

A Framework for Sustainability of Small and Medium-Scale Businesses in Nigeria Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

Michael Aduba

DBA candidate, California Miramar University

ABSTRACT

The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on small and medium-scale businesses in Nigeria has exposed the ill-preparedness of business owners and government in guarding against the collapse of these very critical assets of the economy and subsequently, save livelihoods. Nigeria suffers from a colossal infrastructure inadequacy (for example, power supply and access to the internet are two key inputs of business) and this problem has for a long time impeded the growth of most businesses who cannot afford to run their constant operations on generators and expensive internet. These utilities would have to a substantial extent cushion the effects of lockdowns and enabled e-commerce to thrive, rather than the reliance on the traditional face to face approach of doing business.

The sustainability principle must be brought to bear on all aspects of life in Nigeria, so that the thinking of efficient utilization of available resources will ensure the availability of the same resources in the future, long-term planning by small and medium-scale businesses are anchored on sustainability concept; business mindsets must change to reflect the reality that it is not business as usual. Managers must begin to see the importance of the application of sustainability principles in business will positively impact the short and long-term cycle of their business.

This paper will peruse the different strategies necessary to keep small and medium-scale businesses afloat in the COVID-19 pandemic period and beyond, it will dissect all the avenues required to navigate the muddy waters occasioned by the advent of the Novel Coronavirus disease to safeguard businesses and jobs in the future in the event of another difficult situation.

Keywords: Sustainability, Small Business, Strategy, COVID-19.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted severely on virtually every aspect of socio-economic life of people all over the world, worst affected are people whose jobs are in the small and medium-scale category. Before the advent of the pandemic in Nigeria, the country was already on its way to recovery economic from the economic recession of 2016.

Nigeria's first case of COVID-19 was confirmed on February 27, 2020, when an Italian citizen came to Nigeria. This prompted governments at the federal and state levels to initiate measure aimed at the protection of Nigerians from the much-dreaded disease. The government aimed specifically to prevent an

outbreak of the disease in Nigeria, considering the high rate of morbidity and mortality rate globally. Agencies and departments of government immediately commenced (Olapegba, et al. 2020) a public enlightenment program of implementing guidelines from Nigeria Center for Disease and Control.

The federal government implemented a national strategy of compulsory lockdown and movement restriction among other infection prevention guidelines; these measures have taken a tremendous toll on businesses across the length and breadth of Nigeria; of particular concern is the small and medium-scale businesses who comprise an estimated 50% of industrial jobs and 90% of manufacturing jobs (PWC, 2017). The lockdown and restriction of movement and operations of non-essential businesses dealt a severe blow to the country's unemployment situation. Although these measures affected businesses, they achieved the purpose they were imposed (Olapegba, et al., 2020).

Small and medium-scale businesses are the drivers and nucleus of the Nigerian economy; they operate mostly in the informal sector of the economy and are characterized by lower revenue and profitability, smaller teams of employees, small market area, limited area of fewer locations, sole or partnership ownership, and taxes (Ingram, D., 2019). According to Banji Oyelaran-Oyeyinka (2020), small and medium-scale businesses are defined as businesses with a turnover of less than N100 million (\$263,158) per annum and have less than 300 employees.

A 2017 survey conducted by the Small and Medium-scale Development Association of Nigeria revealed that there are about 41.5 million SMEs in Nigeria with less than 300 employees (Moore, S. 2020). These businesses play a significant role in Nigeria's economic development and poverty alleviation and are spread over the vast scope of business activities ranging from manufacturing to agriculture to the services sector and contribute 48% of the country's total GDP, they are responsible for 96% of all businesses and at the forefront of job creation amounting to an estimated 50% of all industrial jobs and 84% of total employment in Nigeria. They are the generators of skilled and semi-skilled workers and subsequently go on to serve as the industrial and services-oriented backbone of every sector of the Nigerian economy (Onyinyechukwu, L., 2020) employment stability is hinged on the survival of small and medium-scale businesses

To mitigate the impact of the measure implemented by respective governments to control the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) has rolled out stimulus packages, including the establishment of funds (KPMG, 2020) amounting to 50 billion Naira (\$129 million) aimed specifically at the micro and small enterprises, with low-interest rates, a moratorium on repayments of principal amounts, and tax relief measures have been initiated. The question of whether the above mentioned CBN intervention is enough for millions of SMEs and how those funds will be channeled to the intended businesses are entirely another kettle of fish.

