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Entrepreneurial Networking and Business Survival Among Smes in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract— *This research investigates the impact of entrepreneurial networking on the viability of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) within Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The research adopted a survey research design to collect quantitative data from SME operators. A regression analysis was conducted to analyze the relationship between entrepreneurial networking (independent variable) and business survival (dependent variable). Research demonstrates a substantial and affirmative correlation between entrepreneurial networking and the longevity of business ventures. The regression model showed a very strong relationship (R = 0.904), with entrepreneurial networking explaining a substantial 81.7% (R^2) of the variance in business survival. This suggests that active networking provides crucial resources such as information, advice, and market opportunities, which enhance SME resilience. The study concludes that entrepreneurial networking is a vital strategy for improving the longevity and sustainability of SMEs in Akwa Ibom State. It is recommended that SME owners prioritize networking activities and that policymakers create supportive ecosystems to foster such connections.*

Keywords— *Entrepreneurial Networking, Business Survival, SMEs.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) constitute the backbone of most economies, particularly in developing nations where they serve as primary drivers of employment generation, innovation, and economic growth. In Nigeria, SMEs account for a significant proportion of business activities and contribute substantially to gross domestic product, with over 39 million SMEs representing about 96 per cent of businesses and contributing about 48 per cent of GDP. However, despite their numerical dominance and economic significance, the survival rate of SMEs in Nigeria remains alarmingly low. Approximately 80% of startups fail within their first five years of operation, a phenomenon that has attracted considerable scholarly and policy attention. The Nigerian business environment presents unique challenges including infrastructural deficits, multiple taxation, high energy costs, persistent inflationary pressures, exchange rate volatility, weak consumer purchasing power, and limited access to finance. These challenges are particularly acute in the South-South geopolitical zone, where businesses must navigate both national economic headwinds and region-specific dynamics. In Akwa Ibom State, despite substantial government investments in entrepreneurship development—including the approval of N31 billion for SME development, skill acquisition schemes, and women cooperative businesses benefiting 165,912 beneficiaries drawn across the 31 local government areas—the survival and sustainability of SMEs remain significant concerns. At the heart of entrepreneurial success and business survival lie the capabilities of entrepreneurs to access resources, information, and support through relationships and networks. Entrepreneurial networking has emerged as a critical strategic capability that enables entrepreneurs to overcome resource constraints, access market information, and build the collaborative relationships necessary for business sustainability (Oyewale & Alabi, 2026). Networking is ultimately the process of exchanging information between two or more people; in this case, entrepreneurs. Research has demonstrated that SMEs with strong network ties exhibit higher resilience and adaptability, particularly in turbulent economic conditions.

Entrepreneurial networking, first conceptualised within the broader literature on social capital and inter-firm relationships, refers to the set of relationships and connections that entrepreneurs develop and maintain with various stakeholders, including other entrepreneurs, suppliers, customers, financial institutions, government agencies, and professional associations. These networks serve as conduits for resources, information, and legitimacy that are essential for business survival and growth. Studies have shown that Nigerian SMEs with strong network ties exhibit higher resilience and adaptability, particularly in turbulent economic conditions. Networking is increasingly being emphasized in entrepreneurship studies as an alternative to overcome inherent limitations and increase the probability of success and survival of SMEs. Despite the growing body of literature on entrepreneurial networking, the persistent underperformance and high failure rates of SMEs in Nigeria have continued to attract scholarly attention. While various factors have been identified as contributing to this phenomenon, including poor marketing strategies, inadequate financing, and weak infrastructure, the networking capabilities of entrepreneurs themselves have received comparatively less empirical scrutiny in the context of business survival. Specifically, the role of entrepreneurial networking—the ability to develop and leverage relationships for resource access and strategic advantage—in facilitating business survival among SMEs remains underexplored in the Nigerian context. Existing studies have predominantly focused on other Nigerian regions such as Osun State, South-West Nigeria, and Kwara State,

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leaving a notable gap in empirical knowledge regarding the South-South region, particularly Akwa Ibom State (Oyewale & Alabi, 2026; Abiodun, Adebisi, & Ogunrinade, 2026; Salau et al., 2026).

