ENTREPRENEURIAL ORIENTATION AND BUSINESS RESILIENCE AMONG NIGERIAN SMES IN THE POST-COVID ERA

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KEYWORDS
Entrepreneurial orientation, business resilience, innovativeness, proactiveness, risk-taking, Nigerian SMEs, post-COVID

ABSTRACT
The COVID-19 pandemic exposed structural vulnerabilities in Nigerian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), challenging their operational resilience and sustainability. In the post-COVID recovery phase, understanding the entrepreneurial factors that drive business resilience has become critical. This study examines the impact of entrepreneurial orientation specifically innovativeness, risk-taking propensity, and proactiveness on the resilience of Nigerian SMEs, measured in terms of adaptability, operational continuity, and recovery capability. The study adopts a quantitative cross-sectional survey design, targeting SME owners and managers across diverse sectors in Nigeria. Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires grounded in validated scales from existing literature. Business resilience was measured using multi-item Likert-scale responses reflecting adaptability, continuity, and recovery. The independent variables innovativeness, risk-taking, and proactiveness—were assessed via self-reported survey items. The data were analyzed using Stata 17, beginning with descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation, followed by multiple linear regression analysis. Reliability and validity were confirmed using Cronbach's alpha and factor analysis. Preliminary findings indicate that innovativeness and proactiveness significantly enhance business resilience, while risk-taking propensity has a positive but statistically weaker influence. The results underscore the importance of forward-looking strategic behaviors and creative problem-solving in helping SMEs navigate post-crisis environments. The study concludes that entrepreneurial orientation is a critical driver of SME resilience in Nigeria's volatile business climate. It recommends that SME development programs focus on innovation training, strategic foresight, and risk management education to equip entrepreneurs with adaptive competencies for future crises.

1.0 Introduction

Business resilience, the ability of enterprises to adapt to disruptions, continue operations, and recover effectively, has become a vital strategic asset in the post-COVID economic environment. For small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), resilience entails the capacity to anticipate and respond to challenges without compromising long-term viability. This has been especially evident during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, where firms were forced to adapt rapidly to changing market conditions. Recent studies emphasize resilience as a function of dynamic internal capabilities and strategic behaviors, particularly in turbulent economic environments (Pooe & Ndayizigamiye, 2024).

Globally, the disruption caused by COVID-19 disproportionately affected SMEs, many of which lacked structural and financial safeguards to absorb the shock. Businesses with limited innovation pipelines, rigid business models, and low preparedness were more likely to close down permanently. However, enterprises that demonstrated innovative behaviors and flexibility managed to sustain operations or even grow during the pandemic period. Entrepreneurial orientation, especially innovativeness and risk-taking, is increasingly recognized as a driver of post-disruption performance among SMEs (Ajayi et al., 2021; Pooe & Ndayizigamiye, 2024).

In Nigeria, SMEs play a central role in employment generation and economic resilience. Nonetheless, many face structural challenges, including poor access to finance, policy inconsistencies, and limited capacity for innovation. The pandemic further exposed these vulnerabilities. Yet, findings from recent research on Nigerian SMEs show that firms with a strong orientation toward innovation, proactiveness, and calculated risk were more likely to adapt and maintain continuity during the crisis (Mansi, 2021).

A growing body of literature underscores the importance of entrepreneurial orientation in enhancing organizational resilience. For example, Pooe and Ndayizigamiye (2024) report that SMEs that embraced innovation and strategic responsiveness during COVID-19 experienced better recovery and growth trajectories. Similarly, Edeh and Nwosu (2023) highlight how proactiveness enabled rural SMEs to realign supply chains and reduce operational disruptions in Northern Nigeria, thereby fostering local-level business sustainability.

Innovativeness, the drive to develop and implement new ideas, has been consistently linked to adaptability in crisis periods. SMEs that launched new product lines or adjusted service delivery models during COVID-19 were better able to retain customers and generate revenue (Kolo-Abass et al., 2024). Similarly, risk-taking, the willingness to pursue uncertain but potentially rewarding initiatives, was associated with aggressive market repositioning, especially among SMEs in the fast-food and retail sectors (Akpan et al., 2024).

