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**HOW INTER AND INTRA-ORGANISATIONAL
KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT PROCESSES
INFLUENCE SME INTERNATIONALISATION**

JOSEPH, AGBO JOHN

NOVEMBER 2022

**HOW INTER AND INTRA-ORGANISATIONAL KNOWLEDGE
MANAGEMENT PROCESSES INFLUENCE SME INTERNATIONALISATION**

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHUMBRIA AT
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ABSTRACT

Inter and intra-organisational knowledge management processes (KMPs) are critical for enhancing sustainable competitive advantage for the internationalisation of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). Despite that, much scholarly attention has not been paid to how this affects SMEs as regards the challenges they face competing in international markets because of the gaps in skills, expertise, and finance. This study explores how inter and intra-organisational KMPs influence SME internationalisation with the experiences of selected SME operators and regulators in Nigeria. The study addressed four research objectives, which include a) how inter-organisational KMPs influence the internationalisation of SMEs, b) intra-organisational KMPs influence the internationalisation of SMEs, c) how SMEs can balance inter- and intra-organisational KMPs to enhance the internationalisation of SMEs, and d) the barriers to strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for the internationalisation of SMEs.

The researcher used purposeful and multiple case-study methods to provide empirical findings for this study. The population sample of sixteen (16) interviews was selected from the managerial level of the SME operators and regulators in Nigeria, and data were collected through telephone interviews and written statements. Consequently, the study finds that inter- and intra-organisational KMPs contribute to the competence of SMEs which encourages their internationalisation from Nigeria. Secondly, it unravelled that balancing inter- and intra-organisational KMPs to enhance the internationalisation of SMEs can be achieved through the facilitation of efficient knowledge absorption capacity as well as internal and external platforms for knowledge acquisition and transfer. Thirdly, it identified that the major barriers to strengthening inter- and intra-organisation are the lack of stakeholders' trust and risk as well as excessive bureaucratic processes exhibited by the SME regulators in Nigeria. Furthermore, the study extends our understanding of the factors and the barriers that influence the strengthening of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs on SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria. Moreover, this study makes essential contributions to knowledge, practice, and policies and further helps in articulating and understanding the updated version of the Uppsala model of internationalisation by showcasing its influence on inter- and intra-organisational KMPs in strengthening SMEs' competitiveness and internationalisation from the environmental context of a country with an emerging economy and weak institutional framework.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AfCTFA:	African Continental Free Trade Agreement
AGOA:	African Growth Opportunity Act
ANE:	Association of Nigerian Exporters
AWEP:	African Women's Entrepreneurship Program
BOI:	Bank of Industry
CAQDAS:	Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CBEC:	Cross-Border Electronic Commerce
CBI:	Confederation of British Industry
CBN:	Central Bank of Nigeria
CEO:	Chief Executive Officer
CTG:	Cotton, Textile and Garment
ECOWAS:	Economic Community of West African States
ETLS:	ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme
FMITI:	Federal Ministry of Industry Trade and Investment
GDP:	Gross Domestic Product
GDPR:	European General Data Protection Regulation
GSA:	Global Share Alliance
IBA:	Industrial Business Association
IBAs:	Industrial Business Associations
ITF:	Industrial Training Fund
KMPs:	Knowledge Management Processes
KMP:	Knowledge Management Process
KM:	Knowledge Management
KAC:	Knowledge Absorption Capacity

MDAs:	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
MDA:	Ministry, Department and Agency
MNE:	Multi-National Entrepreneur
MNCs:	Multi-National Companies
MoU:	Memorandum of Understanding
MSMEs:	Micro, Small and Medium-size Enterprises
NACCIMA:	Nigerian Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines, and Agriculture
NASME:	Nigerian Association of Small and Medium Enterprises
NANTs:	National Association of Nigerian Traders
NEDEP:	National Enterprise Development Programme
NEPC:	Nigeria Export Promotion Council
NERFUND:	National Economic Reconstruction Fund
NGOs:	Non-Governmental Organisations
OECD:	The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OPS:	Organised Private Sector
PT:	Participant
R&D:	Research and Development
RQ:	Research Question
SME:	Small and Medium-size Enterprise
SMEs:	Small and Medium-size Enterprises
SMEDAN:	Small and Medium Enterprise Development of Nigeria
SMEEIS:	SMEs Equity Investment Scheme
SMESGC:	Small and Medium Scale Enterprises Guarantee Scheme
UNIDO:	United Nations Industrial Development Organisation

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research work to God Almighty, Who, by His Grace and Mercies, I am who I am today.

... to my dear beloved wife, Mrs Helen Agbo and Children, Master Andrew Ekowoicho Agbo, Miss Esther Ojonya Agbo and Master Albert Ofokondu Agbo – Thank you for your love, support, prayers and for tolerating all my late nights at the University!

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DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and is entirely my work. Also, I confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others. Since interviews were conducted as part of this study, ethical clearance for the data and research presented in this thesis has been approved. The approval was sought and granted by the Faculty Ethics Committee on July 10th, 2020. Finally, I declare that the word count of this thesis is 80,355 words.

Name: Joseph Agbo John

Signature:

Date:

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Inter and intra-organisational knowledge management processes (KMPs) and small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) internationalisation are the two (2) significant angles of this study. Consequently, the background of this study focused on how strategic motivations correlate with inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for the internationalisation SMEs. Strong collaborations could provide business associates with valuable opportunities to develop, transfer and share knowledge to enhance organisational learning. Business associates or subsidiary organisations help to improve skills and knowledge through different learning processes to enhance knowledge acquisition, interpretation, and dissemination (Chung et al., 2015; Mason et al., 2012).

Furthermore, tacit knowledge is personal and context-bound. Nevertheless, storing and sharing tacit knowledge is challenging (Swan et al., 2010). Tacit knowledge is a valuable and vital source of innovation, leading to better competitive advantages (Mason et al., 2012). To achieve a commendable competitive advantage, companies are encouraged to gain tacit knowledge from their business counterparts through inter-organisation collaboration, which in the end, facilitates more incredible innovation and new knowledge creation (Lei et al., 2021; Ranucci & Souder, 2015; Zhang & Jiang, 2015). However, explicit knowledge also plays an essential role in organisational growth and development as it is easy to acquire and internalise (Usman et al., 2019). The inter- and intra-organisational KMPs are critical for the internationalisation SMEs in that it creates opportunities for business associates to collaborate in sharing/transferring tacit and explicit knowledge and building competitive advantages that facilitate the internationalisation process (Rammal et al., 2023).

The tacit and explicit knowledge approaches have become essential and independent mantras for effective knowledge management. In the long run, most entrepreneurs (including SMEs) would tend to create knowledge for organisational use through “social interaction or knowledge conversion between tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge” (Perez-Araos et al., 2007, p. 156). The study noted that KMPs are valuable tools for generating, sharing, and applying relevant knowledge to develop efficient organisational competency (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Latif et al., 2020). The least developing and emerging countries can benefit from the developed countries' knowledge and create a robust business framework for mutual growth and development (Mann, 2003). Moreover, exploring how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs

influence the internationalisation of SMEs is vital for enhancing business innovation and organisational competitiveness.

1.2 THE STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Literature opined that over a few decades, the discussion of the internationalisation of SMEs has increased (Dabić et al., 2019; Lu & Beamish, 2001; Matlay et al., 2006). Nevertheless, how have SMEs acquired the knowledge and competency to compete with regional and multinational companies in the international markets? Thus, internationalisation involves exports and imports of goods and services, cross-border collaborations, alliances, subsidiaries, branches, and joint ventures beyond national borders (Singh et al. (2010). The continuous speedy growth of technology has made SMEs consider adopting internationalisation strategies to boost survival, growth and market share in the international markets (Dabić et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2012).

Ribau et al. (2018b, p. 282) posited that “SMEs face the same or more intense competition in international markets, confronting multi-national entrepreneurs (MNEs), otherwise large and national business organisations that are regionally dominant” while exploring and utilising the available market opportunities in the international and competitive markets. Most internal and external challenges facing the internationalisation of SMEs are associated with insufficient skills, incompetence, poor finance, poor human resource, lack of information about foreign markets, and poor access to foreign markets (Jovovic et al., 2017). National and international institutions have established institutional mechanisms to facilitate international businesses (Jouanjean et al., 2016; Pavlenko et al., 2019; Shepherd, 2016; Zaki, 2017). However, these mechanisms appear inadequate. In addition, the challenges facing SME internationalisation are also due to insufficient KMPs and their smallness in nature (Basle et al., 2018; Sharma & Blomstermo, 2003).

Knowledge management has emerged as one of the critical activities enabling businesses, including SMEs, to gain and sustain competitive advantages (Abualoush et al., 2018). Previous studies (Ferraris et al., 2017; Grigoriou & Rothaermel, 2017; Laursen et al., 2015) suggested that internal and external knowledge sharing positively influences organisational performance and innovation. However, in the context of internationalisation, SMEs face challenges to compete with multi-national companies (MNCs) because of the gaps in skills, expertise and smallness of resources (Ayob & Senik, 2015). Therefore, to compete with MNCs and explore international markets, SMEs are encouraged to enhance their learning and organisational

practices (Chung et al., 2015; Nielsen & Nielsen, 2009; Usman et al., 2019; Usman et al., 2018).

Following the idea of Chung et al. (2015), SMEs need to integrate with large and well-doing business organisations to improve skills, expertise and address the knowledge gap. The benefits of inter-organisation knowledge sharing in co-creating knowledge, exploration of new markets, product innovation, and organisational learning help to improve skills (Mason et al., 2012; Usman et al., 2019; Wang & Wang, 2012). Consequently, studies have suggested a positive influence of inter-organisation knowledge on improving organisations' learning, performance, and competitiveness as well as their internationalisation process (Chung et al., 2015; de Zubielqui et al., 2019; Li, 2013; Usman et al., 2019; Valkokari, 2015). However, previous studies focused on the inter-organisational KMP while ignoring the intra-organisational KMP and its impacts on the internationalisation of SMEs (Al-Busaidi & Olfman, 2017; Molina-Morales et al., 2015; Tsai, 2016; Xie et al., 2018). The intra-organisational KMP involves sharing and transferring knowledge within an organisation's boundaries to improve business performance in the internationalisation markets (Nakauchi et al., 2017). Literature on intra-organisation knowledge transfer and sharing reveals that more studies have been carried out on multi-national companies than the diffusion of inter-organisational learning within SMEs (Usman et al., 2019). This also means that integrating inter- and intra-organisational knowledge is vital for understanding their influence on SME internationalisation (Al-Jabri & Al-Busaidi, 2018; Dyer & Nobeoka, 2000; Park & Choi, 2014; Tang & Naumann, 2016).

1.3 RESEARCH GAP

Business internationalisation is challenging and requires effective and efficient KMPs (Costa et al., 2016; Ferraris et al., 2019; Norouzi et al., 2021). However, insufficient knowledge and information impede the facilitation of the internationalisation of SMEs in developing countries (Hsu et al., 2013). In their research, Hsu et al. (2013) identified the characteristics of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), which include the age, experience, level of education and duality of the CEO's position as the factors that promote KMP for the internationalisation of SMEs. Muhammed and Zaim (2020) also investigated how employee engagement and leadership support contribute to intra-organisational knowledge management success in service-based organisations in Turkey. Valio Dominguez Gonzalez and Fernando Martins (2014) conducted a study and identified some internal contextual factors (for example, Problem-solving and incremental improvement; Culture learning and teamwork; Proactive posture and lean organisational structure; Primary knowledge and shared identity, Knowledge absorption

capability; Competence mapping, evaluation and development; Innovative strategy; and Information system) that affect KMP in multi-national companies.

Furthermore, Hemminger et al. (2015) conducted an empirical analysis of intra-organisational knowledge transfer focusing on subsidiaries of multinationals in China. The findings show that support from the management, corporate willingness to acquire strategic planning knowledge, and the relationship between the MNC and its subsidiaries are significant. These studies mentioned above help to create meaningful insights into the understanding of critical organisational factors in implementing internal KMP to influence organisational performance and internationalisation. However, most of the studies highlighted above mainly focused on multinational companies, and there are no sufficient empirical studies within the SME context in developing African countries with weak institutional frameworks. Consequently, there is a need to explore how intra-organisational KMP influences the internationalisation of SMEs from the African context. This will help SMEs to effectively explore available international market opportunities by producing innovative products and to strengthen the organisational workforce and competency. Therefore, this study seeks to fill these gaps by investigating how intra-organisational KMP influence the internationalisation of SMEs in a developing country with a weak institutional framework, such as Nigeria.

Studies have shown that inter-organisational KMPs have commendable impacts on business internationalisation, especially in the SME subsector. For example, Presutti et al. (2016) investigated how the evolution of different dimensions of social capital between SMEs and their vibrant customer directly influences the firm's international performance growth. The study conducted by these authors (Presutti et al., 2016) richly contributed to knowledge, practice and theory; however, there is a need to extend the scope beyond foreign customers and consider the perception of the competitors and regulating institutions. Martínez-Costa et al. (2019) reported that effective inter-organisational knowledge sharing and collaboration between Spanish SMEs enhance inter-organisational relationships and innovation; thus, this could help facilitate the internationalisation processes by expanding the population of the study (including the Government, Companies and Industrial Business Associations).

Dooley and Gubbins (2019) explained the developing interactive tensions evident within an inter-organisational and governance consideration to optimise the KMP in public safety management in Poland and the Czech Republic. However, these authors (Dooley and Gubbins, 2019) noted that inter-organisational knowledge acquisition and sharing appear at unexpected times, and such could have resulted from weak collaboration rules. Consequently, this shows

the extent of the limitation of understanding how inter-organisational KMP could influence business internationalisation, especially in the SME subsector. As it is, the internationalisation of SMEs is a unique concept that fosters business expansion, growth and even the distribution of resources (Buckner & Stein, 2020; Dabić et al., 2020a). Nevertheless, there is minimal research on inter-organisational KMP on SME internationalisation within the context of developing countries with a weak institutional framework. This study addresses this gap and investigates how inter-organisational KMP influences SME internationalisation from the context of SMEs in Nigeria.

Furthermore, Al-Jabri and Al-Busaidi (2018) posited that inter-organisational knowledge transfer is essential for SME growth and expansion; and identified four critical factors for effective inter-organisational knowledge transfer to enhance organisational competency: leadership, intra-organisational transfer capacity, motivation to learn, and absorption capacity. However, their study only focused on the ICT sector of the Oman Sultanate's economy. Thus, there is a need to increase the scope of the sectors of the economy to gain a broader understanding; and identify the factors that prohibit the strengthening of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for the internationalisation of SMEs.

In addition, many internationalisation theories/models have been used to investigate the influence of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs within the context of SMEs and multinational companies from industrialised countries. Most of the internationalisation theories/models used include the Uppsala model (Igwe et al., 2021; Olaore et al., 2020; Verbeke, 2020), Social Network Model (García-Álvarez de Perea et al., 2019; Pergelova et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2020), Knowledge Absorption Capacity Model (Al-Jabri & Al-Busaidi, 2018; Parent et al., 2007), and the Eclectic/Economic approach (Dana & Ratten, 2017). However, the lately propounded version of the Uppsala internationalisation model (Johanson & Vahlne, 2017) appeared under-utilised in the extant empirical literature. Therefore, the researcher used the latest version of the Uppsala Model of internationalisation to demonstrate its relevance to inter- and intra-organisational KMPs in fostering the internationalisation of SMEs.

1.4 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

The influence of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs on the internationalisation of SMEs is understood by the perception of the smallness of SMEs in finance and human resources (Abor & Harvey, 2008; Beck et al., 2006; Rahman et al., 2020). This might have been the reason why much research in inter- and intra-organisational KMPs on business internationalisation focuses

mainly on large business organisations (Nakauchi et al., 2017). The concern has led to having limited explicit and empirical literature on the collaborative study of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs, especially on SME internationalisation, and this has become one of the fundamental rationales for this study to investigate and contribute to the extant literature on how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs influence the internationalisation of SMEs.

The majority of the previous studies on the influence of KMPs on the internationalisation of SMEs were carried out in the European, American, or Asian regions. Hence, it appears there is a dearth of this kind of study within the context of African countries, with robust business opportunities, such as Nigeria (Massaro et al., 2016). Worse still, there are even fewer studies on knowledge management worldwide which mainly focused on large companies and industrialised nations (Centobelli et al., 2017; Durst & Edvardsson, 2012). Hence, the researcher decided to explore Nigeria's context because the country is one of the prominent African market hubs (Ngwenya & Simatele, 2020). Furthermore, Nigeria is somewhat endowed with numerous natural resources for internationalisation. So, the study will help acquire and disseminate knowledge on how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs influence the internationalisation of SMEs from the context of a developing country like Nigeria.

The rationale for considering Nigeria for this study is that the SMEs in Nigeria contribute significantly to the national GDP and employment growth (Hassan et al., 2017). The government is also said to focus more on enabling the development and internationalisation of SMEs to create more employment and business opportunities (Adebayo et al., 2019; Etemad & Wright, 2003). However, there is no adequate proof of robust support and protective institutional mechanisms for the internationalisation of SMEs and knowledge transfer within and outside Nigeria (Agbo et al., 2018; Alaba et al., 2008). This is unlike the industrialised countries, with robust protective and supportive institutional mechanisms to ease the fear and challenges of knowledge transfer for the internationalisation of multinational enterprises and SMEs (Liebeskind, 1997; Tabet & Onyeukwu, 2019). Therefore, the researcher considers the Nigerian context to investigate how inter- and intra-organisation KMPs influence the internationalisation of SMEs in an environment without robust protective and supportive institutional mechanisms.

1.5 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

As a result of the identified research gaps, this study aims to bridge the gaps by exploring how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs influence the internationalisation of SMEs. To achieve this aim, the following objectives will be explored:

- a) To examine the usefulness of intra-organisational KMP in the internationalisation of SMEs.
- b) To critically assess how inter-organisational KMP influences the internationalisation of SMEs.
- c) To evaluate the role of striking a balance between the inter- and intra-organisational KMPs towards promoting the performance of SMEs in the international market; and
- d) To evaluate the barriers to strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for the internationalisation of SMEs.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In the quest to achieve the aim and objectives of this study, the researcher developed the under-listed strategic research questions for the study:

- a) How does intra-organisational KMP influence the internationalisation of SMEs?
- b) How does inter-organisational KMP affect the internationalisation of SMEs?
- c) How can a company achieve a balance between inter- and intra-organisational KMPs to enhance the internationalisation of SMEs?
- d) Using empirical evidence, what are the barriers to strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for the internationalisation of SMEs?

1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Knowledge creation, transfer sharing and application at the inter- and intra-organisational levels are somewhat not straightforward for the SME. The possible intent for SMEs to enhance organisational learning and capabilities is to have intra-organisational knowledge-generating and sharing tools and teamwork through meetings, discussions, training, development programs, and mentoring (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008; Khan et al., 2019). Moreover, this is linked to the social and organisational capital theories (Coleman, 1990; Seibert et al., 2001). Holste and Fields (2010) suggested that without intra-organisational knowledge mechanisms, there is no doubt that inter-organisational learning will be less efficient in contributing to organisational business performance and internationalisation.

International business activities are conducted through processes associated with the Uppsala model (Figueira-de-Lemos et al., 2011; Johanson & Vahlne, 1977, 2017; Johanson & Vahlne, 1990). Moreover, the Uppsala model's primary interest is how objective and empirical knowledge can influence internationalisation in business organisations (Hadley & Wilson, 2003; Hult et al., 2020). Paul (2020) suggested the need to consider the psychic distances

between the home and host countries, which are not limited to factors such as differences in language, culture, political system, economic status, and values. Nevertheless, SMEs' operation at the international level is bound to commitments and commitment processes within psychic distances as the external barriers, risk, uncertainty, and partial ignorance (Cahen et al., 2016; Johanson & Vahlne, 2017). Consequently, the ideology of critical and sustainable inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation requires consistent and reliable capability and knowledge development processes between the parties involved (Johanson & Vahlne, 2017; Schweizer & Vahlne, 2022; Vahlne & Schweizer, 2022). Therefore, applying the Uppsala model for this study will help empirically identify how to encourage the internationalisation of SMEs from emerging countries with weak institutional policies.

Notwithstanding, Doloreux and Laperrière (2014) noted that business organisations struggle to absorb knowledge from foreign markets, particularly SMEs with internationalisation strategy, especially at the organisational level. Thus, this could be one of the reasons why their primary source of knowledge is the internal employees and clients. Regarding developing knowledge-intensive strategies, it is alleged that business organisations such as SMEs with more internationalisation experience are better at developing skills to facilitate internationalisation (Johanson & Vahlne, 2017). Internationalisation seems to be driven by inter- and intra-organisational strategies that need to be well-defined and used while introducing managerial and strategic innovation. Lanza (2005) argued that new organisational knowledge is based on constant knowledge sourcing, sharing, and application. In the long run, this helps to achieve a higher competitive advantage and improved product quality and service embedded with innovation and quality (Nimfa et al., 2021). Hence, adopting the Uppsala model of the study will help the researcher empirically showcase how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs can influence the internationalisation of SMEs. Moreover, Lanza (2005) posited that creating, sharing, and applying required knowledge is critical for the internationalisation of SMEs in developing countries, as it helps in enhancing a robust market share and profitability.

In internationalisation, sharing business interests requires knowledge transfer and acquisition (Ganguly, Talukdar & Chatterjee, 2019). Consequently, there is the need to consider social capital (network) and cost-effectiveness to strengthen knowledge reciprocity between domestic and international SME operators - state and change variables (Johanson & Vahlne, 2017). However, after discussing numerous internationalisation theories, the researcher considered and adopted the updated version of the Uppsala internationalisation model as a theoretical framework for this study (Johanson & Vahlne, 2017).

The updated version of the Uppsala model of internationalisation adopted for this study is dynamic and comprehensive (Johanson & Vahlne, 2017). The Uppsala model adopted for this study evaluates and introduces capabilities rather than resources or knowledge as the state variables. This is because resources or knowledge are comparable to stocks, whereas capabilities provide a hint at the process (Katkalo et al., 2010). Consequently, these processes appear to be one of the most outstanding features of the Uppsala model. The processes include knowledge development and resource commitment through efficient interaction (social network) and utilisation of human and financial resources (Buckley & Casson, 2019; Welch & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2014). Therefore, the Uppsala internationalisation model creates a comprehensive framework to illustrate history-dependency that encompasses both the evolutionary nature of business organisations and the potential for innovative adaptation to the changing business environment (Cyert & March, 1963; Hughes et al., 2022; Johanson & Vahlne, 2017).

1.8 INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology creates ideas and processes for solving the research problem (Thornhill et al., 2009). Hence, the critical concepts relating to the research philosophy, approach, data collection methods, sampling techniques, data analysis, and research procedure are discussed::

1.8.1 Research Philosophy and Approach

The rationale behind the philosophy of this research is to analyse people's experiences (Simpson, 2009); this helps to create an explicit understanding of how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs influence the internationalisation of SMEs from individual perceptions using primary and secondary data.

Within multiple case study research design, an inductive approach is used to carry out a qualitative analysis of fourteen (14) SME organisations in Nigeria and two (2) government organisations that coordinate and regulate the activities of SMEs in Nigeria. This will help explicitly explore how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs influence SMEs' internationalisation. , Given that the majority of studies on inter- and intra-organisational KMPs have utilized a deductive approach to justify existing theories on knowledge management, it becomes pertinent to add voice from a new perspective to the few studies which employed the inductive approach in the Nigerian context.

1.8.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Data is collected using primary and secondary approaches (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Primary research is conducted using semi-structured interviews with the owners or top management officials of the individual SMEs in Nigeria participating in international business and two SME regulators in Nigeria. This enables an understanding of how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs influence internationalisation. Secondary data are sourced from journals, academic books, non-academic materials, industry reports, and internet sources related to business internationalisation, inter- and intra-organisation knowledge processes, and the internationalisation benefits and challenges of SMEs. The data collected were analysed using NVivo 12 as a qualitative tool to ascertain the codes and themes emerging from the empirical findings.

1.8.3 Sampling Techniques

The purposeful sampling of the non-probability sampling method is adopted, which enables the selection of a population from Nigerian SMEs with rich and useable information and the willingness to participate in the study (Morse, 1991; Taherdoost, 2016). These participants were contacted by e-mail and phone through their Association platforms and office. Moreover, the interview invitation letter and the research instrument (interview question) were emailed to the participants. The respondents were allowed a reasonable time of two weeks to read the document and assent to the consent form for participation before the researcher conducted the interviews via telephone. The researcher recorded the voice of the participants on an independent memory stick set aside for the study. Nevertheless, some of the participants choose to respond in writing.

1.8.4 Dependability and Credibility

The research includes only published, dependable, and credible literature as well as findings emerging from interviews to add credibility and dependability to the study. In addition, the data collected via semi-structured interviews are consistent to avoid or reduce the level of a possible variation to a bearable minimum, which could mistakenly affect the nature of data collection. Also, the population sampled includes SME organisations participating in international business. These helped to certify the credibility and dependability of this study.

1.9 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The thesis for this study is organised into eight (8) Chapters:

Chapter One (1): This chapter categorically discussed the origin and purpose of the study, outlined the critical sections, and presented the synopsis of the key concepts (Inter and Intra-organisational KMPs and the internationalization of SMEs). Also, the chapter clearly outlined the structure of the thesis, which served as the roadmap for the thesis.

Chapter Two (2): This chapter discussed and evaluated conceptual models of KMPs and the internationalisation of SMEs from the extant and relevant literature. The literature gave a tentative overview of the philosophy and methodology adopted for the study.

Chapter Three (3): This chapter discussed SME overview in Nigeria and the definition of SMEs from the context of Nigeria. Furthermore, the chapter discussed Nigerian SMEs' participation in the international markets and their possible challenges while exploring business opportunities in the international market. Finally, this chapter also discussed the contributions of the Nigerian government to the growth, development, and sustainability of SMEs in Nigeria.

Chapter Four (4): This chapter explained the rationale behind the research philosophy, the methodology for the study and the research action plan for the study.

Chapter Five (5): This chapter discussed the justification of the method adopted for analysing the data collected from the participants through semi-structured interviews (SMEs in Nigeria). Nevertheless, the researcher engaged two regulators of SMEs in Nigeria, intending to justify the reliability of data collected from the SMEs. Hence, the data collected were analysed using NVivo 12. In furtherance, this chapter also examined the preamble of the presentation of data analysed from the interviews conducted for the study using the thematic analysis process.

Chapter Six (6): this chapter focused on presenting findings that emerged from the suggestions from the participants. The results are associated with the research questions developed for this study. Moreover, this chapter provides the background for discussing the findings in the presiding chapter.

Chapter Seven (7): Chapter six of this study discussed the findings in the existing literature on inter- and intra-organisational KMPs and the internationalisation of SMEs, which provides empirical answers to the research questions.

Chapter Eight (8): This chapter focused on the conclusions of this study. The chapter articulated the findings from the interviews with the Nigerian SME subsector participating in international business to critically understand how the inter- and intra-organisational KMPs influence the internationalisation of SMEs from the Nigerian background. It also discussed the study's limitations and outlined areas for further research based on the findings, discussion of findings, and the literature.

1.10 SUMMARY

This Chapter sets the foundation and purpose of the research work. The introductory chapter provides an overview road map of achieving the proposed study within the knowledge realm and how it began to develop from within it in the proceeding chapters of the thesis. The next Chapter (Chapter Two: The Review of Literature) explored some major views of the internationalisation of SMEs and KMPs in some of the established pieces of literature that are of exceptional relevance to this study.

CHAPTER TWO: THE REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will explore the literature on KMPs and the internationalisation of SMEs. These give the basis for discussing the ideologies on KMPs and the internationalisation of SMEs as well as identifying the critical theories for the internationalisation of SMEs. Furthermore, the literature provides a thoughtful overview of the philosophy and methodology adopted for the study, which will help provide a path for the critical findings to the research questions and achieve the objectives of the study highlighted in chapter one of this thesis.

2.2.1 The Concept of SMEs

The universal definition of SME appears to have become a serious debate. However, there is a need to consider the importance of SME definition from qualitative and quantitative points of view. The qualitative definition sees SME as any form of independent business managed by the owner or part-owners, with a small number of employees, working capital, revenues, assets, and market shares (Bolton, 1971; Buculescu, 2013; Masroor & Asim, 2019; Wong & Aspinwall, 2004). While from a quantitative point of view, there is no universally applicable definition of SME (Razak, 2011; Ribau et al., 2018b; Zahoor et al., 2020). Despite this assumption, literature and institutions have adopted different definitions for SMEs to achieve a recognised purpose and standard for SME quantitative definition (Afrifa & Padachi, 2016; El Madani, 2018; Rahman et al., 2016). The quantitative descriptions of SMEs are based on the numbers of employees, sales and or working capital. Nevertheless, the most common among the three criteria is the number of employees-criteria (Bank, 2011).

Mittal et al. (2018) suggested that the definition of SME by the European Commission can be adopted as a quantitative definition. Consequently, the European Commission defined SME as “an enterprise which employs less than 250 employees and has an annual turnover not exceeding EUR50 million, and an annual balance sheet total not exceeding EUR43 million” (2018, p.195). However, despite Mittal et’ al. (2018) suggestion, most countries adopted individual national quantitative definitions of SMEs.

Notwithstanding the inability to adopt a global quantitative definition of SME, the SME subsector represents a considerably high percentage of business organisations in the world compared to large business organisations (Buculescu, 2013) that contribute significantly to national economic growth in both the developing and developed countries (Bongini et al., 2021; Ndubisi et al., 2021; Roopchund, 2020). The impact of SMEs on national growth does

not somewhat describe large-sized entrepreneurs as irrelevant to national economic growth. However, SMEs provide increasing job opportunities and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) because of the fewer financial resources required for their establishment than large-sized enterprises (Bell & Teima, 2015; Osano & Languitone, 2016; Tirmizi et al., 2018).

Also, the contribution of SMEs to economic growth has necessitated countries prioritising SME growth (de Sousa Jabbour et al., 2020). However, Literature (Anderson, 2011; Beck et al., 2005; Berry & Mazumdar, 1991; Mutalemwa, 2015) highlighted some critical reasons for prioritising the growth of SMEs, which are not limited to:

high share of SMEs in economies is the number of establishments, employees, and output value.

- a) its contribution to favourable conditions and full utilisation of the factors of production, such as labour and capital.
- b) The contribution of SMEs to the establishment and sustainability of the industrial revolution.
- c) facilitate equal distribution of income and labour earnings within a country; and
- d) the enhancement of SME competitiveness and entrepreneurship growth, which has external benefits on economic-wide efficiency, innovation, and aggregate productivity growth.

Given the above reasons, it is evident that SMEs are the real back-bone of national economic growth and development (Bongini et al., 2021; Dabić et al., 2020b; Ribau et al., 2018b).

2.2.2 The Characteristics of SMEs

It is essential to understand the fundamental characteristics of SMEs. Literature (Fatima & Bilal, 2019; Harvie et al., 2010; Wong & Aspinwall, 2004) has critically discussed the characteristics of SMEs. However, in this study, the characteristics of SMEs are discussed based on the context of small or limited resources, flexibility, organisational structure, and risk-taking. Hence, the context is discussed below:

- a) **Small and limited resources:** SMEs have small and limited resources to run their day-to-day business activities. The limited resources include insufficient human and financial resources (Kraus et al., 2017), which are essential for business management and the daily production of goods and services. According to Supyuenyong et al. (2009), the limited number

of expert personnel, human capital, and high turnover rates can severely influence the operations of SMEs. Moreover, SMEs are known to have limited access to funding to finance their business activities; this has been one of the essential features and a setback to its development (Torres, 2006; Eltahir, 2018). Thus, SMEs' poor financial access has become the primary characteristic defining other SMEs attributes and successes.

b) Flexibility: This is one of the SMEs' fundamental and qualitative features in developed and developing economies. Flexibility involves implementing and adapting to internal and external changes (Matejun, 2014). This allows speedy decision-making due to less or no existence of a bureaucratic system of communication between the business owner and employees (Paredes & Carvalho, 2017; Seethamraju, 2008; Wong & Aspinwall, 2004) compared to large-sized entrepreneurs where there may be rigidity and lengthy protocols that take much and reasonable time before decisions are reached. SMEs take advantage of their flexibility for timely responsiveness to consumer needs and market signals, creating and aiding significant market profitability (Blaga et al., 2017).

c) Organisational structure: the organisational structure in every organisation is put up for sharing organisational values, assumptions, and beliefs developed by a group of individuals working to achieve desired organisational objectives (Sinha & Dhall, 2020). According to Pirola et al. (2020), SMEs habitually do not have a precise and clear organisational structure, both at the management and operational levels, due to their smallness. However, Kingsley and Malecki (2004) argue that the informal structure of SMEs creates an intimate interpersonal relationship between the staff, owners of the business, and the external business environment; this encourages individual dedication to work and prompts teamwork.

d) Risk-Taking: this has become one of the significant drivers of competitive advantage and exceptional performance for SME business operators (Banalieva et al., 2018; Hoskisson et al., 2017; Llanos-Contreras et al., 2020). Risk-taking entails the organisational capacity and willingness to exploit uncertain business ideas (Hock-Doepgen et al., 2021). There is a probability that the survival of SMEs may be affected by the kind of risks taken. These threats could be associated with a highly competitive market environment, threatening SMEs. Scholars (Games & Rendi, 2019; Sivadas & Dwyer, 2000) argued that SMEs are more subject to vast risk than multi-national companies, especially in costly business innovations. Nonetheless, there is a slipup guarantee that business innovations will enhance organisational performance (Games & Rendi, 2019, p. 2). However, risk-taking may be one of the inevitable undertakings

for every business establishment. SMEs are somehow prompted to take huge risks in doing business without an in-depth risk assessment.

2.3 THE CONCEPT OF THE INTERNATIONALISATION PROCESS IN SME

Internationalisation has become a critical and creative process of identifying and taking advantage of business opportunities across national boundaries to achieve a better competitive advantage (Christmann et al., 2016; George et al., 2005). According to Zweig (2002, p.3), internationalisation is defined as “the expected flow of products (goods and services) and people across state boundaries, thereby increasing the share of transactional exchange relative to domestic ones, along with a decline in the level of regulation affecting those flows”. For the purpose of this study, internationalisation can be defined as a process in which business organisations including SMEs from a particular country engage in the movement of tangible and intangible products beyond their national boundaries with the aim of satisfying customer’s need at a profit. Hence, the concept of Internationalisation is linked to extending business activities across national boundaries (Welch & Luostarinen, 1988). Previously, multinational companies operated internationally, while SMEs focused on the domestic market (Etemad et al., 2001). However, the reverse is the case in this twenty-first century, as competition in the international markets sometimes lies between multinational companies and SMEs (Dabić et al., 2020a; Ribau et al., 2018b).

Accordingly, SMEs face the most intense competition in the international and domestic markets (Kraus et al., 2017); and this competition may become aggressive to retail businesses and other industries or business organisations. As a result, the companies operating their business in these industries must compete for a very narrow niche, which could minimise their growth, and may, in the long run, lead to vast issues detrimental to the company’s survival (Penar-Turner, 2014).

In internationalisation, SMEs move their products beyond the national border to increase their turnover rates and grow their business activities (Bose, 2016; Dominguez, 2018; Melin, 1992; Odlin, 2019). However, Jacobsen and Van Vugt (2017) argue that a sudden rise in internationalisation prompts questions like, what is the reason for the growth? Moreover, various concepts need clarification for a proper understanding of how SMEs internationalise their business activities.

Literature suggests that the Industrial Business Associations (IBA), which are not limited to ANE; AWEP; NACCIMAN; and NASME, are to facilitate the internationalisation of SMEs

and drive the diversification approach for internationalising the SMEs' business activities (Child & Hsieh, 2014; Costa et al., 2016; Fayos Gardó et al., 2015). These could be some of the reasons SMEs' external networks also contribute to SMEs' business activities across the national border (Costa et al., 2016; Oparaocha, 2015). Although the primary motive for internationalising SMEs' business activities is not only to increase organisational market share, reduce intense competition in the domestic market, increase industrial and product life cycle, and enhance the availability of resources and wealth creation but also to create and strengthen SMEs' inter- and intra-organisational networks (Langseth et al., 2016) as well.

Entrepreneurs who look forward to partnerships across borders or who operate in the context of international business need an in-depth knowledge of products and business environments (Nurhayati & Hendar, 2020; Silva et al., 2017). Burton et al. (2020) posited that the openness and flexibility of the product design architecture determine product internationalisation. Consequently, in-depth knowledge of market products may need to include product features, revealing its capabilities and the relationship between the components (Fixson, 2005; Burton et al., 2020).

2.3.1 The Driving Force to SME Internationalisation

SMEs' internationalisation strategy applies to gaining access to advanced global technology that would enhance the organisational state of competitiveness in the international market (Ngibe et al., 2019). Firms may need to consider various strategies to help business growth and performance by expanding business activities into the international market. The primary objective of SMEs' internationalisation is to take advantage of organisational competence and the existing business opportunities for value and wealth creation (Torkkeli et al., 2019). Moreover, enterprises, including SMEs, are motivated to stimulate their business activities in the international market, either by proactive or reactive factors (Grimstad et al., 2020; Kubíčková et al., 2014; Le Tien, 2019). Thus, these factors are discussed below:

a) Proactive factors: SMEs with international business strategies in a competitive market environment are required to increase their efficiency due to the propensity of the influence of internal factors, such as the exploitation of competencies and market opportunities (Kubíčková et al., 2014; Utama et al., 2019). Business organisations (including SMEs) will analyse opportunities in the foreign market, which could help the management team develop a strong desire and motive to conduct business activities in the international markets. Economic mismanagement and the harmful competitive advantages in the domestic markets drive business organisations to strategically plan business activities across national borders (Alon et

al., 2017). These also enable the administrative group to design a plan for achieving the desired motives of internationalisation (Kraus et al., 2017). A thought over an international market may help identify the available market opportunities at the international markets. As such, proactive organisations must adopt better and more pragmatic internationalisation strategies motive to achieve an increase in economic scale and profit, take advantage of favourable extant international and domestic trade policies, take technological advantage, and leverage market knowledge and comprehensive information (Korsakienė & Baranauskienė, 2011; Tolstoy, 2019).

b) Reactive factors: these are factors that oblige business organisations to react to the internal and external environment for their survival and sustainability; as such, business organisations are with no option but to internationalise their business activities (Czinkota & Ronkainen, 1994; Korsakiene & Baranauskiene, 2011; Tolstoy, 2019; Utama et al., 2019). SMEs find it challenging to internationalise their business when there is no efficient knowledge and knowledge management process (Eriksson et al., 2015; Ferraris et al., 2021). Thus, internationalisation depends on the products the companies produce for their targeted markets (Burton et al., 2020).

According to Tolstoy (2019), the reactive motive tends to expose entrepreneurs to high risk and pressure due to the possibility of product failure in the international market. However, a company's exposure to high risk would become visible when there is a failure in its product architecture (Burton et al., 2020). Various reactive factors (competitive pressure in the domestic market, over-production and excess capacity, and the decline in sales turnover in the domestic market) could be explored, especially when the markets are much more focused on knowledge and experience in international market growth. With the help of information and knowledge sourcing, companies can identify competitors that create barriers to organisational development in the international market. Adebayo et al. (2019) argued that business organisations must also explore a better comparative and competitive advantage over the potential and existing competitors in the same market. These may promote a moment of capacity which can serve as another challenge to rivalry in the international market.

2.3.2 International Market Modes of Entries

International market entry modes discuss how organisations carry out business activities and engagements across national borders (Shen et al., 2017). The international market mode of entry is a recognised procedure or process that allows a company to move its products, technology, human skills, management, or other resources to another country to satisfy human

wants and needs (Root, 1983; 1994; Sharma & Erramilli, 2004). Indeed, international entry modes and strategies are fundamental to the foreign expansion of SMEs, including multinational business organisations (Buckley, 2002; Chiao et al., 2010; Hennart & HI Slangen, 2015; Hitt et al., 2004; Hitt et al., 2000; Meyer et al., 2018; Surdu et al., 2018). This is because it helps create the capacities for accessing foreign markets, upgrading organisational knowledge and skills to develop effective marketing strategies, demonstrating local responsiveness, and even launching global organisational brands in host markets (Chiao et al., 2010; Surdu et al., 2018).

The international market entry modes are considered uncertain strategies that influence short and long-term business performance (Markman & Waldron, 2014; Qi et al., 2020; Verbeke et al., 2019). However, Schellenberg et al. (2018) state that entrepreneurs must conform to institutional policies that determine the essential and appropriate international market entry mode with reduced risk, aligning with the definitions above. Therefore, companies with internationalisation strategies take the rational and strategic decision of the method of entry, putting in place a suitable organisational structure for effective management of international market activities (Musteen et al., 2009; Qi et al., 2020). Hence, companies may need to evaluate products and markets holistically before exploring the international market. Therefore, the international market modes of entry adopted for this study are discussed as follows:

a) Cross-Border E-Commerce (CBEC) as an international market entry mode:

CBEC involves business activities across national borders through electronic and internet platforms (Qi et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2015). The independent platforms used to implement Cross Border E-Commerce are not limited to Amazon, eBay, Alibaba, wish.com, JD.com, Konga, Jumia, and HM.com. Hence, CBEC is one of the 21st century modes of international trading adopted mainly by business organisations, especially SMEs in developed and developing countries, and is noted to be an innovative model integrating e-commerce and internationalisation (Xue et al., 2016). Thus, this internationalisation method is cost-effective for SMEs because the sites are primarily owned by a third party (Qi et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the digital era has prompted online trading in SMEs and Large-size entrepreneurs, which impacts the knowledge management process implementation in business organisations (Chatterjee et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2009).

b) Export as an international market mode of entry: Export is one of the most discussed means of participation in international business (Sharma & Erramilli, 2004) and the earliest method of entering global markets, serving as a stage for future global integration and

development (Bai et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2019). This method may not require a firm to produce goods in the targeted country. However, business organisations face some business burdens, such as the high cost of logistics for moving products from the Country of production to the host countries; the difference in host countries' national trade policies creates issues for the exporting firm (Ekanem & Uwajeh, 2017). In addition, some host countries may impose either tariff or non-tariff barriers or both as a way of trade restriction. Nevertheless, firms could be directly or indirectly (independent Agents for a commission or otherwise) exporting goods and services from one country to another.

c) Subsidiaries as an international market mode of entry: establishing a new business unit across the national border is a legal mode of access into any international market that a good number of business organisations, including SMEs, have strategically adopted (Birkinshaw & Fry, 1998; Ambos & Schlegelmilch, 2005). Business organisations adopt this strategy when new business opportunities are discovered across national boundaries in a targeted business environment. Nevertheless, the subsidiaries' entry mode into the international markets is not always comprehensive in line with the overall priorities of the parent company, and this could lead to adverse cost effects on the subsidiary (Ambos et al., 2010; Delany, 2000; Dörrenbächer & Gammelgaard, 2006; Griffin & O'Toole, 2007). Thus, subsidiaries' mode of entry into the international markets can be in two categories which are the Wholly Owned subsidiary and international joint venture:

i. Wholly-owned mode entry: a wholly-owned subsidiary mode of entry into the international market is when an SME owns the entire business equity of a branch of its business unit established outside national boundaries. This entry mode is pre-destined to have a stringent procedure for SMEs compared to other entry modes into a targeted international market (Pan & David, 2000). Hence, this is due to SMEs' limited access to human, financial resources (Aldrich & Auster, 1986), liability to newness (Freeman et al., 1983), and insufficient knowledge about the foreign markets that should help the organisation to plan its product architecture (Mezias, 2002; Zaheer, 1995; Burton et al., 2020) and the challenging task of taking up key positions in international networks. However, these limitations are determined by the host country's extant national trade and economic regulations (Puck et al., 2009). As a result, most wholly owned subsidiary companies in foreign markets are established and owned by multinational companies due to the SMEs' liabilities. The liabilities include, but not limited to, smallness, foreignness, and newness (Aldrich & Auster, 1986; Freeman et al., 1983; Johanson & Vahlne, 2009; Lu & Beamish, 2006; Morais & Ferreira, 2020).

ii. Joint venture as a mode of entry: Joint venture is another form of subsidiary entry into the international markets. Hence, a joint venture is a business unit formed by two or more firms that pool a portion of their resources to create a separate, jointly-owned business organisation (Lu & Beamish, 2006; Barringer & Harrison, 2000). It can also be called a strategic business alliance between two or more entrepreneurs (Gulati, 1998; Goerzen & Beamish, 2005; Nippa & Reuer, 2019). SMEs' adoption of the joint venture strategy for internationalisation aims to reduce and, if possible, overcome the liabilities of smallness, foreignness, and newness that affect their internationalisation strategy processes (Lu & Beamish, 2006).

d) Franchising as an international market mode of entry: this is a contractual agreement whereby an entrepreneur (SME), known as the franchisor, sells the right to another entrepreneur called the franchisee in a host country to market its products (goods and services) under the franchisor's brand name and to use business practices developed by the franchisor (Brouthers & McNicol, 2009). The parties involved share the benefits and burdens of the contractual agreement. In the agreement, the franchisee must strictly abide by the laid down principles provided by the franchisor to guide and strengthen their relationship; these policies are mostly related to product mix and operational procedures quality (Brouthers & McNicol (2009). At the same time, the franchisor is liable to provide the franchisee with relevant managerial expertise, training, advertising assistance, operating procedures, and site selection (Shane, 1996; Brouthers & McNicol, 2009; Rosado-Serrano & Dikova, 2018). It is worth noting that franchising has become one of the most common international business approaches in this global economy (Hoffman & Prebel, 2003; Quinn & Doherty, 2000; Rosado-Serrano & Dikova, 2018). Franchise as an approach has been playing a significant role in a place where intense competition in the marketplace, fast change of customer taste, highly localised market segments, and culture exist (Brouthers & McNicol, 2009; Elango & Fried, 1997; Lanfranchi et al., 2021; Martin, 1988). Nevertheless, adopting international franchising as an entry mode may require commitment from both parties (the franchisee and the franchisor) to finance the business.

e) Licensing as an international market mode of entry: Licensing is a contractual agreement between a firm (the licensor) who rents proprietary knowledge, that is, know-how, trademarks, or copyrights, to another firm (the licensee) for use in the development and sales of products in the host country market (Cavusgil, 1998; Brouther & McNicol, 2009, p. 184). International licensing is one of the modes of entry to the international market categorised as the non-equity mode of entry (Pan & David, 2000). Thus, it is considered a strategy that

reduces the barriers to foreign trade and strengthens trade liberalisation via tariff reduction (Yang et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the characteristics of SMEs (liabilities to smallness, newness, and foreignness) are the fundamental determinant for them issuing a license to the foreign host business organisation they found worthy and considered for trading on their proprietary knowledge (Aldrich & Auster, 1986; Freeman et al., 1983; Johanson & Vahlne, 2009; Lu & Beamish, 2006; Morais & Ferreira, 2020).

