returned to give the interview transcripts to the participants. Each participant had 3 to 5 days to review the transcript of their interview for correctness. The participants nominated the place, time, and mode of the follow-up interviews.

The six participants chose to have face-to-face interviews on their premises. I followed the interview protocol, obtained the participants' permission to record the proceedings. I recorded the audio of the interview on the Zoom H6 6-Track portable battery-powered audio recorder and the audio recorder on my telephone. I asked the participants to confirm that the transcripts accurately represented their answers during the initial interviews. The six study participants made no corrections to the transcript. I asked for additional information that participants may share to enhance my understanding of the survival strategies of MEs in Nigeria. The participants reiterated some points that they had shared in the initial interviews but did not have additional information. I thanked the participants and promised to share with them the executive summary of the findings of the current study. The participants knew they were part of the research process and the quality of the outcome.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

The three primary research methodologies that researchers use are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. The qualitative approach was most appropriate for the in-depth understanding of the survival of MEs in Nigeria. Researchers use qualitative methods to explore the unique experiences of individuals and groups within their context (Azungah, 2018; Saunders et al., 2015; Williams & Moser, 2019). Qualitative studies are useful for understanding phenomena that are relatively less known (Cypress, 2017; Harrison et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2019). Researchers using quantitative methods assume a fragmented view of the world and reduce inquiries to numerical data and statistical models (Cypress, 2017; Williams & Moser, 2019). Qualitative researchers take a holistic view of a phenomenon and the context in which the phenomenon exists; the essence of a qualitative study is to understand a phenomenon rather than measure or assess it (Williams & Moser, 2019). The qualitative approach was appropriate to explore the survival strategies of some MEs in a hostile ecosystem similar to Nigeria.

Researchers using the quantitative approach rely on numerical and statistical analyses to establish the relationships and patterns between variables. The quantitative methodology is logical and objective, and is appropriate for testing hypotheses and theory (Williams & Moser, 2019). Azungah (2018) argued that researchers studying multidimensional phenomena would miss valuable information if the researchers relied strictly on statistics. The focus of the current study was to understand the strategies that promote the survival of MEs in Nigeria through the collection of rich data and thick

descriptions. The quantitative method was not appropriate because the approach assumes explicit knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation. The survival strategies of owner-managers of MEs in hostile environments such as Nigeria are not well known. The quantitative method was not suitable for studying the unique phenomenon, the survival of MEs in Nigeria, because not all the pertinent information could be expressed in figures or numbers.

Researchers using the mixed methods approach combine the qualitative and quantitative methods in one study. Providence (2018) and Saunders et al. (2015) noted that mixed-methods might produce more robust outcomes than qualitative or quantitative methods, but the mixed-method is demanding. Saunders et al. cautioned that researchers should be mindful of the resources available at their disposal before embarking on their research. I acknowledged the limitations of time, technical skills, finances, and other resources available for the current study. Because the quantitative approach was not appropriate for the research of the survival of MEs in Nigeria, the mixed method was also not suitable. The qualitative approach was most appropriate for studying and exploring a unique phenomenon as the survival of MEs in the turbulent Nigerian environment.

Research Design

The five qualitative research designs are case study, ethnography, grounded theory, historical or narrative, and phenomenology. The multiple case study design was the most appropriate design for the current research. Researchers use ethnography to unearth knowledge about the culture of a group of people (Renjith et al., 2021). Ethnography is time-consuming because the researchers embed themselves in the life of a

group for long periods, sometimes years, to understand the group's cultures mores, beliefs, values, behaviors, and way of life (see McNarry et al., 2019; Renjith et al., 2021; Yin, 2018). Even though culture permeates all facets of a people's lives, the focus of the current research was not on the culture of a group of people or community. The ethnographic design was not appropriate for the current study; the research problem was a business problem and not a cultural or social study.

Phenomenology is the holistic study of people's experiences within a context (Adams & van Manen, 2017; McNarry et al., 2019). Researchers using the phenomenological design engage in extensive interviews and observations to understand and draw out the unique aspects of a phenomenon from the people's lived experiences (Adams & van Manen, 2017; McNarry et al., 2019). Phenomenology design is complicated, requires large samples; researchers need to spend long periods with the group of people with similar experiences (see Webb & Welsh, 2019). The phenomenological design was not suitable for the explorative study of the survival strategies of MEs in Nigeria.

In the grounded theory design, researchers use empirical data to generate theories about a phenomenon. The objective of the grounded theory design is to propound theories or test hypotheses to push the barriers of knowledge (Qureshi & Ünlü, 2020). The design was inappropriate for the current explorative research because the objective was not to generate theories but to contribute to the understanding of the survival strategies of MEs in developing countries, especially in Nigeria.

Researchers use the narrative design to construct stories around the experiences of an individual or a group of people. The researchers collect rich, multidimensional data from many sources (Cypress, 2017) to recreate the experiences of an individual or group (Renjith et al., 2021; Saunders et al., 2015; Yin, 2018). The narratives evolve as the researchers gather, analyze, and interpret data for meaning. The story that emerges reflects the researcher's construction and interpretation of reality (Cypress, 2017; Renjith et al., 2021). The narrative design was not appropriate for the current study because the objective was not to narrate the historical experiences of the owner-managers of the MEs but to understand the strategies that enhanced the survival of MEs in Nigeria.

The case study design was appropriate for the research of the survival of MEs in Nigeria. Researchers use the qualitative case study approach to gain in-depth knowledge of multidimensional phenomena, especially those that are not well known or understood (Mohajan, 2018). The case study was also suitable for exploring the unique experiences of the individuals in their natural environment. The researcher garners knowledge through rich data and thick descriptions from the participants (Wood et al., 2019; Yin, 2018). The case study design is flexible; researchers choose and adapt the design to suit their research objectives (Mohajan, 2018; Wood et al., 2019; Yin, 2018). The case study design could be descriptive, explanatory, or exploratory. The explorative case study design was appropriate for understanding the survival strategies of some successful owner-managers at the BoP.

Researchers study single or multiple cases (Heale & Twycross, 2018; Mohajan, 2018; Yin, 2018). Whereas the single-case design might provide in-depth knowledge of a

phenomenon, the outcome of the multiple case study would be more generalizable (Heale & Twycross, 2018; Mohajan, 2018; Yin, 2018). The rich data from multiple cases enhance the reliability, trustworthiness, and validity of the research (Azungah, 2018; Mohajan, 2018; Yin, 2018). The explorative multiple-case study design was ideal for uncovering the complexity of the survival of the MEs in Nigeria.

Data Saturation

Data saturation is a technique that qualitative researchers use to build rigor into the study. Data saturation occurs when no new knowledge, themes, or codes emerge by adding additional cases (Cypress, 2017; Fusch & Ness, 2019; Twining et al., 2017). To strengthen the validity of this multiple case study, I purposefully selected six cases that addressed the research problem. I stopped selecting and studying new cases when I achieved data saturation; when additional cases did not yield new knowledge.

The primary source of data was face-to-face semistructured interviews with the owner-managers of selected MEs. Researchers use open-ended questions and follow-up questions to probe for meaning and knowledge. Fusch and Ness (2019) and Yin (2018) noted that researchers might achieve data saturation during data collection from each interview. Researchers reach data saturation with each participant when the follow-up member checking questions do not yield new data (Yin, 2018). I used the same peer-reviewed interview protocol for the six cases. I asked open ended and flexible follow-up questions to probe for meaning from each participant until no new data nor themes emerged from each case.

Population and Sampling

Population

The quality of data in qualitative studies depends on the selection of the right population and samples. The general population for the current study was MEs operating in Nigeria. Lagos is the economic nerve center of Nigeria. More than three million MEs (NBS, 2019b) operate in Lagos. The target population was MEs that have survived for more than 5 years in Lagos.

Sampling

Sampling in qualitative studies is complicated. Unlike in quantitative studies where researchers determine the number of samples before the beginning of the research, adequacy of sample size in qualitative research is contextual (Cypress, 2017; Sim et al., 2018). Researchers using qualitative methods seek a deep holistic understanding of a relatively unknown phenomenon. Fusch et al. (2018), Johnson et al. (2020), and Sim et al. (2018) submitted that the emphasis of qualitative research should be on the quality of the data and not on the population size. Researchers are not agreed on what is adequate sampling size for qualitative studies. The sampling method and the sample size must align with the research design.

Sampling Method

I used a two-stepped approach to identify and purposefully select MEs and the owner-managers that met the eligibility criteria for participation in the current research. Researchers use purposive sampling to identify and focus on information-rich cases that provide rich data that address the research problem (Ames et al., 2019; Saunders et al.,

2015; Yin, 2018). The selection criteria were peer-reviewed and approved by the IRB of Walden University. Because of the lack of database on MEs operating in the Lagos, I conducted a mini-survey asking friends, colleagues, and people in the neighborhood for MEs that had operated continuously in Lagos for more than 5 years, and the owners had managed the businesses from inception.

From the pool of 26 MEs, I purposefully selected 10 potential participants who met the eligibility criteria, none of them had prior business interactions with me, and they all understood and spoke English. I approached the prospective participants one after the other, and invited them to participate in the current study. I selected the cases, interviewing the owner-managers until I achieved data saturation after five cases. I conducted a sixth case study for cross-validation of the data.

Using the purposeful sampling method, I identified participants who provided information and insight that addressed the research problem. As the drivers of their firms' fortunes, the participating owner-managers had the knowledge and experience to provide insight into the research problem – the survival strategies that some MEs uses in Nigeria. The purposeful sampling method was appropriate for identifying and selecting owner-managers of some MEs in Lagos with successful survival strategies.

Sample Size

The sampling method and the sample size are critical elements for validity and generalizability in qualitative research. Scholars and researchers have divergent views on what constitutes an adequate sample size in qualitative research (Hennink et al., 2017; Sim et al., 2018). The sample size depends on the scope of the study, the nature of the

research problem, the methodology, design, and the available resources (Saunders et al., 2015); scholars focus on the quality and richness of the data rather than on the sample size. Fusch and Ness (2019) and Renjith et al. (2021) averred that data saturation and research rigor are the markers of the adequacy of the number of samples in qualitative case studies. Qualitative researchers using the case study design select small sample sizes to probe for and gather in-depth, rich sources of knowledge within the bounded contexts (Hennink et al., 2017). Traditionally, sample sizes of four to 10 cases are considered adequate in qualitative multiple-case design. With fewer than four cases, the data might lack validity; larger sample sizes might yield unwieldy data that not only constitute a drain on the resources available for the study (Hennink et al., 2017; Moser & Korstjens, 2018) but undermine the analysis process (Sim et al., 2018). The sample size in this qualitative case study was small and manageable. I reached data saturation after five cases but elected to do an additional case to improve the cross validity of the study.

Data Saturation in Sampling

The sampling process in this qualitative multiple case study was iterative. Researchers using iterative sampling use the knowledge and insight gained from one case study to instruct the future selection of other cases and the research process (Sim et al., 2018). From a mini survey, I identified 10 potential participants who met the selection criteria for the current study. I did not engage the potential participants all at once but invited them one after the other. Four of the identified participants chose not to participate for personal reasons.

After obtaining Walden University IRB approval, I used iterative sampling process; I invited one participant in the first instance and made ongoing selections until the data were saturated. Data saturation occurs when additional cases do not yield new knowledge (Cypress, 2017; Hennink et al., 2017). I reached data saturation after five cases. For cross validation, I conducted a sixth case study. I stopped after six cases when information from new cases was redundant.

Ethical Research

In qualitative studies, the researcher is the primary instrument for collecting data and affects every stage of the process. The researcher determines the research problem and method, the tools for collecting the data, and interpreting the data (Saunders et al., 2015). Ethical issues may arise at any stage in qualitative research. Adams and van Manen (2017) cautioned that researchers must be conscious of their responsibility to maintain high ethical standards at all stages of their study, especially in research involving human participants. Ethical issues in research derive from social interactions and the integrity of intentions and motivation of the parties.

I completed the research ethics and compliance training from CITI Program – Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative. Upon approval of the proposal for the current study, I applied for and obtained the permission of the IRB of Walden University to conduct this research. Saunders et al. (2015) and Peled-Raz et al. (2021) recommended that researchers should obtain the permission of and follow the code of ethics of the relevant IRB. The Walden University IRB process guided the methods and design of the current research effort. The IRB approval indicated that the research design complied

with the university's ethical standards. The IRB approval signified my commitment to conduct the research using ethical protocols and maintaining high ethical standards and practices.

The informed consent process is critical for ethics in qualitative studies involving human participants. The prospective participants should have relevant information about the research (Saunders et al., 2015). Only after the IRR approval from Walden University did I contact the prospective participants. I conducted a mini-survey to identify MEs that have operated in Lagos for more than 5 years. I identified 10 prospective participants who met the eligibility criteria for the current study. I visited the prospective participants individually to explain the purpose of the current research and invite them to participate in the study. I explained the research procedure and their role as participants should they elect to participate in the study. I let them know that their participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw from participating at any point in the research. I offered no incentives or inducement for their participation. I let the potential participants know the value of their contribution to the knowledge of the survival of MEs in Nigeria and the positive influence on social change. Six of the 10 potential participants expressed their willingness to participate in the research. I left two copies of the invitation letter and consent form (see Appendix B) with the willing participants. The participants had 3 days to make their informed decision.

I returned at the agreed times to collect the consent forms from the prospective participants. The signatures of the participants indicated their willingness to participate in the research effort. I thanked the penitential participants for agreeing to participate in the

research and requested a convenient appointment (place, time, and mode) for the interview sessions. I collected a copy of the signed consent form and thanked them for electing to participate in the study. The participants who had signed the consent form retained their rights to withdraw at any stage during the research process.

In line with the principle of beneficence, I ensured that the current research did not unnecessarily expose the participants to harm. Saunders et al. (2015) and Reid et al. (2018) emphasized that researchers must ensure the privacy of the participant and the confidentiality of their data. I kept the identities of the participants and their enterprises confidential and identified them as PP1 to PP6. I secured the electronic data in passworded files in USB and my computer. The USB, the handwritten notes, transcript and other documents, are locked in a fire proof cabinet that only I can access. In compliance with Walden University's requirements, at the end of 5 years, the physical documents would be shredded and all electronic documents deleted.

For transparency, I stated my assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study. To enhance the credibility of the outcome of the current study, I provided a list of the documents that I used in the table of contents; I also attached copies of the relevant documents as appendices. Some of the documents in the appendices included a copy of the interview protocol (see Appendix A), and a sample of the Invitation and Informed Consent Form (see Appendix B).

Data Collection Instruments

Qualitative researchers are the primary data collection instrument. The researcher determines the nature of the data to collect and the strategy for collecting the data

(Cypress, 2017). The beliefs, biases, and interests of the researcher may affect the quality of the research outcome (Reid et al., 2018). Scholars mitigate these biases by using other data collection instruments: researchers use multiple sources of data to increase the richness of the data and improve the reliability of the data (Yin, 2018). The interview protocol, note-taking, reflective journal, and literature research and site visits were additional sources of data that enhanced the quality of the current study.

Researchers use interviews to collect data in qualitative studies. In qualitative research, the researchers use interviews to understand an issue or a phenomenon from the perspective of the participants (Azungah, 2018; Saunders et al., 2015; Yin, 2018). The interview is appropriate in qualitative studies where researchers seek to capture the meaning that participants make of a phenomenon or their experience (Saunders et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2019; Yin, 2018). The interview was the preferred tool for collecting data from owner-managers of successful MEs in Nigeria.

Interviews take different forms; interviews may be structured, semistructured, or unstructured. Interviews may be face-to-face, over the telephone, one-on-one, or group. In the current study, I conducted one-on-one, face-to-face semistructured interviews with six owner-managers of MEs in Nigeria. In semistructured interviews, researchers use open-ended questions to probe for meaning from the participants' perspective (Saunders et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2019). I followed the approved peer-reviewed prearranged interview protocol (see Appendix A). The six participants responded to the open-ended interview questions and follow-up questions. The participants shared the strategies that sustained their enterprises in the Nigerian environment.

Qualitative researchers use face-to-face interviews for data collection. In case studies in which the objective is to understand a phenomenon from the participants' viewpoint, the face-to-face interview is useful for data collection (Saunders et al., 2015; Yin, 2018). During the face-to-face interview, researchers use the opportunity for personal contact and interaction with the participants to garner rich information about the phenomenon of interest (Thomas, 2017). A researcher may observe the nonverbal aspects of communications; the body language and the intonation are additional data sources (Azungah, 2018; Hall et al., 2019). During the face-to-face interaction, the researchers use open-ended questions to probe for meaning, clarify understanding, and obtain additional information from the participants (Wood et al., 2019). I used the face-to-face interview to collect rich data about the survival strategies that owner-managers of MEs deploy in Nigeria. The participants nominated convenient times and locations for their interviews. Five participants selected face-to-face interviews, but one participant elected a telephone interview for the initial interview.

The face-to-face interviews were conducted in the workspaces of the participants during periods when their workloads were light and intrusion from customers or employees were minimal. One participant elected a daytime interview when production was over, and the employees were out to deliver for the day. The other five participants selected evenings, after work hours when the employees had left. The interview settings were such that we were not within earshot of employees or other persons; we had privacy.

We observed the COVID-19 mandatory protocols in Nigeria; we kept the required 2-meter social distancing, wore our protective face masks, and did not sit facing ourselves. I carried additional face masks and hand sanitizers to all the interviews. The interviews, which were cordial and conversational, lasted about 1 hour with all the participants. Nigerians love to socialize; the first 5 to 10 minutes of each interview were spent on small talks to build rapport with the participants. With the participants' permission, I recorded the audio of the interviews on the Zoom H6 6-Track portable battery-powered audio recorder and the audio recorder on a Samsung telephone. The audio equipment was battery-powered to forestall power outage, a rampant in feature in Nigeria ecosystem.

The initial telephone interview with the participant that opted for a telephone interview was in the evening after the close of business. I took permission from the participant to record the interview on a Samsung telephone. I reminded the participant of their right to withdraw from the research should they so wish. I followed the same interview protocol as in the five face-to-face interviews. After the telephone interview, which lasted about 45 minutes, the participant chose to have a face-to-face interview for the follow-up interview. The telephone interview was shorter than the initial face-to-face interviews, which lasted about 1 hour. The contents however were similar.

The initial interviews for five participants and the follow-up interviews for the six study participants took place in the participants' workplaces. I took written notes of my observations of the workspaces, the environments and their locations. Saunders et al. (2015) and Yin (2018) submitted that cases should be studied within their context; the

written notes of my observations shed light on the context of the MEs operating in resource-constrained environments.

Researchers craft the interview questions to align with the research question. Yin (2018) advised that researchers should frame the interview questions so that the participants can relate to the business problem and offer responses that address the research problem appropriately. The interview questions in the current study were straightforward, unambiguous, and nonthreatening. The questions were open and not leading. Considering that more than half of the owner-managers of MEs in Nigeria were not literate (NBS, 2019b), I avoided the word strategy and other management jargon; I used simple concepts to elucidate rich data from the participants.

The interview protocol was another valuable tool for data collection in the face-to-face interviews. Researchers use the interview protocol to maintain consistency in each interview and across different cases to enhance the reliability of the interview process (Yin, 2018). Even though the interview protocol framed the interviews, I was open and responsive in each situation. I ensured the integrity and consistency of the data collection process by following the reviewed interview protocol (see Appendix A).

To enhance the validity of the research data, during the interviews, with the permission of the participants, and without being obtrusive, I took hand-written notes of the body language and the non-verbal cues of the participants. Azungah (2018) and Hall et al. (2019) submitted that the nonverbal aspects of communications such as the body language, tone of voice, and body movements are critical aspects of communication and additional data sources. I was sensitive to the nonverbal cues from the participants, I

listened attentively and paid attention to the body language of the participants. For example, a sigh by the participant could signal discomfort or deep reflection. I asked probing questions to align what I heard with what I observed. I asked follow-up questions to be sure that my perceptions and interpretations of the body language of the participants were accurate. The nonverbal forms of communication enhanced the data collected during the face-to-face interactions.

Researchers and participants affect the quality of the data in a study. The two parties might introduce errors and biases into the interview, thereby affecting the reliability and credibility of the study (Kalu & Bwalya, 2017; Reid et al., 2018; Saunders et al., 2015). To enhance the reliability and trustworthiness of the data, I recorded the audio of each interview. I listened to the audio recordings multiple times and transcribed the recorded audio verbatim into Microsoft Word documents. For enhanced insight, I compared the transcripts of the interviews with the audio recordings and the notes taken during the interview.