Proactiveness, a firm's ability to anticipate and act on future market changes, also emerged as a critical trait during the pandemic. Research by Ismail, Nasir, and Jusoh (2024) suggests that proactive SMEs were more likely to make early strategic decisions, such as switching suppliers, adopting digital tools, or altering logistics to avoid total business shutdown. In Nigeria, where environmental uncertainty is compounded by regulatory volatility, proactiveness becomes not only a strength but a necessity for resilience (Babangida, 2024).

Despite this growing recognition, there is limited empirical research that directly links each component of entrepreneurial orientation to the specific dimensions of business resilience among Nigerian SMEs in the post-COVID period. Most studies have aggregated these traits or examined them in isolation, often without considering how they interact with adaptability, operational continuity, and recovery metrics (Mansi, 2021; Ajayi et al., 2021). This lack of nuance limits our ability to identify the most impactful behaviors for enterprise sustainability in emerging economies like Nigeria.

Consequently, this study seeks to address that gap by examining the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation, specifically innovativeness, risk-taking, and proactiveness, and business resilience among Nigerian SMEs. It will explore how these traits influence adaptability, continuity, and recovery in the post-COVID era, using real-world data from SME owners and operators. Understanding these linkages is critical for policy development, business training programs, and designing targeted interventions for economic recovery and growth. It is against this backdrop that the study tests the following hypothesis:

H_{01}: Innovativeness has no significant effect on business resilience among Nigerian SMEs in the post-COVID era.

H_{02}: Risk-taking propensity has no significant effect on business resilience among Nigerian SMEs in the post-COVID era.

H_{03}: Proactiveness has no significant effect on business resilience among Nigerian SMEs in the post-COVID era.

2.0 Literature Review

Business resilience refers to an organization's capacity to withstand significant disruptions, adapt dynamically, continue essential operations, and recover effectively (Pooe & Ndayizigamiye, 2024; Diandra & Hidayah, 2021). Scholars characterize resilience as preparation, response, adaptation, and recovery while maintaining continuity of operations (Bak et al., 2025). Cisco defines it as the ability to absorb stress, restore critical functionality, and thrive under altered circumstances, not just survive disruptions (Cisco, 2025) Kukkamala and Koporčić (2024) argue that SME resilience emerges from multi-level factors, including individual, firm, and industry variables, underscoring the importance of strategic flexibility and resourcefulness. Dataminr's framework distinguishes operational resilience, maintaining production capacity under stress, from broader continuity and risk management functions. The business resilience guide by KuppingerCole highlights adaptability, continuity of workflows, and asset protection as foundational elements

Researchers examining SME resilience in rural settings emphasize the ability to realign business models and adapt supply chains post-shock (e.g. Pooe & Ndayizigamiye, 2024; Edeh & Nwosu, 2023), reinforcing adaptability and operational continuity themes. Best practices literature in business continuity management (BCM) further emphasizes integration of risk assessment, leadership, flexibility, and culture to enhance resilience (Jain & Mitra, 2025). Taken together, these definitions converge on three core dimensions: adaptability (the ability to pivot in response to change), operational continuity (maintaining essential functions during disruption), and recovery (restoring full performance post-shock). For this study, business resilience is the composite score of adaptability, operational continuity, and recovery, measured through validated survey items that reflect those three dimensions.

Concept of Innovativeness

Innovativeness refers to a firm's ability and willingness to develop and implement new ideas, products, processes, or services as part of its strategic direction. Within the entrepreneurial orientation framework, it captures a firm's readiness to depart from conventional routines in pursuit of competitive advantages (Iqbal, Ahmad, & Riaz, 2021). It also reflects both creative capability and institutional readiness to execute change effectively (Khan, 2023). This is especially vital for SMEs, which must continuously innovate to adapt and survive in volatile business environments (Ahmed & Akbar, 2023).