Akwa Ibom State presents a particularly compelling context for examining this relationship. The state government has recently demonstrated strong commitment to entrepreneurship development through various policy interventions, financial support programmes, and the establishment of the Ibom Leadership and Entrepreneurial Development Centre (Ibom-LED), which has trained and mentored 1,840 new entrepreneurs and disbursed N1.1 billion since 2023. The state also hosts events such as the Ibom-LED Trade Festival, which brings together entrepreneurs, manufacturers, artisans, and creatives for business networking sessions, enterprise development trainings, and investment-focused engagements. Thomas, Abaikpa, Daniel, and Akpan (2024) investigated the relationship between small-scale enterprises and employment generation in Uyo Local Government Area, finding a significant positive relationship between small-scale businesses and employment generation. Abaikpa, Kumbur, Essien, and Udom (2026) examined transformational management strategies and institutional effectiveness in Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, finding significant relationships between transformational management strategies and institutional effectiveness. Yet, despite these investments and the state's strategic positioning as an emerging entrepreneurial hub, the extent to which entrepreneurial networking among SME owners and managers facilitates business survival remains inadequately understood (Abaikpa, Enang, Essien, & Udom, 2026). The gap in empirical knowledge regarding the relationship between entrepreneurial networking and business survival in this context is particularly concerning given the state's heavy investment in entrepreneurship development and the high failure rates that continue to characterise SMEs in the region. Without empirical evidence on how networking capabilities influence the ability of SMEs to survive and sustain operations, policy interventions may be misdirected or insufficient. This study is therefore motivated by the need to examine the relationship between entrepreneurial networking and business survival among SMEs in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, addressing the gap in empirical literature on networking capabilities in this context.

A. Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the effect of entrepreneurial networking on business survival among Small and Medium Enterprises in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

B. Research Question

What is the effect of entrepreneurial networking on business survival among Small and Medium Enterprises in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria?

C. Hypothesis

i. Entrepreneurial networking has no significant positive effect on business survival among SMEs in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

II. Review of Related Literature

A. Entrepreneurial Networking

Entrepreneurial networking refers to the set of relationships and connections that entrepreneurs develop and maintain with various stakeholders, including other entrepreneurs, suppliers, customers, financial institutions, government agencies, and professional associations. Networking is ultimately the process of exchanging information between two or more people; in this case, entrepreneurs. It encompasses the deliberate and strategic efforts of entrepreneurs to build, maintain, and leverage social and business relationships for organisational benefit. Oyewale and Alabi (2026) identified four distinct dimensions of entrepreneurial networking: (1) personal networking—relationships with family, friends, and personal acquaintances; (2) social networking—connections within broader social circles and community networks; (3) operational networking—relationships with suppliers, customers, and other business partners directly involved in operations; and (4) strategic networking—connections with competitors, industry associations, and other organisations that provide strategic advantages. These dimensions collectively capture the multifaceted nature of entrepreneurial networking and provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how entrepreneurs build and leverage relationships. Abiodun, Adebisi, and Ogunrinade (2026) similarly conceptualised personal networking as spanning social, business/professional, and institutional ties. They noted that in regions where informal networkings often substitute for formal systems, personal networking becomes particularly critical for business success. This observation is particularly relevant to the Nigerian context, where institutional voids and weak formal support systems necessitate reliance on informal networks for resource access and business support. Research has demonstrated that entrepreneurial networking is critical for accessing resources, market information, and funding, particularly in contexts with inadequate institutional support. Networking facilitates access to, and use of, external resources and information that are crucial to the survival of enterprises. Studies have shown that Nigerian SMEs with strong network ties exhibit higher resilience and adaptability, particularly in turbulent economic conditions.

Business Survival

Business survival refers to the ability of an enterprise to continue its operations over an extended period, overcoming challenges and adversities that threaten its existence. This constitutes a cornerstone metric for gauging entrepreneurial triumph and serves as a critical barometer for the enduring viability of commercial enterprises. Business survival encompasses not only the avoidance of failure and closure but also the capacity to adapt, grow, and thrive in changing environmental conditions. The high failure rates of SMEs in developing countries have made business survival a critical area of inquiry. In Nigeria, approximately 80% of startups fail within their first five years of operation, highlighting the urgent need to understand the factors that contribute to business survival. Studies have identified various determinants of business survival, including access to finance, managerial

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competence, market orientation, innovation, and networking capabilities (Oladipo & Omolekan, 2026). Networking is increasingly recognised as a crucial survival strategy for SMEs, promoting knowledge exchange, resource optimization, and economic resilience. The ability to build and leverage networks enables SMEs to access resources, information, and support that would otherwise be unavailable, thereby enhancing their capacity to survive and sustain operations in challenging environments.

