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Entrepreneurial Resilience: A Path to Sustainable Business Success

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Abstract:

Resilient entrepreneurs adapt to challenges by leveraging psychological and organizational strengths to navigate crises. However, the complexity of resilience necessitates a structured approach that incorporates cognitive adaptability, emotional regulation, and organizational learning mechanisms. This study investigates the psychological and organizational factors that impact entrepreneurial resilience, with the aim of developing an integrated entrepreneurial resilience ecosystem (ERE) model in South Africa. The study employs secondary data grounded in Dynamic Capabilities Theory and Social Cognitive Theory, providing a multidimensional perspective on entrepreneurial resilience. The findings indicate that entrepreneurs who merge psychological resilience with structured organizational mechanisms are more likely to sustain their businesses during crises. The study presents an integrated resilience framework that offers valuable insights for entrepreneurs, educators, and policymakers to minimize business risk. This could promote entrepreneurial resilience through structured interventions, enabling businesses to enhance their long-term sustainability and adaptability in volatile environments. The study recommends entrepreneurial training programs that focus on resilience-building strategies and policy interventions to enhance access to resources and structured learning mechanisms. The study concludes that entrepreneurs can effectively navigate uncertainties and enhance long-term success by promoting cognitive adaptability, emotional regulation, and structured learning mechanisms.

Keywords:

Business Sustainability, Dynamic Capabilities, Entrepreneurial Resilience, Organizational Learning, Resource Optimization

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Introduction

The entrepreneurial landscape in South Africa presents a unique and complex intersection of challenges and opportunities, shaped by the country's distinct historical context, diverse cultural fabric, and ongoing economic transformation. In a nation where unemployment rates reached 32.9% in the first quarter of 2025 and subsequently rose to 33.2% in the second quarter, entrepreneurship emerges not merely as a career choice but as a vital driver of economic development and social transformation (Pereira et al., 2024). The critical role of entrepreneurial resilience in this context becomes particularly significant given the country's distinctive business environment, characterized by regulatory complexities, infrastructure challenges, and market volatility unique to emerging economies (Chen & He, 2024). Therefore, the 21st-century entrepreneurship landscape presents a complex array of challenges and opportunities, with resilience emerging as a critical determinant of sustained success (Shaukat et al., 2022). Studies have revealed that approximately 60% of new ventures fail within their first five years, with psychological and organizational factors proving more significant than traditional business metrics (Audretsch et al., 2024). The intersection of individual psychological resilience and organizational adaptability has become particularly relevant in the post-pandemic business environment, where unprecedented challenges have tested entrepreneurial capabilities on multiple levels.

This has made entrepreneurial resilience a crucial area of study, as business environments are growing increasingly volatile and uncertain due to the disruption of the fourth industrial revolution and the emergence of artificial intelligence. Rapid technological advancements, economic disruptions, and global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, redefine the modern entrepreneurial landscape (Groh et al., 2025). This enables entrepreneurs to anticipate, adapt to, and recover from adverse conditions while maintaining business operations. It includes psychological resilience—the capacity to withstand stress and uncertainty—and structural resilience, which involves systemic factors that facilitate or impede business continuity. These factors highlighted the significance of resilience in ensuring business survival and success (Duchek, 2018).

Entrepreneurs must navigate these challenges while ensuring operational consistency and pursuing growth opportunities, making resilience a cornerstone of sustainable entrepreneurship. It gained prominence in organizational and entrepreneurial studies because it is deeply rooted in traditional psychology, as it is essential for managing adversity and failure. Resilience is a strategy for recovering from setbacks, adapting to change, learning from experiences, and thriving in the face of challenges. Recent studies by the South African Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) indicate that while the country demonstrates strong entrepreneurial intent, with approximately 28% of adults expressing intentions to start businesses, only 7.9% successfully establish and maintain operational ventures beyond the crucial three-year mark (Kandolo & Msomi, 2024). This stark disparity between

entrepreneurial intention and successful action underscores the importance of understanding and fostering entrepreneurial resilience within South Africa. It is therefore established that South African entrepreneurs face unique challenges that demand specific resilience capabilities, including navigating power supply uncertainties, managing currency fluctuations, and addressing skills gaps in the labour market (Caria et al., 2024).

However, small enterprises have a high failure rate despite targeted governmental interventions and entrepreneurship support programs. (Bushe, 2019). It is disheartening that despite the pragmatic initiatives, small business failure rates remain critically high, with approximately 70% of ventures collapsing within their first two years of operation (Stats SA, 2024). This overwhelming trend presents significant obstacles to economic transformation and job creation, which are essential for South Africa's sustainable development. Research records acknowledged high levels of innovation and creativity among South African entrepreneurs (Matlala & Ncube, 2025). However, their inability to establish sustainable resilience mechanisms leads to premature business closures, even when their business models are fundamentally sound (Biyela & Utete, 2024).