2.3.3 Importance of Internationalising SME

SME internationalisation aims to increase sales, turnover, and national GDP contribution (Bose & Bristy, 2016). Moreover, it is imperative that the internationalisation of SMEs “provides opportunities not only for revenue growth but also for the exchange of knowledge and the enhancement of capabilities, thereby strengthening SMEs' long-term competitiveness” (Wilson, 2006, p. 1). Moreover, this is achievable when a company designs products that fit the target markets' demands and wants across the domestic markets (Burton et al., 2020). Business organisations such as SMEs tend to expand their businesses by following the footprint of prominent and large companies that have created their brand image in emerging markets (Wong & Aspinwall, 2004). SME Internationalisation plays a critical role in management practices and represents essential support to all domestic firms through direct export or supply of products to local associates of organisations recognised at the international level (Burton et al., 2020; Costa et al., 2016).

Accordingly, the strategic internationalisation plans in organisational goals may clash against each other while establishing several dimensions. While firms go through the complete cycle of internationalisation, they also exhibit many cultural changes and modernisation in new opportunities that facilitate the innovation process. Cristofaro and Caterini (2020) argued that concerns might lead to an organisation's bankruptcy or death in speedy business internationalisation. Thus, training and retraining of employees is the first aspect that should come into action when a firm starts expanding its business outside its domestic markets. In this process, the requirement for more skilled individuals may be on the increase in the organisation. Therefore, a pool of opportunities for all employees could also be created, resulting in promoting and retaining those who have acquired the requisite skill.

Internationalisation necessitates new technology, higher production rates, reduced warehouse expenditure, and increased profit margins. Increased workforce and efficiency help commercial companies to operate internationally (Ribau et al., 2018a; Ribau et al., 2018b). On the other hand, the expansion frequency and working on the market supplies' diversification can also

increase the demand for skilled labour. Over time, when the enterprise starts seeing subsequent growth, it expands, diversifies the market, and supplies accordingly. Also, international business can facilitate economic instruments, which only come from mass production or on the order of consignments. Thus, this does not only help one organisation endure market challenges but could also fulfil the needs and support of one or more dependent organisations, simultaneously acting as a boon for many SMEs. Building a direct economic and political relationship with foreign countries is a norm that allows domestic SMEs to gain the advantage of operation over other forms of business internationally (Whitten et al., 2020).

2.3.4 Barriers to SMEs' Internationalisation

The barriers that SMEs face in internationalisation affect their ability to initiate, develop, access, and sustain business operations in foreign markets (Leonidou, 2004). Literature revealed that the barriers to SME internationalisation come in different ways (Abor & Harvey, 2008; Beck et al., 2006; Bell & Teima, 2015; Costa et al., 2016; Crick, 2007; Crick & Chaudhry, 2000; Leonidou, 2004; Mohamad et al., 2016; Morgan & Katsikeas, 1998; Rahman et al., 2020; Roy et al., 2016; Scharf et al., 2004). Thus, the barriers to SME internationalisation could be real or imaginary. However, extant literature has it that the national and international economic stakeholders had tried to reduce or eradicate international business barriers. Consequently, these barriers seem to have caused SMEs to recognise the need to adopt inter- and intra-organisational KMPs in their respective organisations, just like the multi-national business organisations. Consequently, Leonidou (2004) suggested that the barriers can be categorised into two broad groups—such as a) internal barriers and b) external barriers.

a) **Internal Barriers:** the internal barriers could be associated with organisational resources, capabilities, and participation methods in international business. Hence, the internal barriers are categorised into informational, functional, financial, and marketing barriers (Leonidou, 2004).

i) **Informational barriers:** Business information is one of the principal bases for initiating and facilitating international business strategy and performance (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Wernerfelt, 1984; Collis, 1991; Liesch & Knight, 1999; Santhosh, 2019). Providing SMEs with adequate market data and information reduces international market ambiguity and risk (Welch & Wiedersheimpaul, 1980; Prasanthi & Rao, 2019). Gaining sufficient business information can help identify foreign business opportunities in international markets. However, information and data deficiency of a targeted foreign

market could lead to the inability to identify, select, and access the international market, which serves as bottlenecks to SMEs' internationalisation process (Morgan & Katsikeas, 1997; Rahman et al., 2020).

ii) Functional Barriers: these barriers could be related to inefficiencies in financial, production, and managerial timing and capacities to organise, implement and sustain international business strategies. SMEs with international business strategies must have trained and skilled personnel to coordinate internationalisation processes, including sufficient production capacity to meet the market demand (Leonidou, 2004). The inability to supply the needs and wants of the markets becomes SMEs' functional barriers to internationalisation (Rahman et al., 2020; Shah et al., 2013).

iii) Marketing barriers: these are barriers that are mostly affiliated with the company's marketing mix (product, price, promotion, and distribution/place). SMEs face the problem of complying with product quality and specifications in the foreign market (Roy et al., 2016). In addition, offering a fair price to customers in the foreign market becomes a severe problem due to additional costs such as administration, tariffs, transportation, and others (Leonidou, 2004; Roy et al., 2016). According to Leonidou (2004), marketing barriers are the most strenuous internal barriers to SMEs with international marketing strategies due to fast innovation and changes in taste worldwide. Paul (2020) suggested that marketing barriers are linked to poor marketing strategies and insufficient international market knowledge, which prevents SMEs from efficiently delivering value to customers, partners, and clients.

b) **External barriers:** international business obstacles restrict SMEs from home and host environments within which they operate (Leonidou, 1995, 2004). These barriers are beyond the control of SMEs. However, SMEs operate within the confinement of these barriers to survive the obstacles of international markets. Therefore, the external barriers to SMEs' internationalisation can be categorised as follows:

i) Governmental barriers: some policies of the governments of both the host and home countries have much negative impact on the internationalisation of SMEs, especially where the governments refuse to give provision for incentives, domestication of trade and other unfavourable investment policies that restrict individual SME to operate at the foreign markets (Leonidou, 2004). Hence, this signifies that poor or lack of government support

from foreign and host countries severely threatens SMEs' participation in international markets.

ii) Task Barriers: these barriers emanate from the firms' foreign competitors and the customers' habits or attitudes as well as the demographical thresholds such as household size, gender, education, and income level in foreign markets (House, 2020; Leonidou, 2004). The severity of competition against SMEs in the international market appears hazardous due to insufficient financial resources and foreign market knowledge. However, literature considers cooperation as an antidote to this keen competition and a way of enhancing knowledge acquisition, opportunities, and innovation for SMEs in foreign markets (Bengtsson & Johansson, 2014; Bouncken et al., 2020).

iii) Procedural barriers: the excessive bureaucratic process of presenting and recording the relevant document for internationalisation and communicating to the customer's domicile in the international market have become formidable obstacles beyond the SMEs' capability and control for participating in international business (Silva et al., 2016). Hence, the procedural barriers could be noticeable where there are no reliable and robust mechanisms to facilitate international business processes from the host country.

iv) Environmental barriers: Business organisations must operate strategically to deliver effective business (Prajogo, 2016). Nevertheless, the ecological barriers somewhat constitute the economic, political, and socio-cultural factors. Moreover, the economic, political and social factors or barriers are not limited to devalued national currency and exchange rate, poor economic situation, volatile government regulation and tenure, multiple taxations, and language and cultural differences that influence local and international business environments (Silva et al., 2016; Tabet & Onyeukwu, 2019).

2.4 CONCEPT OF KNOWLEDGE AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

In this 21st century, business activities and planning have shifted from the material and financial era to the knowledge era (Gulbranson & Audretsch, 2008; Xue, 2017). Hence, the literature explicitly depicts knowledge as a prioritised and fundamental economic resource and an asset to business organisations, including SMEs (Dalkir, 2017; Xue, 2017). Knowledge can be crucial to an efficient and compelling competitive advantage in national and international business environments. Nevertheless, what should we say about knowledge from the entrepreneurial management context? Should we refer to knowledge as a “justified true belief”

of individuals or groups (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995, p. 87)? This definition integrates three fundamental conditions, which are as follows (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018, p. 5):

- i) The true condition requires that if one knows a proposition, then that proposition must be true. However, on the other hand, if the proposition is false, the people do not understand what they claim to know. Thus, the true condition makes the difference between opinion and knowledge.
- ii) The belief condition: this condition demands that if one knows a proposition, then they believe that proposition; and
- iii) The justification condition: the condition requires that there should be a practical way of justifying that the belief one has is not a lie but true.

Given the elaborate assertions of knowledge as ‘justified truth’, Demarest (1997) suggested that knowledge within the context of commercialisation is not limited to the truth but also includes a persuasive performance, which could facilitate internationalisation processes. To Newell (2015), knowledge is a vital organisational resource that creates and sustains a competitive advantage. Nevertheless, the objectivist defined knowledge as an intellectual entity people possess in their mind (tacit), which may be transferable through codification processes (explicit) for reuse (Cook & Brown, 1999; Hislop et al., 2018). Knowledge is an essential asset “resulting from cognitive processes triggered by the inflow of stimuli” that help organisations achieve a specific objective with market value (Alavi & Leidner, 2001, p. 109). Hence, knowledge can be considered an essential mechanism for business internationalisation processes, identified through internal and external sources, and shared to enhance organisation performance (Calza et al., 2013; Demarest, 1997; Goswami & Agrawal, 2019).

Knowledge without proper management in an organisation always becomes waste, obsolete or useless (Durst & Zieba, 2019; Tan et al., 2006). In this regard, knowledge management “comprise information, communication, human resources, intellectual capital, brands.... It involves facing many challenges such as its usefulness, its transfer to others and its quantity.” (Quintas et al., 1997, p. 385). Hence, we may need to consider and evaluate definitions of knowledge management:

Definition 1: Knowledge management is “the process of continually managing knowledge of all kinds to meet existing and emerging needs, to identify and exploit

existing and acquired knowledge assets and to develop new opportunities” (Quintas et al., 1997, p. 387).

Definition 2: Knowledge management is “a process or practises of creating, acquiring, capturing, sharing and using knowledge, wherever it resides, to enhance learning and performance in an organisation” (Scarborough et al., 1999, p. 669).

Definition 3: Knowledge management is concerned with “the exploration and development of the knowledge (tacit and explicit knowledge) asset of a firm” to achieve organisational objectives; it includes all relevant processes that are linked to the identification, sharing, creating, storing and retrieval of knowledge to “add value through reuse and innovation” (Hislop et al., 2018, p. 51).

Consequently, knowledge management from the context of SME internationalisation can be defined as strategic resources and processes that facilitate organisational innovation and sustainable competitive advantage to identify and explore international market opportunities by competent SMEs. Nevertheless, the parties to foster organisational innovation and a sustainable competitive advantage must understand the required knowledge to achieve the targeted organisational objectives in the international market (Ode & Ayavoo, 2020; Sabherwal & Becerra-Fernandez, 2003).

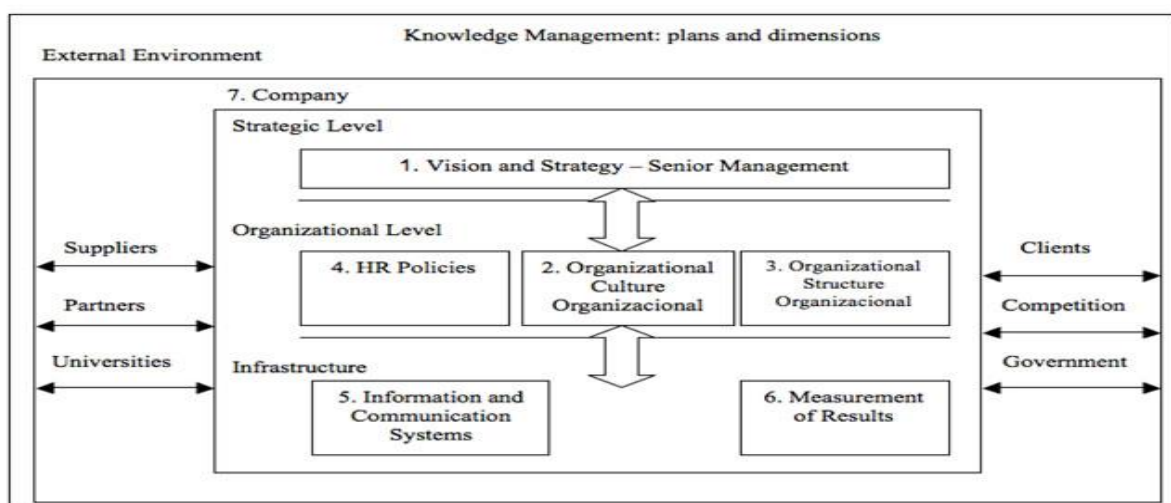
2.4.1 Knowledge Management Dimensions

Knowledge management is considered a vital resource and strategy that drives businesses towards robust cooperativeness in international markets (Keshavarz et al., 2015; López-Nicolás & Meroño-Cerdán, 2011). The business world in modern times is, to some extent, very dynamic and unpredictable. Adaptability is one of the significant factors for business organisations, which helps in familiarising with changes in the internal and external environments (Canevari-Luzardo et al., 2020). Knowledge has been extended in knowledge management and has become an essential mechanism for national and international economic growth (Gunjal, 2019; Loon, 2019). Knowledge management can also be considered one of the vital ideologies that can resolve some critical organisational problems linked to market opportunities. Moreover, knowledge management is beneficial for processing corporate strategies to expand business in organisations (Andriani et al., 2019). Hajric (2018) suggested that knowledge management has several dimensions that provide the required knowledge for achieving organisational objectives, and highlighted the dimensions of knowledge management as follows:

Dimension 1 - Strategic factors and senior management role: Organisations have senior management who oversees and evaluates the company’s knowledge management. Managers are vital in successfully implementing knowledge management ideologies in the organisation. Every manager of a company is known as the symbol of knowledge management esteemed by the subordinates (Javaherdashti, 2016; López-Nicolás & Meroño-Cerdán, 2011). Leaders attempt to share knowledge with their subordinates, which can serve as an encouragement to both parties in achieving organisational objectives. It also helps train and manage subordinates’ knowledge to drive the firm towards profitable growth prospects. Although, competitive advantages position an organisation as a market leader or challenger in the competitive market (Casey Jr, 2015). With the help of sharing knowledge, increasing efficiency, and knowledge advancement, knowledge management makes imitating organisational strategies and tactics more difficult for any other organisation; hence, facilitating the strategic process for organisational growth (Lopes Ferreira & Pilatti, 2013).

A firm's strategic dimension in knowledge management can develop and innovate business strategies to enhance organisational competitiveness and sustainability. As such, organisational strategic dimensions are somewhat used to create organisational goals. However, according to Keshavarz et al. (2015), the fundamental way to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage is by increasing knowledge-based programmes for their managers and subordinates. Moreover, with the help of knowledge management, companies could be able to identify organisational threats and opportunities quickly.

FIGURE 1: DIMENSIONS OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT



Source: Lopes Ferreira and Pilatti (2013)

Dimension 2 - the organisational culture and values: the organisational culture seems to be established with various beliefs, values, and assumptions that guide the employees. Organisational culture and values are essential requirements in the international market. According to Corfield and Paton (2016), with the help of knowledge advancement in an organisation, the company can innovate and improve its organisational culture and values to increase work efficiency. It is one of the significant aspects where the norms and values can be used to achieve essential factors of strategic organisational performance in the international market (Prabhakar et al., 2018).

Dimension 3 - Organisational structure: The bureaucratic structure has become the most famous organisational structure used to efficiently handle contemporary challenges in business organisations (Batool & Saeed, 2016). However, post-entrepreneurial companies focus more on a knowledge-intensive pattern, which gives them opportunities to break the stereotype of bureaucracy. With the help of knowledge management, companies can gain knowledge and improve organisational structure that will eventually increase profitability through rigorous and innovative ideas that seek creativity and enhance employees' learning capacity.

Dimension 4 – Administration of Human Resources: this is an essential aspect of the knowledge management dimension that every organisation needs good management to achieve the desired objective. In this dimension, the company focuses on efficiently developing its human resources skill to achieve organisational goals (Hislop et al., 2018). Moreover, the efficient management of organisational human resources has become essential for improving organisational competency to achieve expectations in the market (Asrar-ul-Haq & Anwar, 2016; Pee & Kankanhalli, 2016). Furthermore, the primary responsibilities of the human resources department are to recruit and manage competent employees as well as retain the existing employees by applying the relevant motivational mechanism that will help to achieve organisational competitive advantage in a competitive market (Bailey et al., 2018; Carbery & Cross, 2018; Hecklau et al., 2016; Pee & Kankanhalli, 2016). Thus, to achieve this, there is a need for a fair sharing of knowledge among the employees via regular meetings, training, and orientation programmes (Inkinen, 2016). The activities that enhance the development and creation of knowledge in an organisation are:

- a) Expanding the organisational capacity to employ staff with relevant skills and competencies will contribute to the organisation's credibility and knowledge flows, which will, in turn, add to the organisational value. This is achievable where the selection

processes are thoroughly implemented via highly selective methods and by considering the diversity of the staff who is being employed (Malandrino et al., 2019);

b) by encouraging the behaviours of employees, which involves both individual and collective learning processes and those behaviours that will help protect the plans and long-run interest of the organisation and strengthen its competencies. Hence, it is important to regularly give attention to the employees' career plan and consistent worker training that will broaden their knowledge, as well as encourage regular interaction with individuals from within and outside the organisation; and

c) by adopting remuneration schemes that will motivate staff to contribute effectively and efficiently to organisational growth and expansion, as the need may be. Hence, organisations have to adopt a good remuneration scheme to get effective results from their staff, which helps to improve and sustain organisational growth in the production and marketing functions (Ibrahim et al., 2019).

Dimension 5 - Information technology: The company's information system influences knowledge storage, dissemination, and generalisation. According to Mao et al. (2016), business organisations like SMEs need regular information system updates to improve organisational activities' efficiency. There are various devices that organisations can use, but it relies primarily on individual inputs.

Dimension 6 - Measurement of the results: Measuring the results is vital for the organisation to obtain and analyse the level of contribution of the employees. The measurement of results should not be compared to knowledge management. By analysing the firm's business results, the company can initiate the process of identifying its weakness and threat. Furthermore, measuring outcomes in organisations triggers the opportunity to evaluate the existing organisational strategies to plan in line with existing organisational challenges and opportunities.

Dimension 7 - Learning through the environment: The organisation's external environment has impacted firms' business activities. With the help of knowledge management, the company can expand their knowledge about the external factors that can affect its business and eliminate possible threats. According to Lopes Ferreira and Pilatti (2013), external environmental factors, including customers, suppliers, governments, and competitors, are beyond an organisation's control. However, the change in the behavioural pattern of companies impacts daily business activities (Martinez-Conesa et al., 2017).

2.4.2 Inter and Intra-organisational KMPs and SMEs' Internationalisation

The inter-organisational KMP is the act of acquiring, interpreting, storing, and sharing knowledge between two or more independent organisations through a created organisational network to influence economic and institutional environments (Agyabeng-Mensah et al., 2021; Del Giudice & Maggioni, 2014). Adopting the inter-organisation KMP in SMEs provides adequate organisational capacity for exploration through cooperation with stakeholders (Agyabeng-Mensah et al., 2021). The collaboration “seeks to create technical knowledge, apply innovative adaptation and share it among partners to obtain a sustainable competitive advantage in international business activities” (Amoozad Mahdiraji et al., 2022, p. 3). Moreover, the fundamental motives for inter-organisational knowledge acquisition and sharing in SMEs and other businesses include “cost reduction, risk reduction, access to scarce resources, market access, access to new technology that speeds up product development and commercialisation, increased capacity, knowledge co-creation, and pool of complementary knowledge and skills” (Dooley & Gubbins, 2019, p. 2115).

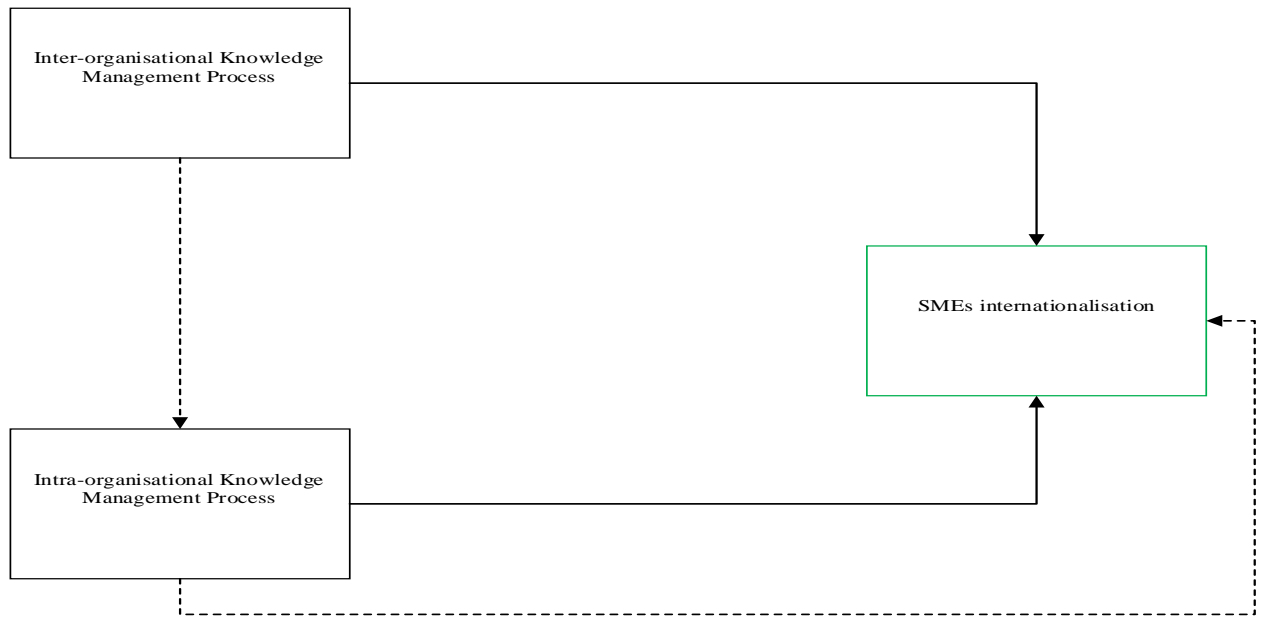
On the other hand, the intra-organisational knowledge management process is an act of acquiring, interpreting, storing, and sharing knowledge within an organisation and its strata to improve organisational competence and business performance (Nakauchi et al., 2017). The intra-organisational knowledge process is one of the common types of knowledge expanding scope, which helps enhance a company's business (Hsu & Chang, 2014; Jiacheng et al., 2010; Khvatova et al., 2016; Lee & Ahn, 2007; Usman et al., 2019). Acquiring and sharing knowledge at the intra-organisational level helps companies motivate staff to work more effectively and achieve organisational goals (Khvatova & Block, 2017). There are many ways in which knowledge acquisition and sharing at the intra-organisational level can be carried out in an organisation. The movement of the team members in the different departments will eventually increase the knowledge process of the organisation. It develops the need for interpersonal learning that will pave the way to attain the company's requisite knowledge (Mahdiraji et al., 2021). They can also use networking strategies to share their knowledge which is also helpful in increasing the efficiency between co-workers. Hence, this may increase the efficiency of their business. In this case, sharing knowledge is carried out by exchanging employees' experiences, which helps them learn from their mistakes (Nakauchi et al., 2017). It also helps in reducing self-centric perceptions and individual ideologies. Companies can lead their business towards their goals by interacting at the intra-organisational level and sharing knowledge with every department to understand its importance and work to lead the organisation towards growth prospects.

In SMEs' internationalisation settings, the organisational KMP is a sequence of knowledge acquisition, distribution, interpretation, retention, and application to influence organisational performance and strengthen its competitive advantage in the international markets (Narver & Slater, 1990; Shahzad et al., 2020). As such, entrepreneurs desire to seek, create and develop new knowledge and retain the existing knowledge in their business activities, as the concept of these inter- and intra-organisation KMPs enhance organisational capabilities (Shen et al., 2010; Tesavrita et al., 2017; Zhitomirsky-Geffet et al., 2016). Thus, KMPs are carried out at the inter- and intra-level of an organisation to ensure adequate and quality knowledge acquisition and sharing (Al-Busaidi & Olfman, 2016). This could be one of the reasons why knowledge management has become "crucial for exploiting business relationships and extracting value from the external networks of an organisation" (Del Giudice & Maggioni, p.842, 2014).

Moreover, inter- and intra-organisational knowledge is assumed to have different ideologies connected by the help of the KMPs. The intra-organisational level assessment can be on the industry level, where there is a link between two or more companies in the same industry regarding a partnership. However, in the context of the same company, where there is a comparison between two or more departments, the intra-organisational level comparison can be considered. Knowledge management is vital in tailoring the sequences between these levels to gain maximum outcomes. According to Usman et al. (2019), companies have different organisational and environmental factors driving knowledge-based marketing strategies. Therefore, sharing and transferring knowledge across the boundaries of a company might have become one of the essential strategies of KM.

The studies on inter-organisational levels of knowledge sharing are carried out with the help of interacting with interpersonal, team-based structures, business intelligence, remote communication, and network ties (Al-Jabri & Al-Busaidi, 2018). It could help in transferring and sharing knowledge at the micro-firm level. With the help of knowledge sharing at the inter-firm level, SMEs can help each other grow and enhance the relationship between the subsectors. Two types of organisational knowledge are transferrable at the inter-organisational level. These types of organisational knowledge are explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge.

FIGURE 2: CONCEPT OF THE STUDY



Source: Researcher (2020)

The mode for sharing and transferring inter-organisational knowledge is unilateral (De Luca & Rubio, 2019). For example, if a client shares or transfers knowledge of their products with the vendors to increase their profitability, the products sold are for the client. Likewise, unilateral and bilateral modes can transfer and share knowledge during operational functions. The Companies need to carry out a proper and clear knowledge structure before transferring the knowledge (Moreira et al., 2018). Companies can follow both unilateral and mutual (bilateral) explicit knowledge-sharing procedures.

The unilateral transfer of explicit knowledge seems to be one of the most common ways to transfer knowledge. One of those examples is the client and vendor relationship, where the client shares more information and knowledge about the goods or services to expand their business. Nevertheless, explicit knowledge can also be transferred through bilateral modes, especially where the main aim is to exchange ideas to grow. The perfect example of this knowledge sharing could be between the Research and Development units. Besides explicit knowledge, tacit knowledge can also be shared by both modes. Firstly, tacit knowledge can be shared with the help of the unilateral process in outsourcing strategies. For example, the suppliers transfer the software application to companies, which could help enhance their business and increase capabilities. Similarly, in bilateral sharing mode, the exchange of knowledge and information is carried out between the competitors to manage a healthy relationship in the competitive market (Coviello & Munro, 1997). Organisations carried out this activity by exchanging complementary information needed for the organisation to grow.

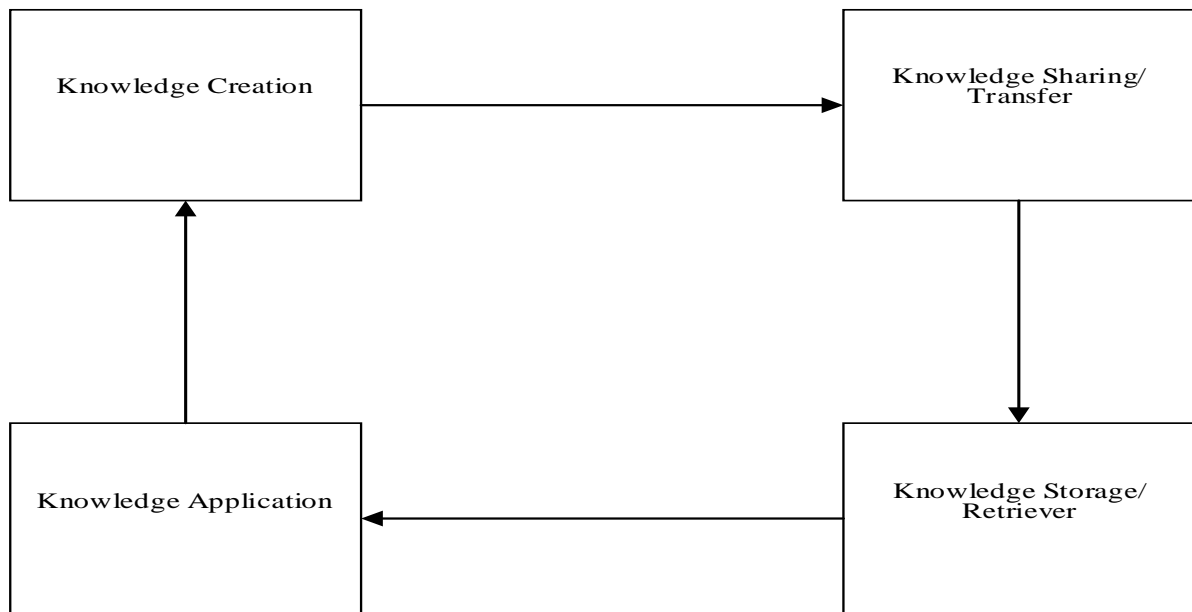
2.4.3 Knowledge Management Processes for SMEs' Internationalisation

KMP is described as the inflow and outflow of knowledge to improve internal and external organisational operations (ALHawari et al., 2008). Some scholars (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Ipe, 2003; Mehta, 2008; Mishra & Uday Bhaskar, 2011; Shujahat et al., 2019) considered KMP as a set of dynamic activities that improve organisational knowledge flows. Hence, KMP can be referred to as the techniques applied in sourcing evaluating, storing, and using stored knowledge to enhance organisational competence and performance. KMPs for firms participating in international business enhance entrepreneurial innovation, and a reliable and valuable organisational competitive advantage in the international markets (Martelo-Landroguez & Cepeda-Carrión, 2016). While applying knowledge management in the SME context may seem informal it is necessary for SMEs' survival, growth, and sustainability (Centobelli et al., 2017; Johanson & Vahlne, 2017).

Given the importance and influence of knowledge on structural innovation for competitive advantage, Martelo-Landroguez and Cepeda-Carrión (2016) argued that business organisations should encourage their workers to create, look for, share, and use knowledge for a defined purpose that will help in achieving routine business activities. Their (Martelo-Landroguez & Cepeda-Carrion) argument encourages knowledge sourcing, transfer, and application to ensure sustainability in the business environment. This requires that staff take up the responsibilities of knowledge gatekeeping as individuals with “the capability to collect, combine, and diffuse knowledge, thus bringing it from where it is known to where it is not” (Petruzzelli et al., 2010, p. 637).

From the literature, it is evident that scholars have attempted to identify and define different KMPs (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Chen & Huang, 2009; Denford & Chan, 2011; Gold et al., 2001; Ipe, 2003; Shujahat et al., 2019). Some scholars believe that the KMPs should not be limited to four (4) tiers: knowledge creation, knowledge transfer/sharing, knowledge storage/retrieval, and knowledge application. Although, there are discrepancies in the numbering and labelling of KMPs into three (3) categories: knowledge creation, knowledge sharing, and knowledge reuse or application (Wee & Chua, 2013). However, the KMPs seem to be a routine activity in business organisations, including SMEs. Therefore, in this study, the researcher adopted the four (4) tiers of KMPs because it seems comprehensive compared to the three-tier. The adopted tiers of KMPs are demonstrated in Figure 3 below.

FIGURE 3: KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT PROCESSES (KMPs)



Source: Author (2021)

2.4.3.1 Knowledge Creation

The knowledge creation process in SMEs signifies developing new ideas or knowledge in firms through inter- and intra-organisational interactions and integrating knowledge to promote organisation growth (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Jiang et al., 2020). As such, the absorption capacity of the business organisation can be an important initiative that should facilitate organisational performance. Martelo-Landroguez and Cepeda-Carrion (2016) suggested that absorption capacity is vital and closely related to knowledge creation. According to Martelo-Landroguez and Cepeda-Carrión (2016, p. 424), the absorption capacity needs to: (a) represent an integral part of SMEs' capability to create new knowledge; (b) help SMEs to introduce knowledge from the outside boundaries of the organisation in an exertion to collect new information and ideas to enable innovation and development of new products for organisation growth (Newey & Zahra, 2009; Wee & Chua, 2013), and (c) give SMEs the potential advantage in terms of knowledge acquisition.

Despite the importance of knowledge creation concerning absorption capacity, SMEs' ability to promote knowledge creation depends on their organisational structure and employees' competencies, attitude, and intellectual resourcefulness (Wee & Chua, 2013; So, 2010; Jiang et al., 2020). Consequently, Davenport et al. (1998) argued that the barriers to knowledge creation in business organisations are associated with the lack of management support and organisational policies to tolerate errors and address possible inter- and intra-organisational

conflict. Moreover, in most cases, knowledge and information asymmetry could lead to misappraisal of knowledge and information gathered to enable SMEs' internationalisation (Whitehead et al., 2016).

Furthermore, the fundamental objective of knowledge creation is to structure strategic innovation that would enhance organisational competitiveness. Based on this background, a significant "role in the innovation processes and new knowledge creation" is taken over by individuals, referred to as knowledge gatekeepers, "that can act as bridges, providing the access" to sort and harmonise knowledge for organisational use (Petruzzelli et al., 2010, p. 636).

2.4.3.2 Knowledge Sharing and Transferring

Many studies considered knowledge transfer and sharing as an act of exchange of knowledge between persons, and the recipient is permitted to apply or reshape the knowledge gained for a new context (Martelo-Landroguez & Cepeda-Carrion, 2016; Wee & Chua, 2013; Baskerville & Dulipovici, 2006; Gold et al., 2001). Knowledge sharing is considered the most integral aspect of the knowledge management process that promotes organisational knowledge innovation capacities and sustainable competitive advantage in the market environment (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Lu & Chen, 2003; Farooq, 2018; Wang & Liu, 2019). However, the success of knowledge sharing could be subject to the values, interests and motives of the parties involved (source and recipient). Thus, the basic motivation for knowledge transfer/sharing at the inter- and intra-organisation is subjected to intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Lin, 2007; Vuori & Okkonen, 2012).

Knowledge sharing and transfer could be challenging to business organisations with no adequate support from the top management, especially where a strict bureaucratic procedure is the critical organisational principle (Al-Kurdi et al., 2018). In the case of SMEs, the flat and simple organisational structure and open culture support knowledge sharing and collaboration (Wee & Chua, 2013). According to Wang and Liu (2018), there are three influencing factors of knowledge sharing in organisations (SMEs and Large business organisations): (i) subjective factors (the cost of knowledge sharing, trust, reliability of the source of knowledge, expected return, and the willingness to share knowledge by the source); (ii) objective factors (value of the knowledge, timeliness of knowledge, knowledge scarcity, the complexity of the knowledge; and (iii) environmental factors (technical support and incentive mechanisms). Considering the suggestions of Wang and Liu (2018) on the factors influencing knowledge sharing in an organisation, it is evident that an organisational management system may not be

enough to facilitate efficient knowledge sharing with international business strategies. However, knowledge gatekeepers could also inhibit inter- and intra-organisational knowledge-sharing at individual and organisational levels (Petruzzelli et al., 2010). Moreover, the knowledge gatekeepers are bound by responsibility to control the inflow and outflow of information and knowledge in an organisation (Petruzzelli et al., 2010; Haas, 2015).

2.4.3.3 Knowledge Storage/Retrieval

Knowledge storage/retrieval can be considered an essential aspect of knowledge management. Knowledge as intellectual resources is collected and stored in repositories such as email or data banks (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Martelo-Landroguez & Cepeda-Carrion, 2016). Hence, knowledge storage/retrieval is the memory of SMEs' history or brain box that enhances a sustainable competitive advantage and organisational performance in the international markets (Alavi et al., 2005; Basle et al., 2018). On the other hand, SMEs can lose the trajectory of the generated knowledge of great value and contribution to organisational performance in the international market (Ramadan et al., 2017). In the end, the staff of SMEs must have access to relevant knowledge to contribute efficiently to daily organisational activities (Martelo-Landroguez & Cepeda-Carrion, 2016). Nevertheless, wherever the knowledge and information become irrelevant for the specific purpose it was generated, the organisation may wish to store the same knowledge in the repository for future use.

2.4.3.4 Knowledge Application

The KMPs in SME internationalisation confirm the practical application of knowledge to achieve organisational objectives (Abualoush, Bataineh, et al., 2018b; Ode & Ayavoo, 2020). As such, literature (Jugend et al., 2015; Ode & Ayavoo, 2020) posited that the importance of knowledge application is to help SMEs create value from internal and external knowledge to promote better internationalisation strategy for comparative and competitive advantages. Applying knowledge in SMEs' internationalisation speeds up the development of new product architecture and better business performance in international markets (Choi et al., 2010; Ferraris et al., 2017). Furthermore, knowledge acquired within and outside an organisation is used to resolve existing or perceived organisational challenges and business opportunities in the international markets (Johanson & Vahlne, 2017).

2.4.4 Types of Knowledge for SME Internationalisation

Today, knowledge represents the most critical asset of business organisations, including SMEs, as it brings tremendous growth (Hislop et al., 2018). Moreover, the knowledge integration mechanism in SMEs' internationalisation is considered (Wach, 2014). The knowledge

integration mechanisms involve the formal processes and edifices that “ensure the capture, analysis, interpretation, and integration of market knowledge and other types of knowledge among different functional units within a firm” (De Luca & Atuahene-Gima, 2007, p. 95). They further suggested the following fundamental categories of knowledge for business internationalisation: (a) Market Knowledge, (b) Cultural Knowledge, (c) Network Knowledge, and (d) Experiential Knowledge.

2.4.4.1 Market Knowledge

Market knowledge is linked to a company’s knowledge of its target or potential customers and competitors (Day, 1994; De Luca & Atuahene-Gima, 2007; Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver & Slater, 1990). It also includes detailed information about foreign markets SMEs that are vital for the successful exploration of available entrepreneurial opportunities in the marketplace, as well as businesses with possible uncertainties in the international markets (Andersen, 1993; Mejri & Umemoto, 2010; Oviatt & McDougall, 1994; Zahra, 2005). SMEs’ commitment to participate in foreign markets depends on how informed the organisations (SMEs) are about the international market in relation to measuring their competence status (Torkkeli et al., 2018).

Market knowledge competence is required to gain organisational goodwill to introduce an existing or new product to an international market (Basle et al., 2018; De Luca & Atuahene-Gima, 2007). Furthermore, De Luca and Atuahene-Gima suggest that a firm correctly identifies, collects, and uses information about customers and competitor conditions to gain knowledge about the market (2007, p.97). Hence, this implies that SMEs with internationalisation concepts may require skills and collective learning about the customers, knowledge about competitors in the international market, and engagement in marketing research and development interface.

Previous studies on the internationalisation of business organisations consistently uphold the debate on the importance of the components of market knowledge competence in encouraging internationalisation strategy (Musteen et al., 2014). Learning about the customers and competitors in the international market of entry is a severe factor determining the success of the internationalisation strategy (Gibbert et al., 2002; Hanvanich et al., 2003). Moreover, Smith and McKeen (2005) argued that knowledge from the customer in the host market enhances the proficiency in identifying customers’ experiences (satisfaction and dissatisfaction) in the foreign market for value. However, knowledge about customers’ experiences is deserted during the product-centric era as part of firms’ knowledge (Porter & Heppelmann, 2016; Roslan et al.,

2021). Although, organisations are desirous of engaging customers from their experiences (Khalilabad et al., 2006). Knowledge about the customer is also associated with SMEs adopting efficient market orientation as a core culture of the organisation (Genc et al., 2019).

Eriksson et al. (2015) posited that market knowledge is a broader issue that clusters into three groups of knowledge, which include business, institutional and international knowledge:

- (i) Business knowledge has to do with acquiring useful information about competitors, target customers, suppliers, distributors, and foreign market conditions.
- (ii) Institutional knowledge comprises knowledge about international laws, language, and standards of the host country; and
- (iii) Internationalisation knowledge is the state of organisational competence, resource availability and skill to participate in international business (Jin & Jung, 2016).

Consequently, these categories of market knowledge (business, institutional, and international knowledge) are some of the requirements for SMEs' internationalisation process and sustainability in the international market (Knight & Cavusgil, 1996; Oviatt & McDougall, 1994; Zhou, 2007; Vahlne & Johanson, 2017).

2.4.4.2 Cultural Knowledge

It is unambiguous from the onset that there is a rapid internationalisation of SMEs between countries with similar cultures and close boundaries (Beckerman, 1956). Nevertheless, cultural differences often result from a mixture of people's ways of life (Felício et al., 2016); this is because culture is a "collective programme of mind that is specific" to individuals or groups of people (Hofstede, 1994; Khare et al., 2019, p. 1096). The cultural differences create barriers for firms, especially SMEs, with internationalisation strategies (Beugelsdijk et al., 2017).

SMEs with internationalisation strategies attempt to adjust to international cultures but fail, especially when adapting to international cultural traits requires an intensive effort (Barkema et al., 1996). Despite the effort of Entrepreneurs (SMEs) to adjust to the cultural differences in the international market, they have always not been successful (Barkema et al., 1996) given that cultural dimensions are theoretical ideas "which cannot be directly measured" (Zahid & Ilieş, 2018, p. 124).

Accordingly, cultural knowledge is a vital resource of organisational abilities which helps to avoid non-tariff barriers emanating from a host country's cultural identity (Khare et al., 2019). Cultural knowledge also relates to managers' perceptions of cultural differences and the evidence for reality (Calza et al., 2013). SMEs need cultural knowledge to explore and take advantage of extant opportunities in the international markets, specifically where the manager has the required cultural competency or experience (Eriksson et al., 2015).

2.4.4.3 Network Knowledge

Hoang and Antoncic (2003, p. 167) posited that a network is "a set of actors and some relationships that link them". Whilst Donckels and Lambrecht (1995, p. 273), cited from Kampouri et al. (2017), considered a network as a "specific type of relationship linking a set of persons, objects or event". In this study, Network Knowledge is the capacity of SMEs to apply business and social relationships to enhance the internationalisation processes and performance by identifying available business opportunities in international markets (Nyuur et al., 2018). Consequently, network knowledge, which comprises social and business networks, facilitates the internationalisation process of all kinds of businesses, especially SMEs (Jin & Jung, 2016; Musteen et al., 2014).

Zhou (2007) argued that social networks interconnect personal relationships to secure organisational opportunities. Nevertheless, social networks also include personal and professional relations established through family members, schooling, occupation, and living experience in a foreign country; these networks are mostly stable, cordial, well-known and connected with trusted parties (Jin & Jung, 2016). Hence, these networks somehow create the webs that drive internationalisation in new markets. At first, the relationship is created without commercial intention; thereby, it gradually becomes a platform for social interaction for the internationalisation of firms (Hadley & Wilson, 2003).

Business networks are the intimate and long-term relationship between business organisations (including SMEs) and their stakeholders: suppliers, distributors, and customers (Coviello & Munro, 1995; Johanson & Vahlne, 1977; Musteen et al., 2014). In addition, the social networks between internal stakeholders of organisations contribute to developing business networks for internationalisation (Chetty & Holm, 2000). Nevertheless, creating a reliable network infrastructure to help sustain the relations or networks between domestic SMEs and international markets can become significant. Matthyssens et al. (2008) suggested that the virtual platforms for creating and sustaining network knowledge for SMEs' internationalisation are through business information platforms such as business fora, trade

shows, exhibitions, and bilateral and multilateral associations, which further become a knowledge hub for internationalisation process.

Resulting from the debate on financial deficiency syndrome beclouding SMEs (Motta, 2018; Pietrovito & Pozzolo, 2019; Ullah, 2019), these international business information platforms are mostly initiated and sponsored either by the government of a host country or jointly by both the host and foreign governments to strengthen and encourage the internationalisation of individual local entrepreneurs, especially the SMEs (Zucchella & Siano, 2014).