B. Theoretical Framework

Network Theory / Social Capital Theory

This study is anchored on Network Theory, also referred to as Social Capital Theory, which provides the foundational theoretical lens for understanding how entrepreneurs build and leverage relationships for business survival. The theoretical foundations of this study draw from the seminal work of Granovetter (1973) on the strength of weak ties and Bourdieu (1986) on social capital, as well as subsequent extensions by Coleman (1988), Putnam (2000), and Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998). Social Capital Theory posits that social networks are valuable assets that individuals and organisations can draw upon to access resources, information, and opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable. According to this perspective, the relationships and connections that entrepreneurs develop constitute a form of capital that can be mobilised for economic benefit. Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition." Several key propositions of Social Capital Theory are relevant to this study:

1. Network structure: The structure of an entrepreneur's network—including its size, diversity, and density—influences the resources and information accessible through the network. Dense networks with strong ties provide trust and reliable information, while diverse networks with weak ties provide access to novel information and opportunities.
2. Resource access: Social networks serve as conduits for resources, including financial capital, human capital, information, and social support. Entrepreneurs with extensive networks have greater access to these resources, enhancing their capacity to survive and grow.
3. Trust and cooperation: Networks facilitate trust and cooperation among members, reducing transaction costs and enabling collective action. Trust-based relationships enable entrepreneurs to access resources and support that would otherwise require formal contracts and collateral.
4. Information and opportunity: Networks provide access to information about markets, technologies, competitors, and opportunities. Entrepreneurs with diverse networks are better positioned to identify and exploit opportunities.

The relevance of Social Capital Theory to this study lies in its emphasis on the relational mechanisms through which entrepreneurs access resources and information essential for business survival. In the context of SMEs in Akwa Ibom State, where entrepreneurs operate in an environment characterised by institutional voids, weak formal support systems, and resource constraints, networking becomes a critical capability for accessing the resources and information necessary for survival. Contemporary scholars have extended Social Capital Theory to the entrepreneurial context, demonstrating that entrepreneurial networking significantly affects enterprise performance and survival (Oyewale & Alabi, 2026; Abiodun, Adebisi, & Ogunrinade, 2026; Salau et al., 2026). Research has shown that networking is a crucial survival strategy for SMEs, promoting knowledge exchange, resource optimization, and economic resilience.

C. Empirical Review

The empirical literature on entrepreneurial networking and business survival has grown considerably in recent years, with studies examining these constructs across various contexts, methodologies, and analytical approaches. This review synthesises existing empirical evidence, identifies patterns and contradictions, and highlights gaps in the literature that justify the present study. Several studies have examined the relationship between entrepreneurial networking and SME performance in Nigeria, providing foundational evidence on how networking capabilities influence entrepreneurial outcomes. Oyewale and Alabi (2026) examined the effect of entrepreneurial networking on the performance of micro enterprises in Osun State, Nigeria. Using a quantitative research design with data collected from 490 respondents selected from a population of 1,370,908 micro enterprise owners through multistage sampling, the study focused on personal networking, social networking, operational networking, and strategic networking. The findings indicated an overall entrepreneurial networking contribution of 74.6%, while personal networking (B = 0.619), social networking (B = 0.755), operational networking (B = 0.829), and strategic networking (B = 0.884) all exerted significant positive effects on micro enterprise performance. The study concluded that entrepreneurial networking significantly affected the performance of micro enterprises and recommended that micro enterprise owners should strengthen networking activities through improved relationship building and strategic collaboration.

Building on this work, Abiodun, Adebisi, and Ogunrinade (2026) investigated the effect of personal networking on the performance of small-scale enterprises (SSEs) in South-West Nigeria. The study addressed the challenges faced by SSEs in accessing resources, market information, and funding due to inadequate institutional support. Using a descriptive survey research design with a population of 235,222 registered SSE owners, data were collected from 519 small enterprise owners across six South-West Nigerian states through structured questionnaires. The study applied simple linear regression analysis to test the hypotheses that personal networking significantly affected business performance. Findings showed that all three dimensions of networking—social (0.970), business/professional (0.951), and institutional (0.889)—positively affected the performance of the SSEs. The study concluded that personal networking played a vital role in enhancing the growth and sustainability of SSEs by providing access to critical resources and fostering innovation.