Considering the huge importance of SMEs in the lives of Nigerians, as the backbone of employment and provision of goods and services, it is critical for all stakeholders to exhaust all the means necessary in ensuring the survival of these businesses beyond the Central Bank's initiative to prevent the total collapse of these entities to exacerbate further the poverty and unemployment situation in the country. Indeed, the COVID pandemic will take a huge toll on the lives and well-being of Nigerians; the greatest impact will

be felt many years after the pandemic, owing to the millions of jobs that have been lost because of the collapse of small and medium-scale businesses.

The principle of sustainability is not just a critical tool for preventing adverse global changes but to also influence the survival and success of businesses (Dunn, M., 2020). Resiliency is at the core of the sustainability principle in business, and businesses that applied such principles before the advent of the COVID-19 crisis have (Viliani, F., 2020) put more emphasis on them now more than ever before, making such businesses better ready to respond to adverse situations.

The workplace as we know it has been reconceptualized, many employees now work from home; business owners must engineer new ways of protecting and providing necessary support for their employees. The reality today is that what commenced as an emergency response has opened the door to fundamental changes in modes of operation (Viliani, F., 2020), the concept of work from home or remote working and flexibility has gained immense traction and will become the norm in the future, transforming material assessment and reportage.

Furthermore, organizations must quickly change the way they transact business; processes must follow guidelines of the Nigerian Center for Disease Control to foster the confidence of the public and business stakeholders for a safe and conducive business and work environment. These changes must go beyond protection against the infection from the novel COVID-19 pandemic to safeguarding lives and business when other difficult situations present themselves. It cannot be over-emphasized that information and communication technology will go a long way in helping these businesses to expand sales through e-commerce as face-to-face transactions decline.

Literature Review

This research paper will review the works of other researchers and reputable institutions of higher learning to systematically analyze a vast range of research studies on the related subject matter. The review will peruse the implication of the spread of COVID-19 on small and medium-scale businesses in Nigeria present strategic solutions for managing the challenges occasioned by the pandemic and finally look at the interrelationships between human activities and the exploitation of nature, which sometimes generates complications causing a crisis on a global scale.

Effects of Covid-19 on Small and Medium-Scale Businesses in Nigeria

The studies from a few types of research have indicated that pandemics of major proportions, particularly in the last millennium, have resulted in low returns on assets (Jorda, et al. 2020). The biggest challenge to the recovery and survival of small and medium-scale businesses in the COVID-19 pandemic period is their grossly inadequate financial resources. Bartik et al. (2020), in their survey of more than 580 SMEs, revealed that huge retrenchment, temporary and permanent collapse of businesses, uncertainty concerning the duration of lockdowns and other disruptions, businesses are hemorrhaging, and on the verge of financial ruins, so many are in dire need of funding. The economic earthquake in Nigeria is of significant proportions (Seth et al. 2020), there is already a myriad of compounding problems such as a nose-dive in the price of crude, which accounts for Nigeria's major export (Olufemi Aladejebi, 2020), the Naira (Nigerian currency) depreciation, high inflation, and job losses.

The COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected Nigeria's already worsening economic situation; there is a massive fall in household consumption and total demand because of three factors aimed at controlling the pandemic's spread (Imanche, S. et al., 2020). The first is the lockdown imposed on non-essential businesses, resulting in restricting movements and the subsequent nose-dive of consumers' propensity to spend on non-essential goods and services. Secondly, the informal sector and the gig economy, which comprises 65% of Nigeria's economy, expect a downfall in income; people who work in this (Obiakor and Adeniran, 2020) sector do so mostly on a short-term basis. Thirdly is the dilution of wealth due to the decrease of assets such as stocks and real estate.

Lockdowns and Movement Restrictions

The imposition of strict lockdowns in Lagos, Ogun, and Abuja because of the high prevalence of COVID-19 cases and the subsequent lockdowns imposed by regional governments bringing economic activities to a halt have dealt a severe blow to a once flourishing informal sector where most small businesses in Nigeria below; the capacity of these businesses to generate income for survival has reduced enormously due to the huge decline in the demand for non-essential goods, as a result (Nseobot et al., 2020). This will result in a sharp fall in the revenue of small and medium scale businesses who are still in operation and will harm Nigeria's economy against the hindsight that about 46% of Nigeria's GDP comprises of SMEs.