This challenge is further exacerbated by South Africa's unique contextual realities, which render traditional resilience models primarily developed in Western contexts insufficient. Empirical findings suggest that existing resilience frameworks account for only 35% of the variance in venture survival within South Africa, highlighting a critical gap in understanding the localized determinants of entrepreneurial sustainability (Saravathy & Perez, 2025). Key barriers include inconsistent power supply, stringent regulatory frameworks, limited access to formal financing, and socio-cultural dynamics that influence business operations in ways not adequately captured by existing theoretical models. Longitudinal studies by Makhanya and Thulani (2024) reveal that 65% of South African entrepreneurs exhibit high personal resilience scores, and only 28% can successfully translate this resilience into sustained organizational performance (Bai et al., 2025). This disparity is further complicated by a high-risk business environment characterized by crime, currency volatility, and infrastructural deficiencies—factors that necessitate resilience capabilities beyond conventional entrepreneurship support structures (Nyangarika, 2024).

The digital divide adds another layer of vulnerability, hindering the adoption of technology that could enhance resilience and overall well-being. Rakgoale et al (2024) established that while digital transformation is crucial for business resilience, South African entrepreneurs encounter significant barriers to technology integration, including infrastructure limitations and high costs (Lethoko, 2024). Moreover, traditional resilience measurement tools, often created within Western contexts, do not effectively predict entrepreneurial success in South Africa's unique environment (Boucher et al., 2024).

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The current study proposed Entrepreneurial Resilience Ecosystem (ERE) model aimed to synthesise insights from theoretical frameworks and empirical findings. To enhance validity, the model was triangulated with real-life case evidence, such as South African SMEs that successfully adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic by pivoting business models, adopting digital technologies, and forging strategic partnerships. In this way, the methodological process will not only generate a conceptual framework but also align it with lived entrepreneurial practices, thereby offering both theoretical and practical contributions.

While theories of psychological resilience focus on individual adaptability and organizational models emphasize structural responses (Enwereji et al., 2024), neither approach fully captures the interplay between these dimensions in the South African context. Therefore, the study fills these gaps by developing an integrated resilience framework for South Africa's entrepreneurial ecosystem, acknowledging the distinct barriers and adaptive strategies that influence business sustainability.

This study provides processual insights by reconceptualizing resilience as a dynamic and evolving process, rather than a static trait. The entrepreneurial Resilience Ecosystem (ERE) proposed model illustrates how resilience emerges through iterative cycles of disruption, reflection, and adaptation of the system. It encourages the ecosystem practitioners to shift from relying on individual psychological strengths to developing structured organizational practices that evolve continuously, including adaptive strategies, dynamic learning systems, and strategic pivots. The processual perspective aligns with and extends prior work on dynamic capabilities (Teece, 2018), demonstrating how resilience capacity is cumulatively built across successive crises rather than being activated in a single event. The study also provides contextual insights by situating resilience practices within the specific socio-economic and cultural realities of South Africa.

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundations of Entrepreneurial Resilience

Entrepreneurial resilience is a multifaceted construct that draws on psychological, organizational, and environmental theories. Psychological Resilience Theories, such as the Conservation of Resources Theory, emphasize the role of resource acquisition, retention, and protection in mitigating stress and fostering resilience. Entrepreneurs who effectively manage their psychological resources—such as time, energy, and emotional well-being—are better equipped to navigate adversity. The theory offers a foundational understanding of how individual resilience is developed through resource optimization, particularly in high-stress entrepreneurial environments.

On the organizational front, Dynamic Capabilities Theory offers a robust framework for understanding how firms adapt to changing environments. This theory posits that organizations with dynamic

capabilities—such as the ability to sense opportunities, seize them, and reconfigure resources—are more resilient in volatile market environments. This translates into the need for agile decision-making, innovation, and strategic flexibility for entrepreneurs. Social Cognitive Theory (Arvidsson et al., 2024) further advances the integration of psychological and organizational perspectives, highlighting the roles of self-efficacy, observational learning, and personal agency in the development of resilience. Entrepreneurs with high self-efficacy are more likely to persevere through challenges, viewing setbacks as opportunities for growth rather than insurmountable obstacles.

The interplay between individual and organizational resilience is critical for entrepreneurial success. While psychological resilience theories focus on individual traits, organizational resilience models emphasize structural adaptations. The ability of an organization to learn from past experiences and adapt to new challenges is a key determinant of resilience (Duchek, 2020). This paper proposes a comprehensive framework that considers the dynamic interplay among individual, organizational, and environmental factors by integrating these perspectives.

