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PART ONE: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH REPORT

**AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE MOST IMPORTANT
EXTERNAL FACTORS AFFECTING SMALL AND MEDIUM
SIZED TECHNOLOGY ENTERPRISE START-UPS (SMTES)
IN NIGERIA: AN EXPLORATORY MULTI-CASE
QUALITATIVE STUDY**

Abstract

Proposed Research Purpose: What are the most important external factors affecting Small and Medium-Sized Technology Enterprises Start-ups in Nigeria? This question represents an ever-increasing concern for (would-be) small business owners and government policy makers alike. Of course, the imperatives for these people are different; from the lingering objective of how to run a successful SMEs in the former to how to provide an enabling environment in the latter, the combinatory enormity of its effect on the Africa's largest economy cannot be overemphasized. As such, while extant literatures are laden with past research studies on SMEs; its importance – in enhancing industrialization among others, there seems to be gap in the depth of research on the external factors affecting small technology start-up businesses in Nigeria¹. This research is as such aimed at filling this important void and providing answers to this lingering, and aforementioned, research question.

Proposed Research Methodology and Design: This will be an exploratory multi-case qualitative research. Considering Nigeria is divided into six geopolitical zones each with somewhat unique attributes and culture, semi-structured interviews would be conducted for small technology start-up business owners and senior managers which were drawn by purposive sampling across all the zones in the country. Focus groups would also be used in collecting information to complement the earlier semi-structured interview.

The highlighted factors from literature review would form the fulcrum upon which the semi-structured interview and focus group themes would be formed. Though NVIVO would be used as the technical software for coding among others, thematic analysis would be adopted in analysing the collected qualitative data.

Originality and Research Value: After rigorous review of extant literatures in databases likes EBSCO, ..., it is of the researcher's professional belief that research study of the same context – in industry, country and adopted methodology – do not exist. As such, this study intends to fill a

¹ Please see section two for details on the need for this research

void in the academic world like that of the practical business world which would be filled by understanding the critical success factors that affects the industry under study.

Keywords: Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), SME external factors, small technology start-up business, small business.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Research Context

Both in extant literature and practical business world, it has become well established that growth and development are often based on the development of new technology and innovation (Jaksic, et al., 2013). In this present business world, firms that are strategically-oriented to constantly innovating in products and processes often provide superior competitive advantage and survive the “red ocean”. Sustainability is the key ingredient to business continuity and long-term competitiveness, and innovation and entrepreneurial activities are pivotal to this. However, the merit of technological innovation and entrepreneurial activities is neither exclusive nor limited to a firm or individual level, it is also the cornerstone of a country’s progress and economic growth. In fact, Jovana, et al. (2018, p. 13), while describing the impact of entrepreneurs, posited that

“apart from creating wealth from their entrepreneurial ventures both for themselves and their country, they also create jobs and represent the main ‘force’ acting against unemployment. Simply put, entrepreneurs are a necessary ingredient in building a prosperous society”.

Just like entrepreneurial start-ups above, the economic importance of Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to nations’ development cannot be overemphasized. Considering that many technology entrepreneurial start-ups fall under small and medium-sized enterprises, many researchers have emphasized their needs to economic development. In fact, in extant literatures, many research works have depicted its importance to facilitating rapid industrialization (Smallbone, et al., 2010), enhancing innovation (Caca, 2010), promoting economic growth (McLarty, et al., 2012), seeing to massive poverty reduction (Azimzadeh, et al., 2013), improving income generation (Ebiyu, et al., 2016), facilitating countries’ economic growth (McLarty, et al., 2012) and increasing their competitiveness (Dobbs & Hamilton, 2007; McLarty et al., 2012) among others.

The importance is often exacerbated by the huge number and commanding percentages they often constitute among all businesses in a given country. Ebiyu, et al. (2016) for instance argued that SMEs in Nigeria constitute 97% of all the businesses in the country and employed 50% of all the total workforce. While juxtaposing SMEs in developed and developing nations, Oyelaran-

Oyeyinka (2017) however posited that SMEs in Nigeria constitute 96% of all the total SMEs in Nigeria, a percentage considerably higher than the 53% in United States of America (USA) and the 65% in Europe. Though slightly earlier, the figure released by the Small and Medium Enterprises Development of Nigeria (SMEDAN) in conjunction with the Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) also gave credence to the aforementioned assertion that SMEs constitute the largest number and percentage of the number of companies that exist. Perhaps more importantly, the bodies also posited that they contributed 38.78 billion naira (48.47%) to the country's GDP as well as 7.27% to its export earnings. Though the statistics released by SMEDAN in conjunction with the country's official statistics office highlight the classification error in the two preceding reports in that micro-sized enterprises were classified separately from small-sized enterprises (SMEDAN, 2014)

With the increasing internet penetration in Nigeria which reached 48.44% in 2017/ 2018, a percentage that is second only to South Africa in the continent, there is rapid establishment of technology start-ups in Nigeria. In fact, despite the recession, technology start-ups remain an important source of foreign direct investment to the largest economy in Africa as narrated by the then Minister of Communications (Leadership News, 2018).

Despite the huge importance of small and medium sized enterprises, various extant research work has established that they however exhibit high failure rate. Though this high failure rate is a global phenomenon and it's regardless of country and industry (Arasti et al., 2012; Fang, et al., 2009; Gray et al., 2012; Ropega, 2011), this case is further exacerbated by the fact that they are not just small and medium-sized businesses, they are technology start-ups with added layer of difficulties and failures. In Nigeria, Alli & Jimoh (2017) posited that over eighty percent of SMEs fail within the first five 5 years of their existence. This is an alarming statistic which need further research because of the associated importance.