Food Industry

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on SMEs in Nigeria's food industry according to the Sun Business Network report, because of the restriction of movement to curtail the spread of the virus, there is the is an impending gloom on the medium to long-term effects on these businesses. A breakdown of this industry indicates that so many SMEs are in the production, processing, marketing, transportation, and sales of food products and other complementary services employing millions of Nigerians (Sun Business Network, 2020). A huge section of the supply chain system of the food sector is severely impacted, and the direct consequence is the sky-rocketing prices and shortages for consumers who depend on these SMEs, it is expected very shortly that massive unemployment and bankruptcies will be unrestrained Adekoya and Aibangbee, 2020; Sun Business Network, 2020). The report revealed that SMEs access to inputs, especially farm produce, was proving to be a challenge to business operations, the inability to meet loan repayment deadlines and lease renewals as a fall-out of the problems of demand and supply has become very common. It was also highlighted in the report that the reduction in production levels result in depletion of working capital, workforce rationalization has already commenced in many SMEs.

Economic Uncertainty

The high level of uncertainty occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic will negatively impact investments in SMEs in Nigeria, it is not clear when the pandemic will eventually, be brought under control and eradicated not just in Nigeria but also on the global scene, this lack of hindsight of the duration of the pandemic also impacts on the effectiveness of economic policies. The Nigerian Stock Exchange has recorded its worst performance since 2008-09 global economic recession (Adenomon et al., 2020). Because of the uncertainty concerning the Coronavirus pandemic and weak investment project forecasts, investors are not willing to make investments in the prevailing economic climate soon.

The atmosphere of uncertainty in the Nigerian financial market impacts severely on the real economy and hence, the SMEs (Ekeruche, 2020). As a result of the loss of capital by businesses and the erosion of the

stock investment by investors, the propensity for spending by businesses and individuals will drop significantly; therefore, very few investors will be willing to stake funds for the survival of SMEs and the reduction in consumer spending leads to a decrease in SMEs' income.

Overdependence on Imports

The overdependence on imports has led to a situation where the closure of a factory in another country because the pandemic has resulted in the collapse of many non-essential businesses in Nigeria. For example, the closure of a fabric factory in China whose product is required as raw materials for most textile mills in Nigeria.

Survival Strategies for Small and Medium-Scale Enterprises

1. Increase Online Sales

The frequent lockdown and movement restrictions aimed at preventing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and customers' deliberate apprehension for offline shopping has resulted in huge online shopping. It is very critical for small businesses who are yet to commence online sales to key into this immediate platform and inform current and prospective customers through the business' websites and social media channels to remain in business. An essential activity for small and medium-scale business owners to undertake are to investigate an array of online platforms available to choose the most appropriate for their business; this will reduce the over-dependence on a face to face transactions. It is also very instructive to review the best product delivery mode to customers (CPAustralia, 2020). Businesses in the service sector should assess service delivery based on digital remedies to reduce the person to person contact.

2. Development of Supply Chain Resiliency

Critical to Nigeria's economic rebound is the development of an effective supply chain system that guarantees efficiency in the production cycle, better customer service and relationship, declining cost of production, and a general improvement in the business' financial performance.

The adoption of innovative techniques by logisticians, transporters, and the supply chain industry will immensely (Deloitte, 2020) help in managing inventory, distribution and the strategic engagement of partners and intermediaries across the length and the breadth of the value chain.

3. Monitoring Current Trends

There could not have been a better time for small businesses to make maximum use of online tools in the quest to survive due to lockdowns and movement restrictions because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Small business owners must be constantly abreast with the changing climate of creating and expanding sales. Social media presence of businesses enables a constant review and checking for changes in online conversations and paying attention to where opportunities are headed and taking advantage of such opportunities (Liguori, E. & Pittz T.,2020). There exists a range of analytic tools on Amazon and Google that enable the monitoring of trends in the domestic business scene.

4. Maintain Current Customer Relationship

The maintenance of present customer relationships is essential, and communication with them will build trust. Changes in operations (for example, changes in the mode of transaction, store hours, adherence to

safety guidelines, etc.) should be communicated to customers through the business website and social media channels. Frequent and high net worth customers who are very critical in terms of substantial revenue (Liguori, E. & Pittz T.,2020) for the business should be accorded a personalized relationship through direct contact. Small and Medium-scale business owners should not just see this as a required necessity occasioned by the pandemic but a handy tool for deepening customer relationships beyond the COVID-19 era.