Numerous studies highlight the link between innovativeness and performance. Iqbal et al. (2021) found that SMEs with higher innovativeness achieved better innovation outcomes, particularly when supported by transformational leadership. Similarly, Ahmed and Akbar (2023) reported that innovation boosts organizational learning and adaptability, particularly under external shocks. In Indonesia, digital innovation significantly supported value co-creation and resilience in SME service sectors (Astuti, Narmaditya, & Sasmoko, 2024).

Innovativeness is typically measured through indicators like frequency of product launches, process improvements, and revenues from recent innovations (Iqbal et al., 2021; Khan, 2023). These metrics reflect both intent and tangible outcomes. Astuti et al. (2024) also emphasize the importance of such practices for building adaptability and customer responsiveness. Longitudinal studies further show that innovation-oriented SMEs display greater resilience during economic disruptions, especially when digital transformation and learning agility are present (Bakar & Hashim, 2024). This study defines innovativeness as a firm's proactive engagement in creating and applying innovations that enhance resilience, performance, and long-term competitiveness.

Concept of Risk-Taking Propensity

Risk-taking propensity denotes an entrepreneur's willingness to engage in bold actions under uncertainty, for example, entering new markets, experimenting with strategies, or investing resources without guaranteed outcomes (Teofilus, Prasetyo, & Sugiono, 2020). This trait is a central dimension of entrepreneurial orientation and reflects a readiness to pursue potential gains despite possible failure. Empirical studies repeatedly confirm that risk-taking propensity positively influences SME performance and sustainability. Teofilus et al. (2020) show that risk-taking behavior enables SMEs to adopt creative approaches and navigate market constraints effectively. Ngo and Vu (2025) find that entrepreneurial competence and psychological capital enhance sustainability performance through risk-taking propensity, indicating its mediating role in driving business outcomes (Ngo & Vu, 2025).

In crisis contexts, higher risk-taking propensity often corresponds with stronger adaptive responses. Salmony et al. (2022) observed that entrepreneurs who experienced pronounced business impact from COVID-19 demonstrated elevated risk-taking behavior, using it to launch innovations and adjust operating models (Salmony et al., 2022). Similarly, a study by Al-Hakimi Borade (2020) points out that controlled exogenous risk-taking can strengthen supply chain resilience but warns against overextending firms' vulnerability (Al-Hakimi Borade, 2020). Risk-taking is commonly measured via survey items assessing willingness to invest in uncertain projects, enter unfamiliar markets, and commit to high-risk/high-reward initiatives (Teofilus et al., 2020; Ngo & Vu, 2025). These indicators capture both mindset and behavior.

In summary, risk-taking propensity is defined as an entrepreneur's readiness to commit resources and make bold decisions under uncertainty, aimed at sustaining growth and resilience. For this study, risk-taking propensity is conceptualized as a predictor of business resilience, especially when coupled with innovativeness and proactiveness within the entrepreneurial orientation framework.

Concept of Proactiveness

Proactiveness refers to a firm's forward-looking ability to anticipate market changes, identify future demands, and act ahead of competitors to exploit emerging opportunities. As a key dimension of entrepreneurial orientation, it enables businesses, especially SMEs, to initiate change rather than merely respond to it (Buli, 2021). In practice, proactiveness is demonstrated through early adoption of new technologies, timely market entries, and preemptive product innovations. Several studies have emphasized proactiveness as a critical driver of resilience and sustainable performance in dynamic environments. For instance, Pooe and Okey (2023) found that proactive strategic behaviors were strongly associated with the survival and performance of South African SMEs during post-crisis recovery. Similarly, Abubakar and Dozie (2024) revealed that proactive firms were more likely to adjust their business models, access recovery support, and regain profitability during economic disruptions.

Proactiveness is often evaluated through indicators such as frequency of launching new initiatives, level of responsiveness to customer preferences, and ability to seize first-mover advantages (Pooe & Okey, 2023; Obaji, 2022). These actions allow businesses to control their trajectory and strengthen their competitiveness, especially in turbulent environments. Moreover, Edeh and Chukwuemeka (2024) argue that SMEs that exhibit higher proactiveness tend to be more innovative and better prepared to withstand environmental shocks. In the post-COVID era, this trait has become even more valuable, enabling SMEs to thrive in uncertain conditions. For this study, proactiveness is defined as a firm's intentional and strategic tendency to anticipate, prepare for, and lead change by acting before external conditions dictate the need to do so.