1.2 Problem Definition and the Research Question

Even on the definition of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs), there is no universally accepted definition of the term because of significant variations in definitions used by various countries or region (Smallbone, et al., 2010; Unger, et al., 2011) neither is there a uniformity in the definition of business success (Beaver, 2002; Beaver & Carr, 2002). Though the most prevailing definition of success according to researchers like Brannback, et al. (2010), Kiviluoto,

et al. (2011), Steffens (2009) is an increase in the sales turnover and/ or profitability, definition of SMEs is mostly prevailing according to regions and countries.

Concurrent with this non-uniformity in the definition of SMEs is that of the factors affecting them. A cursory look at the extant literature would show that knowledge is indeed fragmented on the important factors affecting SMEs as with the technology start-ups that fall under the SMEs despite their unique intricacies. There is no uniformity on the important factors affecting SMEs as significant variations manifested across the industries, sectors, countries and business environments among others. Putting it succinctly, while business literatures feature a wide range of critical success (or very important) factors affecting SMEs, their importance tend to vary with the business environment (the country and industry) of the SMEs; meaning that a success factor in an industry or country may not necessarily be important in another industry or country (Ahmad & Seet, 2009; Alfaadhel, 2010; Al-Mahrouq, 2010; Azimzadeh, et al., 2013; Chawla, et al., 2010; Chawla, et al., 1997; Sharmilee & Muhammad, 2016; Simpson, et al., 2012). As such, this leaves a research gap in that research study of the same settings; countries, industries and, even, methodology has not been done despite its importance.

With the increasing internet penetration, the massive youthful population and its consequent large market, it is easy to see why technology start-ups is consistently being the highest source of non-oil foreign direct investment (FDI) into Nigeria. Besides the various investment reports which are reviewed from Techpoint Africa, report from the Nigeria's then Minister of Communication that technology enterprise (start-ups among others in the technology sector) generated an FDI of 40 billion USD in 2018 further gave credence to this assertion (Leadership News, 2018).

Summarily, despite the promise shown by small technology start-ups (technology start-ups that fall under SMEs), extant research has shown research void because no existing research have shown in the same context: country (Nigeria), industry (technology start-ups), category of enterprise (SME: small business); factors under investigation (external factors); and methodology (multi-case exploratory qualitative research) among others. It is as such that the aim of this research is to fill this paucity. As such, the research questions are detailed below thus:

The Main Research Question is: What are the most important external factors affecting small and medium-sized technology enterprise start-ups in Nigeria?

In order to be able to provide the needed answers to this research questions, the main research question above is further broken down into sub research questions which provide the needed basis for this research. They are:

- ✓ What are the most important (political, environment, socio-cultural and technological) environmental factors affecting small and medium-sized technology enterprise start-ups in Nigeria?
- ✓ Why do you consider those factors as the most important factors affecting small and medium-sized technology enterprise start-ups in Nigeria?
- ✓ What are the important lessons that could be learnt towards successful small and medium-sized technology enterprise start-ups in Nigeria?

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Terms and Overview of SMTES in the Nigeria Context

The importance of SMTES and the larger SMEs to nations' development has been a topic of focus for political, business and management research in recent years (Abiodun, 2014; Alfaadhel, 2010; Lussier & Pfeifer, 2001). They are believed to be the needed vehicle for seeing to nations' industrialization (Smallbone, et al., 2010), facilitating innovation (Caca, 2010), seeing to massive poverty reduction (April, 2015; Azimzadeh et al., 2013), improving income generation (Ebiyu, et al., 2016), facilitating countries' economic growth and increasing their global competitiveness (Chawla, et al., 2010; Dobbs & Hamilton, 2007; Islam, et al., 2011; Martey, et al., 2013; McLarty et al., 2012) among others. While discussing the importance of SMEs to internationalisation, Czinkota & Ronkainen (2012) posited that SMEs required minimal resources and allows for enhanced structural and strategic flexibility. In lieu of this and the consequent effect on the economy, it is easy to see why it is the fastest growing segment of the economy, Kang (2011) argued. Islam, et al. (2011) also supported this stance and further posited that, relative to larger organisations, the simple procedures and systems which allow for flexibility, quick decision making, immediate feedback and the ultimate response to customers are the main driving force behind the massive numbers and percentages of a country's enterprise.

Summarily, while the importance of SMEs is well established in extant literature as with practical business world (Abiodun, 2014; Ahmad & Seet, 2009; Alfaadhel, 2010; April, 2015; Arenius & An understanding of the most important external factors affecting SMTES in Nigeria & RR Page 7 of 33

Kovalainen, 2006; Becchetti & G, 2002; Caca, 2010; Ebiyu, et al., 2016; Ensaria & Karabay, 2014; McLarty, et al., 2012), there is no uniformity on the definition of the term itself (Alfaadhel, 2010; Sharmilee & Muhammad, 2016; Eniola, 2014). For instance, while Micro enterprises in Nigeria is the same with that of the European Union with less than 10 employees (Eniola, 2014), that of South Africa is less than five employees (Sharmilee & Muhammad, 2016). This necessitate the importance to set the boundary in that despite the two countries being from Africa, their definition of Micro, Small, Medium-Sized Enterprises as well as large enterprises are different. As such, the definition as set by SMEDAN's classification which is depicted in the diagram below would be adopted for this research thus:

Figure 1: Classification of Enterprises in Nigeria

S/N	SIZE CATEGORY	EMPLOYMENT	ASSETS
1	Micro enterprises	Less than 10	< 5
2	Small enterprises	10 – 49	5 – < 50
3	Medium enterprises	50 – 199	50 – < 500
4	Large enterprises	> 200	> 500

SOURCE: SMEDAN (2007 cited in Eniola, 2014 pg. 35)

