

# Social capital and engagement in Nigerian small business marketing.

JAMES, I.N.

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**SOCIAL CAPITAL AND ENGAGEMENT IN NIGERIAN SMALL BUSINESS  
MARKETING**

**Imaobong Nsikak James**

PhD

April, 2021

**SOCIAL CAPITAL AND ENGAGEMENT IN NIGERIAN SMALL BUSINESS  
MARKETING**

**Imaobong Nsikak James**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the  
Robert Gordon University

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

## Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis:

**"Social Capital and Engagement in Nigerian Small Business Marketing"** is entirely my work to the best of my knowledge. Where any material could be construed as others' work, it is adequately cited and referenced with appropriate acknowledgements given.

**Imaobong Nsikak James**

## Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to Almighty God – the author and finisher of my faith. You are the source of all knowledge and wisdom.

And to my husband, Nsikak James and lovely daughters Vanessa James and Joyce James, I love you all.

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## Abstract

This study explores social capital and engagement in Nigerian small business marketing. It examines how Nigerian small business owner-managers develop and use social capital in the network of relationships to overcome marketing constraints. Social capital can be viewed as a marketing asset available in network relationships. The process perspective of social capital enables understanding of the formation and use of social resources in networks. Social resources in networks are accessed through relationships built on trust and commitment over time. Although small businesses in Nigeria contribute to the nation's economic and social development, they operate under severe resource constraints. These constraints are mainly due to business size and limited resources, such as limited market impact, limited marketing skills and expertise and limited access to resources. However, small business inherent advantages, such as strong drive and enthusiasm, enable social connections with networks. This study builds on and develops engagement as an advanced form of relationship marketing in Nigerian small businesses. The concepts fit the context of a developing country with low resource availability and limited access to marketing resources.

However, despite the increasing use of the concept "engagement", empirical-based understanding of processes underpinning engagement in small business context remains underexplored. A qualitative research approach is adopted to investigate the processes and dynamics of Nigerian small business owner-managers engagement with various networks for marketing. The complex nature of the phenomenon requires a range of qualitative techniques for data collection and analysis to understand the meaning of small business owner-managers actions during networking. Qualitative data were obtained through participant observation and semi-structured interviews with small business owner-managers in Nigeria. The thematic data analysis approach was adopted using the constant comparative analysis method to compare emerging themes and categories. This approach provides a description and understanding of data interpretations. It explains how Nigerian small business owner-managers engage with multiple networks in a long-term relational exchange relationship for marketing. The research findings identify engagement as a dynamic and iterative process resulting from network interactions, the strength of network ties, network interdependence and stability. This study's novelty lies in explaining the formation

and use of social capital by engaging various networks in small business marketing. It further explores and develops the concept of engagement as a much stronger network relationship to involve networks in marketing. This study proposes a research model that explains the social capital formation and engagement processes of various networks in small business marketing. It develops and demonstrates small business marketing beyond transactions and offers theoretical contributions to the concept of social capital formation and use in small business engagement marketing. Finally, this study proposes recommendations for practice, theory and suggestions for further research.

**Keywords: Small businesses, Small business marketing, Networks, Social capital, Process theory, Entrepreneurial marketing, Relationship marketing, Engagement marketing**

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## Glossary of Terms

- ACP – African, Caribbean and Pacific
- BOI – Bank of Industry
- B2C – Business-to-Customers
- BEIS – Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee.
- CBN – Central Bank of Nigeria
- C.E. – Customer Engagement
- DTCA – Directorate of Technical Cooperation in Africa
- ECOWAS – Economic Community of West Africa States
- EWOM – Electronic Word-of-Mouth
- FCT – Federal Capital Territory
- FMI – Federal Ministry of Industries
- FP4 – Fundamental Proposition 4
- GDPs – Gross Domestic Products
- MAN – Manufacturers Association of Nigeria
- MITI – Nigerian Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Investments
- MSI- Marketing Science Institute
- MSME – Micro, Small and Medium Scale Enterprises
- NAPEP – National Poverty Eradication Program
- NASMEs – National Association of Small and Medium Enterprises
- NNBS- Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics
- NBTE – National Board for Technical Education
- NEPAD - New Partnership for Agencies Development
- NUC – Nigerian University Commission
- NYSC – Nigerian Youth Service Corps

- OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
- RIMA – Rivers State Micro-finance Agency
- R.M. – Relationship Marketing
- SAP – Structural Adjustment Programme
- SDL – Service-Dominant Logic
- SMEDAN – Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria
- SMEIS- Small and Medium Enterprises Investment Scheme
- SSICS – Small Scale Industry Credit Scheme
- U.K. – United Kingdom

# Chapter 1 – Introduction

## 1.0 Introduction

Small businesses are mostly privately-owned enterprises that foster economic development and the technological progress of nations. They do so by opening markets and generating employment opportunities through innovation and creativity. In Nigeria, small businesses constitute 90 per cent of all companies and generate 50 per cent of employment and provision of a variety of goods and services (Aremu and Adeyemi 2011; Ogundele et al. 2013; MSME 2017; Akinbola et al. 2019). Thus, small businesses provide the vehicle for reducing income disparities and adds up to 48 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) (Muritala 2012; Ogundele et al. 2013; Motilewa et al. 2015; Kehinde et al. 2016).

Despite the immense contributions of small businesses to the Nigerian economy, limited resources such as finances, inadequate managerial and entrepreneurial skills, limited demands for goods and services, and lack of adequate infrastructures typically restrain this sector's development and profitability. Political instabilities, unfavourable government and economic policies, and poor access to funding also threaten Nigerian small businesses (MSME 2017; Esther et al. 2018). These factors influence Nigerian small businesses negatively and lead to poor business performance, poor marketing and limits the overall business growth and development (Simpson et al. 2006; Benzing et al. 2009; Ihua 2009; Oluboba 2011; Taiwo et al. 2012; Etuk et al. 2014; Ebitu et al. 2016). Most small businesses in Nigeria go out of business within the first five years of operation. Only about five to ten per cent of small businesses survive, thrive and grow to maturity (Ihua 2009; Agwu and Emeti 2014; Eze and Okpala 2015; Akinso 2018). Prior studies argue that the significant challenges leading to poor survival are limited marketing resources and finance access (Basil 2005; Arinaitwe 2006; Aremu and Adeyemi 2011; Ebitu et al. 2016).

Large organisations and small businesses depend on marketing performance for survival (Becherer et al. 2012). However, traditional marketing theories, which suggest the operational and strategic approach of marketing to large organisation, do not sufficiently explain marketing in small businesses (Simpson et al. 2006;

Reijonen 2010), especially in developing countries like Nigeria. Small businesses have unique characteristics and contexts which differentiate them from large organisations. They are limited in size, including business objectives, management, networking, and marketing approaches (Hill et al. 1998; Carson 2000; Fillis 2002; Hampton et al. 2009; Gamble et al. 2011; Gilmore et al. 2011).

Previous studies have recognised small businesses can overcome marketing challenges by accessing social resources available in networks (Chell and Baines 2000; Jack et al. 2004; O'Donnell 2004; Shaw 2006; Dragnić 2009; O'Donnell 2014; Jones et al. 2020). This study aims to understand how Nigerian small business owner-managers engagement with various networks to improve marketing performance. Engagement in small business is a close relationship between small business owner-managers and various networks based on trust and commitment. It offers theoretically valuable processes through which Nigerian small businesses can access and utilise marketing network resources. This study is concerned with the theoretical and practical perspectives of networking and engagement in small business marketing. The social constructionism approach is explored to build a theoretical understanding of small business engagement processes (Pratt 2009). It will further examine the social capital formation process in networks and engagement practices for marketing. This chapter introduces and outlines the research background, aim and objectives of this study. It explains the need for Nigerian small businesses to understand the processes and use of social resources in networks to improve marketing performance. Figure 1 provides an outline of each chapter of the thesis.

## 1.1 Background of the Research

Every organisation requires marketing for survival. Due to the shift in marketing approaches and the internet and social media presence, customers now have access to various service providers and products (Jones et al. 2013; Taneja and Toombs 2014). Small businesses are establishing new ways to create and maintain connections with customers and other networks for engagement in marketing (Lipsman et al. 2012; Adewale et al. 2013; Gholston et al. 2016). Small businesses faced with marketing challenges embrace long-term relationships with customers (Carson 1985; Grönroos 2006; Reijonen 2010; Sashi 2012; Anderson and Ullah

2014). Small business owner-managers level of engagement in networking enables the development of strong marketing ties and access to resources embedded in networks (Dobbs and Hamilton 2007; Jack et al. 2010; Morrish et al. 2010; Gamble et al. 2011; Jones et al. 2020).

Network for marketing depends on relational activities, which are informal, discreet, interactive, interchangeable, integrated, habitual and can either be passive or proactive (Gilmore 2011; Resnick et al. 2011). These processes are reflected in relationship marketing theory (Zontanos and Anderson 2004). Research on small business owner-managers relationships are centred primarily on creating, developing, and growing business networks (Lee and Jones 2008; Jones and Jayawarna 2010; Taneja and Toombs 2014). Owner-managers often possess networking capabilities such as flexibility, experience, social and communication skills. Networking has been defined as a specific set of linkages among a defined set of actors (Aldrich and Zimmer 1986; Gulati 1998; Premaratne 2002; Ireland et al. 2003; Širec and Bradač 2009). Actors in small business networks can be individuals, groups or organisations (Ireland et al. 2001). Networking is a flexible approach that recognises small businesses informalities and can enhance small business marketing (Gilmore et al. 2006; O'Donnell et al. 2012).

Small business networks are built around owner-managers regular interactions and business activities. Social ties through networks enable small businesses to be understood and accepted in a broader community (Anderson et al. 2018). Customer networking is a voluntary collaboration between businesses and customers for information sharing, resources leverage, access to innovative ideas on products, word-of-mouth referrals and recommendations (Groen 2005; Širec and Bradač 2009). Networking is essential in small businesses as it enables the linkages between organisations and individuals, thus providing a social platform for entrepreneurship (Anderson et al. 2010; McKeever et al. 2014). Networking is not limited to the exchange of information and resources; it is a mode of being entrepreneurial, which reflects the business social environment (Anderson et al. 2010). Business network meetings serve as catalysts for small business networking and indirectly enable the establishment of network interactions. Small business networks have been viewed through the lens of social capital (Anderson et al. 2007; Ramos-Rodriguez et al. 2010; McKeever et al. 2014). Social capital has been defined differently depending on the

disciplines. However, the main idea is that social capital is the asset and resources available in networks (Gabbay and Leenders 2001; Lans et al. 2015).

According to Anderson and Jack (2002), social capital can be viewed as a glue and a lubricant as social capital forms network structures, facilitates network operations, and stimulates network interactions. Research on social capital became prominent in Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988) studies. Bourdieu (1986) describes social capital as social interaction built on trust and affiliation. Coleman (1988) defines social capital by its functions that consist of relational structures that facilitate network actors' specific actions. Burt (1992) and Liao and Welsch (2003) conceptualised social capital as a set of social resources and capabilities embedded in relationships and available through personal and business relationship. Ostrom (2000) views social capital as shared knowledge, norms, understanding, rules and expectations among individuals. Traditionally, social capital is the social resources in relationships and available to people through social connections and interactions (Coleman and Coleman 1994; Liao and Welsch 2003; Kim and Aldrich 2005). Hence, social capital is a relational artefact (Anderson and Hardwick 2017). The application and use of social resources in networks can be referred to as employing social capital (Jack et al. 2004; Hardwick et al. 2014). Social capital is valuable as it reduces transactional cost and enables information and knowledge flow between and among networks.

The theoretical orientation adopted includes Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) process and content perspectives of social capital, which considers different social resources in networks. According to Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998 p. 243), social capital is the *"sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through and derived from the network of relationships possessed by individual or social units."* This definition suggests that social capital allows network actors to access and utilise social resources available in social structures (Davidsson and Honig 2003; Lans et al. 2015). It enables the researcher to investigate network content, the process of networking and how small businesses adopt networking for engagement marketing. Social capital in networks has received considerable attention in research from different disciplines. Various researchers emphasise the network structure (network density or structural holes) and quality (ties strength) of relationships in networks (Coleman 1988; Anderson and Jack 2002; Jack et al. 2004; Vissa 2011; Semrau and

Werner 2014; McKeever et al. 2014). The process theory explains the temporal sequence in which change occurs in different network relationships for expected outcomes (Langley 2009). Lin (2001) posited social capital as resources embedded in network structures; therefore, social capital is reflected in close interpersonal relationships among individuals or groups. Social capital in networks is a critical resource in the effective functioning of small businesses (Dyer et al. 2008; Jack et al. 2008; Anderson et al. 2010; O'Donnell 2014).

Consequently, this study takes up Resnick et al. (2011) small business marketing as relationships with customer network, otherwise known as relationship marketing. Relationship marketing enables small businesses to develop a close and personal relationship with existing customers. With the advancement in technology, fierce competition, product choices and increasingly well-informed customers, small businesses require appropriate marketing strategies to attract, retain and engage customers. Customer engagement promotes a better understanding of customers' needs, expectation and satisfaction (Cambra-Fierro et al. 2013; Rafiq et al. 2013). In marketing, engagement is associated with the level of relationship customers shares with the firm and is termed customer engagement (Pansari and Kumar 2018). Customer engagement involves customers' cognitive, behavioural and emotional absorption resulting from interactive experiences with the business or brand (Vivek et al. 2012; Brodie et al. 2013). Customer engagement can manifest in different customer behaviours such as direct purchases and indirect contributions, including word-of-mouth, recommendations, referrals and word-of-mouse (Van Doorn et al. 2010; Kumar et al. 2010; Pansari and Kumar 2017). Engagement defines network actors' behaviour and contributions towards the business, transactionally and relationally (Cambra-Fierro et al. 2013).

Studies on the adoption of the internet and social media by small businesses have been prominent in the developed countries (McGowan et al. 2011; Durkin et al. 2013; Hardwick and Anderson 2019). Small businesses have experienced the added value of customer experience using social media to build and maintain relationships with various networks. Although social media communication offers real-time and cost-saving alternatives, face-to-face interaction has been identified as most appropriate for network interaction due to intimacy and immediacy (Walther 1995; Oke and Idiagbon-Oke 2010; Hardwick and Anderson 2019). In Nigeria, with the absence of a

regulatory framework on e-commerce security, limited technical skills and internet penetrations, cost and availability hinder small business adoption of social media in marketing (Olayinka et al. 2016; Eze et al. 2020; Abdullahi et al. 2021).

Engagement in small business requires frequent communication and resources to establish trust with networks (Hardwick and Anderson 2019). The concept of engagement has raised scholars' attention from multiple disciplines as it is a vital resource for organisations. Research on customer engagement has increased in marketing as an important area of study (Van Doorn et al. 2010; Brodie et al. 2013; Hollebeek et al. 2016). Previous studies on customer engagement marketing have contributed theoretically and conceptually as psychological, cognitive and behavioural involvement of customers in firms marketing through interactions, commitment and trust (Brodie et al. 2011; Hollebeek 2011; Harmeling et al. 2017; Pansari and Kumar 2017). This research empirically examines Nigerian small businesses engagement with various networks to improve marketing. It focuses on small business owner-managers as they constitute entrepreneurship's natural habitat (Anderson and Obeng 2017).