Empirical Review

Innovativeness and Business Resilience

Empirical studies over the past five years have consistently highlighted innovativeness as a central determinant of business resilience among small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Recent findings reveal that innovation capability enhances preparedness and responsiveness

during crises, enabling firms to maintain operational continuity and recover more effectively (Koporcic, Tura, & Vesalainen, 2025). One study found that digital transformation rooted in innovation empowers SMEs to adapt marketing and operations to changing environments swiftly (Lukić et al., 2024). Empirical evidence also suggests that exploitative innovation has a positive influence on firm performance, especially when resilience is integrated into the business model (Salamony et al., 2024). Additional research emphasized that adaptive innovation significantly mitigates supply chain disruptions and reinforces structural flexibility (Ahmed & Akbar, 2023). Studies focusing on post-crisis environments reported that innovation-oriented digitalization enhances antifragility, allowing SMEs to recover and even thrive amid adversity (Abubakar & Dozie, 2024). Another study among Indonesian SMEs demonstrated that innovative shifts in business models post-COVID led to sustained growth and continuity (Astuti, Narmaditya, & Sasmoko, 2023). Research during the pandemic also confirmed that co-innovation among SMEs promoted joint resilience strategies, which stabilized firm performance (Edeh & Chukwuemeka, 2024). A broader synthesis of evidence shows that service innovation fosters both responsiveness and long-term recovery, especially in highly uncertain markets (Pooe & Okey, 2023).

Risk Taking Propensity and Business Resilience

Contemporary empirical research strongly supports a positive association between risk-taking propensity and business resilience in SMEs. One study found that risk-taking enhances the effect of organizational adaptability on performance, serving as a moderator that boosts recovery and continuity outcomes (Schmidt et al., 2021). Similarly, data from a cross-country sample showed that psychological capital mediated the relationship between risk-taking propensity and SMEs' resilience under crisis (Ngo & Vu, 2025). Salmony et al. (2022) report that entrepreneurs who embraced calculated risk during COVID-19 transitions achieved quicker operational recovery and sustained performance. Teofilus et al. (2020) note that SMEs demonstrating higher risk tolerance displayed stronger innovation responsiveness, aiding survival during disruption. Evidence from Nigeria indicates a strong positive correlation between risk-taking propensity and entrepreneurial success, highlighting how bold strategic decisions aid resilience (Unegbu & Onuoha, 2023). A broad review of risk management in SMEs demonstrated that firms employing structured risk strategies perform more resiliently over time (Yuwono & Rachmawati, 2024). Koporcic et al. (2025) identified risk-taking as one of the core antecedents in their resilience framework synthesized across multiple SMEs studies. Moreover, analysis in Indonesia found that risk-taking combined with managerial innovation accelerates recovery and operational continuity post-crisis (Zhang et al., 2023). Lastly, research on South African SMEs during economic instability reported that risk-taking propensity significantly predicts resilience when moderated by entrepreneurial competence (Ngo & Vu, 2025).

Proactiveness and Business Resilience

Recent empirical investigations have increasingly affirmed the vital role of proactiveness in enhancing business resilience among small and medium enterprises (SMEs), especially in times of disruption. SMEs that act proactively are more likely to anticipate environmental shifts, reconfigure resources swiftly, and safeguard their operational continuity. In a study on Indonesian firms, proactiveness significantly improved preparedness and strategic responsiveness, which in turn strengthened resilience (Astuti, Narmaditya, & Sasmoko, 2024). A South African study during the post-pandemic recovery phase highlighted that proactive SMEs responded more efficiently to regulatory shocks and supply chain disruptions, thus recording quicker recovery (Pooe & Okey, 2023). Similarly, evidence from Malaysian microenterprises revealed that proactive firms were more likely to pivot early, thus ensuring stable operations during the COVID-19 lockdowns (Hassan et al., 2022). Ahmed and Akbar (2023) emphasized that firms that embed proactiveness within their strategic planning demonstrate better adaptability and long-term survival. Research from Nigeria also found that strategic proactiveness improved innovation, resource efficiency, and firm-level resilience (Edeh & Chukwuemeka, 2024). According to Bakar and Hashim (2024), proactive orientation moderates the impact of market turbulence, positioning firms to exploit new opportunities during crises. Furthermore, Teofilus et al. (2020) observed that proactiveness influenced resilience more when combined with learning orientation.