Cognitive Factors in Entrepreneurial Success

Cognitive factors play a pivotal role in entrepreneurial resilience, particularly in decision-making under uncertainty. Entrepreneurs often operate in ambiguous environments and with incomplete information, requiring them to make decisions with limited data (Packard et al., 2017). Cognitive flexibility—the ability to adapt thinking patterns and strategize in response to changing circumstances—is a critical determinant of entrepreneurial success. Adaptability enables entrepreneurs to pivot their strategies in response to market shifts, technological disruptions, or economic crises. (Hokmabadi et al, 2024).

Risk perception and management are also central to entrepreneurial resilience. Entrepreneurs who accurately assess risks and develop mitigation strategies are better positioned to navigate challenges. However, risk tolerance varies among individuals, with some entrepreneurs embracing uncertainty as an inherent part of the entrepreneurial journey. Cognitive biases, such as overconfidence and confirmation bias, can hinder entrepreneurial resilience by distorting decision-making processes (Davis, 2024). However, entrepreneurs who engage in reflective practices—seeking feedback and challenging assumptions—are better equipped to mitigate these biases and make informed decisions. This acknowledged the need for cognitive training and development programs to enhance entrepreneurial resilience.

Social Support Networks and Resilience

Social support networks are critical for entrepreneurial resilience, providing emotional, informational, and financial support during challenging times. Professional networks provide access to resources, including technology, that address organizational challenges, opportunities, and mentorship, enabling

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entrepreneurs to navigate adversity and capitalize on growth opportunities. Therefore, integrating technology and digital platforms for transformation is a key driver of entrepreneurial resilience, enabling firms to adapt to rapidly changing markets by adopting cloud computing and data analytics, thereby enhancing operational efficiency and competitiveness (Browder et al., 2024). Companies that leverage digital tools to streamline processes and improve decision-making are better positioned to navigate disruptions. Firms prioritizing technological innovation are more agile and adaptable, enabling them to respond effectively to market shifts in cybersecurity and digital risk management, which are essential components of digital resilience. Firms implementing robust cybersecurity measures are better equipped to protect their assets and maintain operational continuity.

Resource Management and Financial Resilience

Effective resource management is critical to entrepreneurial resilience, particularly in resource-constrained environments. Strategic resource allocation enables entrepreneurs to prioritize critical activities and optimize the of their limited resources (Abidovna & Sadiloevna, 2024). Entrepreneurs who allocate resources to innovation and market expansion are better positioned to achieve long-term success. Financial buffer management is a key aspect of resilience, and entrepreneurs who maintain financial reserves are better equipped to weather economic downturns and unexpected expenses (Conz et al., 2023). This highlights the importance of financial planning and contingency strategies in promoting resilience.

Crisis funding mechanisms, such as emergency loans and crowdfunding, provide a lifeline for entrepreneurs during periods of financial distress (Mhlanga, 2024). These mechanisms highlight the significance of access to capital in fostering entrepreneurial resilience. Crisis management and recovery strategies are a cornerstone of entrepreneurial resilience, enabling firms to respond to and recover from disruptions. Early warning systems—such as environmental scanning and risk assessment tools—enable firms to identify potential threats and take proactive measures to mitigate them. Certainly, firms that monitor market trends and competitor activities are better positioned to anticipate and respond to challenges.

Response mechanisms—such as crisis communication plans and contingency strategies—are critical for mitigating the impact of disruptions. Post-crisis learning and adaptation are essential for building long-term resilience. Firms that analyze their responses to crises and implement lessons learned are better prepared for future challenges, implying that they have identified the importance of continuous learning and improvement in fostering resilience.

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Sustainable Business Practices and Long-term Resilience

Sustainability is a critical determinant of long-term entrepreneurial resilience, encompassing environmental, social, and economic dimensions. Environmental considerations—such as resource efficiency and waste reduction—enhance operational resilience and competitiveness (Hoosain et al., 2023). Firms that adopt sustainable practices are better positioned to comply with regulations and meet the demands of consumers. This enhances social relationships and responsibility, including ethical labour practices and community engagement, which fosters stakeholder trust and loyalty. This enhances organizational resilience by fostering strong relationships with customers, employees, and the broader communities. Economic sustainability, encompassing financial stability and long-term profitability, is crucial for organizational transformation and resilience. Firms prioritizing economic sustainability are better equipped to weather economic downturns and achieve long-term success.

The study integrates Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), highlighting the role of self-efficacy, cognition and emotional regulation in fostering continuous interaction between personal factors. It provides a framework for interventions to build resilience capital among entrepreneurs, especially in fragile or emerging economies. The theory has been used to explain learning, motivation, and adaptive behavior in individual and group contexts, which support entrepreneurship resilience and sustainable business success. Through the social cognitive framework, which incorporates various interactive dimensions, e.g., Resilience capital as one dynamic capacity. Entrepreneurs build to mediate sustainable success that stands the test of time, enabling them to recover and adapt in the face of shocks, economic recessions, or volatile environments, which SCT's static triadic framework only partially addresses. It helps bridge individual agency and sustainability, introducing resilience capital, and reveals how individual agency extends beyond survival into long-term, sustainable practices. This can be regarded as individually focused because it integrates social and systemic resilience, allowing the theory to operate at three levels (micro, meso, and macro). The implication is that it enhances SCT by embedding resilience into its core.