2.4.4.4 Entrepreneurial Knowledge

Promising entrepreneurs (small, medium, and large entrepreneurs) need the ability and skill to identify opportunities and develop relevant strategies for product innovation that will enhance the exploration of international markets and gain an encouraging competitive advantage (Scuotto & Morellato, 2013; Usai et al., 2018). As such, entrepreneurial knowledge has become the essential tool that helps in the survival and growth of SMEs in foreign and national markets (Mejri & Umemoto, 2010; Shane, 2012). Usai et al. (2018, p. 1639) consider entrepreneurial knowledge as “multivariate skills and capacity, which predominantly requires a collaborative approach to obtain a competitive advantage” in foreign markets.

Considering the definition of entrepreneurial knowledge suggested by Usai et al. (2018), entrepreneurs with competitive strategy require the capability to understand, deduce and apply new information for product innovation that satisfy the targeted markets’ needs holistically (Roxas, 2014). However, the ability of SMEs to identify entrepreneurial opportunities and take advantage of these opportunities depends on the manager’s experience and competence and the business environment statutory and programmes (Zucchella & Siano, 2014). Hitherto, entrepreneurial opportunities are valuable only if the opportunities are well explored (Mejri & Umemoto, 2010).

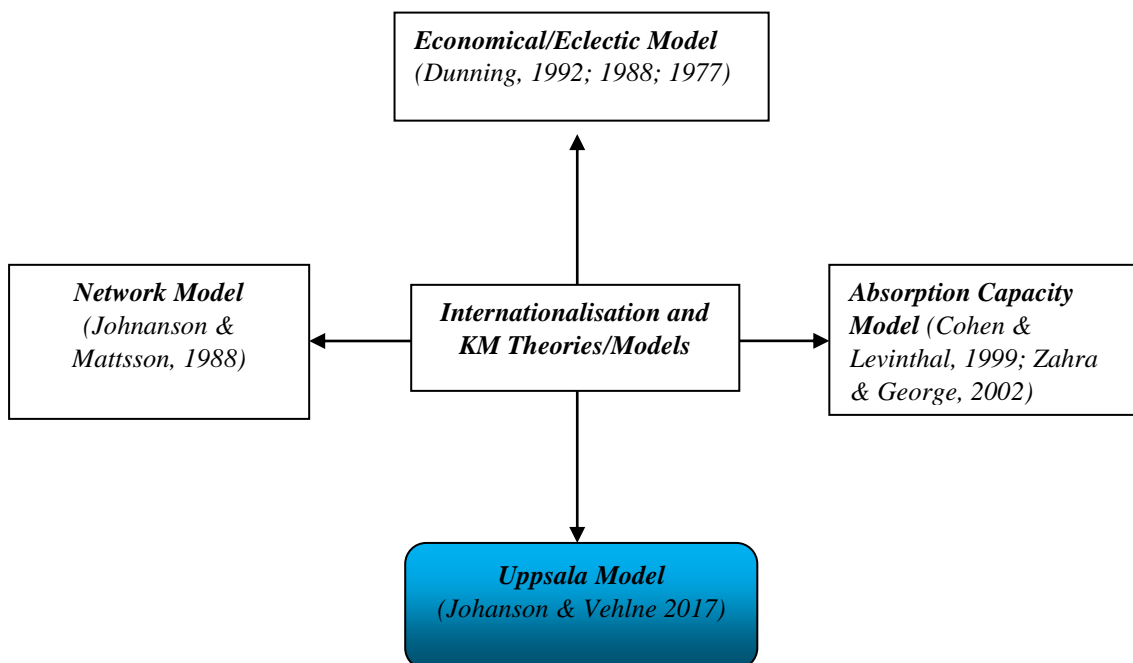
The capability of SMEs to identify and know how to exploit entrepreneurial opportunities in foreign markets depends on their alertness to business ideas (Yasir & Majid, 2017), which involves the collection, handling, and efficient use of information needed to carry out entrepreneurship decisions (Tang, 2008). However, information about international markets is not always adequate and fully reliable (Casson, 2010). Consequently, Casson (2010) suggested that entrepreneurial decision-making in international markets should be judgemental – reasonable and defensible. To protect entrepreneurs (SMEs, to be precise) from being unreasonable and vulnerable in recognition of opportunities, absorptive capacity (prior

knowledge) and cognitive process (intelligence) are the two fundamental factors behind opportunity recognition that influences the internationalisation of SMEs (Mejri & Umemoto, 2010; Shane, 2004).

2.5 THEORETICAL OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The theoretical overview of this study outlines sets of internationalisation models or theories, which include the Network theory of internationalisation, the Absorption Capacity theory, the Eclectic/Economic Approach and the Uppsala model. Moreover, this gives empirical insight to the researcher to consider and choose one of the models or theories to analyse the data collected through interviews with the study population from Nigeria. Hence, the researcher considered and adopted the Uppsala model as the theoretical framework for this thesis. Besides, the Uppsala model gives an empirical overview of the organisational status quo to uphold trust, the capabilities to overcome possible uncertainties, and how objective and empirical knowledge influence internationalisation. Thus, organisational trust and capabilities are critical instruments of KMPs for business internationalisation (Hult et al., 2020; Le & Lei, 2019; Pan et al., 2020). Therefore, the theoretical review for this thesis is presented in Figure 4 below:

FIGURE 4: THEORETICAL OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY



Source: Author (2020)

2.5.1 Overview of Network Theory of Internationalisation

The network approach is a critical model for business internationalisation created from the social relationship (Chetty & Holm, 2000; Paul et al., 2017). This model works in the context of environmental conditions and company relationships (Madsen & Servais, 1997; Chetty & Holm, 2000). Nevertheless, the social network theory or otherwise at times referred to as exchange theory has been used as the fundamental benchmark for defining a business network as “a set of two or more connected business relationships, in which each exchange relation is between the businesses that are conceptualised as collective actors” (Chetty & Holm, 2000, p. 79). These actors are not limited to competitors, suppliers, customers, distributors, and governments (Axelsson & Johanson, 1992; Pagani & Pardo, 2017).

The Uppsala School developed this model to enhance the concept of their original model. Based on this, Johansson and Vahlne (1990) posited that the significance of creating the organisational networks model is to justify the modes and motivation of the internationalisation process by putting an organisation in a multilateral context to encourage inter- and intra-organisational relations.

Coviello and Munro (1997) posit that SMEs express their routine business activities during the internationalisation process by relying on their capacity to create reliable networks to facilitate the market choice and fundamental mode of international market entry. As such, they suggested that existing networks adopt a rapid internationalisation process from the national and international context. Thus, their principal collaborators can initiate international processes and influence investment in the targeted international market. These scholars (Coviello & Munro, 1997) argued that excellent and sustained business network relations play an essential role in internationalisation and facilitating the growth of firm entrepreneurial activity.

From the point of view of Johanson and Mattson (1988), cited from Chetty and Holm (2000, p. 80), a firm’s internationalisation develops and sustains excellent business networks relationship between the firm and its foreign counterparts in three different approaches. Thus, these approaches include:

- i. International extension: forming commercial relationships with foreign counterparts that are new to the firm.
- ii. Penetration: creating commitment in already established foreign networks.

- iii. International integration: integrating their positions in networks in various foreign countries (establishing multilateral commercial networks as much as possible with different international counterparts).

The activities and benefits of the commercial network can prompt business organisations to establish a reliable business relationship that will allow them to secure access to resources and markets. The network model assumes that a business organisation needs resources controlled by other business organisations, which can easily be acquired through networks (Johanson & Mattsson, 1988). The business network can control national networks and/or production networks (Chetty & Holm, 2000). Furthermore, some scholars (Johanson & Mattsson, 1988) identify and suggest four categories of firms within the circumference of the network model (see Table 1). These categories are drawn based on the degree of internationalisation of the market (production net): firms’ relationships that revolve around activities in a specific product area vs the degree of internationalisation of the firm (national net): network in other countries (Chetty & Holm, 2000, p.80). Thus, the categories are presented in Table 1, and discussed below:

TABLE 1: THE NETWORK APPROACH TO INTERNATIONALISATION

		Degree of internationalisation of the market (Production net)	
		Low	High
Degree of Internationalisation of the firm	Low	The early starter: EARLY	The Late Starter: LATE
	High	The lonely international: LONELY	The International Among Others: INTERNATIONAL

Source: Johanson and Mattsson (1988)

1st Category - The early starter: the firm within this category is new to the foreign market; they have a small number and limited international relationships, competitors, and suppliers. The firm within the category has little or limited knowledge of foreign markets and small opportunities to acquire the needed knowledge from their relationships in the domestic market. To acquire the required knowledge for foreign market entry, firms use more experienced local agents and distributors to enter the targeted international markets to reduce costs and the rate of uncertainty/risk in the foreign market (Johanson & Mattsson, 1988; Chetty & Holm, 2000; Morish & Earl, 2020).

2nd Category - The lonely international: The firm is highly internationalised but focuses on the domestic market environment. The firms in this category are called lonely international firms. Nevertheless, the firms can expand into foreign markets due to foreign markets' prior knowledge and experience (Barkema & Vermeulen, 1998; Wu & Ang, 2020). In addition, the firms under this category can exercise a competitive edge over their local competitors because they have already established strong business networks in the operation of their domestic markets (Morish & Earl, 2020).

3rd Category - The Late Started: the firms are in the internationally developed market environment. They got the motivation to internationalise from other business network members (Customers, Suppliers, and Competitors). Nevertheless, they have little knowledge about the foreign entry market due to psychic distance (differences in language, culture, and political systems). Thus, the firms find it challenging to access the foreign market due to intense competition from competitors with more market and experiential knowledge.

4th Category - The International Among Other: This category focuses on firms with good knowledge of the market environment and has the critical capabilities to acquire external resources to operate in foreign markets. Consequent upon the capacity to acquire international knowledge, they become "quick in setting up sales subsidiaries, as it needs to coordinate activities in different markets" (Chetty & Holm, 2000, p. 81).

2.5.2 Overview of Knowledge Absorption Capacity Theory

Knowledge is essential in creating value and developing as well as sustaining SMEs' competitive advantages in the international market (Camisón & Forés, 2010; Teece et al., 1997). Notwithstanding the importance of knowledge for SMEs' internationalisation, SME operators, especially those with internationalisation concepts, need the capacity to absorb external knowledge acquired through KMPs. Scholars see absorptive capacity as the organisational, group, or individual cognitive and dynamic capabilities to value, acquire, assimilate, and apply external knowledge for commercial purposes (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Camisón & Forés, 2010; Zahra & George, 2002; Lane et al., 2006; Sjödin et al., 2019). Thus, before learning, effective organisational R&D has to be considered and adopted as essential periodic activity of a successful business organisation (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990).

Despite the definition of absorption capacity adopted for this thesis, the researcher distinguishes between capability and dynamic capability. According to Winder, capabilities are "the high-level routine that, together with its implementing input flows, bestows upon an

organisation's management sets of decision options for producing significant outputs of a particular type" (2000, p. 983). Hence, capabilities help SMEs in meeting the demand of the target market, while on the other hand, dynamic capabilities are specific strategic plans set up towards effecting organisational change caused by external stakeholders (Teece et al., 1997; Zahra & George, 2002). Furthermore, the dynamic capabilities may influence SMEs' ability to generate and distribute knowledge necessary for building other capabilities, such as production, distribution, and marketing, to achieve better foreign and national competitive advantages (Zahra & George, 2002; Barney, 1991; Ahimbisibwe et al., 2016; Butler & Ferlie, 2020).

According to Zahra and George (2002), the application of absorption capacity theory develops with the evolved environment; thus, they further developed dimensions to create a simplified and conceptualised system to implement absorption capacity theory in firms. These dimensions/capabilities include the potential and realised dimensions of absorption capacity.

- a) Potential dimension of absorption capacity: this refers to the ability of SMEs to acquire and assimilate inter-organisational or external knowledge for commercial purposes (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Camisón & Forés, 2010; Al-Jabri & Al-Busaidi, 2018). Butler and Ferlie (2020) posited that business organisations, including SMEs, are duty-bound to seek knowledge externally. As a result, SMEs may investigate valuing and acquiring inter-organisational knowledge; nevertheless, it does not assure them of the capacity to exploit the knowledge. Thus, the potential dimension of absorption capacity is divided into acquisition capacity and assimilation capacity:
 - i) Acquisition Capacity: this refers to SME's capabilities to locate, identify value, and generate knowledge essential to its business operations, both in the national and foreign markets, from an external source (Zahra & George, 2002; Liao et al., 2003; Butler & Ferlie, 2020). Zahra and George (2002) suggested that knowledge acquisition processes have three fundamental elements influencing a firm's absorption capacity: intensity, speed, and direction. Hence, the intensity and speed of a SMEs ability to identify and gather the required knowledge from appropriate sources determine the quality of the firm's acquisition capabilities.
 - ii) Assimilation Capacity: Assimilation in this context refers to a firm's ability to absorb the acquired external knowledge to foster competitive advantages (Camison & Fores, 2010, p. 709). It can also be referred to as a firm's regular sequences and processes for analysing, processing, interpreting, and

understanding information and knowledge acquired from external (inter-organisational relation) sources for internal use (Zahra & George, 2002; Ahmed et al., 2019).

TABLE 2: THE DIMENSION OF ABSORPTION CAPACITY THEORY

Categories	Dimensions/ Capabilities	Components	Roles and Importance
Potential Absorption Capabilities	Acquisition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior investments • Prior knowledge • Intensity • Speed • Direction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scope of research • Perpetual schema or plan • New connection or network • Speed of learning • Quality of learning
	Assimilation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpretation • Comprehension • Learning
Realities Absorption Capabilities	Transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internalisation • Conversion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synergy • Recodification • Bisociation
	Exploitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use • Implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core competencies • Harvesting resources

Source: Zahra and George (2002)

b) Realised dimension of Absorption Capacity: this absorption capacity refers to firms' ability to convert and take advantage of the knowledge acquired from an external source for organisational use (Ahmed et al., 2019; Butler & Ferlie, 2020). Hence, the realised dimension of absorption capacity signifies the firm's ability to leverage external knowledge for organisational benefit (Zahra & George, 2002). The realities absorption capacity is divided into two components and discussed as follows:

- i. Transformation Capacity: knowledge acquired from the external source must be refined to fit into the understanding and purpose for which the knowledge is acquired. According to Zahra and George (2002), transformation refers to a firm's capability to develop and improve practices that integrate existing knowledge with newly acquired and assimilated knowledge. It means filtering (eliminating and adding) knowledge or interpreting accepted and assimilated knowledge in another way (Camison & Fores, 2010; Ahmed et al., 2019). The ability to identify and combine multiple external information help to reshape a firm's entrepreneurial mindset and foster entrepreneurial action; this further creates better business opportunities in a competitive environment

(McGrath & MacMillan, 2000; Smith & Gregorio, 2017; Song et al., 2018; Zahra & George, 2002).

- ii. **Exploitation Capacity:** exploitation as an organisational capability is based on routine operations, which allow SMEs to improve, increase, and take advantage of the existing knowledge or to create new ones by integrating the acquired and transformed knowledge into their day-to-day business activities at the international market (Lane & Lubatkin, 1998; Zahra & Goerge, 2002). Hence, exploitation capacity entails acquiring and applying knowledge to a firm's routines (Zahra & Goerge, 2002; Camison & Foris, 2010).

2.5.3 Overview of Eclectic/Economic Theory

Participation in international business can be considered a delicate issue. Dunning (1992; 1988; 1977) Eclectic theory guides firms in choosing the appropriate means of entry into an international market. Thus, the firm needs to consider its ownership advantages, the country's location advantages, and the international advantages of the specific condition. Nevertheless, the three elements of this theory (ownership advantages, location advantages, and international advantages) are interdependent, as they all have a significant role in international market entry decisions (Williams, 1997; Casson & Wadeson, 2018). Dunning (1992; 1988; 1977) discussed the advantages as follows:

a) The Ownership Advantages

The ownership advantages imply the firm's competitive advantages over competitors in a specific market environment (Williamson & Wan, 2018). Thus, the ownership advantages are established through the firm's international size, experiences, adaptability of the product (goods and/or services), capacity to differentiate its product, the services and technology intensity of the firm offerings (Dinning, 1993; Brouthers et al., 1996). According to Brouthers et al. (1996), examples of ownership advantages may include but not limited to the difficulties of duplicating organisational products by competitors. Again, the firm can have substantial financial and experimental resources to decide specific market entry.

b) Internationalisation Advantages

Internationalisation advantages involve sensitive issues that prompt firms to choose the foreign mode of operation over an internal method. However, every technique of internationalisation is cost-oriented (Dinning, 1988, 1993). Williams (1997) argued that most firms exploit international markets due to their failure in the current market of operation. Consequently, firm

internationalisation is cost-oriented, especially the cost of maintaining an international relationship established to perform the same functions in the foreign market. In addition, firms engage in internationalisation due to risk and uncertainty. Hence, in this process, the firms internationalise the risks and the risk management process resulting from economies of scale in an imperfect market. Thus, the author of the theory (Dunning, 1977) believes that disparities between ownership and internationalisation advantages are essential and rationally accurate.

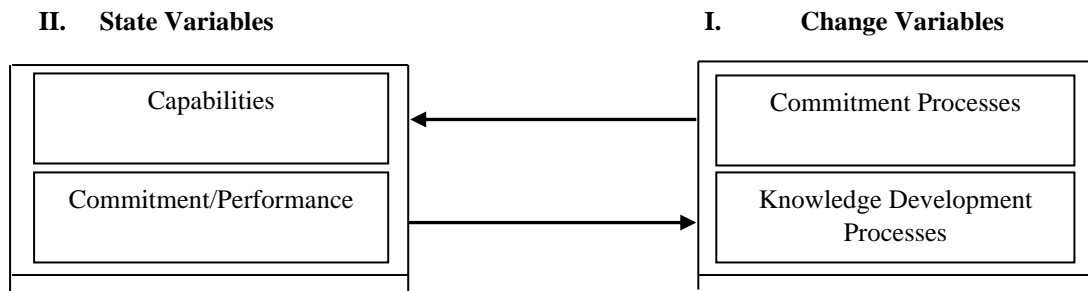
c) The Locational Advantages

The location advantages are factors related to the identified host country of entry and the firm's home country participating in an international market, including market potential and risk (Brouthers et al., 1996). Thus, the location advantages depend on ownership and internationalisation decisions. Firms are expected to enjoy the location advantages of cheaper labour and materials for production than when the firms' products are sold. However, location advantages include better market infrastructures, lower production costs, cultural similarity, economic, legal, political, and national trade policies, sales demand, and potential demand (Dunning, 1993; Brouthers et al., 1996).

2.5.4 Overview of The Uppsala Model of Internationalisation

The Uppsala model is interested in how objective and empirical knowledge influence internationalisation in business organisations (Hadley & Wilson, 2003; Hult et al., 2020). Vahlne and Johanson (1977, 2009, 2017) categorised the Uppsala international model into two significant groups. These categories include i) the Change variables and ii) the State variables (see Figure 5). These variables (state and change variables) influence each other; "the current state is having an impact on the change, and vice versa (Hult et al., 2020, p. 43). Johanson and Vahlne (2009, p. 1423) posited that the model describes "dynamic, cumulative processes of learning, as well as trust and commitment building." Also, the elements strengthen internal and external organisational relationships and productivity by enhancing a reliable competitive advantage in the markets of interest (Chakkol et al., 2018).

FIGURE 5: THE UPPSALA MODEL OF INTERNATIONALISATION



Source: Vahlne and Johanson (2017)

i. **The Change Variables of the Uppsala Model:** Business organisations, like SMEs, operate with the belief of uncertainty, partial ignorance, and risk in a manageable state (Teece, 2014). Despite the concern of uncertainty, partial ignorance and risk, change is a constant variable and a fundamental principle of the learning and knowledge development process of SMEs' internationalisation, which applies to the social, economic, and regulatory environment (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009; Penrose, 1959; Nelson & Winter, 1982). Thus, this concurs with the need to evaluate the appropriate means of exploring the international markets of entry, as noted by the Eclectic model (Buckley & Casson, 2019). According to Vahlne and Johanson (2017), change variables are essential components of the Uppsala internationalisation process model; they are action-oriented elements to which an organisation commits its resources to enhance routine international business operations. The change variables are classified into two categories: a) the commitment processes and b) the knowledge development processes.

a) Commitment Processes

The commitment processes facilitate the understanding and stabilising business relationships between the parties involved (Rusbult, 1980, 1983; Rusbult et al., 2012; Martz & Agnew, 1998; Hadden, Harvey, Settersten, & Agnew, 2019); and the longevity of an excellent business relationship is predictable by three exceptional qualities, which include: Satisfaction – (This is anchored on the notion that the benefit will outweigh the costs in the relationship); Quality alternatives – (It implies that continuing in a relationship will lead to a better result than if one were to leave); and Investment – tangible (shared possessions) and intangible (emotional disclosure) resources (Hadden et al., 2019). Thus, these exceptional qualities are bound to be lost if the existing relationship ends (Goodfriend & Agnew, 2008; Rusbult et al., 2012; Rusbult et al., 2001; Hadden et al., 2019). Business organisations (including SMEs) in internationalisation decide whether to commit resources to foreign businesses (Johanson & Vahlne 1977; 2009). Whether to invest in foreign markets is carried out through a process that includes reconfiguring and coordinating allocated resources (Johanson & Vahlne, 2017).

Moreover, “the resource allocation decisions are made when there is a reasonable positive trade-off between expected benefits and downside outcome” (Johanson & Vahlen, 1977; Figueira De Lemos et al., 2013); cited from (Johanson & Vahlne, 2020, p. 1093). SMEs are obvious in identifying and implementing business opportunities that prompt new inter- and intra-organisational KMPs, which help manage additional risks and uncertainty in the international market (Johanson & Vahlne, 2017), hence, encouraging the need for comprehensive knowledge screening and adoption through adequate knowledge absorption capacity (Mehreen et al., 2022).

b) Knowledge Development Processes

The knowledge development processes imply that learning, creating knowledge, and trust-building happen continuously. Thus, knowledge development influences business organisations' position and collective competencies (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977; Hult et al., 2020). The knowledge development processes further illustrate that frequent socialisation is critical in increasing learning, creating knowledge, commitment, and building trust between the parties involved (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009). In a nutshell, the knowledge development processes are effective mechanisms that facilitate relationship building, flexibility in the strategy implementation process, and adaptation to the organisational task environment, which helps in translating the intended strategy into realised strategy (Arvanitis et al., 2015; Anderson & Weitz, 1992; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Johanson & Vahlne, 2009, 2017). Furthermore, the knowledge development processes encourage acquiring and applying market and experiential knowledge to strengthen the internationalisation process (Mejri & Umemoto, 2010).

- ii. The State Variables of the Uppsala Model:** these variables have to do with the position of the firm that prompts it to participate in an international business – which inculcates the capabilities or organisational competency to reconfigure resources and coordinate empirical actions, turning intended strategy into actual strategy (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009, 2017). The “state variables comprise capabilities and commitment/performance variables, which result from and affect the change variables” (Johanson & Vahlne, 2017, p.1095).

a) Capabilities

Organisational capabilities are a “set of current or potential activities that utilise organisation’s productive resources to make and/or deliver products,” which includes goods and services (Teece, 2014, p.328). SMEs' competencies include efficiently using available resources to achieve a specific task and enhance routine operations. The organisational capabilities are

divided into two variables: operational and dynamic capabilities (Teece et al., 1997; Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Teece, 2014; Johanson & Vahlne, 2017).

❖ **Operational Capabilities:** SMEs with an internationalisation strategy should be able to do things right. In the end, there must be a scale of sufficiency in the performance of a well-defined task that creates a competitive advantage and sustainable business activity in the international market; these in furtherance help to overcome the liabilities to smallness, foreignness, and outside-ship (Chandra et al., 2020; Johanson & Vahlne, 2017; Teece, 2014). Hence, the operational capabilities of a business organisation are “measured against the requirements of specific tasks, such as labour, productivity, inventory turns, and time to completion, and can thus be benchmarked internally or externally to industry best practices” (Teece, 2014, p. 330). Thus, these are achievable with the critical availability of human and material resources and efficient networking within and outside the organisation that prompts adequate knowledge absorption capacity and utilisation.

❖ **Dynamic Capabilities:** In the business context, there is the need for a business organisation and its management to have the ability to incorporate, develop, and redesign internal and external competencies that will help to address rapid changes in the market often, as well as in the business environment to enhance competitive advantage (Pisano & Teece, 2007; Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997; Teece, 2014; Johanson, & Vahlne, 2017). Thus, the dynamic capabilities are exhibited by the business organisation’s managers and top management team (Teece, 2014). Consequently, the dynamic capabilities seem to be routine. Thus, routine is “... behaviour that is learned, highly patterned, repetitious, or quasi-repetitious, founded partly in tacit knowledge ...” (Johanson & Vahlne, 2017, p. 1097).

b) Commitments/Performance

Commitments or performance variables are other state outcome variables that illustrate organisation competency and achieved results. “Commitments describes the distribution of resources over the multi-national enterprises (MNEs) functions, its product lines, the countries where it is active, and the relationship in which it has invested”; while performance refers to “what the company has achieved” (Vahlne & Johanson, 2017, p 1097). Thus, it is crucial and resourceful that commitments and performance are placed side-by-side in the Uppsala model. Perhaps, this is to concur with the expectancy-value theory management (the value of input committed determines the higher output) and prompt entrepreneurs to determine the scope and

content of the knowledge development processes (Cardoza, 1965; Fan & Wolters, 2014; Vahlne & Johanson, 2017) and network position of the organisation (Han et al., 2020).

2.6 SUMMARY

This Chapter presented the background for understanding SMEs' concept to national economic development and growth. Nevertheless, SMEs are affected by some challenges that have prevented their performance and exploration of international market opportunities (Costa, Soares, & de Sousa, 2020). Again, this Chapter discussed the concepts of knowledge management and knowledge management processes, as these should encourage SMEs' internationalisation. To achieve the objectives of this study, the Chapter further looked at the theoretical approaches to Internationalisation and Knowledge Management, which include the Network model, Knowledge Absorption Capacity Model, Eclectic/Economic model, and Uppsala model. Thus, the review of the theories of internationalisation and knowledge management process prompted the study to explore further the challenges, government support, and prospects of SMEs in Nigeria, which will be discussed in Chapter Three: The Overview of SMEs in Nigeria, which is to give an empirical background of SMEs in Nigeria.

CHAPTER THREE: THE OVERVIEW OF SMEs IN NIGERIA

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlined the nature of SMEs in the research context (Nigeria). The discussion covers the definition of SMEs, their contributions and challenges, and their international target markets. Furthermore, this chapter discusses some efforts made by the government through SME regulators to ensure healthy competition and growth of SMEs in Nigeria.

3.2 NIGERIA DEFINITION OF SMEs

The lack of a unified definition of SMEs is one of the challenges in understanding SMEs in Nigeria (Usman & Tahir, 2018; Boateng & Abdulrahman, 2013). It has been suggested that the definition of SME should be based on the size of total assets, annual turnover, and the number of employees (OECD, 2003; Hassan et al., 2017, p.133). The Nigerian criteria for defining SMEs include an asset base between 5 million Naira and 500 million Naira and a staff strength of 10 to 300 people (Ajuwon et al., 2017). Therefore, SMEs' features reflect a country's economic and socio-cultural patterns (Dabaneh & Tukan, 2017). The criteria adopted by the Nigeria National Policy in defining MSMEs are based on the number of employees and the business organisations' assets (excluding land and buildings), as shown in Table 3 below. Nevertheless, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Monetary Policy Circular No 22 of 1998 defined SMEs as an enterprise whose investment (excluding land but including working capital) is less than three hundred thousand Naira (N300, 000) with an annual turnover of five million Naira (N5m).

TABLE 3: DEFINITION OF MSMEs ADOPTED FROM THE NIGERIA POLICY ON MSMEs

	Size Category	Employment	Assets (in Million Naira) (Excluding land and buildings)
1	Micro Enterprises	Less than 10	Less than 10
2	Small Enterprises	10 to 49	10 to less than 100
3	Medium Enterprises	50 to 199	100 to less than 1,000

Source: National Survey of MSMEs (2017)

3.3 INTERNATIONALISATION OF NIGERIAN SMEs

The participation of Nigerian SMEs in international business is considered one of the critical strategies for diversifying the Nigerian economy from oil to non-oil sectors (Harry, 2016; Ijeoma et al., 2018; Charles et al., 2018). Moreover, the internationalisation of SMEs in Nigeria (overall: MSMEs) plays other significant roles, which include: the growth,

development, and industrialisation of Nigeria's economy; these roles create more job opportunities and even facilitate the distribution of natural resources and knowledge (Mpi, 2019; Chandra et al., 2020). Hence, the internationalisation of Nigerian SMEs enhances their chances of survival and speedy growth; it also contributes to reducing the country's national balance of payments deficit (Berry Rodriguez & Sandee, 2001; Bagchi-Sen, 1999; Babatunde, 2016) and the country's national balance of payment correlate with an increase in productivity, competitiveness and effective inter- and intra-knowledge transfer (De Zubielqui et al., 2019; Babatunde, 2016; Ajayi, 2016).

The Support for SMEs' growth and internationalisation in Nigeria has become a significant concern for the Nigerian government (Okpara, 2009; Nik & Nnabuike, 2017). Consequently, the government, through its relevant Ministries, Departments and Agencies, involves the business operators, including large-scale enterprises and SMEs, in the formulation of national and international trade policies (for example, the National Trade Policies, Memoranda of Understandings, Bilateral and Multilateral Agreements) and implementation process, to strengthen and safeguard international business activities of National business operators (Jerome, 2005; Ogunrin, & Inegbenebor, 2015). Moreover, these policies provide the means for sharing knowledge and information and dialogue with international business partners on bottlenecks facing individual countries' national entrepreneurs, especially SMEs (Nicita, 2013). Thus, SMEs' internationalisation in some of the developing countries, including Nigeria, primarily focuses on Agricultural products (for example, Cocoa beans and products, Sesame seed, Cashew seed and product, Leather, Shea butter, Timba and timber products, Textile and apparel, Groundnut (Peanut), Walnut, Ginger, Cassava, and others) in which they have a comparative advantage on (Ajayi, 2016). Some target markets for these products include the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), The United States of America, the European Union member states (including the United Kingdom), India, China, Japan, Canada, and others.

Nigeria, as a member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union, is a signatory to the ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme (ETLS), African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), and other business facilitation policies with other countries. Accordingly, international business facilitation policies were negotiated and signed at bilateral or multilateral levels. Nevertheless, the primary objective of negotiating and signing the international business facilitation policies is to create an enabling environment for capable and willing National SMEs to participate in international businesses. As such, Nigerian SMEs that engage in international businesses are members of the National African Women

Entrepreneurship Program (AWEP) – under the auspices of the AGOA platform, which is the U.S.A. market focus, Association of Nigerian Exporters (ANE) or members of National Association of Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (NACCIMA), and other relevant business associations.

3.4 CHALLENGES OF SMEs IN NIGERIA

Despite the contribution of SMEs to the economic growth and development in Nigeria, research suggests that SMEs in Nigeria suffer severe challenges such as access to financial facilities, lack of sustainable training and development, poor infrastructural development, lack of information management and record-keeping and many more (Abeh, 2017; Akinyemi & Adejumo, 2017; Arinaitwe, 2006; Emezie, 2017; Ezeagba, 2017; Igwe et al., 2018; Mpi, 2019; Okpara, 2011; Saidi et al., 2019). Furthermore, studies have shown that if these challenges are not properly harnessed, they may continue to affect SMEs' survival, growth, and competitiveness in the international market. As such, the fundamental challenges of SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria include the following:

a) **Poor managerial skills:** the effective daily running of SMEs in Nigeria for international business requires adequate organisational skills for planning, organising, controlling, and directing both human and material resources to gain a sustainable competitive advantage (Okpara, 2011; Gbandi & Amissah, 2014; Popescu, et' al., 2020). Moreover, managerial skills are quite different from the inborn qualities of leaders. According to Katz (1955, as cited in Muthuveloo, Chiek and Ping, 2017), business organisations employ managerial skills (technical, human, and conceptual skills) to achieve expected objectives for a given period. However, due to financial limitations, Nigerian SMEs find it challenging to employ highly skilled personnel such as accountants and managers in relevant marketing, research, and development departments (Ezeagba, 2017). This leads to poor marketing, accounting, and financial management practices, which affect SMEs' creditworthiness and sustainability (Ezagba, 2017; Eniola & Entebang, 2016). Therefore, Nigeria's managerial skills level has become very low compared to its counterparts in developed countries (Abeh, 2017).

b) **Limited access to finance:** Financial issues have topped the discussion on the factors affecting the growth and internationalisation of SMEs in developing countries, especially in Nigeria (Adebayo et al., 2019; Igwe et al., 2018). The poor access to credit and capital from the government and non-governmental financial institutions has become one of the significant challenges for SMEs' growth and internationalisation in Nigeria (Agwu & Emeti, 2014; Pavtar, 2017; Gbandi & Amissah, 2014). Thus, this slows down their contribution to national

economic growth and development (Saidi et al., 2019). According to studies, few Nigerian SMEs can access credit facilities from the SMEs Equity Investment Scheme (SMEEIS) due to the inability of the majority to meet the conditions to access credit or capital from the financial institutions under the platform (Eriki & Inegbenebor, 2009; Saidi et al., 2019). In addition, the commercial banks' interest rates are very high and discouraging to many SME organisations in the country (Gbandi & Amissah, (2014).

c) **Poor innovation strategy implementation:** innovation is one of the fundamental components of competitiveness that compels SMEs to improve their market mix (product, promotion, price, place, policies) for a sustainable competitive advantage and market expansion (Damanpour, 1996; Gunday et al., 2011; Aksoy, 2017). Innovation is an essential process that creates, collects, shares and integrates knowledge (Abeh, 2017). Thus, SMEs require adequate financial resources to implement innovation strategies properly. However, due to Nigeria's financial constraints, implementing innovation strategies seems to have become a bottleneck for SMEs' growth, internationalisation, and sustainability.

d) **Political factor:** political factor is one of the critical factors affecting the growth of SMEs, most especially in developing countries (Tokognon & Yunfei, 2018; Igwe et al., 2018). Governments negotiate and implement policies and procedures that severely impact daily human activities, including economic and social activities (Rahman et al., 2017). Therefore, SMEs conduct business activities in line with the existing policies to govern business activities in the country. However, SMEs are unlikely to be given a favourable and conducive environment for doing business in and outside Nigeria's marketplace due to unstable exchange rates, political instability, excessive bureaucratic process of products registration, and continuous multiple taxation levy by different governmental bodies (Abeh, 2017; Agwu & Emeti, 2014; Ezeanokwasa et al., 2014; Feyitimi et al., 2016; Igwe et al., 2018; Tabet & Onyeukwu, 2019).

e) **Inadequate infrastructural facilities:** the excellent management of every business organisation seriously depends on a conducive external environment such as basic infrastructural amenities for running the business (Pereira & Temouri, 2018; Lawal et al., 2016). However, the inadequate availability of basic infrastructure can challenge the survival and growth of large, medium, small, and micro businesses. These basic infrastructural amenities include electricity, water supply, and good transportation networks from the raw material source to the production centre and then the market. Nevertheless, according to some studies (Agwu & Emeti, 2014; Etuk et al., 2014; Bello et al., 2018), inadequate infrastructure

has become a key factor limiting the survival and growth of SMEs in the country. Moreover, SMEs find it challenging to afford the cost of developing alternatives due to poor financial capacity, therefore, depending on government interventions.

f) **The socio-cultural factor:** The socio-cultural factor is associated with internal and external factors that influence organisational and personal decision-making in all life perspectives (Koe & Majid, 2014). Hence, they further stressed that socio-cultural factors include personal attitudes and norms, which are uncontrollable. Accordingly, most Nigerian SMEs use immediate profit for day-to-day investments, making them have a poor culture of ploughing back profits for re-investment (Agwu & Emeti, 2014; Igwe et al., 2018). They further state that Nigeria's attitude towards made-in-Nigeria products is a big challenge to MSMEs or SMEs in the country, given that most Nigerians have shown disdainful dispositions towards the locally made product.

g) **Liability of smallness:** this is one of the SMEs' unique characteristics globally (Lv et al., 2018). Business organisations (small, medium, and large) need to deploy relevant resources to implement their strategies. However, considering Nigerian SMEs' financial constraints due to the liability of smallness (Igwe et al., 2018), funding research and development (R&D) is not always sustainable. Thus, the liability of smallness has made it difficult for SMEs to obtain economies of scale and maximise the value of new technology (Battistella et al., 2015). The trajectory of e-commerce has fostered business internationalisation (Tolstoy et al., 2016; Huo & Ouyang, 2018). However, "SMEs tend to be relatively weak in technological capacity due to their liability of smallness" (Lv et al., 2018, p. 16).

h) **Liability of foreignness:** the liability of foreignness comes to play when the business organisation going international "lacks the knowledge about the foreign target market, consumers unfamiliarity with the companies and other costs concerning foreign operations" (Lou & Mezias, 2002; Jin & Hurd, 2018, p. 74). Thus, foreign liability is considered an influential factor affecting SMEs' business entry strategies into international markets and adds to the cost of running SMEs in international markets (Chen et al., 2006). This is because it is linked to the knowledge of the targeted international market. Nevertheless, business organisations with less liability to foreignness are more likely to adopt the resource-seeking strategy, while those with a high liability to foreignness tend to adopt market-seeking and control-oriented strategies (Chen et al., 2006; Jin & Hurd, 2018, p. 74). According to Gorostidi-Martinez and Zhao (2017), liability to foreignness is overcome through embedded

internationalisation. However, it is unclear if Nigerian SMEs can achieve embedded internationalisation without proper inter- and intra-knowledge in the business organisation.

3.5 GOVERNMENT'S CONTRIBUTION TO SMEs' GROWTH IN NIGERIA

Previous studies contend that governments across various levels have been making efforts to ensure the development and growth of SMEs in Nigeria (Anochie et al., 2015; Toluyemi et al., 2016; Abeh, 2017; Abioye et al., 2017; Ibrahim et al., 2017). Some reasons for such government commitments are the expectation that SMEs' growth is critical to job creation opportunities and economic enhancement which in turn reduce the country's poverty level and crime rate. These provide a benchmark for improved government performance in economic growth and poverty alleviation (Johnson & Schaltegger, 2016; Sadiku-Dushi et al., 2019). According to the National MSMEs Survey (2013), government institutions in Nigeria have made good programmes and policies to boost Nigeria's growth and development. Thus, the programmes and policies highlighted in the National MSMEs Survey (2017) are not limited to:

a) **The Establishment of SMEDAN:** The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) is the apex institution established in 2003 to offer better solutions to MSMEs' problems and challenges in the country (Oduyoye et al., 2013; Ogunsanya, 2020). The Agency is a one-stop shop for fostering the growth of MSMEs in Nigeria (Ogunsanya, 2020). SMEDAN has been at the forefront of developing and promoting Nigerian MSMEs in the domestic and international domains from the onset (Ajayi et al., 2018). SMEDAN, as an institution, collaborates with the state and local governments in Nigeria and the Chambers of Commerce to realise its mandate (Nwekeaku & Ossai, 2019). In summary, the Agency's mandate is to ensure proper stimulation, monitoring, and coordination of MSMEs activities to contribute to the country's national economic growth and development.

b) **The Micro-Finance Policy, Regulatory and Supervisory Framework for Nigeria:** To reduce and possibly eradicate the financial bottlenecks facing MSMEs in Nigeria, the Government of Nigeria, through the Central Bank of Nigeria, launched the Micro-finance policy, regulation, and supervisory framework in 2005 (Nwankwo, & Ogbodo, 2017). The policy provides the regulatory framework for microfinance banks in the country (Yakubu et al., 2018). Thus, the policy's primary purpose is to create a credible and sustainable microfinance bank capable of mobilising and channelling funds to the MSME sub-sector (Nwankwo & Ogbodo, 2017; Yakubu et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the policy spurred new microfinance banks and converted some existing community banks into microfinance banks. Consequently,

microfinance banks have provided the financing window to address the inadequate access to finance, challenging the MSMEs in Nigeria (Igwe et al., 2018).

c) **The Small and Medium Enterprises Equity Investment Scheme (SMEEIS):** It is a scheme that provides equity investment to SMEs in Nigeria (Egbon et al., 2015). To achieve this objective, the Federal Republic of Nigeria mandated all the Commercial Banks in Nigeria to set aside 10% of their profit after tax to support and encourage the MSMEs sub-sector to provide adequate and cheaper funding (Sanusi, 2004; Isa & Terungwa, 2011; National MSMEs Survey, 2013). Accordingly, in December 2009, the banks set aside 42 billion Naira as equity for transforming and resuscitating MSMEs (National MSMEs Survey, 2013). Nevertheless, the term and conditions for accessing the fund are limited to a clear and detailed financial business plan, marketing strategies, and a sound accounting system (National MSMEs Survey, 2017). Thus, the SMEEIS terms and conditions seem stringent to SMEs, which may be the cause that led to the scheme's failure (Gbandi & Amissah, 2014). Gbandi and Amissah (2014) further stated that the scheme covers all legal activities except trading and financial services. However, a good number of SMEs attained the terms and conditions for accessing funds from the scheme but turned it down due to mistrust and refusal to disclose information regarding their business for fear of inviting undesirable tax investigations (Aberijo & Fayomi, 2007; Gololo, 2017).

d) **The Small and Medium Scale Enterprises Guarantee Scheme (SMESGC):** the SMESGC was established in 2010 by the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and managed by the Central Bank of Nigeria (National MSMEs Survey, 2017). Gbandi and Amissah (2014) stated that the scheme aimed to facilitate the development and growth of the SME sector in Nigeria, improve chances for the industrialisation of the economy, and increase SMEs' easy access to credit facilities. In addition, the scheme aims to curtail the possible risks that prevent banks from lending to Nigeria's SME subsectors. To achieve the scheme's objective, the Central Bank of Nigeria set aside the sum of 200 million Naira to wholly finance the scheme. The activities covered under the scheme (SMESGC) are not limited to Manufacturing, Agricultural value chain and educational institutions operating in the country. However, the credit facilities under the scheme are primarily for (i) Working Capital, (ii) Refinancing of an existing lease and loans, (iii) Long term loans for the purchase of plants and machinery, and (iv) resuscitation of ailing industries (National MSMEs Survey, 2017).

e) **The Cotton, Textile and Garment (CTG) Fund:** the CTG fund is a financial scheme that lends funds to those SMEs that engage in the cotton, textile, and garment value chain sub-sector to facilitate their growth and competitive advantage in both the local and international

markets (National MSMEs Survey, 2017). This scheme aims to resuscitate, revive, and set the textile industry on a recovery path, bringing back the sector's lost glory (Aminu, 2016). To achieve this purpose, the Central Bank of Nigeria made available 100 billion Naira as a loan to interested participants in the textile sector (National MSMEs Survey, 2017).

f) **The National Economic Reconstruction Fund (NERFUND):** the significant role of the NERFUND is to provide funds to SMEs through the participating banks in Nigeria (Taiwo & Falohun, 2016). According to Taiwo and Falohun (2016), the scheme enables SMEs to achieve their macro-objectives efficiently and effectively (employment generation, diffusion of economic power, and promoting indigenous technology). To accomplish the scheme's objectives, the Federal Government approved and released 2 billion Naira for direct lending to interested and eligible SME operators in Nigeria (National MSMEs Survey, 2017). However, from Adeyinka et al. (2019) findings, the scheme's fundamental challenge is the unstable exchange rate of the Naira and the inability to service the backlog of loans acquired by the government to facilitate the scheme.

g) **The Bank of Industry (BOI):** The Bank of Industry is a government development financial institution established in October 2001, which dedicates 85% of its financial resources to SMEs and 15% to large business organisations (Oghenochuko, 2019). Thus, the fundamental responsibility of the bank is to provide financial assistance for establishing business organisations, as well as expansion, diversification, modernisation, and rehabilitation of the existing ones (Adeyinka et al., 2019; Oghenochuko, 2019). The Bank of Industry amalgamates the Nigeria Industrial Development Bank, the Nigerian Bank of Commerce and Industry, and the National Economic Reconstruction Funds (Oghenochuko, 2019). Considering the official mandate of the Bank of Industry, the bank collaborates with the state tiers to provide adequate funding to the SME subsectors in Nigeria.

h) **The National Enterprise Development Programme (NEDEP):** The NEDEP was created by Nigeria's Federal Government in 2013. Its implementation is carried out by three Agencies (the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency – SMEDAN, the Industrial Training Fund – ITF, and the Bank of Industry – BOI). The scheme was inaugurated to address SMEs' growth challenges (Osunde, 2016). To address the challenges, NEDEP incorporated some priority areas, which include: creating a better conducive operating environment for SMEs, strengthening the institutional framework that protects the SMEs, increasing SMEs' access to affordable financing, the developing of an updated version of the National MSMEs Policy, evolving business development skills for entrepreneurs, developing technical skills in

MSMEs operators, promoting youth inclusion, taking measures to reduce the high operating cost of MSMEs operators, and the implementation of a full delivery and monitoring structure.

3.6 SUMMARY

This chapter provided the background to SMEs in Nigeria. Extant literature has shown that the definition, characteristics of SMEs, and challenges vary from country to country. Thus, the challenges facing SME operators in Nigeria are diverse, like SMEs in other developing countries. However, in collaboration with its institutions, the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has developed mechanisms to ease some of the challenges, primarily by providing financial and skill development. In a nutshell, the issues explored in this chapter are particularly relevant to this study. Thus, this chapter rejuvenates the researcher's effort to identify the units of analysis and observation for this study which are discussed alongside the research philosophy and methodology adopted in the next chapter (Chapter Four: Research Methodology).