However, it is imperative to note that small business as was used alternatively in this research write-up refers to micro, small and medium-sized businesses as against the large businesses. It is still very imperative to set the above definition as there are unique demarcations of small and large businesses based on different countries and contexts. For instance, while micro enterprises in both Nigeria and European Union are characterised by less than 10 employees, one can infer that an enterprise with 230 employees is a large company in Nigeria but still a medium-sized enterprise (small business, as adopted in this research) in Europe. This is because the definition of medium-sized enterprise in European Union States is less than 250 employees while the same category of enterprise would have less than 200 employees in Nigeria's settings (Eniola, 2014). The definition, and differences between, small and large businesses is further depicted in the table below thus:

Figure 2: Small and Large Enterprises in Nigeria

Index	SME (Small Business)	Large Enterprise (Large Business)
Number of Employees	Less than 200	From 200 above
Assets	Less than 500	From 500 above

SOURCE: Inferred from SMEDAN (2007 cited in Eniola, 2014 pg. 35)

Besides the differences in the table above, several features distinguish small businesses from larger ones; the relatively simple formal structure (Ahmad & Seet, 2009), ability to make fast decisions (Martey, et al., 2013), low purchasing leverage (Raju, et al., 2011), the lack of internal labour markets (Alfaadhel, 2010), lack of former strategy and formulation processes (Raju, et al., 2011; Thun, et al., 2011), the dominance of owners and or managers (Franco & Haase, 2010), centralised and informal decision making (Bonet, et al., 2011), and a limited user base among others (Janeska-Iliev & Debarliev, 2015). Gonzalez-Benito, et al. (2013) also highlighted the differences to include limited cash flows, flat organizational structure, relatively few customers and concentration on current performance which are all associated with small businesses. Many a researcher also argued that where small businesses and large businesses often differs is mostly on the huge personal commitment and high motivation of the owners of small firms (Bonet, et al., 2011; Raju, et al., 2011; Rose, et al., 2006).

While the importance of small businesses and the differences with large businesses are well documented, the failure rate in Nigeria's small businesses is even alarming. Alli & Jimoh (2017), for instance, argued that over 80% of small businesses failed in their first five years. While the next section would highlight the factors that determine their successes or lack-off, there is a need to quickly shed light on the meaning of success and failure.

Understanding business failures is important towards understanding business success. Though the literatures on businesses have focused more on business success (Arasti, et al., 2012), Halabi & Lussier (2014) also argued that an understanding of business failure is as important as business success in understanding the intricacies behind the latter. Eyal-Cohen (2014), while looking at it from the entrepreneurial perspective, also supported this stance and further argued that understanding business failures provide equally critical information for several important stakeholders such as the venture financiers, entrepreneurs and policy makers in the entrepreneurial journey of new business creation and/ or operation. Business failures have, however, been referred to in different ways in business literature. Common among these ones

are dissolution, discontinuance, insolvency, liquidation, bankruptcy, entrepreneurial exit, and deregistering among others. All these definitions overlap to a great extent, but care has to be taken especially when referring to small technology start-ups. As such, the prevailing definition promoted by the likes of Moscalu & Vintila (2012) and Ropega (2011) which defined failure as businesses filing for bankruptcy law protection would be adopted for this research.

While businesses of all categories fail, Ropega (2011) further posited that small businesses fail more because they do not have the same resources which the larger businesses typically have and which provided the needed support for them. He also argued that business failures do not necessarily occur because of the associated problems' in one's business but can be a knock-on effect from actions of others. Summarily, that a lot of small businesses fail is well documented: from only 42% SMEs that has probability of surviving past its fourth year in Iran (Arasti, et al., 2012) to Gray, et al.'s (2012) report that less than 45% of UK start-up survive after five years and the catastrophic report of over 80% of Nigeria's small businesses failing after five years (Alli & Jimoh, 2017), these failures span many countries and localities. With this, it's easy to ask what the factors affecting success of small business start-ups are? Before providing answer to the part that aligns with this research, it is imperative to understand success itself as it pertains to SMEs in general and small technology start-ups in specificity.

Just like business failure, business success is associated with many definitions. This include long term viability, profitability, return on investment (ROI), reputation, sales growth, number of employees, and other rather important metric. Forsaith & Hall (2000, cited in Lampadarios, 2016) categorized these definitions of success into growth and profitability. Lampadarios (2016) further categorized turnover, number of employees and market share under the former while the latter has profit and return on investment under it. These two categories above are financial criteria which has often been traditionally adopted in measuring business success (Steffens, et al., 2009). While this is prevalent, Simpson, et al. (2012) also argued that many SMEs owners/ managers do not run their businesses to maximize financial performance (growth and/ or profitability) but for other non-financial reasons like lifestyle, autonomy and the freedom to balance the work-life cycle and personal satisfaction among others. As such, one can infer that success to many SMEs are not premised on the financial success yardstick but whichever one that meet their set vision prior to the commencement of the business. This stance was also corroborated by results of Gorgievski, et al.'s (2011) study of 150 Dutch SME owners in which they argued that those small business owners use multiple criteria, and not just financial criteria, to measure business success.

In fact, Gorgievski, et al. (2011) further posited that most small business owners put personal and interpersonal criteria above business criteria. This is as they put their scale of preference on personal satisfaction, then followed by profit, satisfied clients, and a good work-life balance, the report concluded.