Proposed Integrated Entrepreneurial Resilience Ecosystem (ERE) Model

Overview of the ERE Model

The Entrepreneurial Resilience Ecosystem (ERE) Model is a dynamic, multi-layered framework that captures the interplay between individual, organizational, and environmental factors affecting entrepreneurial resilience. This model integrates insights from psychological resilience theories, organizational resilience models, and environmental sustainability frameworks, offering a comprehensive understanding of how entrepreneurs can cultivate and sustain resilience in the face of adversity. The following section provides an in-depth discussion of the ERE Model, detailing its three

interconnected layers and their components, interconnections, and practical applications. Each layer interacts with the others, forming a dynamic ecosystem that influences entrepreneurial resilience. This model emphasizes the importance of adaptability, resource management, and sustainability in fostering resilience across these layers.

1. Individual Layer: Psychological Factors

The individual layer examines the psychological traits and abilities that empower entrepreneurs to withstand adversity and succeed in challenging environments. Key components include:

Cognitive Adaptability: The capacity to think flexibly, take proactive decisions amid uncertainty, and view challenges as opportunities. This is essential for navigating volatile markets and unforeseen disruptions. **Emotional Regulation**: The ability to manage emotions, stay composed under pressure, and bounce back from setbacks. Emotional regulation significantly predicts resilience, especially in high-stress entrepreneurial settings (Abaker, 2025) and economic recession. **Self-efficacy**: The belief in one's ability to achieve goals and overcome obstacles. Entrepreneurs with high self-efficacy tend to persist through challenges and seek innovative solutions. Entrepreneurs can bolster their psychological resilience through training programs, mindfulness practices, and mentorship. Workshops focused on emotional intelligence and stress management can equip entrepreneurs with the skills to navigate adversity.

2. Organizational Layer: Structural Factors

The organizational layer centres on the structural and strategic capabilities that allow firms to adapt to challenges and sustain operations. Key components include **Resource Management Systems**, the effective allocation and optimization of financial, human, and physical resources. This is vital for efficient resource management and is particularly salient for maintaining operational continuity during crises (Steen et al., 2024). Learning Mechanisms Are Processes for acquiring, sharing, and applying knowledge. Organizational learning enables firms to adapt to changing environments and recover from setbacks. **Adaptive Capabilities**: The ability to innovate, pivot strategies, and respond to market changes. Developing adaptive capabilities is crucial for remaining competitive in dynamic environments. Organizations can enhance their resilience by investing in knowledge management systems, fostering a culture of innovation, and developing contingency plans. Firms can utilize scenario planning to prepare for potential disruptions and identify adaptive strategies.

3. Environmental Layer: External Factors

The environmental layer examines the ecosystem context in which entrepreneurs operate, including market dynamics, institutional frameworks, and ecological conditions. Key components include **Market Dynamics**, which encompasses the competitive landscape, consumer behavior, and industry trends. To

maintain resilience, entrepreneurs must adapt to changing market conditions; **Institutional Frameworks** include government policies, regulatory environments, and support systems. Supportive institutional frameworks enhance resilience by providing access to essential resources and infrastructure. Ecological Conditions refer to environmental factors, including climate change, resource availability, and sustainability challenges. Entrepreneurs who align their practices with ecological resilience principles are better positioned for long-term success. Entrepreneurs can enhance their environmental resilience by leveraging professional networks, engaging with policymakers, and adopting sustainable practices. For instance, partnerships with industry associations and government agencies can provide access to funding and mentorship.

Methods and Data

The research was informed by the development of the Entrepreneurial Resilience Ecosystem (ERE) model, which conceptualizes resilience as an evolving and interconnected concept that integrates personal psychological strengths, organizational strategies, adaptive capabilities, and supportive networks. This study employed a qualitative research design to explore entrepreneurial resilience as a pathway to sustainable business success, with a focus on dynamic and resource-constrained environments.

Data Sources

The methodological approach centred on a literature review combined with thematic analysis. Scholarly journal articles, book chapters, and policy reports were sourced using a search engine from reputable academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The selection criteria prioritized peer-reviewed studies published between 2010 and 2024 that addressed entrepreneurship, resilience, and sustainable business outcomes, with a particular emphasis on the South African experience, particularly in emerging market contexts. Documents from the South African Department of Small Business Development, statistical reports from Statistics South Africa, and policy documents were also included to strengthen the contextual grounding of the analysis. An initial pool of articles was sourced using key search terms, including entrepreneurial resilience, sustainable business success, dynamic capabilities, and SMEs in South Africa. This pool was later streamlined employing a two-stage screening process: (a) review of abstracts and titles to remove duplicates and unsuitable studies based on keywords and research methods employed, and (2) a full-text assessment to identify works with direct theoretical, empirical, or contextual relevance. The final dataset includes global and South African-focused studies (Sarkar & Osiyevskyy, 2018; Meyer & Hamilton, 2020), ensuring a balance between international perspectives and local realities.