Member checking improved the credibility and reliability of the data. During member checking, the participants validate the researcher's interpretation of the data from the interview (Yin, 2018). The researcher garner additional information during follow-up interviews, member checking, and transcript review (Johnson et al., 2020; Thomas, 2017). To enhance the validity and reliability of the data, I practiced member checking during the initial and follow-up interviews. I paraphrased my understanding of what I heard and asked probing questions to validate my interpretations of the

submissions by participants. I conducted follow-up interviews and transcript reviews with the six participants.

The six participants reviewed the transcripts of their interviews and confirmed that the transcripts were fair representations of the initial interviews. The participants did not make changes to the transcripts. At the end of each follow-up interview, and in line with the interview protocol, I asked the participants if they had additional information to enhance the understanding of the strategies that the participants used to sustain their businesses. Responding to the concluding question on the interview protocol requesting additional information, the participants emphasized some of the facts they had provided during the initial interviews. No fresh insights were added.

Triangulation was a useful technique in the current study. Yin (2018) stated that researchers might increase the reliability and credibility of their study by using multiple sources to triangulate the data. Scholars use triangulation to mitigate research biases and enhance confidence in the research findings (Harrison et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2020). Apart from the interview protocol and face-to-face interview, other data collection tools in the current study included extensive literature research, the audio recording of the interview, hand-written notes taken during the interviews and site visits, and the reflexive journal.

The audio recordings captured the data from the interviews in a more permanent and reusable format; I did not rely on my memory. I listened to the audio recordings many times before transcribing them into word documents. I cross-checked the

transcripts with the audio recordings to validate the transcripts. I listened many times to the audio recording to make meaning of what the participants shared.

The hand-written notes on the body language and the nonverbal cues of the participants during the face-to-face interviews augmented the audio recordings. Nonverbal communications are critical to decoding the complete message from the participants (see Azungah, 2018; Hall et al., 2019). The nonverbal clues also prompted the probing questions that elucidated information from the participants.

The visits to the operating environments of the participants and the written notes of my observations of the workspaces shed more light on the context of the cases. Case studies are contextual (Yin, 2018). The site visits provided more holistic understanding of what the participants did, how, and why. Except for a participant who had to change the location from an open market to a shop in a serviced mall, the other five participants had operated in the same locations for more than from inception, and they showed no inclination of changing their locations.

Reflexivity enhanced the quality and organization of the data in the current study. The sampling process in the current study was iterative. In line with Clark and Vealé (2018), Lazard and McAvoy (2020), and Sim et al. (2018), through reflexivity, I used the knowledge and insight gained from one case study to instruct the selection of subsequent cases and the research process. I reflected daily on the research instruments and tools, research processes, and outcomes. Every day, I recorded my learnings in the journal. Through reflexivity, I knew I had achieved data saturation after five cases. The reflexive journal enhanced the data collection instruments and the research process.

The literature review was iterative. Through the literature search, I located gaps in the knowledge of the strategies that drive the success of MEs in Nigeria. The literature search of the research problem and the research frameworks influenced the development of deductive themes that guided the current study. I searched the literature on the inductive codes and themes that emerged from the outcome of the current study. In line with the recommendations of Johnson et al. (2020) and Renjith et al. (2021) that researchers connect the research outcome to extend the conceptual framework, I searched extant literature on RBV and DCT the frameworks for the current study. In my extensive literature study, I gained insight into ongoing scholarly and research contributions to understanding the operations of MEs in the LDC and other parts of the world.

Data Collection Technique

Qualitative researchers are the primary tool for the collection and interpretation of data. The philosophical assumptions underpin the researcher's creation of knowledge (McNarry et al., 2019; Saunders et al., 2015) and influence every aspect of the research, from design to analysis and presentation. The face-to-face semistructured interview was the primary data collection technique. Researchers use multiple sources of data to aid methodological triangulation and the reliability of the data (Fusch et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2020). To enhance the richness of the data, I augmented the face-to-face interviews with handwritten interview notes, audio recordings, notes of the observations of the site visits, reflexive journals, and in-depth literature research.

I used a two-step method to identify and then purposefully select MEs and the owner-managers who met the eligibility criteria for participation in the current study.

Because of the lack of a credible database on MEs operating in Nigeria, I conducted a mini-survey to identify potential participants for the current study. I relied on friends, colleagues, and neighbors who suggested 26 potential MEs for the research. From the pool of suggested MEs, I used the preidentified selection criteria to identify the potential participants - owner-managers who would adequately address the research question.

I selected 10 potential participants who fulfilled the predetermined eligibility criteria and who would not introduce social, cultural, or religious challenges in the data collection process. Participation was limited to literate owner-managers who founded their businesses and had operated in Lagos for more than 5 years. I purposefully selected owner-managers who I could interview without the aid of an interpreter. Even though I anticipated studying only five cases, I chose the 10 potential participants to accommodate the possibility that some owner-managers might decline to participate in the study. The sampling method was iterative; I selected and interviewed the prospective participants one after the other until I achieved saturation from six cases.

I approached the 10 potential participants one after the other and in person. During the initial visit with each potential participant, I explained the purpose of the current research and the invitation for their participation. I delivered the invitation letter and the consent form to the potential participants and explained the content of the consent form. Three potential participants declined to participate, giving logistics reasons, and one potential participant objected to the audio recording of the interview. I thanked those participants for their time and moved on to the subsequent cases. I gave two copies of the

invitation and informed consent form to the willing participants. The participants and I agreed on the date for the collection of the signed informed consent forms.

On the agreed dates, I returned to collect the signed copies of the informed consent forms. The participants retained their copies of the signed consent form. The participants and I agreed on the mode, date, and venue of the interview. I explained the data collection procedure to each participant. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants had the option of virtual or face-to-face interviews. The virtual interview could be via telephone calls or video conferencing. Five participants opted for the face-to-face interview for the initial interview and the follow-up interview. A participant chose to have initial interview over the interview but consented to a face-to-face interview for the follow-up interview. For the face-to-face interviews, the six participants preferred to be interviewed in their work environments and during their off-peak periods. The face-to-face interviews took place on the privacy of the participants' premises when the customers and employees were not around.

The semistructured interview was appropriate to explore the survival of the MEs in Nigeria. Wood et al. (2019) and Yin (2018) posited that the semistructured interview is proper when researchers seek to understand a phenomenon from the participants' perspectives. Participants expressed themselves well as they responded to open-ended questions that were followed with appropriate probing questions (see Wood et al., 2019; Yin, 2018). An added advantage of the face-to-face semistructured interview was the opportunity to observe the nonverbal cues from the participants (see Wood et al., 2019; Yin, 2018). The interview questions in the study were open-ended. The nonverbal cues

from the participants informed some of the follow-up questions that enhanced the understanding of the survival strategies of MEs in Nigeria. I used open-ended follow-up questions and member checking during the interviews till I reached data saturation in each case.

By following the interview protocol, researchers build rigor into the data collection process. To ensure uniformity and consistency and increase the validity of the study, I followed the same interview protocol (see Appendix A) with all participants. Although the interview protocol gave a sense of direction and set boundaries for the interviews, the interview process was flexible and creative. Adams and van Manen (2017) stated that researchers must be proficient in the etiquette of conversations and information gathering and must maintain the delicate balance between discussion and inquiry. Adams and van Manen maintained that qualitative researchers should remain focused on the objective of the study, which is to generate rich data. In this regard, the initial interviews and the follow-up interviews were conversational and exploratory. The participants expressed themselves and voluntarily shared information that addressed the research question. The interview protocol set boundaries and directions for the interview process.

Proper planning and preparation for the face-to-face interview promoted the success of the data collection process. Wood et al. (2019) stressed that the venue of the face-to-face interaction influences the interview process. In line with Saunders et al. (2015) and Yin (2018) the interview environments were neutral, quiet, safe, conducive, and suited the convenience of the participants convenience. The six participants

nominated the venue, time and mode of their interviews. Johnson et al. (2020) and Thurairajah (2019) maintained that researchers had ethical responsibilities to act in the best interest of the participants without losing sight of the objective of the research. The data collection process suited the convenience of the participants and did not unnecessarily expose the participants to harm.

Except for a participant who, for convenience, opted for an initial telephone interview, the other five participants chose to be interviewed on their premises and at times convenient for them. The interviews were arranged to limit the disruptions to the operations of the participants. The interview with one participant was during the day; the other five participants chose to be interviewed after work hours. The initial telephone interview with the participant who chose a virtual interview was audio recorded on a Samsung telephone and later stored on a passworded file on a computer. The follow-up interviews for the six participants were face-to-face in the premises of the participants. I followed the prearranged interview protocol (see Appendix A).

The practice of reflexivity is a technique for managing the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection in qualitative studies. Even though a researcher might not eliminate all biases, researchers practicing reflexivity may reduce the effect of the biases and increase the reliability of the study (Houghton & Houghton, 2018; Johnson et al., 2020; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Yin (2018) advised that researchers keep a research log. I kept a daily record of the study; the log showed the activities, the participants, time, and duration of the activities. Case (2017), Cypress (2017), Johnson et al. (2020), and Thurairajah (2019) asserted that by practicing reflexivity during and after

each interview, researchers enhance their reliability as the data collection instrument and the success of subsequent interviews. I was conscious of how my experiences, values, and assumptions might inadvertently influence my understanding of the research problem. I kept a reflexive journal where I recorded my feelings and learnings from my experiences every day. I reviewed each day's learning and applied the knowledge to the research process.

After each interview, I read the interview notes repeatedly. Critically thinking about all aspects of the research increases the chances of producing outcomes relevant to scholarship and practice (Case, 2017; Cypress, 2017; Johnson et al., 2020). The challenge with practicing reflexivity is that critical thinking and careful introspection are time-consuming exercises (see Lazard & McAvoy, 2020) and uncomfortable (see Alkhatib, 2019; Skukauskaite et al., 2021). I practiced reflexivity at every stage of the research to be sure that I captured all pertinent information from the perspective of the participants. At the end of each day, I reflected on the research process and progress. I entered my reflections for the day in the journal.

Recording the audio of the interview was a valuable technique for collecting and storing data. The audio recordings accurately captured and stored the interviews. Another advantage of the audio recording is that the researcher may replay the interviews after the meeting. With the permission of the participants, I recorded the audio of the interviews. I used a Zoom H6 6-Track portable battery-powered audio recorder backed by the audio recorder on a Samsung telephone to forestall possible mechanical risks and power outage. Saunders et al. (2015) stressed that a researcher should listen to the audio recordings

many times before transcribing; immersing oneself in the data increases the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon (Cypress, 2017; Denzin, 2017; Houghton & Houghton, 2018). I listened many times to each interview recording before transcribing the recording verbatim in a Microsoft Word document.

Within 5 days after the initial interviews, I returned to the participants to give them a copy of the interview transcript. The participants and I agreed on the date and time for the follow-up interview. The participants had the option of a virtual or face-to-face interview. The six participants opted for the face-to-face interview.

The follow-up interviews took place at the agreed time in the participants' workplaces. The interview with each participant lasted about 30 minutes. I recorded the audio of the interviews on the Zoom H6 6-Track portable battery-powered audio recorder and the audio recorder on my telephone. During the follow-up interviews I conducted the member checking and transcript review.

To ensure that I captured the realities of the participants' experiences, I asked each participant to confirm that the transcript accurately represented their answers during the initial interview. The six participants confirmed that the transcripts were accurate records of the initial interview process. The transcript review enhanced the trustworthiness of the data.

The follow up interviews enhanced the quality and richness of the data. Johnson et al. (2020) and Thomas (2017) submitted that during the follow-up interview, participants might provide additional data that address the research questions. In line with the interview protocol, at the end of each interview, I asked for additional information

that participants wished to share. The participants reinforced some of the points in the initial interviews. I noted the facts that some participants stressed or emphasized, such as their advice to other owner-managers of MEs. The follow-up interview with each participant enhanced the trustworthiness of the data.

Despite its usefulness, a follow-up interview is not without limitations. Some problems with member checking relate to participant fatigue; after the primary interview, the participants may not be interested in follow-up sessions, which they might consider intrusive, or the participants may change their minds on some issues. The current study of the survival strategies of successful MEs in Nigeria was not personal nor sensitive. The participants willingly consented to the follow-up interviews, which we had at their convenience. The participants did not change their minds but reinforced their submissions in the initial interviews.

The semistructured, face-to-face interview has limitations, some of which emanate from the researcher, the participants, and the data collection process (Yin, 2018). For example, the data quality depends on the participants' understanding of the questions, their memory and recollections, and their truthfulness (Saunders et al., 2015; Yin, 2018). The six participants had managed their firms from inception. They all had hands-on knowledge of their businesses and good recollections of their strategies. Yin (2018) also shared that the participants might also introduce their personal biases into the relationship and the data collected during the face-to-face interview. The multiple case study of six owner-managers mitigated the risks of biases from a single participant and increased the validity of the outcome.

The outcomes of the semistructured interview hinge on the interpersonal and interviewing skills of the researcher. A researcher's preferences and biases might cloud the data collection process (see Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Clark & Vealé, 2018; Cypress, 2018; Saunders et al., 2015). I managed my personal biases by being reflexive. Reflexivity was time-consuming. In every step in the research process, I reflected on my reflections to ensure that I was nonjudgmental of the participants and their responses, that I did not use my experiences in the corporate world to frame their responses. Completing the daily reflexive journal required discipline, but the practice helped in planning the research process.

Another challenge with the semistructured interview is that the researcher might lose control of the process. The interview protocol was a helpful tool for setting boundaries to the interview process. Adams and van Manen (2017) recommended that interviews be conversational but remain focused on the study's objective to generate rich data. The interviews were informal but exploratory. The interview protocol provided the frame to ensure that we captured all relevant issues. Despite the limitations, the face-to-face, semistructured interview technique was an appropriate data collection technique to understand the strategies that successful MEs use to sustain their businesses in Nigeria beyond 5 years.

Data Organization Technique

Qualitative researchers organize research data to build rigor and trustworthiness into the research process and credibility into the research outcome. Researchers use different techniques and strategies to manage their data. To enhance reliability and rigor,

Houghton and Houghton (2018) and Langtree et al. (2019) recommended that qualitative researchers document not just data from the interviews but also all aspects of their study. I created a research folder to store all the documents related to this research and a research log to track all activities.

Journalizing is another technique for organizing data and enhancing the credibility and transferability of the research outcomes (Houghton & Houghton, 2018). Throughout the study, I kept daily records of activities and my learnings; the journal contained the details of date, time, summaries of all the research activities, feelings, and decisions. Researchers use reflective journalizing to enhance critical thinking and problem-solving skills essential in qualitative research (Lazard & McAvoy, 2020). I used the reflexive journal as a tool to organize the knowledge about myself and the research. Because the qualitative research process is iterative, I used the reflexive journal to plan the next steps in the research process.

The audio recording of the interview was an organizational technique that enhanced the process of data analysis. Researchers record the audio of interviews to capture and preserve accurate data (Denzin, 2017; Yin, 2018). I recorded the interviews on the digital Zoom H6 6-Track portable battery-powered audio recorder backed by the audio recorder on a Samsung phone. Saunders et al. (2015) recommended that researchers should listen to the audio recordings often to make meaning of the data. I listened to the interview recordings repeatedly before transcribing the interviews verbatim into Microsoft Word documents. I saved the transcripts in a flash drive with a unique password. I kept the flash drive in a safe locker.

Transcribing the audio interview was a useful technique to back up the recording of the interviews. The transcripts in Microsoft Word documents were stored in separate files for each participant. The transcription facilitated transcript review. Thomas (2017) and Yin (2018) shared that transcript review increases the validity of research data and outcomes. The transcripts were printed, and copies were given to participants for their review. The six study participants validated the transcripts of the interview before the transcripts were analyzed. All copies of the transcripts and the flash drive were kept safe in a locked cabinet.

The written notes taken during the interview were additional sources of data and storage technique. Yin (2018) submitted that researchers should capture the nonverbal cues and other body languages that add meaning to the audio recording. During each interview, I took notes, in longhand, of the nonverbal communications from the participants. After each interview, I reviewed and typed the notes as Microsoft Word documents. I saved the files on my computer and a password-protected flash drive stored in a locked cabinet. The written notes augmented the audio recording of the interviews.

The data storage techniques ensured the privacy of the participants. For confidentiality, I used the labels PP1 to PP6 to identify the participants and their records. I assigned passwords to restrict access to the computer and the flash drives. The digital storage cards, interview transcripts, notes, and journals are secured in locked cabinets. After 5 years, the physical documents will be shredded and all digital files deleted.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is critical for research success. Azungah (2018) and Sechelski and Onwuegbuzie (2019) posited that data analysis is probably the most challenging part of qualitative research. Saunders et al. (2015) and Yin (2018) recommended that researchers develop their analytic strategy before embarking on their study. By preplanning the analysis process, researchers align all aspects of the research (Saunders et al., 2015; Yin, 2018). Nowell et al. (2017), Sechelski and Onwuegbuzie (2019), and Yin (2018) recommended that researchers should evolve credible analysis processes to build rigor into their studies. Preplanning the analysis strategy enhanced the transparency and trustworthiness of the research.

The preplanning process for the current study was rigorous. The research problem and the choice of the framework, RBV complemented by the DCT, were approved by the University. I developed a research protocol and a reliable analysis strategy to build rigor into the research. The Walden University IRB approved the research protocol to assure compliance with high ethical standards. Every aspect of the data collection and analysis process was reviewed at different levels at Walden University.

Researchers use different approaches for data analysis. Cypress (2017) maintained that analysis is the interpretation of data. Castleberry and Nolen (2018) and Yin (2018) contended that analysis begins and ends with qualitative research questions: Researchers must ensure that the interview questions align with the research question so that the data collected would be relevant to the phenomenon under review. Other scholars, such as Cypress (2018), Korstjens and Moser (2018), Nowell et al. (2017), Vaismoradi and

Snelgrove (2019), and Yin (2018), posited that analysis in qualitative studies is iterative, reflective, and recursive: analyses begin from the data collection stage through to the final presentation of the outcome of the studies. Researchers evaluate and interpret the data during data gathering (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Nowell et al., 2017). Likewise, Houghton and Houghton (2018) and Langtree et al. (2019) posited that data include the interview data and all aspects of the research process in qualitative research.

I integrated analysis into every stage of the research process, from the definition of the problem to the presentation of the research outcome that addressed the problem. The choice of the research problem required careful introspection and intensive literature research. Research into extant literature revealed a gap in the knowledge of the operations of MEs, especially in resource-constrained LDC. I decided to focus the current research on the survival strategies of MEs and not small businesses because 99.8% of the group labelled small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria were MEs (NBS, 2019b). In line with the requirements of Walden University, I ensured that the study addressed a specific business problem and was relevant to management theory and practice.

The planning stage was critical for the success of the current study. Nowell et al. (2017), Saunders et al. (2015), Sechelski and Onwuegbuzie (2019), and Yin (2018) posited that planning is crucial for aligning all aspects of the research; to build rigor; enhance the trustworthiness of qualitative studies. During the research design, I reflected on the alignment between the specific problem, the research question, the interview questions, and the theoretical framework; the adequacy of the interview questions to

address the research problem; the appropriateness of the research methodology and design; the trustworthiness of the data collection instruments and technique.

At the data collection stage, my reflexivity and analysis ensured that the quality and quantity of the data provided the answers to the research question. The analysis and presentation stages were iterative and recursive. Congruent with Castleberry and Nolen (2018) and Yin (2018), the analysis of the current qualitative case study began and ended with research questions - what strategies do owner-managers of MEs use to sustain their businesses in Nigeria.

Qualitative researchers improve the quality of the data, analyses, and research outcomes through triangulation (Cypress, 2018; Farquhar et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2020; Moon & Nurs, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017). Triangulation can improve the robustness of the knowledge of the phenomenon under inquiry (Moon & Nurs, 2019). Some triangulation strategies used in qualitative studies are (a) data, (b) investigator, (c) methodological, and (d) theoretical (Farquhar et al., 2020; Moon & Nurs, 2019; Yin, 2018). Researchers using the data triangulation strategy collect data from multiple sources to enhance the validity of the research outcome (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Farquhar et al., 2020; Nowell et al., 2017; Yin, 2018). To enhance reliability and rigor, Case (2017), Houghton and Houghton (2018), Langtree et al. (2019), and Johnson et al. (2020) recommended that qualitative researchers collect data from all aspects of their study. Methodological triangulation involves using more than one method for data collection (Cypress, 2018; Fusch et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2020; Yin, 2018). The strategy gives a more balanced understanding of the phenomenon under study than from

a single method. Theoretical triangulation strategies were not applicable for the current study because the objective was not to propound theories or test hypotheses. Investigator triangulation was also not appropriate because I was the only researcher in the current study.