While all these needs are understood, this research would adopt the traditional financial criteria as the premise for measuring success or “importance” in the factors that could guarantee it. This is in line with contemporary research like Davidsson (2009) and Steffens, et al. (2009) which uses sales growth and/ or profitability indices. More so, considering that small technology start-up is the main subject under study, it is sane to use financial criteria as elucidated above considering that a lot of seed investors and venture capitalists have provided financial support for these entrepreneurial start-ups and are expecting payback, in financial success. Summarily and in this report, while the success would be regarded as the increase in sales turnover and/ or increase in profitability, business failure would be regarded as the ceasing in operation following bankruptcy and loss to creditors (Arasti, et al., 2012; Davidsson, 2009; Steffens, et al., 2009)

2.2 Important Factors Affecting Small and Medium-Sized Technology Enterprise Start-ups (SMTES)

2.2.1 Overview, Research Theories and Approaches to Factors of SMTES Growth

As said earlier, evident in business practice and extant research literatures, the success of SMTES is contingent upon a lot of factors. Hadi, et al. (2015) argued that research work on these factors have been premised on theories like the Resource Based Viewed (RBV), Resource Dependency Theory (RBT), Stakeholders Theory (SHT). In addition to these theories, Dobbs & Hamilton (2007) argued there are six major approaches thus: resource-based, learning, descriptive, deterministic, evolutionary and stochastic. These approaches and/ or theories ultimately give rise to a lot of factors that has been researched across industries, countries and other contexts (Dobbs & Hamilton 2007; Hadi, et al., 2015).

McMahon (1998, cited in Dobbs & Hamilton, 2007) posited that the stochastic approach which originated from economics suggests that large numbers of factors affect growth of businesses (SMTES in this context) and as such infer the absence of any dominant theory. While Dobbs & Hamilton (2007) further opined that this approach stems Gibrat’s (1931) “Law of Proportionate Effect” whose work has served as premise upon which many previous research works on the factors affecting businesses were based, its core value is that no single present factor is the main and only determinant and success of a business rather the collective importance of a range of

factors especially over time. For instance, they opined that the success or otherwise of a business will be dependent on the management (the quality and decision of the management team), customers (the need and taste of the customers or clients), government (the policies made by the government which house the firm as well as the policies of other governments which have direct or indirect impact with the firm, for instance policies of a government of a country a firm exports to) and a range of other forces. Contrary to this stochastic approach is the deterministic approach which Janeska-Iliev & Debarliev (2015) argued that it tends to allow one to review the variables, both internal and external, which are often used in explaining firm growth. The focus here, according to Dobbs & Hamilton (2007), Farouk et al. (2012) and Janeska-Iliev & Debarliev (2015), is to identify explanatory variables which can explain the major variations in business growth. These explanatory variables can be the ones associated with the external business environment, the people associated with the business and those internal to the business, Farouk et al. (2012) concluded. Practical example of this is in Dobbs & Hamilton's (2007) research which used over 30 independent variables which were collected from previous research as key determinants in the growth of small businesses since the mid 1990s. However, this deterministic approach is often similar to the descriptive approach except in their intent and 'description', Farouk et al. (2012) posited. As against descriptive approach, deterministic approach give emphasis "on what causes growth rather than on how a business adapts to accommodate growth", Dobbs & Hamilton (2007 pg. 299) concluded.

As the name implies however, the evolutionary approach, which stemmed from the principles of biological evolution and adaptation to explaining business growth, is associated with the combination of variables affecting entrepreneurial outcome over time. This was used in research such as Aldrich (1999, cited in Clarke et al., 2014). Summarily, the promoters of this approach argued on the importance of time-value refinement of the variables while critics posited that time is a very precious luxury which can not be afforded while the business is on the learning curve, Clarke et al. (2014) posited. While this is premised on the evolutionary importance of time, the resource-based approach, as the name implies, is premised on the 1959 seminal work of Penrose whose proposition is that small business internal strength which is strengthened by the resources available to contribute to managerial knowledge and its application of business success is supreme.

While developing the conceptual framework of the factors affecting SMEs manufacturing business performance, Hadi, et al. (2015) argued mostly from the theoretical perspectives of

successful SME factors and listed the stakeholders theory (SHT) as well as resource-based view (RBH) and resource-dependency theory (RDT). SHT, to them, is based on the generalization of the idea of Freeman's (1984) stockholder's theory which view capitalism as the interconnected relationships between a business and all its stakeholders like its customers, suppliers, investors, communities and employees among others and argued that values needed to be created for all these groups. The Stakeholder can however be viewed from both narrow or wide perspectives. Freeman & Reed (1983) posited that the narrow view is looking at the stakeholder as those groups that are crucial to the survival of an organization while the broader or wider view refers to the groups which can affect the organization. If SHT is to be adopted, it is safe to say the former is more applicable to this study than the latter considering that this study intends to research the very important factors which affect SMTES in Nigeria.

As described earlier, while the resource-based view focuses on the internal resources as well as the capabilities of an organization (Ghapanchi, et al., 2014), the dependency theory, according to Pfeffer & Salancik (1978), states that business success is based (or dependent) on the resources of another organization. They further posited that this theory suggests that the business success depends, to a large extent, on the environment and other actors in this environment. Having analysed these theories and approaches, it is important to note that they are not distinctly separate in categories but overlap to a great extent and provide the bases upon which earlier researched factors affecting various contexts; industries and countries among others, are premised (Chawla, et al., 2010). These include April's (2015) study which was conducted when looking at the critical factors that influence the success and failures of SMEs in Namibia with a special focus on the Khomas region of the developing country, Ahmad & Seet's (2009) qualitative study of the behaviours of SME owners in Malaysia and Australia in their quest to study business failures, a similarly cross national study of key success factors of SMEs in Singapore/ Malaysia and Australia/ New Zealand conducted by Ghosh & Kwan (1996), Al-Mahrouq's (2010) study in Jordan, Ensaria & Karabay's (2014) study in Turkey, Chittithawom et al.'s (2011) study of Thailand's SMEs, Patton & Worthington's (2003) study which look at the important environmental factors affecting the printing industry in the United Kingdom, and Lampadarios's (2016) which look at critical success factors affecting SMEs in UK chemical distribution industry among others. Research from the studies above show that the factors affecting SMEs and the technology start-ups which fall under the SMEs are different across industries, countries and cultures among other contexts.