## 1.2 Research Rationale

Successful orientation creates opportunities for small businesses to overcome marketing challenges both economically and environmentally by accessing external resources in networks (Jones et al. 2013). Research has identified that small businesses can overcome the liability of smallness and minimal market impact through effective networking (Brooksbank et al. 2012; O'Donnell 2014; Dodd et al. 2015). The idea behind networking is to collaborate with various networks to develop, maintain, and improve relationships and others based on reciprocity, trust, and commitment (Jack et al. 2010; Predić and Stošić 2013; O'Donnell 2014). Networks provide access to resources, competencies and marketing information not otherwise readily accessible. The process of establishing a relational exchange of resources requires connections. Small businesses develop social relationships for resource exchange through face-to-face and online interaction (Durkin et al. 2013). Despite the contribution of networks and engagement to marketing, there are limited studies relating to the process of accessing and utilising social capital in small businesses. Most studies focus on network resources (Predić and Stošić 2013; O'Donnell 2014;

Gilmore 2020; Jones et al. 2020) and theoretical concepts of engagement in marketing (Harmeling et al. 2017; Pansari and Kumar 2018). The studies on the use of network resources for small business marketing are mostly in large organisations in the developed countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States of America (Vivek et al. 2014; Hollebeek et al. 2016; Pansari and Kumar 2018).

Studies show small businesses in Nigeria foster economic growth and development by generating employment opportunities at low investment cost. They develop entrepreneurship with the utilisation of local raw materials and encouragement of rural development and poverty reduction (Basil 2005; Ojeka 2011; Ashamu 2014; Eze and Okpala 2015; Bello et al. 2018). Statistically, 90 per cent of all businesses employ less than 50 employees, which imply 90 per cent of companies in Nigeria are small businesses (Agwu and Emeti 2014; Oke and Aluko 2015; Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (NNBS) 2019). Small businesses are the industrialisation bedrock and the most crucial automation component in Nigeria's economic recovery and growth (Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (NNBS) 2019). Due to the importance of small businesses to nations' economy, the government have initiated policies to aid the creation, promotion and development of the small business sector through the establishment of financial institutions, initiation of funding and technical programmes (Basil 2005; Ojeka 2011; Lawal et al. 2016; MSME 2017).

Despite the government's efforts at federal, state and local government levels to ensure small businesses growth, small businesses in Nigeria continue to fail and underperform (Onugu 2005; Ojeka 2011; Okhankhuele 2017). Arguably, the development of small businesses in Nigeria is a step towards building a vibrant and diversified economy. However, Nigerian small businesses face peculiar challenges such as restrictive trade policy, limited market access, poor access to credit facilities, low information flow, inability to analyse and capture market opportunities (Onugu 2005; Apulu 2012; Ayeni-Agbaje and Osho 2015). Other problems that affect small businesses in Nigeria include insecurity, pervasive corruption and weak linkages among various sectors (Taiwo et al. 2012; Oke and Aluko 2015; Ebitu 2016). These challenges have led to reduced productivity, adversely affecting the nation's economic growth and development (Okhankhuele 2017; Kaigama et al. 2017). SMEDAN (2019) identified limited access to finance, limited market access, and inadequate marketing approach as the significant challenges Nigerian small business

face. Ebitu (2016) ranked the problems militating against small businesses' performance and identified limited finance and poor marketing strategies. This research addresses how Nigerian small business can access social capital in networks and engage networks to improve marketing performance.

### 1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

Research on network development processes and utilisation of network resources for engagement in small business marketing is relatively limited in developing countries such as Nigeria (Hakimpoor et al. 2011; Jones et al. 2013; O'Donnell 2014; Jones et al. 2020). Therefore, this study explores how Nigerian small business owner-managers engage with various networks to improve marketing performance. The following objectives were considered to address the research aim:

1. To examine various Nigerian small business networks and their roles in small business marketing.
2. To understand the processes of social capital formation and use in Nigerian small business networks for marketing.
3. To examine Nigerian small business owner-managers marketing practices and the factors that influence marketing relationships.
4. To consider how Nigerian small business owner-managers utilise social capital in networks through engagement to improve marketing performance.

#### 1.3.1 Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to achieve the research aim and objectives:

1. Whom do Nigerian small business owner-managers network with, and what is the role of networks in small business marketing?
2. How do Nigerian small businesses access and use social resources in networks for marketing?
3. How do Nigerian small business owner-managers market goods and services, and what factors influence marketing performance?

4. How does engagement processes in networks promote Nigerian small business marketing?

#### 1.4 Methodology Overview

This study adopts the social constructionism philosophical stance and qualitative research method, which is appropriate for building complex and theoretical understanding (Pratt 2009). Rather than measuring network exchanges, qualitative methods were adopted for a detailed and richer analysis of network processes and social resources contributions in small business marketing (Hill and McGowan 1999; O'Donnell 2014; James et al. 2021). A qualitative approach allows the researcher to explore and understand what goes on in the small business network of relationships (Jack et al. 2015). This method is appropriate, given the nature of this study. The existing literature on the concepts and processes of small business networking, social capital formation, relationship marketing and engagement marketing forms the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework acts as a guide to understand the theories and concepts of social resources in networks (Jack et al. 2004; O'Donnell 2014). Qualitative research allows the research participants' beliefs and perceptions to be incorporated into the study (Burns and Bush 2010; Creswell 2013). Data collection was preceded by a pilot study with thirteen Nigerian small business owner-managers in Aberdeen, North East of Scotland, United Kingdom. The pilot study enabled the researcher to develop and test the adopted research approach and techniques' adequacy. It also improved the researcher's experience in interviewing, data analysis and uncover potential research challenges. The pilot study provided the researcher with hands-on experience in conducting qualitative research, refocusing and sharpening the research scope.

Eligible research participants were selected using a purposive sampling method. Participant observation enabled the researcher to identify the research participants during network meetings and develop a rapport with them. Semi-structured interviews and participant observation were the data collection methods adopted. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to explore emerging themes during data collection and analysis. The data collection process was conducted over six months with Nigerian small business owner-managers across various industrial sectors. The researcher observed participants at five network meetings at the

research locations and an hour at the participant's business premises before interviews. Thirty-two participants were interviewed, and further followed-up interviews on seven participants by telephone to clarify ambiguity identified during analysis. Interview sessions varied between 90 to 120 minutes; the interview's length was determined by the flow of information and probing based on the emerging themes. Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face at the participants' business premises and tape-recorded.

Prior research on small business marketing and networking has adopted semi-structured interviews as networks are relational artefacts (Carson and Cromie 1990; Uzzi and Gillespie 2002; Blankson et al. 2006; O'Donnell 2011; Resnick et al. 2011; Vissa 2012; 2014; Soetanto et al. 2018). The consequences are the product of relational exchanges such as social capital. There is a need to understand various networks, the linkages between network members and access to social resources (Anderson and Jack 2002; Jack et al. 2008). The semi-structured interview is an effective strategy to understand the entrepreneurial process with the opportunity to probe research participants when necessary (Curran and Blackburn 1994; Fulford and Rizzo 2009; Turner 2010). Face-to-face interviews allowed the research participants the opportunity to narrate their lived experiences.

Semi-structured interviews are particularly appropriate when the subject matter is complex, and the objective is to understand the underlying reasons for behaviours and perspectives. The qualitative research approach allows researchers to gather data on what participants believe and experience in social interactions. Qualitative research typically does not allow many participants in the study, and the empirical results are not generalisable beyond the sample. However, it allows for the generation of context-rich, detailed and descriptive accounts on the transformation and development process of networking (Jack et al. 2010; Chetty et al. 2014; Jensen and Laurie 2016). Moreover, the findings are likely to be theoretically generalisable at the conceptual level (Xiong et al. 2018).

Nvivo (data analysis software) was used to manage the interview data generated. The thematic analysis process employed a constant comparative method, which involves reviewing data for emerging themes (Silverman 2006; Jack 2010; Jack et al. 2015). The data analysis process adopted for the study is a well-accepted

approach for analysing entrepreneurial networks (Hill et al. 2002; Anderson et al. 2007; Jack et al. 2008; Hampton et al. 2009; Jack et al. 2010). Rich information on the research participants' entrepreneurial journey was gathered, including network context, networking, and engagement to small business marketing.

## 1.5 Originality of the Research

Despite the significance of small businesses to the Nigerian economy, there are limited studies on Nigerian small business marketing. Networks are crucial to small businesses; it mitigates the liability of newness and smallness (Aldrich and Reese 1993; Jones et al. 2020). Previous studies on networks and networking focus on network content and networking in small firms marketing (O'Donnell 2014; Sullivan and Ford 2014; Perry-Smith and Mannucci 2017). Studies on the role and strength of network ties in small businesses networks are predominantly in developed countries (Jack 2005; Hampton et al. 2009; Jack et al. 2010; Soetanto et al. 2018; Hardwick and Anderson 2019). The dynamic network nature and how small businesses can access social capital in networks for marketing have not been extensively addressed, especially in developing countries. Therefore, this research aims to address this research gap in building knowledge of social capital and engagement processes for Nigerian small businesses across various sectors and specific to the location of research, South-South geopolitical zone in Nigeria. This study demonstrates social capital processes in networks and explains the antecedents and outcomes of engagement in Nigerian small business marketing. It further contributes to the existing body of knowledge in small business marketing and entrepreneurship in general.

This study contributes to small business marketing practices by employing network theory, social capital theory and process theory to explain relationship and engagement marketing (Hill and McGowan 1996; Gilmore 2011; Jones and Rowley 2011). The research model in chapter 8 illustrates the processes of accessing social resources and engagement marketing in Nigerian small businesses. Secondly, it builds on previous knowledge of social capital contribution to small business marketing and examines existing theories and concepts to explain small businesses' engagement practices.

Social capital variables (interaction, interdependence, stability and strength of network ties) in chapter 7 allow the explanation of the processes of formation and social resources for marketing. Through the iterative social capital formation and use process, Nigerian small business owner-managers can identify and engage networks in marketing activities. The process of social capital formation and utilisation for Nigerian small businesses, based on the participant observation and semi-structured interviews with owner-managers in small businesses, is explained. The qualitative research approach provided useful ways to explain the antecedents and outcomes of engagement: connectedness, involvement, participation and advocacy in Nigerian small business marketing. Thirdly, the study contributes to the emerging practice of engagement by providing explanations of social capital development processes and how social resources contribute to Nigerian small business marketing.

## 1.6 Thesis Structure

This thesis is organised and presented in nine chapters, as detailed below:

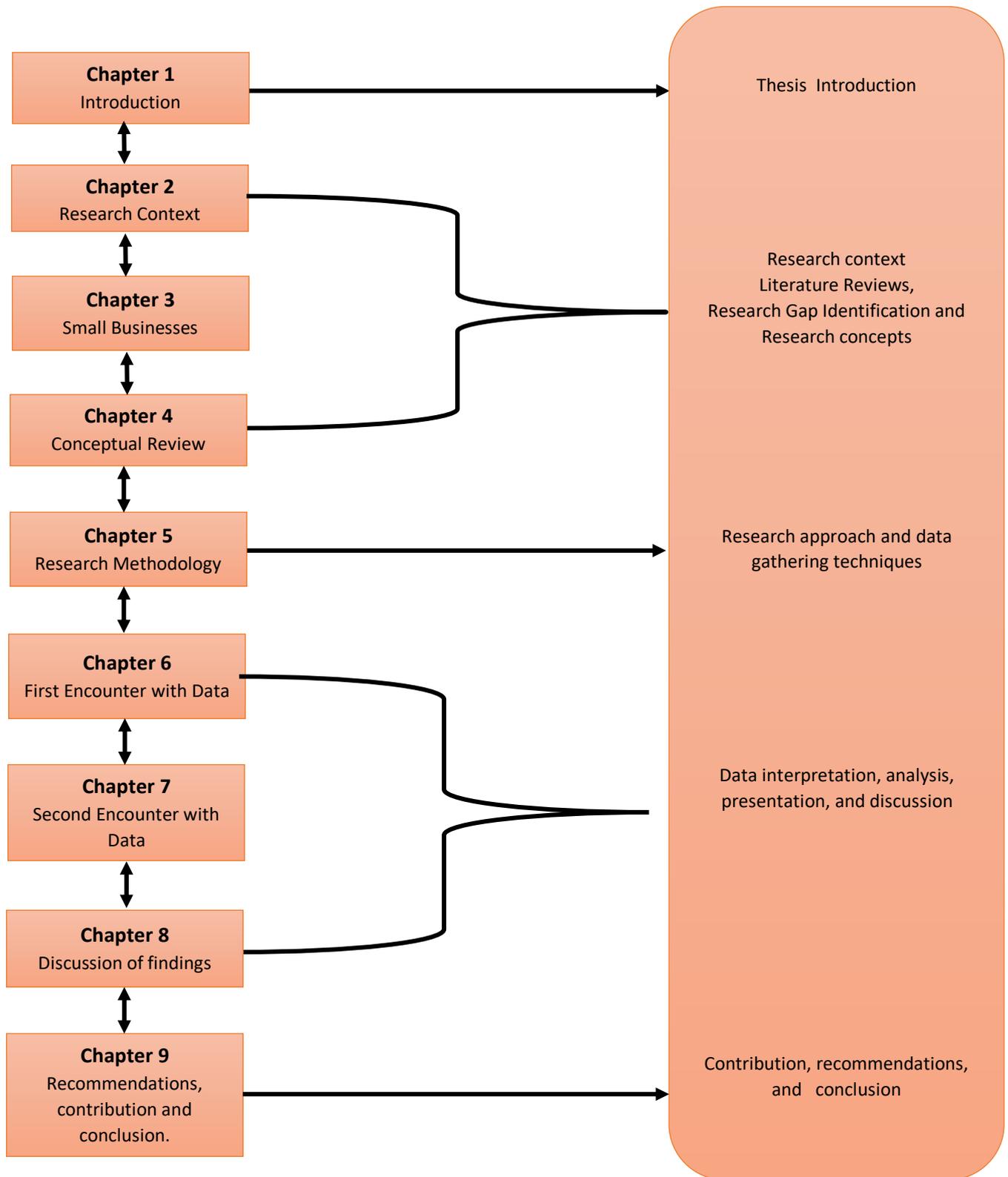
- **Chapter One:** This is the introduction chapter of this study, which seeks to answer the question, "*Why the research?*" This chapter introduces the thesis, research background, rationale of the research, aim and objectives, an overview of the methodology adopted, and a summary of the contribution to the body of knowledge. Finally, it presents the structure and outline of the overall thesis.
- **Chapter Two:** This chapter explores the research context. It describes Nigeria, the economic, political and socio-demographics, the chosen research location, the characteristics and challenges of Nigerian small businesses.
- **Chapter Three:** This chapter reviews the concepts of small businesses, small business marketing and challenges, entrepreneurial marketing and the use of social media and networks.
- **Chapter Four:** This chapter presents the conceptual review and the theoretical underpinning for this study. It explores the concept of networks, process theory, the concept of social capital in networks in conjunction with small businesses. It further examines various marketing concepts, such as transactional marketing,

relationship marketing, and engagement marketing. This chapter concludes by presenting small business marketing evolution and the thesis conceptual framework.