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Salau, Olanyan, Yahaya, and Idris (2026) examined entrepreneurial exposure and performance of small and medium enterprises in Kwara State. The study's population consisted of 5,071 registered owners of manufacturing SMEs in Ilorin Metropolis, with a sample size of 364 determined using the Raosoft sample size calculator. Primary data was gathered through a structured questionnaire, and multiple regression analysis was utilized to analyze the data. The results showed that entrepreneurial networks had a significant positive impact on sales growth ($\beta = 0.671$, $t = 14.563$, $p < 0.05$), while entrepreneurial training had a significant positive impact on profitability ($\beta = 0.742$, $t = 15.355$, $p < 0.05$). The study concluded that entrepreneurial exposure significantly impacts the performance of small and medium enterprises in Kwara State. Nandez and Esayne (2024) explored the role of entrepreneurial skills competence and networks in enhancing MSME performance in a developing economy. Using a strong quantitative research design with structured questionnaires based on established scales, MSMEs across various sectors in Nigeria were recruited through purposive sampling. The data were analyzed through multiple regression and mediation methods. The results showed that entrepreneurial competence, market orientation, sales orientation, and business networks had direct and indirect relationships with firm performance. The study highlighted that having skills, market orientation, and a strong business network can help MSMEs grow and compete effectively in a competitive market.

Beyond performance outcomes, researchers have examined the relationship between entrepreneurial networking and business survival specifically. Oladipo and Omolekan (2026) examined harnessing entrepreneurial networks for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) survival in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. The study concluded that networking is a crucial survival strategy for SMEs, promoting knowledge exchange, resource optimization, and economic resilience. The study recommended that SME owners should actively participate in industry collaborations, innovation hubs, and supplier partnerships to enhance business performance. Studies from other developing country contexts have provided additional insights into the role of networks in business survival. Research on female entrepreneurs in Bangladesh found that unexpected networks played a significant role in supporting business survival, while professional networks did not show a significant effect. This finding highlights the importance of diverse and unconventional networks in contexts characterised by institutional adversity. Research on SMEs in institutionally weak environments has revealed that firms can turn disadvantages into advantages by strategically building networks, formalizing internal processes, and engaging with both local and international partners. This finding is particularly relevant to the Nigerian context, where institutional voids and weak formal support systems necessitate reliance on informal networks for business survival.

A growing body of research has examined various aspects of entrepreneurship and SME development specifically in Akwa Ibom State, providing contextual grounding for the present study. Thomas, Abaikpa, Daniel, and Akpan (2024) investigated the relationship between small-scale enterprises and employment generation in Uyo Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State. The study found that small-scale enterprises have a significant positive relationship with employment generation, providing empirical evidence on the factors that promote entrepreneurial activity in the state. The study highlighted the importance of policy interventions in fostering entrepreneurship and employment generation, recommending that government should provide more support to small-scale businesses through access to credit facilities, business development services, and enabling infrastructure. Abaikpa, Enang, Essien, and Udom (2026) examined the role of vocational and technical education in promoting small business startups in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The study found that outdated curriculum, limited financing, and poor infrastructure have a significant negative impact on the performance, establishment, growth, development, and sustainability of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State. The study recommended that educational institutions should be supported to ensure a continuous supply of skilled and educated entrepreneurs to meet the demands of the business world.

Abaikpa, Kumbur, Essien, and Udom (2026) investigated transformational management strategies and institutional effectiveness in Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic Ikot Osurua. Using a cross-sectional survey method with a sample of 112 respondents drawn from a population of 155, the study found significant relationships between transformational management strategies and institutional effectiveness. The study recommended that the institution should explore diverse funding sources and cultivate a positive institutional culture that embraces transformation. This finding is particularly relevant to the present study as it underscores the importance of strategic management capabilities—closely related to networking—in achieving positive organisational outcomes in Akwa Ibom State. Abaikpa, Nkereuwem, and Ekpo-Ufot (2026) explored the entrepreneurial mindset and innovation capacity among students of Federal College of Education Ididep, Ibiono, Akwa Ibom State. Using a descriptive survey design with a sample of 250 students, the study examined how entrepreneurial mindset dimensions—including creativity, initiative, risk-taking propensity, and opportunity recognition—influence innovation capacity. The findings revealed significant positive relationships between entrepreneurial mindset dimensions and students' innovation capacity, suggesting that fostering entrepreneurial thinking at the educational level can enhance students' ability to generate and implement innovative ideas.