2.2.2 The External Environmental Factors affecting SMTES

Research from the studies above proposed several important factors affecting SMEs according to various contexts. The critical success factor proposition from Chawla, et al. (1997) is such that eleven factors were categorized into three, named task environment, general environment and personal characteristics. Task environment contains seven factors thus: human resources, industry trend, purchasing inventory control, supplier relations, vendor relations and location issues while general environment mainly has economic environment attached to it. The third one, personal characteristics contain goal orientation and owner experience. These factors are similar to those ones itemized in Keats & Bracker's (1988, cited in Lampadarios, 2016) study which proposes that six factors affect small businesses but which were categorized into the same group of general environment, task environment and personal characteristics and Smallbone, et al.'s (2010) study which categorized them into four groups thus: entrepreneurial characteristics, management strategies, firm characteristics and environmental factors.

Dobbs & Hamilton (2007) also summarized 34 research work published since the mid-1990s and compiled a list of independent variables which they summarized under four groups similar to Smallbone, et al.'s (2010) categories. The factors that fall under management strategies are employee recruitment and development, financial resources, business collaboration, growth objective, product market development and flexibility. For entrepreneurial characteristics, motivation, experience, size of the founding team and experience make the factors under it while for firm characteristics, age and size of firm make for the factors under it. These lists are not exclusive

Besides the factors highlighted in Dobbs & Hamilton (2007) research, several academic research were also conducted with varying level of classifications but similar factors affecting SMEs (Abiodun, 2014; Alfaadhel, 2010; Al-Mahrouq, 2010; Al-Mahrouq, 2010; Amorós, et al., 2013; Azimzadeh, et al., 2013; Becchetti & G, 2002; Caca, 2010; Chawla, et al., 2010; Franco & Haase, 2010; Hadi, et al., 2015; Harris & Gibson, 2006; McLarty, et al., 2012; Patton & Worthington, 2003). Lampadarios's (2016) look at a lot of these prior studies including Caca (2010), Simpson, et al. (2012) and Smallbone, et al. (2010) and posited that the important factors affecting small businesses can be classified into three major ones: the ones relating to the firm (enterprise factors), ones relating to the small business owners (personal or entrepreneurial factors), and the ones relating to the the external business environment.

According to Simpson *et al.* (2012, p.267), the “business environment of SMEs is [however] extremely “difficult, dynamic and diverse”. Simpson *et al.* (2012) further argued that the government structure, policies, funding regimes among others automatically creates factors that are required for success. To analyse the business environment, the PEST tool which is often used in analysing the macro economic environmental factors of businesses (Lampadarios, 2016) is adopted. The PEST is a combination of four acronym with the “P” representing Political environmental factors, “E” representing the economic environmental factors, “S” representing the socio-cultural environmental factors and “T” representing the technological environmental factors.

The political environment as the name suggests is the category given to all factors that deals with the nature of political systems, its institution, processes and their effects on the SMTES in Nigeria. The likes of Allard, et al. (2012) who argued on the importance of political stability to business success, Guo & Shi (2012) who also emphasized political stability as well as the likes of entrenching the tenets of democratic rights to success of businesses and (Wetherly & Otter (2014) who emphasized government stability, policies and services to help the business have allgave credence to the importance of political environment as important factors to the success of small businesses. With this well documented in literature, the lingering question is not would political environment have effect on the success of the small business start-ups rather what are the important political factors that affect small busines technology start-ups in Nigeria and why?

Concurrent with the importance of political environment to success of small business start-ups as well as the encompassing small businesses is the economic environment whose factors in varying degress have been previously established in extant literatures (Guo & Shi, 2012; Wetherly & Otter, 2014). Wetherly & Otter (2014) posited that sub-factors such as inflation rates, economic growth patterns, foreign exchange rates and foreign direct investments (FDI) constitute some of the economic factors affecting small businesses. De Maeseneire & Claeys (2012) also supported this assertion of the importance of economic environment on the success of small business but also add such sub-factors like the availability of loans, subsidies and other sources of finance which are important levers for successful entrepreneurial start-up and operation. Amorós, et al. (2013) further buttressed the aforementioned and cited the credence the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) also gave the economic environment’s influences. With this, what are the most important factors here that affect SMTES and why? Would be another lingering but important question.

Similarly, Aggarwal & Goodel (2014) also posited that the socio-cultural contexts like the population size, population growth rate, structure, age distribution, employment levels, education and growth rate among others affect to a large extent the success of small businesses. Kreiser, et al. (2010) and Thornton, et al (2011) also supported those stances and further argued that organization, irrespective of sizes – large or small businesses, and reach – local to a domain, regional in reach, national to the country or international among others exist and operate in a society and as such subjected to a lot of societal and cultural influences.