- **Chapter Five:** This chapter provides a complete account of the research approach and methods adopted for the study. It describes the philosophical assumptions, research paradigms, research design and explains the research methods adopted, including research context, sampling strategy, data collection techniques, data collection processes, data analysis process, research trustworthiness and ethical consideration.
- **Chapter Six:** This chapter presents the empirical findings from the research data. This chapter attempts to answer the research question by describing and analysing the research data on whom Nigerian small business owner-managers network with and the contribution of networks in small business marketing?
- **Chapter Seven** is a detailed discussion on how small businesses develop and utilise networks resources for marketing, how social resources in networks contribute to small business marketing, and how small business owner-managers engage various networks to promote marketing performance? This chapter illustrates and explains the findings concerning small business network marketing and social resources in engagement marketing. It presents a detailed explanation of the social capital formation and use processes and further illustrates small business engagement marketing processes.
- **Chapter Eight:** This chapter presents the research key findings by interpreting research data and discussing its relevance and contribution to knowledge. It addresses the research aim and objectives with literature and the research findings. This chapter also illustrates the small business marketing evolution and presents the developed research model for small businesses engagement marketing.
- **Chapter Nine:** This chapter concludes the thesis by assessing how the research aim and objectives were achieved. It highlights the main findings of the study in light of the literature. This chapter also presents thesis contributions to the body

of knowledge, recommendations, suggestions for further research and further highlights the study limitation.

Figure 1: Thesis Structure



Source: Author generated

## Chapter Two – Research Context

### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews the research context to understand the environment small businesses under investigation operate. This chapter is structured as follows: Section 2.1 provides the overview of Nigeria, explaining the economic, political and socio-demographics. Section 2.2 discusses the historical perspective of Nigerian small businesses. Section 2.3 presents different Nigerian small business support agencies established by the government. In Section 2.4, a definition of small businesses in Nigeria is presented with the marketing challenges. Section 2.5 describes the various states in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria, the location chosen for this study, and finally, section 2.6 is the chapter summary.

### 2.1 Nigeria

The Federal Republic of Nigeria, commonly known as Nigeria, is a country in West Africa, with approximately 196 million inhabitants, about 47 per cent of West Africa's population (The World Bank Annual Report 2017; Internet World Stats 2020). Nigeria consists of Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja and 36 autonomous states with over 274 different ethnic groups, languages and cultural heritages (Chinenye and Ogbera 2013). Nigeria is divided into three major regions and further grouped under six geopolitical zones. The geopolitical zones of Nigeria include South-East, South-South, South-West, North-Central, North-East, and North-West. The subdivision is for the smooth running of governance and delivery of services such as education and health care (Gbenga-Ilori and Ibiyemi 2010). Nigeria is about 923,768 sq. km and shares borders with the Republic of Benin in the west, Chad and Cameroon in the East and Niger in the North. The south lies on the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean (Internet World Stats 2020).

#### 2.1.1 Economic Overview

Following Nigeria's independence in 1960, small and medium scale enterprises have promoted the economy's growth by reducing poverty and unemployment in the nation. There has been a significant shift from capital-intensive based industrial

projects to small-scale businesses with potential for sustainable industrial development (Agwu and Emeti 2014; OECD 2016b). Nigerian small businesses boost employment and facilitate growth from the non-oil sectors. However, in 2016, Nigeria's economy contracted by 1.5 per cent to the lowest GDP growth in over two decades (Adebusuyi et al. 2015). The low GDP caused a massive drop in government revenue and foreign currency availability. It negatively impacted the nation's development and the profitability of small businesses (OECD 2016b).

In Nigeria, significant economic growth constraints have been identified as inadequate power supply, deficient transportation infrastructure, widespread corruption, and high inflation rate (Basil 2005; Aremu and Adeyemi 2011; Agwu and Emeti 2014). Although Nigeria is rich in natural resources, the resources are underdeveloped, leaving many of the inhabitants with meagre income resulting in poverty (The World Development Report 2019; The World Bank 2020). Nigeria has made significant progress in socio-economic terms over the last 15 years, with an increase in the Human Development Index (HDI) of 14.4 per cent between 2005 and 2018. However, Nigeria continues to face massive developmental challenges due to over-dependence on crude oil and a lack of diversity in the economy (The World Bank in Nigeria 2020). Figure 2 shows the fluctuations in the annual GDP change rate from June 2015 to January 2018 due to the oil price collapse. In 2016, Nigeria experienced a recession, with GDP declined in more than two consecutive quarters, impacting small business profitability and performance.

Figure 2: Real GDP growth rate in Nigeria (July 2015 -January 2018)



Source: <https://tradingeconomics.com/nigeria/gdp-growth-annual>.

Nigeria economy has been affected adversely due to inequality in terms of income and opportunities. Lack of job opportunities, regional disparities, social and political unrest in the country. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2020), over 50 per cent of Nigeria's population lives in poverty, without adequate access to basic amenities. Nigeria economy is dominated by crude oil and its derivatives, which account for 60 per cent of the federal government revenue and more than 77 per cent of the nation's total exports (CBN 2016). Besides crude oil, Nigeria has an abundance of human capital, agricultural resources and many solid mineral resources, which are still underdeveloped (Shehu et al. 2013; Ogunbayo et al. 2014).

Another key sector in Nigeria is agriculture, employing over 60 per cent of the workforce, generating 26 per cent of the nation's GDP (Afolabi 2015; Adesugba and Mavrotas 2016). Small businesses in Nigeria engage in agricultural practice, contributing to industrial and economic development (Aina 2010; Muritala 2012; Eze and Okpala 2015; Gumel 2017). Table 1 shows small businesses in various economic sectors in Nigeria. Most small businesses in Nigeria are into educational activities, wholesale and retail of finished goods, manufacturing of domestic products, food processing, medical services, administrative and support services.

Table 1: Distribution of small businesses by Economic Sector

SMALL BUSINESSES BY ECONOMIC SECTOR	Number
Agriculture	1,424
Mining and Quarrying	218
Manufacturing	13,442
Sewage, waste management, and remediation activities	24
Construction	500
Wholesale and retail	15,248
Transportation and storage	820
Accommodation and food services	7,130
Information and communication	448
Administration and support services	2,956
Education	22,141
Arts, entertainment and recreation	251
Other services	2,793
<b>Total</b>	<b>67,396</b>

Source: Adopted from SMEDAN/NNBS MSME SURVEY 2019

### 2.1.2 Political Overview

After the Nigerian independence in 1960 from British rule, there has been political instability, which has resulted in an unpredictable market and a climate of social tension for small businesses (Onuorah 2009). During the civilian rule headed by Shehu Shagari, there was a rise in oil prices, and revenues increased, which contributed to the Nigerian economy's growth. In 1983, the country returned to

military leadership led by General Muhammadu Buhari due to the high level of corruption. The military rulers demonstrated commitment by lowering spending and reducing the numbers of government benefits and public services. The leadership of Buhari launched a campaign against corruption, poor work ethics, emphasising patriotism and promoting environmental sanitation.

The recession in 1986 led to a decline in income. The recession increased the level of unemployment, devaluation of currency despite the World Bank's support and the rescheduling of foreign debt. An interim government led by Ernest Shonekan was appointed in 1993, after the military annulment. The military continued to exchange power until 1999, when there was a transition to a civilian government led by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), followed by Yar'Adua in 2007 Goodluck Johnathan in 2010. In the 2015 election, there was a transfer of power between President Muhammed Buhari's political parties. The mission of Buhari for the nation is to fight corruption, increase security, tackle unemployment, diversify the economy and enhance climate resilience (The World Bank in Nigeria 2019). Nigeria is made up of numerous ethnic and religious groups. The ethnic differences, which often cause unrest, are amplified by the differences in economic development between the country's southern and northern parts.

There are three government administration levels in Nigeria: the federal, the state and the local governments. Nigeria operates a national presidential system that consists of the executive, the legislative and the judicial. The federal government level is the top in the hierarchy consisting of the president, vice-presidents, and ministers called "the cabinet", also known as a group of ministers, appointed to head specialised areas such as agriculture and foreign affairs, finance, education and aviation. The legislative branch or the national assembly deals with the regulations and laws of the nation. This branch comprises the Senate and the House of Representatives. The judicial branch's role is to ensure there is no abuse of power; they are responsible for executing, overseeing, and implementing the nation's legal system.

The next level is the state government, which comprises the executive branch, legislative branch, and judicial branch. The head of this level is the state governor, and the laws are formed and analysed through the State House of representatives.

The next level is the local government, which is the closest government to the grassroots people. It consists of provincial government chairpersons, secretaries, and councillors. There are also international organisations in partnership with Nigeria for political development, including the United Nations (U.N.), International Monetary Fund (IMF), The World Bank, African Development Bank, World Trade Organisation (WTO), Organisation of Petroleum Exporting countries, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and the Commonwealth nations.

### 2.1.3 Socio-Demographic overview

The population of Nigeria is over 206,956,343 people, equivalent to 2.75 per cent of the world's total population, which indicates that 1 in every 43 people on the planet is Nigerian (Worldometer 2020). Nigeria has the largest population in Africa, about 47 per cent of West African's total population. In 2019 the sex ratio was 1.030 males per 1.0 females, Nigeria population density is about 215 per Km<sup>2</sup>, with 51 per cent of the people located in urban areas. The median age in Nigeria is 17.9 years. Over 187 Nigerian emigrates daily to settle in other countries due to socio-economic issues such as insecurity, economic instability and civil unrest.

## 2.2 Historical perspective of small businesses in Nigeria

Before Nigerian independence, the Nigerian economy depended significantly on small businesses involved in agriculture. Agricultural produce includes cocoa from the South-West, rubber and palm oil plantation from the East and groundnuts from the Northern part of Nigeria were the significant sources of wealth (Adisa 2008; 2014; Adeyemi and Abiodun 2014). The agricultural sector accounted for over 74 per cent of employment and contributed significantly to Nigeria GDP (Adeyemi and Abiodun 2014; Abdulrahman and Ibrahim 2019). After independence, the government attempted to ensure that small businesses play an essential role in developing the country. The indigenisation decree of 1972 and Nigeria Enterprises promotion act in 1972 paid particular attention to developing small-scale businesses as a seedbed and training ground for entrepreneurship (Ogechukwu 2013; Ogundele et al. 2013). The discovery of oil in some parts of the country turned the attention of the government from small businesses both in the urban and rural areas from agriculture to oil derivatives (OECD 2016b). The drop in oil price in 2008 and the economic downturn

forced the government to refocus on small business and other non-oil producing sectors to encourage local resources in industrial development (Okeke et al. 2014). Small businesses have been acknowledged as the engine of change in Nigeria, and the government have created agencies to support this sector in human and financial resources (Oghojafor et al. 2011; Ihugba et al. 2013).

## 2.3 Nigerian Small Business Support Agencies

The Nigerian government has created the following Enterprise Supporting Agencies (ESA) to facilitate and empower small business owner-managers through entrepreneurial development programmes: Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN), Bank of Industry (BOI), National Association of Small and Medium Enterprises (NASME) (Ogechukwu 2013; Adegbuyi et al. 2016; Akinbola et al. 2019). In 2000, the National Poverty Eradication Program (NAPEP) was established during President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration to empower small businesses with financial resources to facilitate small businesses start-ups (Ayodeji and Balcioglu 2010; Motilewa et al. 2015; Adegbuyi et al. 2016). The government set up avenues to reduce overhead costs by providing start-up funds through agencies such as the Central bank of Nigeria (CBN), the Federal Ministry of Industries (FMI) and the Small-Scale Industry Credit Scheme (SSICS). Many states in the federation have also set up investment corporations and agencies where state governments allocate funds annually to grant loans to small businesses.

In 2003, to promote and develop the successful establishment of functioning and production units of micro, small and medium scale enterprises (MSME) across the nation and enhance sustainable economic development, the government established the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency Nigeria (SMEDAN). This agency identifies individuals or groups with viable business ideas and supports them financially with equipment and skill development. They also provide the following services: business creation awareness, business development services, access to market and finance, advancing entrepreneurship education and much more (SMEDAN 2017). Despite all these strategies and policies by the government to promote small businesses growth, small businesses' beneficial impact is minimal. Due to corruption, fund diversification, political instability and policy inconsistencies, small businesses

struggle to access governmental supports (Onugu 2005; Ihua 2009; Apulu 2012). Ogundele et al. (2013) identified inadequate monitoring of the programme execution by government executives and approval of fictitious loans mitigate against the success of support agencies. Informal sources such as family, friends and former colleagues remain the primary source of resources such as funds, information, and innovation for small businesses (Gumel 2017).

## 2.4 Small Businesses in Nigeria

There is no universal definition for small businesses, as the definition varies from country to country depending on the economy of the nations, the level of economic development and the numbers of employees or value of assets and investments (Ogechuwu 2006; Aruwa and Gugong 2007; Aigboduwa and Oisamoje 2013). The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) in 2005 provided guidelines in the Small and Medium Enterprises Investment Scheme (SMEIS) describing small business as an enterprise with a maximum asset base of 40 million nairas (excluding land and working capital) with no limit of employees. In 2013, the Small and Medium-Sized Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) defined small business based on dual criteria; employment and assets: those with total workforces of between 10 to 49 persons and total assets of ₦5, 000,000.00 to ₦50, 000,000.00 excluding land and buildings. Table 2 presents the summary of micro, small and medium scale businesses in Nigeria classification.

Table 2: Classification of small businesses in Nigeria

Enterprise category	Number of Employees	Assets (excluding land and buildings)
Micro Enterprises	Less than 10	Less than 5 million Naira
Small Enterprises	10 to 49	5- less than 50 million Naira
Medium Enterprises	50 to 199	50 – less than 500 million Naira

Source: Adapted from SMEDAN/NNBS MSME SURVEY 2019

### 2.4.1 Challenges of Nigerian Small Businesses Marketing

Although successful small businesses contribute immensely to Nigeria's development, more than 50 per cent of small businesses close in their early stages. Table 3 shows the contributions of small businesses in various sectors to the GDP of Nigeria. Some authors argue that Nigerian small business challenges are mainly due to the nation's unstable economic situation (Arinaitwe 2006; Ihua 2009; Aremu and Adeyemi 2011; Karadag 2015). According to Ogundele et al. (2013) and Lampadarios (2016), internal and external factors affect small businesses' growth and productivity in Nigeria. The internal factors include age and size of the company, network relationships, market, poor perception of marketing opportunities, purchasing inputs, marketing of products, responding to customers' needs, management of customers and product development. External factors include, but are not limited to unstable government policies, unfavourable macroeconomic environment, inadequate market research, high operating costs, poor record-keeping, infrastructural inadequacies (such as water, electricity, road) (Oboh 2004; Ogujiuba et al. 2004; Onugu 2005; Basil 2005; Ayanda and Labara 2011; Gumel 2017).