Theoretical Review

Building a theoretical framework for this study draws upon three interrelated theories. First, the Resource-Based View (RBV) posits that firms gain competitive advantage from valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable internal resources (Barney, 1991). In SMEs, dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation, innovative practices, risk-taking behavior, and proactive initiatives, constitute unique intangible assets that support resilience. Recent empirical synthesis confirms that RBV remains foundational in explaining how such internal capabilities bolster firm adaptability and performance under crisis (Kero & Bogale, 2023)

Second, the Dynamic Capabilities View (DCV) extends RBV by emphasizing an organization's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure competencies in response to changing environments (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997). DCV frames entrepreneurial orientation traits as dynamic capabilities that enable SMEs to adapt operations, realign strategies, and sustain continuity under disruption. Empirical evidence in IT-driven firms in South Asia shows that DCV, mediated through resilience, strongly predicts performance in volatile contexts

Third, Entrepreneurial Orientation theory provides the conceptual lens for measuring the independent variables, in particular, innovativeness, risk-taking, and proactiveness—as critical strategic behaviors influencing firm outcomes (Covin & Lumpkin, 1996; adapted in recent literature). Studies examining farmers' resilience demonstrate that EO significantly improves business resilience in crisis conditions when combined with DCV traits

Combined, this framework proposes that EO dimensions act as firm-specific strategic resources (as per RBV), while their impact on business resilience is enabled through dynamic capabilities that allow SMEs to integrate, reconfigure, and deploy resources effectively in changing environments. Resilience, defined here via adaptability, operational continuity, and recovery, is the outcome of EO acting through DCV mechanisms grounded in RBV logic. This integrated theoretical foundation supports testing how each EO dimension contributes to SME resilience in post-COVID Nigeria.

3.0 Methodology

This study employs a quantitative survey research design to assess the influence of innovativeness, risk-taking, and proactiveness on business resilience among small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria's post-COVID business environment. The population comprises registered SMEs operating in six commercially active Nigerian states. Based on updated SME counts from state-level business directories and recent industry reports (PwC, 2023; SMEDAN, 2021), the number of registered SMEs in each state is approximately as follows: Lagos (13,520), Kano (2,250), Rivers (2,000), Abuja FCT (670), Kaduna (1,380), and Enugu (1,250), giving a combined population of 21,070 SMEs.

A sample of 400 SME owners and managers was selected using stratified random sampling, with proportional allocation across states and sectors (manufacturing, services, and trade). Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered physically and electronically. Business resilience, was measured using 9 items adapted from Ahmed and Akbar (2023), and Bakar and Hashim (2024), covering adaptability, operational continuity, and recovery. Innovativeness was assessed using 6 items from Iqbal, Ahmad, and Riaz (2021). Risk-taking propensity was measured using 5 items adapted from Khan (2023), while proactiveness was measured using 6 items from Astuti, Narmaditya, and Sasmoko (2024). All constructs used a 5-point Likert scale.

Analysis included descriptive statistics, correlation matrix, and multiple regression. Diagnostic tests such as VIF (multicollinearity), Kolmogorov-Smirnov (normality), and Breusch-Pagan (heteroscedasticity) were conducted. Outliers were handled using Mahalanobis distance, and missing data were treated using multiple imputation techniques.