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This Chapter discussed the rationale and design of the research methods adopted for this research work, as the choice of research methodology is one of the most critical and challenging aspects of result-yielding investigation (Opoku et al., 2016). Consequently, this is associated with the effective analysis of the influence of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs on SMEs' internationalisation. Moreover, from the study, there is a need to critically crave and understand numerous theoretical approaches in dealing with phenomena and key into the experiences of business operators within the category of SMEs.

Following the preceding chapters (Chapters 2 and 3) and the above paragraph, this chapter explores the philosophical approach and methodology adopted for this study. Klakegg and Pasian (2016) posited that whatever researchers believe or assume about their investigation substantially impacts their research activities and findings. Thus, the researcher considers, discusses, and justifies why each approach is adopted to achieve the research objectives and answer the research questions in chapter One of this thesis.

4.2 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

Philosophical consideration enables the researcher to achieve a quality and dependable outcome in this study (Hothersall, 2019; Boon & Van Baalen, 2019). As it may be, research work could be based on fundamental assumptions that determine how to conduct effectual research reality. The most appropriate philosophical beliefs relate directly to the underlying nature of human knowledge (Basias & Pollalis, 2018) and the extent to which our values influence the research (Saunders et al., 2007). Thus, research philosophy serves as a mechanism that defines the “method of developing knowledge and the nature of that knowledge” (Johnson & Clark, 2006, p. 105) within the background of investigation. Also, “important assumptions regarding how researchers view the world” are recognised (Johnson & Clark, 2006, p. 105). These “assumptions will constitute a credible research philosophy, which underpins methodological choice, research strategy and data collection techniques, and analysis procedures” (Saunders et al., 2007, pp. 130 - 131).

This research explores and depicts a setting to understand the context under investigation (Cousin, 2005). The researchers also influenced this perception of the truth and attitude towards the nature of the study. Hence, it is essential to define the research philosophy of this research work and its findings. The choice of research philosophy is associated with the

researcher’s assumptions about reality and the type of knowledge the researcher believes. Burrell and Morgan (2017) argued that philosophical theories have guaranteed social science approaches and that the assumption of the social environment’s behaviour becomes the fundamental driver of research practices. Several philosophical approaches are associated with social science research (Burrell & Morgan, 2017; Saunders et al., 2007). Hence, it is vital to categorise the philosophical position of the social science phenomenon of investigation from an objective or subjective perspective (Burrell & Morgan, 2017; Hassard, 1991). Nevertheless, this depends on the researcher's argument in the study. Table 4. below showcases the different types of philosophical approaches via the objectivist and subjectivist approaches:

TABLE 4: PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACHES BASED ON OBJECTIVIST VS SUBJECTIVIST STANCE

Objectivist	Subjectivist
Quantitative	Qualitative
Positivist	Phenomenological
Scientific	Humanistic
Experimentalist	Interpretivist
Traditionalist	
Functionalist	

Source: Holden and Lynch (2004); Hussey and Hussey (1997)

The researcher adopts the subjectivist approach for this study to gain empirical knowledge of reality within the Nigerian SME domain. Consequently, this could undoubtedly build on subjective opinions from the participants interviewed. The subjectivist approach, alongside the social constructivism discussed in the ontology consideration section of this chapter (see section 4.3), would reveal this study's detailed and relevant research philosophy. Quantitative research builds on a positivist approach concerned with the voluminous size of data collection and interpretation (Queirós et al., 2017). Moreover, this differs from the multiple case studies approaches of the qualitative research method the researcher considers. The qualitative approach is socially constructive (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015; Brennen, 2017). It aims to understand the issues under investigation through a direct interface, communication with the people and social problems, and the direct impact on the research domain (Crossan, 2003; Hammersley, 2012, 2018). Hair Jr et al. (2019) posited that researchers are the seekers of truth about the world and experiences, which regularly involves investigating a given phenomenon: why and how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs influence SMEs’ internationalisation. The

multiple case studies approach of the qualitative research method also involves questioning the targeted participants through systematic processes and procedures and answering questions in the participants' own words. This aids in collecting data from the domain, and data analysis is collected from detailed reasoning from the research problem area(s) to facilitate understandable and presentable interpretations of data for the study (Creswell, 2009). Consequently, this will drive the study to achieve quality findings (Brewer, 1993; Yilmaz, 2013).

In contrast to positivism, social constructionism researchers believe that knowledge is not independent, and understanding the phenomenon under investigation from the participants' involvement is essential (Yilmaz, 2013). Traditionally, in social constructionism, the “researcher uses inductive logic, studies the topic within its context and uses an emerging design” (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 137). Moreover, “qualitative research usually emphasises words rather than quantifying the collection and analysis of data” (Bryman, 2008, p. 366), which initiates the concept of the social construction of realities in this study (Flick, 2018). Furthermore, as discussed in Section 4.4 of the chapter, the researcher has established contact with participants who are into and envisage participating in international businesses. Consequently, this allows quality, dependable, and credible data collection from the domain and sub-domain of the studies. Nevertheless, we need to give a detailed overview of the existing management research philosophies and highlight the critical elements under social constructivism related to phenomenology and the component of the interpretivism philosophical approach of ontology (Irshaidat, 2019; Saunders, 2019). Therefore, the comparison of the five philosophical research positions in business and management research is captured in Table 5 below.

TABLE 5: COMPARES THE FIVE PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH POSITIONS IN BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

Ontology (nature of reality or being)	Epistemology (what constitutes accepted knowledge)	Axiology (role of values)	Typical methods
Positivism			
Real, external, and independent. One actual reality (universalism) is Granular (things) order.	Scientific method. Observable and measurable facts. Law-like generalisations, Numbers, Causal explanation, and prediction as a contribution	Value-free research. The researcher is detached, neutral, and independent of what is researched. The researcher maintains an objective stance.	Typically deductive, highly structured, large samples, measurement, typically quantitative methods of analysis, but a range of data can be analysed.
Critical realism			
Stratified/layered (the empirical, actual, and real). External, independent intransient. Objective structures. Causal mechanisms.	Epistemological relativism. Knowledge is historically situated and transient. Facts are social constructions—a historical causal explanation as a contribution.	Value-laden research. The researcher acknowledges bias by world views, cultural experience, and upbringing. The researcher tries to minimise bias and errors. The researcher is as objective as possible	Reproductive, in-depth, historically situated analysis of the pre-existing structure and emerging agency. Range of methods and data types to fit the subject matter
Interpretivism			
Complex, rich, and socially constructed through culture and language. Multiple meanings, interpretations, realities, the flux in processes, experiences, practices	Theories and concepts are too simplistic. Focus on narratives, stories, perceptions, and interpretations. New understandings and contribution	Value-bound research. Researchers are part of what is researched. Subjective. Researcher interpretations key to contribution researcher reflexive	Typically, inductive. Small samples, in-depth investigations, and qualitative analysis methods, but a range of data can be interpreted.
Postmodernism			
Nominal complex, rich, socially constructed through power relations. Some meanings, interpretations, and realities are dominated and silenced by others. The flux of processes, experiences, and practices	What counts as ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’ is decided by dominant ideologies. Focus on absences, silences, and oppressed or repressed meanings, interpretations, and voices—exposure of power relations and challenges of prevailing views as a contribution.	Value-constituted research. Researcher and study embedded in power relations. Some research narratives are repressed and silenced at the expense of others. The researcher is radically reflexive.	Typically, deconstructive – reading texts and realities against themselves. In-depth investigations of anomalies, silences, and absence. Range of data types, generally qualitative methods of analysis.

Ontology (nature of reality or being)	Epistemology (what constitutes accepted knowledge)	Axiology (role of values)	Typical methods
Pragmatism			
Complex, rich, external 'Reality' is the practical consequences of ideas—a flux of processes, experiences, and practices.	The practical meaning of knowledge in specific contexts, 'True' theories, and knowledge enables successful action. Focus on problems, practices, and relevant problem-solving and inform future practice as a contribution.	Value-driven research. Research initiated and sustained by the researcher's doubts and beliefs. The researcher is reflexive.	It follows the research problem and question. Range of methods: It was mixed, multiple, qualitative, quantitative, and action research—emphasising practical solutions and outcomes.

Source: Saunders (2019, pp. 144 - 145)

While interpretivism depends on the constructivist nature of reality, the constructivist argues that the social world is not given but constructed and executed by humans through social interaction (Irshaidat, 2019, p. 16). Hence, this exemplifies that social interaction is not objective but subjectively defined. Thus, the researcher adopts interpretivism's phenomenographic aspect to reach a theoretical study resolution through a collective idea and understanding of the participants (Irshaidat, 2019), unlike the positivist researcher, who puts participants in an objective position. Therefore, this research considers the participants' experiences and perceptions to understand the influence of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs on SMEs' internationalisation within Nigeria's business operators at the SMEs' level.

4.3 ONTOLOGY CONSIDERATION

From a philosophical view, a discussion about ontology could be concerned with the assumption of the nature of phenomena. Ontology from the existing context refers to the "researcher's beliefs about the nature of reality or being"; the belief about what is true and determines to know about reality (Killam, 2013, p. 7) on how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs influence SMEs participation in international businesses, particularly in Nigeria. Saunders et al. (2007, p. 133) also refer to ontology as the assumptions about the nature of reality. Thus, the definition of ontology brings about a question: What is reality's nature? (Killam, 2013, p. 7). Ontology is associated with nature under investigation, regardless of whether truth is subjective or objective.

The truth about the study domain of this research work is rich in subjectivity, which implies that management staff are competing to create knowledge assets and absorb them in a well-organised approach. As stated earlier in chapter one of this study, past research focuses mainly on the inter-organisational knowledge management process. The study revealed the positive

influence of inter-organisational knowledge on improving organisations' internalisation process's learning, performance, and competitiveness (Chong et al., 2013; Demirbag et al., 2021; Dooley & Gubbins, 2019). However, the literature review shows that most existing studies focused on inter-organisational knowledge, particularly on the impact of intra-organisational KMPs (Spraggon & Bodolica, 2012; Tsai, 2008; Usman et al., 2019). Therefore, intra-firm knowledge involving knowledge flows within an organisation is suggested to improve SMEs' business performance in the international market.

Nevertheless, this claim is yet to be examined in detail, and most past studies have failed to explore the dissemination of inter-organisational learning within organisations. There is, therefore, little research associated with inter, and intra-organisational KMPs to understand how they influence SMEs' internationalisation process in the Nigerian context. Hence, the researcher chooses to adopt the case studies and phenomenological approach. Consequently, the researcher will collect primary data for this thesis via semi-structured interviews with SME operators that have international business experiences and their coordinating associations, ministries and agencies in Nigeria (Schutz, 1970; Umanailo, 2019). Thus, this allows a decisive result to increase as the succeeding chapters unveil the findings of this study.

4.4 EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONSIDERATION

The epistemological approach involves natural or human knowledge (Crotty & Crotty, 1998; Saunders et al., 2007). Consequently, epistemology and ontology are concepts that co-exist and complement each other. Given that, the ontology and epistemology concepts express the theoretical position of individuals' points of view and allow the study to consider a unique and essential question "How do we know what we know" (Crotty & Crotty, 1998, p. 3) on the relationship between inter- and intra-organisational KMPs and SMEs' internationalisation. Considering the relationships between ontology and epistemology, the judgements from the epistemological point of view also include ontological issues in the context of this research work. Hence, a clear interpretation of the organisational elements such as people, processes and practices are achievable where there is an understanding of how epistemology and ontology correlate in this research work.

Epistemology on knowledge is significant for conducting research (Boon & Van Baalen, 2019). In this background, the possibility of acquiring, sharing, storing, and re-using knowledge is considered as the underlying assumptions about the world's nature of knowledge and reality which are correlated (Johnson & Duberley, 2000, p. 11). According to Moon and Blackman (2014, p. 1171), "Epistemology is concerned with validity, scope and method of

acquiring knowledge, such as what constitutes a knowledge claim, how knowledge can be produced or acquired, and how its application scope can be determined”. Considering Johnson and Duberley's (2000) and Moon and Blackman's (2014) positions, it is apparent that the effect of acquisition and diffusion of knowledge on SMEs’ internationalisation is the primary aspect of this study. Hence, epistemology is vital in finding how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs affect SME internationalisation. Burrell and Morgan (2017, p. 32) deliberated on what sorts of knowledge can be acquired and whether the nature of knowledge is challenging.

Consequently, the researcher noted that every phenomenon’s truth and knowledge are subject to individual interpretation; thus, this allows the subjectivity and realism of the human attempt to make sense of the world around us (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 141). Table 6 below encapsulates a synopsis of ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods and techniques.

TABLE 6: ONTOLOGY, EPISTEMOLOGY, METHODOLOGY, AND METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

	What is it about?	Questions we ask
Ontology	Philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality on knowledge management and SMEs’ internationalisation	What is real? What types of beings are there? How is it that different types of existing ones? What is a type?
Epistemology	A general set of assumptions about ways of inquiring into the nature of the world	What is knowledge? How do we know what we know? How is the knowledge acquired?
Methodology	A combination of methods is used to enquire into a specific situation.	What question am I asking, and what kind of conclusion do I hope to come to? How can I properly research this question in my best interest? What data is available?
methods and techniques	Individual techniques for data collection, analysis etc	How can we collect and analyse this data? How does this method or technique help me to answer my research question? Is this method or technique appropriate to the context and research question I am investigating?

Source: Easterby-Smith et al. (2018, p. 63)

4.5 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The complex nature of the study deals with how the researcher discovers what is believed to be known or produced regarding the influence of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs on SMEs' internationalisation (Crossan, 2003). According to Eriksson and Kovalainen, research methodology refers to “the organising principles, which guide the research process and design” (2008, p. 16). Consequently, the researcher decided on a methodology to collect data to be analysed appropriately as part of the research work. Hence, two (2) discrete research

approaches are for consideration: qualitative and quantitative. Thus, the two-research approaches are discussed in 4.5.1 and 4.5.2 below.

4.5.1 Quantitative Research Approach

The quantitative research approach assumes that human nature can be explained by social structure and facts, whereby methodologies are investigated using a deductive logic of natural sciences (Amaratunga et al., 2002). Quantitative research approaches independently trust numbers to represent opinions or concepts in research work (Amaratunga et al., 2002). Notwithstanding, the participation of a large group of participants is recommended to approve the generalisation of findings (Saridakis & Cowling, 2020; Saunders et al., 2007). Scholars may suggest that the quantitative research approach “seeks to obtain accurate and reliable measurements that allow a statistical analysis” of investigation (Queirós et al., 2017). Contrary to the quantitative research approach, this study investigated individual experiences, judgments, and opinions (Flick, 2018) to determine how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs influence SMEs’ internationalisation in Nigeria.

4.5.2 Qualitative Research Approach

Qualitative research is a systematic and subjective approach to highlighting and explaining the individual job and entrepreneurship daily life experiences and further gives meaning by focusing on the phenomena (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). This approach allows the researcher to study behaviour from different perspectives and life experiences to discover the situational details through a framework relating to the study (Flick, 2018; Holloway & Wheeler, 2002). From Creswell's point of view, the application of “qualitative research for this study is to understand better the research domain (Nigeria SMEs) based on distinct methodological traditions on inquiry that explore a social or human problem”. Creswell (2007) further posited that the qualitative approach enables the researcher to build a multifaceted, holistic picture, examine words, report details of participants, and conduct a study in a natural environment. Thus, this will offer extensive clarity on individual perspectives, unlike the quantitative research approach that is based on objectivity and many participants.

The qualitative approach is used because few studies on inter- and intra-organisational KMPs on SMEs’ internationalisation within Africa, especially Nigeria, are socially constructive (Flick, 2018). Therefore, using the multiple case studies approach of the qualitative method will further help contribute to the existing literature about Nigeria's SME’s participation in the international markets and enhance the extant theoretical evidence and concepts of KMPs and SMEs’ internationalisation with an African background. Furthermore, this enriched the value

of knowledge management, KMPs and internationalisation by the SME sub-sector from Africa, and Nigeria, which will help harmonise and implement KMPs in SMEs for internationalisation.

4.5.3 Qualitative VS Quantitative Research Approach

The choice between qualitative and quantitative approaches is a lingering issue falling in and out of favour depending on the directions the study has taken (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Nevertheless, a qualitative approach defines expressive measurements based on a comprehensive and detailed analysis of a given domain and phenomenon (Woolsey, 1986). Therefore, it is essential to note that applying philosophical terms in this study does not critically matter. However, the researcher's ability to concentrate on the philosophical choices and defend them against other available options that could be adopted for the study is of great interest (Saunders et al., 2007).

The differences between qualitative and quantitative research approaches necessitate the choice and adoption of research design. The differences are driven by the elements that directly influence the reasons for the initiation of this study. Thus, it is a priority for researchers to deliberate on the type of study, whether qualitative, quantitative or mixed approaches when considering the research strategy. Creswell (2007) defined research strategies as inquiry strategies. The relevance of choice strategies of inquiry research is based on the research's objectives and how detailed the study is expected to be (Basias & Pollalis, 2018).

For this study, the researcher adopts a qualitative inquiry strategy to empirically understand the domain of Nigeria's SMEs in an international business context; and how inter- and intra-organisation KMPs influence their internationalisation. This is carried out using individual participants' points of view via the semi-structured interviews for SMEs in Nigeria that engage in international businesses and some government and non-government institutions that facilitate the internationalisation of SMEs in Nigeria. Participants who agreed to take part in this study are not limited to SMEs from AGOA – AWEP, Nigeria Chapter, ANE, NACCIMA, NASME, and their coordinating Ministry, Department and Agency (MDA). The selected participants are within the managerial levels of SMEs and MDA. This method conforms with the path of a qualitative strategy of inquiry for the following reasons: a) to make effective use of the data collection owing to the direct access to key members of the organisations that are involved in decision making, b) to identify and understand the perception of the domain of the study on the impact of knowledge transfer on SMEs' internationalisation, and c) to get an empirical understanding of the areas of problems. Consequently, it is essential to consider the

study's critical positions: inter- and intra-organisational KMPs and SMEs' internationalisation process, representing the vital factors of research questions.

Nevertheless, the researcher needs to be cognizant of the fact that there is no best methodological approach to research work; the choice of methodology approach depends on the research objective and the researcher's ability to use the appropriate methodological approach to achieve the set objectives and find answers to the research questions of the study (Mackey & Gass, 2015; Thomas et al., 2019).

4.5.4 Case Study Approach of Qualitative Research

The case study approach is a subset of qualitative research (George & Bennett, 2005). Thus, the case study approach is a critical and dynamic research strategy that seeks to describe some existing circumstances on “why”, “how”, and sometimes “What” social phenomena function within a given setting and condition (Yin, 2018; 2009; 2003; Easterby-Smith et al., 2012; Saunders et al., 2007), as reflected in the research questions in chapter one of this study. Nevertheless, research questions with “how” and “what” could also be a concern of the survey method of research (Yin, 2003).

Scholars have extensively explored the case study approach of qualitative research to contribute to knowledge in the social sciences and other disciplines (Cassell & Symon, 2004; Easterby-Smith et al., 2012; Hines, 2016; Yin, 2009; 2018). The case study approach takes an in-depth look at a given phenomenon under investigation within its context (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012; Cassell & Symon, 2004). Moreover, Robson (2002, p. 178) defined the case study approach as “a strategy for conducting a research work which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence”. This is applied to this study to allow the researcher to establish a transparent, logical background of findings and understand how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs influence SMEs' internationalisation process (Morris & Wood, 1991; Yin, 2018).

In addition, the researcher chooses to use multiple case studies within Nigeria's strata of SME operators and regulators. This is to have considerable evidence from different sources that will help achieve contextual validity of evidence from individual cases to investigate further how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs influence SMEs' internationalisation (Yin, 2003; 2018). Consequently, the research uses internationalised SME operators and two of the SME regulators in Nigeria as the unit of analysis and the heads/top managers of these SMEs as the unit of observation for this study (Sedgwick, 2014, Yin, 2018). The study's selection of the

unit of analysis and observation inspired the researcher to develop chapter three of the dissertation: an overview of SMEs in Nigeria. This aligns with the suggested definitions of the unit of analysis and unit of observation by Sedgwick (2014). Furthermore, Sedgwick (2014) defined a unit of analysis as the statistical focus on who or what information is analysed for a conclusion; on the other hand, a unit of observation is the who or what data is measured or collected.

4.6 INTERVIEW DESIGN FOR THE STUDY

An interview could be a practical and relevant means of data collection, especially in a qualitative research case study approach. According to Bryman (2008), an interview involves collecting data from selected respondents through face-to-face contact or telephone conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee. Hence, the interview design can either be closed-ended or opened-ended questions. Nevertheless, open-ended interview questions are adopted for the semi-structured interviews since this study is qualitatively driven (Galletta, 2013). Thus, in designing the interview questions, the questions are constructed in such a way that they are relevant to the literature review and the research questions that require answers from the interviews conducted with the interested participants.

4.6.1 Discussion of Interview Questions and Direction

For the dependability of the research instrument (interview questions), the following factors are considered for the design of interview questions:

- a) Clarity of the interview questions to get answers to the research questions.
- b) The orderliness in the arrangement of the interview questions to be asked during the semi-structured interview process.
- c) Sensitive questions that are related to organisational financial and market positions.

These are avoided to help protect and keep the confidentiality of participants and their companies. Considering the interview questions with the above conditions enables the researcher to establish better interpersonal relations with the participants and build trust and reliability. However, the interpersonal relationship was only on business processes related to the course of this project. Thus, this encourages the participants to freely discuss and comment on every interview question, which creates the opportunity to dig deeper into these responses. Nevertheless, the researcher should avoid questions that could skew responses during the semi-structured interviews. The researcher also considered avoiding questions that could stimulate

emotionally loaded words and phrases by keeping questions understandable and straightforward. The semi-structured interview is one of the data collection methods vital for understanding the complex attributes and processes as well as gives room for modifying most studies (Majid et al., 2017). Thus, this study aimed to build on participants' experiences because managing business activities are complex and complicated (Nason,2017). Consequently, this will allow the participants to be subjective in answering the interview questions (Galletta, 2013).

To achieve a precise result for this study, the researcher proposed twenty (20) participants. Nevertheless, the researcher is mindful of the participants' satisfactory saturation level, mainly where participants are adequately represented (Saunders et al., 2018). Therefore, to facilitate contact with the proposed participants, the researcher emailed them through their associations for a strategic data collection process, requesting individual participation in the semi-structured interview. In addition, the researcher forwarded a copy of the interview question and consent form to participants that declared interest in taking part in the study.

4.6.2 Selection of Participants for the Study

Sampling to researchers in the social sciences and management domains is essential to research work. Martínez-Mesa et al. (2016, p. 327) defined research sampling “as a process through which sampling units are selected from the sample frame. Therefore, the original targeted twenty (20) sample size constituting some Business Associations of SMEs in Nigeria, such as NACCIMA, ANE, AWEF, NASME, and the coordinating Agency, Department/Ministry, was selected to enhance data collection. Selected participants from SME operators and regulatory bodies would give unified study findings. Moreover, the participants' perception or point of view is critically justified in a phenomenological research approach, as in this research work. Thus, Creswell (1998) recommends between five (5) to twenty (20) participants.

The researcher used a purposeful sampling method to select the population for the study based on their experiences of business activities across the national boundaries of Nigeria. Consequently, the researcher identified the participants' with similar characteristics that should enhance knowledge and information sharing for SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria (Naderifar et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the researcher further focused on achieving a data point of saturation (Morse, 1994; Saunders & Townsend, 2016), which enables the researcher to acquire detailed data to adequately address the research questions (Islam & Aldaihani, 2022). Moreover, data saturation serves as “the flagship of validity for qualitative research”

(Constantinou et al., 2017, p. 585) and as the yardstick to “meet with the ontological and epistemological foundations of qualitative research” (Constantinou et al., 2017, p. 583).

Data quality is essential irrespective of the number of participants or interviews conducted in a study (Daniel, 2019; Naderifar et al., 2017). Hence, every member of the associations in international business and the representative from the regulatory MDAs within the sample frame had an equal opportunity to participate in the study. At the end of the data collection process via telephone interviews and in writing, the researcher got responses from sixteen (16) participants with international business experiences. The synopsis of the various methods used in collecting data and the time quality of the interviews are presented in Table 7. Consequently, these data prompted the results of the investigation of how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs influence SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria.

TABLE 7: SYNOPSIS OF METHOD USED FOR DATA COLLECTION

S/N	Identified in the study	Pilot Candidate	Duration of Interview	Economy Sector	Experience of Internationalisation	No. of Staff	Role/Designation	Mode of Response
1	PT. 1	X	52 Minutes	Health (Hygiene)	Yes (Intermediaries)	5	CEO and Medical Practitioner	Voice Recording
2	PT. 2		53 Minutes	Agriculture	Yes (Intermediaries)	25	President of SME Association/Cooperative Society and a Legal Practitioner	Voice Recording
3	PT. 3		43 Minutes	Agriculture	Yes	23	Managing Director (MD) and a Co-founder of an NGO on Knowledge distribution in Nigeria	Voice Recording
4	PT. 4		Not Available	Education	Yes	29	CEO and Trainee	Writing
5	PT. 5		49 Minutes	Agriculture/Health	Yes	13	Business Development Manager	Voice Recording
6	PT. 6		58 Minutes	Textile and ITC	Yes	9 (Core Staff)	CEO/Managing Director	Voice Recording
7	PT. 7		Not Available	Agriculture	Yes	4 (Core Staff)	Managing Director	Writing
8	PT. 8		70 Minutes	Agriculture	Yes	13	CEO/Managing Director	Voice Recording
9	PT. 9		Not Available	Export (Trading on Commodity)	Yes	72	Principal Consultant	Writing
10	PT. 10		52 Minutes	Agriculture/Training	Yes (Intermediaries)	12 Core Staff	CEO/President of Businesswomen Association	Voice Recording
11	PT. 11		56 Minutes	Textile	Yes	6	CEO/Managing Director	Voice Recording
12	PT. 12		97 Minutes	All Sector	Yes	13	President of Exporters Association	Voice Recording
13	PT. 13	X	32 Minutes	Beauty and body cream	Yes	44	CEO/Secretary of an SME association	Voice Recording

S/N	Identified in the study	Pilot Candidate	Duration of Interview	Economy Sector	Experience of Internationalisation	No. of Staff	Role/Designation	Mode of Response
14	PT. 14	X	38 Minutes	Agriculture	Yes	38	The President and General Secretary of the SME Association	Voice Recording
15	PT. 15		Not Available	Administrator (SME coordination)	Yes	8	Director/ International Trade Commissioner	Writing
16	PT. 16		45 Minutes	Administrator (SME coordination)	Yes	Over 200	Director	Voice Recording

Source: Author (2022)

4.6.3 Ethical Considerations and Informed Consent

From inception, ethical consideration and informed consent seem to have come to a critical matter subjected to many legal issues, which every researcher and academic institution is in possession of. Since the research participants are more consciously concerned about protecting their privacy rights, the researchers are mandated not only to respect these rights but also to request participants' voluntary participatory agreement before the data collection process (Pape, 1997). Thus, this section vividly showcases the ethical consideration approved for the study. Hence, the researcher explains this section in the subsequent subsections.

4.6.4 Informed Consent

The researcher appraised every participant with the informed consent of this research work before starting the interview. The informed consent for this study made the following pieces of information available to the participants:

- a) The duration of a semi-structured interview which lasted for between 45 minutes and an hour.
- b) The use and purpose for which the semi-structured interview is to be conducted.
- c) The fundamental structure of the interview process.
- d) That involvement is not compulsory but voluntary. Thus, the participants have the right not to answer any questions, and
- e) That they have the right to withdraw participation at any time they consider appropriate.

The fundamental reason for obtaining informed consent from every interviewee is to respect and promote individual independence and sovereignty, which is paramount (Jefford & Moore, 2008; Kreuter et al., 2020). Thus, to uphold a good research standard and ethics, the researcher took cognisance of the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) that guides data collection for this research work.

4.6.5 Industrial Business Association Consent

The researcher contacted participants through some IBAs, which include: NASME, NACCIMA, NANTS, AWEP, and ANE within the domain of the study. These IBAs oversee, regulate, and protect the activities of their members. Thus, the individual Business

Associations consulted and sought the interest of their members in the interview before enlisting them into the interview sample list.

4.6.6 Confidentiality and Anonymity

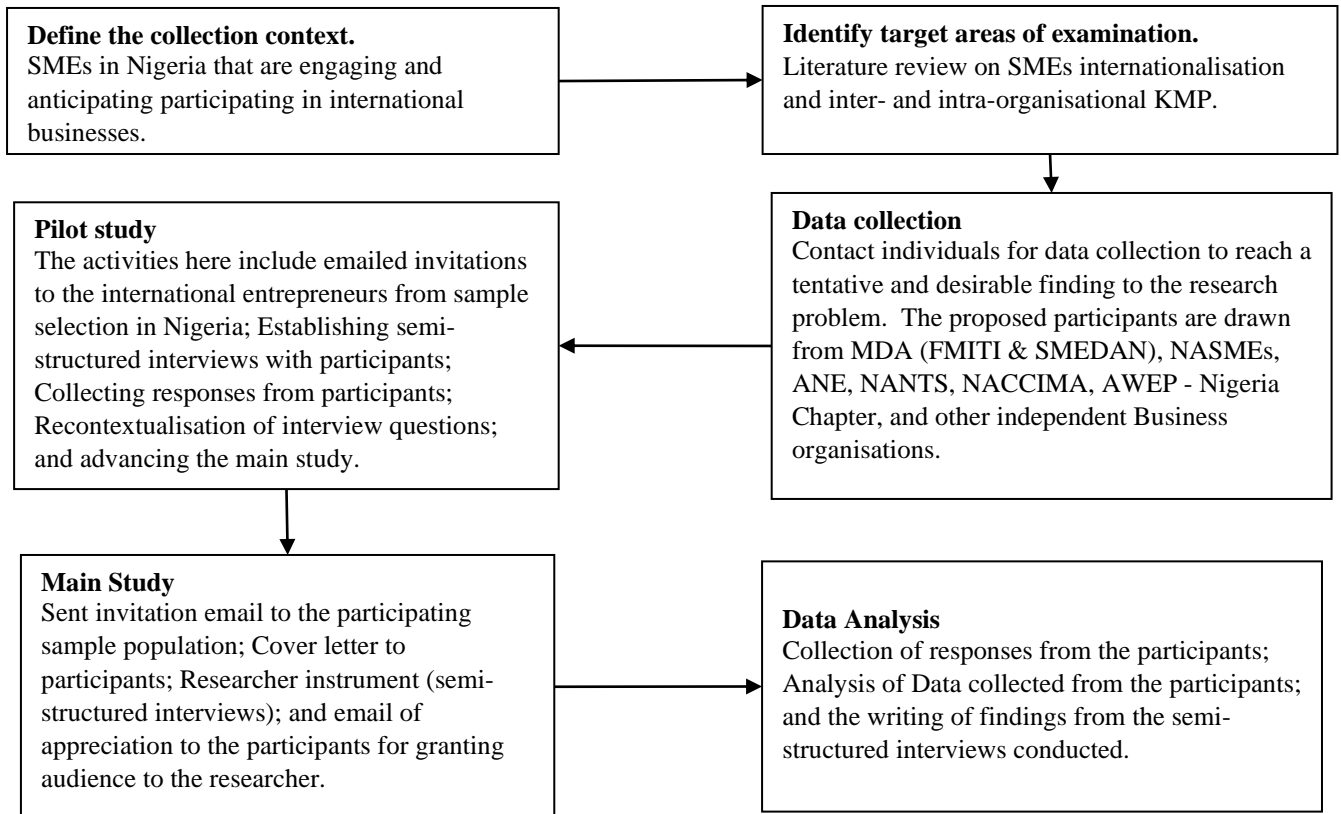
The concept of confidentiality supports the value of respect for autonomy; this also means a trace of identifiable information about a person or a group of individuals during the research process will not be by any means disclosed to the public without permission (Wiles et al., 2008). Thus, this study's application of confidentiality is essential to protect and safeguard every participant's identity and adhere to Northumbria University and the United Kingdom's extant ethical research practices. Consequently, to comply with the anonymity principle, the researcher conceals every participant's identity before starting the semi-structured interviews. Furthermore, to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, the researcher chose to use alpha-numeric to represent participants' identities in this study.

4.6.7 Data Collection

The target participants for this study include MDA and SMEs in Nigeria anticipating or involved in international businesses. The researcher retrospectively created a good working relationship with Nigeria's target MDA and SME associations. Nevertheless, this is aimed at creating a better condition for data collection. Thus, many SME operators in Nigeria seem to engage in cross-border operations (businesses) in countries not limited to the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, China, Japan, India, Taiwan, Brazil, Germany, and all West African countries.

Accordingly, the members of the National Chambers of Commerce (NACCIMA) of Nigeria, the Association of Nigeria Exporters (ANE), the Nigerian Chapter of the African Women Entrepreneurs Program (AWEP) and other similar associations that form the strata of SMEs seem to become more exposed to international businesses. Furthermore, the associations produce and trade in Agricultural and Industrial products, which are not limited to Textile and Apparel, Shea butternuts and oil, Spear parts of light and heavy-duty machines, Leather, and others. Hence, inter- and intra-organisational KMPs can contribute to SMEs adopting the international strategy. Below is an outline of the approach developed by the researcher for the data collection.

Figure 6: Diagrammatical Presentation of Data Collection Processes



Source: Author (2022)

Following the research process adopted in Figure 6 above, it is essential to note that the primary data collection process for this research report is divided into two primary phases:

Phase One: This deals with the social constructivism approach using semi-structured interviews. An earlier pilot study of the selected target audience of two (2) participants was undertaken to check and confirm the research instrument used within the semi-structured interviews. Next, the potential participants were contacted through email and telephone, requesting their confirmation of participation in the interviews piloting the research instrument. After that, follow-up calls to the participants to confirm the receipt of emails sent.

Phase Two: This phase comprises a social constructivism approach using semi-structured interviews. The selection of participants was made based on voluntary acceptance to participate. Thus, the researcher requested participants' participation through emails and telephone calls. The selected participants took part in the interviews and their responses were captured through a voice recorder. While, some of the participants wrote and forwarded a hard copy of their response to the researcher through email (See Table 4.4: Synopsis of various methods used in collecting data and the quality of the interviews)

4.7 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design could be considered a mechanism that describes the vital components of research activities, which helps the researcher achieve its purpose. There are numerous similar definitions of the research design method. For this study, a research design is defined as generating an instrument for data collection to be investigated and measured as part of the research process related to the research questions adopted (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). Thus, the researcher developed guidelines, references, theoretical starting points, and practical considerations to help realise a credible and effective research work in line with the research questions in chapter One of this study (Hakim, 2000; Saunders, 2019). This aims to have insightful processes and operating procedures throughout the stages of this dissertation (Hammersley, 2018).

4.7.1 Pre-Question Generation

To enable the research to generate reliable and appropriate interview questions for the participants, the researcher conducted a comprehensive literature review to identify the gaps in the inter- and intra-organisational KMPs on SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria's research settings (unit of analysis). These gaps acknowledged the need for a theoretical full life-cycle background in past studies and an inclusive way of getting information from a top organisation member knowledgeable in international business.

4.7.2 Semi-structured Interviews

Given the gaps in the literature review, the researcher developed a draft research instrument (interview question) for the semi-structured interviews (Majid et al., 2017). This research instrument was comprehensively discussed and checked with other experienced researchers for their advice. The interview question for the study is in **Appendix A** of the thesis. Nevertheless, fundamental questions are captured in the interview question, enabling the researcher to get holistic, clear, and relevant feedback from the participants. Thus, the critical questions cut across the research questions in chapter one of the thesis. Furthermore, the researcher found it worthy of selecting knowledgeable participants that occupy influential positions in their respective organisations and have the authority to decide for their respective organisations on issues related to this study. Thus, this was done to avoid a single-tier bias (Huselid & Becker, 2000).

4.7.3 Pilot Study

The researcher selected three (3) participants from the research population to pilot the study's interview questions to help examine and confirm the credibility of the interview questions (In,

2017). The interview questions were thoroughly verified using a small population of the SME subsectors after consultation with some knowledge experts to confirm the interview questions' credibility, quality, and orderliness before contacting the study's total population. Consequently, the pilot study resulted in minor changes in the structure and orderliness of the interview questions. In addition, other identified issues were amended, which included the paraphrasing of some interview questions. Thus, this process enhanced the quality and credibility of the interview questions used for this study.

4.7.4 Pilot Semi-structured Interview Questions

A Survey of the participants within SME subsectors that engage in international businesses is constructed following the study's research questions. Hence, the review focuses on inter- and intra-organisational KMPs and SMEs' internationalisation. The semi-structured interview questions comprised eighteen (18) questions but were reduced to fifteen (15). The coping of the interview questions is to make up for the issues of interest that led the researcher to embark on this study.

4.7.5 Pilot Semi-structured Interviews

The researcher formally wrote and requested the participants' audience through their organisation and individual associations (National Association Chamber of Commerce of Industry, Mines and Agriculture - NACCIMA; Association of Nigerian Exporters – ANE; and African Women Entrepreneurship Programme – AWEF, Nigeria Chapter). These associations monitor and protect members' business activities and represent members in decision-making when dialoguing with the governments at the three tiers (Federal, State and Local governments). However, the researcher could not establish face-to-face contact with the participants due to Nigeria's extant policy to curtail the spread of COVID-19. Thus, this ensured compliance with Nigeria, the UK and global ethical protocol against the spread of COVID-19.

After considering the study's general importance, the associations agreed to provide the researcher with a contact list of interested members to participate in the semi-structured interviews. The Semi-Structure interviews were conducted on different days and times convenient for the participants via electronic means: telephone conversations, while some of the participants responded in written form.

4.7.6 Open-ended Questions

To effectively use the open-ended questions for this study, the researcher used a coding system to measure the response of the participants before putting the data back together in a meaningful pattern (Creswell & Báez, 2020; Elliott, 2018; Reja et al., 2003). Hence, the open-ended question allows participants to answer questions according to their understanding, opinions, perceptions, and experiences (Geer, 1991). As such, valuable information about the truth is easily sourced according to the respondent's perspective (Geer, 1991; Reja et al., 2003).

The researcher classified and categorised responses collected according to the participant's opinions to clarify the coding system employed. Thus, the participants were requested to answer every interview question in their own words. Also, careful planning and preparation were used. These facilitated the understanding and classifying of the responses into smaller strata to allow proper thematic coding and analysis of data collected from individual participants (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2021). However, the responses to open-ended questions are usually spontaneous, making them more unlimited and expensive (Popping, 2015). The researcher considered not predicting the participants' answers to open-ended questions but learning from the domain. Hence, predicting responses from participants should be circumvented at all costs. Nevertheless, the researcher spends an average good time evaluating and transcribing the data collected to avoid misconceptions of data evaluation that may adversely affect the researcher's effort to achieve a result.

4.8 SUMMARY

This chapter provides the background for the research method used for this study and the philosophical opinions behind the research methodologies. A review of research methodologies (qualitative and quantitative) was carried out. However, multiple case studies design of the qualitative research method was adopted for this study.

A socially constructive philosophy was considered and adopted as the best approach to achieve the objectives of this study and present valid and reliable results for an efficient theoretical framework. The first stage was to conduct interviews with participants holding at least a managerial position in their respective organisations. Nevertheless, every participant in this study voluntarily agreed to participate. An inductive approach was applied to gain an in-depth understanding of this study from the perceptions of the SMEs in Nigeria, whereby semi-structured interviews with the selected participants were based on the gaps identified from the

literature reviews. The first step adopted by the researcher was to pilot the interview questions to ascertain their credibility before proceeding to the main interview for the study.

It is noteworthy that the choice of a qualitative research approach over quantitative research is not because of any perceived weakness of the quantitative approach. The researcher's choice of research method depends on the research questions, objectives and perception (Mukhopadhyay & Gupta, 2014). Thus, this chapter also provided a detailed review of the research ethics and data collection process. The next chapter of this thesis shall discuss the data analysis process adopted to give a precise examination of the data collected through open-ended interviews that should provide answers to the research question presented in chapter one of this thesis.

CHAPTER FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous Chapter (Chapter Four) of this study discussed the research philosophy and the method adopted for data collection. Consequently, this chapter discusses the data analysis process and presentation. Hence, it is essential to carefully analyse the data collected to make sense of it and reach a meaningful conclusion that should be understandable to the readers or users of this research work (Saunders et al., 2016). Consequently, the researcher used Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), NVivo 12, to systematical code the transcribed data collected for the study. The participants' statements are grouped into codes, which are grouped into themes they are best associated with, while the themes are integrated as aggregate dimensions. In a nutshell, the data for this thesis are presented using the approach recommended by Corley and Gioia (2004); Gioia et al. (2014) in terms of extracting the First Order (concept), Second Order (Themes), and Third Order (Aggregate) dimensions. Moreover, this Chapter critically examines and elucidates the process adopted and exemplifies its credibility.

5.2 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE DATA ANALYSIS

Sixteen (16) interviews were conducted, serving as the primary data source for this study. To make sense of these interviews and ensure the trustworthiness of the data, the researcher further gave participants the opportunities to discuss beyond the subject of discussion (Miles et al., 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition, the researcher completely transcribed the data collected through voice recording and writing to protect the confidentiality and identity of the participants (See Section 4.6.6 of Chapter Four). However, transcribing qualitative data for this study is highly labour-intensive and time-consuming (Miles et al., 2020). This caused the researcher to be very conscious of time limitations for transcribing the interviews conducted for this study.

Nevertheless, the researcher repeatedly played and listened to each participant's voice recording while thoroughly checking typography errors and missing words in the transcribed data. After that, the researcher selected and consulted two participants to vet the transcript of the interviews carried out with them. Moreover, this process lasted for two weeks before getting feedback from the selected participants, who agreed to vet the interviews' transcripts. Furthermore, to limit the mistakes and increase the reliability, validity, and trustworthiness of transcribed interviews, the researcher read the transcribed data three times to be acquainted

with the collated statements from the participants and facilitate the development of codes, sub-themes, and themes (Easton et al., 2000; MacLean et al., 2004). A sample of one of the interviews transcribed is presented in **Appendix B**

5.3 DATA ANALYSIS PREPARATION AND PLANS

The researcher analysed data for this thesis using thematic coding. According to (Boyatzis, 1998), thematic coding is a widely used method by scholars and researchers to identify the quantitative approach in qualitative research by developing the applicable codes. This illustrates that thematic coding is a process of using code to convert qualitative information into quantitative data. The fundamental emphasis of this approach is creating and focusing on the themes. Moreover, this is carried out by assembling information, systematically coding the information into data, and reassembling the data into clusters to develop a clear and comprehensive interpretation of data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). The application of thematic analysis for this study employed the researcher to use a simplified template to investigate how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs influence SMEs' internationalisation. Nevertheless, the researcher extracted codes and themes from the transcribed data using one of the computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), NVivo 12.

5.4 DATA CODING AND THEME

Given the research questions and the literature review of this thesis, the codes and themes are based on a decision from the researcher's point of view, which is linked to the interpretivism paradigm of this study (Saldana, 2021; Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020; Packard, 2017). In qualitative research, data coding is a critical aspect of data analysis and interpretation, which involves categorising several bits of transcribed data focusing on the salient features of the study (Saldana, 2016; Miles et al., 2018), while the theme is a summary of codes generated from data in the role of ideas presented by participants during interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Miles et al., 2018). Thus, the researcher's choice for the use of the thematic analysis for this study is to facilitate and "provide an accessible and systematic procedure for generating codes and themes", which in the end creates "flexibility in terms of the research question, sample size and constitution, data collection method, and approaches to meaning generation" (Victoria et al., 2017, p.297).