Human capital is also a challenge for small businesses in Nigeria, coupled with inadequate accounting systems, which leads to an improper assessment of performance and financial resources mismanagement (Ayanda and Labara 2011; Igwe et al. 2018). Small business owner-managers require essential planning, organising, coordination and communication skills (Etuk et al. 2014; Igwe et al. 2018). Studies in developed countries have identified that small businesses can gain innovativeness and marketing capabilities through networking (O'Donnell 2011). Previous research in networking enables small businesses to access social resources such as marketing resources (O'Donnell et al. 2002; Harrigan et al. 2011), opportunity recognition (Wolff and Moser 2009), product and service ideas (Groen 2005), product feedback and suggestions (Kasouf et al. 2009).

Table 3: Contribution of small businesses to Nigeria GDP by sector

<b>Activity Sectors</b>	<b>Contribution to GDP (In %)</b>
Agriculture, Forestry, hunting, fishing	6.53
Mining and quarrying	0.39
Manufacturing	21.27
Building and construction	7.68
Wholesale and retail trade	8.68
Hotels and restaurants	27.98
Transport and storage	5.60
Information and Communication	9.57
Financial intermediation	1.39
Real estate, renting and business activities	13.25
Education	14.69
Profession, scientific and technical services	2.08
Administrative and support services	15.20
Human health and social services	20.06
Water supply, sewage, waste management, and remediation	6.63
Other community, social and personal services including barbing salon, hairdressing and laundry service	17.01

Source: Adapted from SMEDAN/ NNBS MSME SURVEY 2017

Most Nigerian small business owner-managers view marketing as selling, reflecting various dysfunctional business behaviours against customer satisfaction and relationships (Ogechukwu and Oboreh 2013). Ebitu et al. (2016) identified poor marketing performance as a contributing factor to small business failures. SMEDAN (2019) identified the following small business marketing challenges: low market access, poor access to credit facilities, poor information flow, lack of market knowledge and poor attitude towards customers. Inadequate access to long-term financing due to small size and productivity also hinders the profitability and sustenance of Nigerian small businesses (Obokoh and Asaolu 2012; Akinola and Iordoo 2013; Gbandi and Amissah 2014).

Previous research posits the lack of small business marketing orientation accounts for small business failures (Carson et al. 1995; Stokes et al. 1997; Stokes 1998; O'Donnell 2011). Due to external and internal challenges Nigerian small businesses face, small businesses in Nigerian can rely on network relationships to improve marketing performance (Adegbuyi et al. 2015). Understanding how Nigerian small businesses can develop and establish long-term relationships beyond sales with network members is required. The small business's success is more on entrepreneurial and internal factors than external influences (Karanja et al. 2013). The small business owner-manager behaviour and relationship strongly influence the business's overall performance and entrepreneurship orientation (Muchiri and McMurray 2015). The following section reviews the research location.

## 2.5 Location of study

The specific location chosen to explore social capital contribution in networks to small business marketing is the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria, located at latitude 4°N longitude 9°E, comprising six states: Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers State. The area covers 84,587km<sup>2</sup> and has a coastline spread over 540km. The study area is bordered to the south by the Atlantic Ocean and the East by Cameroun. The zone inhabitants include IZONS, Urhobo, Isoko, Ikwere, Ika, Ukwuani, Abua, Itsekiri, Ogoni, Efik, Ibibio, Annang and Bini (Ibaba 2005; Etekpe 2007). Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone is the country's economic mainstay as over 70 per cent of the national revenue is derived from the oil in the region (Awa et al. 2010; Anugwom 2011; Abeh 2017). The Nigerian South-South geopolitical zone is endowed with diverse vegetation belts from the largest rain forest in Nigeria to the mangrove swamps, savannahs, mountains and waterfalls (Odoemenem and Inakwu 2011). There are rare animals, including endangered species and various plant families (Edoumiekumo et al. 2013). In addition to the oil and gas in this region, there are natural resources with enormous potential for farming and tourism investment opportunities.

Small firms in this region are mostly sole proprietors, urban concentrated with poor accounting and marketing inefficiencies (Ebitu et al. 2016). Nonetheless, the small businesses in the Nigerian south-south geopolitical zone are very enterprising, with little or no start-up support from the government. They mostly start-up from personal

savings with very low capital outlay (Basil 2005; Aremu and Adeyemi 2011). Even with the knowledge of financial support from banks and government agencies, they have no access to funds due to government officials' bottlenecks. Most small business employees are family members or people in close relationship with the owner-manager as they are afraid of financial mismanagement or fraudulent actions (Okpara 2011). This research was conducted in the area located with the blue colour of the map in Figure 3, showing Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. The researcher had spent several years in this region, owned and managed a small business for five years before relocating to the United Kingdom to further her education. The purpose was to access the small business owner-managers lived experience, and such personal information is accessed based on trust and confidentiality. Table 4 shows the number of small businesses in the various states of the research location.

Table 4: Small business in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria

<b>States of Study</b>	<b>Number of small businesses</b>
Akwa Ibom State	1882
Bayelsa State	297
Cross River State	1417
Delta State	1470
Edo State	2633
Rivers State	1593
<b>Total</b>	<b>9292</b>

Source: Adopted from SMEDAN annual report 2017

Figure 3: The different geopolitical zones in Nigeria



Source: SMEDAN /MSME survey summary report 2017

### 2.5.1 Akwa Ibom State

Akwa Ibom State, fondly called the land of promise, was previously in Cross River State. Akwa Ibom State is in Nigeria's coastal region, with 7,081 square kilometres (National Bureau of Statistics 2019). Akwa Ibom state is predominantly Christian, though some still practice local African religions. It is one of the oil-producing states in Nigeria, with various other natural resources such as clay, coal, glass sand, silver nitrate, natural gas and salts, and limestone. There are two major seaports on the Atlantic Ocean with the proposed construction of a world-class harbour in Oron. The cultural similarities across the state bind the people together, especially in cuisine and dressing. Akwa Ibom State's government has made a tremendous effort to diversify its economy through mechanised farming, tourism, and information technology. In 2013 Akwa Ibom state government collaborated with the Directorate of Technical Cooperation in Africa (DTCA), Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) and other enterprise agencies to improve small businesses entrepreneurial training. Small businesses operating in Akwa Ibom include welding and construction, borehole drilling, computer services, plumbing, catering and hospitality services, educational sectors, fashion and designs, hairdressing saloons and small-scale manufacturing companies. In 2014, Akwa Ibom State won the best state exhibitor, displaying small businesses' goods and services at the international trade fair in Abuja (Akpan et al. 2013).

### 2.5.2 Bayelsa State

Bayelsa State was created in October 1996 from Rivers State by the military regime of General Sani Abacha. Bayelsa state is in the lower southern part of the Niger Delta region, and the capital is Yenagoa. Crude oil was first discovered in Nigeria at Oloibiri, Bayelsa State, in commercial quantity (Edoumiekumo et al. 2013b). Bayelsa is a multi-ethnic state, and the predominant religions are Christianity and traditional worship. Bayelsa State shares territorial boundaries with Delta State on the North, the Atlantic Ocean on both the West and South and Rivers State on the East. Bayelsa state has a landmass of 21,110 square kilometres with the fewest Local Government Areas of 8, with over 2 million people accounting for 1.2 per cent of Nigeria's total population (Ibaba 2005; Etekpe 2007; South-South Region 2019).

Bayelsa State accounts for over 30 per cent of oil production in Nigeria. The state is renowned for palm wine tapping, trading, lumbering, farming, fishing, carving and weaving (Tamuno and Edoumiekumo 2012; South-South Region 2019). With most of the state below sea level, over three-quarters consists of a maze of meandering creeks and mangrove swamps. Besides, Bayelsa also has vast reserves of clay, sand, and gravel, which are of utmost importance to the industrial sector (Ifelunini and Wosowei 2013). Small businesses in Bayelsa mainly engage in fishing, farming, local gin making, carving and weaving. They are mostly rural dwellers due to the terrain and lack of adequate transportation.

### 2.5.3 Cross River State

In 1967 Cross River State was created, a new division from the former Cross River Region and its capital is Calabar. Cross River State shares boundaries with Benue State to the west, Abia State to the south and the Atlantic Ocean. It has a landmass of over 20,156 square kilometres and a population of over three million people with a rich cultural heritage. Cross River State is the home of the most beautiful scenery with numerous natural resources such as oil and gas, limestone, kaolin, clay, salt, barite and quartzite. Most small businesses operating in this state are hospitality, information technology, bakery, farming, fishing, wood and carvings (Odoemenem and Inakwu 2011).

### 2.5.4 Edo State

In 1991 Edo state was created. It is made up of 18 local government areas and comprises three major ethnic groups: Binis, Esan, and Afemai. The population is over four million people with a landmass of 19,794 square kilometres. Edo State to the North is bordered by Kogi State, Ekiti State and Ondo State to the West, Delta, and the East and South. There are abundant natural resources of crude oil, clay, chalk, natural gas, granite stone, quartz and limestone in Edo State. There are over 100 significant festivals celebrated in Edo State yearly and notable for bronze work. Agriculture is the mainstay of the state economy, with products such as yams, oil palm produce and rice as cash crops (Obadan and Ohiorenoya 2013). Most small businesses here operate in hospitality, transportation, catering, arts and crafts studios, rubber and cocoa plantation, food processing and packaging and education (Oboniye 2013).

### 2.5.5 Rivers State

Rivers State is the third significant small business populated states in Nigeria. Port Harcourt is the capital of Rivers State, and the population of Port Harcourt is about 6.5 million. Rivers State is known to be pleasant and hospitable. There are various ethnic groups and with a land area of 11,077 square kilometres. Rivers State is bounded to the South by the Atlantic Ocean to the North by Anambra State, Imo State, and Abia State, to the East by Akwa Ibom State and to the West by Bayelsa State. The environment is mainly mangrove swamps and accounts for more than 40 per cent of the crude oil and food production in Nigeria. Port Harcourt is a cosmopolitan city, which makes it the second-largest commercial centre in Nigeria. There are two significant refineries and a seaport in Rivers State, with various industries spread across the state. In 2016 Chief Wike, the governor of Rivers State, launched a RIMA campaign (Rivers State Micro-finance Agency) to empower small business owners through micro-credit schemes to recover the state's economic situation. Most small businesses in Rivers State operate as a family or sole proprietorship business (Agwu and Emeti 2014). Over one thousand five hundred registered small businesses in Rivers state offer various products and services (Aremu and Adeyemi 2011; Fatai 2011), with over 90 per cent involved in wholesale and retail trade.

### 2.5.6 Delta State

Delta State is in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. It is one of Nigeria's wealthiest states, and its capital is Asaba on the Niger River. Delta state was created in 1991 from Bendel State and divided into 25 local government areas. The land area is about 18,050 square kilometres, with an estimated population of 4.2 million people. Delta State is ethnically diverse with various linguistic stocks. The region is predominately mangrove swamps in the delta, merging with freshwater swamps to the north. Agriculture is a significant revenue generator of the Delta State economy. In Delta State, the following are grown for local consumption and commercial purposes: yams, cassava, oil palm, rice, and corn. Warri is the state's capital and economic nerve centre, located in the southern part of the state and densely populated (Abeh 2017). The major petroleum refineries in Nigeria are located at Warri, the capital of Delta State. Delta State is blessed with many solid mineral deposits, including crude oil,

industrial clay, silica, lignite, kaolin, tar sand, decorative rocks, and limestone as raw materials for industries (South-South Region Guide 2020). Small businesses operating in Delta State include oil servicing, transportation, restaurant and bars, cinema viewing centres, dry cleaning, domestic cleaning services, electronic sales, party rentals, hair and beauty salons and furniture making.

## 2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviews small businesses in the research location. Nigerian small businesses are faced with multiple challenges ranging from political instability, inadequate infrastructure, and socio-economic issues. Nigerian small businesses struggle to survive amidst all these challenges. This chapter also discussed the historical perspective of small business development in Nigeria and the enterprise support agencies that promote small business performance. Small businesses in Nigeria are different from their counterparts in developed countries due to peculiar marketing challenges. The next chapter examines small business as an entrepreneurial process, entrepreneurial marketing and small business networks

## Chapter 3 – Small businesses

### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of relevant literature to provide the theoretical fundamentals of small business marketing. It draws on previous relevant research findings that are related to the subject. Small business owner-managers play critical roles in opportunity recognition and utilisation for business development and innovation. Although small businesses contribute significantly to economic growth, they face challenges, especially in marketing (Shehu et al. 2013; O'Donnell 2014; Mbah and Nwajei 2019). This chapter discusses small business marketing and entrepreneurial marketing as understood from previous studies in developed and developing countries. This chapter is structured as follows: Section 3.1 discusses small businesses in the United Kingdom and Nigeria. Section 3.2 examines the concept of entrepreneurial marketing as a small business marketing approach. In section 3.3, small business marketing and marketing challenges are reviewed. Section 3.4 discusses small business networks. Section 3.5 examines social media's role in small business networks, and section 3.6 presents a summary of the chapter.

### 3.1 The Concept of Small Businesses

Small businesses are acknowledged as the mainstay of both developed and developing economies and are considered the backbone of economic growth (Singh et al. 2008; Walsh and Lipinski 2009; Adeyemi and Abiodun 2014). Small businesses make up a substantial proportion of businesses worldwide as they account for over 70 per cent of employment (OECD 2016b). Typically, small businesses operate at a low capital cost, promoting indigenous technology development, providing local goods and services, and contributing immensely to nations' gross domestic product (GDP) (OECD 2016b). In the developed economies such as the United Kingdom, small businesses account for 99.3 per cent of all UK private sector enterprises (BEIS 2018). Small businesses also account for over 59.1 per cent of private-sector employment, 48.7 per cent of private sector turnover, and two-thirds are owned by individuals (BEIS 2018). Small businesses can be viewed as the nursery for entrepreneurship, often driven by an individual or a group of a few persons' creativity and innovation. In Nigeria, small businesses account for 90 per cent of companies

and contribute immensely to the generation of employment, provision of goods and services (Onugu 2005; Aina 2007; Ayanda and Labara 2011; Ogundele et al. 2013).

The definition of a small business varies across regions and national boundaries, depending on the country's economy. Dealing with too many and varied definitions, Bolton (1971) suggests a general definition of small businesses based on economic criteria with the following conditions: having a relatively small share in the marketplace, personally owned or managed with no formal management structure. According to the United Kingdom's Companies Act 2006, a small business is defined based on the following criteria: annual turnover, number of employees, and the annual balance sheet total of the business. Small business is defined as a business with a yearly turnover of not more than £10 million, an annual total balance of not more than £10 million and employing less than 50 employees (European Commission 2020). The *annual turnover* is the income a business receives in a year from its sales and services after discounts. The *annual balance sheet total* is the value of the main assets of the business.