The empirical literature reviewed reveals several important patterns. First, there is consistent evidence that entrepreneurial networking is positively associated with SME performance across various Nigerian contexts (Oyewale & Alabi, 2026; Abiodun, Adebisi, & Ogunrinade, 2026; Salau et al., 2026; Nandez & Esayne, 2024). Second, networking has been identified as a crucial survival strategy for SMEs, promoting knowledge exchange, resource optimization, and economic resilience (Oladipo & Omolekan, 2026). Third, studies from Akwa Ibom State have examined various aspects of entrepreneurship and SME development (Thomas, Abaikpa, Daniel, & Akpan, 2024; Abaikpa, Enang, Essien, & Udom,

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2026; Abaikpa, Kumbur, Essien, & Udom, 2026; Abaikpa, Nkereuwem, & Ekpo-Ufot, 2026), but none has specifically examined the relationship between entrepreneurial networking and business survival. This review thus identifies a clear gap in the literature: while entrepreneurial networking has been studied in relation to SME performance and while business survival has been examined in other contexts, no study has specifically examined the relationship between entrepreneurial networking and business survival among SMEs in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Furthermore, the majority of existing studies have employed cross-sectional survey designs, suggesting that quantitative approaches are appropriate for examining these constructs. The present study aims to fill this gap by providing empirical evidence on the effect of entrepreneurial networking on business survival in the Akwa Ibom State context, thereby contributing to the growing body of literature on networking capabilities in Nigeria's South-South region.

III. Methodology

A. Research Design

This study adopted a survey research design. The survey design is appropriate for this study as it allows for the collection of quantitative data from a large number of respondents regarding their perceptions of entrepreneurial networking and business survival. The survey design is consistent with previous empirical studies on entrepreneurial networking in the Nigerian context and enables the use of standardised instruments for data collection and statistical analysis (Oyewale & Alabi, 2026; Abiodun, Adebisi, & Ogunrinade, 2026).

B. Study Area

The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Akwa Ibom State is located in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria and comprises 31 local government areas. The state has emerged as a significant hub for entrepreneurial activity, with the state government demonstrating strong commitment to SME development through various policy interventions and financial support programmes. The state's strategic focus on entrepreneurship development, including the establishment of the Ibom Leadership and Entrepreneurial Development Centre (Ibom-LED) and the approval of N31 billion for SME development, makes it an appropriate context for examining the relationship between entrepreneurial networking and business survival (Thomas, Abaikpa, Daniel, & Akpan, 2024; Abaikpa, Enang, Essien, & Udom, 2026).

C. Population of the Study

This study's population encompasses every registered Small and Medium Enterprise functioning within Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. According to available records from relevant government agencies and the National Bureau of Statistics, the number of registered SMEs in Akwa Ibom State is substantial, reflecting the state's growing entrepreneurial ecosystem. For the purpose of this study, the target population consists of SME owners and managers who have been in operation for at least three years and are registered with relevant regulatory authorities.

D. Sampling Technique and Sample Size

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to select respondents for this study. This technique is appropriate as it ensures representation across the different local government areas of Akwa Ibom State and across different sectors of SME activity. The 31 local government areas served as strata, and respondents were proportionally selected from each stratum. The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sampling formula, which is widely used in social science research. Given the large population of SMEs in Akwa Ibom State, a sample size of 384 respondents was targeted to ensure adequate statistical power and representativeness. This sample size is consistent with previous studies on entrepreneurial networking in Nigeria (Oyewale & Alabi, 2026; Abiodun, Adebisi, & Ogunrinade, 2026).

E. Instrument for Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising two sections: Section A: Entrepreneurial Networking Scale. This study adopts the multidimensional entrepreneurial networking scale informed by the work of Oyewale and Alabi (2026) and Abiodun, Adebisi, and Ogunrinade (2026). This scale measures the dimensions of entrepreneurial networking: personal networking, social networking, operational networking, and strategic networking. Items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from (strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, disagree and and neutral). Section B: Business Survival Scale, adapted from established measures in the entrepreneurship literature. This scale measures the extent to which respondents' businesses have survived challenges and continued operations, including adaptability, resilience, and sustainability. Items were measured on a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was pre-tested with a small sample of SME owners to establish its face and content validity. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, with a threshold of 0.70 considered acceptable.