Data and methodological triangulation strategies were appropriate strategies for the current qualitative multiple case study of the survival strategies of MEs in Nigeria. I incorporated the data from the audio recording of the interviews, the transcripts, interview notes, reflective journals, and the literature review. The research methods for methodological triangulation in the current study were the semistructured interviews and literature research of scholarly studies.

Qualitative researchers use different methods for analyzing the data from their studies. Castleberry and Nolen (2018) and Sechelski and Onwuegbuzie (2019) proffered many approaches to analysis, some of which included classic data analysis, qualitative software analysis, or thematic analysis methods for finding meaning in the research data. The thematic analysis technique is flexible, robust, reliable, and widely used for analyzing and finding meaning in the data in qualitative studies (see Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Clarke & Braun, 2017; Nowell et al., 2017; Saunders et al., 2015). The thematic analysis approach was appropriate for the multiple case study of the strategies used by successful MEs in Nigeria. I used Yin's (2018) five-step, iterative, and recursive analysis approach to frame the analysis. The steps were to (a) compile and organize the database, (b) disassemble the data, (c) reassemble and reduce the data, (d) interpret the findings, and (e) conclude the outcome.

The semistructured interview was the primary data collection tool. Saunders et al. (2015) and Yin (2018) maintained that researchers record and transcribe the audio of each interview. The transcripts of the interviews and the written notes were raw data that I analyzed. Korstjens and Moser (2018) and Yin (2018) recommended member checking to improve the validity of the data. Houghton and Houghton (2018) and Langtree et al. (2019) suggested that qualitative researchers document not just data from the interviews but also all aspects of their study. I recorded the data from the interviews and all aspects of the current study. Aligning with the submissions of Case (2017), Cypress (2017), Johnson et al. (2020), Saunders et al. (2015), and Yin (2018), I kept a research database that included the audio recording, the written interview notes, the reflexive journals, mind maps, and my data analysis.

Researchers use technology to provide administrative efficiency in managing and organizing extensive data (Robins & Eisen, 2017). Some of the software programs available for content analysis in qualitative studies include NVivo or Atlas TI, Excel, Word. The qualitative data-assisted softwares help with data management but do not replace analysis requiring critical thinking and reflection (Renjith et al., 2021). I used Microsoft Word and excel for compiling, storing, organizing and analyzing the data from the study.

Microsoft Word and Excel were helpful for data storage, data organization, and content analysis. The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed into word documents. The observation notes and the reflexive journals were also stored as word documents. Files were created for each participant. I identified and color-coded important

and frequently used words and phrases in each transcript. Microsoft excel was useful for cross-comparison of the codes from the six cases. Copies and different versions of the transcripts and other word documents were stored as new documents after each update. Microsoft Word and Excel were useful in the first step of compiling and organizing the research data.

In line with Yin's (2018) five step thematic analysis approach, the next step was to disassemble the data; to take the data apart in search of meaning. I studied the interview transcripts to identify and group similar issues raised by the study participants. Clarke and Braun (2017), Levitt et al. (2017), and Williams and Moser (2019) recommended that researchers use open coding to reduce extensive data to manageable sizes. I listened to the audio recordings multiple times, searching for meaning and relationships within each case and across the six cases. I read the transcripts, the notes, and the reflective journal repeatedly to familiarize myself with and make sense of the data. I identified similar issues raised by the participants. I then organized the data into groups of similar ideas or topics and assigned codes to the categories. Coding is a critical technique in thematic analyses as the researcher looks for meaning and ideas in the data collected from the participants (Renjith et al., 2021). I used the open coding technique to understand and reduce the data from each case.

The next step was to reassemble and compress the data. Researchers reflect on the codes and sort them into categories or themes (Clark & Vealé, 2018; Cypress, 2018; Saunders et al., 2015; Williams & Moser, 2019; Yin, 2018). I color-coded the transcripts looking for patterns in each and then across the six transcripts. I reflected on the

interrelationships between the ideas, codes, and emergent themes. The mind map facilitated critical thinking and analysis. I used the mind map to visualize the linkages and interrelationships between the various constructs, resources, and capabilities that influence the survival of the MEs. The technique of mind mapping was also used to develop the deductive and inductive codes. Because the analysis phase is cyclical (Yin, 2018), I reviewed and analyzed the multiple codes for patterns until no new themes evolved, until the data were saturated.

Researchers should build rigor into the data analysis. Sechelski and Onwuegbuzie (2019) suggested that researchers use more than one qualitative data analysis approach to triangulate the data. I used the deductive and the inductive approaches to analyze the data. Researchers using the deductive approach focus on the research problem and the theoretical framework to develop the themes (Azungah, 2018). During the literature search, I used the mind map to create codes and themes around the research problem – survival of MEs in Nigeria and the theoretical framework- the RBV augmented by the DCT; the deductive codes formed the bases of the analysis processes in the study. Some themes identified during the literature search were entrepreneurship, risk taking at the BoP, strategy at the BoP, entrepreneurial orientation, entrepreneurial motivation, and impediments to success

The inductive approach is based on the analysis of the data collected from the interview. Microsoft word and excel facilitated content analysis to develop inductive codes; I reviewed the codes for meaning to generate deductive codes and the emergent themes. In line with Castleberry and Nolen (2018), Johnson et al. (2020), Renjith et al.

(2021), and Williams and Moser (2019), technology-assisted but did not replace the rigor or critical and creative thinking needed to unearth the meaning of the various themes, patterns, and interrelationships in the data. Saunders et al. (2015) posited that the emergent themes should relate to the conceptual framework and the research question. I used the mind map to connect the inductive themes with the deductive themes.

The fourth step in the thematic analysis process was to make sense of, and interpret the findings. This stage of the analysis was recursive: the process involved going back to literature on the research problem and the research framework for sensemaking on the emergent themes. I interpreted the emergent themes and strategies based on the extensive review of the deductive themes identified during the literature research and the inductive themes from the data analysis. The RBV complemented by the DCT was the lens for addressing the research question – what strategies do some owner-managers use to survive beyond 5 years in Nigeria?

The conclusion and presentation of the outcomes were the last stages of qualitative analysis. The researchers conclude and verify the findings derived from the thematic linkages (Saunders et al., 2015). To enhance the credibility of the conclusions, Castleberry and Nolen (2018) emphasized that researchers should present direct quotations from the raw data to support the emergent themes. Kraus et al. (2020) postulated that researchers must produce new knowledge and link the existing literature with fresh insights from their studies. I reviewed the literature on the emergent themes from the analyses searching for knowledge and insights that either supported or contradicted the research findings. I reviewed recent developments on RBV, the

conceptual framework for the current study. I presented thick data and descriptions that the participants shared.

Reliability and Validity

Researchers conduct qualitative studies to get in-depth knowledge of a phenomenon of interest. Unlike in quantitative studies, where there is some agreement on what counts as quality in research, researchers and scholars have not agreed on the criteria to assess quality in qualitative studies. The concepts of reliability and validity may not apply to qualitative studies as in quantitative studies (Johnson et al., 2020; Kalu & Bwalya, 2017; Yin, 2018). The qualitative research is predicated on humans interacting within the context of a study (Cypress, 2017; Mohajan, 2018; Noble & Heale, 2019). The quality of qualitative studies depends on the researcher, the participants, and the nature of the phenomenon under investigation.

Reliability

An instrument is reliable if that instrument consistently measures the construct that it is designed to measure. Research is presumed credible if the outcome of the study can be replicated by other researchers (Daniel, 2019). The threats to the reliability and validity of qualitative research lie in the researcher and the participants. The errors and biases in the parties may undermine the quality of the study (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Clark & Vealé, 2018; Cypress, 2018; Saunders et al., 2015). As the primary instrument for data collection, the researcher influences all aspects of the study and the credibility of the findings (Cypress, 2017; Saunders et al., 2015). Qualitative researchers should be conscious of their personal biases, especially in analyzing and interpreting the data.

To enhance the research quality, I operationalized rigor in all stages of their study. From the choice of the research problem to the design, collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data and presentation of the research outcome, researchers should be meticulous (Clark & Vealé, 2018; Cypress, 2017; Houghton & Houghton, 2018; Johnson et al., 2020; Kalu & Bwalya, 2017; Noble & Heale, 2019; Yin, 2018). The research log and the reflective journal were helpful tools to reduce biases and for learning.

Researchers use multiple data collection tools to curtail the challenges associated with humans as data collection instruments in qualitative studies. By combining different data sources, researchers obtain a more holistic perspective of the researched phenomenon (Cypress, 2018; Johnson et al., 2020; Noble & Heale, 2019; Yin, 2018), thereby increasing the validity and the reliability of the data and the research outcome. To complement me as the primary research instrument, I used the interview protocol, note-taking, audio recording, the reflective journal, and site visits as additional tools for collecting data. The case study protocol, the systematic collection, and the interpretation of the data strengthened the credibility of the outcome of the current research.

Dependability implies that the research measures the phenomenon. The researcher must be consistent in all aspects of the research process (Johnson et al., 2020; Noble & Heale, 2019). To ensure that the current research is dependable, I built rigor into every aspect of the study by following a research protocol approved by Walden University. Using the same interview protocol for the six cases, I ensured consistency of the data collection during the interview process. I kept a reflective journal of every aspect of the research; the information stored in a journal is more reliable than relying on the

researchers' memory. Yin (2018) asserted that qualitative researchers could enhance the dependability of case studies by creating a reliable database. I kept a case study database that included the audio files, transcripts of the interview, notes taken during the interviews, and the thematic analysis results. The design and the outcome of the current research were reviewed at different levels in Walden University to assure compliance with high ethical and scholarly standards; multiple perspectives gave better insights into the phenomenon under study. Other strategies that enhanced dependability included rich documentation, member checking, and triangulation.

Validity

The quality of the research reflects the validity of the research outcome. Research is valid if the study accurately captures and presents the participants' views (Kalu & Bwalya, 2017). Researchers enhance the validity of their research through (a) prolonged engagement with the participants, (b) persistent observation, (c) triangulation, and (d) member checking (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The data collected from the participants were credible; I carefully selected owner-managers that I could communicate with directly. I chose owner-managers who had reasonable comprehension of the English language.

Credibility

The readers and users of the research determine if the study and the outcome are trustworthy. Because the current research explored the strategy that successful owner-managers of MEs used in sustaining their business, the results must be an accurate representation of the submissions of the participants. Korstjens and Moser (2018) and

Yin (2018), recommended that the participants in a study assess the credibility of the research outcome. I conducted the follow-up interview and the transcript review within 5 days of the initial interview. The participants reviewed the transcripts of their interviews to ensure that the report accurately captured their views.

Some researchers have questioned the value of member checking. Johnson et al. (2020), Thomas (2017), and Yin (2018) noted that member checking might not increase the credibility or trustworthiness of qualitative research. Participant fatigue may set in. The practice of member checking might yield additional information from the participants and minimize their biases (Azungah, 2018; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I conducted member checking during the initial interviews, transcript reviews, and follow-up interviews to ensure the trustworthiness of the data.

Qualitative researchers contend with the biases and errors that the participants may deliberately or inadvertently introduce into the research. The multiple case study design mitigated the risks of biases that each owner-manager might harbor. The various constructions of reality from the perspectives of different owner-managers gave more in-depth and more credible knowledge of the strategies for survival in Nigeria. In qualitative research, researchers study samples until additional samples do not yield new knowledge, that is, when the data is saturated (Fusch et al., 2018). I purposefully selected and interviewed six owner-managers until new cases did not contribute new themes nor patterns.

Triangulation was another strategy for improving the validity of the outcome of the current study. Researchers garner data from many sources to triangulate data.

Triangulation enhances the knowledge of the phenomenon and the trustworthiness of the research (Farquhar et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2020; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The various tools for data collection have merits and demerits. When used in combination, the tools complement and augment themselves (Farquhar et al., 2020; Fusch et al., 2018; Yin, 2018). The audio recording, the transcripts, the notes during the interview, the site visits, and the reflective journal were sources of data that enabled me to triangulate the data and improve the validity of the current research. I triangulated the case study method with the literature research.

Transferability

I conducted qualitative research on the strategy that MEs used to succeed in Nigeria. Yin (2018) averred that qualitative case studies are contextual. Research is transferable if the outcomes are generalizable and applicable in other contexts (Nowell et al., 2017). By building rigor into all aspects of their study, researchers ensure that other researchers can replicate their research and use the research outcome within different contexts. Levitt et al. (2017) and Pitard (2017) stressed that qualitative researchers should present the assumptions underpinning their research so that other scholars and researchers might understand their perspective. I stated my assumptions, limitations, and delimitations so other researchers can tailor future research to their context. Researchers enhance the transferability of their study by keeping meticulous research records and by being transparent (Johnson et al., 2020; Noble & Heale, 2019) so that readers and users of the research information, if need be, can follow through the research and replicate the study. I meticulously recorded all activities and documented the research processes in my

log and research database. I presented the interview protocol (see Appendix A), detailed descriptions, and rich data that other researchers could use to replicate the current study.

Confirmability

Other researchers should be able to confirm and or extend the outcome of this research. The researcher's integrity and rigor in the research process influence the authenticity of the data and the analysis (Noble & Heale, 2019). Researchers improve the confirmability of their study by being transparent, demonstrating that the research process and the data from the participants were objective and not biased (Daniel, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017). Even though I protected the participants' identity, I meticulously kept the research log and documented the research process for an audit trail. The documents and the raw data would be kept secured for 5 years, after which they will be destroyed.

Data Saturation

Data saturation is a measure of the quality of rigor in qualitative research. In the qualitative case study, data are saturated when the next case did not add new knowledge (Hennink et al., 2017). If the data collection were stopped before the data were saturated, researchers might miss valuable information, thereby undermining the creditworthiness of the research. I purposefully selected cases until the data across cases were saturated. A data collection tool in the current research was the semistructured interview. I achieved within case data saturation; I asked open questions and follow-up questions to probe for meaning until no new insights were gained from each participant. Data saturation was achieved within-case and across the six cases.

Transition and Summary

In section 2, I gave an overview of the design for studying the survival of MEs in Nigeria. I reviewed my roles as the researcher and the challenges with ethics in qualitative case studies involving humans. I discussed the research methodology and design. I presented the rationale for selecting the samples for this research, the techniques for collecting, organizing, and analyzing the data. I concluded section 2 with the discussion of the strategies to enhance the credibility and validity of this research.

The outcome of the current study is presented in Section 3. I introduced the section with an overview of the study, revisited the purpose of the research and the research question. I presented the data, the analyses of the data, and the results. Section 3 includes discussions of the possible applications of the findings to professional practice and the implications for social change. I concluded with recommendations for future research and my reflections on the research process.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The objective of the current qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that some owner-managers of MEs in Nigeria used to sustain their business beyond the first 5 years of operation. After obtaining the approval of the Walden University IRB, I purposefully selected six MEs that had operated successfully in Lagos for more than 5 years. I conducted face-to-face interviews with five owner-managers who had managed these firms since their inception; the sixth participant opted for a telephone interview. The participants voluntarily gave their written informed consent. With the permission of the participants, I took notes and recorded the interviews on a portable battery-powered audio recorder backed by the audio on a telephone. For consistency, I used the same peer-reviewed interview protocol (see Appendix A) for the six interviews.

The RBV augmented by the DCT was the conceptual framework for the current research. The credibility of the data was enhanced by member checking, transcript review, and follow-up interviews. I used the thematic approach for the analysis of the data. The detailed analyses of the data from each case and across the six cases yielded 14 codes that were grouped into three strategic themes that revolved around entrepreneurial resilience, relationship and social networking, and adaptive business processes. In Section 3, I explored the applications of the results for professional practice and the implications for social change. I concluded the section with recommendations for future research and my reflections on the research process.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question was the following: What strategies do some owner-managers of MEs in Nigeria use to sustain their business beyond the first 5 years of operations? The data collection tools were semistructured interviews with six successful owner-managers of MEs in Lagos, Nigeria. The following interview questions facilitated the exploration of the survival strategies of some owner-managers of MEs in Nigeria:

1. What factors enabled your enterprise to survive in Nigeria beyond 5 years of the start-up?
2. What were some obstacles that you had to surmount to make your business survive?
3. How did you overcome these obstacles?
4. What suggestions do you have for other owner-managers of MEs that could help them sustain their business in Nigeria?
5. What additional information would you like to share with me to help me understand what you did to keep your business running for more than 5 years?

The probing questions during the initial and follow-up interviews elicited responses addressing the survival strategies of the MEs. I avoided using the word “strategy” in the interview questions and during the research interviews because of the poor literacy level of the owner-managers of MEs in Nigeria. NBS (2019b) estimated that more than half of the owner-managers of MEs in Nigeria are not literate. Moreover, the term “strategy” has divergent definitions because of the diversity of the theoretical and

operational lenses used by researchers (Yanes-Estévez et al., 2018). The rich data from the semistructured interview provided insight into how the participants' MEs survived in the Nigerian environment.

I conducted a minisurvey to locate MEs that had operated in Lagos for more than 5 years; 26 MEs were found. I purposefully selected 10 potential MEs in Lagos that met the eligibility criteria for this study. I selected 10 MEs to allow for potential participants who might decline to participate in the study. The sampling was iterative. Four potential participants chose not to participate in the study; three potential participants gave logistics as reasons for declining to participate, and one objected to the audio recording of the interview. The participating MEs were from varied industries including light manufacturing (tailoring), production (shoemaking), wholesale (rice), and retail (wines and spirits) businesses. The owner-managers were interviewed one after the other until I reached data saturation.

Six owner-managers of MEs voluntarily participated in this research. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants had the option of face-to-face or virtual interviews. Five participants opted for the face-to-face interviews in their preferred locations and time; one owner-manager, for convenience, chose the telephone interview for the initial interview. The six follow-up interviews were face-to-face. We observed COVID-19 protocols; we wore face masks and maintained at least 2 meters of social distance. The participants were labeled PP1, PP2, PP3, PP4, PP5, and PP6 to protect their identity. I reached data saturation after five cases but conducted an additional case study for cross-validation.

The participants provided informed consent by signing the informed consent form. Using the interview protocol (see Appendix A), I conducted the initial interviews and the follow-up interviews between November and December 2020. With the permission of the participants, I recorded the audio of the interviews on a portable battery-powered audio recorder- Zoom H6 6-Track backed by the audio recorder on a telephone. I listened to the recordings many times before transcribing the audio recordings of each interview verbatim into Microsoft Word documents. Each participant was given a copy of the interview transcript to review. The six participants validated the accuracy of the transcripts.

The thematic analysis approach was the preferred approach for this exploratory qualitative multiple case study. Yin's (2018) five-step iterative and recursive analysis approach guided the analyses. The five steps were to (a) compile and organize the database, (b) disassemble the data, (c) reassemble and reduce the data, (d) interpret the findings, and (e) conclude on the outcome. The analyses occurred from the data collection stage to the final presentation of the outcome of the studies. To enhance the credibility of the conclusions, and in line with Castleberry and Nolen (2018), I presented direct quotations from the raw data to support the emergent themes.

The interviews were conducted in English. Jawas (2020) maintained that language goes beyond words; the cultural aspect of language gives value and meaning to the words. Nigerian English is predominant in the environment. Nigerians can and do talk about themselves using "I," "we," and "you." I used my understanding of the language and the culture for sensemaking. Castleberry and Nolen (2018), Johnson et al. (2020),

and Williams and Moser (2019) submitted that thematic analysis depends on the rigor of critical and creative thinking of the researcher to reveal the meaning of the themes, patterns, and interrelationships in the data. I chose the manual analysis approach because language is beyond words; the importance and value are situated in culture and the environment. I understand the culture and the environment in Lagos, Nigeria.