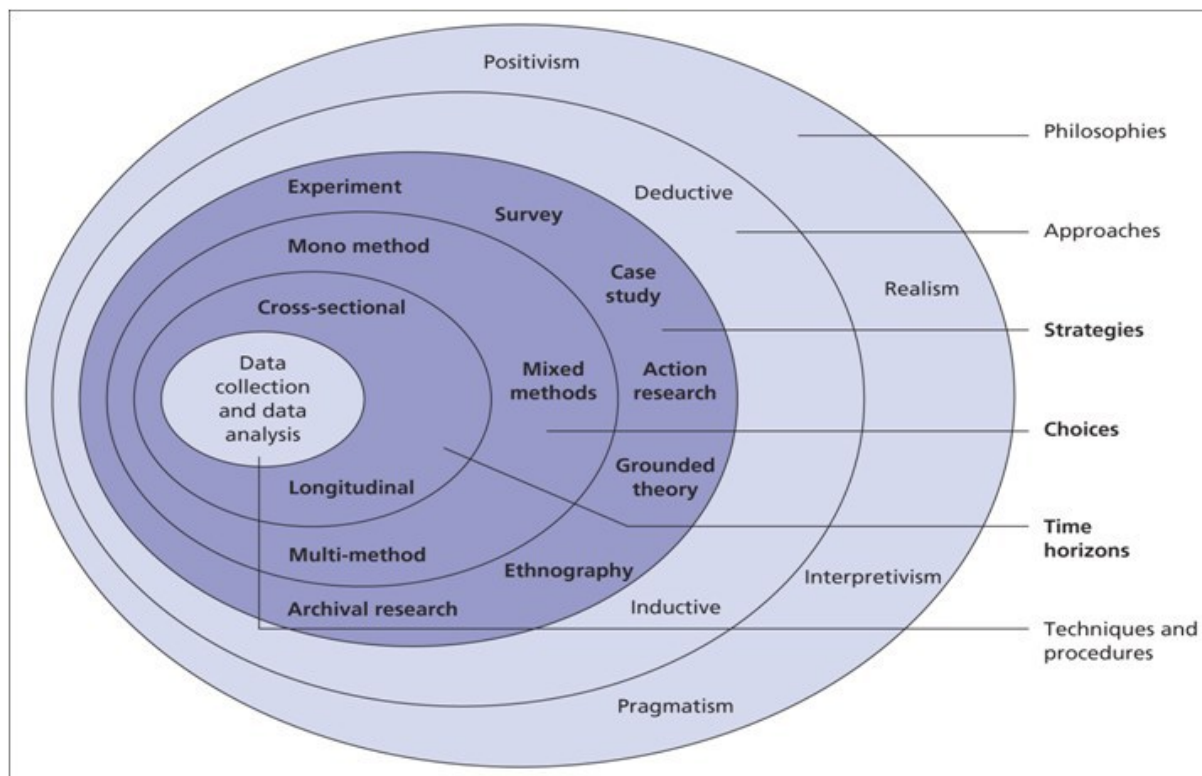
Can technological environment be an important factor for small technology start-ups? Or more elaborately, what are the sub-factors that should be considered very important for the success of small technology business start-ups and? Palmer & Hartley (2012) as well as Wetherly & Otter (2014) answered the former in a different context and argued that technology has become integral to the growth of businesses in the present world which has witnessed technological advances. Wetherly & Otter (2014) further posited that technological environment deals more about the societies' needs and advances in technology.

3.0 Proposed Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction and the Proposed Research Philosophy

While it has been argued that there is no best approach to research, it is also posited that the adopted approach should be the one that could best resolve the research problem (Bell, 2010; Bryman, 2008). Bryman & Bell (2011) and Saunders, et al. (2012) also posited that why the researcher's skill may determine the adopted research methodology, it should ultimately be dependent of the nature of the study and the type of information required. As such, the appropriateness of the adopted research methodology is important, Saunders, et al. (2012) concluded.

Figure 3: Saunders' Research Onion



SOURCE: From Saunders, et al. (2012)

3.2 Proposed Research Philosophy and Approaches

Saunders, et al. (2012) described the research philosophy as the development of the research background, knowledge and its nature with the help of the research paradigm. It has great impacts on research work from the introductory stage to the conclusive stage (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2008) because it entails the defined way the research topics were refined and the observable facts were collected, analysed and even reported (Saunders, et al., 2009). Gill & Johnson (2010) further posited and emphasized its importance to not just the investigative process but the investigative entity. As claimed by Easterby-Smith et al. (2012, cited in Lampadarios, 2016 pg. 117), there are three ways to look at research philosophy and they are from the ontological considerations, epistemological considerations and the methodology. While ontology is of either objectivism or subjectivism, epistemological stance can either be positivism or post-positivism (phenomenology), Easterby-Smith et al. (2012, cited in Lampadarios, 2016 pg. 117) concluded.

With regards to epistemology, Easterby-Smith et al. (2012, cited in Lampadarios, 2016), Saunders, et al. (2009) and Saunders, et al. (2012) all posited that positivism and phenomenology

(post-positivism) are arguably the two main research philosophies. And they are generally associated with quantitative and qualitative research respectively.

In research work of this nature, several studies have adopted the positivistic stance as well as a complementary deductive approach and quantitative methods which allows them to be able to identify important factors to the success of small businesses as independent variables and test against the dependent variable of the business performance. Examples of these contemporary studies which used this traditional approach include Chittithawom et al.'s (2011) study of Thailand's SMEs, Gorgievski, et al.'s (2011) study which looked from the perspectives of small business owners and their personal differences, Harrigan, et al.'s (2011) study which looked at the important factors affecting a technology adoption and usage in SMEs as well as others like Lussier (1995), Lussier & Pfeifer (2001) and McLarty, et al. (2012) among others. However, these methods, and as such these research works, have received criticism on the methodological flaws, reliability issues especially with the respondents bias owing to questionnaire weaknesses, subjective nature of the dependent variable and lots more (Ahmad & Seet, 2009; Azimzadeh, et al., 2013; Brannback, et al., 2010; Franco & Haase, 2010).