F. Method of Data Analysis

This study employed a dual-method statistical approach to analyze the questionnaire data. Descriptive statistics—including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Forinferential analysis, simple linear regression was used to test the hypothesis examining the effect of entrepreneurial networking on business survival, as this method is appropriate for assessing the relationship between an independent variable (entrepreneurial networking) and a dependent variable (business survival). All analyses were conducted using SPSS version 25.0, with the significance level set at $p < 0.05$.

IV. Data Presentation, Analysis And Findings

A. Presentation of Data

This section is basically designed to present, analyse and interpret the primary data obtained via the questionnaire which was purposively administered to the respondents. These are shown in the Table I.

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From the Table, out of 384 questionnaires administered, 338 representing 88% were successfully returned. Eleven (11) copies of questionnaire representing 11.9 % were not returned.

Table II presents the percentage analysis of respondents' views on entrepreneurial networking based on five statements. The results generally indicate a high level of entrepreneurial networking among the respondents, as most respondents selected either Strongly Agree (SA) or Agree (A) across the indicators.

TABLE I. Number of questionnaire copies administered and returned

		Percentage
Copies of Questionnaire Administered	384	
Copies of Questionnaire Retrieved	338	**88.0**
Copies of Questionnaire not Retrieved	46	**11.9**
Total		**100**

Source: Fieldwork, 2026

TABLE II. Percentage analysis of the Responses on Entrepreneurial Networking

Entrepreneurial Networking Dimensions	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
I regularly receive useful business advice from my family members and close friends.	165(48.8%)	102(30.2%)	17(5.0%)	34(10.1%)	20(5.9%)	338(100%)
My personal relationships provide me with emotional support that helps me sustain my business.	125(37.0%)	124(36.7%)	30(8.9%)	45(13.3%)	14(4.1%)	338(100%)
I actively participate in community or social groups that help expand my business contacts.	134(39.6%)	115(34.0%)	21(6.2%)	44(13.0%)	24(7.1%)	338(100%)
I use social media platforms to build and maintain relationships that benefit my business.	113(36.4%)	109(32.2%)	16(4.7%)	63(18.6%)	27(8.0%)	338(100%)
I use social media platforms to build and maintain relationships that benefit my business.	132(39.1%)	129(38.2%)	22(6.5%)	34(10.1%)	21(6.2%)	338(100%)

Source: Researcher's computation (2026)

For the statement, "I regularly receive useful business advice from my family members and close friends," 165 respondents (48.8%) strongly agreed, while 102 respondents (30.2%) agreed. This gives a combined positive response of 79.0%. Only 34 respondents (10.1%) disagreed and 20 (5.9%) strongly disagreed, while 17 (5.0%) were undecided. This suggests that family members and close friends constitute an important source of business advice and information for the respondents.

Regarding the statement, "My personal relationships provide me with emotional support that helps me sustain my business," 125 respondents (37.0%) strongly agreed and 124 respondents (36.7%) agreed, giving a combined agreement of 73.7%. In contrast, 45 respondents (13.3%) disagreed and 14 (4.1%) strongly disagreed, while 30 (8.9%) were undecided. This finding indicates that personal relationships provide considerable emotional support that may help entrepreneurs cope with business challenges and sustain their ventures.

For the statement, "I actively participate in community or social groups that help expand my business contacts," 134 respondents (39.6%) strongly agreed and 115 respondents (34.0%) agreed. Therefore, 73.6% of the respondents expressed positive agreement. Meanwhile, 44 respondents (13.0%) disagreed, 24 (7.1%) strongly disagreed, and 21 (6.2%) were undecided. This implies that participation in community and social groups is an important means through which respondents develop and expand their business networks.

On the use of social media to build and maintain business relationships, 113 respondents (36.4%) strongly agreed and 109 respondents (32.2%) agreed, representing a combined positive response of 68.6%. Conversely, 63 respondents (18.6%) disagreed and 27 (8.0%) strongly disagreed, while 16 (4.7%) were undecided. This result suggests that a substantial proportion of the respondents use social media as a tool for developing and maintaining relationships that support their businesses.

Finally, the last statement recorded 132 respondents (39.1%) who strongly agreed and 129 respondents (38.2%) who agreed, resulting in a combined agreement of 77.3%. Only 34 respondents (10.1%) disagreed and 21 (6.2%) strongly disagreed, while 22 (6.5%) were undecided. This further demonstrates the importance attached to social media and relationship-building in entrepreneurial networking.