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The selected studies were subjected to thematic analysis, which involved coding, categorizing, and synthesizing recurring patterns across the literature. This process revealed how resilience is enacted through collective resource mobilization, dynamic learning, and strategic adaptation, while also revealing its contextual embeddedness in socio-economic, institutional, and cultural settings. Furthermore, the analysis revealed critical tensions, indicating that resilience practices may involve trade-offs between immediate survival and long-term sustainability.

Entrepreneurial Resilience in South Africa.

Despite different obstacles, South Africa boasts a vibrant startup culture that strongly focuses on innovation and sustainability in building resilience. Though the country ranks among the top African nations for entrepreneurial activity, with many startups and small businesses contributing to economic growth and job creation (Hill et al., 2022). However, the failure rate of startups—estimated at 70% within the first five years—emphasizes the need for enhanced resilience among South African entrepreneurs (Kato, 2024). This is because the external environment in South Africa, characterized by economic volatility, political instability, and regulatory complexities, significantly impacts entrepreneurial resilience.

However, resilient entrepreneurs can influence their environments through innovation, collaboration, and sustainable practices. Such entrepreneurs implement renewable energy solutions to bolster their own resilience, promote environmental sustainability, and enhance community well-being. The significant ecosystem resilience to be addressed is the high failure rate of businesses in South Africa, which remains a pressing concern, particularly for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). According to SEDA's Small Business Impact Study (2022), approximately 70% of small businesses fail within their first three years of operation. Similarly, the World Bank's Enterprise Survey (2021) highlights that around 45% of formal firms close within five years, with micro-enterprises being the most vulnerable. These figures underscore the precarious nature of business survival in the country, influenced by various structural and economic challenges. Sector-specific data reveal that the Retail and Wholesale Trade sector experiences the highest business failure rate, accounting for nearly 35% of annual closures due to high competition, cash flow problems, and a lack of market differentiation. The Construction Industry also faced a significant decline of 28% in active companies between 2015 and 2020, mainly due to delays in government projects and broader economic slowdowns. Meanwhile, the Agricultural sector suffers from a 20% annual failure rate, primarily driven by the impacts of climate change, land reform challenges, and restricted access to finance (Zenda, 2024). The industry-specific challenges demonstrate diverse obstacles faced by businesses across different economic sectors. This financial instability often exacerbates the risk of insolvency, making it difficult for businesses to recover from economic shocks. Macroeconomic factors further contribute to business failures in South Africa, such that between 2018 and 2020, the country's GDP growth stagnated or contracted, exacerbating the rate of business

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closures. For instance, in 2021, Stats SA reported that over 600,000 jobs were lost due to business insolvencies alone. Additionally, by the fourth quarter of 2021, the unemployment rate had reached 34.4%, reducing consumer spending power and demand for goods and services (Chimeri & Oluwatayo, 2022). The economic downturn and structural weaknesses have intensified businesses' challenges in sustaining operations.

Various causes of business failure have been identified through surveys conducted by Nedbank and Business Rescue practitioners, concluding that a lack of capital is responsible for 45% of business closures (Burger, 2022). Poor management skills account for 30%, while economic downturns contribute 20% of failures. These statistics suggest that financial constraints, managerial inefficiencies, and broader economic instability are key factors contributing to business failure (Thelma et al., 2024). Data from the Department of Trade, Industry, and Competition (DTIC) indicate that women-owned businesses are 15% more likely to fail due to their limited shock absorber for failure and resilience, primarily because of restricted access to funding and mentorship opportunities (Sanders, 2023).

According to the Quarterly Labor Force Survey (QLFS), most informal businesses do not survive beyond two years due to the bureaucratic hurdles that affect their operations. Many enterprises operate without proper documentation or support systems, making them particularly vulnerable to financial instability and regulatory challenges. Addressing these systemic issues could significantly improve the resilience and sustainability of businesses nationwide.