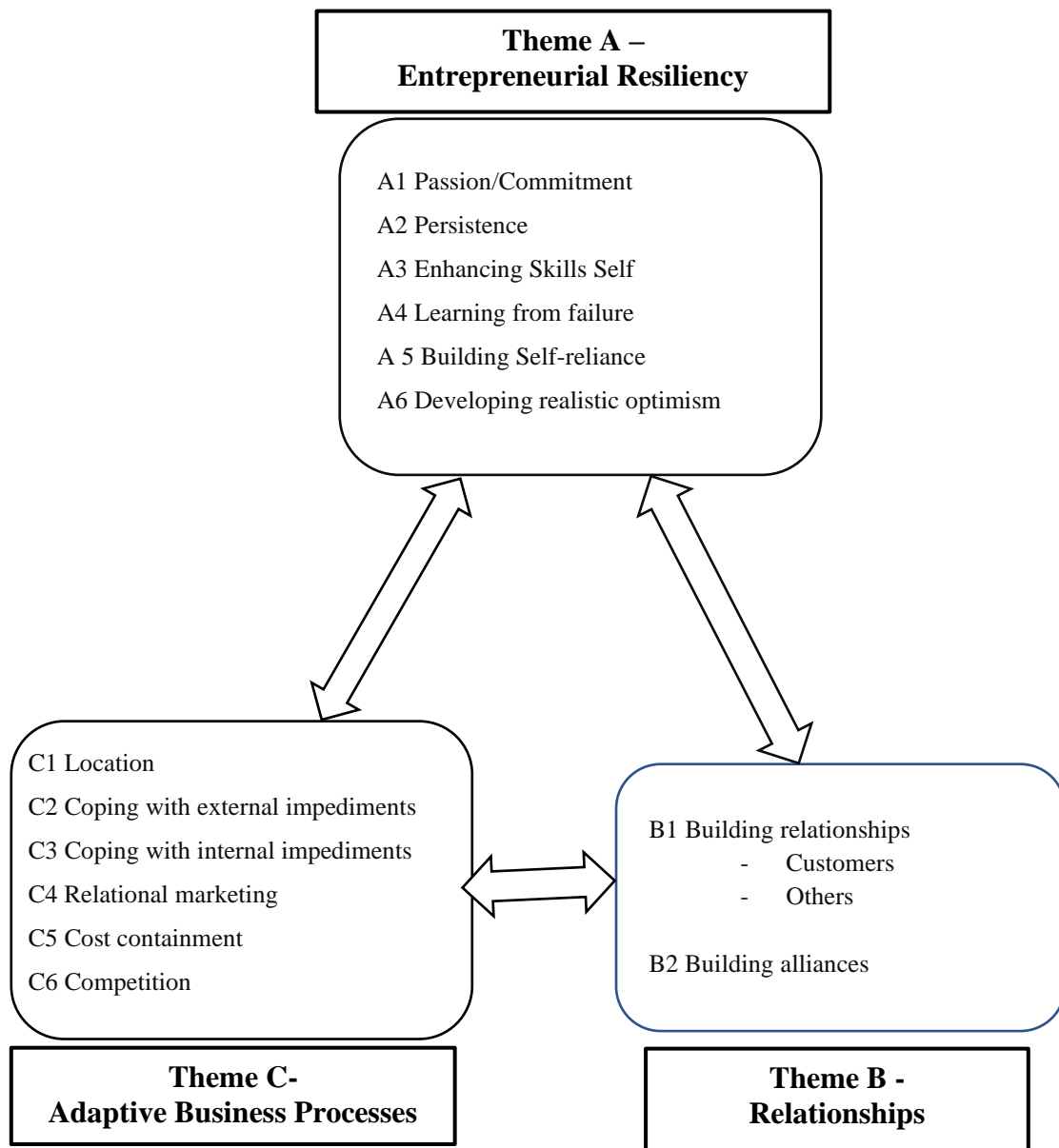
I immersed myself in the data. I listened to the audio of each interview many times before transcribing it verbatim. In search of meaning and insight, I read each interview transcript multiple times to identify and group similar experiences, actions, or issues raised by the participants. I coded the ideas presented by each participant and then made the cross-case comparison. The analysis process was recursive. I reviewed and analyzed the codes for patterns until no new themes emerged and the data were saturated. I interpreted the emergent themes and strategies based on the extensive review of the literature. I searched the literature for insight into some emergent constructs like “psychological capital,” “religiosity,” and “resiliency” that were not identified in the initial literature review.

The following were the codes from the data: alliances, client and customer relationship, commitment, coping with external impediments, cost containment, employee relationship, learning, location, optimism, passion, persistence, religiosity, self-development, word of mouth marketing, and referrals. The codes were grouped into three themes: entrepreneurial resiliency, relationships, and adaptive operations (see Figure 1). Embedded in the themes were the 14 strategic imperatives that owner-managers of

successful MEs in Nigeria deployed in sustaining their business beyond 5 years of operations.

Figure 1

Strategic Themes for Survival of Microenterprises in Nigeria



The strategies revolved around the owner-managers developing resiliency, leveraging the social networks and alliances, and developing adaptive business processes. The survival of the MEs depended on the owner-managers' capabilities to cope with their environment, manage their relationships, and drive their firm's operations. The owner-managers' relationships and networks influenced the business processes; the adaptive processes in the firm are also contingent on the relationships of the owner-manager.

Background to the Cases and Participants

In the following section, I provide the profile of the participants (see Table 3). The participating MEs were from varied industries including light manufacturing (tailoring), production (shoemaking), wholesale (rice), and retail (wines and spirits) businesses. All of the MEs had operated in Lagos for more than 5 years. The owner-managers were the participants in this study. I was the guide to understanding the language and context of the participants.

Table 3

Profile of Participants

Participant	Years in business	Number of employees	Location	Business
PP 1	13	2	Home	Event catering
PP 2	26	4	Home	Dressmaking
PP 3	11	5	Rented shop	Dressmaking (niche)
PP 4	26	2	Home	Leather shoe making
PP 5	12	0*	Mall	Retail sales (drinks)
PP 6	13	1	Rented shop**	Retail/wholesale (rice)

Note. *Normally 2 employees working 2 shifts.

** shop close to home.

PP1 catered for big events and programs. Some programs lasted for 2 to 3 months.

The production area was an open shed in the compound of the house. PP2 made clothes

for mainly up-and-coming young female professionals. PP2 specializes in making local designs (*aso ebi*) for large gatherings. PP2 had operated for 26 years in the same makeshift workspace at the back of the home. PP3 was a niche player. PP3 made custom-designed clothes for African women with unique shapes who do not fit regular international sizes. PP3 had operated in the same small rented shop for 11 years. PP4 produced leather shoes and footwear for males and females of all ages. PP4 made custom-fitted leather shoes for customers under their label and shoes on order for other brands. For 25 years, PP4 had operated in the same small production space at home. PP5 retailed premium spirits and wines. PP5 traded in an open market for 4 years and later relocated to a small shop in a mall close to the target market. PP6 sold rice wholesale in 50kg bags and retail in small measures. The shop was within walking distance from the home. PP6 stored and packed products at home.

Guide to the Language of the Participants

Naira is the Nigerian currency. The Naira exchanged at Naira 500 to one USD. *NEPA* in local parlance is synonymous with the national electricity grid. *No light* means power outage. *Aso ebi* is the uniform fabrics worn by attendees to events such as funerals, birthday parties, weddings, and other social ceremonies and celebrations. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, these events might have up to 3,000 attendees, most wearing the same fabric. The participants may refer to themselves as “I,” “we,” “our,” “one,” or “you,” so “one must be smart” may mean “I am smart.”

In the following sections, I present the three themes that emerged from the analyses of the study data (see Figure 1). Theme A was entrepreneurial resilience, Theme

B was relationships, and Theme C was developing adaptive operational processes. The emergent strategies under each theme (A1–A6, B1 and B2, and C1–C6) are discussed under the relevant themes.

Theme A: Entrepreneurial Resilience

In resource-constrained and challenging operating environments, the entrepreneur's risk exposure is heightened and the chances of failure are high. To survive, the firm must be resilient. The MEs' performance depends on the capabilities of the owner-manager, who may be the only constant employee in the firm. Resilience is a dynamic capability that entrepreneurs use to bounce back from adverse situations (Fatoki, 2018; Lin, 2018; Wall & Bellamy, 2019). Ayala and Manzano (2014) and Lin (2018) linked resilience with resourcefulness, hardiness, and purposefulness. The resilience of the owner-managers influences the performance of the MEs (Fatoki, 2018). Similarly, Jaafar et al. (2017), in their longitudinal study of Malaysian MEs, found that the owner-managers used entrepreneurial resilience to drive the performance of their businesses.

The six participants in the current study used resilience as a strategy to sustain their enterprises. Passion, commitment, and persistence were used by the participants. The participants also exercised positivity. They learned from their failures and focused on the good side of the hostile environment. The six participants were all forward-looking despite the COVID-19 pandemic. In the words of PP1, "When COVID-19 is gone, we will still be here." Six strategies were identified under Theme A, entrepreneurial resilience. The strategic imperatives in Theme A were passion and commitment (A1),

persistence (A2), enhancing skills (A3), learning from failure (A4), building self-reliance (A5), and developing positivity and realistic optimism (A6).

A1: Passion and Commitment

The passion of the owner-managers influenced the operations and sustainability of their enterprises. Al Issa (2020) found that the grit made up of passion, commitment, and persistence of the owner-managers affects the growth and sustainability of their ventures. Similarly, in their empirical study of MEs in the United States, Cardon et al. (2017) established the importance of passion in the enterprise's operations. In the research of young entrepreneurs in China, Grabowski and Stawasz (2017) found the link between entrepreneurial performance and success and entrepreneurial passion. Passion showed through the diligence, decision making, problem-solving, and creativity of the entrepreneur, the owner-manager. Cardon et al. and Al Issa established that passion and grit drive resilience, persistence, and performance. The six current study participants declared their love for their products and their businesses.

Commitment and resiliency are two related constructs. Commitment requires that the entrepreneur be willing and able to remain dedicated to their venture, especially during troubled times. The performance of the enterprise reflects the commitment of the owner-managers and their resilience, especially in the face of limitations and hindrances in their environment (Ayoade et al., 2018; Fatoki, 2018; Wall & Bellamy, 2019). In their study of small businesses in South Africa, a challenging environment similar to Nigeria, Fatoki found that resilience was essential for entrepreneurial and firm success. Consistent with the findings of Wall and Bellamy, the six MEs in the current study had survived

through the adaptation of their business processes. PP2 had reinvented the business; PP1, PP3, and PP4 were creative with their internal processes; and PP5 found new ways of engaging the customers. The participants had learned from their mistakes and had incorporated their learning to reconfigure their business operations and relationships:

I see work as fun. We sleep late and wake early. Even when you are tired, you can't think tired until you finish the work. I have passion for what I love doing. I love cooking, I love when people are happy eating my food. (PP1)

I will attribute my success to my passion and persistence. I love what I do. I left school not because I was failing but because I was clear that what I wanted to do was dressmaking. When I say commitment, I would like to explain that I have passion for what I do. I take the ups and downs in the business as part of growing the business. I do not allow things to weigh me down. It is not all the time you think about the money you will make; it is about enjoying what you do. You must get your fulfillment from the job. (PP2)

One major thing that worked for me was that I had the clarity of vision and passion. I was quite clear about "*the Why*" we were in business. So even when we had challenges, our vision and passion kept us going. We were very passionate... . Challenges will come, frustrations too, but if your *why* is strong, you love what you do and are passionate, you will be able to hang on in there. It is a phase; there will be periods of tears. If you are committed, you will be able to hang in there. I want to sell to the world, no doubt, but I think I am called to serve a group of people, and I remain committed to doing just that. (PP3)

The first thing that has sustained this business is the passion that I have for the business. With the ups and downs, along the line one might get discouraged. Is it “NEPA,” or the machines that are not available, or the unreliable employees, or maintaining three generators? Too many obstacles, but the passion that I have for the business has kept me going. (PP4)

Initially the business idea was dropped at my doorstep; but once I started, I learned more about the business. It became an interesting line of business. I love what I do. I failed but I started again. (PP5)

The ups and downs will surely come. Just like a child learning to walk, you must be ready to fail and rise again. You will crawl, then you find you can stand. After standing, you find you can walk. After that, you find you can run. So, if you ask me what stage I am in, I will say, I have stumbled and have learned to walk and run. I am trusting God that I will soar. I should build my company and employ younger ones. (PP6)

A2: Persistence

Persistence is the entrepreneurs’ decision to remain in business, pursuing their objectives despite the obstacles and environmental challenges or the business impediments (Al Issa, 2020; Caliendo et al., 2020; Murphy et al., 2019). Entrepreneurial persistence is a dynamic capability (Caliendo et al., 2020). Despite the vagaries, uncertainties, risks, and resource constraints in the Nigerian ecosystem, the six participants had persisted in their lines of business for more than 10 years. PP1, PP3, PP5, and PP6 had managed their enterprises for more than 10 years; PP2 and PP4 had

operated the same business for more than 20 years. The participants did not show any inclination to leave their business. PP2, working from home, said “now that the children are grown, I can concentrate on my business.” PP5 was the only participant interested in another business, real estate, in addition to the business of retailing premium wines. PP6 mentioned that in the future, they might consider other lines of business.

Entrepreneurs passionate about their venture are likely to persist in their venture even in difficult circumstances. Cardon et al. (2017) highlighted the importance of passion in driving persistence. The six participants talked about passion, commitment and persistence interchangeably. They loved their vocation and businesses; they were committed to their enterprises, the hostility in the external environment notwithstanding. The positivity and optimism were constructs that helped the participants to persist. Ayala and Manzano (2014) posited that optimism is a construct of resilience. Even in the realities in the COVID 19 pandemic, the six study participants were undaunted by the uncondusive business environment; rising cost, thin profit margins. In the words of PP3, “it is just a phase.”

When COVID-19 pandemic is over, we will be here. (PP1)

It was challenging running the business and managing the family; but now that my children are grown, I will have more time to face the business. (PP2)

If you are not committed, you just keep doing anything and everything. Everybody has a calling. I have come to realize that we are all different tools. We are like an orchestra; different instruments, some people playing the violin, some the piano.

We are all different parts of the puzzle. So, find your part and fit in. I have chosen to be faithful to my calling. (PP3)

Keep a focus on your vision. The ups and downs will surely come. (PP6)

A3: Enhancing Skills

Entrepreneurship is highly demanding and challenging. Owner-managers of MEs embarking on risky ventures, especially those operating in resource-constrained environments at the BoP, contend with many daunting stressors (Umukoro & Okurame, 2017). The owner-managers of MEs are responsible for the survival of the business, their livelihood, those of the employees, and other dependents. PP3 surmised that the many roles the owner-managers play could be overwhelming, and sometimes, “you just feel like running away.” The risk of falling is high, especially in the uncertain and precarious Nigerian environment, which Okeke and Nwankpa (2018) and World Bank (2017b) described as fragile and chaotic. The owner-managers developed dynamic capabilities to cope with the changes in the Nigerian ecosystem:

I am always looking to increase the creativity and variety in our menu offering. I am always experimenting with different recipes. (PP1)

When I started, I had to learn how to design. I employed teachers to teach me difficult areas of cutting, for example different types of sleeves and jackets. I have learned to use the computer to design, and for data storage and retrievals. You must be on top of your game, otherwise the employees and the customers will run you mad. I am always learning new designs. (PP2)

I realized that the success of my business rested squarely on my shoulders. So, if I needed to improve the quality of my business, I first have to improve myself and my people. Only then can we improve our business. I had many weak areas that affected the business adversely. I had to invest time and resources in developing myself, and it is beginning to reflect in the operations. I learned a lot about financial planning and management, self-management, team building, marketing, digital marketing and more. (PP3)

(In order) to keep on top of changes in the business, especially the processes, we attend many workshops, to move with the trends in the industry. We try to upgrade ourselves to make sure we are on top of everything that is happening with classic shoes production; I attend training programs once or twice a year, to improve myself, to learn new developments in shoe making. I missed the workshop this year because of COVID-19. We try to be creative as well with what we do. (PP4)

I have been on several fairs around the world. I organize wine tasting events often. The customers want variety, I learn from the customers and my suppliers. (PP5)

I have learnt to keep good records. You don't have to be a chartered accountant to know that cash is not profit. You need to have a plan, that will guide. I may not be where I want to be, but I strategize for the next steps. (PP6)

A4: Learning From Failure and Mistakes

Another strategy used by the study participants was learning through failure and mistakes. The resilience and positivity of entrepreneurs enable them to view mistakes and failure as part of their learning (Ayala & Manzano, 2014; Fatoki, 2018; Lattacher &

Wdowiak, 2020). In complex environments, unmet expectations provide opportunities for learning and creativity; the entrepreneurs learn from their experiences and integrate their knowledge in future decision-making. Soares and Perin (2019) averred that learning was critical for the operations of small businesses, but He et al. (2017) noted that the emotional distress associated with failure negatively affects learning. The psychological capital of owner-managers moderated the stressors in their lives (Martin et al., 2018). He et al. (2017) highlighted the need for more research on the behaviors of entrepreneurs who handle failure well. The six study participants had all made costly mistakes; PP3 and PP5 experienced near-collapse of their firms. All the participants had positive attitudes to failure and mistakes; they learned from failure. Learning is an adaptive capability:

I used to give the staff accommodation in my house, now I don't because they steal a lot. To deal with challenges of stealing and over invoicing, I buy from source and cut off the staff and the middlemen. We buy directly from the produce market... . Complaints are not personal. We learn from mistakes and improve. I see customer complaints as a call to improvement. (PP1)

When we first started many years ago, we allowed our customers to pay for our service when they collected their clothes. They drop the fabrics for theirs *aso ebi*, but when the event is over there is no incentive to collect. We had large stocks of clothes not picked up by the owners. We then started insisting on a down payment of at least 50% before we sew. Another condition we gave was that we would auction clothes not collected within 6 months... . Some years back, things were slow, very slow. We thought we could augment the business by selling imported clothes

and shoes. We did only that lot: We ended up with so much inventory that we could not sell. We made huge losses. It was a bad diversion from our regular line of business. So, we went back fully into what made us and what we are known for - made to measure clothes and attires. (PP2)

In the beginning, we thought we could run the business on passion. I had to go back and learn the business. When we started, I use to be sentimental in hiring; I ended up with huge expenses, increases in payroll, and I still had to do most of the job. We were ineffective and inefficient. I learned that you need to recruit people with the right attitude and the necessary skills... . At some point, I was not investing in my personal development. It backfired in my business, we almost got obsolete. I learned the hard way to create a balance between growing my business and developing myself. We had challenges with financial planning and management. We went into serious debt that almost killed the business. Not that I was frivolous, we invested in expanding before we had the market. We learned that before spending, there should be a strong “*why*”. Now, we are goal-oriented and target-driven. (PP3)

I think I have learned to overcome the issues of people owing me. Initially, we took people for their words; just place your orders, and we will deliver. We made the shoes, and then they don’t show up. You may not see them for years. So, I get stuck with the shoes, and money is tied down... . Now, even if you are close to me, I want your commitment. Customers must make a down-payment of at least 75% before

we start production; they must pay in full amount for repairs. This strategy has helped us a lot. (PP4)

I failed. I learned from it (*the experience*) and picked up again. I had a wine shop in an open market in Lagos. I later realized it was a wrong move. The environment was not conducive for my target market. The location was bad, and sales were poor. Setting up in the market was a bad decision. But I learned from it. We have now reopened in a shopping mall in the highbrow area of Lagos close to my target market... I did not have challenges with purchases; I had credit lines from some of the importers. I had most of the challenges with sales. In the bad location, I sold on credit to push the sales. This turned out to be a bad strategy. I owed the importers a lot of money; I lost a lot of money too. I paid the importers back over time to regain their trust. Now, no more credit sales. We do only cash transactions. (PP5)

There are tendencies for people to be fraudulent. To mitigate that risk, you have to be smart. Honestly, experience is the best teacher; if you have gone through it once, you will never ever want to go through it again. You lose a lot, you might pay for it, but it is a learning experience. When you get into the field and experience it (fraud), you won't want it to happen to you again. (PP6)

A5: Building Self-Reliance

The owner-manager is the critical employee in MEs. In Nigeria, most MEs do not grow beyond the owner-managers; NBS puts the average employment by MEs in Nigeria at 1.1 persons (NBS, 2019b). By the NBS classification, MEs employ fewer than 10 persons, and small businesses employ 10 to 49 persons. PP2 and PP4 had operated for

more than 20 years, and both participants had fewer than five full-time employees. PP5 and PP6 run their shops with only one full-time employee. The participants complained about getting the right employee with the right attitude, skills, and work ethics. One of the constructs of resilience is hardiness (Fatoki, 2018), entrepreneurs taking full control of their decisions and actions. The participants were all self-reliant; they knew their business and were not dependent on their employees. This approach might, however, constrain their growth. Except for PP3, who had a vision of an international business and was instituting structures to grow the firm, the other five participants appeared comfortable running their microbusiness. PP3 remarked, "I have started putting structures in place. ...They can take ownership of the processes and the procedures, and the systems even when I am not there." Even at that, in 11 years, PP3 had only five employees.