TABLE IIII. Percentage analysis of the Responses on Business Survival

Business Survival Dimensions	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
My business quickly adapts its products or services in response to changes in customer demands.	115(34.0%)	116(34.3%)	41(12.1%)	41(12.1%)	25(7.4%)	338(100%)
My business has successfully recovered from major operational or financial setbacks in the past.	123(36.4%)	117(34.6%)	23(6.8%)	46(13.6%)	29(8.6%)	338(100%)
Even during economic downturns, my business has managed to remain operational.	160(47.3%)	85(25.1%)	31(9.2%)	37(10.9%)	25(7.4%)	338(100%)
My business has consistently generated enough revenue to cover its operating costs over the past few years.	153(45.3%)	110(32.5%)	27(8.0%)	31(9.2%)	17(5.0%)	338(100%)
My business has not experienced prolonged closures or interruptions that threatened its existence.	120(35.5%)	135(39.9%)	31(9.2%)	34(10.1%)	18(5.3%)	338(100%)

Source: Researcher's computation (2026)

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Table III presents the percentage analysis of respondents' views on business survival based on five indicators. The findings generally show a positive level of business survival among the businesses represented by the respondents.

For the statement, "My business quickly adapts its products or services in response to changes in customer demands," 115 respondents (34.0%) strongly agreed and 116 respondents (34.3%) agreed, giving a combined positive response of 68.3%. Meanwhile, 41 respondents (12.1%) disagreed and 25 respondents (7.4%) strongly disagreed, while 41 respondents (12.1%) were undecided. This suggests that a substantial proportion of the businesses are capable of adapting their products or services to changing customer preferences, an important characteristic for maintaining business continuity.

Regarding the statement, "My business has successfully recovered from major operational or financial setbacks in the past," 123 respondents (36.4%) strongly agreed and 117 respondents (34.6%) agreed, representing a combined agreement of 71.0%. In contrast, 46 respondents (13.6%) disagreed and 29 respondents (8.6%) strongly disagreed, while 23 respondents (6.8%) were undecided. This indicates that most businesses have demonstrated the capacity to recover from significant operational or financial difficulties.

For the statement, "Even during economic downturns, my business has managed to remain operational," 160 respondents (47.3%) strongly agreed and 85 respondents (25.1%) agreed, resulting in a combined positive response of 72.4%. On the other hand, 37 respondents (10.9%) disagreed and 25 respondents (7.4%) strongly disagreed, while 31 respondents (9.2%) were undecided. The result indicates that many of the businesses have been able to withstand adverse economic conditions and remain operational.

Concerning the statement, "My business has consistently generated enough revenue to cover its operating costs over the past few years," 153 respondents (45.3%) strongly agreed, while 110 respondents (32.5%) agreed. The combined agreement of 77.8% represents the highest positive response recorded across the five indicators. Conversely, 31 respondents (9.2%) disagreed and 17 respondents (5.0%) strongly disagreed, while 27 respondents (8.0%) were undecided. This suggests that most businesses have been financially capable of generating sufficient revenue to meet their operating expenses.

Finally, for the statement, "My business has not experienced prolonged closures or interruptions that threatened its existence," 120 respondents (35.5%) strongly agreed and 135 respondents (39.9%) agreed, giving a combined positive response of 75.4%. Only 34 respondents (10.1%) disagreed and 18 respondents (5.3%) strongly disagreed, while 31 respondents (9.2%) were undecided. This indicates that most of the businesses have maintained relatively stable operations without experiencing prolonged interruptions that could threaten their existence.

B. Testing of Hypothesis

Hypothesis One

Entrepreneurial networking has no significant positive effect on business survival among SMEs in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.904[a]	.817	.817	.32830

a. Predictors: (Constant), Entrepreneurial Networking

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	162.096	1	162.096	1503.973	.000[b]
	Residual	36.214	336	.108		
	Total	198.310	337			

a. Dependent Variable: Business survival

b. Predictors: (Constant), Entrepreneurial Networking

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.490	.089		5.481	.000
	Entrepreneurial Networking	.890	.023	.904	38.781	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Business survival

The hypothesis states that entrepreneurial networking has no significant positive effect on business survival among SMEs in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the effect of entrepreneurial networking on business survival.