S/N	**Category**	**Statistics**	**Sources**
1	Overall Business Closures	Over 100,000 SMEs closed permanently between March 2020 and December 2021	National Treasury Economic Recovery Plan Report (2021)
		Estimated job losses due to business closures: ~1 million	Stats SA Labour Market Dynamics Report (2021)
2	Sector-Specific Impacts	Hospitality & Tourism: 400% increase in business failures during lockdowns	Tourism Business Council of South Africa (TBCSA) Crisis Report (2021)
		Retail Sector: 35% of businesses reported reduced sales or closure	FNB Consumer Confidence Index (2021)
		Construction Industry: 25% decline in active projects (2020–2021)	Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) Annual Report (2021)

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		Manufacturing: 20% of firms experienced insolvency	World Bank Enterprise Survey Update (2021)
3	Financial Stress	70% of SMEs reported difficulty accessing finance during the pandemic	Small Enterprise Finance Agency (SEFA) Pandemic Response Report (2021)
		The average debt-to-income ratio for failing businesses increased by 30%	Experian South Africa Financial Health Report (2022)
4	Government Support Uptake	Only 15% of eligible SMEs accessed the R200 billion loan guarantee scheme	National Treasury Loan Guarantee Scheme Evaluation Report (2021)
		Relief funding applications: ~60,000 approved out of 400,000 submitted	Department of Small Business Development (DSBD) Pandemic Funding Report (2021)
5	Digital Transformation Gap	60% of failed businesses lacked digital presence or e-commerce capabilities	PwC Digital Readiness Survey for SMEs (2021)
6	Mental Health Impact	45% of entrepreneurs reported stress-related mental health issues	Psychology Research Group, University of Johannesburg Study (2021)
7	Gender Disparities	Women-led businesses were 20% more likely to fail than male-led counterparts.	DTIC Gender Entrepreneurship During Pandemic Report (2022)
8	Informal Sector Impact	Informal traders experienced a 50% reduction in income, resulting in increased closures.	Quarterly Labor Force Survey (QLFS), Stats SA

Table 1: Entrepreneurship Failure in South Africa due to Pandemic (2020-2022)
(Source: Compiled by the author)

Table 1: Statistics related to the impact of the pandemic on entrepreneurship in South Africa, including disparities across sectors and demographics.

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Key metrics offer insight into business resilience and recovery during the COVID-19 pandemic. Reveals how resilience manifests differently based on sectors during start-ups, survival, growth and maturity phases of business. The Business Closure Rate (2020–2022) measures the percentage of businesses that permanently shut down due to pandemic-related disruptions, underscoring the overall economic impact. Sectors Most Affected identifies industries with the highest number of closures and financial losses, including the hospitality, tourism, and retail sectors. This reveals context-specific coping and adaptive strategies that entrepreneurs applied in resource-constrained or volatile markets. Government Support Uptake indicates the proportion of eligible businesses that accessed relief programs, such as the R200 billion loan guarantee scheme, highlighting the effectiveness and reach of policy interventions. Digital Transformation Adoption evaluates how businesses adopted digital tools and platforms to maintain operations, transitioning to e-commerce, remote work, and online service delivery. Finally, Recovery Strategies include initiatives by governments, businesses, and communities, such as financial aid, skill development programs, and economic stimulus measures, aimed at stabilizing and revitalizing affected industries. These metrics illustrate the challenges, adaptations, and recovery efforts shaping the post-pandemic business landscape.

S/N	**Countries**	**Business Close Rate (2020-2022)**	**Sector Affected**	**Government Support Uptake (%)**	**Digital Transformation Adoption (%)**	**Recovery Strategy**
1	S/Africa	15%	Hospitality, Tourism, Retail	15	40	Pivoting to e-commerce, government relief funds, and private-sector partnerships
2	Botswana	12%	Tourism, Mining	20	35	Diversification into agriculture, digital innovation hubs, and microfinance programs.

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3	Namibia	18%	Tourism, Agriculture	10	30	Focus on local markets, community-based initiatives, and donor-funded projects.
4	Zimbabwe	20%	Manufacturing, Retail	5	25	Barter trade, informal economy expansion, and remittance reliance.
5	Zambia	16%	Mining, Agriculture	12	32	Public-private partnerships, agricultural subsidies, and rural electrification programs.
6	Mauritius	8%	Tourism, Textiles	25	50	Decisive government intervention, export diversification, and technology-driven adaptations.

Table 2: Comparative Analysis of Entrepreneurial Failure During the Pandemic in Southern Africa (Source: Compiled by the author)

Table 2: Statistics related to comparative Entrepreneurial Failure during the Pandemic in Southern Africa.

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Table 3: Illustrates the impact on African countries and provides insights into how different entrepreneurship and economic sectors experience and enact resilience differently due to cultural, social, or structural factors. This establishes how resilience in the face of adversity sparks innovative practices and connects not only with survival but also as a driver of innovation and long-term competitive advantage. It provides evidence of the evolution of resilience through the lived experience of failure, recovery, and learning circles that promote diversification, as well as the application of technology, referred to as e-commerce. Although it affects all economic sectors, it brings about a transformation that positively impacts the development of the ecosystem and adaptations, which may not always align with resilience, but may involve trade-offs.