5. Maintain Entrepreneurial System Connection

Staying connected with the business, the domain of entrepreneurial ecosystem helps to stimulate creative thinking and usher innovative approaches, particularly in crisis periods (Liguori et al., 2019). The business community and entrepreneurial connections (Pittz, et al. 2019) are an important reservoir of recognizing opportunities (e.g., what other businesses are doing in terms of diversification, current trends of customer satisfaction, business expansion, available financing options, etc.) There is intense pressure on entrepreneurs on how to salvage their businesses in the pandemic period, these networks act as support systems facilitating business activities through various communication portals, an example is the Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which was established to promote (LCCI, 2020) and protect trade and industry and reflect the pulse of the Lagos business community concerning issues that border on trade and industry.

6. Develop a Contingency Plan

Every business, whether big or small, must begin to plan for unforeseen situations to withstand difficult situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the pandemic took the business world by storm, it will permanently change the operations mode for all businesses going forward. The contingency plans must cover the most important stakeholders who include employees, customers, and suppliers.

Employees: Contingency planning is key to employees infected with COVID-19, work engineering processes with regards to social distancing, working from remote locations, provision of support systems for staff working remotely, the protection of company documents due to the risk of working from home or other remote locations through the update of work from home protocols.

Customers: Customers must be informed immediately that their orders cannot be filled and provide them with alternative suppliers or deadlines for those orders cannot be met, as the individual situation may present themselves. To reduce unnecessary cancellation of sales by customers, an update of the sales contract may be required.

Small business operators must ensure that their premises are clean and conducive for customers. For example, the provision of hand sanitizers and face masks will add value to the firm's reputation concerning following the guidelines of disease control agencies and respect for their customers' health.

Supply Chains: It is important to anticipate disruptions in the supply chain, and inquiries should be made to ascertain the crisis's impact on the supplier's ability to meet the business needs. Develop relationships with new suppliers and test-run how efficient they are in meeting the requirement of business operations. Price negotiation should commence in earnest.

7. Development of Resilient Value Chains

According to the International Trade Center (2020), although small business in Nigeria is quite resilient and can quickly adjust to adverse situations, the COVID-19 pandemic presents an opportunity for their

owners to develop a new mentality for the development of better and resilient value chains that are not predisposed to situations that may come up in the future.

8. Adoption of Sustainability Strategy

Sustainability According to Knut Haanaes (2016), business is an important strategy for creating long-term value; it considers an organization's operating environment in social, ecological, and economic. It is anchored on the assumption that it will promote business longevity. Dorothy Tembo (2020) opines that small business owners must develop sustainability as a viable production option because it is inexpensive and environmentally compliant.

Crisis Management and Business Sustainability

Disasters affecting humankind are viewed by management theory as political and organizational issues. It is important to note that societies are prone to calamities and can be remedied by far-sighted leadership armed with strategic plans.

Through strategic planning, businesses can guard against disasters and alleviate the adverse effects of such disasters, and to a large extent, able to perpetuate their survival.

Sustainable development models have largely arisen from various stages involved in crisis management, these include observation, precaution/preparation, containment, rehabilitation, and study.

The global economic crisis may be experienced because of climate changes, contagion from animal sources, and fraudulent business practices of exploiting ecosystems for profit. Van Staden (2020) is of the view that there is a catastrophic relationship between nature and development in well-documented cases of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), the extinction of the donkey and living species crisis due to the practice of the 'ejiao.' traditional medicine of extraction of gelatin from the donkey and myriads of examples of global capitalism exploiting and annexing ecosystems.

In the same vein, the COVID-19 pandemic has opened the complex relationship between humankind and nature. Because of this broad and intricate connection, the connection between (Obrenovic, B., 2020) activities or inactivity of human beings, including business and the prevalence of natural disasters, are becoming more difficult to distinguish. There is a dire need to develop and use conceptual models for current management problems spanning across all sectors.

Why Nigerian Small and Medium-Scale Businesses Should Adopt Sustainability Concept

The concept of business sustainability indicates that the broad idea of the protection of the environment (which includes the prudent use of available resources and efficient application of stakeholders' inputs) where the operations of the business take place. Managers need to understand that their businesses are positively impacted by the application of sustainability in business in the short and long-term.

The unfortunate situation in Nigeria is such that sustainability thinking is not accorded the desired priority deserves, especially fighting tooth and nail to weather the economic storms and trying to stay afloat. These businesses must as (SustyVibes, 2016) a matter of necessity realize that sustainability results in being distinctively recognized and can present better opportunities, they can leverage to improve their profit margins.