I run the business. I do my marketing, and purchases. I am involved in the preparation and cooking of the food. (PP1)

I am the CEO. I design, I cut, and I sew. If you don't know how to sew, don't go into dress making. If you cannot cut, please do not go into sewing. (PP2)

I know the weight of the success rests on my shoulders. I do most things in the business. When I am overwhelmed, I would collapse some roles and find someone to take over those roles. (PP3)

You need to be on top of your game. Know your business in and out. I say that any particular business you want to venture into, it is best that you know the rudiments of everything about the business so that your staff do not hold you to ransom. That

is what has kept me going. I know the business, I can do the business, I can use my hands. I don't rely on them. (PP4)

I am alone in the shop. I do everything by myself. I don't have a life. (PP5)

You just have to be there; employees are not just honest. You cannot turn your back for a minute. I am always here with one assistant. (PP6)

A6: Developing Positivity

Entrepreneurs use lenses to view situations and phenomena. Those with a high level of positivity dwell on the positive aspects of issues, events, and circumstances. The entrepreneurs adopting the positive organizational approach learn and grow through their challenges and negative experience (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). Resilient entrepreneurs embrace challenges. The positivity was evident in all the study participants. The Nigerian environment is not conducive to business; the country ranked poorly in the ease of doing business (World Bank, 2018). PP3 commented that Nigeria was not like any other country. The participants coped with the impediments in the environment and focused on the positives such as the supportive culture of the people.

The six participants acknowledged the supportive culture of the people. In the words of PP2, PP3, PP4, Nigerians are “happy people,” “Nigerians love to party,” “Nigerians love to look good.” PP6 remarked that “even during the pandemic, people must eat; many organizations distributed rice as palliatives during the lockdown due to COVID-19”. PP5 stated that “people will always drink, the pandemic irrespective: when they have their parties, they always call me.” Of their mistakes and business failures, the participants emphasized the lessons learned and not the losses sustained:

We learn from experience and improve. We see complaints as a call to improvement. Nobody is importing now due to COVID-19 and inflation. Everything is expensive, so our profit margins are low. We continue because it is important that we keep our customers. I am forward-looking. COVID-19 will go, and things will normalize. When things get better, we will be around. People must eat. We are creative, and we strive to meet high-quality standards. (PP1)

The business is good. Nigerians love to party. Doing this business has not been easy. You need to persevere. In the beginning, it would seem that everybody is doing well and that you are being left behind. You just have to keep on believing in yourself and in what you do. You will make it. We are better; we keep changing. We keep reinventing ourselves. If something does not work, we try something else. We try new things, new methods. We try to follow the trends. If I am not succeeding, I find out who is doing well, and we adapt. (PP2)

With the depreciation of the *Naira*, hyperinflation, and high-interest rate environment, importation is difficult; many importers are beginning to look inwards. That sounds like an advantage, but because our costs are increasing, it also is a disadvantage. The depreciation of the *Naira* has made made-in-Nigeria products attractive. We aim to be a big business. We are trying to see if we can register with the Nigeria Export Promotion Council; Government gives incentives to encourage exporters. (PP3)

Before COVID-19, the social aspect of our lives was very supportive. Fantastic! Because, every week, women came in for shoes and bags to match their *aso ebi* for

different occasions. Nigerians love to party; we love to dress well. Nigerians love to look good and elegant. I will gladly say that we now appreciate goods made in Nigeria. Our line of business aligns with the entertainment industry. With COVID-19 and the restrictions on social or religious gatherings, the orders stopped. The orders have started coming in since the economy was opened up. I look forward to seeing the business grow bigger than what it is now. (PP4)

The environment is good. Nigerians love to party. COVID-19 did not affect me much. Because no matter the circumstance, whatever the environment brings, there is always the need to drink. Happy times, sad times, people will drink. Remember, I sell to those who can afford it. When they need high-end drinks, they call me. (PP5)

My area of business is good - food. Rice is a staple food that people eat every day. It is a daily need. That has kept us in business. Even during the COVID-19 period, people bought for consumption and some groups also distributed rice as palliatives. I have stumbled and have learned to walk and run. I am trusting God that I will be able to soar. (PP6)

Theme B: Relationships and Networks

Relationships are intangible resources that owner-managers of ME leverage to run and sustain their businesses. In complex systems, the actors and agents influence the outcome and output of the systems (Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017; Roundy et al., 2018). Managing and leveraging the relationships with all stakeholders is a dynamic capability for the success and survival of the MEs (Blankson et al., 2018; Darbi et al., 2018; Martin

et al., 2018; Warren & Szostek, 2017; Williams & Kedir, 2017). The owner-managers, the main actors in the MEs, are very much a part of their socio-economic environment. The owner-managers adapt their relationships and processes to suit their goals.

In this study, the dynamics of the internal and external relationships were different. Whereas the study participants valued the external relationships, they all saw their employees as impediments to their business. The six participants had challenges with getting workers with the proper skills set and the right attitude.

B1: Building Relationships

Building Customer Relationships. The six study participants developed close, lasting, mutually beneficial relationships with their customers, suppliers, and other support systems. Customer relationship was a priority to the participants. The outcome of this study is consistent with the findings of Blankson et al. (2018) in their study of marketing practices of MEs in Ghana. This research outcome is congruent with Reynoso and Cabrera (2019) that MEs at the BoP build and nurture enduring relationships. Darbi et al. (2018) submitted that the operations of small businesses in the informal sectors were built on trusting relationships that were mutually beneficial to all parties. In this study, the relationship between the owner-managers and the customers often transcended business transactions. PP2 said the customers helped out with the business and even personal issues, “they understand; when we have issues with our tailors, they forgive our mistakes.” The assertion of PP2 is consistent with the submission of the other participants. In the words of PP3, “we are like family; they love us.”

I get close to the clients to understand their needs So, when a customer orders a particular meal for an event. I provide extras to make it interesting for their guests. I like to know about their guests to know what to prepare. I do my clients favors. I don't pressure them for payments. (PP1)

We enjoy a lot of goodwill. We have built good relationships. Most of customers are like family and friends. We have many aunties and uncles, because we have built personal relationships. Relationship management and customer service are our strengths. It is what has made us survive, because sometimes in this business we make mistakes. (PP2)

A lot of our customers have become like family to us because we show them a lot of love, care and respect. We also try to be as professional as we can be at all times. They feel safe with us, they are happy with us and they tell others about us. They have grown with us. Many were young when we started; now they are mothers. (PP3)

What we have going for us is our high standards in meeting orders and deliveries. Our business grew through friends and families. We worked hard and got friends bringing in their friends. We try to be creative with what we do. We have created a niche for ourselves. (PP4)

I am close to my customers. Even after I closed the shop in the market, I still kept in touch with them. From time to time, I advertise my products to them through WhatsApp. When they need high end drinks for their parties, they call me. I work well with relationships; the referrals have really helped. (PP5)

When it comes to customer service, we try as much as possible to let the customer know they are king. We don't want people to return our products. We want them to keep coming back. We try as much as possible to satisfy the customers so that they give us referrals. We do get a lot of referrals. (PP6)

Developing Other Relationships. Apart from relationships with customers, the participants leveraged other relationships in their networks. PP1, PP2, PP3, PP4, PP5, and PP6 had extra hands that are not employees who they could call on for support. PP1, PP2, PP4, and PP6 worked from home, benefitting from family support. PP1 and PP6 stressed the importance of financial support from family and friends, especially at the start-up stages; PP5 relied on friends for the wine tasting and other exhibitions. The network of relationships reduces the negative effect of the high employee turnover in the enterprises. PP1, PP5, and PP6 had good relationships with their suppliers, who granted credit when needed.

A family member gave me the opportunity to cook for a few people in her office for her birthday. I did not make money from that job, but within the week, I had six assignments which launched me into my business. I started getting steady orders from that office... . I can get things on credit from my suppliers when I need help. When we have large orders, I have people I call on to help. I rely on family and friends for referrals and funding. (PP1)

Tailors generally are not reliable. During the peak periods, the employees may come up with excuses to not show up for work. My children have learned to hem and fix

buttons. During these periods, all the family members support, especially with the finishing. (PP2)

During peak periods when we have serious deadlines, we recruit temporary workers or collaborate with other tailors. (PP3)

An advantage to working from home is that I can do late hours. I can work late into the night when I have deadlines for delivery. I can have my meals, spend time with the family and then return to my work. All in all, my family members have been understanding and supportive of the business. (PP4)

I have a lot of people who I call on when the need arises. I organize wine tasting events for friends, customers, potential customers and their friends. (PP5)

During the peak periods, I will say that family members are part of the team.

Funding in this wholesale business is a challenge. I have been privileged because I am a beneficiary of the Lagos State Employment Trust Fund. I also have access to the financial support of my family members. (PP6)

B2: Building Alliances

MEs in resource-constrained environments use their dynamic capabilities to leverage the resources and capabilities of other firms and stakeholders. Moghaddam et al. (2017) posited that dynamic capability alliances improve the performance of small firms. However, the alliances should be within the capabilities of the owner-managers; otherwise, the relationships could become dysfunctional (Moghaddam et al., 2017). The MEs in this study developed capabilities in forging strategic alliances with various stakeholders in their networks.

We build strong relationships with our clients and suppliers. Our suppliers give us credit. My gas supplier will supply whenever I need the support, especially during long programs before my clients pay. (PP1)

We rely on the credit support from many suppliers. (PP2)

We are looking to partner with another firm that promotes wellness and well-being. Our customers will know we genuinely care about them. (PP3)

I used to do the marketing myself; it was tiring. I have developed alliances with other companies to push sales and marketing while I focus on production. I produce their designs under their brand names. I make shoes under my label, and I also make shoes for other labels. (PP4)

We build strong relationships with our clients and suppliers. I partner with the importers to bring in the drinks. I also get generous credit from the suppliers when I buy from them. (PP5)

I don't enjoy credit from the suppliers because of the volumes they want us to buy; I cannot afford a trailer load of rice. But I hope to get there. (PP6)

Theme C: Adaptive Operational Processes

The MEs exist in an ecosystem. The Nigeria environment is complex, fragile, hostile, and dynamic, a system with many limitations and impediments that negatively affect the operations and survival of MEs and other small businesses (Okeke & Nwankpa, 2018; Onwe et al., 2020; World Bank, 2017b). Owner-managers, to be successful, should recognize their limitations within the environment; the owner-manager adapt their processes and operations to suit the realities of their situation. For example, in the

Nigerian setting, the owner-managers adapt their operations to reduce the negative effect of the weak institutional, and inadequate infrastructural resources. Kazakov et al. (2021) stressed the import of the interactions between the actors and the resources in the dynamic ecosystem: the actors in the dynamic adaptive environment co-create the system. The six study participants adapted their behaviors to respond to the employees, customers, suppliers, and the larger environment.

C1: Choice of Location

The location of the enterprise is essential, but it is not the only driver of the success of the business. PP5 failed within the first 4 years of operations partly because of poor location; retailing premium drinks in the open market, in PP5's words, "was a bad idea; the environment was not conducive to my plans." PP4 worked from home in a makeshift workspace in an obscure part of Lagos. He claimed that the business was "fantastic." The customer relationship management, word of mouth marketing, and the quality of the product augmented the poor location. Other intangible resources combine with location to sustain the business.

C2: Coping With External Impediments

The six study participants pointed to the poor infrastructural facilities in the country as a major challenge to their operations. The municipal utilities, especially the unreliable power supply was inadequate unstable and unpredictable. All the participants relied on generators to run their business. PP4 maintained three generators to reduce downtime in the production process; PP5 sited the shop in a serviced mall that provided tenants stable utilities; PP6 operated the shop during the daytime and closed before it got

dark. In the evenings PP6 used the generator at home for the business. The body language and tone of voice of the participants showed more acceptance than complaints. PP6 commented, “NEPA- what can we do?”:

The greatest challenge in the environment is NEPA. We are forced to rely on generators. Our work is usually at night or early in the morning when we prepare for the day. No NEPA, and the price of petrol (for running the generator) has gone up. The cost of transportation has gone up. It affects everything... . Water is also a problem. We rely on a borehole, which still requires electricity to power the pump. (PP1)

NEPA is a major problem. Some years back, we would have less than 6 hours of electricity in a day; there were days of total darkness. All our machines run on electricity. We had to invest in generators. We had to buy the bigger, more powerful diesel engine because the noise from the small generators was disturbing our clients and our production. The bigger generator could also carry all our machines. (PP2)

The constant power outage is a big problem; we are continually running on generators. On average, in an 8-hour working day, we run the generators for about 5 hours every day. The high fuel consumption and the cost of servicing the generators increase our costs and have implications for our production and sales. Honestly, NEPA is a big problem. (PP3)

NEPA is a major factor affecting the business because in all stages of shoemaking, from design to finishing, one needs electricity. I have three generators that I run, depending on my work schedule. I have never had uninterrupted *light* since I started

this business 25 years ago. Fuelling the generators takes a lot and the cost of petrol is increasing. (PP4)

NEPA is not a problem for us. We operate in a serviced mall; the mall owns and operates the generators. Of course, we pay service charges. We build the cost of the rent and service charge into our products. (PP5)

NEPA is a big issue. There is hardly any day they do not take *light*. It is uncomfortable, but what can we do. We use the generator at home when we need to pack. We close the shop by 6 pm before it gets dark. We are lucky, our products do not need to be refrigerated. (PP6)

Apart from electricity, PP1 mentioned the lack of potable water supply, a critical resource in food production. PP1 relied on treated water from the borehole powered by a generator. The six participants lamented the cost implications of the rapidly declining value of the *Naira*, the increases in fuel costs, and the high inflation rate, which was in the double-digit. PP6 highlighted the challenges with fraud, the inconsistencies in government policies, and the insecurity in the environment. The study participants had learned to cope with and manage the challenges in the environment:

Inflation is too high. Onions and pepper are gold. Local foodstuffs and the imported ingredients are expensive; transportation costs are high. The unrests in the northern part of the country contribute to the food shortage. (PP1)

The options (of fabrics and accessories) have reduced, no thanks to the poor exchange of our local currency. Good trimmings are not available, and when you find them, they are expensive, and our customers do not want to pay. (PP2)

The state of the economy, the depreciating value of the Naira, and inflation. The state of the economy introduces a problem; the diminished buying power makes our customers more price-sensitive than ever before. It is difficult to find good quality fabrics. (PP3)

We need to import our machines. On two occasions, I had to travel to China, just to get some machines... . The import duties are too high, the (raw) materials and accessories are costly. The importers complain of high import duties which they pass to us... . Goods are not coming in into Nigeria as before. We are relying on old stock. (PP4)

The depreciation of the Naira increases our costs; all our wines are imported. The rising cost is not a major setback in our business. Inflation reduces our profitability for a while, but our customers eventually adjust to the new prices. (PP5)

The unstable policies in the country are also an issue. One day importation is allowed, the next importation is banned, or the borders are closed. So, one might have a situation in which you have placed orders for goods, and there is a change of policy even while your goods are in transit; The goods are then treated as contrabands, and you sustain huge losses... . Fraud has killed many businesses in the country. Experience, they say, is the best teacher. If you have been defrauded once, you will not ever want to go through the experience again. You lose a lot, but it is a learning experience. (PP6)

C3: Coping With the Employees as Internal Impediment

The employees are agents in the creation of products and services. In this study however the six participants noted that apart from the negatives in the environment, their greatest internal challenge was with the employees. The participants shared that finding employees who were honest (PP1, PP3, PP5, PP6), hardworking (PP1, PP2, PP3 PP4, PP5, PP6,) and with the right attitude (PP1, PP2, PP3, PP4, PP5, PP6) was difficult. The employees had poor work ethics and would steal. The staff turnover was high in all the MEs. Even after 25 years, PP2 and PP4 had fewer than five employees. In over 10 years, none of the MEs had “grown” to be a small business employing 10 persons.

The staff turnover is high. If they (staff) don't have access to stealing, they will leave. It is difficult to manage human beings. No matter how well you take care of them (employees), they will still steal. I give Christmas gifts, food rations; I even help them with personal issues. They still steal. The greatest challenge is with the workers; they steal a lot. They conspire and team up together to steal. They steal when they buy ingredients; they buy lower quality items and bill for higher prices. They are not reliable. (PP1)

The tailors are just not reliable; they are also arrogant. Just when you begin to work well with them, they quit, and you have to start all over again. If they think you don't know how to cut, then you are in trouble. During the peak periods, like Christmas, they may come up with excuses not to show up for work, just to hold you to ransom. (PP2)

We have issues with professionalism and respect. Most of the people we work with are artisans, many of them are uneducated. There are times they are disrespectful to themselves; they say that they are playing. Then one day, they may be disrespectful to our customers who may not find it funny. (PP3)

Coming to work is a big problem for many employees. Getting to work early is a bigger problem. We resume at 8.00 am, they saunter to work at 9.30 am, sometimes 10 am; It can be very frustrating. They are not reliable nor dependable. When you have deadlines and deliverables, they give flimsy excuses and may not come to work; A lot of horrible things that they say. (PP4)

The workers are always a serious concern. You see lazy ones and dishonest ones They steal a lot. And most are lazy. (PP5)

Finding loyal hands is a big problem: Where would you find dependable people who you can vouch for? Even when you are there, they steal. During stock taking, you might be counting empty cartons and you believe there are products inside them. (PP6)

The two significant challenges with employees were poor work ethics and pilfering and stealing. This study outcome is consistent with research of Aladejebi (2020) and Yekini et al. (2018) which established that employee theft was rampant in Nigerian businesses; employee theft constrains the growth and survival of MEs in Nigeria (Yekini et al., 2018). The study participants managed employees with poor work ethics; PP1 corrected, PP3 coached, PP4 pushed and encouraged, PP5 counseled, and PP6 gave on-the-job training. The participants all had zero tolerance for dishonesty or theft. The

typical approach was to let the erring employees go. PP3 would relieve the employee who was persistently rude to the customer. The participants had lean staff, but they all had networks, including family members who supported them during peak periods. PP6 admitted that the margins on wholesales are low, and the business could not support more than one employee at a time. Self-reliance was another approach that the current study participants used to deal with employee issues. All the participants had the hands-on approach; they all could work alone. The participants were confident in their persons and in their abilities.

I use their (employees) services only when we have orders, they do other things to fill their downtime... . The food reflects the mood of the person. If the workers show up for the day with a negative attitude, I take them off cooking and do it myself; bad moods transfer to the food... . To deal with the challenges of stealing and over-invoicing. I buy directly from the source and cut off the employees and the middlemen. Mistakes can be corrected, but once they steal, they go. (PP1)

You earn the respect of the employees when they know you can do what they do and that you can do it better. There are times I just let all of them go and do my work myself. I am happy sewing only one dress in a day instead of having hypertension. I let the customers know if we will not be able to meet their orders. My children and other family members support with the finishing. (PP2)

We try to nip disrespectful behaviors in the bud. We don't permit derogatory statements in my organization; it has to be mutual respect. There is no room for insubordination. Working here is a privilege. For bad behaviors, the employee goes

on suspension, and if the bad behavior persists, we let the person go. We try to teach and coach them. We have simplified and standardized some of our processes. We set targets; They get bonuses when they exceed their targets. We use temporary hands during peak periods. (PP3)

On staff issues, one has to be very patient with them in that many people are not willing to work. I say that any business you venture into, it is best that you know the rudiments of the business so that your staff does not hold you to ransom; That is what has kept me going. So that whether staff show up or not, I know the business, I can do the business, I can use my hands and produce. I don't rely on them. (PP4)

The lazy ones, I counsel. But the dishonest ones, I let them go once we find them out. I am alone in the shop now; I don't have a life. I am looking for two employees to work shift (*only one employee per shift*). As back up, I have a lot of people, those people I can call on when the need arises. (PP5)

You need to be on your guard. You don't put someone there and go to sleep. You need to be on top of your game. Know your business in and out. I am in the shop most times with the one salesperson. (PP6)

C4: Relational Marketing

The marketing strategy that the participants used was word of mouth. Owner-managers of MEs in resource-constrained environment use word of mouth marketing strategy leveraging on their social network within their community. At the BoP, customers trust the recommendations from respected persons in their families, friends, and social networks (Blankson et al., 2018; Reynoso & Cabrera, 2019; Yohanes et al.,

2017). The owner-managers leveraged their relationships to build their social capital. Only two participants, PP2 and PP5, used electronic social media. PP5 connected with the clients on WhatsApp. PP2 had some social media presence but claimed that they did not get clients through the social media. PP3 was beginning to see the value of online marketing and trying to gain some presence. PP1, PP4, and PP6 did not engage in social media at all. The slow acceptance of technology and social media may reflect the state of technology in the environment. Word of mouth and referrals were the drivers of business marketing in the six MEs.