S/N	**Countries**	**Business Recovery Rate**	**Digital Transformation on Growth (%)**	**Government Support Effectiveness (%)**	**Entrepreneurial Resilience Index (ERI)**	**Key Changes**
1	South Africa	65%	40%	30%	7.5/10	Increased focus on e-commerce, fintech innovation, and green energy startups; moderate recovery but persistent challenges in the informal sectors.
2	Botswana	60%	35%	35%	7.2/10	Strengthened agricultural entrepreneurship, growth in tech hubs, and improved access to finance for SMEs.
3	Namibia	55%	30%	25%	6.8/10	Shift towards local production, increased reliance

						on community-based initiatives, and modest digital adoption.
4	Zimbabwe	50%	25%	20%	6.3/10	Informal sector dominance persists, with limited formal recovery due to macroeconomic instability; however, some growth is observed in cross-border trade.
5	Zambia	58%	32%	30%	6.9/10	Enhanced agricultural value chains, renewable energy projects, and regional trade expansion.
6	Mauritius	75%	50%	40%	8.5/10	Diversified exports, tech-driven industries, and robust government support programs drove a strong recovery.

Table 3: Entrepreneurial Changes in Southern Africa (2021–2025) (Source: Compiled by the author)

Table 3: Provides a comprehensive overview of the evolution of entrepreneurship in Southern Africa between 2021 and 2025, highlighting successes and ongoing challenges. It underscores the importance of digital adaptation, effective governance, and resilient mindsets in fostering sustainable post-pandemic recovery. The entrepreneurial landscape in Southern African countries has undergone significant

changes from 2021 to 2025, characterized by varying recovery rates, differing levels of digital transformation, and varying government interventions. The Business Recovery Rate indicates the percentage of businesses that successfully resumed operations after the pandemic, with the adoption of technological advancements. Mauritius leads with a recovery rate of 75%, followed by South Africa at 65% and Botswana at 60%. In contrast, Zimbabwe trails at 50% due to ongoing macroeconomic instability. The Digital Transformation Growth assesses the increase in digital adoption, with Mauritius again at the forefront, showing a 50% growth rate driven by advancements in tech-driven industries. Zimbabwe, however, records the lowest growth at 25%. The effectiveness of government support is measured by the Government Support Effectiveness, with Mauritius again leading at 40% due to robust support programs. Conversely, Zimbabwe remains at 20%, reflecting its weak institutional support. Finally, the Entrepreneurial Resilience Index (ERI), a composite score that measures adaptability and resourcefulness, ranks Mauritius highest at 8.5/10, indicating strong resilience among its entrepreneurs.

Results

Empirical Evidence and Synthesis

This study introduces the Entrepreneurial Resilience Ecosystem (ERE) model, which is derived from the synthesis of theoretical frameworks and thematic analysis. The model conceptualizes resilience as an interconnected system that integrates personal strengths, such as psychological resilience, with organizational practices, including structural and strategic resilience (Sarkar & Osiyevskyy, 2018). It demonstrates how South African entrepreneurs cultivate resilience through adaptive capabilities, dynamic learning systems, and supportive networks (Meyer & Hamilton, 2020).

The ERE model was validated through triangulation with real-life case studies and empirical data from the literature. For instance, South African SMEs that successfully adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic pivoted their business models, embraced digital technologies, and forged strategic partnerships (South African Department of Small Business Development, 2021; Statistics South Africa, 2022). Quantitative data reveal that SMEs with high resilience capacity achieved a 35% higher survival rate during the pandemic than those lacking structured resilience mechanisms (Statistics South Africa, 2022). These findings align with global research on resilience in entrepreneurial contexts, underscoring the importance of psychological capital and dynamic capabilities (Baron et al., 2016; Teece, 2018).

Future Trajectories and Implications

Emerging Trends in Resilience-Success Relationships: The evolution of entrepreneurial resilience shows dynamic patterns across different business environments. Hussain (2024) identifies increasing convergence in certain resilience factors, particularly in digital adaptation and stakeholder management capabilities. The study projects significant changes in how resilience will contribute to entrepreneurial

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success in increasingly interconnected markets, emphasizing adaptive capabilities and innovative response mechanisms. Integrating technological advancement with traditional business practices is crucial to future entrepreneurial success. Studies by Botha and Thompson (2023) demonstrate that entrepreneurs who effectively combine digital capabilities with context-specific business approaches show superior performance metrics. The study analysis reveals that balanced integration strategies result in 55% better operational efficiency and 63% higher market adaptability scores. Future implications for entrepreneurial resilience suggest a growing need for sophisticated support mechanisms and adaptive learning systems. Research by Opeyemi (2025) highlights the importance of effective integrated approaches that balance universal business principles with local market requirements. Their findings indicate that entrepreneurs who adopt comprehensive development strategies demonstrate 2.5 times better success rates in achieving sustainable business growth.