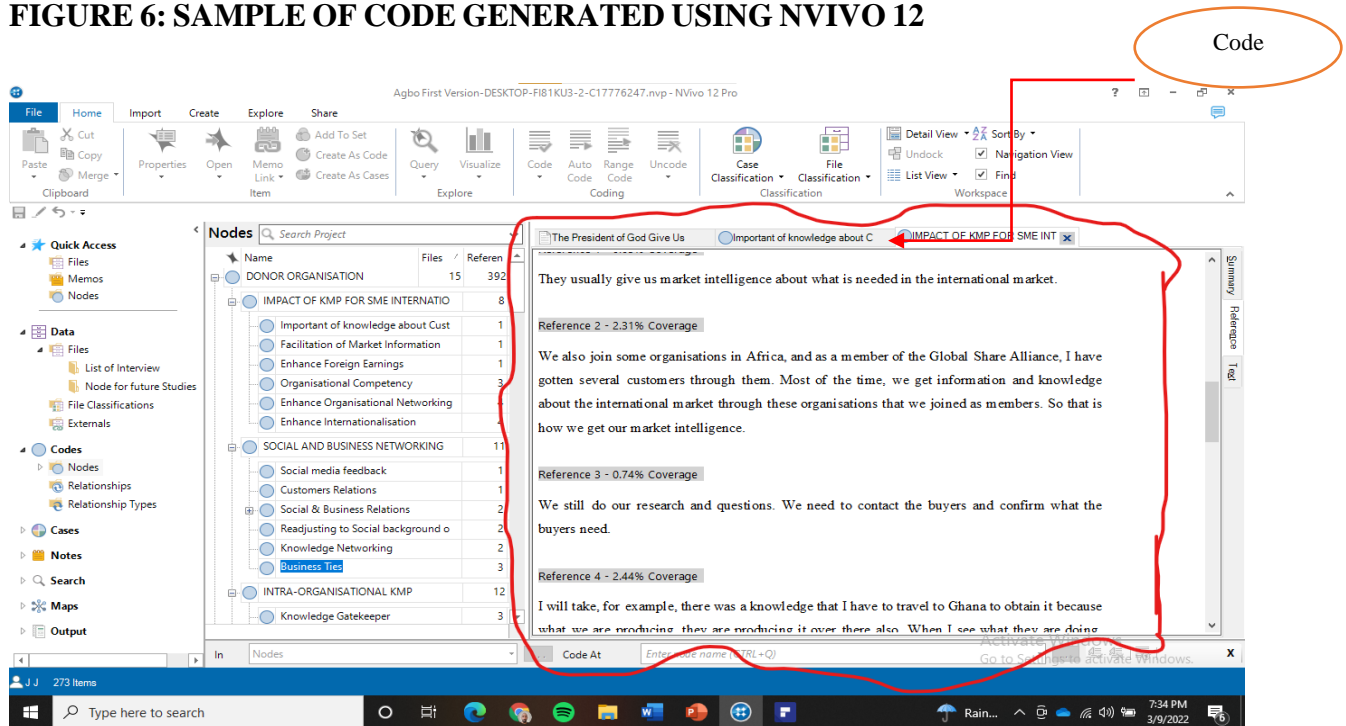
5.4.1 Generating Codes for the Study

Data analysis is one of the essential aspects of this study that helps manage data and create meaning understood by the readers and users of this thesis (Saunders et al., 2016). Hence, having identified the importance of data analysis as the antecedent to finding answers to the

research questions for this study, the researcher repeatedly read the transcribed data line-by-line to enhance comprehension and familiarisation with the data before the commencement of data coding for the study (Ryan & Bernard, 2003; Saunders et al., 2016). Thus, the repetitive reading of the transcribed data makes it easier for the researcher to identify codes and themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

To visualise the rigorous steps for generating codes, see the screenshot of the codes extracted from the statements of the participants' using the NVivo 12 software, as shown in Figure 7 below.

FIGURE 6: SAMPLE OF CODE GENERATED USING NVIVO 12



Author (2022).

To commence the coding of the transcribed data, the researcher requested the assistance of a colleague and an experienced qualitative researcher to independently code two of the transcribed interviews to consider whether the conclusion reached on the coding and themes were credible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt et al., 2007). However, the independent evaluators identified minor issues, particularly in the vocabulary used in creating themes from the codes. For example, one of the independent evaluators used the terminology 'asymmetry' whereas the researcher used 'lack of.' Thus, the researcher found it worth using the suggested terminology, as it helped minimise word count.

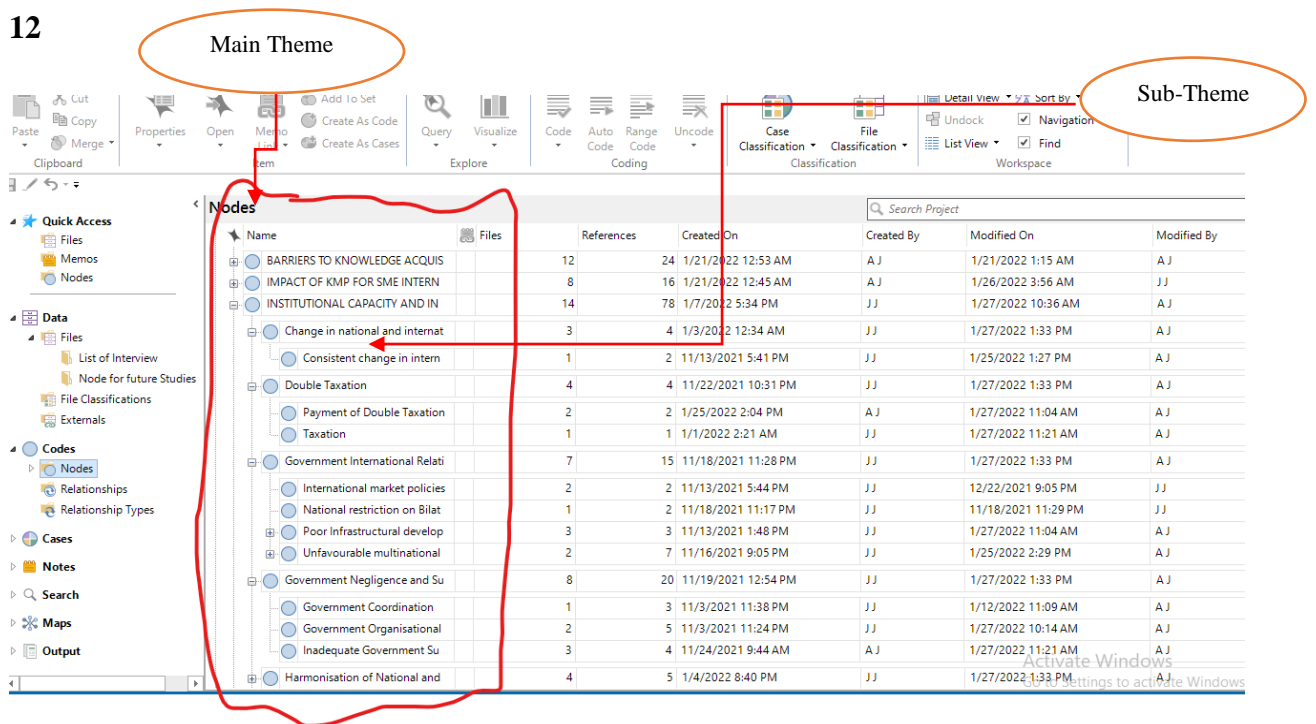
From Figure 7, the highlighted area with red ink displays some of the codes generated by the researcher from the transcribed data collected from the participants that participated in the study. Hence, the researcher merged the related codes into a group to avoid data overloading and assembled them into higher-order themes that answer the research questions in chapter one of this thesis (Miles et al., 2020).

5.4.2 Generating Themes for the Study

It is critical to generate sub-themes and themes from the codes developed for the study. Section 5.4 of this chapter outlines that the theme combines two or more related codes “to provide a framework for organising and reporting the researcher’s analytic observations” (Victoria et al., 2017, p. 297). Furthermore, identifying codes and themes creates a roadmap for building a logical chain of evidence and drafting a theoretical model for the study (Miles et al., 2020). Despite that, the researcher combined the related sub-themes as themes to enhance a comprehensive data organisation for the study. In Figure 8, the areas highlighted with red ink highlight how the researcher combined some of the themes to form the central theme(s), although not all the themes have sub-themes.

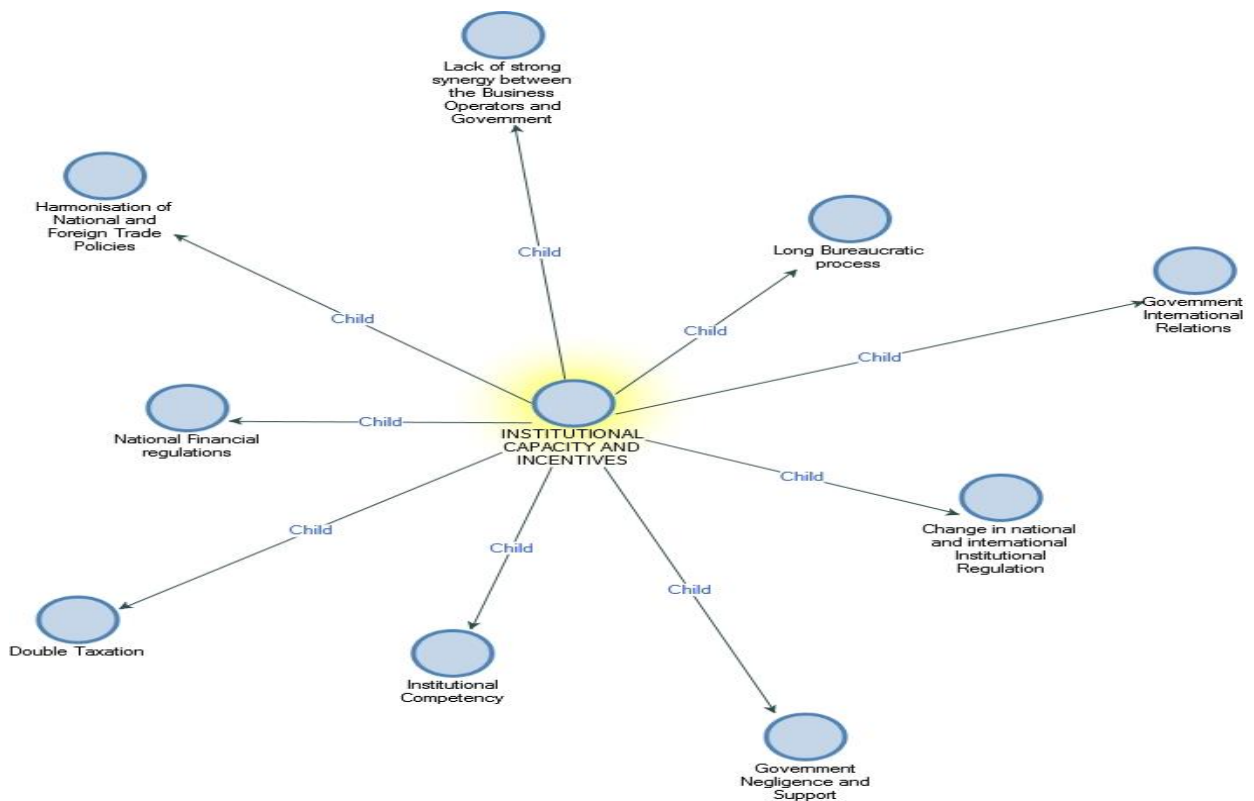
FIGURE 7: SAMPLE OF SUB-THEMES AND THEMES GENERATED USING NVIVO

12



Source: Author (2022)

FIGURE 8: A SECTION OF NODE FROM NVivo



Source: Author (2022)

Figures 8 and 9 show that many related sub-themes are combined to create central themes. Hence, this shows how rigorous the researcher has been in this study. Furthermore, merging themes help to identify the antecedent that contributes to reality and find answers to the research questions (Bogna et al., 2020).

5.4.3 Data Analysis and Saturation

The researcher analysed every data collected from the case study until it reached saturation to avoid data redundancy and to enhance efficient management of the limited time and resources available to complete this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Georgiou & Perdikiogianni, 2017). Hence, data saturation was adopted as the critical point for determining the sample size for the study. Saturation in qualitative research is defined as “thematic exhaustion”; and as “the point in collection and analysis when new information produces little or no change to the codebook” (Bunce & Johnson, 2006, p. 65), “with changes consisting of the addition of new codes and refinements of code definitions” (Braun & Clarke, 2021 p. 203). The researcher got the required and relevant themes that will generate answers for the research questions for this study after analysing the 13th data collected from Nigerian SMEs via interviews. Nevertheless, the researcher went further to collect and analyse two (2) additional data from participants

working with the regulators of MSMEs in Nigeria to ascertain the reliability of data collected from the SMEs operators in Nigeria (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Francis et al., 2010; Bunce & Johnson, 2006).

5.4.5 Thematic Presentation of Data

The thematic presentation of data in Figure 5.4 highlights the results of the data analysis process. The process states the findings from the data gathered as the participants related their experiences and perceptions of how inter- and intra-organisation KMPs influence SMEs' internationalisation. Table 8 below indicates that inter- and intra-organisational KMPs which enhance SMEs' internationalisation are complex and dynamic issues and cannot be overemphasised due to the sequences of interconnected concerns. Nevertheless, while the data presented via the thematic analysis highlight the concepts, themes, and Aggregate Dimensions of how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs affect SMEs' internationalisation from Nigeria's perspective, the researcher also engaged the participants to offer a means to alleviate the challenges identified.

The presentation of findings using: (i) the First - Order: Concept, (ii) the Second - Order: Themes; and (iii) the Third - Order: Dimension propounded by Corley and Gioia (2004) facilitates the thematic structuring of data collected through interviews and builds on clear, transparent, and valid procedures for the study. Moreover, the data presentation structure adopted does not “only allow the design of data into a sensible graphic aid but also provides a graphical representation of how the researcher progressed from raw data to terms and themes in conducting the analyses” (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 20) as well as create a simplified sequence to develop a model for the study.

TABLE 8: PRESENTATION OF DATA

First Order: Concepts	2 nd Order: Theme	3 rd Order: Aggregate Dimension
<p># You will know how to set up, what to do, and how many employees you need. So, there is no need to start a business and look to whom to sell the product.</p> <p># Knowledge helps us to plan</p> <p># The internal knowledge to improve my understanding of sourcing resources.</p> <p># We disseminate it (knowledge/information) locally and use it to develop new materials for skill development</p> <p># It helps us manage other countries' cultures, languages, beliefs, and norms.</p>	Organisational Planning	Organisational Factors
<p># You need to ask yourself these questions to know the position of the organisation in Business: How has your business been with these people? Are they efficient? Are they credible? Do you pay money for the product, and do you get your product completed? Do you pay money for the product and get the sub-standard product? All this knowledge and information is key to doing business.</p> <p># So, in as much as the international business operators are looking for the credibility of the company, they want to do business with you as the customer who wants to do business with them. You should also want to do your due diligence to know the basic knowledge of these people on who has done business with them.</p> <p># How has your business been with these people? Are they efficient? Are they credible? Do you pay money for the product, and do you get your product completed? Do you pay money for the product and get the sub-standard product? All this knowledge and information is critical in doing business.</p> <p># It would be best to do due diligence to check their record.</p> <p># Primarily, where our product has similar features to our competitors' products, we learn from them to improve our product to get a better competitive price in the international market.</p>	Organisational Appraisal	
<p># My product can meet the standard and compete with any international product.</p> <p># Distinguish what is standing out in our product compared to theirs (Competitors) in terms of quality (Product Quality).</p> <p># Aids more creativity and innovation in our business.</p> <p># It boosts our consultancy knowledge and grants us more exposure</p> <p># Boosts our company brand and capacity.</p>	Organisational Competency	
<p># The significant barrier is the standardisation of our product.</p> <p># The quality of your product will keep attracting more customers.</p> <p># You would not want to do business with someone that is not credible.</p> <p># I am not using a particular raw material because the raw material is cheaper compared to other raw materials in the market, but I must be confident if I am using the same raw material used in the international market, which is what I am using to produce my finished products.</p> <p># Some of the SMEs lack adequate, educated staff in their organisation.</p>	Credibility	

First Order: Concepts	2nd Order: Theme	3rd Order: Aggregate Dimension
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> # To the customer, we share information and knowledge to ensure inclusiveness. It would be best if customers felt as being part of the system. # We can leverage our relationships with friends in the diaspora to take advantage of trade opportunities open to us # Business and Customer relationships must be strengthened. Developing more personal and customer relationships would increase SMEs' sales and profitability if SMEs could build stronger connections with customers. # On my own as a medical practitioner, I am a busy person, and I always engage with people, especially patients; that is the truth. My interaction with them allows me to talk to them about my products. 	Customers Relations	Social and Business Networking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> #As an operator in that kind of international relations on behalf of many companies, we ensure that our members are linked up to the international partners in the international market; they have promising joint ventures, distributors, etc., that is why we oversee that aspect. # It opens the organisation to other partners, and they can recommend their associate members to you. # We have a perfect relationship with an International Chamber of Commerce in India called INDO and the African Chamber of Commerce and Industries, which work for Africa, and these organisations link us up to most African countries that are associating with them. # We ask the Embassy to confirm the genuineness of the information. 	Knowledge Networking	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> # Training and partnership with UNIDO, Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), and National and International NGOs. # Business consultant via mentorship to small-medium enterprises/Local partnership. # Interface with our associates within and outside the country, we acquire much knowledge about our operations # Embassies and High commissions of foreign countries in Nigeria and so on. # Internets. 	External platforms	The platform for Knowledge Acquisition and Sharing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> # Internal Organisational meetings and Seminars. # Inter-personal consultation between staff. Our knowledge is 50% from the organisation, and we also do our findings to get more information from the companies/buyers. 	Internal Platforms	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> # It allows us to tailor our services to the customers and help us meet internationally acceptable requirements for products and services # It will give me an advantage in creating a competitive advantage for my products over the extant competitors. # I have acquired more knowledge about the competitors' products and engaged in rigorous product innovation. # You will be able to come back and redesign your logo and your office's face to attract people coming to patronise you. #The knowledge acquired from external competitors gives you more concept to packaging your product well to attract potential and existing customers. 	Business Innovation	Knowledge Absorption Capacity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> # I cannot compare all the existing products in the international market with my product. Nevertheless, the few I have compared my product with other companies, and it shows that we are not doing badly. # If a farmer gets to know another kind of fertiliser in the market, which we may not know of, and then they come to the meeting, they will tell us that ABC is now using this to improve her production quality. #You need to know what others are doing if you are competing in the same market; you need to know what position your opponents (competitors) are in so that you, too, can reposition yourself, strengthen your competitiveness, or leave the market entirely. 	Knowledge Benchmark & Comprehension Capacity	

First Order: Concepts	2nd Order: Theme	3rd Order: Aggregate Dimension
<p>#We have a research development committee. What they do, is take cognizant of what others are doing and see how they apply it to our own space.</p> <p># Travelling is part of education. So, when you travel, you learn about how other people do their business. But the way I do my business here might not be how they do their business.</p>		
<p># We dissimilate it locally and use it to develop new materials for skill development</p> <p># We do acquire information daily. We process the information, and when we get what is right, we use that to advance our business activities.</p> <p># We distribute knowledge even to those who did not participate in the meeting.</p> <p># Ideas are exchanged, and Turkey has resulted in using a wood container. You can see that it can increase the market for wood exported to Turkey to make containers to export.</p> <p># We still do our research and questions. We need to contact the buyers and confirm what the buyers need.</p>	Knowledge Dissemination	
<p># Knowledge generated out of an organisation can negatively impact business activities or performance if you do not try to screen the knowledge and information you gather and the organisation you work with.</p> <p># An organisation like ours will look at such information and see how to diffuse and ratify what is negative.</p> <p># The purpose of gathering information and knowledge is to communicate it instead of allowing it to affect our business community negatively. Therefore, we try to get the best and most optimistic information and knowledge.</p> <p># Call the partners to conduct the necessary due diligence or groundwork for you in that market and even help you to certify.</p> <p># Knowledge generated out of an organisation can negatively impact business activities or performance if you do not try to screen the knowledge and information you gather and the organisation you work with.</p>	Knowledge Screening	
<p># I am the type that goes out of my way to seek information and knowledge.</p> <p># The knowledge of my competitors has a considerable influence on my business. I came to Lagos State and saw the product (Cashew nuts) they brought from Ibadan, and I went to them to ask questions.</p> <p># I told you about the training organised by the XXXX in Lagos; I participated in that training, and such training is crucial for many SMEs in Nigeria.</p> <p># This is because the quality they require at the international level demine the price you will offer for the goods. This affects our planning because you must meet their grade A level if you want to get a high premium price.</p> <p># We see how things go from one office to office another and how they monitor the chains of production, and at the end of the day, you will be able to learn that when you come back to Nigeria, you will now put in your own company to be able to improve on what you have ongoing in your organisation or company.</p>	Motivation to Learn	
<p># We share knowledge with our competitors.</p> <p># We try to ensure that knowledge and information are not held from each other.</p> <p># At the Inter-Agency level, we organise positive knowledge-sharing avenues with business membership organisations like NACCIMA and Nigeria Small-scale industrialists like new voices, AWEP, Unfamiliar Faces, Nigerian Association of Women Entrepreneurs, and the micro</p>	Motivation to Teach	

First Order: Concepts	2nd Order: Theme	3rd Order: Aggregate Dimension
<p>and small Associations that house or at the umbrella of our organisation for MSME including farewell; traditional and informal workers organisations that take care of MSME within the informal sectors.</p> <p># In our organisation, we share knowledge in batches. It has also been our culture that when a member of the organisation goes for training and when they come back, they will share the knowledge with others so that everybody will be on the same pace.</p> <p># I know the kind of training I have gone through. Even the production manager in my company, I put him through some things about our product architectures to avoid failure in our products. I always make sure that we do not compromise; we go for the best.</p> <p># Some of us have gone far in the business and will always advise our new starters/competitors to look at how we have been doing this, but it might work for you if you try it like this.</p>		
<p># Sharing knowledge with outsiders often affects company profitability and performance, as they may try to target or identify the company's weaknesses.</p> <p># Trust from the market stakeholders is also one of the vital factors affecting our participation in the international market entry by MSMEs.</p> <p># The competitors should try to find out what you are doing. You do not go to a competitor and tell the person that I am making more profit.</p>	<p>Limited Stakeholders Trust and Risk</p>	<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Barriers to Knowledge Acquisition and Sharing</p>
<p># Because of the financial challenges, we, the MSME operators, find it challenging to fund R&D.</p> <p>#The shipping containers are costly with our partners, especially export from India, Turkey, Nigeria, and other countries.</p> <p># Timing in knowledge sharing is minimised per day; creating a platform is necessary, which is sometimes costly.</p> <p># We can join us on WhatsApp for information sharing; the cost of data on this will take a long time.</p> <p># One of the challenges of knowledge sharing is communication costs in Nigeria. You must recharge your mobile phone and subscribe to data, which is very costly.</p>	<p>Poor Finance</p>	
<p># They cannot properly advise the farmers on processing their products to meet international market standards because they lack knowledge.</p> <p>#You may find it exceedingly difficult to access information about market demands.</p> <p># Pricing is also not proper because you cannot access the prevailing prices in the international market.</p> <p># Targeted country importation regulations may not be specified until you arrive in the country.</p> <p># We do not have adequate information to penetrate the international market.</p>	<p>Knowledge and information Asymmetry</p>	
<p># Relationships outside enable us to certify Nigerian companies; since we are a membership organisation, we are not a company as such; we are an association of companies taking care of exporting companies, which have our members registered with us that is at the business level.</p> <p>#This association can ask any Embassy or High Commission; unlike individuals, the company may write to the Embassy to respond to individual inquiries.</p> <p># What we decide to do after gathering such information we now began to take steps to block members from engaging in trade malpractices</p> <p># We do not just tell them not to take orders, but we make decisions. For example, if a member wants to export to a country like the UK, we will ask them to show us proof of the product, including product quality and product quantity.</p> <p># At the policies level, we represent Nigeria's interest by mobilising members to conduct due diligence on companies our international associate wants to do business with. So, we have a good relationship boost.</p>	<p>Activities of Knowledge Gatekeepers</p>	

First Order: Concepts	2nd Order: Theme	3rd Order: Aggregate Dimension
<p># The difficulty of international certification of our product significantly affects our participation in the international market.</p> <p># I registered with NASME, okay, and when such opportunities (international trade opportunities) come up, they will not let you know.</p> <p># By the time they reneged on that agreement with the foreign company they did the first time, it could be the sector they did not meet up with or a manufacturing sector they did not. When they now discover that it is becoming a significant challenge for their members, they have the right to blocklist the country in question.</p> <p># We had been enduring things like product rejection in the international market, and whenever I hear such, I tell the public that taunts do such business.</p>	Institutional incompetency	
<p># Many businesses, including the MSME operators, are double tax. They double tax us (multiple taxes). You pay many taxes at the end of the day and would not even have much profit to save (5 participants spoke on the issues related to multiple taxations at the local, state, and federal government levels).</p>	Multiple taxations	
<p># It usually takes much time for goods to come out of the seaport.</p> <p># Thus, the problem is not limited to knowledge sharing but the implementation and how fast they resolve your business challenges.</p> <p># Reaching government officials is not easy. You may have to be extremely patient to follow through the long route of fixing the appointment.</p> <p># It will take a long time for them to have a solution policy to support your business challenge.</p> <p># There is a bureaucratic bottleneck, and if you cannot get them, you would not be able to share information and knowledge; likewise, the cloak also affects the smooth movement of information from the top to the down because there is much confusion as into which channel to use in the dissemination of information.</p>	Bureaucratic process	
<p># The refusal to sign multilateral trade and economic agreements such as the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the European customs union due to the fear of making Nigeria's economy a dumping ground.</p> <p># When our members engage in export, the Government makes it compulsory that we repatriate our funds into the country, and the commercial banks that sell the foreign currency determine the selling price of the foreign currency.</p> <p># Policies have been in existence, but things are not going too well in the system. However, the major challenge is the implementation of the policies formulated by the Government.</p> <p># We need to enlighten our members to let them know the product quality and requirements, including the technical barriers and other necessary things about the country of entry before they start. So, we do a lot of offshore and onshore information sharing and applications.</p>	Government regulations on international businesses	

Source: Author (2022)

5.5 *SUMMARY*

The purpose of underscoring the trustworthiness is to justify the process adopted in analysing data for the study and the practicality of how the researcher determines the sample size for the survey through the conceptualisation of data saturation. In addition, it was posited that researchers need to create familiarity with the transcribed data to facilitate the process of coding and creating sub-themes and themes for the study. This should help reduce the error of omission of relevant statements from participants and the study's rigour issues. Consequently, the researcher was able to systematically extract relevant data from the interviews conducted with the participants, which in the end, facilitates the capability to present the results thematically in a tabular form (see Table 8). Thus, the following Chapter (Chapter Six) will discuss in detail the findings from the empirical data collected.

CHAPTER SIX: PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding Chapter highlighted the processes adopted to generate the outcome of the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews, which were analysed and thematically formatted following the data structure adopted in Table 8. The interview results were then presented in First order: the concepts, Second order: the themes, and Third order: the aggregate dimension of the themes.

Prior to the commencement of the interviews, chapter two (Literature Review) and chapter three (Overview of Nigeria's SMEs) of this thesis highlighted a wide range of concerns that hamper the effective and efficient acquisition and transfer/sharing of knowledge within and outside SMEs as well as efforts made by the Government of the country (Nigeria) to alleviate the challenges to inter- and intra-organisational KMPs to facilitate SMEs' internationalisation. Consequent on the responses from participants, the researcher carefully identified the key themes (aggregate dimensions) that would help provide empirical answers to the research questions mentioned in chapter one and further discuss the findings. In the data structure in Table 8, the researcher presents the findings from the interviews in a thematic format to aid a better understanding of the experiences of SMEs in Nigeria (Sundler et al., 2019). The aggregate dimensions highlighted in Table 8 include organisational factors, social and business networking, the platform for knowledge acquisition and distribution, knowledge absorption capacity, and knowledge acquisition and sharing barriers.

6.2 ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS

Section 6.2 focuses on the findings from the empirical data collected to answer RQ 1: *how does intra-organisational KMP influence SMEs' internationalisation?* First, intra-organisational KMP determines the efficiency of organisational factors (Allameh et al., 2011; Bennett & Gabriel, 1999; Clohessy & Acton, 2019; Intezari et al., 2017). This, in turn, helps facilitate knowledge development processes for SMEs' internationalisation. Moreover, organisational factors deal with how an organisation internally uses knowledge management to achieve corporate competitiveness. Moreover, this reflects the modalities (knowledge management dimension) that enhance the organisational capacity to source and absorb knowledge for organisational use (see Section 2.5.3).

The five distinctive themes emerged in the findings of RQ1, which include organisational planning, organisational appraisal, organisational competency, business confidentiality, and credibility. These themes are critically discussed below.

6.2.1 Organisational Planning

In line with responses from the participants, organisational planning is a strategy on how SMEs organise day-to-day business activities to increase the productivity of satisfying the targeted markets at a profit. Consequently, organisational planning has become one of the bases for SMEs to adequately allocate resources to enhance the equitable implementation of intra-organisational KMP for the effective and efficient internationalisation of SMEs (Abualoush, Bataineh, et al., 2018b). Five participants, including PT. 09, asserted that SMEs with the concept of internationalisation must also identify the market problem critical to business opportunities, as the fundamental objective of SMEs is to make a profit (Murnieks et al., 2020). The participant further stated that there would be no market for any product if there were no problems the product was made to solve. PT. 15 and PT. 16 reported that problem identification is critical to internal business plans and strategy, and identifying a solution to the problem is the preparative stage of going into any business.

Furthermore, the identification and solutions to market problems are entrenched in organisational competence that can be achieved through rigorous corporate planning in SMEs' intra-organisational KMPs in a manner that helps satisfy the demand of international target markets. This statement was reinforced by PT. 05 and PT. 13:

...You need to identify the market, identify the problem, look at the solution, and check through the market... (PT.05)

Knowledge management enables us to plan what we are doing now, what we are doing that will be temporary, what we are doing that will be permanent after COVID, how we will change, and how it will affect our investments. (PT. 13).

PT. 12 further added that sharing of acquired knowledge, such as market, cultural, network, and experiential knowledge (that is, types of knowledge for internationalisation), to facilitate SMEs' internationalisation is an empirical process of knowledge management, which is achieved through adequate and rigorous organisational planning of resources. In addition, this helps to determine the extent to which SMEs can participate in international businesses and achieve more business opportunities (Farooq, 2018; Wang & Liu, 2019). PT. 03 also suggested that intra-

organisational KMP is very significant, especially in planning the organisational resources in the supply chain of customer demands.

6.2.2 Organisational Appraisal

In Section 2.4 (i.e., measurement of the results), organisational appraisal allows SMEs to leverage strengths and shortcomings to achieve an organisational goal through competency (Kusumaningrum et al., 2019). Improving organisational competency for SMEs' internationalisation is thus associated with applying KMPs through resource renegotiation that can be achieved through effective organisational appraisal. PT. 06 asserted that *it would be best to internally do due diligence to check their [Collaborators] record*. In this regard, the strategic and senior management roles are significant and cannot be overemphasised (Hajric, 2018). For example, PT. 05 further stated that:

You need to ask yourself these questions to know the position of your organisation in Business: How has your business been with these people? Are they efficient? Are they credible? Do you pay money for the product and get your complete product? Do you pay money for the product and get the sub-standard product? All this knowledge and information is key to doing business. So, in as much as the international business operators are looking for the credibility of the company, they want to do business with you as the customer who wants to do business with them; you should also want to do your due diligence to know or have the basic knowledge of these people on who has done business with them. How has your business been with these people? Are they efficient? Are they credible? (PT. 05).

Consequent on the suggestion from PT. 05, the organisational appraisal can be considered a robust instrument of intra-organisational KMP that helps SMEs in the local and international markets to achieve a competitive advantage. Nevertheless, there is a need to utilise organisational teamwork and knowledge sharing to achieve organisational goals and objectives. PT. 03 re-enforced this statement and argued that:

Primarily, where our product has similar features to our competitors' products, we learn and improve our product to get a better competitive price in the international market (PT. 03).

The above response from the participants shows that SMEs with the internationalisation concept are prompt to evaluate their internal organisational activities and resources to overcome external environmental factors and challenges through operational knowledge management processes.

Furthermore, in an effort to get the capacity to assess organisational activities SMEs accept commitments promoting the integration of knowledge development for internationalisation.

6.2.3 Organisational Competency

With reference to Section 2.4.1, organisational competency is the capacity that leads SMEs to strive for a strategic process of enhancing organisational performance by applying intra-organisational KMP to achieve organisational goals in international markets. Therefore, SMEs with organisational competency need to carry out efficient production and marketing functions to boost performance in international markets (Chandra et al., 2020; Teece, 2014).

Seven participants, including PT. 10 and PT. 13, suggested that intra-organisational KMP is one of the robust mechanisms. It encourages organisational teamwork, creativity, diverse business innovation, improving the understanding within a company, and restrengthening the skills to design company products that will serve the international market competitively. Accordingly, PT. 01 and PT. 07 added that:

.... this is because my product can meet the standard and compete with any international product. It also helps to distinguish what stands out in our product compared to theirs [Competitors] in terms of quality [Product Quality] (PT. 01).

It [KMP] improves the understanding within the company and the know-how to design the company products that will serve the international community (PT. 07).

PT. 04 added that the intra-organisational KMP boosts the company brand and increases staff capacity to achieve a competitive edge. However, achieving efficient organisational competence is subject to the availability of human and material resources. For example, PT. 05 suggested that:

Mainly, there are two things you should be looking for when participating in international business. Firstly, the technical know-how; Second, based on the organisation I work for, it is the production capacity, ability to produce a particular product and understanding of the equipment (PT. 05).

The insight from PT.05 indicates that a successful internationalisation of an SME depends on its capacity to demonstrate its technical knowledge internally, which is evident in its capacity to produce standardised products for the targeted international markets. This position was further

corroborated by three participants, including participants PT. 01 and PT. 06. The participants stated that organisational competency is one of the complex factors that should be effectively managed through a fair sharing of knowledge among employees (that is, Knowledge Networking) to enhance competence in internationalisation. However, PT. 16 argued that SMEs whose staff lack the prerequisite knowledge are likely to be deficient in the requisite competence to facilitate internationalisation. Consequently, there is a need to provide both new and old staff with vital knowledge to ensure sustainable organisational competence.

6.2.4 Credibility

Six participants revealed that SMEs' credibility strengthens the confidence gained through organisational competence to satisfy the target market. Credibility thus helps SMEs with the capacity to gain more international market opportunities. Accordingly, PT. 04 disclosed that intra-organisational KMP is a vital catalyst for developing SMEs' credibility to participate in local, regional, and international markets.

Twelve participants, including participant PT. 02, highlighted that many foreign customers find it challenging to do business with suppliers who cannot exhibit a good sense of credibility towards their business activities. The argument from PT. 02 justifies the suggestion on the realised dimension of absorption capacity by Zahra and George (2002). Therefore, organisational credibility depends on the quality of the output to satisfy the market's demand. In support of this, PT. 04 and PT. 15 added that:

It [the quality of our product] gives us the opportunity to expand our knowledge about foreign policies (PT. 04).

SMEs' growth is rapid, and foreign customers can be linked to global supply chains, taking advantage of opportunities created by internationalisation. Therefore, the knowledge of foreign customers would significantly improve Nigeria's SME participation by taking advantage of opportunities for internationalisation. Moreover, the knowledge of product standardisation, preferences, and quality satisfaction also directly links to business/market improvements (PT. 15).

To re-enforce the assertion of PT. 04 and PT. 15, PT. 01 further stated that companies with good product credibility ensure quality and standard products that could compete in any international market and attract more customers. Thus, rigorous and open knowledge transfer/sharing between

staff at all levels must be adopted and implemented within the organisation to achieve product quality and credibility for SMEs' internationalisation.

6.3 SOCIAL AND BUSINESS NETWORKING

Section 6.3 focuses on findings related to RQ 2: *how does inter-organisational KMP influence SME's internationalisation?* Social and business networking is another aggregate theme identified from the interviews. Many participants asserted that the pro-social behaviour of establishing and maintaining formal and informal relationships enables a better flow of information and knowledge between the knowledge agents and users—this, in turn, enhances SMEs' competence to participate in international businesses. For example, PT. 09 and PT. 12 stated that:

We can leverage our relationships with friends in the diaspora to take advantage of trade opportunities open to us (PT. 09)

We [SMEs] have... a good relationship boost. It helps our members access international markets because our struggling associates can recommend our members and other organisations. We also have joint programmes like trade fairs that we can participate in together. In this season of global crisis... relationship is significant because we now must organise webinars, ordinary conferences and exhibitions for our members in partnership with our association. So, the relationship is excellent (PT. 12).

Consequent on the response from PT. 09 and PT.12, social and business networks are created through the practical application of inter-organisational KMP to help SMEs establish and sustain profitable relationships between staff and market stakeholders. This is not limited to the local and international knowledge agents, customers, governments, and competitors. As such, the social and business networking platforms must agree with the existing organisational culture and policies, especially the financial capacity to fund the platform and achieve set objectives (Sinha & Dhall, 2020). To this end, the social and business network is a central theme divided into customer relations and knowledge networking, contributing to effective knowledge development processes and organisational capabilities (Johanson & Vahlne, 2017). Thus, this could help facilitate inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation in developing countries such as Nigeria.

6.3.1 Customer Relations

Nine participants, including PT. 07 and PT. 16 asserted that many SMEs in Nigeria create a substantial relationship with customers to have direct access to market information from the customers. Consequently, these participants noted that direct customer market information and knowledge give SMEs the leverage to access and understand entrepreneurial knowledge, serving as the instrument to explore international market opportunities and enhance organisational competency. In addition, PT. 02 reiterated that an effective and sustainable relationship between SMEs and their stakeholders, especially the customers, provides vast explorable opportunities for the growth and development of SMEs. This, in turn, creates room for reaching potential customers and retaining existing customers through equitable distribution of the product (goods and services) information and knowledge.

To the customer, we share information and knowledge to ensure inclusiveness. You must make your customers feel part of the system (your company). You listen to your customers and tell them when you change your product, price, or packaging. For instance, I spoke with one of our customers some days ago and told him ... we will change our packaging so that if you see this product in this kind of packaging, it is still our product, and the quality is still the same. The man who is buying understands the system. If you do not share specific information or knowledge with him, the product may go into the market, and they would not recognise it as your own. Also, you will get feedback by sharing information and knowledge with people. If you do not say, here I am, nobody will say there you are. By sharing information, people will say that it should not be how you say one thing that ought to be. It should be this other way. So, that is going to-and-fro in management. You must manage your customers like your core staff (PT. 02).

PT. 02 revealed that SMEs with reliable commercial networks are prompted to establish cordial relationships for secure access to resources and market for established and sustainable sales subsidiaries in international markets. Moreover, SMEs must develop and maintain good customer relations to enable market knowledge and information feedback.

PT. 01 and PT. 16 reiterated why SMEs need to create sustainable and good customer relationships, thus:

I always engage with people, especially patients; that is the truth. My interaction with them allows me to talk to them about my products. Also, I have social

relationships, and I try as much as possible to talk about my business at any given opportunity, especially at social gatherings (PT. 01).

The business and customer relationships need to be always strengthened. For example, developing more personal customer relationships would increase SMEs' sales and profitability if SMEs could build stronger customer connections (PT. 16).

Participants suggested that the fundamental purpose why most SMEs build sustainable business and customer relationships is to boost organisational strategies for competitiveness and to maximise profitability. Four participants added that the interactions between them [SMEs] and the customers create real opportunities to identify the required product standards and volumes in the target market. Furthermore, PT. 07 disclosed that in the paradigm shift from the material and financial era to the knowledge era, the ability of SMEs to interact with their customers creates more opportunities for SMEs to know how their product in the international market has fared. Therefore, this helps SMEs pull knowledge and information from potential and actual customers, as it encourages identifying the demand of the target (international) market.

6.3.2 Knowledge Networking

Thirteen participants, including PT. 08 and PT.12, acknowledged that knowledge networking is a significant factor that creates platforms where genuine knowledge and information are shared to facilitate local and international businesses. Three participants were particular about the idea that competitive entrepreneurs need up-to-date market information to link them to their potential and existing markets. For example, PT. 03 stated that:

We [SMEs] have some associations that we have joined. So, for example, we get information from the Centre for promoting imports from Developing Countries – CBI, a Dutch organisation. They usually give us market intelligence about what is needed in the international markets. We also join some African organisations, and as a member of the Global Share Alliance (GSA), I have gotten several customers through them. So, we usually obtain information and knowledge about the international market through the organisations we join as members. So that is how we get our market intelligence (PT. 03).

Moreover, five participants, including PT. 08, further revealed that SMEs in Nigeria have strong knowledge networks comprising the national and international Organised Private Sectors (OPS). For example, some institutionalised and recognised networks include but not limited to the Bi-

National Chambers of Commerce, Regional Business Associations, and Multi-lateral Business Associations that facilitate the acquisition and re-distribution of business information and knowledge between members. Such networks create a reliable background for SMEs to participate in international business and create more wealth and employment opportunities in the country. Therefore, participants underscore and consolidate the economic issues, as the knowledge and information gathered enable SMEs to consider the appropriate means of entry into an international market of choice. For example, when the researcher asked PT. 12 about the impact of knowledge networking on the growth of SMEs' participation in international business, the participant responded that:

As an Association, the markets we target go beyond just discussion. We must have some of them with a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). So, once you identify a good market and have a partner, the partnership establishes relationships through a memorandum of understanding. Any organisation is open to other partners and can recommend their associate members to you.... If you want to engage with a company at all worth, and you already have an MoU with any of the internal partners, you do not need to go hustling; you call the partners to carry out the necessary due diligence or groundwork for you in that market and even help you to certify them. A company might talk to a chamber or an association that is our associate, and that chamber or association outside which has a relationship with us will just have a question to ask us, that is, requesting us to clear you (PT. 12).

Following the response from PT. 12, one could argue that knowledge networking is one of the mechanisms needed in SMEs to allow adequate exploration of business opportunities that abound in both national and international markets. Moreover, establishing legal instruments gives stakeholders strong business security and assurance.

Nevertheless, there is an argument that poor social and business networking within the national and international business associations could cause SMEs to lose significant business opportunities in the local and international markets. Thus, most business networkings are created via personal influence in society, as recollected by PT.01:

... I do not know how to go about it. Moreover, it depends on whom you know. Some things revolve around a particular group because they do not want you to reach the top. This is not good. So, it does not help businesses. If the organisers

allow the invitation open to us, I would like to be there. However, there is no free flow of information and knowledge from the association to some of its members that seriously need them (PT. 01).

In other words, PT. 01 highlighted that SMEs with weak or no social networks are unlikely to be given the opportunities to participate in an international business exhibition that would enable effective knowledge acquisition and transfer. Therefore, one could conclude from the insight of PT. 01 to note that the SME network is established and strengthened through social networks between the parties involved (see Section 2.4.4.3). These networks serve as a medium to encourage the sharing and acquiring of knowledge and information between two or more SMEs to enhance operational capacity.

6.4 THE APPLICATION OF PLATFORMS FOR KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION AND SHARING

The platforms for knowledge acquisition and sharing identify the mode in which SMEs acquire and share/transfer explicit and tacit knowledge to enhance internationalisation. Seven participants, including PT. 03, PT. 07 and PT.10 corroborated that the knowledge acquisition and transfer platforms include training, business fora, trade exhibitions, seminars, the internet, interpersonal contacts, and IBAs. Thus, the findings from this theme provide empirical answers to RQ 3 – *how a company can balance inter- and intra-organisational KMPs to influence SMEs' internationalisation*. Mancilla-Amaya et al. (2010) suggested that business organisations, including SMEs, should have a process in which knowledge and information are acquired and shared/transferred to thrive in developing organisational competency. In addition, these platforms for knowledge acquisition and transfer are likely to create room for social interaction and bring the inclusion strategy to the inter- and intra-organisational KMPs (Perez-Araos et al., 2007; Paul et al., 2017). Eight participants, including PT. 12 and PT. 16, opined that Nigeria has credible knowledge acquisition and sharing/transfer platforms for facilitating SMEs' internationalisation, while PT. 09 further noted that they [SMEs] acquire comprehensive international market knowledge through:

Travel to targeted countries for tourism, search for trade relationships, and support from organisations like the Nigeria Export Promotion Council (NEPC) and other countries' Trade organisations and Trade networking (PT. 09).

Furthermore, given the responses collated from participants, the study identified and classified the platforms into two categories: (i) internal platform and (ii) external platform. PT. 04 and PT.

16 highlighted that these platforms create a genuine means for SMEs' knowledge acquisition and sharing through training and retraining of staff, which in the end contribute to the implementation of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation.

6.4.1 External Platform for Knowledge Acquisition and Sharing

Nine participants, including PT. 09 and PT. 12, asserted that one of the significant sources of knowledge acquisition and sharing/transfer for SMEs' internationalisation is the external platforms, which include business exhibitions, national and international business fora, business consultation through mentorship to SMEs, and local partnerships, trade fairs, internets, and others. Furthermore, PT. 04 and PT. 05 mentioned that:

Business consultant via mentorship to small-medium enterprises, as well as Via training and partnership with UNIDO, SMEDAN and International NGOs (PT. 04).

As you know, change is a constant, and the researchers are not relenting; they are working day-in-day-out (PT. 05).

However, PT. 13 informed that the acquisition of explicit knowledge concentrates more on the external platform for knowledge acquisition and sharing/transfer. PT. 01 and PT. 06 noted that SMEs with internationalisation concepts always yearn for new knowledge to enhance their competency and competitiveness. Consequently, PT. 03, and PT. 07 added that SMEs are prompt to ask questions on issues affecting their business activities when given the opportunity to participate in external workshops and seminars that could enhance internationalisation processes.

6.4.2 Internal Platform for Knowledge Acquisition and Sharing

Consequent to the explanation of the intra-organisational KMP in Section 2.4.2, it is evident that efficient internal platforms of knowledge acquisition and sharing in SMEs, such as interpersonal contact, seminars, and training within a company, are the driving force for a reliable intra-organisational KMP. Hence, there is a good level of transparency and consistency of responses on the internal platform for knowledge acquisition and sharing/transfer for the processing and achieving SMEs' internationalisation. Seven participants revealed that SMEs organise independent internal meetings from which staff members share explicit knowledge while tacit knowledge is acquired practically. However, some organisation members could exhibit bias toward hoarding information and knowledge from colleagues. Thus, participants further stated that the internal training on which tacit and explicit knowledge is distributed helps SMEs to build

product confidence in the target international markets. To demonstrate this, three participants asserted that:

Even the production manager in my company, I put him through some things about our product architectures [training of staff: sharing of tacit knowledge] to avoid failure in our products (PT. 01).

... every month, members of the cooperative society do organise a meeting. Our monthly meeting updates members on what has happened in the company and society (PT. 02).