I always cook in the hope of getting new customers from every transaction. Our business thrives on referrals. When people love your food, they ask for your business card. We grew from the referrals from our customers, friends and families. (PP1)

Our patronage grew mainly through word of mouth. Friends inviting other friends and family members. Now we use the social media to create awareness for our services. But our customers and their referrals are still our best point of sales. We hardly get customers through the social media. (PP2)

Our customers have been the backbone of this business from the first customer to over 1000 customers today. We grew mainly through referrals and word of mouth. Our products are tailor-made for each customer. We go beyond the extra mile to wow our customers. Our processes are customer centric. When they (*customers*) wear our attires, they model, and are happy to model for us; they (*customers*) encourage others to use our services. Of course, the quality of our products speaks

for us. We meet the wardrobe needs of our clients in order for us to remain relevant.

(PP3)

I have customers who have been with me for many years. Our customers appreciate the value of our products which compare favorably with imported custom-made leather shoes. I owe the success of this business to our customers. The customers are not only loyal, they give us good referrals. See, I work from an obscure workshop at home; the location does not speak for me, and I also do not do any form of marketing. Word of mouth has sustained us in the last 25 years. Referrals... . Of course, our shoes are of good quality. We understand our customers' needs and preferences. (PP4)

I have been on several fairs around the world. I organize wine tasting events from time to time, for close friends and customers. I combine these wine tasting events with other attractions like exhibitions of artwork and photography. The events help me understand my customers' tastes and bring in new customers. I also make money from the exhibitions. When they need drinks for their parties, they call me. (PP5)

We try as much as possible to satisfy our customers so they can give us referrals. We get a lot of referrals; word of mouth and referrals have spoken well for me. I don't do any advertisement. Marketing has been mainly referrals and word of mouth. (PP6)

C5: Cost Containment Strategies

The six participants knew where the leakages were in their businesses. From experience, the participants had devised ways of containing or limiting the leakages.

Some leakages related to pilferage and dishonest invoicing by employees, customers bad credits, and fraud. The participants lamented the high-cost environment fueled by the rapid and continued depreciation of the local currency; all the participants had high import content. Keeping lean staff complement may be a cost-containment strategy to keep payroll expenses low, all the participants except had fewer than five full-time employees relying on temporary workers when needed. PP6 mentioned that the thin profit margin on wholesale rice could support one employee. Working at home or close to home could also be a cost-containment strategy:

I run the business. I do my marketing, and purchases. I save money by buying directly from the suppliers. I am involved in the preparation and cooking of the food. My focus is on growing the business not just on profit. I need to make money but I don't put money on the front burner. When charging *we build in all costs*. Costing is important. The cost of service goes beyond just the food. Inflation is high, everything is expensive. Waiters have breakages and losses; we charge these inevitable costs into our billings. (PP1)

When the customers delay or fail to collect their orders, we have so much money tied down; we insist on downpayment of at least 50%. To limit wastages and rejects, I do most of the cuttings myself and then assign the sewing to the tailors based on their proficiency. We monitor inventory well; if the employees take buttons, zippers, etc., they are small things, but the cost adds up. (PP2)

I used to recruit based on sentiments. Now we recruit people with the right attitude and skills; people who can do the job, who can hit the ground running. We are more

goal-oriented and target-driven. We now plan our production; tailors have targets and deliverables. We measure actuals against plans; we reward performance. We began to track inventory; we started keeping proper inventory records to reduce the pilferages. (PP3)

I buy my all the materials myself. Our products are made to order so when customers do not pick up their order I am stuck with the shoes. Customers now make a down payment of 75% of the cost of the shoes before we produce; they pay in full for repairs. We get very creative and innovative especially given the high cost of our materials. (PP4)

I am the owner-manager. I do virtually everything. I do my marketing, and purchases. I have a lot of people who are not staff, those people I can call on when the need arises. Because of the nature of the product (premium wines and spirits) we are able to pass the increases in cost to our customers. (PP5)

I am the owner and I manage. I am the promoter and the sole proprietor. I do my marketing, and purchases. At any point in time, I have one full time employee working with me; during our peak periods, we use temporary hands. I will say that family members are part of the team... . In the wholesale business the margins are thin, but we make up in the volumes. Wholesale business is seasonal. During the slack periods we do retail; the profit margins are higher, but sales are slow. You must know what you earn; cash is not profit. It takes discipline not to dip your hands into the business. You need to keep good records. (PP6)

C6: Handling Competition

The MEs all faced one form of competition or another. PP1 must respond to other local food vendors; PP2, PP3, and PP4 faced intense competition from imported apparel and shoes, especially the goods from China and Dubai. PP5 and PP6 had to respond to competition from their suppliers and other retailers and wholesalers in the market. There are two major wines and beverages markets in Lagos; PP5 buys some of their products from these markets. PP6 competes with the many wholesale rice markets in Lagos; Rice is also sold in open markets and supermarkets. Except PP6 who sold wholesale rice, the other participants faced competition from online marketers such as Jumai and Konga.

Environmental scanning was a feature of the activities in the MEs. PP2 was explicit, “when something is not working; we find out who is succeeding and how they do it. We recognize that what works in one environment may not work for us, so we tweak with the solution.” PP2, PP3, and PP4 kept abreast of what was trending in their industries, and in the words of PP2, we reinvent our business. To ensure they were on top of their games, PP1 stayed close to the clients and their patrons, PP4 attended workshops, and PP5 attended international fairs and organized events.

The participants protected their enterprises by offering exceptional value in their products. MEs in emerging markets deploy their limited resources on entrepreneurial activities, creating value for the customer (see Darbi et al., 2018; S. Gupta, 2019; Pansera, 2018; Parwez & Shekar, 2019). PP1 always gave deals that exceeded the customers’ expectations; PP2 had exceptional finishing in their clothes designs; PP3 and

PP4 provided custom-made solutions, offering value to compete with imported brands; PP6 positioned for integrity in a market where integrity was in short supply.

All the participants used relational and personal marketing strategies to protect and grow their customer base. This marketing strategy is consistent with the empirical evidence from Blankson et al. (2018) that in rural Ghana, the relationship with customers protected the MEs from intense competition in their environment. Owner-managers of MEs in resource-constrained settings at the BoP use their social networks to develop their marketing and competitive edge (Baluku et al., 2018; Cieslik & D'Aoust, 2017; Darbi et al., 2018; Reynoso & Cabrera, 2019). The study participants developed long-lasting relationships with loyal customers who promoted the business through referrals and word of mouth. PP2 asserted that the customers had become like family: PP3, PP4 had customers who had been with the firms from inception, 11 years for PP3, and 25 years for PP4. The strong bonds with the customers was their competitive edge.

PP1 protected and grew the customer base by building lasting relationships and exceeding the customers' expectations.

When the customer orders a particular food, we give extras to make the menu more interesting for their guests. We study the client and their guests. Creativity and variety in the menu stand us apart; I am always thinking of ways to make the meals interesting and fun especially in long programs that run for many weeks... . We do our customer's favors. I don't pressure my good clients for payment. (PP1)

The reception area which also served as the waiting room for the customers in PP2's premises was air conditioned and comfortable. PP2 had also invested in a higher capacity noiseless generator for the comfort of the customers and the employees.

The business is good. Our customers are mainly up and coming professionals. We sew a lot of Ankara fabrics mainly as *aso ebi*. We are meticulous about our finishing. We have managed to keep reinventing ourselves; I am always learning new designs. (PP2)

PP3 was a niche player making custom-designed clothes for women, especially African women, and their unique shapes. These women found it difficult to fit into imported apparel made for European shapes and sizes. The international sizing standards did not favor many African women and their unique bodies. PP3 emphasized that the firm *created solutions for women's wardrobe*.

The acceptance of made in Nigeria products is low. Customers have the wrong perception that made in Nigeria products should be cheaper than the imported clothes. We educate our customers that custom-made garments are more expensive than mass-produced apparel. We know we cannot compete on price, but we provide value that you might not get in imported brands. Competing with foreign brands has not been easy; we try to match quality, but we cannot match the price. The depreciated Naira makes everything expensive. We chose to go the route of giving value. We strive to offer the best quality of fabrics, accessories, sewing, and service. We strive to do our best and be the best. You have to be dynamic and sensitive to trends and be open to new ways of doing things, to remain relevant. (PP3)PP4 was a niche player. The participant manufactured handmade custom

fitted leather shoes for discerning customers. PP4 faces stiff competition from imported synthetic shoes and used leather shoes that flood the Nigerian market.

Consistency is important. Of course, our shoes are made to measure and are of good quality. We understand the customers' needs and preferences. Our products are known for durability. Our packaging is unique. The product itself is "*ghaam*"-excellent/ unique. We produce genuine leather shoes, bags, and other accessories. So, now Nigerians are beginning to find out that many imported shoes and accessories are made from synthetic leather, which peels in a couple of months; they do not get value for money. We give value. We try to be creative as well with what we do. We have created a creative niche for ourselves. To keep on top of changes in the business, especially the processes, we attended many workshops so that we can move with the trends in the industry. We have changed our machines so we can do the things trending in classical shoes. (PP4)

PP5 sold premium spirits that were available in local open markets where the importers also competed directly. Operating in the open market, PP5 failed within 4 years of start-up. PP5 relocated the shop to a highbrow shopping mall close to the target market. The private events which PP5 organized were responses to the competition in the market.

I organize wine tasting events with close friends and customers. The events help me know and understand my customer's tastes. We also combine wine tasting with other events like art and photography that appeal to the customers that we seek. Our

customers know their drinks; when they need high-end wines and spirits, they call me. (PP5)

Apart from the three major wholesales markets, rice is sold in every open market, and in supermarkets in Lagos. Rice is a commodity, and the price is common knowledge. The integrity of PP6 was a competitive edge. In the unregulated commodity markets, rice merchants cheat on weight and quality, the switch brands and they might also sell expired products. PP6 maintained that the business was good; rice is a staple food in Nigeria:

We tell the customer the quality, the brand, and the prices. The customer can vouch for us. Our word is our bond; we don't cheat on weights. I can say that (integrity) has been a competitive advantage for us; our integrity speaks for us... . Customers like options. Carrying many brands affects our inventory carrying cost, but we try as much as possible to meet their needs. We know the brands that move in our community. (PP6)

Last Words

The last question in the interview protocol elucidated advices from the study participants to aspiring and existing owner-managers of MEs on the ways to sustain their business. The advice from the participants reinforced some of the strategies that the participants had earlier mentioned during the interviews (see Table 4). The advice was integrated into the generation of the themes.

Table 4*Advice to Aspiring and Existing Owner-Managers of MEs*

Theme	PP1	PP2	PP3	PP4	PP5	PP6
Passion	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Focus/Vision		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Relationships	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Commitment	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Persistence	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Learning	✓		✓		✓	✓
Hard work	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Self-reliance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Religiosity	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

The advice from the six participants pertained mainly to the self-development and the psychological frame of the owner-manager. The suggestions that participants gave about the business still related to the self-management of the owner-manager. For example, when the participants PP3, PP5 advised the owner-managers to be clear about their vision, we understand that the owner-manager should be clear about the vision of the business. In giving the advice, the participants buttressed their advice with personal experiences, thereby shedding more light on the research question – what strategies the participants had used to sustain their businesses for more than 5 years.

Passion, persistence, and resilience were essential constructs for the survival of the MEs. PP3 advised that owner-managers must love what they do. In PP1's words, "whatever business people will like to go into, it must be something that they are very, very passionate about; because passion goes a long way." Indeed, passion fuels commitment, persistence, and resilience (Al Issa, 2020; Cardon et al., 2017). The owner-manager must find fulfilment in their endeavour. PP4 emphasized resilience and passion.

PP3 cautioned on the need to moderate passion with discipline- “You also have to be disciplined. I learned that the hard way, that the business goes beyond just passion.” PP1, PP2, PP3, PP5 stressed the need to believe in oneself and learn from mistakes. PP5 advised that entrepreneurs should “be ready to take risks. Remove the fear of failure, as failure is necessary.” PP3 cautioned that the entrepreneur should not take “stupid risks.”

Vision

PP3 emphasized the need to have clear vision and focus. “If you don’t have a clear vision, no strategies can save you. Yes, it was the clarity of vision that attracted the right strategy that took us out of the dark pit.” PP4 “Stay committed, stay focused”. PP5 - “Be committed to your vision.”

Mission

PP6 advised owner-managers of MEs to be clear on the needs they are meeting. The products or services must meet the needs in their environment for the business to be sustainable. PP3 corroborated the position of PP6 - “entrepreneurs should identify a problem, and be passionate about solving the problem.”

Hard Work

PP2 advised that “They must be ready to work hard, be disciplined and be consistent.” PP3 remarked - “You may have a dream; you may even have the talent, the gift from the Most-High, *but* if you are not willing to put in the hard work, you may not succeed.” PP4 cautioned - “They need to work hard.”

It Is Not All About Money

PP1 advised- “Focus on growing the business not just on profit. I need to make money, but I don’t put money on the front burner.” PP2- “It is not all the time that the only thing you think of is the money you are going to make. It is about enjoying what you are doing. You must get your fulfilment from there.” PP3 “It goes beyond making money.”

Religiosity

PP1 “-if it is not your calling, you will not succeed.” PP4 - “Pray.” PP5 - “Be prayerful.” PP6 “Another advice that I will give is that they should have faith; trust for God’s favor by being prayerful.” PP3 referred to talent as a gift from the “Most High,” the “Most High” is God.

Discussion of Results

The aim of this study was to unearth the survival strategies of MEs in a resource-constrained, hostile environment such as Nigeria. MEs in Nigeria is a heterogeneous group of firms that employ fewer than nine persons and the owner-manager. These MEs, 99.8% of small businesses, employing nearly 70 million Nigerians, fail before 5 years of start-up (see McKenzie, 2017; NBS, 2019b). Despite the vagaries in the hostile Nigerian setting, some MEs have survived longer than 5 years. The strategic imperatives of MEs in the resource-constrained environment at the BoP are different from the formal strategic planning processes for large structured firms. Darbi et al. (2018) and Reynoso and Cabrera (2019) called for research to understand the management of MEs at the BoP.

This study explored the survival strategies of MEs in Nigeria, a resource-deprived environment.

The thematic analysis of the data from this study yielded fourteen strategies that were reduced into three themes, Theme A. entrepreneurial resilience, Theme B. relationship nurturing, and Theme C. adaptive operations. The survival strategies of the participants revolved around the owner-managers enacting resilience, leveraging their social relationships and alliances, and adapting the business processes to respond to the internal and external environments. The survival of the MEs depended on the owner-managers' capabilities to manage their relationships with others. The owner-managers also demonstrated abilities to adapt their firm's operations to respond to the challenges in their ecosystem.

The psychological makeup of the owner-manager is vital for their wellbeing and the sustenance of their businesses. As PP3 noted, the owner-manager plays many roles within and outside the firm; the demands of these roles could be overwhelming. Luthans and Youssef-Morgan (2017) posited that four resources, hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism (HERO), make up the owner-managers and the MEs' psychological capital. Hope keeps the entrepreneurs' ambitions alive as they persevere in achieving their goals. The entrepreneur's efficacy promotes the belief and confidence that they can run their business successfully. Resilience is the entrepreneur's staying power and commitment to fudge on against all odds, and optimism or positivity is the attitude that things will work well and keeps the entrepreneur forward-looking (Ayala & Manzano, 2014; Fatoki, 2018; Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). Fatoki (2018) presented three constructs of resilience

as resourcefulness, hardiness, and opportunism. Hardiness is the ability of the entrepreneur to take control of themselves and their environment. Resourcefulness is making do with the minimal resources available in their environment, a crucial skill in a resource-deprived ecosystem. Another construct of resilience is grit (Al Issa, 2020). The study participants used resilience as a strategy to sustain their business in their challenging setting.

The study participants leveraged their relationships to develop the adaptive processes in their business. Darbi et al. (2018), Martin et al. (2018), Reynoso and Cabrera (2019), Warren and Szostek (2017), and Williams and Kedir (2017) submitted that the personal networks, intuition, and other skills of the owner-managers compensate for the constraints imposed by the scarcity of resources in their environments. Baluku et al. (2018) and Yohanes et al. (2017) found that the social competencies of the owner-manager affected their strategic choices. Agyapong et al. (2017), in their study of MEs in Ghana, found that the social capital of the owner-managers influenced the performance of their enterprise. Word of mouth and relationship marketing were the main marketing strategies in the resource-deprived environment. The participants were engrossed in the day-to-day running of the business. In the words of PP4, "I developed alliances. They (alliances) do the sales and marketing so I can concentrate on manufacturing." PP3 shared that the customers were happy to model their apparel.

Social capital includes the relationships within the organization. All the participants relied more on external networks to support their operations. PP3 demonstrated some interest in building an inclusive organization; PP3 was sure the

employees “can take ownership of the systems even when I am not there.” Aladejebi (2020) and Yekini et al. (2018) established that stealing and pilfering by employees are endemic in MEs and small businesses in Nigeria. Gherhes et al. (2020) submitted that the MEs in disadvantaged environments are not able to compete for employees with the right skills. The six participants saw the employees as hindrances in the business because of poor work ethics and attitude – the employees stole and were lazy.

The owner-managers psychological capital and their relationships are essential resources for the firm’s survival. Social capital and psychological capital combine to enhance the networking and marketing efforts and the owner-managers strategic resolve (Baluku et al., 2018). In their study of MEs in Kenya and Uganda, Baluku et al. (2018) found that the owner-managers social competence and psychological capital affected MEs’ performance and survival. The position of Baluku et al. (2018) was congruent with Yohanes et al. (2017), who established that social capital was critical for the operations of MEs and other small businesses in Indonesia. Cieslik and D’Aoust (2017) confirmed that owner-managers of MEs relied on their networks and their embeddedness to compensate for resource constraints in their environment. In the current study, the six research participants, managing their MEs in the resource-constrained environment, had developed the capabilities to leverage their personal and business relationships to build their social capital. PP1 stressed the importance of the relationships with family members, especially at the start-up phase for funding and referrals. The six participants emphasized the need to build ongoing relationships with suppliers, customers, and other stakeholders. The study participants had developed support systems that allowed them to

keep lean staff. The social capital of the participants augmented the resource constraints and risks in the Nigerian environment.

The outcome of the current study showed that access to finance was not critical for the survival of MEs. Finance and funding are essential for the successful establishment of the business venture (Caliendo et al., 2020) but not for the survival of the enterprise. Only participant, PP6, dealing in wholesale rice merchandise, mentioned the importance of financing for the business; wholesale of rice is capital intensive. Even though a state government loan augmented the start-up capital, PP6 pointed out that the firm relied on financial support from family members. Agyapong and Attram (2019), Rankhumise and Letsoalo (2019), and Yusoff et al. (2018) also established that the level of financial literacy of the owner-managers affected the performance and growth of the business.

PP3 took commercial loans to finance expansion; poor financial planning and management pushed the PP3 to near collapse. In the words of PP3, we almost became 'obsolete.' Funding the business with commercial loans was not a strategy for the survival of the MEs at the BoP. PP4 advised owner-managers interested in the survival of their enterprise to avoid debt. The preferred sources of funding by the study participants were family, supplier credits, and internally generated funds- customers paying in advance.

The current research findings are contrary to the assumption that MEs grow into small businesses, especially when growth is measured by the number of employees. In Nigeria, MEs have fewer than 10 employees, and small businesses 10 to 49 employees.

(NBS, 2019b). The six participants operating for over a decade remained MEs; after 25 years of operations, PP2 and PP4 had fewer than five full-time employees. The study participants appeared comfortable with the size of their businesses. This research finding is congruent with Song and Guo (2020) and Vasconcelos (2021) that not all owner-managers are driven by economic or financial gains. The growth and survival of the enterprise reflect the owner-managers desires and motivation for setting up the business (Baluku et al., 2018; Caliendo et al., 2020; Gherhes et al., 2016; Song & Guo, 2020). Some owner-managers deliberately keep the operations small to retain control of the firm; others keep their businesses micro to avoid the institutional and regulatory challenges that come with growth (de Souza & Seifert, 2018). The study participants have remained microenterprises employing fewer than nine persons; the reasons were beyond the scope of this study.