Nigeria also based the definition of small business on annual turnover, the number of employees and capital employed (Gbandi and Amissah 2014). According to MSME (2017), a small business is a business with a capital value of fewer than 500,000 nairas and with less than 50 employees, with an asset base of 1- 50 million naira (excluding lands and buildings) and employee size of 1 and 50. In small businesses, the owner-manager often performs and oversees most business roles, such as management of employees, accounting, and marketing (Schaupp and Belanger 2013; Asomaning and Abdulai 2015; Okon and Edet 2016).

### 3.1.1 Characteristics of Small Businesses

Small businesses operate on a small scale, displaying a unique set of characteristics that differentiate them from large organisations, including lower revenue, profitability and marketing skills (Boohene et al. 2008). Small business is characterised by informal planning and control systems, lack of resources, limited market impact, and reliance on a few customers and employees (MacGregor 2004). Carson (1985) grouped small business characteristics into five categories: the scope of operations, scale of operations, independence, nature of ownership and

managerial style. Table 5 summarises the characteristics of small businesses. Small business operations tend to be local and regional, with a minimal share of a given market. Small businesses are independent as they are not part of a large organisation, mostly owned and managed by an individual or a group of very few persons.

Table 5: Small business characteristics

<b>Small Business characteristics</b>	<b>Description</b>
Nature of ownership	The equity of small businesses is mostly by an individual or a very few people.
Scale of operation	Small businesses tend to have a limited share of a given marketplace (Hill 2001) and relatively low in each industry sector.
Scope of operation	Small businesses operate within a community or regional market, not necessarily local.
Managerial Style	The owner-managers are the sole managers in small businesses. Managers tend to know all the employees and participate in all aspects of business activities. Decision-making is made solely by the owner-manager in small businesses.
Independence	Small business does not form part of a larger enterprise. The owner-manager has the ultimate authority and control over the company.

Source: Adapted from Carson (1985)

Small businesses can quickly adapt their mode of operation and offerings, which often allows frequent feedback, decision-making, and proximity to the market (Reece and Costello 2005; Singh et al. 2008). Small businesses are different from large organisations in business strategies and policies. While large organisations operate with defined processes for developing and implementing strategies, small businesses use less structured approaches, primarily responding to customer needs. The

planning process in small business is usually informal, multifunctional and happens mostly in the owner-managers mind. The training and development of staff are minimal and informal, resulting in fewer and more multifunctional human resources. Lack of qualified and trained human resource hinder the quality of small business products and services. Small businesses possess unique attributes such as frequent face-to-face interaction and real-time communication with customers and suppliers, people-oriented relationships and prompt response to market changes (Smallbone et al. 1993; Resnick et al. 2016). Levy and Powel (2005) identified flexibility as one of the significant attributes of small businesses. Flexibility in small business promotes innovation in product offerings, easy adaptation and speedy response to environmental and market changes. Small businesses are close to the market and readily respond to customers' changing needs (Zontanos and Anderson 2004). Small businesses operate a flat managerial structure with a management team working very closely with the owner-manager (Onugu 2005).

### 3.2 Entrepreneurial Marketing in small businesses

Small business marketing is situated at the Marketing and Entrepreneurship Interface (MEI) (Hills and LaForge 1992; Collinson and Shaw 2001; Hills et al. 2008; Hills and Hultman 2011; Miles et al. 2015). Entrepreneurial marketing, as a theoretical concept, is developed within two concepts: entrepreneurship and marketing. According to Hills and Laforge (1992) and Shane and Venkataraman (2000), marketing and entrepreneurship are interrelated and viewed as fundamental strategic orientations that include risk management, uncertainty and response to internal and external business environments. Entrepreneurial marketing focuses on identifying and exploiting opportunities to respond to risk and proactively utilise available resources to create value in the marketplace (Miles et al. 2015). Although entrepreneurial marketing has attracted researchers from different fields of study, this concept is still underdeveloped. The concept of entrepreneurial marketing lacks a clear definition and adequate practical tools to align with small businesses (Ioniță 2012; Ünay and Zehir 2012). Entrepreneurial marketing mostly referred to small business marketing due to resource constraint, which requires creativity and innovativeness for survival in a competitive market (Stokes 2000, Miles et al. 2015). It represents an untraditional marketing approach, which provides entrepreneurs

with the means to a successful business despite limited resources (Becherer et al. 2012).

Although entrepreneur and small business owner-managers are often used interchangeably, not all small business owner-managers are entrepreneurs (Connon et al. 2012). An entrepreneur is a business owner-manager who initiates and exploits business opportunities for growth and profitability (Shane and Venkataraman 2000). A small business owner-manager also owns and runs businesses to achieve personal goals and provide income for the family (Runyan et al. 2008; Ionitã 2012). Moreover, entrepreneurs are innovatively striving for new products, services, discovering new strategies to open new markets. Entrepreneurship is conceptualised as discovering opportunities and creating new economic activities through firm creation (Reynolds 2005; Gilmore and Carson 2018). The process of entrepreneurship can occur both in large and small organisations, focusing on innovation, high-profit margins and opportunity recognition (Thurik and Wennekers 2004; Mortazavi and Bahrami 2012). Small businesses are the nursery for an entrepreneurial process as the organisational structure is relatively simple (Hill 2001a). The management culture is creative and innovative (Carson 2003; O'Dwyer et al. 2009; O'Dwyer et al. 2011). The terms entrepreneurs and small business owner-managers can be used interchangeably to describe someone who owns and manages a small business while exploiting opportunities (Gilmore et al. 2011).

Entrepreneurial marketing in small businesses is driven and shaped by the owner-manager personality and makes no explicit reference to the size of the business (Hill and Wright 2000; Morris et al. 2000; Bäckbro and Nyström 2006). According to Morris et al. (2002 p. 5), entrepreneurial marketing is "*proactive identification and exploitation of opportunities for acquiring and retaining profitable customers through innovative approaches to risk management, resource leveraging and value creation.*" Morris et al. (2002) consider entrepreneurial marketing elements to include acquiring and retaining profitable customers and resource advantages. Therefore, an entrepreneur identifies and exploits opportunities while managing risk and retaining customers. This definition reflects the dynamic process of adaptation in the entrepreneurial process. Gaddefors and Anderson (2009) view entrepreneurial marketing through the lens of social constructivism as a social and relational process whereby marketing is a competence acquired by entrepreneurs and a process

whereby the producers and the consumers co-produce and co-consume (Gaddefors and Anderson 2009; Ioniță 2012). Kraus et al. (2010 p.9) defined entrepreneurial marketing as *“an organisational function and set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organisation and its stakeholders, characterised by innovativeness, risk-taking, pro-activeness, and may be performed without resources currently controlled”*. Entrepreneurial marketing focuses on marketing through communication, value delivery, and customer management to benefit the organisation and the stakeholders.

Morrish et al. (2010) further integrate entrepreneurship and marketing to bring new elements such as focusing on co-creation, communication, delivering value to customers, innovativeness and pro-activeness. Entrepreneurial marketing is beyond traditional marketing theories and cannot exist without an entrepreneur. Unlike conventional marketing, in entrepreneurial marketing, the customer and the entrepreneur are co-producers (Gaddefors and Anderson 2009; Ioniță 2012). Small businesses operate in an entrepreneurial context and may not fit into traditional marketing theories (Jones and Rowley 2011). Entrepreneurial marketing can also be viewed as an effectual adaptation of marketing theory to small businesses' needs (Jones and Rowley 2011; Becherer et al. 2012). Sarasvathy (2008) presents a unique model of developing new businesses known as effectual logic on how businesses make decisions in uncertain situations, choosing between many possible effects with set means. Effectual logic promotes relationship building and attracts stakeholders to express ideas and views toward collective results (Sarasvathy 2008; Ioniță 2012). Entrepreneurs are effectual regarding marketing decisions and practice (Dew et al. 2009). In line with effectual logic, an entrepreneur adopts the bottom approach to identify networks, forms an initial customer base, defines the market and creates a new product with existing products ideas for new markets (Sarasvathy 2008). Small business owner-managers use available resources (both tangible and intangible) to do what they can do (capabilities and competencies) with whom they know (networks) for marketing (Sarasvathy 2008).

The customer is the central element of entrepreneurial marketing. Therefore, adapting rapidly to customers' needs is essential in entrepreneurial marketing (Stokes and Wilson 2010). Entrepreneurial marketing incorporates creative approaches for

customer acquisition, retention, and development. The idea of customer intensity enables a dynamic knowledge base of changing customer demands and requirements (Morris et al. 2002). Entrepreneurial marketing is a marketing approach based on frequent contact with customers and other networks for a long-term relationship and combining resources to provide customers' unique values (Hills and Hultman 2005; Coltman 2007; Ionitã 2012; Miles et al. 2015). Morris et al. (2002) and Becherer et al. (2012) developed seven core dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing: proactiveness, calculated risk-taking, innovativeness, opportunity focus, resources advantage, customer intensity and value creation. These dimensions focus on both entrepreneurial orientations and marketing orientations. Small businesses develop the creative capacity for resource acquisition and customer relationships (Morris et al. 2002). Small business marketing depends on available resources and opportunities.

Entrepreneurial marketing enables small business owner-managers to allocate and manage resources and respond quickly to changing market conditions. It emphasises the adaptation of marketing appropriate to small businesses acknowledging the owner-manager (Stokes 2000; Miles et al. 2015). Carson et al. (1995) describe entrepreneurial marketing in terms of interactive capabilities, personal experience and owner-manager competence. The appreciation of the interrelatedness of marketing and entrepreneurial processes recognised small business marketing as entrepreneurial marketing (Lam 2004; Gilmore et al. 2006). Previous studies posit entrepreneurial marketing practice by entrepreneurial firms such as small businesses (Kilenthong et al. 2011; Hills and Hultman 2011; Miles et al. 2011). Entrepreneurial marketing approaches in small businesses enables the flow of new marketing ideas, which often translates into valuable products and services (O'Dwyer et al. 2009; Hills and Hultman 2011). The next section examines marketing practices in small businesses.

### 3.3 Small Business Marketing

Due to the shift in marketing, global competition, and customers' never-ending needs, organisations now find new ways to create and sustain emotional connections. Different dimensions such as design and product co-development, co-production, distribution and communication with customers are considered in marketing (MSI 2006; Singh et al. 2008). Traditional marketing theories suggest an

operational and strategic marketing approach to large organisations and do not sufficiently explain small business marketing (Simpson et al. 2006; Reijonen 2010). According to Gamble et al. (2011), small businesses cannot practice conventional marketing approaches, mainly due to limited resources and expertise. The traditional marketing theories focus mainly on business planning, market research, advertisement and marketing mix implementation, designed for large organisations (Hulbert et al. 2013).

Small businesses have unique characteristics and context that distinguish them from large organisations. These differences include business size, business objectives, management styles and marketing approaches (Carson 1999; Gilmore et al. 2001; Fillis 2002; Gamble et al. 2011). Carson et al. (1995) and Reynolds (2002) linked small business marketing with owner-manager behaviours, business experience, and relationships. Small business owner-managers mainly adopt marketing practice that suits the current situation and network with industry and market contacts (Gilmore and Carson 2007; Read et al. 2009; O'Donnell 2014; Miles et al. 2015). Small business owner-managers use personal and business contacts to seek new opportunities, skills, business ideas and market information (Shaw 2003; Lamprinopoulou and Tregear 2009; Harrigan et al. 2011). According to Stokes (2000), small business owner-managers view marketing as a tactic to attract new customers and ignores traditional marketing's philosophical and strategic concepts.

### 3.3.1 Small Business Marketing Challenges

Small businesses are influenced by various marketing challenges ranging from lack of marketing resources, marketing competencies and reduced market impacts (O'Dwyer et al. 2009; Reijonen and Laukkanen 2010; Jones and Rowley 2011). The owner-managers influence on the management of small firms often poses difficulties in strategic implementation (Reijonen 2008; Kolabi et al. 2011). Entrepreneurial marketing seems more appropriate for small business as contacts and relationships attract new businesses, create new markets and improve existing ones (Gilmore et al. 2013; Miles et al. 2015). The intuitive and situation-specific nature of entrepreneurial marketing and its implementation without previous planning suits small business owner-managers marketing behaviour. Small business owner-

managers operate a simple, pragmatic and intuitive marketing approach without complexity and formality.

Sales and marketing are the most dominant problems small businesses face, affecting survival and business performance (Huang and Brown 1999; O'Donnell 2011). The marketing functions which affect small businesses are mostly promotion and market research as financial constraints hinder the ability to employ marketing experts. Small businesses are limited in marketing practice and performance due to the following constraints: *limited resources* which include finance, sales and marketing knowledge, *lack of specialist expertise* such as marketing and sales expertise as owner-manager tends to be a generalist and *limited impact in the market place* as they tend to have fewer orders, customers and employees compared to large organisations (Carson 1985; Carson and Cromie 1990; Hill 2001; Bjerke and Hultman 2002). Small businesses operate within a dynamic environment that influences marketing decisions. Nonetheless, small business marketing decisions are haphazard, nonsequential and unstructured, often resulting in informal, spontaneous, reactive and continuous-evolving marketing (Carson et al. 1998; O'Dwyer et al. 2009; Morrish et al. 2010; O'Donnell 2011). Small business marketing evolves in response to new products and market demands to satisfy customer requirements. Marketing constraints stimulate small businesses to be innovative by developing and maintaining a relationship with customers, suppliers and other organisations (O'Dwyer et al. 2009; Slotte-Kock and Coviello 2010; Jack et al. 2010).

Although a traditional marketing model is not suitable for small businesses, the basic marketing principles are still applicable but differently (Anderson and McAuley 1999). Small business marketing is unique, responding to the dynamic business environment, inherent size and stage of development, resource constraints and intrinsic characteristics of the owner-managers (Gimore et al. 2001; O'Dwyer et al. 2009; Gamble et al. 2011). Although small businesses' marketing approaches are not formally structured, these do not make it less important (Simpson et al. 2006; Dragnić 2009; O'Dwyer et al. 2009). Table 6 summarises the characteristics and description of small business marketing. Small business owner-managers are mostly responsible for both the organisation's ownership and managerial functions (McCarthy 2003; Simpson et al. 2006; Dobbs and Hamilton 2007; O'Dwyer et al. 2009; Morrish et al. 2010; Gamble et al. 2011). Small business marketing involves

direct interchanges and relationship building, preferably active personal contact with customers rather than marketing through mass promotion (Stokes 2000; O’Dwyer et al. 2009). Owner-managers usually seek casual relationships with customers than formal marketing research. Small businesses market goods and services mainly through relationship building and combinations of interaction processes to reduce transactional cost (Gilmore et al. 2001; O’Dwyer et al. 2009). They develop personal and business contacts to promote brands and market goods and services (Harris et al. 2012). Small businesses depend on networks and networking to overcome marketing challenges by forming and generating customers and suppliers contacts (Hill and Wright 2001; Gilmore et al. 2001; Miller et al. 2007). The owner-manager level of engagement with network members often determines the type of marketing approaches the business implement (Dobbs and Hamilton 2007).