I think it is teamwork [interpersonal consultation between staff]. Of course, one person cannot know it all. But anybody from management can develop a better concept that will improve productivity, which we always require. So, anyone welcomes it; we apply it, and we are good to go if it works. So, there is no knowledge that is a waste. Also, the internal training and retraining of staff will enable them to learn how to apply new concepts in the business and make your business more competitive in the market (PT. 06).

Consequent on the participants' responses, it is evident that the knowledge and information acquired by one or more staff members in SMEs from the external platforms are primarily distributed to other staff through the internal platform. Thus, interpersonal consultations between staff and internal organisational seminars could enhance organisational knowledge development processes and commitments for an effective and competitive internationalisation process.

6.5 THE APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE ABSORPTION CAPACITY (KAC) TO STRIKE A BALANCE BETWEEN INTER- AND INTRA-ORGANISATIONAL KMP FOR SMEs' INTERNATIONALISATION

Knowledge Absorption Capacity (hereafter referred to as KAC) is considered one of the factors of KMPs (that is, acquisition, assimilation, transformation, and exploration of knowledge) to enhance SME's internationalisation (Zahra & George, 2002; Ahimbisibwe et al., 2016; Butler & Ferlie, 2020). Furthermore, KAC requires positive cognitive capacities and the intensity of investigative efforts from both the knowledge provider and the user (García-Villaverde et al., 2018). Consequently, this theme and the accompanying subthemes will answer RQ 3: how can a company *balance inter- and intra-organisational KMPs to influence SMEs' internationalisation?*

Participants suggested that SMEs complement inter-organisational KMP with intra-organisational KMP to ensure significant performance and gain a competitive advantage to enable internationalisation. As such, the sub-themes identified and deliberated on include business innovation, knowledge benchmarking and comprehension capacity, knowledge dissemination, knowledge screening, and motivation to learn and teach.

6.5.1 Business Innovation

In SMEs, business innovation is a process in which knowledge is acquired, shared, and assimilated to create a new idea to enhance competitive advantage (Oliva et al., 2018). Twelve participants revealed that inter- and intra-organisational KMPs are effective mechanisms for knowledge absorption capacity that enable business innovation for internationalisation processes. Consequently, most SME operators scan their target customers in the international market to discover and participate in its trending demand, which coincides with the Uppsala model. Furthermore, PT. 02 suggested that SMEs need to take notice of their competitors' daily activities and actions in the target markets to enhance healthy competition for survival and sustainability. This is because SMEs with internationalisation strategies predominantly do not operate in a monopoly market. This position was corroborated by PT. 07 and PT. 09 accordingly:

Inter- and intra-organisational KMPs give me the lead in creating a competitive advantage for my products over the competitors (PT. 07).

It [inter and intra-organisational KMPs] allows us to tailor our services to the customers and help us meet internationally acceptable requirements for products[goods] and services (PT. 09).

The response from the above participants shows that the primary objectives for balancing inter- and intra-organisational KMPs are to boost innovation and competitiveness for organisational growth, which further enables SME capacity to participate and meet the demand of target customers in the international markets.

Furthermore, PT. 01 and PT. 12 proposed business innovation as a business strategy that enhances a company's competence in comparing its product (goods and services) with competitors' products. Moreover, the capacity to absorb knowledge determines the efficiency of business innovation. Participants further asserted that business innovation could increase organisational trust to compete in the international market, especially where technical trade barriers (specified and regulated product characteristics such as product shape, design, labelling, packaging, size, functionality, and performance) play a significant role.

6.5.2 Knowledge Benchmarking and Comprehension Capacity

Three participants argued that no business organisations (SMEs) in Nigeria operate without competition; therefore, entrepreneurs must know how to balance inter- and intra-organisational KMPs to survive and sustain their market position. Consequently, the primary objective of knowledge benchmarking is to build on the current development of competitors as a standard for a substantial change in product to enhance competitive advantage in target markets (Hussain et al., 2019). For example, PT. 01 echoed that:

I know it is easy to compare all the products in the international market with my product. But the few I have compared my product with revealed that we [the company] are not doing bad regarding the international standardisation of product standards (PT. 01).

On the other hand, PT. 02 further stated that numerous SMEs with the internationalisation concept deserted their target markets or possibly went bankrupt due to their poor capacity to benchmark and comprehend knowledge (Change Variables: Knowledge Development Processes and Commitment Processes) which should facilitate innovation and competitiveness.

Furthermore, PT.03 reiterated that:

When I see what the multinational businesses [companies] are going through, although we are small players, we try to imitate and mimic what they are doing so that we are on the line to prosperity or better quality. We do not use the competitor's information or knowledge to do anything but work on our products and improve daily. That is what we use the competitor's knowledge and information for (PT. 03).

In addition, PT. 06 underscored and linked travelling for a business excursion to a process of knowledge benchmarking. The participant further disclosed that many SMEs have failed to realise that travelling to visit multinational companies is also a tool for knowledge absorption capacity in balancing inter- and intra-organisational KMPs that enable SMEs' internationalisation. Travelling to visit business centres and factories of multinational businesses in developing and developed nations allow SMEs to create and organise their business to meet international standards. PT. 15 also revealed that this process is a significant way to acquire external knowledge that should give them an edge over their counterpart in the regional markets.

Nevertheless, PT. 03 further stated that sometimes, SMEs find it challenging to assimilate knowledge acquired outside their organisational boundaries. Ultimately, sharing and balancing inter- and intra-organisational KMPs in the organisation could also become problematic. This participant further reported that some knowledge acquired (tacit knowledge) could only be demonstrated or learned during experimental or production processes. Therefore, this coincides with the SME's capabilities and commitments/performance (Johanson & Vahlne, 2017).

6.5.3 Knowledge Dissemination

Three participants, including PT. 12, identified knowledge dissemination as one of the critical tools for knowledge absorption capacity that enhances SMEs' internationalisation, especially where it involves balancing inter- and intra-organisational KMP. Specifically, five participants reflected on how the dissemination of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs is imperative for SMEs' performance in the international markets. For instance, PT. 10 submitted that:

In our organisation, we share knowledge in batches. It has also been our culture that when a member of the organisation [Association] goes for training and when they come back, they will share the knowledge with others so that everybody will be on the same pace. When I saw someone then in Abuja for quarantine services and other things, at least the lady spoke to me, and when I came back, I shared the knowledge gained from my conversion with her to other members, and we now do our best to improve our product (PT. 10).

PT. 04 further underlined that the priority of every organisation is to consider how every knowledge acquired is locally disseminated and used to develop new materials for skill development. Participants further revealed that knowledge and information dissemination could help organisations manage international trade barriers associated with cultural differences, language, beliefs, politics and norms in internationally targeted markets.

In addition, PT. 03 asserted that:

... for example, there was the knowledge that I must travel to Ghana to obtain it because what we are producing, they are producing it over there also. When I see what they are doing, sometimes, I must do a video recording to enable me to show my staff the process. Anytime I don't have the privilege to do video recording, I personally will come back to train the staff about the new development and how we can achieve it. Most of the time, I am also involved in production. So, for any

new development like that, I take the lead, and then after a while, when they master it, I withdraw myself and search for more things to improve on.

Consequent on the assertion of PT. 03, video coverage of tacit knowledge could serve as a means of storing and converting tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge. Consequently, the knowledge stored in electronic form is helpful for mastering explicit knowledge, which could become tacit knowledge for organisational usage (Kmieciak, 2019; Nonaka, 2009). In conclusion, knowledge dissemination is an exceptional means of improving staff capabilities and giving companies an edge over their competitors in the same market (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Lu & Chen, 2003; Farooq, 2018; Wang & Liu, 2019). Therefore, Section 2.4 supports the participants' experiences regarding this sub-theme.

6.5.4 Knowledge Screening

Three participants representing the IBAs in Nigeria noted that SMEs' proficiency in absorbing knowledge that will produce a significant result and achieving organisational goals is determined by the capacity to screen the knowledge acquired outside the organisational boundaries efficiently. For example, PT. 06 suggested that information and knowledge gathered should be shared with the members of the Industrial Business Association. However, knowledge and information collected require screening to avoid negative impacts on the business communities. Thus, these IBAs are more optimistic about the information and knowledge disseminated to their members. For example, PT. 12 and PT. 13 stated that:

Knowledge generated outside an organisation can negatively affect business activities or performance if you do not try to screen the knowledge and information you gather for the organisation you work with. Currently, information is so much on the internet. However, much of this information and knowledge could be wrong or insufficient (PT.12).

We need to understand our customer needs and pricing strategy and ensure that our product is differentiated from the competitor's product in the local and international markets, enabling us to penetrate the target market easily (PT. 13).

Three other participants, including participant PT. 06, suggested that SMEs with international business strategies must screen every knowledge acquired outside the organisational boundaries before implementing it into day-to-day business activities. This would help avoid sharing and acquisition of misleading information and knowledge. Furthermore, the participants commended that this development applies to the demand and supply associated with the target markets.

Given the response above, balancing inter- and intra-organisational KMPs that would facilitate SMEs' internationalisation requires thorough knowledge screening procedures. However, there is no guarantee that every knowledge identified and learned will provide the urgent expected result in an organisation (SME).

6.5.5 Motivation to Learn

Six participants were emphatic about the motivation to learn and how this creates windows for improvement and competency in organisations while coping with the regular changes and fierce competition in the international markets. Thus, the participants articulated that SMEs need to seek information and knowledge rigorously from available external sources and compare them with the actual knowledge and information in the organisation to overcome the potential and existing market problems and avoid being pushed out of the target markets. Additionally, most SMEs are motivated to acquire and share knowledge for intrinsic (self-actualisation) and extrinsic (social and financial gain) motives (Vuori & Okkonen, 2012). For example, participants PT. 06 and PT. 10 asserted that:

We saw how things go from one office to office another and how they monitor the chains of production, and at the end of the day, you will be able to learn that when you come back to Nigeria, you will now replicate it in your own company to improve on what you have ongoing in your organisation or company. It is about everyday learning; you cannot learn everything in one contact. So, you continue to learn, go from one company to another, learn the pattern, and learn their system. Then, you return and replicate what you learned in your company to see how it works. You know that is the knowledge that has been able to help us in our business here in Nigeria (PT. 06).

I am the type that goes out of my way to seek information and knowledge. Most of the programmes I attend are self-sponsored to take this company far. I go out there to hear what they say to improve myself (PT. 10).

PT. 03 added that from their experience, the fundamental motive to learn and become competitive in the international market is to meet international product specifications and standards to secure a premium price for their product. PT. 02 underscored this by noting that the organisation's core responsibility is to yearn for more external information and knowledge and balance it with internal knowledge to improve service delivery, which is achievable by training and retaining staff. PT. 08 reiterated that:

As a business organisation, we have a particular product from Germany; other companies from countries like Holland and Ukraine are producing such a product. So, we now must begin studying the products from these other countries to find out the competitive advantage of our products over theirs (PT. 08).

Consequently, another reason why SMEs need to learn is to improve their company's products, identify the difference between their products and competitors' products, and develop organisational experience and competency. While PT. 06 further added that acquiring a new skill in an organisation creates opportunities to strengthen better competitive advantage and maximise profit in the target market.

6.5.6 Motivation to Teach

The motivation to teach in order to facilitate KMP for SMEs' internationalisation could be considered a list of factors that drives individuals to share knowledge with other SME operators or co-staff since this enhances intellectual capacity that would contribute to business growth. Hence, the driving force to teach is to develop a company or a profession of interest (Jonsson, 2015). Consequently, findings from six participants revealed that SME operators in Nigeria are typically motivated to teach or share knowledge. This helps to balance inter- and intra-organisational KMPs, especially where the organisational culture and policies approve it. For example, PT. 10 posited that:

In our organisation, we share knowledge in batches. It has also been our culture that when a member of the organisation goes for training and when they come back, they will share the knowledge with others so that everybody will be on the same pace. So, for instance, when I saw someone in Abuja to discuss quarantine and other things, the lady spoke to me, and when I came back, I must let others know about what I learned from her; we now do our best to improve our product (PT. 10).

PT. 16 furthermore disclosed that SMEs are not only a benchmark to their colleagues in business in the local and international market; but also serve as the key contact for consultations to the national policies maker (Legislators) and SMEs' regulators on the creation, amendment, and domestication of national economic policies. In addition, this brings together the usefulness and application of this study's proposed model (see Section 2.5.4). To this end, the confirmation of these statements is reflected in the following responses:

Some of us have gone far in the business and will always advise our new starters/competitors to look at how we have been doing this thing [business], but it might work for you if you try. Sometimes, we also have people meeting with government agencies and advising them on how to better the running [create a better business environment] of our companies; by amending extant policies or creating and domesticating national trade policies (PT. 06).

Against this backdrop, three participants further corroborated that SMEs are willing to share and transfer the requisite information and expertise at the inter- and intra-organisational levels to encourage SMEs' significant participation in international business. For example, PT. 01, PT.02 and PT. 03 stated that:

I know the kind of training I have gone through. Even the production manager in my company, I put him through some things about our product architectures to avoid failure in our products. I always ensure we do not compromise; we go for the best (PT. 01).

The XXX Cooperative Society is an exciting business organisation aiming to empower women and youth, and we felt that the best way to empower them is to provide a platform where they can market their goods and get some money into their pockets (PT. 02).

If we have essential information, we will have more to share. We have enough personnel to train people. So, we try to contribute and remove the barriers to international markets on our quota (PT. 03).

Therefore, participants noted that balancing inter- and intra-organisational KMPs is expected to achieve specific objectives that are core to advancing organisational goals. Participants indicated that these objectives are not limited to developing the competitiveness of National SMEs but also limit barriers to internationalisation, promote the manufacturing of products that meet international standards, encourage the development of skills and competency, and create wealth and job opportunities for interested, capable and competent entrepreneurs.

6.6 THE BARRIERS TO STRENGTHENING KMPS FOR SMEs' INTERNATIONALISATION

Considering the findings in Sections 6.2 to 6.5, inter- and intra-organisational KMPs constitute strategic mechanisms for enhancing SMEs' internationalisation. However, the participants mentioned some factors inhibiting the application and strengthening of inter- and intra-

organisational KMPs to enable SMEs' internationalisation. Drawing from the data, Section 6.6 will focus on how the identified factors serve as barriers to strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMPs which in turn affect the SMEs' internationalisation. As such, this will help to provide answers to RQ 4: *Using empirical evidence, what are the barriers to strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation?*

6.6.1 Stakeholder Trust and Risk

Drawing from the responses from 13 participants, stakeholders' trust and risk are some of the inhibiting factors that can negatively affect the inter- and intra-organisational KMPs which should help for SMEs' internationalisation. Moreover, the stakeholders' trust and risk are associated with how SMEs could ensure internal business security from the external business environment, especially when knowledge and information are shared outside the boundaries of an organisation (Pirson et al., 2017). For example, PT. 04 and PT. 13 asserted that there is a high risk of sharing knowledge with external stakeholders, such as competitors in the same market, especially when there is no trust between the knowledge donor and the knowledge user. Thus, this could significantly influence SMEs that are more security conscious of their internal organisational activities. While PT. 06 posited that *people [SMEs] are afraid to bring in other people [other SMEs] to further their idea or pursue their goals, except for a few people who have the exposure*, PT. 05 noted that many SMEs hold the perception that:

If you bring in somebody [business operator] to talk about something significant or something that will bring in progress before you know it, that person [business operator] will start fixing and planning how to gather the whole thing and run away and, if possible, get rid of you (PT. 05).

PT. 02 suggested that *"the competitor(s) should find out what you are doing. For example, you do not go to a competitor and tell the person that I am making more profit on a particular product"*. Consequently, SMEs who desire to grow and explore the international market at a profit should be rigorous in sourcing information and knowledge to enhance their competence.

On the other hand, four participants highlighted that some SMEs in the country are always willing and ready to share and distribute explicit knowledge at the inter- and intra-organisational levels to boost internationalisation. Hence, this is more linked with SMEs from the same Industrial Business Association (IBA) strata. For example, PT 08 and PT. 16 stated that:

We [SMEs] share knowledge with our competitors (PT. 08).

We [Government Agency] try to ensure that knowledge and information are not held by each other. At the inter-Agency knowledge level [economic stakeholders], we organise the positive building of knowledge-sharing avenues with business membership organisations (PT. 16).

Some studies (Ranucci & Souder, 2015; Zhang & Jiang, 2015) suggested that tacit and explicit knowledge encourage organisational innovation that would help in gaining a better competitive advantage for market expansion and SMEs' internationalisation. However, the participants revealed that many of their staff were comfortable sharing only explicit knowledge within and outside their organisational boundaries. Hence, some of the participants re-enforced the above statement and informed that:

I know the kind of training I have gone through. Even the production manager in my company, I put him through some things about our product architectures to avoid failure in our products. I always ensure we do not compromise; we go for the best (PT. 01).

In our organisation [IBA], we share knowledge in batches. It has also been our culture that when a member of the organisation goes for training and when they come back, they will share the knowledge with others so that everybody will be on the same pace. For example, when I saw someone in Abuja for quarantine and other things, at least the lady spoke to me, and when I came back, I must let other organisation members know about it. I told you about the training organised by the GIZ in Lagos; I participated in that training, and such training [activity] is crucial for many SMEs in Nigeria (PT. 10).

Against this backdrop, it is evident that most SMEs in Nigeria critically depend on external knowledge to ensure competitive organisational innovations in the target marketplace (both local and international markets). Hence, the vulnerability in product quality and pricing position in the international market makes SMEs feel insecure. For example, PT. 03 reiterated that:

We [SMEs] could achieve that [success in international markets] by participating in international business activities and acquiring knowledge and information from some international organisations. They [international business consultants] advised that we must join international organisations to get the best price. The quality each organisation decides is what we will adhere to; by so doing, we will get the best price (PT. 03).

The participants opined that the issues of stakeholder trust and risk are some of the fundamental barriers to strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMPs which helps in SMEs' internationalisation. However, trust is a crucial factor influencing individual decisions to take risks and the tendency to engage in social and business relationships (see Sections 2.2.2 and 2.5.4). Also, this could enhance their opportunities to participate in international markets competitively by selling at the best price and quality.

6.6.2 Poor Finance

The data suggests that finance is one of the most critical factors for the operational application of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for effective SMEs' internationalisation. Furthermore, this study revealed that SMEs are always ready to source and balance external and internal knowledge to enhance organisational competence for SMEs' internationalisation. Consequently, this process helps identify more market opportunities and reduce the cost of doing business in the international market. For example, PT. 12 stated thus:

We have experience, for instance, with the cost of freight. We share knowledge that shipping containers are costly with our partners, especially exporters from India, Turkey, and other countries, including Nigeria. Ideas are exchanged, and Turkey has resulted in using wood containers. You can see that it can increase the market for the exportation of wood to Turkey to make their containers. In a global setting like this, sharing information and knowledge is always the best; during trade fairs, digital trade fairs, or exhibitions where we do not have visual exhibitions, people can still exhibit their products online (PT. 12)

Eight participants, including PT. 02 and PT. 15, identified poor sources of finance as one of the principal challenges to inter- and intra-organisational KMPs which in turn affects SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria (see detail challenge of finance in Sections 2.2.2 & 3.4). For example, PT. 16 disclosed that financial challenges had created an enormous limitation for SMEs to independently carry out comprehensive Research and Development (R&D) that should help develop a sustainable competitive advantage and encourage SMEs' internationalisation. Furthermore, PT. 03 and PT. 06 reiterated and reported that:

When it comes to quantity, we have not been able to reach that quantity that we can command respect to gain more recognition. So, we are only working on raising funds so that by the time we start operating in larger commercial

quantities, and we will gain more international recognition as we work on our quality (PT. 03).

SMEs in Nigeria have many challenges. It is so hectic because you do not have support. ... in China or other countries, the Government assists by giving loans to SMEs. With that loan, you can hire the best brains you can get. You can also send them for training. Some big companies send their staff for training abroad, and some send their staff to countries like Germany, England, America, and others, bringing back their acquired knowledge. However, we found it challenging to do such because of the financial challenges. Before you even manage the cost of running your generator set and repairing your vehicles due to the bad roads, where will you get the money to send someone for a unique course or training to help the company? You will discover that you are not getting much profit before desiring to sponsor your staff for advanced training (PT. 06).

It was revealed that insufficient finance to boost the inter- and intra-organisation of KMPs in SMEs has become a severe challenge to its internationalisation. Notably, instituting international packaging standards requires much financial backing to achieve such a business strategy for SMEs' internationalisation. For example, PT. 10 stated thus:

I only know that if I have access to finance, at least I will improve on the packaging. If I can raise some money and do the packaging, the bag will last for four to five years, but the cost of doing it runs into millions of Naira to improve our packaging to that standard. The bag is at about four million Naira, less than 4.5 million Naira for the packaging. I said, wow, when did I see one million Naira before talking about four million Naira to do the packaging? (PT. 10).

Following the continuous complaints about how insufficient finance affects inter- and intra-organisational KMPs and in turn hampers SMEs' internationalisation, PT. 15 disclosed that SMEs could partner with existing multinational organisations to increase their internal and external knowledge while reducing further barriers. PT. 07 further noted that finance had affected SMEs' capacity to train and retrain staff, creating a robust forum for acquiring and sharing knowledge outside the organisational boundaries and replicating such expertise in the organisation.

6.6.3 Knowledge and Information Asymmetry

Nine participants asserted that adequate and updated knowledge and information are crucial to strengthening inter- and intra-organisation KMPs which helps in SMEs' internationalisation. However, the limited flow of knowledge and information within and outside organisational boundaries creates a barrier to the functional implementation of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for efficient SMEs' internationalisation. For example, PT. 07 stated that it has been challenging for SMEs to access adequate and comprehensive information and knowledge about the international market demands and the prevailing prices for their products which should arouse the interest in SMEs' internationalisation. PT. 03 and PT 14 further added thus:

For me, what I think is that the barrier to participating in the international market majorly is knowledge and information. Because sometimes, we do not get the correct and sufficient knowledge and information. It might not be complete even when you have the right knowledge and information. So, we do not have adequate and comprehensive knowledge and information to penetrate the international market (PT. 03).

As SME, if you do not know [knowledge] about the international community, especially what they want and what is required, it will affect what you export to the international market (PT. 14).

PT. 09 also stated that there is a lack of comprehensive knowledge and information on extant import and export policies that regulate the national and international markets. Consequently, these could lead to failure to adhere to national and international import and export regulations, product rejection and confiscation, and perhaps affect bilateral economic and political relations. Therefore, if some SMEs cannot access comprehensive knowledge and information of extant policies that regulate the national and international markets, it is evident that some could be unaware of these policies. To this backdrop, PT. 10 reiterated thus:

I do not know about any of the policies to benefit from in Nigeria. I go out there to hear what they are saying to improve myself, and I do not know any such policies to enable the exportation of my product (PT. 10).

Furthermore, PT. 12 added that most IBAs in Nigeria on agricultural produce find it challenging to appropriately advise their members on processing products to meet international market standards. This is because they lack adequate and updated knowledge and information that would help to guide members. To reduce this challenge, PT. 01 recommended that SMEs be supported

and furnished with sufficient, reliable, updated knowledge and information to encourage internationalisation.

6.6.4 Activities of Knowledge Gatekeepers

Within an organisation, specific individuals are responsible for accessing, evaluating, and enabling the mobility of knowledge and information for organisational use (see Section 2.4.3). However, there are mixed reactions on how knowledge gatekeepers are considered barriers to strengthening the implementation of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs which in turn affects SMEs' internationalisation. Four participants argued that the activities of knowledge gatekeepers significantly affect the acquisition and sharing of knowledge and information between the knowledge users and donors at the inter- and intra-organisational levels. The interview (data) largely revealed that knowledge gatekeepers are legally recognised bodies or individuals with holistic and fair responsibilities to acquire, evaluate, organise, and share knowledge to develop strategic organisational competitiveness.

Despite this, PT. 01 stated that knowledge gatekeepers, such as IBA and government institutions, often conceal market knowledge and information that could enable SMEs to access international trade platforms holistically. There was also consensus between PT. 03 and PT. 14 that the poor action and attitude of knowledge gatekeepers in the domain enhance irregularity in KMP, as highlighted in Section 6.6.3.

Generally, participants agree that knowledge gatekeeping is vital for enhancing confidentiality, which would help SMEs achieve a competitive advantage. For example, PT. 05 asserted that:

Competitors sometimes may not tell you the whole truth about the product. But everybody has plans for their product and organisational secrets, which is confidential. Sometimes, you do not need to reveal all the information or knowledge you get to people, including the organisation's stakeholders. Your competitors believe you will push them out of the market if you know everything about their business strategy. Perhaps, there is always a level of hoarding back information and knowledge from competitors. Sometimes, rather than going directly, you may have to go indirectly by not being involved in the sales with the competitors to get some information and knowledge about the product from your competitors in the market has gone through the product online to see what it contains (PT. 05).

Furthermore, PT. 12 stated that:

After gathering such information and knowledge, we decided to take steps to block members from engaging in such practices [trade malpractices]. Our responsibility is to check all scam information for the benefit of our members in the country and our international partners abroad. We do much screening for market access. We do not just tell them not to take orders but decide. So, for example, if a member what to export to another country, we will ask them to show us proof of the product, including the product of quality and quantity (PT. 12).

Consequent on the response from the above participants, knowledge gatekeepers in business organisations hoard information and knowledge, which could enhance the strengthening of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs. Despite this, participants consider hoarding information and knowledge as one of the functions of knowledge gatekeepers that should provide a reasonable time for the parties to certify the knowledge and information, which could further help reduce the trend of trade malpractices.

6.6.5 Institutional Incompetence

Regarding institutional incompetence, four participants disclosed that some established institutions expected to create a conducive environment for strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMPs towards SMEs' internationalisation lack sufficient skills to carry out their responsibilities. For instance, PT. 01 stated that while the company is registered with a well-recognised IBA in the country, the IBA has never invited the company to participate in international trade exhibitions or business fora where veritable knowledge and information are shared.

PT. 13 asserted that institutional incompetence has seriously led to difficulties in the certification of products for the international market. It also limits SMEs' ability to know and acquaint themselves with international competitors and suppliers, which would strengthen the mobility of eligible knowledge and information for the internationalisation process. Moreover, PT. 01, PT. 12 and PT. 15 substantiated the statement made by PT. 13 and argued thus:

I registered with NASME, okay, and when such an opportunity comes up, they will not let you know (PT. 01).

We [SMEs] have been enduring things like product rejection in the international market, and whenever I hear such, I tell the public that it is a taunt [illegal and

inexperienced people] in such business. But, of course, anybody can be a taunt. So, for example, a technocrat doing an official and abstract assignment and getting access to some money can call a group of individuals to go to some local market to buy a list of products that he/she wants to sell abroad, and they do not pass-through association like the existing exporter that knows the market but ship the goods to the international market. But, of course, this act could also be carried out by the State government, government agencies, or private companies. And then the next thing we hear is that the goods are rejected at the international market, and when I am told, I say the taunt Scoffer] does it (PT. 12).

...the actions or inactions by the home and foreign government in relation to its indigenous companies and exporters (PT. 15).

These participants articulated that the national regulators for international trade against trade malpractices have created opportunities for inexperienced exporters to export goods. Hence, the participation of illegal and inexperienced people in international businesses could jeopardise national integrity and scare away international trading partners. Ultimately, this could impede the capacity to strengthen inter- and intra-organisational KMPs which helps in SMEs' internationalisation.

Furthermore, the participants disclosed that product quality and quantity are two fundamental factors that help any business organisation gain more recognition that strengthen the ability to share inter- and intra-organisational KMPs which aids internationalisation. However, concerning Sections 2.2.2 (Characteristics of SMEs) and 3.4 (The challenges of SMEs in Nigeria), PT. 03 argued that SMEs mostly found it challenging to achieve better identification that would encourage the strengthening of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs which helps in SMEs' internationalisation due to the inability to independently produce and meet the volume of demand in the international markets.

6.6.6 Multiple Taxation

Five participants considered business tax payment as the statutory responsibility of every business organisation, including SMEs. Thus, reducing taxes or giving tax holidays to business operators, particularly SMEs, creates a conducive business environment, encourages competitive advantage, and strengthens inter- and intra-organisational KMPs that help for internationalisation (Saxunova et al., 2018). Nevertheless, PT. 03 and PT. 04 expressed concern that SMEs pay multiple taxes to Local, State, and Federal levels of the government in Nigeria. Consequently,

the multiple taxations have formed part of the barriers to strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMPs that need to be addressed to encourage SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria. From this backdrop, PT. 06 and PT. 07 considered multiple taxation a challenging attitude exhibited by government authorities and further reported that:

Many business operators are double tax [pay multiple taxes]. So, they double tax [multiple taxes] us here. So, you pay many taxes at the end of the day and would not even have much profit to save (PT. 06).

If you want to start a business... the tax collectors from Local Government Authorities, State and Federal governments will come to collect tax. So, you will end up paying from your nose, spending all your resources from your business to pay taxes. This is uncalled for, and it shouldn't be in Nigeria. So, in Africa, there should be a uniform taxation board; you would not have to pay today and another day again. The worst thing is that, for the Local Government, another set of local government tax force agents will still come, and they will clamp you down; you will pay again. Before you know it, you would have paid three (3) different local government agents or four (4) in a year while running a particular business (PT. 07).

Participants thus articulated that the multiple taxations are part of the fundamental factors challenging SMEs to sponsor R&D and staff training to facilitate the acquisition of relevant skills for strengthening inter- and inter-organisational KMPs for internationalisation. However, this is a general reflection of how some SMEs lose their funds by paying multiple taxes to federal, state, and local government authorities.

PT. 13 concluded that multiple taxation had affected the financial capacity of many SMEs to fund their participation in international and national business fora, business exhibitions, and the training and retraining of staff to encourage and strengthen inter- and intra-organisational KMPs which in turn aids SMEs' internationalisation. Against this backdrop, the participant further argued for the need for urgent attention to help reduce and, if possible, eradicate the burden of multiple taxation on SMEs in Nigeria.

6.6.7 Bureaucratic Process

Another barrier to strengthening inter and inter-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation is the bureaucratic process. PT. 02 and PT. 16 suggested that the bureaucratic process involves complex rules and procedures that cause a delay in performing functional

responsibilities to help in the mobility of knowledge and information that will enable the internationalisation process. Accordingly, the study asserted that a bureaucratic process mitigates the possibility of measuring KMPs (see Section 2.4.1). Thus, the assertions from three participants further underscored this debate. For example, PT. 01 and PT. 05 noted that:

Some people did not even go through the standard protocol. Getting my NAFDAC registration classification and code, even [product registration] with the Standard Organisation of Nigeria, was not easy (PT. 01).

Reaching [getting to] government officials is not easy. You may have to be extremely patient to follow the long route of fixing the appointment. Nevertheless, when you eventually reach out to government officials, it will take a long time for them to have a solution policy to support your business challenge (PT. 05).

Furthermore, PT. 02 highlighted that Government, as a stakeholder, is to assist SMEs in strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMPs. However, the Government's Ministries, Departments and Agencies exhibit complicated and irrelevant bureaucratic processes. For example, a state government has a Special Assistant to the Governor for Commerce, a Senior Special Assistant to the Governor of Commerce, a Personal Assistant to the Governor for Commerce, and the Commissioner for Commerce. Therefore, this makes the SMEs more confused and worried about identifying whom to report issues that limit inter- and intra-organisational KMPs to enable the internationalisation of SMEs. In addition, the bureaucratic process affects the mobility of knowledge and information from the top to the lower managerial level because there is much confusion about which channel can disseminate information and knowledge.

6.6.8 Government Regulations on International Businesses

Three participants identified strict government regulations as barriers to strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMPs. Thus, from the participants' experience and opinion, government regulations are described as the official procedures established by the government to legalise business activities. The participants suggested that unstable government regulations as one of the barriers to strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMPs. For example, PT. 14 highlighted that:

The barriers [barriers to strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMP] are within the Government policies at the national level, especially on foreign exchange. When our members export products, the Government makes it

compulsory that we repatriate our funds into the country, and the commercial banks that sell the foreign currency determine the selling price of the foreign currency. And then, when we come to the EPA thing with the European Union, it affects us because our government refused to sign the agreement. Because of this, some francophone countries have the upper hand in exporting products to EU countries (PT. 14).

Generally, creating an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) aims to enhance trade liberalisation, create a robust economic relationship, and remove any concerns affecting free trade among members (Adetula & Osegbue, 2020; Khan et al., 2021). However, the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria became an exception. The Government refused to sign the EPA that could help establish a robust economic relationship and strengthen inter- and intra-organisational KMPs which yields fruitful relationship between SMEs in Nigeria and their international counterparts.

PT. 06 also asserted thus:

We [SMEs] find it difficult to get direct access to foreign exchange, so what we do, is we go through the black market (Bureau de Change). This is because the Nigerian Government restricted international businesspeople [including SMEs] to a limit of foreign currencies to travel with; this restriction only happens here in Nigeria (PT. 06).

The response from PT. 06 above shows that the government regulations restrict SMEs to a specific and limited amount of foreign exchange, which could hinder access to competent international platforms of knowledge acquisition and transfer (business fora, seminars, and international training) that are to strengthen inter- and intra-organisational KMPs which in turn aids SMEs' internationalisation.

Furthermore, PT. 12 stated thus:

We look at the payment system of that country [destination country] and whether they can get payment easily; because up to now, there are still some countries that we do not easily get payments even though we will hear of all the platforms that you can send money.

The response from PT. 12 above suggests that the inability to secure a veritable means of

payment negates the principal objective of trade facilitation to create an enabling business environment for producing and distributing goods and services (Grainger, 2008). Moreover, from the participant's point of view, trade facilitation is a mechanism for simplifying, regulating, and managing information and knowledge to aid the movement of goods and services between the seller and the buyer and to make payment. Thus, experiencing difficulties in processing payments between international buyers and sellers could become an established barrier to strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMPs which helps in SMEs' internationalisation.

PT. 05 added that bilateral and multi-lateral economic agreements are vital policies binding the parties involved in international businesses. However, the scope of these agreements has become a restrictive factor in strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMPs on products not covered by the economic policies between the signatories. Hence, this could become a challenge to discuss the acquiring and transferring of relevant and holistic knowledge and information that would enhance organisational competency to participate in international business(es).

6.7 SUMMARY

This chapter presented the findings from the data outlined in Figure 5.4 to address how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs influence SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria. Consequent on the suggestions of the participants, the findings of the research questions are divided into five significant Sections, which include: Organisational factors (RQ1), Social and business networking (RQ2), the application of platforms for knowledge acquisition and sharing (RQ3), the application of KAC to balance between inter- and intra-organisational KMPs (RQ3), and barriers to strengthening KMPs (RQ4). Thus, the suggestions from the participants highlighted for the thesis are dynamic. As such, the recommendations from the participants corroborated the literature review in chapters two and three of this thesis.

RQ1: the study finds that intra-organisational KMP enhanced SME organisational dynamics, which invigorated the capacity to achieve corporate competitiveness. For example, the participants recommended that it is essential for SMEs in Nigeria with an internationalisation concept to identify the market problems that would create international business opportunities. Moreover, the participants further stated that the identification and solutions to market problems depend on the organisational degree of competence to plan its resource and measure results that would help build and strengthen organisational credibility in the international market.

RQ2: following the participants' response, inter-organisational KMP is considered a mechanism to help SMEs create wealthy customer relations, and social and business networking with

external stakeholders to enable internationalisation. For instance, participants emphasised that social and business networking creates platforms for knowledge and information acquisition and sharing to facilitate regional and international business for SMEs in Nigeria. Despite that, some of the participants argued that business fora and exhibitions (see Section 6.4.1) are some of the knowledge acquisition and transfer platforms. However, some SMEs are not allowed to participate in such platforms. Consequently, this study suggests that poor social and business networking could cause SMEs to lose significant international business opportunities.

RQ3: these Sections considered how SMEs can balance inter- and intra-organisational KMPs to influence their internationalisation. Accordingly, the findings of RQ3 are divided into two main segments (Sections 6.4 and 6.5). The first segment (Section 6.4) is on knowledge acquisition and sharing platform findings. The participants recommended training, business fora, trade exhibitions, seminars, partnerships, internet, inter-personal contact, mentorship, business consultations, and IBAs as critical platforms for knowledge acquisition and sharing that facilitate the balancing of inter- and intra-organisational KMP for SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria. The second segment (Section 6.5) discussed the application of KAC to balance inter- and intra-organisational KMPs. Thus, the participants noted that inter- and intra-organisation KMP serves as an effective mechanism for KAC, which in the end, could help SMEs to build reliable information and knowledge that would promote a competitive advantage for internationalisation.

RQ4: this Section explored the factor preventing the strengthening of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs. Thus, these barriers are complicated and interrelated. The findings reiterate some barriers to internationalisation in chapters Two and Three. Chapter Six, therefore, corroborates the barriers highlighted in the literature. Consequently, the participants opined that the barriers to boosting inter- and intra-organisational KMPs include the absence of stakeholder trust-and--risk between the knowledge donor and user, insufficient finance to sponsor regular R&D and staff training, knowledge and information asymmetry, the rigid functions of the knowledge gatekeepers within and outside organisations, institutional incompetence on the creation of a conducive business environment, multiple taxations, bureaucratic process and government regulations on international business.

Consequently, each Section in chapter Six provides detailed and empirical answers to the research questions on the investigation of how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs influence SMEs' internationalisation. The next chapter (chapter Seven) of this thesis will thus discuss the findings from the data collected.

CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

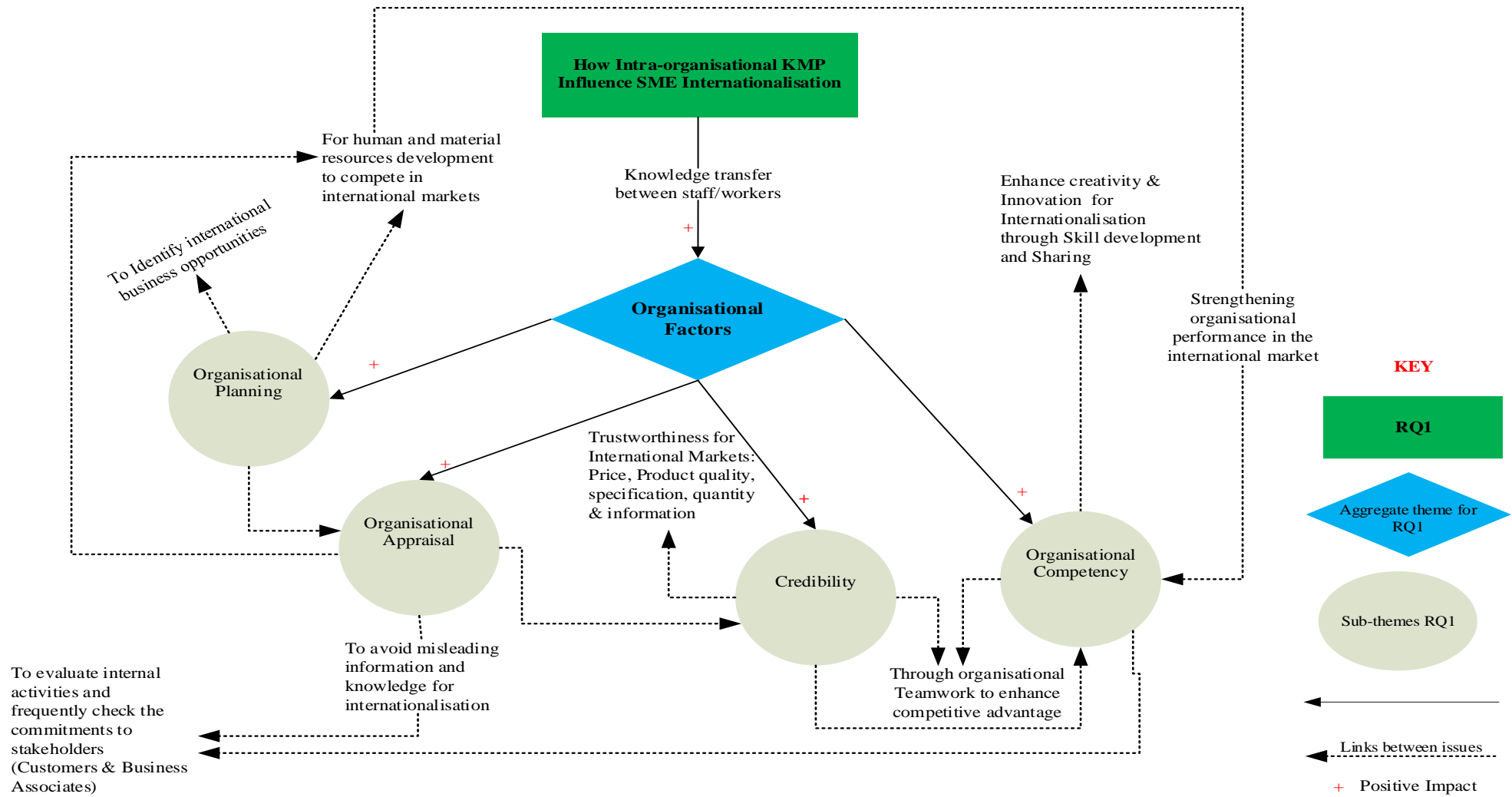
7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the key findings from the data collected from selected participants in Nigeria to investigate how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs influence the internationalisation of SMEs' from the Nigerian context. The findings presented in the previous chapter (chapter Six) will be discussed in themes based on research questions and in line with the objectives of this study. Therefore, the discussion of findings for this study would be categorised based on the research questions of the study outlined in chapter one.

7.2. RQ1: HOW DOES INTRA-ORGANISATIONAL KMP INFLUENCE SMEs' INTERNATIONALISATION?

Findings in Section 6.2 suggested that intra-organisational KMP is one of the fundamental mechanisms influencing organisational factors, contributing to the SME's competence to participate in international businesses. Furthermore, the literature suggests that organisational factors are the direct enablers of organisation performance that enhance competitive advantage (Daily et al., 2007; Massoud et al., 2011; Tung et al., 2014). Therefore, the intra-organisational KMP has become an instrument determining the proficiency of organisational factors influencing SMEs' participation in international business from Nigeria. This relates to how activities are planned and implemented in an organisation. As such, the data collected for this study highlights some themes, including organisational planning, organisational appraisal, organisational competency, and credibility as vital organisational factors. Figure 10 below provides the synopsis of addressing RQ1 on how intra-organisational KMP influences SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria.

FIGURE 9: ADDRESSING HOW INTRA-ORGANISATIONAL KMPs INFLUENCE SMEs' INTERNATIONALISATION IN NIGERIA



Source: Author (2022)

7.2.1 Organisational Planning

This study found that the intra-organisational KMP in SMEs is a fundamental organisational factor that allows SMEs to effectively and efficiently engage in organisational planning to encourage internationalisation. Consequently, participants considered organisational planning as a prerequisite for successful internal organisational activities encouraging SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria. Furthermore, the data from the interview, in line with the state and change variables of the Uppsala model, suggested that the trend of organisational planning within SMEs in Nigeria has enhanced the capacity to identify international business opportunities from existing market problems. Moreover, this pushes the SMEs to plan to get solutions for market problems at a profit. These findings align with the administration of the Human Resources knowledge management dimension, which requests every business organisation to exhibit efficient resource management to achieve organisational goals at a profit (Lopes et al., 2013).

Furthermore, the findings revealed that there would be no market for any product if there were no problems the product was made to solve. Despite this, problem identification and development of required products (goods and services) are achieved through organisational strategic planning of human and material resources (Hislop et al., 2018; Lau & Kleiner, 1988). As such, this has reflected the contribution of SMEs to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Thus, this indicates that planning human and material resources in SMEs involves developing human skills to efficiently utilise material resources and secure a competitive advantage to facilitate effective internationalisation. However, this could encourage SMEs to internally plan the process of acquiring and transferring/sharing market and experiential knowledge that allows the exploration of the international markets and overcomes barriers to international businesses at a profit through the empirical application of intra-organisational KMP (De Luca & Atuahene-Gima, 2007; Tang, 2008).

7.2.2 Organisational Appraisal

The study revealed that organisational appraisal is also one of the organisational factors frequently used by SMEs in Nigeria to ensure internal due diligence in restructuring acquired knowledge and information to achieve organisational objectives. Murnieks, Klotz and Shepherd (2020) reported that organisational planning in businesses such as SMEs is bound to customer satisfaction at a profit. This study demonstrates the need to strategically coordinate every piece of knowledge and information acquired to ensure organisational security and to improve competence. Therefore, the participants recommended that SMEs with the objective of excellent

performance and sustainability in the international markets should adequately plan for sufficient information and competent human resources to enable comprehensive and strategic organisational appraisal to encourage strategic innovations for internationalisation.

Thus, the study highlighted that SMEs in Nigeria evaluate their internal activities and frequently check commitments to business partners and target customers in the international markets to help demystify misleading information and knowledge (Cegarra-Navarro et al., 2021). Therefore, the intra-organisation activities of KMP place SMEs in a comfort zone to internally appraise organisational market opportunities against external environmental factors (competitors, government policies, and technical trade barriers) and gain a sustainable competitive advantage in the international markets.

7.2.3 Organisational Competence

Organisational competence has been identified as one of the organisational factors that encourage organisational teamwork and creativity, innovation, fostering understanding of the relationship between staff in a company, and strengthening the skills that develop a competitive company brand in the international markets. Johanson and Vahlne (2017) suggested that businesses, including SMEs, must secure the experienced human resource needed to enhance creativity and innovation that would promote internationalisation through skill development. Therefore, applying intra-organisational KMP in a company provides a veritable opportunity for developing and strengthening staff skills through regular training and retraining of staff. However, this is subject to the availability of financial and material resources and staff capacity to absorb and demonstrate the (new) knowledge and information.