An emergent strategy that the population in this study used was keeping their business micro. The six study participants prided themselves in the knowledge of their business and remained micro. Lumpkin and Dess (1996) and de Souza and Seifert (2018) noted that some owner-managers make deliberate decisions not to grow the business to retain autonomy and control or to preserve their lifestyle, and for other emotive reasons. Many owner-managers are engrossed in the day-to-day running of their firms and do not have time or energy to grow the business (Gherhes et al., 2020). The six study participants operated in small shops that may preclude their growth. PP4 had worked for 25 years in the same workspace that could not accommodate more than three persons at a time. After more than a decade of operations, none of the participants had grown to

employ more than five persons. The small size is not necessarily a disadvantage, it might be a choice.

The performance of the firm reflects the financial and nonfinancial aspirations of the owner-managers. The participants had priorities other than economic or financial gains. PP1 puts the firm's survival above profitability, especially in the harsh environment, "we want to be there when this pandemic is over." PP2, PP3 also stressed passion and customer relationship over profitability. PP2 said, "it is not always about money; you must find fulfillment in your job." Our findings also align with Aftab et al. (2018), Song and Guo (2020), and Visser et al. (2019); the participants in the current study did not measure their success and fulfilment by economic and financial gains. The owner-manager determines the strategic direction of the enterprise.

Entrepreneurs aspiring to survive in Nigeria need "to pray and ask for God's favor." Blankson et al. (2018), in their study of marketing practices in subsistence Ghana, submitted that religiosity permeated the business practices. du Toit et al. (2020) in their study of survivalist MEs in South Africa established that religiosity was one of the survival strategies of these resource-impooverished MEs. Religion evidenced in religiosity is a way of life, part of the culture in most African countries. Aftab et al. (2018) found that religiosity affected people's physical and mental wellness. Aftab et al. submitted that religiosity is an effective coping mechanism, especially in resource-deprived and challenging environments (Pandey & Singh, 2019). The demands on the entrepreneurs are onerous. In the words of PP3:

One of the challenges of a small business owner is that the demands are overwhelming. The owner-manager plays too many roles. You get to a point where you want to go home and abandon everything behind. It gets that overwhelming. You are juggling too many things, balancing the personal, the family, and the business roles and needs.

The business environment in Nigeria is complex and dysfunctional. In the words of PP3, "Nigeria is not like any other country." Religiosity might be a coping mechanism that owner-managers use to handle the hostile environment. Aftab et al. (2018), Almuhtaseb et al. (2020), and Skrzypińska (2021) linked religiosity with sense-making and decision making. Religiosity may enhance people's satisfaction with life. The religiosity of the participants might explain their stance of not being overly focused on profitability. All the participants noted that making money was important, but money was not everything. PP1 and PP3 emphasized the need to grow the business and the customer base; PP2 stressed the need for fulfillment while making money. This study outcome is consistent with Vasconcelos (2021) that spiritual capital emphasized meaning and value over financial gains. The study participants advised aspiring entrepreneurs to find their calling; the participants linked passion to the calling. Entrepreneurs should find meaning and fulfillment in their vocation. In their seminal work, Vasconcelos (2021) surmised that spiritual capital enhances the resilience and wellbeing of the individual. The six study participants displayed high resilience levels in the adverse Nigerian socio-economic environment. Religiosity is a resource and a dynamic capability.

Findings to the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the RBV augmented by the DCT. In the RBV, the firm is a heterogeneous aggregation of resources, knowledge, and capabilities. The firm's growth and its sustainability depend on available resources (Penrose, 2009) and the processes that the managers use to exploit these resources to create and sustain the firm's competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984). The managers must be capable of responding to the challenges in the ever-changing environment. The owner-managers capabilities and skills determine the success of the enterprise (Ferreira et al., 2016). Khan and Quaddus (2017), using the RBV and DCT lenses, concluded that MEs' sustainable growth was a function of the firm's resources and capabilities. Olthaar et al. (2019) established that the RBV was useful to understand the strategies that MEs at the BOP use to compete with other MEs and the larger firms in their environment. Darbi et al. (2018), in their review of extant literature, shared that the RBV is a dominant framework for understanding the management of small enterprises in the informal sector. Burvill et al. (2018) concluded that the RBV combined with DCT provided a better framework than if used separately. This study further contributes to the use of the RBV and DCT in the context of the strategies of MEs in resource-constrained ecosystems and at the BoP.

The operations of the firm depend on the available resources. In the RBV, the firm is a heterogeneous aggregation of resources, knowledge, and capabilities. The internal and external resources could be tangible or intangible. The tangible resources are mainly physical. The intangible assets, nonphysical resources include internal capacities

and skills, social capital, brand equity, goodwill, among others. This study's outcome is consistent with Barney (2001) and Wernerfelt (1984) that the internal resources influence the strategic options that the managers explore. The psychological and social competencies of the study participants influenced the operations of the firm. The psychological bundle comprised resources and competencies such as resilience, passion, commitment, persistence, positivity, and religiosity. The social network of the participants included family, friends, customers, suppliers, and alliances. The dynamic capabilities of the owner-managers and the internal processes were resources that sustained the MEs.

In the resource-constrained environment at the BoP, the intangible assets drive the strategies that the owner-managers deploy. The participants leveraged their personal and customer relationships to run and promote their operations. The quality of the products from PP1, PP2, PP3, PP4 met their customers' needs. PP5 and PP6 sold commodity-like products also ensured that their wares were targeted as specific consumers. All the participants used relational marketing, word of mouth, and referrals from trusted and loyal customers to ward off competition and grow their businesses. The capabilities of the owner-managers of the MEs and their social networks influence the survival strategies of their enterprises (Darbi et al., 2018; Wall & Bellamy, 2019). The RBV and DCT were adequate conceptual lenses that framed the qualitative multiple case study of the survival strategies of MEs in a resource-constrained environment such as Nigeria.

Applications to Professional Practice

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the strategies that owner-managers of MEs use in sustaining their businesses in Nigeria and, by extension, at the BoP. Sohns and Diez (2019) highlighted the dearth of research on MEs in developing economies. Akinyemi and Adejumo (2017) and Martens et al. (2016) noted the performance of MEs, especially those in sub-Saharan Africa, was under-researched: the literature on MEs in the developed economies might not be relevant at the BoP. Case studies are contextual (Yin, 2018), and the experiences in the western world are not transferable to the LDCs (Gupta, 2017; Mor et al., 2020; Umadia & Kasztelnik, 2020). The current research into the survival strategies of MEs in Nigeria bridged the gap in knowledge of the operations of MEs in developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, and by extension, at the BoP.

The study aligns with the findings of other scholars and researchers that the owner-manager is the center of the activities in the ME. The owner-manager of ME is responsible for the day to day running of the enterprise (Gherhes et al., 2016). Eijdenberg et al. (2017), Gopaul and Rampersad (2020), and Majama and Magang (2017) found that the owner-managers of MEs do not engage in formal planning but use intuition and knowledge of the business and the environment to chart the strategic course of the firm. Congruent with Darbi et al. (2018) and Reynoso and Cabrera (2019), none of the study participants engaged in a rigorous academic strategic planning process. The participants relied on their learning from their experiences to chart the course of the firm; in the way of businesses operating informally, the participants used capabilities and resources that

Darbi et al. (2018) referred to as “unique” and “atypical” resources. The study participants relied on their networks of customers, suppliers, friends, and family for the operation and sustenance of the business. The findings of the current study might be of interest to scholars and researchers interested in MEs, entrepreneurship, strategy, and managerial practices of MEs in informal settings at the BoP.

The findings of the current study contribute to the understanding of the strategies that owner-managers of MEs use in resource-constrained environments such as Nigeria. Most MEs in Nigeria and the BoP operate in the informal sector; the outcome of this study contributes to the knowledge of the operations of MEs in the informal sector and narrows the gap in understanding of the operations of MEs in developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

The study participants demonstrated some levels of religiosity. Van-Buren et al. (2020) and Vasconcelos (2021) averred that, despite the importance, the role of religiosity in the workplace is under-researched. Their position was corroborated by Skrzypińska (2021), who advocated for more research and theoretical studies into spiritual capital and spiritual intelligence in the workplace. The non-financial goals of the owner-managers affect their strategic decisions (du Toit et al., 2020; Song & Guo, 2020). This study attests to the importance of religiosity in the operations of MEs in resource-constrained environments like Nigeria.

The resources and capabilities of the owner-manager drive the strategies that improve the survival of MEs in resource-constrained environments like Nigeria. The formal, sophisticated strategic planning processes are not relevant for MES in the

informal settings at the BoP, where the institutional framework is either weak or nonexistent (Gupta, 2017) and the environment not conducive; strategy is contextual (Sanjay et al., 2020). Darbi et al. (2018) and Lin (2018) submitted that western type strategic planning was not relevant in the informal sector where the actors endure resource constraints and institutional hazards. In MEs, the owner-managers the only constant actors in the enterprises; decision-making rests on their shoulders. The findings provide insight into the informal ways that the owner-managers rely on themselves and their capabilities to develop long-lasting relationships to strategically position themselves and their firm.

The resources available to the MEs at the BoP are limited. However, owner-managers can develop their capabilities to deploy and combine scarce resources creatively (Tehseen et al., 2019). Luthans and Youssef-Morgan (2017) noted that there are techniques to enhance owner-managers psychological capital and social competencies. Resilience improves the survival of the enterprise; owner-managers should invest in developing their capacity for adaptiveness, resourcefulness, and purposefulness (Ayala & Manzano, 2014). The owner-managers interested in sustaining their MEs should concentrate their energies on developing the strategies identified in this study.

Owner-managers might enhance the performance of their MEs by investing in their personal development, building lasting relationships, and growing their networks. Business at the BoP that cannot engage actively in advertising and marketing may use their connections and networks to develop the business, increase the customer base, and

ward of competition. Managerial practices to sustain the company depend on the capabilities of the owner-managers.

MEs are essential links between local resources and the medium and big firms. MEs accounted for over 90% of the manufacturing sector in Nigeria (NBS, 2019b). The MEs and small businesses are hubs of local innovation (Jamak et al., 2017; NBS, 2019b) and stimulate industrialization in the environment. The improvement in the survival rate of the MEs might lead to a more vibrant local business environment in Nigeria.

Consultants and agencies responsible for developing policies and structures to support the operations and the sustainability of this crucial sector of the economy might use the findings from this study to develop relevant curricula and programs to improve the capabilities of owner-managers and the sustainability of the MEs in the country.

Implications for Social Change

Unemployment poses serious socio-economic challenges to Nigeria. Nigeria is a youthful nation with more than half of the population between the ages 15 and 35 years (World Bank, 2018). The youths constitute almost 60% of the labor force (NBS, 2020). In Quarter 2 of 2020, more than half of Nigerians were either unemployed or underemployed; the unemployed was 27.1%, and the underemployment was 28.6% of the labor force. The highest level of unemployment was in the youth category; 34.9% of Nigerian youths were unemployed, and another 28.2% were underemployed (NBS, 2020). Whenever a ME fails, one or more persons, mainly the youths, are back in the burgeoning masses of the unemployed or underemployed (Bushe, 2019). Some of the social vices linked with poverty and unemployment in Nigeria include insurgencies in the

northern part of the country, youth restiveness in the Niger Delta area in the South, kidnapping, and demand for ransoms, thuggery, stealing, and various economic crimes and fraud (NBS, 2019a; Okeke & Nwankpa, 2018; World Bank, 2020b). Fraud, pilfering, and stealing are some constraints to MEs' growth and survival in Nigeria (Umadia & Kasztelnik, 2020). The success and survival of MEs will keep more people, especially the youths, in sustainable employment, thereby reducing the social ills pervading the polity and improving Nigerians' socio-economic well-being.

Owner-managers of the MEs at the BoP are embedded in their environments. The owner-managers have enormous responsibilities for sustaining themselves, their families, employees, and other dependents; they are the social security for themselves and their dependents. The attendant psychological, emotional, and financial implications of failed MEs are huge (Bushe, 2019). When the owner-managers and employees lose their sources of income, they, their families, and other dependents suffer. As more owner-managers learn and practice the survival strategy in their unique environment, the BoP, the MEs' longevity in Nigeria would improve. As the MEs survive and the self-efficacy of the owner-managers increases, the owner-managers might be motivated to set up more businesses (Al Issa, 2020; Gupta, 2017). With the survival and proliferation of MEs, more Nigerians will be employed; Nigerians' socio-economic and general well-being would improve.

MEs are critical for the socio-economic well-being of the country. Jha and Depoo (2017) found that small businesses stimulate economic activities in their environments. The development of the Nigerian economy relies on the performance of the MEs; the

MEs contribute more than half of the country's GDP (NBS, 2019b). The oil sector accounted for over 70% of the country's income but contributed less than 10% to the GDP. Ijeoma et al. (2018) stressed the need to diversify Nigeria's economy; the overreliance on crude oil exposes the country to the vagaries of the international oil market. The survival of MEs might lead to a more inclusive economic development of the country. As more people have sustainable employment, the government would gain higher income from taxes, and the country's prosperity would increase. Increased revenue from local taxes might reduce the country's overdependence on crude oil.

Nigeria is the most populous country south of the Sahara and the 7th globally (United Nations, 2019). Nigeria is also one of the fastest-growing populations; by the year 2024, Nigeria will be the 3rd largest population in the world (United Nations, 2019). The economic well-being of Nigeria affects global economic well-being.

Recommendations for Action

The aim of this research was to explore the survival strategies of MEs in Nigeria's impecunious, fragile and resource-constrained environment. The three themes that emerged from this study were resilience, relationships and alliances, and adaptive business processes. Because the owner-manager is the critical employee in the MEs in Nigeria (NBS, 2019b), the strategic direction and survival of the business depend on the owner-managers. The research findings will help the owner-managers and other stakeholders interested in developing MEs and other small businesses, especially in resource-constrained settings. Some stakeholders in Nigeria include the federal and state

government, the organized private sectors, and charity organizations. SMEDAN, the development banks, and many NGOs are involved in the development of entrepreneurs.

The first recommendation is to owner-managers of MEs and other small businesses. Aspiring entrepreneurs should identify and address specific needs in their environment. The entrepreneurs should set up enterprises that they are passionate about and should focus on solving particular problems. The owner-managers need passion, resilience, and commitment to sustain their business in the hostile Nigerian business environment.

The owner-managers should invest in their self-development and build strong relationships to sustain their firms. Positivity and psychological capital are essential resources that owner-managers should develop. Luthans and Youssef-Morgan (2017) posited that positivity and psychological capital are learned skills. Similarly, Ayala and Manzano (2014) maintained that the dynamic capability resilience could be developed with time. Barrios et al. (2019) and Barros et al. (2019) established that training programs for sustenance entrepreneurs in resource-constrained environments should include hope to enhance resiliency and goal attainment abilities of entrepreneurs. The owner-managers can and should learn persuasiveness, emotional intelligence, personal discipline, and creative problem solving to improve their entrepreneurial success.

Another recommendation is for the relevant stakeholders to review the policies, strategies, and programs for nurturing MEs. The training and capacity development curricula for entrepreneurship and improved business practices in Nigeria should incorporate this study's findings. Some interested parties at the national level include the

Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, Federal Ministry of Women and Employment, National Directorate of Employment (NDE), charged with developing entrepreneurship in Nigeria. These ministries have counterparts at the state level in the 36 states in the country. Vocational schools, universities, and other educational institutions are also engaged in entrepreneurship education. The stakeholders should incorporate this research's outcome to develop curricula and capacity development programs relevant to the MEs at the BoP. Researchers and scholars have questioned the transferability of curriculum used in the western world might not be appropriate or applicable in other environments. Barrios et al. (2019) submitted that the training and development should be relevant to the entrepreneur's environment. The outcome of this study was instructive and might help develop youth entrepreneurship in Nigeria.

A final recommendation is that the various governments should create an enabling environment for entrepreneurship to thrive. The MEs would be more productive with better institutional and infrastructural support. Song and Guo (2020) established the relationship between a trusting ecosystem and the entrepreneurial initiatives of the owner-managers. Consistency in policies might enhance trust in the Nigerian ecosystem, thereby creating an inducement for entrepreneurship.

Who Should Pay Attention

The outcome of this research might interest stakeholders interested in the development of Nigeria's economy. MEs are critical for economic growth, poverty alleviation, wealth redistribution, industrialization, and job creation in Nigeria. The MEs account for over 99% of small businesses and, as a group, are the largest employers of

labor (NBS, 2019b). The various arms of government at the federal or state levels, policymakers, institutions, and organizations involved in the development of entrepreneurs will find this study's outcome helpful.

The Federal Government of Nigeria had developed many initiatives to stimulate entrepreneurship and employment in Nigeria. SMEDAN is responsible for promoting and nurturing entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs in Nigeria. SMEADAN has programs for capacity building and empowerment programs. For example, *One Local Government One Product Program (OLOP)* is to revitalize entrepreneurship in rural areas. The *N-Power scheme* aims to create jobs and empower Nigerian youths. The Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development's strategic thrust for the period 2019 to 2023 is to develop Nigerian youths for successful entrepreneurship. The Directorate of Employment (NDE) is charged with reducing unemployment, especially among the youths. Over 60 % of Nigerian youths are underemployed or unemployed (NBS, 2020). The Entrepreneurship Development Center (EDCs) was established in Nigerian universities to expose students to entrepreneurship. The federal and state governments, private firms, and non-governmental organizations have vocational training outfits across the nation.

The curriculum for entrepreneurship training for aspiring or budding entrepreneurs in educational and vocational institutions should integrate theory and practice. The entrepreneur must understand the intricacies of their business but the technical competencies alone will not sustain the business. This study specifies some other competencies for survival in the Nigerian environment. The stakeholders involved

in developing MEs and small businesses can use the outcome of this research to build relevant curricula and capacity development programs relevant to the MEs at the BoP.

Owner-managers of MEs and other small businesses interested in sustaining their enterprises should also pay attention to the findings of this study. Aspiring entrepreneurs in resource-constrained environments at the BoP can use this study's knowledge to develop themselves. The entrepreneurs learn to invest and direct their limited resources in developing sustainable business models.

Policymakers in government responsible for solving the diversification and stability of the Nigerian economy should be interested in the sustainable growth and development of MEs; the MEs contribute more than half of the country's GDP and have the capacity to do more. Consultants, educators, and development and donor agencies might find the survival strategies useful for designing capacity-building programs for the training and development of entrepreneurs in Nigeria. The federal and state governments and the various regulatory agencies might use this study's results to develop and promote policies that spur the survival of MEs in Nigeria.

The governments should create an enabling environment for the development and sustainability of MEs and other small businesses. MEs are catalysts for economic growth, poverty alleviation, wealth redistribution, industrialization, and job creation. The institutional framework and infrastructure in Nigeria are inadequate and disabling for the operations MEs (Jayeola et al., 2018). Even though the ease of doing business in Nigeria improved slightly in 2019, Nigeria still ranked as one of the worst places to do business

(World Bank, 2020a). The government should provide consistent policies, institutional support, and functional infrastructures to sustain entrepreneurship in the country.

Disseminating the Results

The outcome of this study is relevant for academics and practice. I shall share the knowledge from this study with the social, business, and academic communities. As a mark of gratitude, I will share the executive summary of this study's outcome with the six owner-managers who volunteered to participate in this study: hoping that the participants will learn and share their learning with other aspiring and existing owner-managers of MEs. I shall leverage my various personal and professional networks to share the knowledge from this study. I shall seek opportunities for involvement in the various capacity-building programs with some government and non-government organizations. For example, SMEADAN and Nigerian Bank for Industry have programs for developing and nurturing entrepreneurship in Nigeria.

I shall disseminate the insights from this research to the academic communities through publications in professional and scholarly journals with international reach. I shall avail myself of the resources and networks in Walden University communities. Some local newspapers and periodicals accept papers for publication in the business sections. I shall seek the opportunities to facilitate entrepreneurship programs organized by The Nigerian Institute of Consultants, National Institute of Management Development, Centre for Management Development, and The Lagos Chamber of Commerce.