Research Design Overview

The research will make use of the systematic literature review method; it will collect and critically analyze a wide variety of research studies or papers systematically to provide a comprehensive summary relevant to the subject matter (Juan Benito, 2016).

The adoption of the systematic literature review will help recognize and incorporate the research of scholars regarding gaps (Dahlgren Memorial Library, 2020) the research topic and furnish proof for practice and policymaking while identifying research gaps.

The systematic review of selected literature allows for the adherence to an unambiguous process where conditions relevant to the research are stated in clear terms (CSU, 2020). It looks at an exhaustive and clear study over a wide variety of academic databases and other materials emanating from reputable organizations (Duke University, 2020) that can serve as templates for other researchers and applicable to solving problems in another environment. It is a culmination of a rigorous and thoughtful search process specific to the subject matter being studied. The identification of information being sought for, criticized and revealed within a recognized timeframe.

This research paper employed certain search strategies, terms, timeframes and will acknowledge the limitations experienced while conducting the research.

Conceptual Framework

The survival of small and medium-scale businesses in Nigeria amidst the COVID-19 pandemic is critical to the provision of jobs in the formal and informal sectors of the economy, to this end, it is imperative for these businesses to quickly adapt business survival strategies aimed at sustaining their operations and preventing a total collapse of the Nigerian economy, which has endured structural turbulence in recent times. The salvage of jobs must be on the front burner to avert a worsening poverty and insecurity situation in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework – Prospect Theory

This research paper is anchored on the prospect theory, which focuses on decision-making in uncertain times (Tversky and Kahneman, 1986). This theory is fitting for looking at challenging situations such as pandemics. Decision making of operators or actors is hinged upon the framing of a problem. It will greatly aid in a positive description of a situation rather than negative terms to avoid making riskier choices (Craighead et al. 2020).

Research Description

The main aim of this research paper is to bring to light the adverse effects of the novel COVID-19 pandemic on small and medium-scale businesses in Nigeria and, more importantly, to develop a framework for their survival and guard against similar difficult situations in the future. The paper critically explored the works of other researchers in the related subject matter. It highlighted current trends across the globe to have a bird's eye view for a holistic solution for the general business community's ongoing crises. To this end, it was of utmost importance for the paper to be free from bias and devoid of the researcher's emotions and passions. This is very necessary to avoid research pitfalls that negate objectivism, clarity, and congruency.

The intended audience includes small and medium-scale business owners, Small and Medium-scale Enterprises Development Association of Nigeria (SMEDAN), other researchers from related and unrelated disciplines, the Federal Ministry of Trade and Investment, government agencies and departments, the Nigerian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NCCI), financial services and institutions (local and foreign) and the general public. Though the crises occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic is on a global scale, certain remedies to the problem as elucidated in the paper has appropriately targeted the Nigerian situation because of the country's peculiar predicaments.

The paper presents itself as a manual to succor small and medium business owners amidst the COVID-19 crisis. This is because it sets out clearly in simple language, the road map for survival in an outbreak of a very contagious disease in the future.

The researcher envisages that other researchers will avail themselves of going further to improve on the work done particularly in the area of application of the framework highlighted and ultimately evolved as a policy and strategic tool for the small and medium-scale business community in Nigeria.

Sources of Data Collection

This research paper relied on secondary data sources, including information gathered from existing sources such as journals, library searches, the internet, etc. Data from reputable institutions such as universities and research organizations came in very handy in buttressing the research paper's main theme.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criterion of Data Sources

There was a clear demarcation of relevant and non-relevant secondary data in the data-gathering plan of action from the outset of the undertaking of this research. This is because the number of materials available is quite extensive, and it was of utmost necessity to develop a clear criterion of selection of data necessary for the research to advance the unity of thought process and purpose and guard against getting lost in the material search process.

It was indeed essential to focus effort on data collection from the country serving as the geographical location of the subject matter for the research, relevant information from Nigerian institutions of higher learning, research centers, small and medium-scale business associations, the Lagos Chamber of Commerce, and Industry and so many other sources of Nigerian origin were sought for and retrieved. Data from other climes were also utilized where it was appropriate to help consolidate the findings of the research.

Analysis of Data

Research Question 1

What is the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on small and medium-scale businesses?

As a response to the first research question, there is a unified evidence from various studies highlighted in this paper on the consequences of decisions (lockdowns and movement restrictions) taken by federal and state governments to curtail the spread of the pandemic. The study was undertaken by Bartik et al. (2020)

surveyed 580 small and medium-scale businesses, and the result of that survey indicated an astronomical number of job losses, the collapse of businesses, financial predicaments, and the dire financial position.