Hence, this study revealed that organisational competence is an essential factor that requires effective management through sharing knowledge and information among staff and further creates room for comparing the organisational product with the competitors' products. As such, the intra-organisational KMP includes acquiring, interpreting, storing, and sharing knowledge within a company to enhance organisational competence and business performance and promote SMEs' internationalisation (Martelo-Landroguez & Cepeda-Carrión, 2016).

7.2.4 Credibility

This study suggested that credibility is one of the organisational factors that many business organisations are eager to achieve and sustain as part of the organisational culture; credibility in SMEs is the aftermath of managerial competence that strengthens corporate confidence for SMEs' internationalisation. According to Fernández-Alles et al. (2022), credibility is one of the

organisational factors and a critical instrument for gaining the trust of organisational stakeholders. Consequently, this study underscored that when there is a failure of trust between SMEs and their stakeholders, many international customers find it challenging to honour doing business with suppliers who cannot demonstrate credibility towards their business activities. Therefore, credibility integrates SMEs' ability and commitment to be trustworthy regarding price, product specification, quality, quantity, and information (Johanson & Vahlne, 2017). As such, rigorous and open knowledge transfer/sharing between staff in SMEs is needed to uphold sustainable credibility in SMEs. Against this backdrop, literature has tagged credibility as an influencer to recognise and contextualise multiple external information and knowledge that would reshape SMEs' approach to internationalisation (Song et al., 2018; Zahra & George, 2002). As such, this study considers credibility a complex organisational factor that enhances SMEs' confidence by exhibiting organisational competence. Therefore, organisational credibility is somewhat prioritised to foster SMEs' growth and internationalisation.

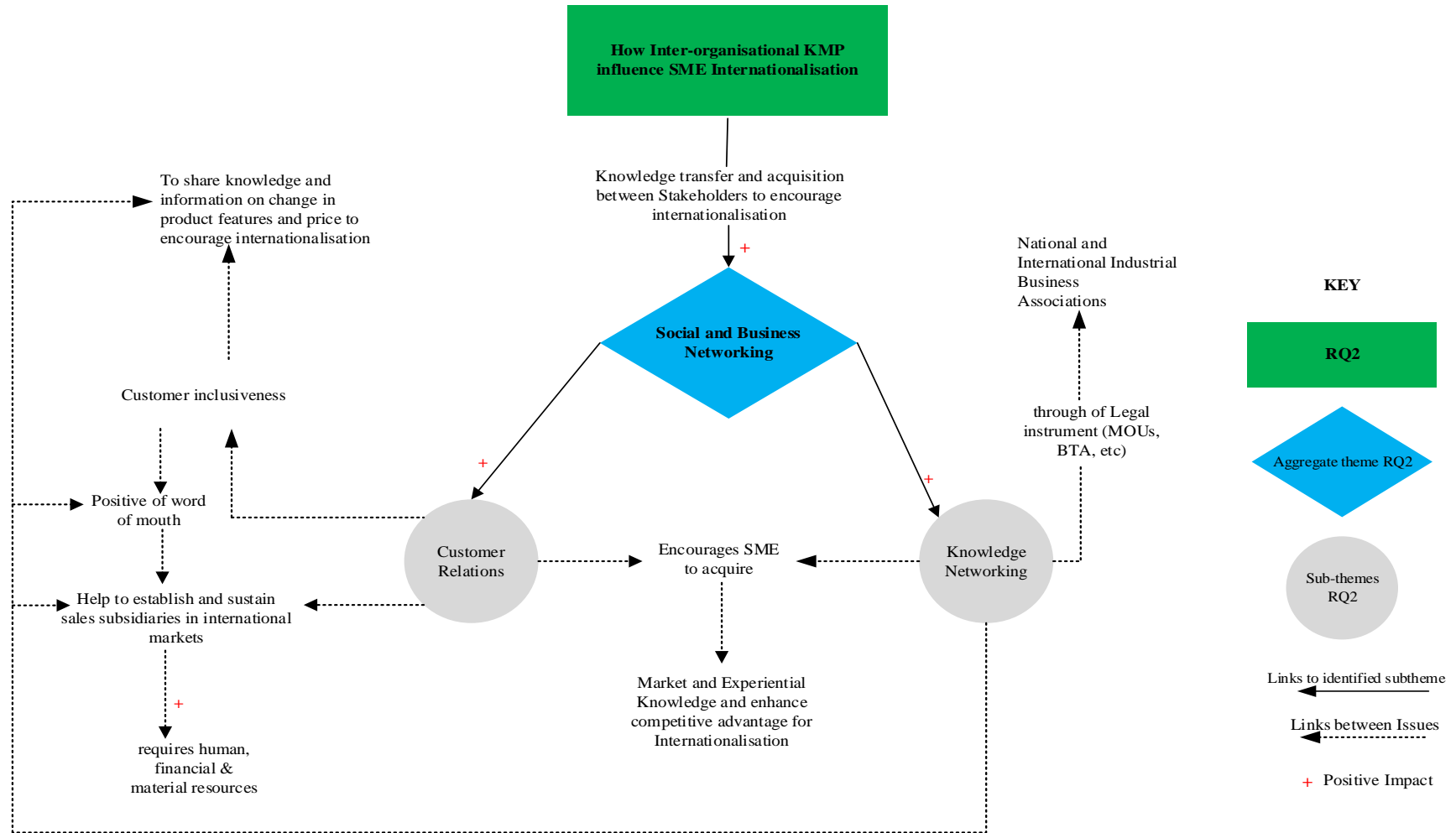
7.3 RQ2: HOW DOES INTER-ORGANISATIONAL KMP INFLUENCE SMEs' INTERNATIONALISATION?

Section 6.3 of the findings focuses on how inter-organisational KMP influence SMEs' participation in international business. The data discoursed that social and business networking between SMEs in Nigeria and their stakeholders is one of the primary ways of creating a cordial and resourceful relationship that encourages the acquisition and sharing of market and experiential knowledge for internationalisation. According to Bundy et al. (2018, p. 477), stakeholders are individuals or groups that can affect or be affected in pursuit of organisational objectives. Therefore, to integrate the mode for SMEs to access inter-organisational KMP, the study further highlights the need for a means by which social and business networks (knowledge development process) can be recognised to increase, and sustain the acquisition and sharing of knowledge and information between SMEs which facilitate a unique competitive advantage and the internationalisation of SMEs (Johanson & Vahlne, 2017; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Thus, the participants disclosed that SMEs in Nigeria are prompt to be associated with numerous platforms that aid the acquisition of information and knowledge for the enhancement of business opportunities and competitiveness. This study identified a list of venues, which include the Continental British Industries (CBI), Global Share Alliance (GSA), Bilateral Chambers of Commerce, African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and the African Women Entrepreneurial Programme (AWEP)/African Growth Opportunities Act (AGO).

Thus, the participants asserted that these platforms had linked many SMEs to gaining active and potential customers in the international markets.

The quest for social and business networking as the factor of inter-organisational KMP to influence SMEs' internationalisation can occasionally be unpredictable; this is because social and business networking are anticipated to agree with the extant organisational culture and policies, especially the financial capacity to fund the identified and suitable platforms to achieve the set objectives for market expansion beyond the national boundaries at a profit (Sinha & Dhall, 2020). Figure 11 below provides a focused report addressing RQ2: how does inter-organisational KMP influence SMEs' internationalisation?

FIGURE 10: ADDRESSING HOW INTER-ORGANISATIONAL KMP INFLUENCE SMES' INTERNATIONALISATION IN NIGERIA



Source: Author (2022)

7.3.1 Customer Relations

With reference to Figure 11, SMEs' adoption and implementation of inter-organisational KMP address the factors inhibiting access to information and knowledge; and this creates a veritable forum for acquiring new knowledge, which further leads to a better and quality relationship between the national and international customers, enhances product quality and increases sales turnover through direct access to market knowledge and information from the target customers. Furthermore, good customer relations give SMEs the leverage to understand entrepreneurial knowledge, serve as the instrument to explore international market opportunities and enhance organisational competency (Libai et al., 2020; Mejri & Umemoto, 2010; Zucchella & Siano, 2014). Besides, this study found that SMEs need to share various product information and knowledge with their customers and consumers to ensure inclusiveness, which could create an equitable ground for good social and business networking between the company and its stakeholders.

Data from the interview suggested that the inclusiveness concept of a company with its customer relations encourages “you (the SME) to listen to your customers and tell them when you change your product features, price, or package”. Furthermore, the study found that SMEs with reliable commercial networks with their customers quickly secure access to resources and markets for established and sustainable sales subsidiaries in the international markets. As such, the importance of customer relations to SMEs cannot be overemphasised; therefore, this study recommended that SMEs endorse essential and reliable customer relations that would create more opportunities for SMEs to know where and how their product performs in the international markets. Furthermore, according to Purwanto et al. (2020), establishing a cordial relationship between SMEs and customers could encourage customers to recommend SMEs' products to potential customers. Consequently, this study suggested the provision of efficient human, financial and material resources to build a good relationship between SMEs and their stakeholders, including customers, consumers, government institutions, and business partners. This, therefore, will encourage effective and efficient commitment processes and implementation by business organisations (Johanson & Vahlne, 2017; Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

7.3.2 Knowledge Networking

Another way inter-organisational KMP influences SMEs' internationalisation is by facilitating knowledge networking. The interview data highlighted that knowledge networking is a critical mechanism that eases the acquisition and sharing of knowledge and information between two or more individuals and SMEs to enhance competitive advantage and encourage

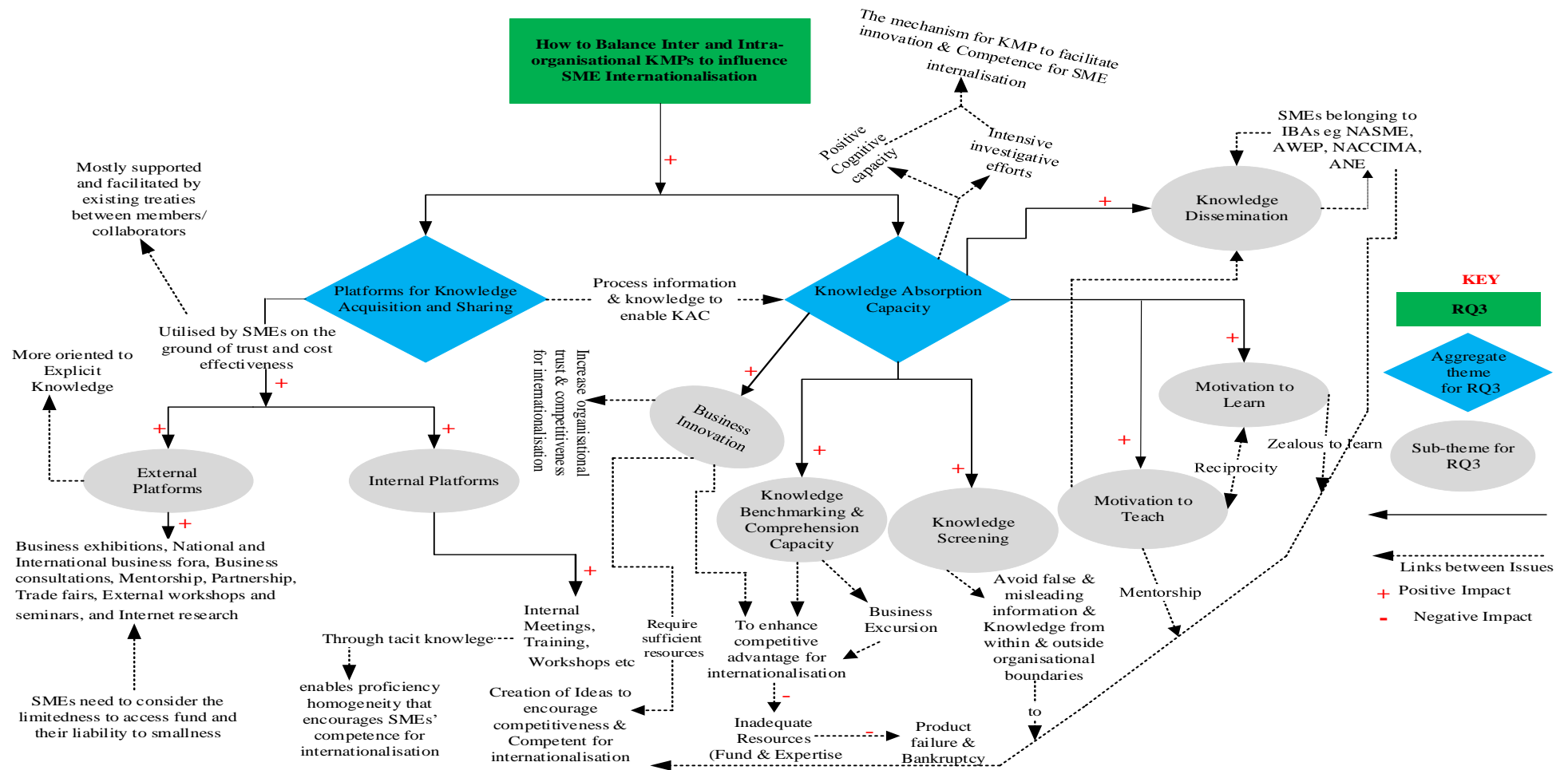
internationalisation. Paul et al. (2017) reported that networks are a linking structure that enables the internationalisation of SMEs. Besides, the international market comprises competent and competitive institutional bodies with different organisational ideas, values, and beliefs for economic growth and development (Beugelsdijk et al., 2017). Accordingly, organisational networking is one of the principal elements needed to enhance credible knowledge development processes for business internationalisation (Johanson & Vahlne, 2017).

Notwithstanding, this study identified a gap in government intervention to strengthen the knowledge network among SMEs in Nigeria. The participants opined that SMEs usually depend on current and comprehensive information and knowledge of the markets to enhance international competitive advantage and increase market performance. This showcased the significance of knowledge networking and revealed that SMEs in Nigeria source knowledge and information through extant and healthy relationships with stakeholders across the national and international context. The stakeholders include governments, competitors, customers, consumers, and IBAs. Therefore, the participants suggest establishing networks with legal instruments such as the memorandum of understanding and bilateral trade and investment treaties. The legal tools provide stakeholders with robust and reliable business safety measures that enable acquiring and sharing business information and knowledge to encourage sustainable organisational competence which enhances internationalisation (Bernaz, 2021).

7.4 RQ3: HOW CAN A COMPANY BALANCE INTER- AND INTRA-ORGANISATIONAL KMPs TO ENHANCE SMEs' INTERNATIONALISATION?

This section addresses how a company can balance inter- and intra-organisational KMPs to enhance internationalisation; the discussion integrates the findings in sections 6.4 and 6.5. This study suggested that to balance inter- and intra-organisational KMPs that would enhance SMEs' internationalisation, there is a need to have veritable platforms through which knowledge can be acquired and shared. Hence, this could also foster adequate knowledge absorption capacity to promote business innovation and competitive advantage in the international target markets. Some studies (Butler & Ferlie, 2020; Zahra & George, 2002) opined that knowledge absorption capacity (KAC) is the fundamental component of KMPs: knowledge acquisition, assimilation, transformation, and exploration. Figure 12 shows the representation of how to balance inter- and intra-organisational KMPs to enhance SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria.

FIGURE 11: ADDRESSING HOW A COMPANY IN NIGERIA CAN BALANCE INTER- AND INTRA-ORGANISATIONAL KMPs TO ENHANCE SMEs' INTERNATIONALISATION



SOURCE: AUTHOR (2022)

7.4.1 Platforms for Knowledge Acquisition and Sharing

Wang and Liu (2019) reported that loyalty is the key factor influencing knowledge sharing between customers and SMEs. Nevertheless, this study found that the key factors affecting knowledge sharing for SMEs' internationalisation include lack of trust between the SMEs and stakeholders as regards cost-effectiveness since SMEs' operation in Nigeria is plagued by limited funds (Igwe et al., 2018). Consequently, the participants highlighted training, business fora, trade exhibitions, seminars, the internet, interpersonal contacts, and IBAs as platforms for acquiring and sharing knowledge that helps in balancing inter- and intra-organisational KMPs to facilitate SME competence for internationalisation. In addition, this study argued that the integration of external and internal platforms provides the dynamism for social interaction and the inclusion strategy to inter- and intra-organisational KMPs. Consequently, the platforms for knowledge acquisition and sharing are categorised into two significant platforms: (i) external platforms for knowledge acquisition and sharing and (ii) internal platforms for knowledge acquisition and sharing.

7.4.1.1 External Platforms for Knowledge Acquisition and Sharing

The participants reported that acquiring and sharing knowledge outside the organisational boundaries require legal instruments such as the memorandum of understanding and other treaties. Bernaz (2021) and Hussein et al. (2016) suggested that business treaties such as the Memorandum of Understanding, Bilateral Trade Agreements etc., define how knowledge can be shared and transferred between individual economic stakeholders, including SMEs. Consequently, the components of external platforms for knowledge sharing and acquisition are not limited to business exhibitions, national and international business fora, business consultations through mentorship and local partnership, trade fairs, external workshops and seminars, and internet research. This study further found that the acquisition of explicit knowledge is pitched on external platforms for knowledge acquisition and transfer.

While the participants recommended external platforms for knowledge acquisition and transfer, they seem not to have accounted for cost implications attached to external platforms, such as the international business fora, workshops, seminars, and exhibitions, since some of the fundamental challenges to SMEs identified by the literature in section 3.4 are limited access to finance and liability of smallness. However, some studies (Axelsson & Johanson, 1992; Pagani & Pardo, 2017; Vahlne & Johanson, 2017) suggest that the participation of SMEs in external platforms provides an open avenue for networking to acquire tacit and explicit knowledge that would enhance SMEs' competency to internationalise through joint business partnerships.

7.4.1.2 Internal Platforms for Knowledge Acquisition and Sharing

Danskin et al. (2005) and Nakauchi et al. (2017) reported that the internal platform for knowledge acquisition and sharing in SMEs is the organisational memory of SMEs, achieved through effective R&D, and this depends on SMEs' capacity to screen, absorb, and integrate the newly acquired knowledge into the knowledge base. Furthermore, this study found that increasing knowledge acquisition and sharing/transfer within an organisation enables proficiency homogeneity that encourages SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria. As such, the study identified that most SMEs in Nigeria had inculcated regular internal meetings, training, and workshops as organisational culture because this instrument has become a means of acquiring and sharing tacit and explicit knowledge within an organisation.

Additionally, the participants suggested that practical knowledge (tacit knowledge) is the most complex knowledge to acquire and transfer to an organisation. Moreover, this, in one way or another, influences the organisational capacity for competitive advantage. As posited by this study, many SMEs may find it challenging to unveil their product architecture to competitors except to the trusted members or staff within the company. Therefore, the SMEs in Nigeria deliberately chose to transfer tacit knowledge to enhance innovation capacity, meet the market demand and maintain standards for their products in the targeted international market.

7.4.2 Business Innovation

Business innovation is a process of acquiring and sharing information and knowledge that would help create new ideas to enable entrepreneurs to gain a competitive advantage in international markets (Oliva et al., 2018; Duradoni & Di Fabio, 2019). Zahra and George (2002) reported that acquiring and sharing information and knowledge are segments of the KMP. As such, knowledge could be sourced from within and outside the organisational boundaries. Therefore, this study found that SMEs need the capacity to source and assimilate knowledge to create relevant ideas that would help enhance organisational competitive advantage for the internationalisation process.

The participants suggested that balancing inter- and intra-organisational KMPs improves SMEs' capacity to encourage a productive KAC, which could help facilitate international business innovation. Consequently, the study found that applying the business innovation concept is one of the ways SMEs could balance the inter- and intra-organisational flow of knowledge to access stakeholder competence and develop an organisational competitive advantage for internationalisation. To achieve a competitive advantage, SMEs formulate a strategy to examine

the target markets and enable them to identify and explore available business opportunities that would determine business innovation to be employed. Thus, this is in line with the state (capabilities and commitments/performance) and change (commitment and knowledge development processes) variables of the Uppsala model (Adebayo et al., 2019; Johanson & Vahlne, 2017).

The participants recommended that inter- and intra-organisational KMPs in SMEs be created through solid synergy of acquiring and sharing knowledge and information that would contribute to business innovation. Thus, the study asserted that business innovation is a strategy to enhance a company's competence to evaluate its product (goods and services) with competitors' products. However, the capacity to absorb knowledge determines the efficiency of business innovation. Therefore, the study revealed that business innovation increases the organisational trust that encourages competition in the international market, especially where specified and regulated product characteristics such as product shape, design, labelling, packaging, size, functionality, or performance play a significant role (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977, 2017).

7.4.3 Knowledge Benchmarking and Comprehension Capacity

This study identified knowledge benchmarking and comprehension capacity as part of the factors SMEs use for balancing inter- and intra-organisational KMPs to enhance competitive advantage that will influence internationalisation. Although, the participants opined that inadequate resources, which include funds and expertise, could lead to product failure and organisational bankruptcy. Teece (2014) and (Johanson & Vahlne, 2017) suggested that SMEs need to be detailed and operate with the belief of uncertainty, partial ignorance, and risk in a manageable state. The data collected for this study revealed that no business organisation (SME) in Nigeria operates in isolation. Therefore, amid intensive competition between SMEs and multinational companies in the international markets, there is a tendency to collaborate to acquire and share information and knowledge among other entrepreneurs, especially those in industrial business associations with common objectives (Paul et al., 2017).

Furthermore, data from the interviews suggested that one of the fundamental means of engaging in knowledge benchmarking that would facilitate SMEs' understanding of the international market trend is to embark on frequent national and international business excursions to enhance competitive advantage for internationalisation. The primary objective of the business excursion is to improve the knowledge development processes by identifying and learning new things

carried out by active and potential competitors (Johanson & Vahlne, 2017; Usman et al., 2019). In addition, Hussain et al. (2019) posited that the critical goal of knowledge benchmarking is to build on competitors' current and significant business innovations to enhance competitive advantage in the international markets. Therefore, knowledge benchmarking and comprehension may require SMEs to compare their products with competitors' products. The data from the interviews further argued that most SMEs compare their products with some selected competitor's products in the targeted markets; however, this requires more time, expertise, and finance, which may not be adequately achievable at the disposal of SMEs.

7.4.4 Knowledge Dissemination

Another aspect of KAC on how a company can balance inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation is knowledge dissemination. The participants underscored that knowledge dissemination is an essential tool for knowledge absorption capacity that SMEs can use to balance inter- and intra-organisational KMPs that encourage participation in international business. For example, Alavi and Leidner (2001) opined that knowledge dissemination is the most integral aspect of KMP that promotes organisational knowledge, innovation capacity and sustainable competitive advantage. Consequently, this called for SMEs to balance the inter- and intra-organisational KMPs to source adequate and commendable knowledge. Moreover, this study found that many SMEs are members of at least one IBA (for example, NACCIMA, NASME, AWEP Nigeria Chapter, and others). Thus, joining these IBAs helps them to disseminate the required knowledge and information to facilitate internationalisation.

Furthermore, this study found that most IBAs in Nigeria have made knowledge dissemination a mantra for influencing knowledge-sharing between members. From the information provided by the participants, it is anticipated that the trend to share both tacit and explicit knowledge is less attainable, except for the explicit knowledge between members. Moreover, the explicit knowledge disseminated between the SMEs is said to have tremendously helped SMEs manage non-tariff barriers to internationalisation, which are related to cultural differences, language, beliefs, and norms (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Roy et al., 2016). However, tacit knowledge is converted into explicit knowledge for easy assimilation (Kmieciak, 2019; Nonaka, 2009). Consequently, this study found that video coverage and face-to-face knowledge dissemination have contributed to the mastering and converting tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge. Therefore, disseminating knowledge to improve staff capacity has given some SMEs an edge over their competitors as regards internationalisation (Farooq, 2018; Wang & Liu, 2019); it has

as well exemplified how SMEs in Nigeria balance inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for efficient internationalisation.

7.4.5 Knowledge Screening

Lee and Lee (2007) opined that the fundamental objective of knowledge management is to enhance organisational performance by approaching processes, which include the effective screening of acquired information and knowledge that the organisation would use. However, this study discovered that explicit knowledge transferred between SMEs and the stakeholders is somewhat collected from unreliable sources that might affect the internationalisation of SMEs. Therefore, the participants recommended identifying the primary source of knowledge for SMEs in Nigeria, which is not limited to staff, industrial business associations, and government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). However, the participants suggested that SMEs that acquire internal or external knowledge and information must screen and validate the knowledge and information before they are used for entrepreneurial purposes.

This study further found out that some SMEs regulating institutions in Nigeria, such as FMITI, SMEDAN, NACCIMA, NASME, ANE, and AWEP, have been concerned with networking knowledge and information transfer that should galvanise the internationalisation of SMEs from Nigeria. However, the issue of misleading information and knowledge is predominantly apparent when the information and knowledge user fails to effectively investigate and evaluate the information and knowledge acquired from other sources (Zahra & George, 2002). Therefore, this study discoursed that most industrial business associations of SMEs, including individual SMEs in Nigeria, are aware of the need for knowledge screening to balance the inter- and intra-organisational KMPs which will help for effective SMEs' internationalisation but lack the competent capacity and social networking for comprehensive knowledge and information screening.

7.4.6 Motivation to Learn

Amidst the continuous change and complex national and international competition, the participants argued that motivation to learn and implement new ideas in SMEs enhances organisational innovation and competitive advantage in the international markets. Johansson and Vahlne (1990) reported that the significance of creating the organisational networks model is to justify the modes and motivation of the internationalisation process by putting an organisation in a multilateral context to encourage a balance in inter- and intra-organisational relations. Moreover, this study found out that SMEs in Nigeria are yearning for actual

knowledge and information from external sources and balancing it with the intra-organisational KMP to promote competence and innovation for internationalisation. However, the motivation to learn depends on the capability to make the commitments that should strengthen the social and business relationships between the knowledge facilitator and learner (Johanson & Vahlne, 2017).

Furthermore, this study found that most of the executive members of IBAs and individual SME operators in Nigeria are zealous to learn new concepts that would contribute to organisational growth and competitive advantage. Vuori and Okkonen (2012) reported that the motivation to learn new ideas from the external source and balance it with internal knowledge is invigorated by the self-actualisation of feeling good at work and the social and financial reward for contributing to a positive outcome. Therefore, data from the interview suggested that SMEs should build the enthusiasm to learn new ideas that would help balance inter- and intra-organisational KMPs to encourage SMEs' internationalisation.

7.4.7 Motivation to Teach

The study suggests that the motivation to teach in the flow of knowledge towards SMEs' internationalisation involves the factors that drive individuals to transfer as well as share knowledge that would develop intellectual capabilities for business growth and sustainability (Vuori & Okkonen, 2012). The participants suggested different ways in which Staff in SMEs could be motivated to transfer and share information and knowledge to enable the frequent flow of knowledge within and outside the organisational boundaries.

This study found that most SMEs in Nigeria are encouraged to facilitate the frequent flow of information and knowledge within and outside organisational boundaries. Most significantly, the SMEs that belong to a stratum of IBAs consider it necessary to transfer information and knowledge to some trusted colleagues and stakeholders to develop and sustain credible social and business relationships. The participants further opined that this could instigate knowledge reciprocity among the business stakeholders.

This study further revealed the driving force for sharing and transferring information and knowledge to help balance inter- and intra-organisational KMPs which aids SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria. Thus, this is to develop competence to create job and business opportunities and ensure that global standards and the safety of products are met. However, this study found that there are mixed feelings about the possibility of facing treachery from the receivers of information and knowledge. The mixed feelings of betrayal depict that there is no

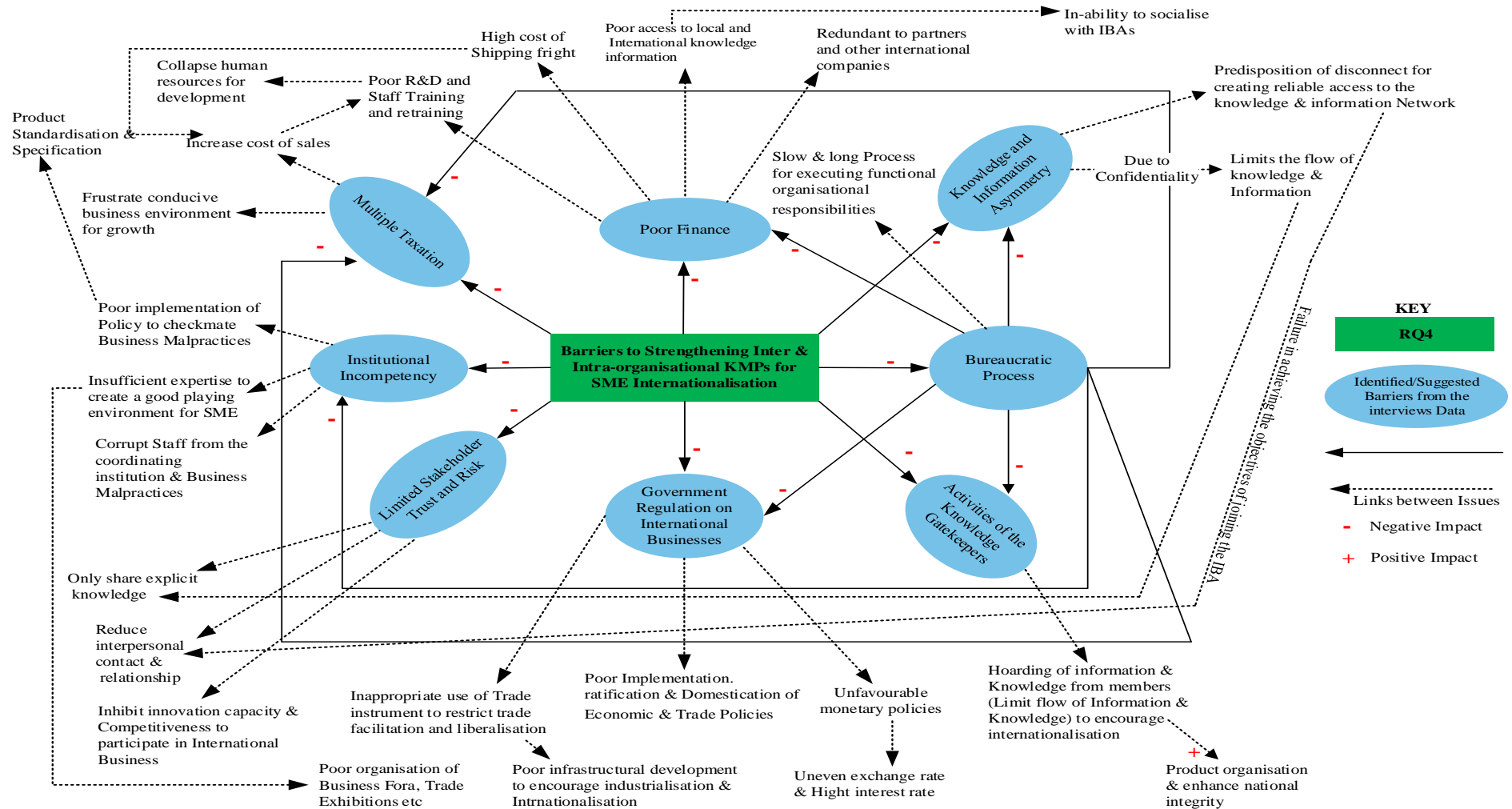
robust institutional framework to protect Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), or the Nigerian SMEs are unaware of its existence and enforcement procedure in the country. Nevertheless, IPR is often and expressly associated with KMP between independent business organisations, including SMEs (Taubman & Watal, 2022).

The data from the interview suggested the need for practical implementation of network theory between SMEs and the stakeholders (SMEs operator, regulators, customers, competitors, and legislators) in Nigeria. This is because the network theory creates an avenue to justify the approaches of motivation to teach through networking (Chetty & Holm, 2000). As such, the study reported that the motivation to teach had made a lot of SME operators mentors to potential SMEs and the business regulators and legislators on economic policies amendment, formulation, ratification, and domestication. Moreover, the primary intent of business mentoring in Nigeria is to create more job opportunities and enhance youth productivity, influencing SMEs' internationalisation from the Nigerian background.

7.5 RQ4: WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO STRENGTHENING INTER- AND INTRA-ORGANISATIONAL KMPS FOR SMEs' INTERNATIONALISATION?

In Section 6.6, the data from the participants recommended a list of factors as the barriers to strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMPS for SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria. These factors suggested as barriers to strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMPS are discussed below with empirical evidence. Thus, the factors include limited stakeholder trust and risk, poor finance, knowledge and information asymmetry, the activities of knowledge gatekeepers, institutional incompetence, multiple taxations, bureaucratic process, and government regulation on international businesses. Figure 13 below shows the representation of the barriers to strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMPS which aids SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria.

FIGURE 12: ADDRESSING THE BARRIERS TO STRENGTHENING INTER- AND INTRA-ORGANISATIONAL KMPs FOR THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF SMEs IN NIGERIA



Source: Author (2022)

7.5.1 Limited Stakeholder Trust and Risk

Previous studies (for example, Gu et al., 2002; Ajmal et al., 2017; Zeffane, 2015) suggested that trust and risk are intertwined factors that require a careful management process to strengthen inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation. However, the participants of this study opined that with a weak propagation or the absence of stakeholder trust and the ability to take risks, inter- and intra-organisational KMPs which should aid the internationalisation process would likely fail; this is because inter- and intra-organisational KMPs concurrently require interpersonal contact and relationships between the knowledge source and users to create and sustain business security (Pirson et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the data from the interviews showed that many SMEs in Nigeria found it difficult to trust their competitors in knowledge sharing and transfer, except few SMEs endowed with more experiential knowledge. For example, this study found that SMEs experienced deceitful business behaviour from their fellow business partners and competitors, leading to insolvency. Therefore, considering the lack of trust and the inability to bear the risks of knowledge sharing with some stakeholders (most notably, the competitors and governments) to strengthen inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation, the participants recommended that SMEs may need to strategise and secure organisational knowledge and information repository. Consequently, this prevents balancing inter- and intra-organisational KMPs that should influence SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria.

A number of studies (Usai et al., 2018; Nakauchi et al., 2017; Johanson & Vehlne, 2017; Mejri & Umemoto, 2010; Johanson & Mattsson, 1988; Zahra & George, 2002) posited that SMEs with an internationalisation concept need experiential knowledge (multiple skills and the capacity to identify and comprehend knowledge and information that should enable the process of innovation) to survive in highly competitive international markets. Accordingly, this study opined that most SMEs in IBAs with common aims and objectives are prompt to transfer explicit knowledge. Nevertheless, SMEs with internationalisation concepts need tacit and explicit knowledge for effective innovation to foster competitive advantage in the international market (Deng & Zhang, 2018; Lei et al., 2021; Ranucci & Souder, 2015; Zhang & Jiang, 2015). Consequently, the participants opined that the lack of stakeholder trust and the inability to bear the risk had become one of the tough challenges to strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria.

7.5.2 Poor finance

Some studies (for example, Rahman et al., 2022; Eltahir, 2018; Kraus et al., 2017; Torres, 2006) posited that poor access to finance is one of the critical factors affecting SMEs' operational functions; this, in turn, limits SMEs' capacity to participate in international businesses. However, the participants of this study stated that SMEs in Nigeria are eager to source funds to strengthen inter- and intra-organisational KMPs to enhance organisational competence and competitive advantage for SMEs' internationalisation, as well as create a veritable avenue for identifying more market opportunities in the international markets. On this backdrop, this study found out that the cost of shipping freight in some developing countries, such as Turkey, India, and Nigeria, has become expensive; thus, the financing and implementation of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs somehow contribute to the positive impact of the wood packaging strategy, which creates an international market opportunity for SMEs in the wood business in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the participants argued that the operational functions for inter- and intra-organisational KMPs that facilitate the internationalisation of business organisations, including SMEs, are not limited to research and development (R&D), training, and retraining of staff; as such, these operational functions require funds for effective implementation. Nevertheless, this study found that many SMEs in Nigeria have been discouraged by poor access to funds to sponsor human resources development that should strengthen inter- and intra-organisational KMPs to facilitate SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria. According to Agwu and Emeti (2014), the institutional bodies (Micro-Finance Policy, Regulatory and Supervisory Framework for Nigeria; SMEEIS; SMESGC, CTG Fund, NERFUND, BOI, and others) established by the Nigerian Government at the Federal, State and Local levels to ensure the funding for the development and growth of SMEs in Nigeria have failed to accomplish their statutory responsibilities in seeing to the internationalisation of SMEs in Nigeria.

In addition, this study found that most of the SMEs in Nigeria acquire advanced and comprehensive knowledge to meet international production and packaging standards has declined due to the persistent challenge of poor access to funds to strengthen inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation. Therefore, the participants suggested that SMEs need to speedily galvanise the partnerships of multinational organisations into supporting inter- and intra-organisational KMPs while reducing subsequent barriers to inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria.

7.5.3 Knowledge and Information Asymmetry

Whitehead et al. (2016) suggested that knowledge and information asymmetry is a complex factor where either or both the source and recipient of knowledge and information suffer a decrease in the knowledge and information transfer success. Accordingly, the participants of this study discoursed that SMEs in Nigeria need factual, adequate, comprehensive, and up-to-date market information and knowledge to strengthen and sustain inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for effective SMEs' internationalisation. However, the contending issue this study found is the limited inflows and outflows of information and knowledge about the international markets within and outside the organisational boundaries of some SMEs. As such, this led to a predisposition of disconnect against creating reliable access to the knowledge network between the information and knowledge source and recipient for SMEs' internationalisation (Hahl et al., 2016; Johansson & Vahlne, 2017; Johansson & Mattsson, 1988; Zahra & George, 2002).

Furthermore, the data from the interviews revealed that all SMEs in Nigeria belong to at least one industrial business association; and the fundamental objective of this network is to stimulate internationalisation by creating legitimate fora that would foster social relationships for the exchange of information and knowledge, and adhering to the framework of the environmental condition between the economic stakeholders. Nevertheless, this study found out that SMEs in Nigeria find it very challenging to transfer or share factual, adequate, comprehensive, and up-to-date knowledge and information with their members who are not privy to the knowledge and information to build organisational competence. Therefore, it is evident that there is a lack of appropriate and precise information and knowledge, which serves as a barrier to strengthening and sustaining practical implementation of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs to enhance SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria.

7.5.4 Activities of the Knowledge Gatekeeper

This study considered the activities of knowledge gatekeepers as a barrier to strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria. According to Petruzzelli et al. (2010) and Haas (2015), knowledge gatekeepers control the quality of knowledge and act as bridges to provide access to information and knowledge that facilitates innovation within and outside an organisation. This study found that most of the SMEs in Nigeria belong to various groups of IBAs that are well-recognised and function as national and international knowledge gatekeepers. These IBAs influence the KMPs that should enhance members' (SMEs) competitive advantage and encourage internationalisation. Nevertheless, data from the interviews reiterated that the knowledge gatekeepers' core responsibility of knowledge gatekeepers is to protect the integrity of the association and the nation in the diaspora. Hence, on

this threshold, the knowledge gatekeepers could invariably impede the free outflow and inflow of information and knowledge between SMEs and the stakeholders at the international and national levels due to the rigidity of knowledge and information control (Hervas-Oliver & Alborn-Garrigos, 2014).

However, the participants suggested that SME operators and IBAs must act as knowledge gatekeepers to control the flow of complex information and knowledge to enhance confidentiality. Thus, hoarding and disseminating poorly developed information and knowledge could encourage knowledge and information asymmetry. Moreover, as suggested in section 7.5.3, knowledge and information asymmetry have brought about disarray, and this could prevent interpersonal and organisational relationships that should invariably influence SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria.

7.5.5 Institutional Incompetence

Another factor this study identified as a barrier to strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation is institutional incompetence. Torkkeli et al. (2018) considered an institution as a recognised structure with regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements or pillars. Data from the interviews for this study showed that the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria might have established institutions with clear and focused objectives. However, the argument is that some of these institutions lack the expertise to create a veritable playing ground for strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation. For instance, the participants illustrated that some government ministries, departments and agencies, and IBAs find inviting entrepreneurs to the local and international fora challenging. Moreover, participating in local and international fora creates and strengthens social and business relationships – networking for knowledge acquisition and sharing (Costa et al., 2016; Oparaocha, 2015).

This study also found that some institutional bodies in the country that regulate SMEs' activities against all forms of trade malpractice are ineffective and corrupt; consequently, the incompetent entrepreneurs (SMEs) are tagged as 'Taunt.' The participants further revealed that most of the Taunts participating in international business are government officials who lack practical and in-depth knowledge of the international entry market. On the backdrop, this research consented to the advice by De Luca and Atuahene-Gima (2007) that being knowledgeable about the international market of entry requires the ability to appropriately identify, collect, and use information and knowledge about the customers and the competitors for product innovation performance, and earn a favourable competitive advantage at the international market.

Nevertheless, the study recommends the need for competent staff to enact and implement appropriate policies to encourage knowledge acquisition and sharing and safeguard the SME subsector in Nigeria. Moreover, this study found that product quality and quantity are fundamental factors that should certify SMEs' capability and recognition to strengthen inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation. However, the lack of competency by some constitutionally established institutions to check product standardisation has compromised the protocol. Therefore, this has pushed for the loss of integrity by some SMEs that should encourage knowledge and information network that would strengthen inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria (Musteen et al., 2014).

7.5.6 Multiple Taxation

The participants posited that tax payment is one of the entrepreneurs' legal obligations that help governments raise funds for national growth and development. However, this study found that multiple taxations are imposed on SMEs; this frustrates a conducive international business environment that should strengthen inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation.

Furthermore, Tabet and Onyeukwu (2019) opined that multiple taxation levied on SMEs in Nigeria had created a barrier to enhancing SMEs' capabilities for making financial commitments to strengthen inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation, which could subsequently reduce the lifespan of the SMEs. Besides, this study found that the multiple taxes paid by the SME operators in Nigeria include but not limited to personal income tax and company tax paid to many and different representatives from the departments in local government authorities, the states government, the federal government, and community taskforce agents.

According to Kraus et al. (2017), the fundamental challenge for SMEs' participation in international business is inadequate funds to finance relevant business operational functions that would enhance organisational competitive advantage. For example, as SMEs are to pay multiple, usually disproportionate taxes, how would they be able to raise funds to sponsor the training and retraining of staff as well as facilitate R&D? Moreover, knowledge acquisition and transfer or sharing are the essential elements for KMPs that enhance organisational competitive advantage and innovation, which further encourages the internationalisation of SMEs (Apostolou & Mentzas, 2003; Saxunova et al., 2018). Consequently, the participants advised that the government at all levels needs to develop a modality to help reduce the multiple tax burden on

SMEs; this would help to save the limited financial resources for developing human resources and carrying out appropriate annual R&D.

7.5.7 Bureaucratic Process

This study noted the bureaucratic process as another critical barrier to strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria. With evidence from the empirical findings in Sections 6.6.2 to 6.6.6 and Section 6.6.8, this study finds that this barrier as well as other barriers such as poor finance, knowledge and information asymmetry, activities of knowledge gatekeepers, institutional incompetence, multiple taxation and government regulation hamper the facilitation of business. However, making decisions on overcoming these barriers is part of the essential responsibilities of the Nigerian government ministries, departments, and agencies established to create an enabling business environment.

The salient question to this section is how Nigerian government institutions can create an enabling environment to strengthen inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation. Are there strict and excessive bureaucratic processes for accessible networking between entrepreneurs and government institutions responsible for resolving challenges to business internationalisation? The participants opined that the bureaucratic process is a slow and excessive process for executing functional organisational responsibilities. Furthermore, the study found that most bureaucratic processes are caused by affiliating unnecessary political portfolios to individuals without expertise. According to Krammer (2019), in a context where there is an unreasonable bureaucratic process, bribery becomes an easy and available option; this, in turn, affects SMEs' innovative performance and internationalisation processes.

As a result of slow and excessive bureaucratic processes, the data from the interviews reported that many SMEs are confused and worried about how to identify the vital and reliable government personnel to report the challenging factors to identify, acquire, process and transfer/share knowledge that will encourage SMEs' participation in international businesses.

7.5.8 Government Regulations on International Businesses

Following the participants' recommendations in Section 6.6.8, the study found that the Nigerian government policies and regulations for SMEs' internationalisation have been unpredictable in strengthening the implementation of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs to influence SMEs' internationalisation. Hence, the study highlighted that governments (most significantly, at the local, states and federal government levels) seem to be at the vanguard of formulating, signing,

ratifying, domesticating, and implementing trade and economic policies that govern national and international business activities in their respective jurisdictions. Nevertheless, trade policy instruments (For example, tariffs, subsidies, import quotas, voluntary export restraints, local content requirements, administrative policies, and antidumping duties) could be primarily used as barriers to international trade liberalisation and facilitation. Thus, these instruments could, in the end, frustrate the effort of SMEs to adopt and strengthen the application of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria.

Consequent on the above argument, the data collected for this study uncovered that SMEs from Nigeria find it challenging to acquire and share knowledge from the EU region compared to other African counterparts from the Francophone countries. Thus, this study found that the perception of this sentiment was based on the Nigerian government's refusal to sign the proposed West Africa and EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). Nevertheless, the fundamental provision for creating and implementing EPA between the West African countries and the EU countries is to liberalise and facilitate trade between the two (Adetula & Osegbue, 2020; Khan et al., 2021). Therefore, considering the inadequate infrastructural development for industrialisation in the West African region, the participants from this study argued that liberalising trade between West African countries and the European Union may cause the weaker region to become a dumping ground of goods.