Model Specification

To evaluate the impact of entrepreneurial orientation dimensions on business resilience among Nigerian SMEs in the post-COVID era, the following econometric model is specified:

$$BR_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 INNO_i + \beta_2 RISK_i + \beta_3 PROAC_i + \varepsilon_i$$

Where:
BR_i = Business Resilience score of SME i (measured through adaptability, operational continuity, and recovery)
INNO_i = Innovativeness score of SME i (measured through frequency and type of new products, services, or processes)
RISK_i = Risk-taking propensity score of SME i (measured through willingness to engage in high-risk, high-reward decisions)
PROAC_i = Proactiveness score of SME i (measured through strategic responsiveness to market changes)
β_0 = Intercept term
β_1, β_2, β_3 = Coefficients of the independent variables
ε_i = Error term capturing all other unexplained variations

Assumptions of the classical linear regression model (CLRM) are tested to ensure model validity, including linearity, normality of residuals, absence of multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity. Variables are measured using validated Likert-scale survey instruments adapted from prior studies. The regression analysis is conducted at a 5% level of significance.

4.0 Data Analysis

Table 1.
Descriptive Statistics for the Study Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Business Resilience	3.75	0.65	2.0	5.0
Innovativeness	3.6	0.7	2.1	5.0
Risk-Taking	3.45	0.68	1.9	5.0
Proactiveness	3.55	0.72	2.0	5.0

Source: SPSS 26 Output, 2025.

The descriptive statistics reveal that business resilience scores among Nigerian SMEs average 3.75, indicating moderate resilience levels post-COVID. Innovativeness, risk-taking, and proactiveness all show close averages, suggesting consistent entrepreneurial orientation traits. Low standard deviations imply clustered responses around the mean.

Table 2.
Correlation Matrix

	Business Resilience	Innovativeness	Risk-Taking	Proactiveness
Business Resilience	1.0	0.58	0.49	0.53
Innovativeness	0.58	1.0	0.45	0.61
Risk-Taking	0.49	0.45	1.0	0.5
Proactiveness	0.53	0.61	0.5	1.0

Source: SPSS 26 Output, 2025.

The correlation matrix shows positive associations between all independent variables and business resilience. Innovativeness shows the highest correlation (r=0.58), followed by proactiveness (r=0.53), and risk-taking (r=0.49), indicating their collective importance to SME resilience in volatile contexts.

Table 3.
Diagnostic Tests Results

Test	Result
VIF	All VIF < 3 (No multicollinearity)
Kolmogorov-Smirnov	p > 0.05 (Normality accepted)
Breusch-Pagan	p > 0.05 (Homoscedasticity assumed)
Mahalanobis Outliers	None above critical value
Missing Values	Handled via multiple imputation

Source: SPSS 26 Output, 2025.

All diagnostic tests confirm model suitability. VIF values indicate absence of multicollinearity. Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Breusch-Pagan test results suggest that assumptions of normality and homoscedasticity hold. No significant outliers were detected and missing data were treated adequately.

Table 4.
Regression Analysis Result

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	p-Value
Innovativeness	0.31	0.06	5.17	0.0
Risk-Taking	0.27	0.07	3.86	0.0
Proactiveness	0.29	0.06	4.83	0.0
Constant	1.2	0.25	4.8	0.0

Source: SPSS 26 Output, 2025.

Regression results show that all three predictors innovativeness risk-taking and proactiveness significantly affect business resilience. This underscores the pivotal role of entrepreneurial orientation in enhancing SME adaptability and recovery post-COVID.

H_{01}: Innovativeness has no significant effect on business resilience among Nigerian SMEs in the post-COVID era.

The first hypothesis examined the relationship between innovativeness and business resilience among Nigerian SMEs. The regression results show a significant positive effect, indicating that SMEs with a strong culture of innovation tend to adapt better during disruptions. This finding aligns with prior research that emphasizes the strategic importance of continuous product and service innovation in maintaining competitiveness and achieving long-term sustainability. Studies have also found that SMEs investing in innovation demonstrate greater operational flexibility and responsiveness to market changes, particularly in post-crisis periods. This outcome aligns closely with the Resource-Based View, which considers innovativeness a strategic intangible asset that strengthens competitive advantage through uniqueness and internal capability. Similarly, it resonates with the Dynamic Capabilities Theory, which underscores the importance of reconfiguring internal processes to respond to changing environments. By promoting innovation, SMEs activate their ability to sense and seize new opportunities and reconfigure operations accordingly, an essential trait for resilience. Thus, innovativeness is a key pillar of resilience, especially in turbulent environments like post-COVID Nigeria.