The further allusion to the study by Bartik and his fellow researchers, Imanche S. et al. (2020), in their study point out the root causes behind the massive impact of the COVID-19 crisis by highlighting three major factors first are the imposition of a lockdown on non-essential businesses, the consequence of which was the restriction of movement and the inevitable sharp drop in the demand for non-essential goods and services. Secondly, Obiakor and Adeniran, (2020) opined that the informal sector of the Nigerian business environment where so many small and medium-scale businesses belong (65% of the Nigerian economy) has a gloomy future owing to the expectation of stakeholders of an immense fall in income from these businesses. The third factor has to do with the decrease of assets such as stocks and real estate because of capacity underutilization.

Further corroboration of the effects of the lockdown was made by Nseobot et al. (2020) and his team of researchers who in their study revealed a sharp decline in the revenue of small and medium scale businesses because of compulsory lockdowns, especially in Lagos, Ogun, and Abuja in the effort by respective state governments for controlling the spread of the disease, this orchestrated the movement of many businesses going down south and has to a very large extent weakened a once growing informal sector.

Specific study on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially on Nigeria's food supply chain was conducted by the SUN Business Network (2020), according to the study, due to movement restriction, the future, whether short or long-term of small and medium-scale businesses (major players in Nigeria's food supply chain industry) was in serious jeopardy, the uncertain outlook of the situation reinforces a continuous downward trend in revenue and survival of these businesses. The study indicates that the prices of food are going up because of the disruption in a major segment of the supply chain resulting in shortages and the subsequent effect of this will be a huge loss of jobs and unrestrained bankruptcies.

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Adenomon et al., (2020) due to uncertainty about the capacity of public health medicine in Nigeria and around the globe in bringing the disease under control, there will be a steep decline in investment into small and medium-scale businesses in Nigeria, this is already happening as data from the Nigeria Stock Exchange indicate the worst performance since the global recession of 2008-09.

From the foregoing analysis, there is uniformity of agreement on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on small and medium-scale business in Nigeria and studies other researchers not referred to in this analysis all paint a very negative situation.

Research Question 2

What interventions are required for the sustainability of small businesses?

The analysis of the data based on research, question 2 is hinged on the fact that strategies, solutions or interventions are in dire need towards the survival and sustenance of small and medium-scale businesses in Nigeria to stem a catastrophic tide of business collapse and job loss. Hence, this analysis will look

dissect the works of other researchers with a view to how their research studies will help keep businesses afloat and flourish within the pandemic period and beyond.

In the quest for providing alternative means of transacting businesses particularly in the COVID-19 pandemic period because of the frequent lockdowns and movement restrictions and the general phobia for face to face business transactions, CPAustralia (2020) advises small and medium-scale business of the critical need for those who do not yet have an online shop or sales outlet to immediately consider doing so and go a step further by relaying the information of their online presence to their prospective and current customers. The implication of an online presence or e-commerce platform is to expand sales without customers or buyers; this will counter the fall in face-to-face transactions and keep the business afloat. However, customer service friendliness and confidence in payment systems are key to successful online retailing activities.

To meet the demands of customers and the general public, be it online or by physical transaction, the resiliency of supply chain capacity must be enhanced under the analysis of data regarding research question two, the researcher highlighted the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on Nigeria's supply chain regarding food security, Deloitte (2020) as mentioned in the literature review of this paper, and therein was indicated that for Nigeria to experience a rebound in its economy, it is crucial for public and private stakeholders to begin the development of a resilient supply chain that will withstand the negative impact of difficult situations in the future; this will protect and support production cycles in all sectors of the economy. This will help keep businesses afloat and save millions of jobs, especially in the Nigerian business environment's informal sector.

The issue of resiliency was also strongly alluded to by the International Trade Center (2020); the ITC stated in its report that although the resiliency of small businesses in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized, the crisis emanating from the pandemic is an opportunity for operators of small business to structure a mindset of creating and strengthening value chains that can survive the turbulence of complicated challenges that come up from time to time.

According to Liguori, E. & Pittz T. (2020), to continue in business, small and medium-scale businesses need to maintain relationships with their customers through communication and inform them of changes in the ways business is currently undertaken to build trust and confidence. Communication can be done via the business website and social media. Maintaining the business's current customers through an effective customer relationship management system ensures an unbroken connection that guarantees its ability to continue as a "going concern." This means that the entity will remain in business for the foreseeable future (Kenton, W., 2020) and meet its obligations as and when due.