Furthermore, participating in international business for exhibitions, trade fairs, and seminars are critical ways to strengthen inter- and intra-organisational KMPs to enhance organisational innovation and competitive advantage for SMEs' internationalisation. Nevertheless, this study found that government-restricted access to foreign exchange for business operators has become a substantial impediment for SMEs to finance their participation in international social and business interactions. Thus, this has become a barrier to strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria.

7.6 SUMMARY

This chapter has discussed the content of the previous chapters and described in detail the most critical empirical findings from this study. Hence, the researcher analysed the findings within the confine of the objectives, research questions, literature, and theories, to ascertain how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs influence SMEs' internationalisation. Therefore, the next chapter of the study will focus on theoretical and practical/policy contributions to knowledge articulated from the empirical findings from the Nigerian background, limitations of the research and recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter of the thesis discusses findings from the empirical data collected within the context of the objectives, literature, and theories. This chapter will see to the conclusion of this study. The conclusion chapter of the study outlines the key findings from the empirical investigation in line with the research questions and research objectives, as well as discusses the contributions of the study to knowledge, practice and policy, the limitations that affect the scope and empirical results that should provide more detailed findings to the research questions. Finally, the last section of this chapter will provide critical recommendations for future research based on the previous literature and key findings from this study.

8.2 THE KEY FINDINGS

Chapters Two and Three of the study underscored critical areas on how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs can influence SMEs' internationalisation and the critical empirical overview of SMEs in Nigeria to qualify the adaptation and implementation of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs within the SMEs section of Nigeria. Moreover, from the outline of SMEs in Nigeria in chapter three, this study highlighted that the government of Nigeria created viable mechanisms to enable full industrialisation and internationalisation of SME subsector in Nigeria (Okpara, 2009; Ogunrin & Inegbenebor, 2015; National MSMEs Survey, 2017; Babatunde, 2016; Ajayi, 2016; Nik & Nnabuike, 2017; Mpi, 2019; Chandra et al., 2020). Nevertheless, from the researcher's knowledge, there are no adequate studies and proof of robust support and protective institutional mechanisms to eradicate the fear and challenges of the adoption and application of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs to enhance skills for SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria (Tabet & Onyeukwu, 2019). Therefore, this triggered four (4) key research questions for this study, which include:

RQ1: How does intra-organisational KMP influence SMEs' internationalisation?

RQ2: How does inter-organisational KMP affect SMEs' internationalisation?

RQ3: How can a company balance inter- and intra-organisational KMPs to enhance SMEs' internationalisation? and

RQ4: Using empirical evidence, what are the barriers to strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation?

This study focused on two significant angles: inter- and intra-organisational KMPs and SMEs' internationalisation processes and adopted a multiple case studies approach based on the

participants' experiences (interpretivism research philosophical approach) to provide empirical findings to the research questions. In addition, the researcher conducted sixteen (16) interviews with participants from the SMEs subsector and some selected organisations that play critical roles in facilitating and liberalising SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria through inter- and intra-organisational KMPs.

Additionally, this study discussed the application of internationalisation and knowledge management theory (Uppsala model) in answering the research questions. The theory/model illustrates organisational competence, relationships and cost efficiency as critical international business strategies that enable SMEs' competitiveness for internationalisation. Sections 8.2.1 to 8.2.4 of the chapter will underscore the essential findings of the research questions.

8.2.1 Key Findings for RQ1

RQ1 critically investigated how intra-organisational KMP influences the internationalisation of SMEs in Nigeria. The investigation under RQ1 recommended that intra-organisational KMP efficiently creates corporate competitiveness through enhanced networking between relevant departments and individuals in a company to share and transfer relevant knowledge. The data opined that intra-organisational KMP critically contributes to the efficient and strategic organisational planning and appraisal of scarce human and material resources to enhance organisational competency for the internationalisation of SMEs. It is critical for SMEs in Nigeria with an internationalisation concept to identify the market problems that would create international business opportunities. Also, this further noted that improving organisational competency depends on access to human and material resources and staff capacity to absorb relevant knowledge and information.

Regarding credibility, the discussion in chapter 7 suggested that intra-organisational KMP contributes to SMEs' credibility in Nigeria. Consequently, this study indicated that credibility is one of the vital organisational factors that uphold the possibility of excelling in national and international businesses in Nigeria. Thus, the participants noted that most outstanding SMEs in Nigeria with internationalisation concepts integrate credibility into the organisational culture. Therefore, the study recommended credibility as an aftermath of managerial competence that strengthens business confidence and competitiveness to foster SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria.

8.2.2 Key Findings for RQ2

In measuring inter-organisational KMP, this study noted that KMP is a system that supports SMEs in creating social and business relationships between external and internal stakeholders to facilitate internationalisation in Nigeria through established platforms. This study underscored these platforms in section 6.4 (internal and external platforms for knowledge acquisition and sharing). Besides, most of the inter-organisational KMPs which aid SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria are constellations of IBAs, which are not limited to NACCIMA, NANTS, ANE, AWEP, CBI, and GSA. These IBAs formed relationships between companies and customers within and outside different countries. The participants recommended that social and business networking as the factor of inter-organisational KMPs meant to influence SMEs' internationalisation could become unreliable when there is no pact with the organisational culture, policies, and financial capacity. Thus, the study noted that inter-organisational KMP influences SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria through two key factors: customer relations and knowledge networking.

Regarding customer relations, section 6.3.1 revealed that the adoption and implementation of inter-organisational KMPs by SMEs in Nigeria allows the opportunity to acquire new knowledge and establish the outlook for competitive product architecture, product quality, and increased sales turnover. In addition, critical social and customer relationships acquaint SMEs with the market and entrepreneurial knowledge (Johanson & Vahlne, 2017; Musteen et al., 2014). This, however, also explore how inter-organisational KMP enhances knowledge networking to influence SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria. The participants observed that SMEs in Nigeria often rely on knowledge networking to acquire current and comprehensive information and knowledge through existing and healthy external relationships with stakeholders. And the stakeholders include competitors, national and international governments, customers, consumers, and IBA. Meanwhile, the study revealed that most inter-organisational KMPs in Nigeria are protected and sustained by legal instruments such as the memorandum of association and bilateral or multilateral treaties.

8.2.3 Key Findings for RQ3

This study evaluates the relevance of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation in RQ2 and RQ1 and argues for the need to explore how to balance inter- and intra-organisational KMPs to develop the viability of ensuring competitive advantage and innovations that would encourage internationalisation. The participants advised that one of the fundamental ways to balance inter- and intra-organisational KMPs is to establish reliable and sustainable knowledge acquisition and transfer platforms. Accordingly, this study classified these

platforms into internal platforms (internally organised meetings, training, workshops, and staff-to-staff contact) and external platforms of knowledge acquisition, transfer and sharing (National and international business fora, business exhibitions, business consultations through mentorship, trade fairs, external workshops and seminars, and internet search engines).

Furthermore, after a critical review of the literature on the KMPs and illustration of responses from the participants, this study highlighted business innovation, knowledge benchmarking and comprehension capacity, knowledge dissemination, knowledge screening, and motivation to learn and teach as some of the critical factors on how companies such as SMEs can balance inter- and intra-organisational KMPs to influence their internationalisation. Besides, this study observed that these factors depend on effectively utilising the Knowledge Absorption Capacity (KAC) to build reliable information and knowledge to encourage competitive advantage for SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria.

8.2.4 Key Findings for RQ4

Following the experiential level influence of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs on SMEs' internationalisation shown in this study, it is evident that inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria have not been well-utilised due to the barriers this study found. Consequent on the empirical investigation, the study identified some complex and correlated barriers to strengthening the application of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria. For example, KMPs require reliable and sustainable interpersonal contact and relationships between the knowledge users and the sources built by trust (Pirson et al., 2017). Nevertheless, this study found that many SMEs in Nigeria with internationalisation concepts face challenges in acquiring, sharing and transferring knowledge with the stakeholders, such as co-workers, customers, competitors and government officials, due to the lack of trust and the fear of possible business insolvency.

This study considered poor finance as one of the critical barriers to improving inter- and intra-organisational KMP for SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria. Hence, there is a persistent argument that insufficient financial resources have been tagged as the major barrier to the growth and development of SMEs in Nigeria (Abekh, 2017; Akinyemi & Adejumo, 2017; Emezue, 2017; Mpi, 2019; Okpara, 2011; Saidi et al., 2019). Nevertheless, this study observed that SMEs in Nigeria need funds to carry out operational functions such as research and development, training and retraining their staff. Thus, the insufficient funds for SMEs in Nigeria had weakened the capacity of some SMEs to push for the acquisition and sharing of the required knowledge and information that would enhance organisational competitiveness in the international markets. This

could limit the actualisation of the elements (capabilities, commitment processes, commitments/performance, and knowledge development processes) of Uppsala's theory of internationalisation in Nigeria (Johanson & Vahlne, 2017). Against this backdrop, this study recommended the need for SMEs in Nigeria to stimulate business partnerships with credible multinational companies to support the growth and practice of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation.

It has become a tradition in Nigeria for SMEs to belong to at least one IBA; this ritual promotes social and business networking for acquiring and sharing knowledge and information among corporate organisations. Nevertheless, Nigeria's SMEs are having trouble accessing accurate, adequate, and comprehensive knowledge and information, which has significantly affected the strengthening of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria. In addition, one of the fundamental functions of knowledge gatekeepers is to hoard knowledge and information from individuals, which could somewhat obstruct the development of interpersonal and business relationships that can facilitate the internationalisation of SMEs.

The Government of Nigeria might have established some key regulated institutions such as ministries, departments, agencies and IBAs to monitor and control the activities of corporate organisations, including the SMEs, at the Local, State and Federal Government levels. However, according to the participants, some institutions lack the competency to create genuine and sustainable programmes encouraging business and social relationships to support inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria. Moreover, multiple taxation has somewhat become a factor that disintegrates the attitude of SMEs in Nigeria to take financial commitment and budget funds from their profit to fund the training and retraining of new and old staff. In the long run, this could impede the strengthening of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria.

The decision to resolve the barriers to strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria somewhat requires government support and interventions. Consequently, this could trigger the question of how supportive the Local, State, and Federal Governments are as regards acquiring and sharing knowledge and information to enhance the competency of SMEs from Nigeria to participate in international businesses. It is evident in chapter three that the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has to some extent given the support that would enhance the acquisition and sharing of information and knowledge to foster SMEs' internationalisation. Nevertheless, the bureaucratic process by the SME regulators

at the local, state, and federal levels in Nigeria has frustrated business and social networking between government officials and SME operators.

Lastly, this study highlighted that government regulation on international business fortified the barriers to strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria. As it is, the roles of government in formulating, signing, ratifying, and domesticating bilateral and multilateral trade and economic policies cannot be overemphasised. However, the participants argued that government need to consider carefully and legislate microeconomic (labour market regulation, corporate taxation, and product market standards) and macroeconomic (fiscal, monetary, and exchange rate policies) policies that would help create a conducive business environment for the internationalisation of SME subsector in Nigeria.

8.3 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

The primary aim of this study is to investigate how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs influence SMEs' internationalisation, with Nigeria as the unit of analysis and the SMEs in Nigeria as the unit of observation. Consequently, this study addresses identified gaps and makes significant contributions. The contributions of this study are captured into two major categories: i) contributions to knowledge and ii) contributions to policies and practice.

8.3.1 Contributions to Knowledge

In comparison to the body of literature that has explored the concepts of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs and SMEs' internationalisation (Al-Jabri & Al-Busaidi, 2018; Cheong et al., 2019; de Zubielqui et al., 2019; Easterby-Smith et al., 2008; Khvatova et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2008; Lombardi, 2019; Nakauchi et al., 2017; Usman et al., 2019), it is evident that previous studies and peer reviews on the influence of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs on SMEs' internationalisation in Africa (Nigeria, to be specific) to the best of the researcher's knowledge has been under-investigated. This study conducted empirical research on how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs influence SMEs' internationalisation, focusing on Nigeria. Consequently, this study contributes to the knowledge as it provides empirical knowledge and showcases the experiences of SMEs and SME regulators on how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs influence SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria.

Firstly, this study revealed that intra-organisational KMP is one of the vital mechanisms influencing the proficiency of organisational factors within the context of SMEs in Nigeria. The organisational factors identified by this study within the context of SMEs in Nigeria include organisational planning, organisational appraisal, credibility, and organisational competency.

Moreover, the organisational factors directly deal with how SMEs in Nigeria internally manage knowledge and information to achieve the corporate competitive advantage that will facilitate internationalisation (Daily et al., 2007; Massoud et al., 2011; Tung et al., 2014). Therefore, the organisational competency of SMEs in Nigeria that will facilitate internationalisation depends on access to efficient human resources management that will enhance the capacity of staff to absorb available and relevant knowledge and information (Butler & Ferlie, 2020; Zahra & George, 2002).

Secondly, most SMEs in Nigeria acquire and share knowledge through inter-organisational KMP (social and business relationships) with the aid of relevant stakeholders. For example, the stakeholders include IBAs, consumers, local and international governments, distributors, suppliers, etc. The social and business relationships between SMEs in Nigeria and their stakeholders influence the capacity to explore the target markets (Bundy et al., 2018). Therefore, this study argued that, for SMEs in Nigeria to create inter-organisational KMP that will enhance SMEs' internationalisation, there is a need to be conscious of organisational culture, policies and financial capacity. The organisational culture, policies, and financial capacity help to build trust and establish sustainable sales subsidiaries in the international markets (Ambos & Schlegelmilch, 2005; Birkinshaw & Fry, 1998). Furthermore, inter-organisational KMP between SMEs in Nigeria is facilitated with legal instruments such as the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and Bilateral and Multilateral Business Treaties. Therefore, this study shows that SMEs in Nigeria need robust and reliable business safety measures that enable inter-organisational KMP to encourage sustainable organisational competence to enhance SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria (Agbo et al., 2018; Alaba et al., 2008; Bernaz, 2021).

Thirdly, this study investigated the idea of selected SMEs in Nigeria on how to balance inter- and intra-organisational KMP to enhance SMEs' internationalisation. This study contributes knowledge by revealing the fundamental means to balancing inter- and intra-organisational KMPs to establish reliable and sustainable knowledge acquisition and transfer platforms. The platforms suggested include business fora, workshops, training, staff-to-staff contact, business consultations, trade fairs etc. Establishing these platforms encourages adequate knowledge absorption capacity to promote business innovation, knowledge benchmarking and comprehension capacity, knowledge dissemination, knowledge screening, motivation to learn and motivation to teach (Adebayo et al., 2019; Butler & Ferlie, 2020; Duradoni & Di Fabio, 2019; Lee & Lee, 2007; Oliva et al., 2018; Vuori & Okkonen, 2012; Wang & Liu, 2019). However, the SMEs in Nigeria are conscious of the cost implications of acquiring and balancing the knowledge to enhance SMEs' internationalisation. Nevertheless, these platforms enable

adequate knowledge absorption capacity and networking to strengthen competitive advantage (Ahmed et al., 2019; Butler & Ferlie, 2020; Johanson & Vahlne, 2017; Zahra & George, 2002).

Furthermore, considering the influence of inter- and intra-organisational KMP on business organisations in developed and emerging countries in Asia and the Middle East (Hussein et al., 2016; Nakauchi et al., 2017; Vuori & Okkonen, 2012; Wong & Aspinwall, 2004; Zahra & George, 2002; Zhang & Jiang, 2015), inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation from Nigeria context has not been well-utilised due to some complex and correlated barriers. The barriers identified include poor access to finance, knowledge and information asymmetry, multiple taxation, institutional incompetency, limited stakeholder trust and risk, government regulation on international businesses, activities of the knowledge gatekeepers, and bureaucratic processes. Therefore, this study further revealed that the SMEs within the context of Nigeria belong to at least one IBAs. For example, NACCIMA, NANTS, ANE, AWEP, and NASME, and these IBAs are a unit of organisational stakeholders that share knowledge and information to influence SMEs' activities and internationalisation (Bundy et al., 2018).

8.3.2 Contributions to Policy and Practice

Firstly, the findings of this research identified that the bureaucratic process at the local, state, and federal government levels of Nigeria is the most critical barrier to strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria. The participants posited that most SMEs in Nigeria find it difficult to timely present business complaints to government institutions due to the government's irrelevant and strict bureaucratic processes. This study further showcases how the bureaucratic process as a barrier to strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria also influences other barriers (poor finance, knowledge and information asymmetry, activities of gatekeepers, government regulations on international businesses, institutional incompetency, and multiple taxations). According to Heyman (1991), the principal role of the government is to protect life and property and ensure the business security of people. Therefore, this study contributes to the practice and showcases the need for the government of Nigeria to employ competent staff in MDAs; create transparent and accessible networks between the SMEs and the government.

Secondly, this study identified that some government officials in the political offices that oversee and regulate the activities of SMEs in Nigeria lack the essential skills to carry out the political responsibilities assigned to their offices effectively. Hence, there is a need to assign such a complex political appointment to well-informed and competent officials that can effectively

contribute and advise the government on encouraging community and business relationships for inter- and intra-organisational KMPs to enhance SMEs' competence and competitive advantage for internationalisation. Thus, this will help support the argument of previous studies, which opined that SMEs are the back-bone of national economic growth and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Bongini et al., 2019; Dabić et al., 2020b; Ribau et al., 2018a; Ribau et al., 2018b) and suggested that bribery and corruption should be eradicated as they affect the innovative performance of SMEs in the international market (Krammer, 2019).

Thirdly, this study revealed that complex economic policies, multiple taxation at the Federal, State and Local government, and poor access to official foreign exchange rates negatively affect SMEs' participation in international business fora and exhibitions to acquire, appraise and share international knowledge within and outside their organisational boundaries. Therefore, this contributes to the practice by revealing that the Nigerian Government must critically consider and harmonise national taxation policies into a single profile; this will enable the SME operators in Nigeria to be optimistic and plan their annual expenditure on taxation.

Fourthly, there is also a need for the government to strategise and formulate policies that will guide both formal and informal SME operators in Nigeria on how to access foreign exchange rates at the official rate, as this will help to reduce the overhead cost and strengthen inter- and intra-organisational KMP for SMEs' internationalisation.

In addition, this study could serve as a benchmark for the neighbouring sub-Saharan African countries to Nigeria, such as the Republic of Benin, Ghana, Chad, Niger Republic, Togo, Cameroun and other Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) members. This will help measure inter- and intra-organisational KMPs on SMEs' internationalisation at the regional states level and enhance infrastructural development to strengthen inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for regional trade. This is because there is a high tendency for SMEs from these neighbouring countries to engage in bilateral and regional trade.

8.3.4 Contribution to Theory

This study explores how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs influence SMEs' internationalisation by using intra-organisational KMP as the mediation variable. Thus, to the knowledge of the author of this thesis, there is no empirical study where intra-organisational KMPs serve as a mediation variable to showcase how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs contribute to and encourage SMEs' internationalisation. Moreover, using the updated version of the Uppsala model, this study noted that knowledge sharing within and outside organisational

boundaries is a notable instrument that enhances organisational capacity building and sustainable business growth, which in the end, helps create a reliable competitive advantage for internationalisation processes (Adeyemi, 2023; Almahamid et al., 2010; Huysman & De Wit, 2013). Consequently, this study makes a notable contribution to theory as it enunciates the fundamental processes by which the updated version of the Upsala international model influences inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' competitiveness and internationalisation (Johanson & Vahlne, 2017; Khan et al., 2019; Nimfa et al., 2021). However, the study further noted that poor knowledge development processes and commitments impede the facilitation of SMEs' internationalisation in developing countries, such as Nigeria.

Furthermore, the study contributes to the theory by empirically showcasing the implications of and how the elements (capabilities, commitments, knowledge development processes and commitment processes) of the updated version of the Upsala model of internationalisation (Johanson & Vahlne, 2017) influence inter- and intra-organisation KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation from the context of an emerging country, with no robust institutional framework. As such, the study contributes to the theory as it gives an in-depth understanding of the updated Uppsala internationalisation model from the environmental context of an emerging economy like Nigeria.

8.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study significantly contributes to knowledge, practice, policy, and theory by identifying and exploring the factors and drivers of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation. The findings showcase the experiences of selected SMEs cutting across relevant sectors of the economy and two SME regulators in Nigeria. In summary, sixteen samples of the population from Nigeria were selected for interviews to collect data that helped investigate how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs influence SMEs' internationalisation. However, the opinions of the population sample size for this study cannot be empirically generalised to represent the entire African business community due to the differences in culture, national policies and ethics of businesses (Hammersley, 2012, 2018).

This study focused on and collected data from participants at the managerial level of the selected study population to identify and investigate managerial opinion and support for applying inter- and intra-organisational KMP for SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria. Hence, the data shows that amidst the barriers to strengthening the inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation, the managerial staff consciously support the application of inter- and intra-organisational KMP to encourage SMEs' internationalisation. Thus, there is a need to include the

non-managerial staff in future studies. This will help determine the staff's readiness to acquire and disseminate new knowledge.

The researcher conducted interviews for this study during the global pandemic (COVID-19). The global pandemic has caused much disruption to global economic, educational and social activities (Lone & Ahmad, 2020; Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). This study is not exempted from the negative impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Consequent to the waves of the global pandemic, the Nigerian government and the government of the United Kingdom imposed strict restrictions on movement and social interaction with people not living together in a house. During the lockdown, the researcher travelled to Nigeria twice and attempted to conduct interviews with the participants in line with the laid down rules. However, every attempt was unsuccessful because the participants felt unsafe having face-to-face interviews. Therefore, the researcher must use the phone and a few written interviews as the available alternative for data collection for this study (See Table 7). This led to much time consumption and challenge in scheduling interviews with the participants in Nigeria through telephone.

Duration is another limitation of this study. The governing bodies of universities in the United Kingdom, including Northumbria University, legislated that the maximum standard duration for completing a full-time PhD programme in management line is four years. However, this study was obstructed by the recent global pandemic and unforeseen challenges, such as health and cyber security issue on the school's portal. The challenges mentioned above did negatively influence the duration of this study.

8.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The researcher noticed some critical areas where the influences and ideals of this research work could be expanded. First and foremost, in gatekeepers, one of the concerns the participants raise is the need for research to verify the impact of the activities of knowledge gatekeepers (most significantly, the government officials that regulate SMEs' activities). Therefore, this will help strengthen inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation and further enhance SMEs' contribution to national economic growth (Dabić et al., 2020b; Ribau et al., 2018a; Ribau et al., 2018b).

Secondly, following the limited study on the impact of inter- and intra-organisational KMPs in the sub-Saharan African countries compared to the study of the same in the developed countries and the Asian region, the study recommends a bi-national or multinational case study of a similar study. Consequently, the approach will help conduct a comparative analysis and examine the

regional prospects and barriers to inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation in the sub-Saharan African region.

Thirdly, this study focused on and collected data from participants at the managerial level of the selected study population to identify and investigate managerial opinion on how inter- and intra-organisational KMPs influence SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria. Hence, the data shows that amidst the barriers to strengthening the inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation, the managerial staff consciously support the application of inter- and intra-organisational KMP to encourage SMEs' internationalisation. Consequently, there is a need to include the non-managerial staff in future studies. This will help to determine the readiness of the staff to acquire as well as disseminate new knowledge. Therefore, help to holistically examine the empirical impact of the updated version of the Uppsala model adopted for this study.

Furthermore, the study recommended investigating how the government of Nigeria can consider and carefully establish micro and macroeconomic policies to help create a conducive environment for SMEs' internationalisation from the Nigerian context. Thus, this may help to stimulate business partnerships with credible multinational companies and strengthen inter- and intra-organisational KMPs to enhance SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria.

Appendix A: Interview Questions

INTERVIEW QUESTION

Opening: Thank you for your voluntary participation and contribution to this study. I assure you that all information you shall disclose will be strictly treated as confidential in line with the ethical consent form you filled out before the commencement of this interview.

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Please, I like you kindly give a brief introduction about yourself.
2. Kindly provide a brief introduction about your organisation.

B. INTERNATIONALISATION

- 3a. Which countries does your company engage in doing international business with?
- b. How did your company start its international business operations?
- c. How long has your company been in international business operation?
4. Why do you think SMEs in Nigeria choose to participate in international business?

C. KNOWLEDGE, KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND INTERNATIONALISATION

5. How do you think SMEs in Nigeria acquire international market knowledge?
- 6a. With examples, how do Social and Business relationships boost SMEs' participation in international business?
- 6b. How does the knowledge of foreign customers improve the participation of SMEs in Nigeria in international business?
- 6c. How does the knowledge of local and international policies influence SMEs' participation in international business?
- 6d. How does the knowledge of competitors and suppliers influence the participation of SMEs in Nigeria in the international markets?

7. How has the knowledge and information SMEs generated outside their organisation influenced their international business performance?
8. How does the knowledge and information SMEs generate within the organisation affect its international business performance?
9. How do you think SMEs in Nigeria manage internal and external knowledge assimilated for international business participation?
10. Based on your experience as an international business operator/international business facilitator, what are the barriers to strengthening internal and external knowledge for SMEs' participation in international business?
11. How do internal and external knowledge barriers affect SMEs' participation in international business activities?
12. How do you think has knowledge shared within SMEs contributed to their business performance in the international market?
13. What are the challenges to SMEs sharing knowledge and information with external stakeholders, such as competitors, suppliers, customers, government, etc.?
14. What factors do you think SMEs in Nigeria need to consider before creating and sustaining international business relations?
15. From your standpoint, how has the COVID-19 era affected Nigerian SMEs/MSMEs' participation in international business?

Appendix B:

Association of Nigerian Exports (ANE)

***** You can refer to the profile of the association forwarded to your email for the answer to previous questions**

Q: How does your company acquire its international market knowledge?

Answer: The association of Nigeria exporters is the same as in the profile: index organisation for exporters in Nigeria and Cartesian based on its partners worldwide; and exporters worldwide. Through our interface with our associates outside, we acquire much knowledge about our operations and benchmark what we do with international practice. But, of course, we are all trading from the same platform because most of the trading comes from the same platform. For example, the international chamber of Commerce.... and the international trade office in Geneva are trading exports. So, most... globally, we acquire knowledge from the same platform dealing with international and national agencies such as the World Trade Organisation, the international trade centre, and the world bank. Then, of course, Embassies of foreign countries in Nigeria.

Q: For example, how do Social and Business relationships boost your company's international business participation?

Answer: the markets we target go beyond just discussion. We must have a memorandum of understanding with some of them. So, once you identify a good market and have a partner, the partnership establishes relationships through a memorandum of understanding; it opens the organisation to other partners, and they can recommend their associate members to you. For instance, if you want to engage with a company at all worth, and you already have an MoU with any of the internal partners, you do not need to go hustling; you call the partners to ask to carry out the necessary due diligence or groundwork for you in that market and even help you to certify. A company might talk to a chamber or an association that is our associate, and that chamber or association outside which having a relationship with us will just have a question to ask. So, in short, relationships outside enable us to certify Nigerian companies; since we are a membership organisation, you know, we are not a company as such; we are an association of companies taking care of exporting companies, which have our members registered with us that is at the business level. At the policies level, we represent Nigeria's interest by mobilising members to conduct due diligence on companies our international associate wants to do business with. So, we have a good relationship boost. It helps our members access international markets

because our struggling associates can also recommend our members and other organisations to us. We also have joint programmes like trade fairs that we can participate in together. This season, such a relationship is significant because we now must organise webinars, ordinary conferences and exhibitions for our members in partnership with our association. So, the relationship is excellent.

Q: How does the knowledge of competitors and suppliers influence your members' participation in international business?

Answer: When participating in an international trade fair, I would not just leave my members to take off from the country. Take a flight and arrive in the country for the trade fair. We do some preliminaries. For instance, we have a perfect relationship with an International Chamber of Commerce in India called INDO African Chamber of Commerce and Industries, which works for Africa; these organisations link us to most African countries associating with them. So, in one stone, you can see we are participating even if it is Vectra or as an international trade fair that we used to go to before the covid. When we go to India, we meet so many companies in Africa and different countries, and then you meet with their companies, it happens like that. For instance, yesterday, we had an inter-Vectra meeting, and in that Vectra meeting, you can imagine different countries across Africa participating and even other companies from India; that is just an example.

Again, based on the knowledge we acquire, we distribute knowledge even to those who did not participate in the meeting. In that programme held yesterday, there were presentations on what we must do or what we can do and what we had done before the covid, during the covid and post covid. So, it helps us to start planning. Indeed, in international trade, we must talk and ask questions. Such knowledge enables us to plan: what are we doing now? What are we doing that is going to be temporary? What are we doing that is going to be permanent after covid? How will we change? How will it affect our investments? For instance, you must invest in face masks and hand sanitiser during the covid era. As an investor interested in that sector, you do not need to invest much in machinery because Covid surely will pass away; so, if it passes away, the investment should not be a heavy or long-term investment, for such investment will not yield so much. Such investment is a temporary investment.

So, other things are happening too. We have experience, for instance, with the cost of freight and shipping. We share that shipping containers are costly with our partners and export from India, Turkey, Nigeria, and other countries. Ideas are being exchanged, and Turkey has used a wood

container. You can see that it can increase the market for wood export to Turkey for them to use in making their containers. In a global setting like this, sharing information and knowledge is always the best; people can still exhibit their products online during trade fairs, digital trade fairs, or exhibitions where we do not have a visual presentation.

Q: How has the knowledge and information generated within and outside the business organisation affected your international business performance?

Answer: Knowledge generated from an organisation can negatively impact business activities or performance if you do not screen the knowledge and information, you gather and the organisation you work with. An association like this aims to identify what information and knowledge we can acquire directly from the desk or from our members to know which ones are positive and negative. So, that is why I mentioned due diligence. If our member receives an order or information abroad and does not understand it, it can ask us to do due diligence. This association can ask any Embassy or High Commission; unlike individuals, the company may write to the Embassy to respond to individual inquiries. The association can call the economic counsellor of any embassy to inquire what a member has gotten from their home country. We ask the Embassy to confirm the genuineness of the information. So, we make sure that we seek clarity. We are like a clearinghouse, so we do not allow negativity to pass on to our companies or country. Sometimes, foreign countries even have the wrong impression. For instance, the impression about Nigeria's security situation could be of concern. An organisation like ours will look at such information to know how to diffuse and ratify what is negative. Some years back, I went to one of these Western countries, the United States of America; there are Nigerian in the state I went to, and I met with them in a group. Moreover, one of the raised issues was that there was insecurity in Nigeria even when the level of the insecurity was not as it is now. I was not bold enough to travel to that country and was there for about a week. Every morning I wake up to watch television, and I see many criminal activities. So many murders, domestic crimes, and some other kinds of crimes. So, when they told me about how insecure Nigeria was, I told them that yesterday, I watched the report on their television about the level of criminal activities, which could make legit commercials hectic. If these criminalities were happening in my country, people would not sleep in their houses again. Therefore, I told them the criminality level is worse in their area than in Nigeria. So, since I have engaged with the people, I have acquired knowledge about their country. Therefore, if someone says something different about the countries I have visited, I can disabuse such information and knowledge. Gathering information and knowledge is to communicate it instead of negatively affecting our business community. Rather, we try to ensure we get the best and get positive information and knowledge. But if the

information is horrible to affect our people, we can tell our people to be careful and not associate with certain markets or individuals. So, this helps us to send an alert. We also have negative information that may be true but not wide. I remember, so years back, I was to visit a country to plan a trade show, and I wrote to the association of importers in that country for we are exporters. So, I met the importers of that country, which are our direct customers. Moreover, they responded that they do not do business with the Nigeria Exporters and that we have dishonest exporters through the recruited government employee, which was damning. That shows a negative impact on what information and knowledge people have or gather about my country. I had to write to the Nigerian consulate in that country and interface with the people; I took the matter up with the Minister of Commerce in my country. When I travelled to the country, I sought to meet with the people who made such comments, and they refused to meet with me. They said they wanted to do something. But I must fight up. I discovered that what they said was not general, but some customers have done evil business practices, affecting us, our country, and exporters negatively. I discussed that exporters would go to the length of obtaining orders from companies abroad and could not meet the orders. Furthermore, by the time they reneged on their agreement with the foreign company, they did the first time may is a sector they did not meet up with, or the manufacturing sector did not. When they discover it is becoming a major challenge for their members, they can blacklist the country. Moreover, start looking for another market outside the country. That is one area I discovered was the problem. What we decided to do after gathering such information, we now began to take steps to block members from engaging in such kinds of practices and enlighten them that when they go to receive an order from a company abroad, and you do not supply, they have caused a nightmare. Some of them even close their shops. Because the companies abroad in a civilised society, when giving an order, they go ahead in their country to look for market of the product they will supply. A contractual agreement is binding in that area, unlike here, where you can remit and get away with it. Furthermore, that became an issue; most countries were affected because suppliers did not meet a deadline or supply. So, they had a problem affording local supply in countries, which led some of them into bankruptcy, etc. This led the country to do that. So, what do we do? With that knowledge, as an association, we refuse to inform companies and our members to get international orders when they have proven to use the products they can export. We do not just tell them not to take orders. However, this compelled us to decide. For example, if a member wants to export to a country like the UK, we will ask them to show us proof of the product, including the product of quality and proof of product quantity. If, for instance, the company claim to be able to supply, and I ask to know the capacity of the factory, and it has taken an order that is ten to twenty times beyond the company's capacity, and we find out and ask when the

company will meet the rest for that order? We will not allow such a company market contact for orders. So, that can be a way of using the information to fight the negative impact on our business and our associates abroad.

Q: How does knowledge and information acquired outside your company help to increase her participation in international business?

Answer: As I said, you see, we thank God. Currently, information is so much on the internet. A lot of this information could be false information, and much such information can be good information. So, we do acquire information daily. We process the information, and when we get what is right, we use that to advance our business activities. For example, if a member wants to export to a country, we can x-ray the country's market, the market expectation, and the quality expectation of the product we are sending; that is the standard. Then, we look at the payment system of that country and whether they can get paid quickly; up to now, there are still some countries where we do not promptly get payments. Even though we will hear of all the platforms you can send money to, it may not be accessible in some countries. So, we get other things from the machine, enabling us to plan the market for entry or market access for our members.

Moreover, for us, if we are going to handle international trade fairs, which we used to have trade fairs for decades now, you must know the market very well before we take your people to that market; and you also must make sure that they do not fall into the wrong hands. As an operator of international relations for companies in Nigeria, we ensure that association members are linked to international partners. In the international market, they have promising joint ventures, distributors, etc., which is why we handle that aspect. Even now, with information all over the internet, we still must advise members to be very careful with whatsoever information they have. I stay here and see people sharing information like international grants, local grants, and other things. Therefore, any information, especially international information, must be screened. Somebody can post something to inform people that this is from the Federal Government or an Agency, banking, or petroleum, all kind of things that scam. It is business to check all scam information to benefit our country members and international partners abroad. We do much screening for market access; we look at the quality that the countries are expected to receive so that nobody starts sending products to a country, and these products are rejected. We have been enduring things like products being rejected at the international market, and whenever I hear such, I tell the public that it is a taunt doing such business Anybody can be a taunt. For example, a technocrat doing is official and abstract assignment and gets access to some money, he/she can call a group of individuals to go to some local market to buy a list of products want to sell them

abroad and does not pass-through association like the existing exporter that knows the market but may ship the goods to the market or us. State Government, Government Agencies, and Private companies could do it. However, we heard that the goods are rejected and confiscated at the international market. My response to such business malpractice was that the taunt carries it out. No trained exporter from a cooperate organisation or exporter will make that mistake because we would have enlightened them on product quality and requirements, including the technical barriers and others about the country entry before they start. We do a lot of offshore and onshore information sharing and applications. That is all that I can say for now.

Q: What are your challenges in sharing knowledge and information with external stakeholders, such as competitors, suppliers, customers, Government, etc.?

Answer: It is expensive to share knowledge and information with external stakeholders. I imagine you are speaking from the UK, not from China, India, or the United States of America; the cost will be lower if we have a cheaper charging rate for the telephone call. If you are trading with us and have made this cost, it is excessively high, so I must advise our members for more information sharing. We can join WhatsApp information sharing, for the cost of data is cheaper than the phone call. We have been on this discussion for over thirty (30) minutes on the phone, which is very expensive.

Moreover, the internet we are discussing is not always reliable, so you must find the appropriate time and when it is convenient. So, these challenges can be online, internet and telephone costs. Like the last two days, 29th and 30th July 2021, the Federal Ministry of Education sponsored an Ed-Tech (like education technology) event. So, I must be there for those two days. I was looking for something I was expecting, so I told them direct things they needed to know.

What technology can reduce our cost of communication with international communities? Moreover, what is available for export? There is a platform, and we need to know what is available in the service sector to export technology. What has been developed by our country? Can we export them? Therefore, after the meeting, I found it essential to interact more with the technical advisers, the organiser of the event, and the ICT directorate in the ministry. In such kind of event, we identify what we can do to alleviate the negative and enhance the positive impact of knowledge and information sharing with our external stakeholders, to support our members, enhance competitiveness in the international market, give timely advice to our external and local stakeholders, suppliers, customers as well as Government. Whatever this is discovered, I can get back to the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment and advise that I found essential

issues discussed at the education technology conference. Of course, at the event, I informed about the interest of our international technology partners in the UAE that are interested in investing in the country's technology sector of the economy. I advised them to join in that event to take charge, and they joined and asked questions for clarity, which was good. That event also helps our stakeholders, including partners, customers, suppliers, competitors locally and internationally, and the governments, so that is taken up.

Q: What factors do you think SMEs in Nigeria need to consider before creating and sustaining international business relations?

Answer: First, you need to do the standard and primary research to know who and what is elsewhere; and look at the credible platforms of international organisations. For instance, if you are looking for importers, you must start looking for organisations like the international chambers of Commerce and see what they recommend. The international trade centre in Geneva has recommended and consulted ministries of trade and foreign affairs of the international countries you are targeting and see whom they recommend. For instance, in Nigeria, by the time you get to find out something from the federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment, they will advise you on the organisations you can relate to within the sector, whether it is to those importing or exporting. If you reach out to the Central Bank of Nigeria, you will get much information on their website, which publishes guidelines on many things related to the economy. The Nigeria Customs Service gives guidelines on what to do, and with legitimate organisations, you can work. You have many things to do before creating an international business relationship. As an international business operator coming to Nigeria, it is essential to know the platform to visit and the people to talk with to acquire the requisite information about the market. Among the organisations visited include the Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission. We do our detailed findings to identify credible organisations or individuals to do business with as an organisation that promotes exports. After that, the SMEs must visit the organisation's website to acquire relevant information that would answer some questions about the nature of the market.

The feedback to the Government is also vital because of policies. At this point, the Association of Nigerian Exporters must represent Nigeria's image. So, we sit on the board of the Nigeria Export Promotion Council; as we are there, we should advise the Government and the international business Operators interested in exports and partner with Nigeria on what is expected. We also have other boards, like the free trade zones. So, if a company is considering investing in Nigeria, we should advise such a company and our customers on the lack of digital. We need to recommend that the company use the available free trade zones, mainly if they

export to other neighbouring countries from Nigeria. But if the investors want to target the significant Nigerian markets, they must invest inward in the customs territory of Nigeria. So, some of these are the things we do and gather information.

The knowledge providers side, as I had mentioned, was the technology that we under-estimate. We work through search engines. We google all the googles and ensure that you work with the marketing and trading platforms like all these and those moving goods from Nigeria that we can reach out to. We have financial platforms not originally from Nigeria, like Barger and many of them. I am talking about them because they are a financial technology company, we can use to cash our money or receive money from abroad. I saw some Nigerian fintech companies coming on board, and CBN is already doing that.

Furthermore, we also try to learn much about the forex situation by seeing what they do, for example, the Bureau De'change, the commercial banks, and the fintech companies and options. So, these are some things we do know whether we can create a relationship with these platforms, to know whom we can send our goods to and other countries, and those that are credible enough to reach us. So, a lot has been done. It is through information sharing and relationships, and knowledge providers are essential. They have bewitched screening to know whom they can recommend to our customers, suppliers, and competitors. The knowledge of the competitors is fundamental. Every competitor has a trade secret, which you must get to know and try to see how your competitors work in such a market environment.

On the government aspect, in Nigeria, we are the export promotion committee in each of the country's states. Therefore, if I want a piece of trade information about a particular state in Nigeria, I should be able to contact the chairman of the state committee of export promotion, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce of every state. The Director of Commerce is the secretary of the committee. Therefore, I do not need to start running to a state. I should be able to use the platform at the state level to provide knowledge for export business. For example, farmers' associations, the chambers of commerce, manufacturers' platforms, and even in the country, Nigeria, if I need something from the solid mineral, I will not start looking for companies in that sector; instead, I consult with the associations that associated with solid ministry production and talk with their president or secretary of the association. Thus, we also recommend that to the international business operators coming to our country. We also source that for such information and knowledge from foreign countries through their Embassies and High Commissions in Nigeria. We also recommend such a procedure to our international business partners to do the same through our high commissions in their respective countries as

the information and knowledge providers of Nigerian markets and other markets. Without acquiring knowledge and information about a particular market, we advise our members to stop doing business with such a market.

Q: How strongly do you see the available institutional framework of the country to facilitate SMEs' internationalisation?

Answer: The problem we are having in the country is that the Government does too much. The Government is the centre of attraction, and the businesses are managed without the Government's help. For your information, it would be good for the Government to have structures that would leverage and incorporate the private sector more. For example, if you get to the Nigerian investment promotion commission, they have a one-stop shop, and all the members are government agencies. Both international and local businesses are government agencies. If you go to the NIPC website, they are all Government. Also, you will see that the Government has established the national committee on export promotion, which is co-chaired by the Minister of Industry, trade and investment and the governor of each state. If we look at it, they are all government officials, and the governors must send their representatives. Ask me how many private sector representatives there are. The only private organisation I knew and included in the Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment Committee is the Federation of Agricultural Commodity Association of Nigeria (FACAN), an arm of the agricultural sector.

Why are they putting FACAN? It is because FACAN is part of the Government. After all, they have a secretariat at the Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Investment, Abuja. So, they have decided to say since FACAN is here. However, FACAN is of little value because they can only advise on contacting the farmers on exporting their farm produce. However, they cannot recommend that the farmers process their products to meet international market standards because they lack knowledge. Where such happens, farmers will be required to pay marketers chargers.

Also, on AGOA and the AfCFTA, the companies within these platforms are import-driven organisations. These organisations get the full support of the Nigerian Government; why? Because these have been their allies for some time, primarily when Nigeria pursued import as a business. Now that we are doing export in Nigeria, they cannot change. They found it very difficult. They still carry the old book.

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

Faculty of Business and Law

Informed Consent Form for Research Participants

Title of Study:	HOW INTER- AND INTRA-ORGANISATIONAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT PROCESSES INFLUENCE SMEs INTERNATIONALISATION
Person(s) conducting the Study:	Agbo John Joseph
Programme of Study	Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
Address of the Researcher for Correspondence:	Room 415, Newcastle Business School, Northumbria University, City Campus East Newcastle Upon Tyne NE1 8ST United Kingdom
Mobile Contact:	07404604126
E-mail Address:	a.joseph@northumbria.ac.uk
Description of the broad nature of the Research:	<p>This study examines the usefulness of intra-organisational KMP in SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria.</p> <p>This research will critically assess how inter-organisational KMP influences SMEs' internationalisation in Nigeria.</p> <p>This research will attempt to evaluate the role of balancing between the inter- and intra-organisational KMPs on SMEs' performance in the international market; and</p> <p>This research will evaluate the barriers to strengthening inter- and intra-organisational KMPs for SMEs' internationalisation from the context of SMEs in Nigeria.</p> <p>The researcher hopes to achieve the above through a qualitative research method based on semi-structured interviews with top SME stakeholders (SME operators/Industrial Business Associations and SME regulators in Nigeria).</p>
Description of the involvement expected of participants, including the broad nature of questions to be answered or events to be observed or activities to be undertaken, and the expected time commitment:	<p>The participants will be invited to participate in semi-structured interview questions, which will be based on issues from literature and the context of SMEs in Nigeria.</p> <p>The participation of every participant will be voluntary.</p> <p>The identities of the participants and organisations represented will be marked anonymous. The participant's name will be represented by using an alphanumeric.</p> <p>Each interview will last not more than an hour of duration.</p>
Description of how the data you provide will be securely stored and/or destroyed upon	The data collected will be downloaded and stored on the university software and secured with a password. In the case of voice-recorded interviews, hard copies of the transcripts

completion of the project:	generated from the interviews will be locked in the university cupboard. Part of the data collected will be retained for educational use for three years, and the rest of the information will be expunged.
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Information obtained in this study, including the consent form, will be kept strictly confidential (that is, it will not be passed to others) and anonymous (that is, individuals and organisations will not be identified unless this is expressly excluded in the details given above).

Data obtained through this research may be reproduced and published in a variety of forms and for a variety of audiences related to the broad nature of the study detailed above. However, without your permission, it will also not be used for purposes other than those outlined above.

Participation is entirely voluntary, and participants may withdraw at any time.

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this study based on the above information.

Participant's Signature:

Date:

Student's signature:

Date:

Please keep a copy of this form for your own records

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