Insights from the ERE Model

Across all contexts, psychological resilience—characterized by self-efficacy, emotional regulation, and cognitive flexibility—is a crucial determinant of entrepreneurial success. Entrepreneurs who can cope with adversity and maintain a positive outlook are more likely to recover from setbacks and seize new opportunities. Social networks and community support are essential for building resilience, especially in resource-constrained environments. Entrepreneurs who leverage informal networks—such as stokvels, tontines, and community-based organizations—are better equipped to navigate challenges and sustain their businesses. Innovation and adaptability are key drivers of resilience, enabling entrepreneurs to overcome resource limitations and respond effectively to changing market conditions. Notable examples include mobile money platforms in Kenya, climate-smart technologies in West Africa, and renewable energy solutions in South Africa. Implementing sustainable practices—such as renewable energy, waste reduction, and circular economy models—enhances resilience by addressing environmental challenges while achieving commercial success. This is particularly pertinent in Africa, where environmental vulnerabilities present substantial business risks. Tackling barriers to entrepreneurship—such as limited access to finance, infrastructure deficiencies, and regulatory complexities—calls for targeted policy interventions. Examples include improving access to credit, investing in digital infrastructure, and streamlining regulatory processes.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study has highlighted the crucial role of the entrepreneurial resilience model as a pathway to sustainable business success, particularly in dynamic and resource-constrained environments. By advancing the Entrepreneurial Resilience Ecosystem (ERE) model, the research highlights that resilience is not a fixed individual attribute, but rather an evolving and interconnected system that

integrates different elements, including personal psychological strengths, organizational strategies, adaptive capabilities, and supportive networks. The findings demonstrate that entrepreneurs sustain their ventures by leveraging collective resources, dynamic learning, and strategic adaptation in response to adversity. Specifically, the study emphasizes that resilience is deeply contextual, shaped by socio-economic realities, institutional environments, and cultural values. For instance, South African entrepreneurs navigate a volatile environment by mobilizing community networks, embracing innovation, and reconfiguring business models in ways that reflect both local challenges and opportunities. At the same time, the research highlights the paradoxical nature of resilience: while it fosters survival and adaptation, certain practices may compromise long-term sustainability by creating trade-offs between immediate continuity and broader social or environmental commitments.

Overall, the study contributes to a richer understanding of resilience as a dynamic, situated, and sometimes contested construct within entrepreneurship. For practitioners and policymakers, it provides practical insights into cultivating entrepreneurial ecosystems that align resilience practices with the Sustainable Development Goals. In doing so, the study positions entrepreneurial resilience as both a vital capability and a critical area for ongoing inquiry in advancing sustainable business success.

Empirical Contribution

The findings highlight how entrepreneurs cultivate resilience in environments marked by resource scarcity, institutional uncertainty, and volatile markets through reliance on informal networks, reciprocal community support, and culturally embedded coping strategies (Meyer & Hamilton, 2020). The ERE model thus emphasizes that resilience is not universally enacted but is deeply shaped by localized structural and cultural conditions, adding empirical nuance to the growing recognition that entrepreneurship is contextually embedded (Sarkar & Osiyevskyy, 2018). The study reveals tensions and paradoxes whereby strategies that enhance immediate survival—such as digital pivoting, lean restructuring, or cost-cutting—may simultaneously undermine social equity or environmental commitments. These contributions advance the literature, placing entrepreneurial resilience as an interconnected, evolving, and contextually embedded system. Therefore, the model could be used as a policy framework to design interventions that address barriers to resilience at the individual, organizational, and environmental levels. For example, initiatives aimed at improving access to finance, streamlining regulatory processes (bureaucracy), and promoting sustainability can enhance resilience across the ecosystem. The ERE model not only deepens the theoretical understanding of how resilience is cultivated but also problematizes its implications for sustainable business outcomes, which could inform the development of training programs that incorporate technology, thereby integrating the ERE Model to equip entrepreneurs with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate adversity through innovation and creativity. Instituting workshops that focus on cognitive adaptability, emotional regulation,

and resource management can strengthen individual and organizational resilience, thereby offering a more nuanced empirical foundation for future research on resilience and entrepreneurship. Also, Firms can apply the model to develop resilience strategies tailored to their specific challenges and opportunities. For example, scenario planning and risk management frameworks can help organizations prepare for potential disruptions. The question is, could the ERE model sustain a developing economy during an economic recession?

Limitations

Although the ERE model provides a theoretical framework for future investigations into the processes, contexts, and tensions inherent in resilience-building, it may not be wholly or sufficiently sufficient in addressing psychological resilience to withstand stress and uncertainty and structural resilience. Therefore, the curriculum framework of learning institutions must include and foster entrepreneurship development to enhance resilience and risk-taking, thereby sustaining ventures during economic recessions. ERE will be better studied if future endeavours employ a mixed-methods approach involving in-depth interviews and survey questionnaires in a wider scope to increase empirical validity, as the current study relies more heavily on secondary data, which is limited to the context of Southern African Communities.

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