Pittz, T. and his team of researchers have studied the importance of maintaining a connection with the ecosystem of entrepreneurs to help in generating creativity and enhance innovative approaches in business processes and service delivery. The community of entrepreneurs is the channels through which information such as new business opportunities, improvement in sales means of customer satisfaction, and so on are relayed to the business owner. This is a veritable avenue for small and medium-scale

entrepreneurs to avail themselves of the opportunity to rescue their businesses and in the process meet the obligation of payment of wages and salaries of their employees.

To buttress the study by Pittz T. and his team of researchers on the importance of maintaining a relationship with the business ecosystem, the Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI, 2020) serves as a facilitator of such an ecosystem in Nigeria. Its major role is the protection of trade and industry and gives information regarding trade and industry.

The analysis of this systematic literature cannot be complete without the synthesis of findings from other researchers, the works of researchers perused in this paper concerning the concept of sustainability can be described as a clear and uniform approach that guarantees the long-term survival of small and medium-scale businesses and essential for these trying times and even beyond. Knut Haanaes (2016), from his research, states that the application of sustainability in business ensures the development of the long-term value of the business; Dorothy Tembo (2020) is also in agreement and adds that the mentality of sustainability should be adopted by small business operators because it is affordable.

The above view on sustainability is expounded by SustyVibes (2016) taking the Nigerian business environment into consideration, it provides a guide for sustainability thinking by business owners and its long-term results are expressed in the identity of the business, guarantee better opportunities that can be explored to grow the business.

Methodological Integrity

In the process of undertaking the study for this research, the researcher paid critical attention to ethical consideration and tried to maintain course (fidelity) so that congruency and clarity of the theme is emphasized as much as possible, and the related data collection was sought mostly from academic journals, other online research publications and by academic scholars, these materials were properly contextualized for their insights and meaningful contributions (Levitt, H. M. (2020).). The works of other researchers were not overstated to justify the findings of the research (Harsh Suri, 2020). The researcher's emotions, passions, likes, dislike, or any other personal feelings were not brought to bear on any aspect of the research to avoid dilution.

The paper is a product of core principles of methodological integrity, and as such, utmost care was taken in the sourcing of materials for the research to ensure the reflection of high-quality research. Specifically, honesty was the guiding principle in the development, conduct, evaluation, and communication was free from bias, respect for culture, level of orientation, ecosystems and societies were duly accorded the researcher's accountability for the research paper from idea origin to development and organization (All European Academics, 2017) Denigration and unacademic language was avoided in the paper.

There was a quality assessment of the risk of bias, which aided the regulation, creation, and establishment of a synthesis of clarity of evidence (Puberica, 2020) based on data collection and materials search strategy.

Research Findings

It can be seen from the analysis of the literature review concerning the first research question one, that there is a consensus of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on small and medium-scale businesses based on twenty-five (25) studies screened, evaluated for qualification and inclusion in the review.

Based on research question one, data was extracted, taking into consideration, the size of business (small and medium), the peculiar nature of the Nigerian business environment, studies from reputable scholars and institutions mostly of Nigerian origin, the timeframe of COVID pandemic crisis (February to the time of completion of a research paper).

The table below systematically summarizes the findings of the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on small and medium-scale businesses and their negative impact:

Table 1

Problems	Outcomes
Lockdowns and Restrictions	The decline in revenue because of a drop in sales and business collapse
Effect on Food Security	Disruptions in the supply chain leading to food shortages, supply chain businesses fold up.
Economic Uncertainty	Prevents planning discourages investors and lenders from supporting small and medium-scale businesses.
Over-dependence on Imports	The collapse of businesses whose source of raw materials depends on foreign markets affected by the COVID-19 crisis.

The consensus from the view of studies of researchers concerning research question two indicates the different interventions adjudicated for small and medium-scale businesses to help alleviate their predicament and strategize to keep their businesses alive and better prepared for challenging situations in the future.

The evidence from the works of researchers concerning the research question 2 highlight the different strategies relevant to the survival and growth of small and medium-scale businesses within the COVID-19 pandemic period and beyond.