Perhaps more importantly, while these aforementioned research studies contributed to identifying the important factors that affect small businesses and small technology start-up businesses alike, they did not offer further insight as to the reason why they are considered important. A phenomenological philosophical stance with associated inductive research approach which often provides the needed insights and other nuances as had done in many research studies like those of Azimzadeh, et al. (2013), Franco & Haase (2010) and Simpson, et al. (2012) among others would be adopted in this research. This would help in answering one of the sub-research question which intends to know "why" those factors are considered important in Nigeria.

3.3 Proposed Research Strategy and Choice

While there are many options available in the research strategies, case study approach which allow for in-depth analysis of issues (Saunders, et al., 2009) would be adopted. According to Silverman (2013), case study research is particularly useful in cases where the important of culture and contexts in differences could mean a lot. Considering that Nigeria is divided into six geo-political zones with a somewhat huge differences in context among these zones which might affect the research results, multi-case study (multiple case studies) strategy would be adopted by selecting cases in each of the six zones in the country. More so, a multi-method of both semi-

structured interview and focus groups would be used. Justifications for these as it pertains to this context would be explained in one of the later sections.

3.5 Proposed Research Time Horizon

Research work of this nature are always determined by the available resources: funding (money) and time most importantly. Of course, one must be careful of who fund a research work in order not to be in an ethical dilemma. However, considering that there is no funding for this proposed research at the moment as well as the limited availability of time, the research would most possibly be a cross-sectional one which would be conducted at a point in time.

3.6 Proposed Methods and Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

As said earlier, a multi-method approach would be adopted in this research. This would allow us to combine both interview method and focus groups to arrive at a more robust understanding of the associated issues. While the interview would be a semi-structured one for owners of small technology start-ups as was done in similar researches like that of Azimzadeh, et al. (2013), Franco & Haase (2010), Galabova & McKie (2013) and Simpson, et al. (2012), the focus group would be used for the senior managers or leaders or early employees of the technology start-up businesses so as to elicit more responses from them.

The plan is to conduct five semi-structured interviews in English for the owners of the small technology start-up businesses as well as two focus groups for the managers/ leaders or early employees of SMTES so as to elicit more responses on the issues. These five interviews and two focus groups would be conducted in each zone of the country so as to make up for the differences which exist across zones of the country. Procedures for the data collection methods would be carefully crafted which would ensure anonymity and confidentiality of the interviewees and focus group participants as well as their voluntary participation would be shared before the commencement of the process. More so, the lead researcher would have a field diary to augment the data collection. The data collection processes would be recorded with the interviewees who would be called pseudonyms instead of their real names for anonymity. The collected data would be transcribed using consecutive numbers from 1 to 50 and analysed using thematic analysis.

3.8 Reliability, Validity, Proposed Ethical Considerations and Other Issues

The research author would carefully go through the transcripts, identify themes by exploring the key constituents, group them together in draft schedules and go through them thoroughly again.

One of the ways of achieving reliability in qualitative research is by re-checking categorisations following agreement of the final system. This is called an open analysis (Neuendorf, 2002). While Nvivo software is just a tool deployed in the management of qualitative data, it is very useful when used correctly and could help maintain the integrity of the data.

Of course, reliability and validity of qualitative research is more nuanced than an often-simplistic description of how to go about it. Considering that validity in qualitative research means the “appropriateness” of the tools, processes and data (Leung, 2015), this proposal put emphasis on making sure the research question is right, the methodology is most appropriate for it not just based on the (un)conscious bias of researcher’s expertise, the sampling and data analysis is appropriate by looking at the regional differences of the country and making sure each zone is ably represented are all ways making sure the research work is ultimately valid as proposed by Leung (2015). More so, the correct philosophical underpinning (Leung, 2015), the proposed triangulation (Finfgeld-Connett, 2010), multi-dimensional analysis and the adopted multiple case studies (Jansen, 2010), well-documented audit trail (Carcary, 2009) as proposed in this study would all help in enhancing the research validity.

On ethical considerations, besides others, three key things would be given priority in line with the need to uphold high ethical standard in social research works. These are to

- ✓ Make sure the interviewees know that they have informed consent and their participation is entirely voluntary. While their participation is of high value, they would be made informed that they can leave at any point in time.
- ✓ Maintain highest form of confidentiality and anonymity. The design and implication of the research design is done in such a way that the utmost confidentiality would be maintained. From using pseudonyms in calling them to reporting, the highest level of this would be maintained.
- ✓ Maintain independence of research or not get morally-bankrupt funding which would lead to bias and or inability to do a honest reportage.

4.0 Research Summary and Conclusion

Having established the importance of this work, it is of the researcher’s belief that it will add not just to the knowledge base but would be pivotal to practical business world. Technology start-ups are beginning to gain enormous momentum in Nigeria and Africa at large. Being the most

populous country in Africa with the largest market, it is easy to see why most entrepreneurial innovations and inventions in Africa always stems from Nigeria. With this research, entrepreneurs, investors (seed investors and venture capitalists), employees and government officials who are policy makers would be able to fathom the core environmental factors affecting small technology start-up businesses in Nigeria.

PART TWO: PERSONAL REFLECTIVE REPORT

1.0 Introduction

“It is perfectly true, as the philosophers say, that life must be understood backwards. But they forget the other proposition, that it must be lived forwards.”

Søren Kierkegaard, Journals IV.A.164 (1843)

Inherent in Søren Kierkegaard’s quote is the need to reflect on the teachings from one’s history and use that to champion a new course. Philosophical? Yes, but this course with the inherent teachings from it is nothing short of it.