Table 6: Characteristics of Small Business Marketing

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Description</b>
Simplistic and informal	Marketing is usually sensitive and reactive, with little attention paid to planning, strategies, and analyses due to limited resources.
	Small business marketing practice is mostly influenced by the needs of the moment with little attention to plans, strategies and analysis (Stokes 2001; Deakins and Freel 2009).
Unstructured	There is little or no adherence to a formal structure. Marketing activities are carried out based on the small business owner-managers capabilities, experience and circumstances.
Haphazard	Owner-manager response to current opportunities and circumstances in a chaotic way according to personal and business priorities at any given point in time (Scase and Goffee 1980; Carson 1995).
Reactive	Small businesses respond to the dynamic business environment (Carson 2001; O’Dwyer et al. 2009; Gamble et al. 2011).

Source: Author generated

### 3.4 Small Business Networks

Every business aims to create and keep customers, and small businesses, through networking, keep up with customers' changing needs and demands. Marketing practices have evolved from production and sales-centred to customer and relationship-focused (Lam and Harker 2015). Instead of the short-term transactional approach, small businesses have adopted a valued long-term relationship marketing strategy. Small businesses utilise the entrepreneurial marketing perspective that seeks new opportunities by understanding the marketplace (customers, competitors, and suppliers) and business environment (Hulbert et al. 2013; Miles et al. 2015). Entrepreneurial marketing practice allows the owner-managers to create and develop a close relationship with customers (Stokes 2000; Harrigan et al. 2011). Small firms' marketing approaches include word-of-mouth, recommendations and referrals from customers and suppliers (Stokes and Nelson 2013). Small business owner-managers are characterised by the fundamental customer relationship management activities they exhibit through a flexible and adaptable nature of developing and managing personal networks. They engage in face-to-face interaction (Stokes 2000; Stokes and Wilson 2010; Harrigan et al. 2011; Miles et al. 2015) and adopt technologies such as social media (Harrigan et al. 2012; Jones et al. 2014) to interact with customers and other networks frequently. Small business marketing is dynamic and continuously changes throughout various business stages in response to product and market demands (Gilmore et al. 2001; Miles et al. 2015).

Sustainable competitive advantage is essential for small businesses in a dynamic and uncertain environment where they cannot compete with economies of scale. The development of innovative products and services through interactive activities and participation in social, business and trade activities increase the ability to provide customers with higher value (O'Dwyer et al. 2009). Networking creates a vital source of market and customer information on which owner-managers can base marketing plans (Gilmore et al. 2001; O'Dwyer et al. 2009). Small business networking involves owner-managers communicating and building relationships with customers and suppliers to maximise marketing opportunities and growth (Simpson et al. 2006). Studies of small business marketing have investigated how networks and networking facilitate relationships and collaboration to break into markets, especially in the developed economy (Miles et al. 2014; O'Donnell 2014).

Small business smallness allows owner-manager to form close relationships with networks, be flexible to market needs and grant easy access to market information (Carson et al. 1995; Hultman and Miles 2008; O'Dwyer et al. 2009; Jack et al. 2010). Small business marketing creates an interface between the firm and the external environment (Smallbone et al. 1993). Owner-managers prefer a conversational relationship with customers and suppliers where they have face-to-face contact and response to needs and expectations. For small business marketing to be improved, there is a need for continuous market development, opportunity recognition and customer base expansion.

O'Donnell (2011) identified the following themes to represent marketing practices in small businesses by adopting a relationship marketing perspective and bottom-up approaches. *Keeping existing customers* reflects the influence and value of relationship marketing. There is a significant paradigm shift from transactional marketing to relationship marketing (Grönroos 1994) and now customer engagement, as small businesses depend on a small number of customers. Existing customers are the best asset in a small business owner-managers portfolio. The interaction between the customers and the owner-manager allows small businesses to meet customer needs. Interaction with customers is a form of personal selling to keep existing customers and acquire new ones (Hill and Wright 2001; Hills et al. 2008). *Acquiring new customers*: Small businesses cannot quickly adapt to advertising due to cost and the inability to quantify benefits. Small businesses often rely on existing customers' word-of-mouth recommendations to acquire new customers (Stokes 1998; 2000). *Marketing planning* in small businesses is mostly reactive, with little or no preparation involved (Carson and Cromie 1989; Hills et al. 2008). Small business marketing is expressed primarily in words and ideas. Stokes (2000) indicates that small businesses adopt a bottom-up approach to marketing research where the needs of fewer customers are met and expand customer base gradually with experience and resource availability. The critical factor for successful small businesses is the owner-managers ability to market products and services cost-effectively (Gilmore et al. 2001; O'Donnell 2014).

Small businesses market goods and services through networks (O'Donnell 2014), but the processes involved in building networks of relationships for small business

marketing research is limited. Small businesses gather business ideas and market information, access resources, and seek new opportunities through interaction with network contacts (Shaw 2003; Lamprinopoulou and Tregear 2009). Networking enables small businesses to adapt, identify and refine marketing strategies. Small business networks are voluntary social interactions between two or more individuals or firms for information sharing, knowledge exchange, and co-development of goods and services (Groen 2005). A network is a social structure, which consists of a set of relationships between individuals. Networks consist of nodes, connections, flows and mechanisms (Conway and Steward 2009). The nodes are the various networks, and the connections are the social ties or bonds that hold the nodes together. The flows are the resource exchanges between network actors, and the mechanism is the mode of interaction or processes employed to access network resources (O'Donnell 2001; Conway and Steward 2009). Network connections consist of direct and indirect ties from one actor to a collection of actors for information exchange, resources, ideas, and knowledge (Reese and Aldrich 1995; O'Donnell et al. 2001; O'Donnell 2004; Rocks et al. 2005).

Network ties are building blocks that hold and define the quality of the relationship among network members. Network ties enhance small businesses ability to identify opportunities and acquire resources (Batjargal 2003). The strength of ties among network actors depends mostly on the level, frequency, and reciprocity of the relations, which determines the quality of resources available in the networks (Jack et al. 2004). Granovetter (1973) classified the strength of ties as weak and strong; strong ties are characterised by frequent interaction at least twice a week, and weak ties interactions are less than twice a week but at least once a year. Jack et al. (2004) suggest that an ideal network is made up of both strong and weak ties (heterogeneous), with robust information and resources.

Network research in management can be traced back to Mintzberg's (1973) study on managers' role in developing and maintaining contacts and relationships outside the organisational chain of command. Granovetter (1973), in his seminal article on the strength of weak ties, stated the importance of a relationship with an individual and groups. Entrepreneurial network research by Hoang and Antoncic (2003) emphasises network content (nature of the relationship and the resources available), network governance (networking and coordination of network resources) and network

structure (relationship patterns in networks). Network resources enable small businesses to overcome newness and smallness liability (Aldrich and Reese 1993; Anderson and Ullah 2014). Small business owner-managers utilise networks for insight into complex market information, opportunity exploitation, and customer engagement (Olkkonen et al. 2000; Gilmore et al. 2001; Elfring and Hulsink 2007; Dyer et al. 2008). Characteristics of networks such as size, topology, structure and the quality of relationships have been studied extensively (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998; Anderson and Jack 2002; Reagans and McEvily 2003; Semrau and Werner 2014).

Previous studies show that small business networks are dynamic, changing with time due to resource requirement and business stages (Hitt et al. 2002; Slotte-Kock and Coviello 2010; Jack et al. 2010). The resources available in networks include access to information, ideas, business opportunities, financial capital, power and influence, emotional support, goodwill, trust, and cooperation in social connections (Coleman 1988; Burt 1992; Lin 2001; Liao and Welsch 2003; Kim and Aldrich 2005). Small businesses depend on external collaboration for idea generations (Hagedoorn 2006) and partnerships to reduce the transaction cost and access to the market (Varis and Littunen 2010; Hardwick et al. 2013). The importance of vertical network relationships with customers and suppliers as a significant source of small businesses marketing resources has been emphasised (O'Donnell 2004; 2014). Although there are previous studies of resources available in networks for small business (O'Donnell 2001; Hoang and Antoncic 2003; Miller et al. 2007; Jack 2010; Sullivan and Ford 2014), studies on the processes of accessing network resources and how small businesses can utilise network resources for marketing is limited. Therefore, this study contributes to the literature by investigating networking and network resources to promote Nigerian small business marketing. The following section discusses small business network relationships through social media.

### 3.5 Social media and Networks

The core of maintaining a valuable relationship with network members is through the development of a close, long-termed relationship based on trust and commitment (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Research into small businesses emphasises the use of face-to-face contact with network members for productive network relationships

(Hardwick et al. 2012; Hardwick and Anderson 2019). The introduction of the internet and the development of web 2.0 technologies enable the creation of social media content, connection and interaction with users through sharing and accessing information and facilitating interoperability (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010; Berthon et al. 2012).

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010 p. 61) defined "social media as a group of internet-based applications that builds on the technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allows the development and exchange of user-generated content". Social media is classified based on the different types of applications such as Facebook, YouTube for video and picture sharing, LinkedIn for professional networking, Twitter for user forums, blogs and microblogging. The utilisation of social media technologies and applications enables organisations to deliver valuable offerings to customers through communication. These technologies provide a platform for organisations to reach a wider context, build relationships and connect with potential customers (Durkin et al. 2013; Taneja and Toombs 2014). According to Stockdale et al. (2012), social media is a tool for marketing to identify key consumer influencers, engage them, generate brand advocates and spread information among users in real-time at a reduced cost. Trust must be established to build and foster online word-of-mouth marketing and recommendation (Miller and Lamma 2010; Gligorijevic and Leong 2011; Hardwick and Anderson 2019).

Social media provide platforms that permit two-way conversation among network members to share experiences and evaluate businesses through reviews and recommendations (Fournier and Avery 2011). There are currently various powerful social media applications, including new intervening digital technologies and devices such as smartphone apps that support e-Word of Mouth (eWOM) marketing, taking advantage of the speed, scale, and ubiquity of the internet (Michaelidou et al. 2011). Many researchers posit the positive impact of eWOM on small business marketing, which includes an increase in sales, customer brand advocacy and rapid product adoption (Bulearca and Bulearca 2010; Nakara et al. 2012; Karimi and Naghibi 2015; Wang et al. 2015). Marketing facilitated by new technologies and the internet allows small businesses to create frequent interactive relationships and engage various networks in e-marketing (McGowan and Durkin 2002; Brodie et al. 2007; Kim et al. 2013; Valos et al. 2016). Small businesses increasingly recognise social media

adoption opportunities to build and maintain relationships with networks. Social media enables small businesses to explore new markets, exchange knowledge, and enhance customer buying behaviours (Harris and Rae 2010; Wells 2011; Zeng and Gerritsen 2014; Hollebeek et al. 2014).

According to Pine et al. (2009), e-technology is critical in managing and building stronger relationships with networks. Social media allows small businesses to access marketing resources such as monitoring business conversations, feedback, customer service, promotions and sales (Tuten and Solomon 2017). Social media interaction with various networks, especially customers, can improve customer satisfaction, track changes, and facilitate modification of existing products and develop new products (Tikkanen et al. 2009; Karimi and Naghibi 2015). Social media provides small business owner-managers with powerful tools to build network relationships for marketing (Atanassova and Clark 2015; Harrigan et al. 2017). Further understanding of how small businesses relate to networks to access social resources to improve marketing performance will be useful.

### 3.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviews small businesses, small business marketing, entrepreneurial marketing, and social media to enhance small business network relationships. Entrepreneurial marketing is practised by small businesses to enable the flow of marketing resources and opportunity recognition. This chapter discussed how small businesses understand and practice marketing through network relationship building. Networking is recognised as a means through which small business owner-managers can market products and services. Social media allows small businesses to relate with various networks in real-time to build a long-term close relationship.

## Chapter 4 – Conceptual Review

### 4.0 Introduction

Previous research has shown that networks and interactions with networks are paramount to small business performance and development (Aldrich and Zimmer 1986; Zontanos and Anderson 2004; Anderson et al. 2010). Networks extend small business ability to access resources by tapping into external sources to overcome marketing limitations and improve entrepreneurial practice (Anderson et al. 2010; Slotte-Kock and Coviello 2010; Jack et al. 2010). Jack et al. (2008) identified entrepreneurship as a social practice and networks as access to external resources and brand identity. The social capital theory explains the scope and quality of networks (Anderson and Jack 2002). This chapter attempts to answer the following research questions from literature: with whom do small business owner-managers network, and what is the role of networks in small business marketing? How do small businesses access and use social resources available in networks for marketing, and finally, how does engagement with networks promote small business marketing?

This chapter presents a critical review of relevant literature and explains the conceptual research framework and structured as follows: Section 4.1 explores the concept of networks and networking in small businesses. In section 4.2, the process theory is examined as nature, sequence, and networking events. This section explores the complexities of network contexts to explain how networks emerge and evolves. Section 4.3 explores the concept of social capital, examining the content and process perspectives of social capital. Section 4.4 discusses relationship marketing based on the commitment-trust theory to explain resource exchange and mutual support between businesses and customers. Section 4.5 explores the concept of engagement, and engagement marketing, as a high level of interaction and involvement of different networks in small business marketing. Section 4.6 explores the evolution of small business marketing in response to customers' rapidly changing demands. Section 4.7 provides a critical review of the concepts and theoretical underpinning of the study. The conceptual framework demonstrates the interrelations between the concepts and theories of social capital, networks, relationship marketing

and engagement marketing in small businesses, and finally, section 4.8 is the chapter summary.

## 4.1 The Concept of Networks

One of the possible ways small businesses can overcome resource constraints is through network activities. Small business owner-managers develop contacts and engage in networking to promote business performance (Gilmore et al. 2006; Harris and Gibson 2006). The underlying idea is the businesses' ability to collaborate with networks. Small businesses easily create a strong relationship with existing and potential customers due to business size. Small businesses are less able to utilise marketing theories, which are appropriate for large firms. However, they can engage in networks to access marketing resources. Small business networks are built around the owner-managers regular interactions with personal networks, social networks, business networks, inter-firm networks, marketing and sales network (Gilmore et al. 2001; Harris and Gibson 2006).

Networking is a low-cost approach to win and keep customers, access market intelligence, information and feedback (Stokes 2000; Gulati et al. 2011). Networking involves the interaction within the networks where values, access to external resources, opportunity, exchange, and knowledge sharing are established (Hoang and Antoncic 2003; Rocks et al. 2005; Resnick et al. 2016). Morrish et al. (2010) recognise small business owner-manager as the central actor in the marketing process. Small business marketing is driven by ideas and intuition and usually informal (Stokes 2000), and the owner-manager is the driving force. Organisations relate and interact with each other to understand industry benchmarks and competitive trends, share knowledge, and access new ideas and information to enhance business performance (Mu et al. 2008).