The table below systematically summarizes the survival strategies:

Table 2

Survival Strategies	Outcomes
Establishment of e-commerce platforms	An increase in sales enables the business to stay afloat and meet its obligation, thereby saving jobs.
Development of resilient supply chains	Enables a hitch-free logistics process capable of surmounting shocks (e.g., the transportation of bulk goods by trains and heavy-duty vehicles over vast geographic area save time and money)

Customer Relationship Management	Helps in the retention of existing customers and ensure they continue to patronize the business.
Maintenance of Entrepreneurial Ecosystem	Helps business owners in tracking the events within the business community. Information obtained here is very critical for business survival.
Development of Contingency Plan	Enable the small and medium-scale business operator, employees, customers, and other business stakeholders to follow detailed guidelines (e.g., Remote working protocols and modes of customer service delivery).
Development of Business Resilient Value Chains	Enables businesses to rebound when faced with difficult a situation such as the COVID-19 pandemic.
Adoption of Sustainability Principle	This allows for a long-term mindset to be incorporated into the mainstream of the business plans of small and medium-scale businesses to utilize present resources efficiently to safeguard its use by future generations.

The assessment of the risk bias for this research paper did not encounter any form of bias in the selected literature reviews due to the researcher’s scrutiny of the primary and secondary data used by other researchers and peer-reviewed materials used for the research.

Limitation

The researcher’s penchant for an exhaustive search for related literature on the subject matter was constrained by time required for the submission of the paper.

Discussion of Findings

The research findings have opened new opportunities for small and medium-scale businesses, even amid a pandemic. For example, the movement to or increase in online sales can enable small businesses to diversify in offering an array of products or services not offered when business transactions involved physical contact. Goods can be bought wholesale and offered to customers via online retail platforms.

It will also create jobs in transport and logistics industry because of the need for distribution of ordered goods by customers, for online shopping to gain a foothold in Nigeria’s business environment, trust, and confidence of the general public on the security of payment platforms, quality of ordered goods, and efficient customer service must be brought to the front burner of the customer satisfaction process.

The development of resiliency by small and medium-scale businesses in the supply chain industry entail the coming together of these businesses to formulate a win-win strategy to fashion an unencumbered process from the movement of raw materials to the delivery of finished goods to the final consumer. These small entities' strength is They are amplified when they come together and are better organized to achieve a specific goal of delivering items for production and consumption. Supply chains

require technical capabilities to become resilient, strategic alliances can be forged among small logistics companies to leverage each other's resources, capabilities and competencies for optimal output.

Implementing an effective customer relationship management system builds customer loyalty and enhances the organization's brand name. It will single out the business as unique in its dealings and help win new customers. Apart from its primary role of customer retention, it will help the organization find new customers and keep them happy. Many small and medium-scale businesses in Nigeria do not pay attention to their customers' maintenance; hence, they are constantly struggling to find new ones.

Information emanating from the entrepreneurial ecosystem is targeted specifically to solving the problems of respective businesses. In Nigeria, for instance, market and trading associations are the channels through which effective communication is relayed to micro, small, and medium-scale businesses because of the trust for their informal structure. Ideas and new opportunities that make these businesses agile also emanate from these ecosystems, hence, their ability to innovate and withstand certain external pressures to their operations.

Contingency plans enable businesses to activate alternative work processes or protocols in difficult situations. This may include the plan of allowing some employees to work from home and providing them the guidelines and rules to follow to safeguard the organization's files, the implication of having employees work from home can lower the rent overhead of small businesses and enable them to save the expense particularly in the COVID-pandemic period, so many businesses have now made it the new normal, and employees are reaping the fruit of not having to spend money on transportation to their workplaces or buying gasoline to power their vehicles.

Finally, the adoption of the concept of sustainability by owners and operators of small businesses will further create new opportunities that will enable small and medium-scale businesses to efficiently carry out their operations by streamlining effort and conserving resources lead to higher employee output and decrease in cost.

Conclusion

It can be inferred from the foregoing that small and medium-scale businesses in Nigeria are bread and butter of the Nigerian economy, and it is indeed imperative for small and medium-scale business owners and operators to begin without delay to rethink their business plans and processes and adopt strategies that will aid not just their survival but also their growth. Federal and state governments must not make the usual blunder of throwing money at a problem but must target key areas that will help to oil the wheel of progress. These areas include the provision of constant supply of electricity, access to the internet and ensuring that the stimulus package for micro, small and medium-scale businesses gets to the intended beneficiaries.

In the bid to save livelihoods in the small and medium-scale businesses; time is of the essence; the faster all stakeholders move to save jobs, the better for the Nigerian economy. Although too much water has passed under the bridge, these businesses' present situation can still be salvaged to prevent a total collapse of an essential component of the Nigerian business environment.

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