You would be right to ask how? Please, allow me to explain thus:

Looking back at previous research works I have conducted in the past, I have but noticed that they are mostly quantitative. Perhaps, this stems from the fact that the researchers' expertise always determines the methodological choice of research studies. While I have conducted many marketing researches at work which are mostly qualitative, they are somewhat different to research in academia with the academic rigours and structures. With a power of hindsight at the past and the newly accrued knowledge, it's easy to see where the previous choices stem from. However, besides the need to use the qualitative method owing to the stated requirement, it is of my professional view that this coursework is more suited to it. However, I might have used a mixed methodology of both qualitative and quantitative research instead of the mono-methods of either qualitative or quantitative. This decision isn't just a conscious bias because of the newly accrued knowledge of qualitative discourse, it is one which is deeply rooted in academic research paradigms. This will be explained in this reflective report which encompasses the rationales behind some of the decisions. For brevity, the report is grouped into four sections. Besides this section which is the introduction, others are rationale for the research topic, review of the proposed research methodology and summary which represent section two to four in that order.

2.0 Rationale for the Research Study

Yin-Yang is an ancient Chinese philosophy which primarily denotes the power of dualism and depict how seemingly opposite or contrary forces could be complementary. While this discourse is as old as Chinese history, Peter Thiel, former CEO of PayPal, a well-known Investor and the author of an Amazon best-selling book, "Zero to One" popularize the concept in his book by positing that we shouldn't take issues as this or that rather than this and that. This research and the research topic fits perfectly. With the need to write a research plan/ proposal that would be done using the qualitative research method, I begin to see the imperative of not just fulfilling this course need but using that opportunity to see to research that are in line with my professional career.

As a business development executive in a technology business, my job is to source new partnerships with individuals in a business to consumer (B2C) plan, other businesses in our business to business (B2B) plan as well as business to government (B2G) plan. During my business operations, there are numerous factors that affect the smooth operations of the delivery of this job mandate. These factors are mostly obvious at regions that are outside the company's primary home state where the company is located. A research of this nature, though it is a plan or proposal; one I intend to do at some point, it would nevertheless help not just as an academic requirement but as a fulfilment to a career need; a case of YinYang.

More importantly, considering the importance of small technology start-ups and the encompassing SMEs which is well documented in extant literature (Please see Abiodun (2014), Ahmad & Seet (2009), Alfaadhel (2010), April (2015), Arenius & Kovalainen (2006), Caca (2010), Ebiyu, et al. (2016), Ensaria & Karabay (2014) and McLarty, et al. (2012) among others) as well as the void because of the differences in different context, a research topic was borne.

3.0 Review of Write-Up and Justification for Research Methodology

With a laser focus on what to research on, I begin to read extensively on the subject matter and reviewed from 2 to 7 research articles in a week. Though it make perfect sense that factors affecting entrepreneurial ventures are not the same across industries, countries and cultures, extant research literatures also backed this (Please, see Ahmad & Seet's (2009), Al-Mahrouq (2010), April (2015), Chawla, et al. (2010), Chittithawom et al. (2011), Ensaria & Karabay (2014), Ghosh & Kwan (1996), Patton & Worthington (2003) and Lampadarios (2016) among others).

However, and as detailed in the main research write up, some things became glaringly obvious while reviewing the research on the factors affecting small businesses (the term I used while referring to SMEs as against large enterprise. This word includes the small technology start-up businesses too which is the main object of study). One of such is that most of these research studies traditionally adopted the quantitative research methodologies (Please, see Chittithawom et al. (2011), Gorgievski, et al. (2011), Harrigan, et al. (2011), Lussier (1995), Lussier & Pfeifer (2001) and McLarty, et al. (2012) among hundreds of others). As expected, these research work adopted positivistic philosophical stance, used deductive approach and quantitative methods. The quantitative methods mostly reviewed the factors affecting the small businesses as independent variables while the performance stand as the dependent variable. There are however many criticisms of these aforementioned studies which include the problems associated with questionnaire weaknesses, reliability issues, subjective nature of the dependent variable and inability to give the much-needed further insights Brannback, et al., 2010). As such, Ahmad & Seet (2009), Azimzadeh, et al. (2013), Brannback, et al. (2010), Franco & Haase (2010) all used qualitative methodology which are similar to the adopted methodology used in the research work I proposed.

With the experience of hindsight, there are some often asked and lingering questions like which (of the qualitative) do you found easier to use (and why), which would you use in your doctoral research and why? And any similarities between them that have been identified. In answering these questions using the lessons from their differences in methodological stances as well as personal perspectives, I would say this is more nuanced than an often-simplistic explanation would not do justice. The reason being that, research methodological choices should not really (or entirely) be hinged on the expertise

of the researcher but the best research method which is best suited to providing the needed answer to the research questions. As such, I would rephrase the question thus: having understood the basic tenets of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, what research method would you apply if you were to conduct this research for your doctoral thesis? And my answer would be both. I would use a mixed methodology of both quantitative and qualitative research. And the reasons are not far-fetched.

While the qualitative research methodology gives more in-depth insights on the issues under study and it's often adopted in cases where answers of "why" and "how" were asked (Saunders, et al., 2009), quantitative method on the other hand is more suitable to understanding relationship and getting to large number of people. However, it should be noted that none would not be used in spite of one another, but both would be used in tandem in such a way that the summation of the two would be more than the addition of individual methods. As a methodological approach, Saunders, et al. (2009) argued that both can be used to complement each other's weaknesses in what they called "methodological pluralism" which they attributed to pragmatism which places emphasis on the research questions and place no restriction on the adopted methodology. This methodological pluralism also has precedence in similar research works such as Alfaadhel (2010), Arasti, et al. (2012) and Simpson, et al. (2012) among others. This also give the needed justification for such research work.

4.0 Summary

Summarily, while the summation of the experience has impacted me in all the realm of learning, I am still of the opinion that the best research methodology is the most suitable one which will help achieve the research objectives.

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