Networking contributes to entrepreneurial processes as it enables owner-manager to gather useful information for decision making and evaluate market situations and opportunities (Anderson and Jack 2002; Rocks et al. 2005). Networks can be employed for marketing, such as market research, promotion, and selling. The owner-manager tends to maintain a close relationship with customers, suppliers, and

potential customers (Slotte-Kock and Coviello 2010) to access marketing information. O'Donnell (2004) presented small business networks to include existing customers, potential customers, existing suppliers, potential suppliers, friends and family, colleagues, competitors, government agencies, and other businesses. Relationship marketing frameworks are adopted by small businesses to manage and retain existing customers (Stokes 2000; Harrigan et al. 2011; Miles et al. 2015). Most small business customer relationship management is through personal networking and face-to-face interaction (Stokes and Wilson 2010). The invention of digital technology and social media has facilitated the expansion of small business network scope (Kasouf et al. 2009). New communication channels have emerged with cost-effective options to reach a broader market and specific target markets (Harrigan et al. 2011; 2012; Stokes and Nelson 2013). The contribution of networks to small businesses has been established to include generation of sales, building and maintaining confidence, validation of ideas, joint problem solving, decision making and business growth (Uzzi 1996; Lechner and Dowling 2003; Jack et al. 2004; Kim and Aldrich 2005; Jack et al. 2008; Johannisson 2014),

#### 4.1.1 The Concept of Networking

The networking literature lacks a consensus on the definition of networking. However, networking has been operationalised in various ways. Some scholars view networking with the focus on an individual's behaviours to build and maintain networks (Castles et al. 2014). Industrial Marketing Purchasing (IMP) groups investigation suggests how network relationships facilitate small business marketing. Carter and Jones-Evans (2006) view the processes of building contacts and nurturing resource flow in relationships as networking (Duss 1997; Håkansson and Ford 2002; Mitrega et al. 2012). Small businesses, especially at start-up, rely on relationships and collaboration to break into new markets. Networking is a voluntary interaction with the socio-economic systems, and benefits include access to external opportunities and resources to enhance firms' reputation and credibility (Birley 1985; Hoang and Antoncic 2003; Groen 2005; Chen and Tan 2009; McGrath and O'Toole 2013). Networking also facilitates business opportunities and contributes to business functions (Forret and Dougherty 2004; Wolff and Moser 2009). Networking grants access to entrepreneurial resources such as marketing expertise and knowledgebase (Neergaard et al. 2005; Jack et al. 2008; O'Donnell 2014). Small business owner-

managers develop close personal relationships with customers through adaptability and flexibility to customers' needs (Stokes 2000; Harrigan et al. 2011; Mitrega et al. 2012). Network relationships are built around the owner-managers regular interaction, personalities, experiences and daily business activities (Gilmore et al. 2006; Gamble et al. 2011).

Small businesses tend to maintain an inherent relationship with customers to advertise and promote business performance (Rocks et al. 2005; Harris and Gibson 2006; Slotte-Kock and Covielle 2010; Harrigan et al. 2011). Research into small business marketing is based mainly on networks and relationships with customers and markets (Gilmore et al. 2006). Networking enhances service value through customer co-creation, connection and communication (Stokes 2000; Kasouf et al. 2009; O'Donnell 2014). Small businesses' smallness facilitates a close relationship with networks and grants easy access to market information (Hills et al. 2008; Anderson and Ullah 2014). O'Donnell (2004) suggests the following factors that influence network relationship quality: *the network-level* defines how owner-managers relate with various networks. *Network proactivity demonstrates* how small business owner-managers deliberately and consciously network to access social resources. Johannisson (1990) describes network ties' strength as regular use of relationships, level of maturity, degree of trust, and the nature of experiences between network actors. These factors determine network ties' strength as strong or weak, which impacts network resources availability (Granovetter 1973; 1985).

Network theory posits business functions exist and develop in a network of social relations. Network theory suggests small business owner-managers can cost-effectively gain access to social resources to improve business performance (Zhao and Aram 1995; Watson 2006). Previous research on small businesses with a range of social and business connections has enjoyed higher growth rates and better business performances (Lechner and Dowling 2003; Hampton et al. 2009; Anderson et al. 2010; Hakimpoor et al. 2011). There are new and exciting contributions at theoretical and empirical levels on networks' role in small businesses (Birley 1985; O'Donnell 2014; Lans et al. 2015). Studies have linked small business marketing to relationships with suppliers, customers, and other stakeholders to access resources (Hill and McGowan 1998; Gilmore and Carson 1999; Shaw and Conway 2000; Slotte-

Kock and Coviello 2010; Conway and Jones 2012; Shaw 2012; O'Donnell 2014). Therefore, the creation and maintenance of network relationships appear important and possibly essential to small business marketing.

Although previous research recognizes the role of networking in small businesses, they often view networks as a standalone activity rather than a dynamic marketing strategy (McGowan and Rocks 1995; O'Donnell et al. 2002; Rocks et al. 2005; Sullivan-Mort et al. 2012). Small businesses go through successive phases, including specific activities, interactions, and trust relations with strategic initiatives to access the resources embedded in relationship networks (Harrison et al. 2010). Networks can be described as interactive and inherently dynamic. Network changes occur over time; the understanding of networks dynamic nature is fairly limited (Ford and Håkansson 2006; Halinen et al. 2013). The following section will discuss the network process as a key to accessing network resources.

## 4.2 Process Theory

Entrepreneurial research into networks has studied *network content* - the nature of relationships and the resources available in networks, *network structure* - patterns of relationships among network members and *network governance* - the flow of network resources among network members (Hoang and Antoncic 2003; Inkpen and Tsang 2005; Halinen et al. 2013). Previous studies understand the content and network relationships in organisations regarding resources, actors and events (Borgatti and Foster 2003; Medlin 2004). Bizzi and Langley (2012) define networking among firms as dynamic inter-relationships constituting multiple activities through space and time. Organisational networks are a built-in process considering various elaborate strategic initiatives with network members (Harrison et al. 2010; Moroz and Hindle 2012). Networking is viewed as a process of understanding the relationship between network members informed by social network theory and dyadic interactions.

Process theory explains the temporal sequence in which change occurs in a relationship for an expected outcome. Process research in networks addresses how relationships develop, highlighting various activity links, resource ties and bond development between network members (Langley 2009). Networking involves sequential activities to understand network contexts' complexities and how networks evolve (Hoang and Antoncic 2003). According to Halinen and Törnroos (1998) and

Van de Ven (1992), the network process is the nature, sequences and order of activities and events that relationships undergo. Van de Ven and Poole (1995) defined the process as a developmental progression of organizational change, events and activities. Network dynamics imply changes in networks, thus highlighting time as an essential variable in a relationship. Changes in networks occur in a continuous structure with network members, resource ties and activity links. Network structures are characterised by heterogeneity in terms of experiences, capabilities and interpretation (Ford and Håkansson 2006; Håkansson et al. 2009; Chou and Zolkiewski 2012).

Van de Ven (1992) suggests four different abstract theories relevant to understanding the developmental dynamics of networks: process, time, events and the conceptual lens that provide the basis for analysing change. Networks are conceptualised as processes that evolve and develop over time and at aggregate levels, such as development (Halinen 2012) and change processes (Möller and Halinen 1999; Halinen et al. 2013). Business networks pose a significant methodological issue in the study of the process. (Bizzi and Langley 2012), suggest a multilevel and longitudinal research design to allow a period to understand the evolutionary changes in a relationship. Process in networks can be logical to explain the causal relationship between variables measured overtime to capture change (Halinen and Törnroos 2005; Slotte-Kock 2009). Events are referred to as periods of change in the business environment, such as an economic recession or technological transition (Nyström 2009; Halinen et al. 2012). Events also include all the activities network members are involved in concerning relationship and future development (Halinen and Tähtinen 2002). Processes in networks connect spatial and temporal settings (Tidström and Hagberg-Andersson 2012; Makkonen et al. 2012). Halinen et al. (2012) qualitative inquiry used the concept of event and time as steppingstones to understand networking. The next section examines small business networks through the lens of social capital theory (Deakins et al. 2007; Ramos-Rodriguez et al. 2010).

### 4.3 The Concept of Social Capital

The social capital theory explains network nature, scope and quality (Anderson and Jack 2002; Greve and Salaff 2003). It offers insights into individuals' performance and the nature of relationships within network structures for embeddedness and resource integration (Putnam 2000; Moran 2005). Networking provides the

conditions for access to and use of social resources embedded in networks. Most definitions regard networks and relationships as the core concept of social capital (Bourdieu 1985; Lin 1999; Casson and Giusta 2007). Social capital studies can be linked to Hanifan (1916), who used the term social capital to describe intangible assets that count most in peoples' daily lives, such as goodwill, fellowship and social intercourse. Jacobs (1961) explain social capital as social networks' importance in an urban environment. The popularity of the concept of social capital rapidly increased due to studies by Bourdieu (1986). Bourdieu (1986 p.248) defined social capital as the *"aggregates of actual or potential resources, which are links to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintances and recognition"* to describe social interactions.

There is no universal definition to clarify the concept of social capital. Ostrom (2000) defines social capital as shared knowledge, understanding, norms, rules and expectations. Putnam (2000) defined social capital as the connections between individuals, social networks, and reciprocity norms and trustworthiness. Lin (2001a chapter 2) defined social capital as *"resources embedded in social networks, resources that can be accessed through ties in the networks."* Powell and Smith-Doerr (1994), in Anderson and Jack (2002), view social capital as the glue and lubricant that influences and activates social relationships and facilitates the generation of trust and develop network norms and behaviour. As a glue, social capital links and binds network members together through trust and commitment and lubricates network members relationships to enable information and resource exchange. Adler and Kwon (2002) define social capital as the goodwill engendered by different social relations that facilitate actions. Here, the emphasis on goodwill suggests social capital is built on trust and relies on reciprocity norms, social relationships and associations. Common characteristics exist in the definition of social capital, the role of trust as the glue that binds network members together and lubricates network processes (Anderson and Jack 2002; Jansson 2007).

According to Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998 p.243), *"social capital is the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through and derived from the network of relationships possessed by individual or social units."* Social capital can also be the *"cumulative capacity of social groups to cooperate and work together*

*for a common goal*" (Woolcock 2001). Putnam (2000) views social capital as social organisation features, the network, norms, and social trust, which facilitate coordination and cooperation. Burt (1992) and Liao and Welsch (2003) conceptualised social capital as social resources and capabilities embedded in relationships and available through personal and business relationships. Social capital is an expression of a successful relationship that involves high trust and willingness to live by societal norms and reciprocity (Bowles and Gintis 2002; Cooke and Wills 1999). The various definition explains the different dimensions and conceptualisations of social capital.

Social capital is a broad umbrella theory that is used increasingly across disciplines such as business, political science, economics, organisational theory, sociology and education (Adler and Kwon 2002). Social capital brings together concepts such as social resources, trust, social exchange, relational embeddedness, culture, social networks and social support (Adler and Kwon 2002). Within the business discipline, researchers use social capital to describe outcomes such as value delivery (Uzzi 1997; Tsai and Ghoshal 1998; Adler and Kwon 2002), firm performance (Batjargal 2003), network strength (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998), and entrepreneurial networks (Liao and Welsch 2003). Social capital grant access to all kinds of resources, including financial support, useful information such as market intelligence, information about customers and competitors (Burt 1992). According to McKeever et al. (2014), social capital is the theoretical construct, and the resources in networks are both tangible and intangible. Based on the various definitions, social capital can be viewed as the resources embedded in networks and accessed through active and purposeful relationships based on norms, shared values, goals, trust and reciprocity.

Social capital is a feature of networks that facilitates coordination and cooperation for mutual benefits (Anderson and Jack 2002). According to social capital theory, networking provides value to network members and access to social resources embedded within networks (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998; Jack et al. 2004; Rhys 2010). Small businesses employ social capital in networks to access marketing resources (Anderson and Jack 2002; Adler and Kwon 2002; Maurer et al. 2011). Building social capital requires a considerable time investment to establish and maintain network relationships (Adler and Kwon 2002). Accessing network resource

requires dynamic social connections among network actors (Tsai and Ghoshal 1998; Hitt et al. 2002). The role of social capital in entrepreneurial networks has been explicitly acknowledged (Lechner and Dowling 2003; Liao and Welsch 2005; Jack et al. 2008). The studies on specific social processes that can enhance entrepreneurs' ability to exploit opportunities are relatively limited (Davidson and Honig 2003; Anderson and Jack 2007).

#### 4.3.1 Social Capital Content Perspectives

Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) made a significant contribution to studying social capital diverse nature and forms. The concepts of social capital can be explained in two perspectives: content perspective and process perspective. The content perspectives consist of three multidimensional social capital that facilitates unlocking ideas and information sharing (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998). *The relational dimension* (trust, norms, and obligations) refers to the quality of relationships, the nature of ties and the level of associability among network members. It can also be viewed as assets rooted in relationships such as trust and trustworthiness (Granovetter 1992). Trust is vital in developing relationships; it is both a catalyst that solidifies relationships (Granovetter 1985) and an incremental outcome in networks (Kandemir et al. 2006; Morrissey and Pittaway 2006).

*Structural dimension* (ties, relationship configuration): this is the pattern of relations or connections that links network members. It indicates networks and access to people or organisations with the desired set of knowledge, expertise and resources. The two forms of social capital structural dimension are bonding, otherwise known as strong ties and bridges, otherwise known as weak ties. Bonding are tightly knit ties through frequent communication (Adler and Kwon 2002). Business owners with a closed, homogenous network in which all actors are well known to each other benefit from information and knowledge sharing, norms such as trust, reciprocity and mutual obligation (Jones and Rowley 2011). Bridging is a more extensive, diverse and heterogeneous network that allows access to a broader range of resources, although it might be challenging to access resources as members may not have the same level of obligation and commitment (Jones 2015; Jonsson 2015).

*Cognitive dimension* (shared values, shared language): The cognitive dimensions builds on the understanding that various actions create and sustain relationships such as shared values and common language. A high level of trust and shared norms of reciprocity can increase the free exchange of ideas and information (Willem and Buelens 2007). Shared norms and paradigms among networks generate strong ties, promote integration and collective responsibility (Coleman and Coleman 1994; Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998; Yli-Renko et al. 2001). Social capital content dimensions promote recognition, understanding and differentiation of the nature and forms of social capital. The structural dimensions reflect social capital sources, while the relational and cognitive dimensions reflect resources available in networks (Gedajlovic et al. 2013).