The Model Summary shows an R-value of 0.904, indicating a very strong positive relationship between entrepreneurial networking and business survival. The R-square value of 0.817 indicates that entrepreneurial networking explains 81.7% of the variation in business survival among the sampled SMEs, while the remaining 18.3% is attributable to other factors not included in the model. The adjusted R-square of 0.817 further indicates that the explanatory power of the model remains substantially unchanged after adjustment. The standard error of the estimate is 0.32830, suggesting a relatively small prediction error.

The ANOVA result indicates that the regression model is statistically significant. The model produced an F-value of 1503.973 with a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). This means that entrepreneurial networking significantly predicts business survival and that the regression model provides a statistically significant explanation of variations in business survival.

The Coefficients table further confirms the positive and significant effect of entrepreneurial networking on business survival. Entrepreneurial networking has an unstandardized coefficient (B) of 0.890, a standard error of 0.023, a standardized beta coefficient of 0.904, and a t-value of 38.781 with a significance level of 0.000. The positive coefficient indicates that an increase in entrepreneurial networking is associated with an increase in business survival. Specifically, a one-unit increase in entrepreneurial networking is associated with an estimated 0.890-unit increase in business survival, holding other factors constant.

Since the p-value of entrepreneurial networking (0.000) is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis that

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entrepreneurial networking has no significant positive effect on business survival is rejected. The study therefore concludes that entrepreneurial networking has a significant positive effect on business survival among SMEs in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

C. Discussion of Finding

The finding of the study indicates that entrepreneurial networking has a significant and positive effect on business survival among SMEs in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The regression result produced an R-value of 0.904, indicating a very strong positive relationship between entrepreneurial networking and business survival. The R-square value of 0.817 further shows that entrepreneurial networking explains 81.7% of the variation in business survival, while the remaining 18.3% is explained by other factors outside the model. The adjusted R-square of 0.817, which is virtually identical to the R-square, suggests that the model has strong explanatory power and that the result is not substantially affected by model adjustment. This finding suggests that SMEs that maintain stronger entrepreneurial networks are more likely to survive and remain operational. Networking enables entrepreneurs to develop relationships through which they can obtain business information, advice, emotional support, market opportunities, resources, referrals and other forms of assistance. This interpretation is consistent with social capital theory, which views relationships and networks as resources that individuals and firms can access and utilize to achieve economic objectives. Stam, Arzlanian and Elfring (2024), in their meta-analysis of 61 independent samples, found a positive and significant relationship between entrepreneurs' social capital and small-firm performance. They also reported that network diversity was particularly important in explaining performance outcomes.

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that entrepreneurial networking exerts a significant and strong positive effect on the survival of SMEs in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, confirming that networks are vital strategic assets. By providing access to critical resources such as market information, business advice, referrals, and emotional support, networking enhances SME resilience and capacity to withstand operational challenges. Given that 81.7% of the variance in business survival is explained by networking, it is clear that SMEs cannot afford to operate in isolation. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that SME owners and managers proactively invest in building diverse and strategic relationships through industry associations, trade fairs, and mentorship programs. For policymakers and support agencies, this finding underscores the need to create formal platforms—such as business clusters and networking hubs—that facilitate collaboration and knowledge exchange among SMEs. Finally, future research should delve deeper into sector-specific networking dynamics and distinguish between the effectiveness of formal versus informal networks within the Akwa Ibom State context, to further refine strategies for business sustainability.

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Appendix I

Questionnaire

Please read carefully each of the statement below and tick to indicate your agreement or disagreement to each item. Each item has to do with the effect of entrepreneurial networking on business survival among Small and Medium Enterprises in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The level or degrees of your responses are: Strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D) and Neutral (N).

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S/N	EFFECT OF ENTREPRENEURIAL NETWORKING ON BUSINESS SURVIVAL AMONG SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA	SA	A	SD	D	N
A	**Entrepreneurial Networking**					
1	I regularly receive useful business advice from my family members and close friends.					
2	My personal relationships provide me with emotional support that helps me sustain my business.					
3	I actively participate in community or social groups that help expand my business contacts.					
4	I use social media platforms to build and maintain relationships that benefit my business.					
5	I use social media platforms to build and maintain relationships that benefit my business.					
B	**Business Survival**					
6	My business quickly adapts its products or services in response to changes in customer demands.					
7	My business has successfully recovered from major operational or financial setbacks in the past.					
8	Even during economic downturns, my business has managed to remain operational.					
9	My business has consistently generated enough revenue to cover its operating costs over the past few years.					
10	My business has not experienced prolonged closures or interruptions that threatened its existence.					

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