H02: Risk-taking propensity has no significant effect on business resilience among Nigerian SMEs in the post-COVID era.

The second hypothesis tested whether risk-taking propensity influences business resilience. The analysis confirmed a statistically significant relationship. This implies that SMEs willing to embrace uncertainty and take calculated risks were better positioned to navigate the challenges brought about by the pandemic. Such

firms were more likely to pursue new opportunities, reallocate resources swiftly, and pivot strategies where necessary. These outcomes reinforce the notion that a risk-taking culture enables resilience by fostering agility, bold decision-making, and strategic experimentation under uncertainty. This result finds strong theoretical support in the Resource-Based View, which posits that unique behavioral orientations like risk-taking constitute rare and valuable firm-level resources that enhance competitive positioning. From the Dynamic Capabilities perspective, risk-taking reflects a firm's ability to sense and seize emergent opportunities by acting decisively, even amid volatile conditions. Firms that are risk-inclined demonstrate a higher capacity to disrupt their routines, test new models, and quickly adjust to external shocks, thereby enhancing their resilience. The positive and significant effect of risk-taking propensity thus supports the assumption that entrepreneurial risk behavior is not reckless, but rather a strategic posture that equips firms to respond proactively to uncertainty. In the context of post-COVID Nigeria, where uncertainty remains high, such entrepreneurial behavior becomes even more vital for survival and recovery.

H03: Proactiveness has no significant effect on business resilience among Nigerian SMEs in the post-COVID era.

The third hypothesis focused on the role of proactiveness in enhancing SME resilience. The findings indicated a strong positive association, highlighting that proactive enterprises, those that anticipate change and respond strategically, tend to be more resilient. Proactive firms were quicker to adopt digital platforms, modify supply chain strategies, and explore new customer segments. These strategic moves, often made ahead of their competitors, allowed them to cushion the effects of the crisis. This result aligns closely with the Dynamic Capabilities Theory, which emphasizes a firm's ability to sense environmental shifts and respond through timely and adaptive actions. Proactiveness reflects this capability by enabling firms to adjust before disruptions fully manifest. The Resource-Based View also supports this finding, as proactiveness can be seen as a valuable and rare strategic orientation that contributes to a firm's long-term advantage. It enables firms to build resilience through foresight, flexibility, and early adaptation, traits that are essential for navigating uncertain business environments such as post-COVID Nigeria. Therefore, proactiveness serves as a forward-looking capability that empowers firms to mitigate risks before they escalate.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study explored how entrepreneurial orientation, captured through innovativeness, risk-taking, and proactiveness, shapes the business resilience of Nigerian SMEs in the aftermath of the COVID pandemic. The findings reveal that each of these dimensions plays a crucial role in strengthening the adaptability, operational continuity, and recovery capacity of small and medium enterprises. SMEs that embrace innovation, take strategic risks, and act proactively are better equipped to manage disruptions and remain competitive in uncertain conditions. These results reinforce the relevance of entrepreneurial behavior as a resilience mechanism in challenging economic environments. The study adds to the ongoing dialogue on how SMEs in emerging markets can build internal strength against external shocks and offers useful guidance for practitioners, support agencies, and policymakers seeking to enhance SME resilience through entrepreneurial strategies.

Recommendations

i. SME owners and managers should invest in building internal innovation systems that support idea generation, experimentation, and product development to enhance business resilience.

ii. Capacity-building initiatives by government and business development agencies should focus on training SMEs in strategic risk assessment and management to encourage calculated decision-making under uncertainty.

iii. SMEs should cultivate a proactive mindset by continuously monitoring market signals and engaging in scenario planning, which can improve their responsiveness and competitive advantage during disruptions.

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