I am committed to raising the standards of entrepreneurship in Nigeria and in Africa. I am a facilitator and mentor in a university and some not-for-profit organizations involved in the development of entrepreneurs in Nigeria and in Africa. As a certified trainer and behavioral coach, I shall collaborate with these and other institutions to integrate the learning from the current study into the curricula and capacity-building programs that would enhance the survival of MEs beyond 5 years of operations.

Recommendations for Further Research

In the current qualitative multiple case study, I explored the strategies that successful owner-managers use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years of operations. I purposefully selected six firms that had operated for more than 5 years in Lagos. Delimitations to scope the current study included the small sample size of six MEs, the limited geographical location, Lagos, and owner-managers who I could communicate with in without the aid of the interpreter.

The first recommendation is that other researchers may increase the number of participants and study cases in different locations in Nigeria and other countries to enhance the generalizability and transferability of the study outcome. The strategies deployed by owner-managers of MEs in urban centers may differ from those employed in rural settings because resources available to firms in rural settings are different from those in urban centers (see Blankson et al., 2018; Gherhes et al., 2020; Greenberg et al., 2018; Kosa et al., 2018). The current study was conducted in Lagos, a cosmopolitan area in Nigeria. Researchers may explore the strategies used by MEs in rural settings in Nigeria and other countries.

The current study was based on cross-sectional data; the cases were mixed. Four participants were in production, PP2 and PP3 in dressmaking, PP4 in shoemaking, and PP1 in catering for events. Two participants were traders; PP5 sold premium wines, PP5 sold rice (wholesale and retail). Future studies might focus on specific industries and sectors within the ecosystem. In line with the concepts of DCT (Teece et al., 1997), longitudinal studies in different subsectors and different locations might increase the knowledge of the survival strategies that successful MEs use over time.

The six participants operated in the informal sector of the Nigerian economy. The characteristics of the MEs and the owner-managers operating in the informal sector of an ecosystem differ from their counterpart in the formal system (see Darbi et al., 2018; Dionysus & Arifin, 2020; Reynoso & Cabrera, 2019). Researchers may opt to explore the differences in the survival strategies of MEs in the formal and informal sector of the economy.

The classification of MEs in Nigeria creates a heterogeneous group. Irrespective of the size of operations, a firm is classed as a ME as long as it employed fewer than 10 persons. Consequently, a multi-naira business will be in the ME category with the survivalist street traders as long as the number of employees is less than 10. Other researchers may explore the strategies and business models used by MEs at different levels of operations and in different lines of business.

The cultural diversity in Nigeria provides opportunities for researchers to extend the survival strategies to different cultural settings. The cultural milieu influences the operations of the MEs (see Adeyemi et al., 2019; Akoh, 2020; Blankson et al., 2018;

Darbi et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2019). Because of the limitations on the resources available for this research, I was careful to avoid cases that could introduce cultural, social, or religious conflicts. More than 50% of the owner-managers of MEs in Nigeria are illiterate (NBS, 2019b). I also purposefully selected participants that I could communicate with without the need of an interpreter. Other researchers may replicate the current study in different cultural settings and at different literacy levels.

An interesting outcome from the current study was the significance of religiosity for the operations and survival of the MEs in Nigeria. Other researchers might explore the import of spirituality and religiosity in the operations of MEs in other resource-constrained environments like Nigeria. The participants emphasized that the essence of business was not always about economic returns. Other scholars may also research into organizational objectives beyond financial and economic goals.

The conceptual framework for the current study combined the RBV and the DCT; the two lenses were used interchangeably. Other researchers may explore the linkages between resources and dynamic capabilities in the survival strategies of MEs. Researchers may use other lenses to frame the understanding of the management processes at the BoP. There is a lot of research opportunities at the BoP and in the informal sector.

Reflections

A professor friend said the doctoral journey is a test of will. Each step of the doctoral journey reinforced the learning from previous steps and provided the fulcrum for the next steps. As the journey progressed, I admitted that to produce research work

relevant to practice and scholarship, I needed to drop my biases and learn scholarly work rigor. I immersed myself in literature, upgrading my knowledge in my area of interest. The more I thought I knew, the more I found I did not know. I admit the process of learning was a humbling experience. The ocean of knowledge is not only vast but deep; in the depths are riches waiting for searchers.

I elected to conduct multiple case study research to develop my capabilities as a qualitative researcher. I focused on MEs because of the importance of the group for Nigeria's socio-economic well-being; over 98% of small businesses are MEs accounting for over half of Nigeria's GDP (NBS, 2019b). I was particularly intrigued to learn that the average start-up capital for MEs is about \$100. Unfortunately, most of these MEs fail within 5 years of start-up. Despite the difficulties in doing business in Nigeria, some MEs, like the population of the current studies, survive and thrive in the hostile, resource-constrained Nigerian setting. The literature on the factors contributing to the failure or success of small businesses, especially in the developed world, is abundant. The literature on the operations and the strategies of MEs, especially in LDC, is not well understood (Gherhes et al., 2020). The current study provided empirical evidence on the operations of MEs run by the owner-managers in resource-constrained environments.

I worked in formal organizations where strategic planning and monitoring were practiced religiously. Annual budgeting and monthly performance reviews were part of the organizational life in those performance-driven environments. I had to bracket my knowledge and experience of "strategy" to learn from the perspectives of the participants. The outcome of the current study was interesting and unexpected; the strategies that these

entrepreneurs used were contrary to the classical MBA strategy taught in business schools. The simplicity of the survival strategies of the owner-managers was intriguing. The six study participants operating in different lines of business sounded almost alike; the same themes resonated in the six cases: resilience, adaptability, and relationships. The survival strategy can be disseminated to the literate and illiterate ME owners in Nigeria, especially those in rural areas.

The research process was demanding. Finding 10 potential MEs and owner-managers who met the selection criteria was daunting as there were no current database for MEs; most MEs in Nigeria operate informally. The same way the participants leveraged on their relationships to sustain their businesses, I also had to leverage on my relationships to locate the participants for the current study.

I learned a lot from the six participants who shared their experiences with me. I admired their tenacity and their passion for their business, surviving against all odds. The six participants were on top of their games; they understood their business. Their positivity was uncanny; the raging COVID-19 pandemic did not seem to deter the optimism of the study participants. PP1 remarked, “After COVID-19, we will still be here.” The positivity could be linked to their religiosity.

The multiple-case qualitative research study of the MEs engaged all my senses. Castleberry and Nolen (2018) submitted that qualitative studies using the thematic analysis approach are demanding. The most intellectually engaging yet the most fulfilling aspect of the research process was the analysis and interpretation of the research data, which required critical thinking and creativity to make sense of the data. As Castleberry

and Nolen (2018) recommended, I took time off the data analysis a few times to refresh my thought process. I imbibed the practice of reflexivity in the research process. I apply reflexivity to other areas of my life.

Many entrepreneurship programs emphasize the acquisition and development of technical skills. The outcome of this study provides evidence that the psychological and social competencies help the owner-managers of MEs cope with the complex, challenging, and highly dynamic environments. One of the study participants remarked, “this is Nigeria, not like any other country.” Barrios et al. (2019) stressed the need to develop programs to enhance the resilience of entrepreneurs in challenging environments. Capacity development programs for aspiring or existing entrepreneurs in resource-deprived ecosystems should focus on the entrepreneur’s psychological, social, technical competencies, and spiritual intelligence.

The assessment of business ideas should reflect the hope and aspirations of the owner-managers. In programs developing and evaluating the business ideas of aspiring entrepreneurs in LDCs, the metrics should include the social impact of the proposed businesses. In the words of the participants, “it is not always about money.” The participants advised that the business owners should address the needs in the environment. Sustaining their enterprises has implications for positive social change in the country.

Growth is not necessary for and is not survival. Cieslik and D’Aoust (2017) pointed out that most development agencies aim to transform MEs into larger enterprises. The study participants had all been in business for more than 10 years and seemed

content with being MEs. In developing policies and programs to grow MEs into big enterprises, consultants should assess the entrepreneurs' motives for setting up the firm. Some owner-managers may not be interested in increasing employee numbers which is a criterion for classification of businesses in Nigeria.

As I approached the finish line of the doctoral experience, I resolved to be a positive social change agent contributing to knowledge and practices of MEs in the Nigerian and, indeed, the African ecosystem. I have acquired some expertise in conducting qualitative research and will continue to contribute to understanding the operations of MEs in Nigeria and at the BoP. I got this far with the support and resources available at Walden University. The various tutors and reviewers, my research committee, and my chair have contributed to my journey towards being a confident, independent scholar-practitioner.

Conclusion

Most MEs in Nigeria do not survive up to 5 years of operations, nor do they grow to employ more than one person. Nigeria ranks poorly in the ease of doing business (World Bank, 2020b). Despite the many difficulties in the Nigerian environment, some MEs survive and thrive. The current study focused on the strategies that the survival strategies of successful owner-managers of MEs in Nigeria. The RBV and the DCT provided the framework for this qualitative, multiple case study. Six purposefully selected owner-managers participated in the study; five participants opted for face-to-face interviews, but one interview was over the telephone. The six participants had managed their businesses from inception for about 11 to 25 years. The participants demonstrated

sound knowledge of their business and the environment. For consistency, I followed the same interview protocol in the six cases. I reached data saturation after five cases but did an additional case study to enhance the validity of the study. The interview protocol, notes taken during the interview, reflective journal, literature research, and visits to the participants' workplaces were additional sources of data that enhanced the trustworthiness of the data and quality of the current study. I provided rich and thick data to improve the transferability of the outcome.

The thematic analysis approach was appropriate to the study of the survival strategies of the study participants. The analysis yielded three themes - (a) entrepreneurial resilience, (b) relationship and networking, and (c) adaptive business operations. Six strategies emerged under Theme A- entrepreneurial resilience. Under Theme B, were two strategies, and under Theme C - adaptive business processes, were six strategies. The resilient owner-manager leveraged the social networks to drive the business processes. The business processes, in turn, shaped the relationships of the owner-managers and the social networks within the hostile ecosystem. The owner-managers adapted the business processes to respond to the relationships and environment.

The outcome of the current study is consistent with some literature on the operations of MEs and small businesses at the BoP; the owner-managers of MEs as the main agents determine the strategic direction of their enterprises. The MEs responded to the challenges in the environment by developing adaptive capabilities and operating systems (see Gherhes et al., 2020; Williams & Kedir, 2017). The Nigerian ecosystem has been described as an unpredictable, unstable, complex, and hostile ecosystem (Okeke &

Nwankpa, 2018; Onwe et al., 2020; World Bank, 2017b). The study participants had complete control of their enterprises; the participants were responsive and adaptive.

In resource-constrained environments, the owner-managers use their intangible resources, such as their psychological and social capital, to drive the performance and survival of the enterprises. The six study participants relied on relational marketing, word of mouth, and referrals to protect and sustain their businesses. The participants did not engage in formal strategic planning but depended on their experience and knowledge of the business and the environment to navigate their firms. They adapted their relationships and processes to sustain their firms.

Owner-managers of MEs interested in survival of their enterprises may use the strategies identified in the current study to sustain their business beyond 5 years. Resilience is a critical dynamic capability that owner-managers must learn and practice. Stakeholders in MEs' development and growth may apply the knowledge from the current study to develop capacity-building programs that address the needs of MEs in their local settings. Universities and other institutions involved in entrepreneurship training may integrate the outcome of the current study into their curricula.

MEs are critical for the sustainability of the Nigerian state. 99.8% of small businesses in Nigeria are MEs; the MEs are the largest employers of labor and account for over half of the country's GDP. Improved business practices would promote the longevity of MEs. Local entrepreneurship would flourish; unemployment and the attendant social ills might reduce. More vibrant MEs will enhance wealth redistribution and reduce poverty in the country.

Survival in Nigeria is like swimming against the tide; the negative influences in the environment thwart the hard work of the owner-managers of MES in the ecosystem. The productivity of the MEs might be enhanced by the government creating a more conducive socio-economic environment. For example, safe network of roads, stable and adequate supply of electricity and potable water would promote the wellbeing of the owner-managers and their enterprises. The survival of the MEs in Nigeria requires the commitment of all stakeholders.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

The primary research phenomenon

The survival of microenterprises (MEs) in Nigeria.

Overarching research question

What strategies do some owner-managers of MEs in Nigeria use to survive beyond 5 years of operations?

Primary Research Goals

The purpose of this research interview was to explore the strategies that the owner-managers of some MEs use to survive in Nigeria.

Questions

A. Initial Probe Questions: (*Context, credentials, background, interest etc.*)

- i. What is the nature of your business –*products and or services*?
- ii. How long have you been in this line of business?
- iii. What are your roles in this enterprise?
- iv. How long have you been managing your business?
- v. How many employees do you have in this business?

B. Targeted Questions - (*probe with follow-up questions in C*)

Interview Questions

1. What factors have enabled your enterprise to survive in Nigeria beyond 5 years of the start-up?
2. What were some obstacles that you had to surmount to make your business survive?
- 3 How did you overcome these obstacles?
4. What suggestions do you have for other owner-managers of MEs that could help them sustain their business in Nigeria beyond 5 years of the start-up?

5. What additional information would you like to share with me that would help me understand what you did to keep your business running for more than 5 years

X is the number of years from question A. iii.*

C. Follow-Up Questions (*from the answers in B*)

D. Wrap-Up Questions

- i. What additional information would you like to share with me that may help me understand the strategies that contributed to the survival of your business?

Interview Protocol

Pre-Interview Session

1. Thank the potential participants for giving you the time for the meeting.
2. Introduce yourself.
3. Explain the reason for the meeting – to solicit their voluntary participation.
4. Give an overview of the research study.
5. Elaborate on the contribution to knowledge.
6. Explain why the business has been selected for the case study.
7. Inform potential participant that you will need them to participate in a face-to-face semistructured interview.
8. Inform the potential participant that the interview will be about 45 minutes in a venue convenient for them.
9. Explain the interview process.
10. Tell the participants that the audio of the interview will be recorded.
11. Explain how the researcher will protect the privacy of the participants and the confidentiality of the data collected during the interview.
12. Explain the content of the Consent Form.
13. Let the potential participant know that participation is voluntary, and they can withdraw from participating at any point in the study.

14. Assure them of the confidentiality of the information that they share.
15. Clarify the concerns/questions of the potential participant.
16. Ask if the participant is willing to be a part of the study.
17. If the response is **No** - thank them for their time.
18. If the response is **Yes** - Give the participants, the Informed Consent Form.
19. Agree with the participants when you would collect the signed Consent Form.
20. Thank the participants for their time.

Collection of Consent Form

1. Thank the participant for granting you audience.
2. Explain the purpose of the meeting – to collect the Signed Consent Form and to agree the way forward.
3. Invite potential participants to participate in a face-to-face interview.
4. If **No**. Collect the consent form and thank them for their time.
5. If **Yes** – Check that the Consent Form has been duly signed.
6. Collect the signed Consent Form.
7. Ask if participants if they need further clarifications.
8. Agree the date, time and place that will be convenient for the interview.
9. Thank the participants for their time.

Interview

Before the arrival of the participant

1. Arrive the venue early.
2. Arrange the space to assure the convenience of the participant.
3. Set up and test the audio recorder for clarity.
4. Have water and glasses on the table.

When Participants Arrive

1. Welcome the participants warmly.
2. Thank them for their time.
3. Develop rapport and make sure the participants are comfortable.
4. Briefly explain the objectives of the research.
5. Thank them for signing the Informed Consent form.
6. Remind the participants that you will be recording the audio of the interview and that you would also be taking notes.
7. Remind the participants that they may stop the interview/withdraw their participation at any time by just saying so.

The Interview

- 1 Request for permission to record the interview.
- 2 Start recording.
- 3 Announce that you are starting the recording of the interview with SS1 (the Code for the participant) the date and time of the interview.
- 4 Ask the *General questions* one question at a time. (refer to the Interview Questions).
- 5 Observe and take notes.
- 6 Transit to the *Core questions* in the interview protocol.
- 7 Ask the first *Core* question.
- 8 Listen, observe and probe for meaning with by asking follow-up questions.
- 9 Take notes.
- 10 Thank the participants for their contribution.
- 11 Ask the next *Core* question.
- 12 Repeat steps 8 to 11 until all the *Core* questions have been addressed.
- 13 Ask the *Closing* question in the interview protocol.

- 14 Follow up with probing questions if necessary.
- 15 Ask the participants if that would be all.
- 16 If *No*, please listen more.
- 17 If *yes*. Please thank the participants for their time.
- 18 Remind the participants that you will transcribe the recorded audio of the interview and that you will share the transcription with them.
- 19 Agree a time for the follow up interview/member checking.
- 20 Thank the participants.
- 21 Pack up the recording instruments.

Follow up Interview/Member Checking

1. Thank the participants for their contribution.
2. Explain the need for the member checking and follow up.
3. Give participant a copy of the interview transcript.
4. Seek permission to record the audio of the interview and to take notes.
5. Remind participants that they can stop the interview at any time.
6. Note any comments or corrections that the participant makes on the transcript.
7. Seek clarification and ask probing questions.
8. Note any comments or corrections on the transcript.
9. Seek clarification and ask probing questions.
10. Ask the participant if there are other information they wish to share.
11. If none, thank the participant for their time.

Appendix B: Invitation and Participant Informed Consent Form

Date:

Owner-Manager:

Name of Business:

Street Address

Dear KKKKK,

INVITATION /CONSENT FORM

I invite you to take part in research about the strategies that successful microenterprises use to survive in Nigeria. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before you decide to take part.

My name is Olatutu Sholeye. As part of the requirement for completing my doctoral studies at Walden University, I am researching the strategies that some successful microenterprises in Nigeria employ to operate their business beyond 5 years. Microenterprises are businesses employing no more than 10 persons, including the owner-manager of the company. Prior research has shown that most microbusinesses in Nigeria do not survive up to 5 years.

Background Information:

The goal of this research is to identify the strategies that some owner-managers of microenterprises use to survive in Nigeria. You are invited to participate in this research because you are the owner of a business that you started and have managed for more than 5 years in Lagos. Your opinions and experiences are of value in my study.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to participate, and you may withdraw from the research at any time for any reason that you may choose not to share with me. I shall respect your right to participate or not participate in this study.

Procedures

If you choose to be a part of the study, I ask that you take part in an interview that will last about 45 to 60 minutes. Depending on your preference, the interview may be virtual or face-to-face. The virtual interview could be via voice or video telephone calls.

I will ask questions to help me understand how you have successfully run your business in Nigeria in the last 5 years. With your permission, I shall record the audio of the interview and take notes during the interview. I shall transcribe the interview. Within 3 days of the initial interview, I shall send you the transcript of your interview to be sure that I capture your views correctly. Within a week after the initial interview, I ask that you meet with me a second time for about 15-30 minutes so that I can confirm my understanding of your responses. This follow up interview could also be virtual or face-to-face.

The risks to your safety or wellbeing are minimal. Should you experience discomfort at any point during the process, you may choose to stop the process or withdraw from the study. You may choose not to answer any question that you are not comfortable with by indicating your decision: You do not need to explain your decision not to answer any question or withdraw from the study.

To minimize the potential risk to confidentiality, I shall protect your identity by using a pseudonym for your business and an alphanumeric label for you as the owner-manager. The audio recording and the transcript will be stored in a passworded drive and kept safe in a locked cabinet for 5 years. The data will not be used for any purposes other than the research. The data will be securely stored and destroyed after 5 years. Please note that the researcher has an ethical and moral duty to report child/elder abuse and any criminal activity if made aware of such activity during the data collection process.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. There will be no economic compensation for your participation. You may not benefit directly by participating in this study. However, the knowledge you share may be useful to (a) owner-managers of microenterprises who desire to sustain their business in Nigeria, (b) the statutory and policymakers. The result of this study might also contribute to the general knowledge of management strategies in microenterprises. The positive social change impact will be more sustainable job creation, reduction in poverty, and improved overall wellbeing of the people of Nigeria. I shall share with you the summary of findings from the research.

You may ask me questions now and at any time during the studies. You may also use

my email xxxxxxxxxxx or my telephone number +234 1 XXXXXXXXX.

However, should you have concerns about your rights as a participant that you wish to discuss, you may call the Research Participant Advocate at my university xxxxxxxx.

If you feel you understand the study well enough to decide to participate, please sign the consent form below to indicate your willingness to participate in the study of microenterprises in Nigeria by Olatutu Sholeye voluntarily. I will give you a copy of this consent form for your records.

Thank you.

Yours Sincerely,

Olatutu Sholeye (Doctoral Candidate)

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information; I understand the study process and my role in this research well enough to decide my involvement. I now give my informed consent to participate voluntarily in this study.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____