#### 4.3.2 Social Capital Process Perspectives

The social capital process perspective consists of four dynamic factors that influence the social capital development processes: stability (time), interaction, interdependence and closure (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998; Arregle et al. 2007). These factors facilitate the formation and maintenance of social capital in networks, enabling networks to be relatively endowed. *Stability (Time)* is a crucial element in developing social capital, as all social capital forms depend on the process and continuity of social structures (Giddens 1990; Granovetter 1992). Stability influences continuity, which increases clarity and visibility of mutual obligations, development of trust and shared norms in networks (Putnam 1993; Misztal 1996; Hitt et al. 2002). Social capital reflects goodwill accumulated over time as stable relationships develop a reputation among network members (Bourdieu 1986). *Interaction* strengthens social relationships between network actors for the development of trust and maintenance of mutual obligations. Network structures facilitate interaction by accumulating cognitive and relational social capital dimensions over time (Doornbosch-Akse and Van Vuuren 2019). A high level of mutual *interdependence* drives the social capital formation and extends social exchange among network members (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998).

Social capital diminishes when network members become more independent (Coleman 1988; Pearson et al. 2008; Laud et al. 2015). *Network Closure* is the extent to which network members are interconnected. Closure reflects the existence of

significant tie strength between network members (Coleman 1988). It facilitates identity, shared norms, trust, unique codes and languages (Coleman and Coleman 1994; Boland and Tenkasi 1995). Network closure can be loosely or tightly knitted depending on the degree of boundaries that enhance or hinders internal focus on network activities (Pearson et al. 2008). The tie strength level between network members facilitates network closure and defines the relationship's quality (Granovetter 1973).

#### 4.4 Relationship Marketing

Due to intense competition in the business sector and customers' unending demands, small businesses now develop a close relationship with business contacts for mutual benefits and repeated sales (Hatten 2012; Badenhorst-Weiss and Cilliers 2014; Durkin and Kerr 2016). The importance of nurturing long-term relationships with customers has been acknowledged in marketing theory and practice (Palmatier et al. 2009; Parry and Westhead 2017). Small business marketing develops and manages long-term relationships with customers to retain and satisfy them (Sheth 2015). Relationship marketing was first introduced in service marketing by Berry (1983) to reposition traditional marketing orientations. The focus was on developing a long-term relationship with existing customers and turning them into loyal customers. Relationship marketing is the process of identifying, establishing, maintaining, enhancing, and, when necessary, terminating relationships with customers (Grönroos 2000; Zontanos and Anderson 2004). Relationship marketing features include delivering superior customer value and satisfaction (Kotler and Armstrong 2010; Armstrong et al. 2014). The emphasis is on developing and retaining existing customers by building long-term profitable and mutually beneficial relationships. The three critical conceptual dimensions of relationship marketing are the economic aspect (investment, cost reduction), the strategic dimension (core competencies, strategic fit and time to market), and the behavioural dimension (social bonding, trust, and culture) (Wilson and Janatrania 1994). The economic aspect rooted in the economic theory of utility states that customers spend their income to maximize satisfaction from purchased goods and services (Ivana et al. 2003). The strategic and behavioural dimension derived from Porter (1985) work builds on long-term relationships with customers to improve profit (Ennew and Binks 1996). Shani and Chalasni (1992 p.44) defined relationship marketing as "*an integrated effort to*

*identify, maintain and build up a network with individual consumers and to continuously strengthen the network for the mutual benefit of both sides through interactive, individualised and value-added contacts over a long time."*

McKenna (1991) views relationship marketing as putting the customer first and deviating from manipulating the customer to genuine customer involvement (communication and knowledge sharing). According to Morgan and Hunt (1994), relationship marketing is referred to as all marketing directed towards establishing, developing and maintaining successful relationships. These definitions focus on the relational aspect of marketing and encompass organisational relationships beyond traditional marketing. According to Hennig-Thurau and Hansen (2000), the concept of relationship marketing focus on three distinct but interrelated theoretical approaches. The *behavioural perspective*, such as customer retention, trust and satisfaction, *network theory* focusing on network members' interactive nature and the *new institutional economics* approach, uses economic theories to explain agency theory development. Furthermore, Sheth (2017) suggests that relationship marketing is limited to the marketing domain and collaboration for marketing actions. Therefore, relationship marketing is a collaborative relationship between the firms and customers characterised by interdependence, long-term orientation and mutual benefits.

Relationship marketing aims at increasing market productivity and cooperation between organisations and parties involved. It improves marketing efficiencies such as access to new markets, developing new products/services and satisfying customers (Sheth and Parvatiyar 1995). Relationship marketing purposes are achieved by identifying suitable relationship partners who have the necessary capabilities to fulfil mutual goals. At the initial stage of the relationship, which is acquiring: the business owner-managers decide which customer type and specific customer to engage in a collaborative relationship. Small businesses engage in several relational approaches, including building trust and reputation, creating a positive personal statement to establish and maintain a long-term relationship (O'Malley and Tynan 1997; Hunt 1997). Relationship marketing is an integrative process that requires three key elements: communication, interaction and value (Grönroos 2004; Alam 2012; Izogo et al. 2016). Interaction, repeated encounters and open communication are essential

for building a trusted relationship among owner-managers and stakeholders. Both academics and practitioners have recognised the benefits of relationship marketing, including business performance and increased sales (Aijo 1996; Hawke and Heffernan 2006; Sashi 2009). Relationship marketing through interaction and communication increases customer satisfaction, leading to customer loyalty and access to new customers (Hultman and Shaw 2003; Nwakanma et al. 2007; Zhang et al. 2016).

According to research by Gartner (2013), large organisations spend over £12 billion annually on customer relationship management to understand how to target and sell to targeted customers. Due to resource constraints, small businesses adopt low-cost strategies on long-term customer engagement and loyalty as part of relationship marketing strategy (Hawke and Heffernan 2006; Alam 2012; Thomason et al. 2013; Webb and Roberts 2016). Customer relationship is a means for small businesses to gain a competitive advantage (Anderson and Ullah 2014; Atanassova and Clark 2015). Large organisations practice relationship marketing with sophisticated technology using both human and non-human automated interaction with customers. The nature of relationship marketing in smaller businesses is mostly human-oriented, with long-lasting social relationships characterised by empathy, reciprocity, personal and customised services (Gilboa et al. 2019). Small businesses with a small customer base naturally relate closely to customers (Zontanos and Anderson 2004). The success of relationship marketing depends mainly on customers' willingness to participate in the business (Raciti et al. 2013; Izogo et al. 2016; Sharafizard and Standing 2017). Relationship marketing depends on the owner-managers tactics and relational orientation to build close relationships with customers (Kim et al. 2012; Raciti et al. 2013). A long-term relationship with customers requires a higher level of trust and commitment (Izogo et al. 2016; Durkin and Kerr 2016).

#### 4.4.1 Commitment-Trust Theory

The key components of relationship marketing are trust and commitment. Commitment-Trust theory posits two fundamental factors that influence the success of relationship marketing. Relationship marketing is a relationship based on trust, resource exchange and mutual support between businesses and customers (Alam 2012; Izogo et al. 2016). Trust is recognised as multidimensional and exists at an individual, organisational and inter-organisational level (Lewicki and Bunker 1996).

Different disciplines have studied trust: economics (Sako 1992), sociology (Sztompka 1999), organisational management (Ellonen et al. 2008), marketing (Schoder and Haenlein 2004) and entrepreneurship (Zhang and Hamilton 2010). There are various definitions of trust, and none claims a universal application (Anderson et al. 2010a). Trust has been studied in different explanatory frameworks such as social exchange theory in social communities (Borch 1957), relationship marketing (Hunt and Morgan 1994) and small and medium enterprises' growth theory (Aldrich et al. 1991). Trust shapes a person's beliefs and attitudes towards another individual in an exchange relationship and provides an understanding of individual behaviours (Grabner-Krauter and Bitter 2015).

Customer trust is the willingness to rely on an exchange partner on whom they have confidence in service quality (Moorman et al. 1993). According to Morrissey and Pittaway (2006), trust enables customers to get involved in the collaborative process of product development and other marketing functions beyond the purchase. Trust is vital in forecasting the strength of the relationship and significantly influences the quality and commitment in the relationship (Wong and Sohal 2002; Fleming et al. 2016). Trust fosters cooperation, functional conflicts, and uncertainty (Patulny and Svendsen 2007; Bogers 2011; Ng et al. 2011). Huang and Chang (2008) posit a high level of trust among network members reduces transactional costs and uncertainties. There are two primary forms of trust: cognitive (competence-based) and emotional (social-based) trust (Hossain and Wigand 2004). Cognitive trust is earned through competence and reliability (Roy et al. 2004), while emotional trust develops from social relations or goodwill in a dyadic relationship, otherwise referred to as relational artefact (Anderson and Jack 2002).

Trust is vital in establishing and maintaining relationships with customers, suppliers, and others in the network (Hardwick et al. 2013; Negi and Ketema 2013; Shararfizad and Standling 2017). Trust eliminates barriers that hinder long-term relationships, facilitates knowledge sharing and continuous feedback that fosters innovation (Alam 2012; Swanson and Thorsson 2015). Trust has been argued as being the cornerstone of relationship commitment. Without trust, commitment becomes a struggle (Morgan and Hunt 1994; Kwon and Suh 2005). Commitment is a process when exchange partners believe that the relationship is meaningful to warrant maximum efforts to

maintain it (Moorman et al. 1992). Morgan and Hunt (1994) describe commitment as an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship with obligations. There are two types of commitments: calculative and affective commitment (Gustafsson et al. 2005; Bowden 2009). Affective commitment is a result of emotional bonds between businesses and stakeholders that reflects trust and reciprocity. In contrast, calculative commitment results from a lack of other service providers, forcing the customer to remain with a business (Sashi 2012). The focus of relationship marketing is on existing customers and potential customers and retention with the value of exchanging goods and services (Grönroos 2004). The following section extends the scope of relational marketing beyond customers to involve various networks in small business marketing.

#### 4.5 The Concept of Engagement

In today's highly interactive and dynamic business environment, organisations biggest challenge is not creating high-quality products or finding new customers but maintaining a high level of engagement with both existing and potential customers. Marketing research has gone beyond the benefits of relationship marketing, such as lowering marketing costs, higher revenue, higher marketing efficiency and repeated sales. Customer and service provider roles have blurred and become interrelated (Kumar et al. 2008; Jaakkola and Alexander 2014; Hollebeek et al. 2018). Customers are no longer passive end-users of firm offerings but actively interact with brands and firms to shape offerings and co-create value (Baumöl et al. 2016). Businesses relate with customers differently through customer satisfaction, seeking product/service feedback, and participate in social media interaction (Kumar 2013; Kumar and Pansari 2016).

The theory of engagement is the evolution of relationship marketing theory, and the foundation is on trust and commitment (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Relationship marketing facilitates establishing a long-term relationship with customers to promote productivity, efficiency and cooperation (Pansari and Kumar 2017). Relationships between customers and firms have evolved. Now satisfied customers are emotionally connected with firms and are directly involved through purchases and indirectly through feedback and referrals. Engagement is business processes, solution development, co-creation and marketing between business and networks (Brodie et

al. 2011). The concept of engagement has been studied across different disciplines, in organisational behaviour as employee engagement (Catteeuw et al. 2007; Kumar and Pansari 2016), sociology as civic engagement (Mondak et al. 2010; Bowden et al. 2017), and marketing as customer engagement (Brodie et al. 2011; Kumar 2013). Engagement occurs among different network actors, not just the customers–firm dyad. An actor can be an individual or organisation involved in the logic of exchange systems, including the economy and society (Vargo and Lusch 2017; Brodie et al. 2019). Multiple actors' engagement is defined as "both the dispositions of actors to engage in the interactive process of resource integration" (Storbacka et al. 2016 p. 3009). Different actors in networks engage with each other in diverse resource integration activities and product co-creation (Chandler and Lusch 2015; Jaakkola et al. 2015; Lusch and Vargo 2017). Jaakkola et al. (2015) identified different interaction and service experience co-creation dimensions among network actors. Connectedness among network actors and the broader service ecosystem has become central to the domain of engagement research (Fehrer et al. 2018). Dyadic relationships between customers and firm provide the foundation for a broader perspective of engagement that embraces networks involving multiple actors (Brodie et al. 2019). Recent research on engagement emphasises the reciprocal, social and collective nature of engagement beyond dyadic interaction (Chandler and Lusch 2015; Alexander et al. 2018). Multiple networks, not just customers, such as business networks (Vivek et al. 2018; Reinartz and Berkmann 2018; Jaakkola and Aarikka-Stenroos 2019), employee networks (Kumar and Pansari 2016) and even non-human's actors (Storbacka et al. 2016), are involved in various engagements.

Previous engagement research in marketing investigates the dynamics of engagement at an individual level within dyads, focusing on the customers and interactions with firms (Van Doorn et al. 2010; Brodie et al. 2011). Recently, studies on engagement concepts in networks extend beyond dyads to focus on engagement with diverse actors and groups of actors (Chandler and Lusch 2015; Li et al. 2017). There is a need for a broader perspective of engagement beyond the dyadic interaction between customers and businesses to include resources exchange between diverse networks (Jaakkola and Alexander 2014). The first level of marketing engagement pertains to customer behaviour, attitude and level of connection towards a firm termed customer engagement (CE) (Brodie et al. 2011; Vivek et al. 2012). Customer engagement has been discussed extensively in

marketing academia as a critical driver to business performance, which includes psychological processes driving customer loyalty (Van Doorn et al. 2010; Gummerus et al. 2012), customers' lifetime value (Schmitt et al. 2011) and as a firm's competitive performance (Kumar et al. 2016; Hollebeek et al. 2016; 2018). The concept of engagement enhances our understanding of customer engagement and other customer-related constructs such as customer involvement, customer experience (Verhoef et al. 2009), customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and customer brand value (Kumar et al. 2015). This study extends the customer engagement conceptual domain in small businesses from one centred primarily on customers and consumers to various networks (Lusch and Vargo 2011; Brodie et al. 2019). It further explores engagement processes among multiple network actors to understand the dynamics and iterative processes of multiple actor engagement in Nigerian small business networks.

#### 4.5.1 Customer Engagement

Customer engagement focuses on various aspects of customers' behaviour and attitudes towards a firm (Kumar et al. 2016). Customer engagement has attracted considerable attention among practitioners and is often referred to as customer marketing, loyalty, satisfaction and retention practices (Economic Intelligence Unit 2007). Businesses are shifting focus from selling to emotional connectedness with customers for repeated sales, long-term profitability through loyalty and affective commitment (Vivek et al. 2012; Pansari and Kumar 2017). Customer engagement has been discussed from the perspective of relationship marketing (Bowden 2009), service-dominant (S-D) logic (Brodie et al. 2011), customer attitude toward a brand (Vivek et al. 2012), and customers contributions towards firms (Kumar 2013). Various customer-centric constructs have been used to describe customer engagement such as customer satisfaction (Bowden 2009; Hollebeek 2011b), customer involvement (Wirtz et al. 2013), customer participation (Cui and Wu 2016; Leckie et al. 2016), customer loyalty, customer trust (Rossmann et al. 2016) and customer commitment to evaluate the effectiveness of business marketing. Vivek et al. (2012) defined customer engagement as the intensity of customer participation and involvement with business offerings and operations. The conceptual framework of customer engagement consists of both existing and potential customers' participation and involvement. Van Doorn et al. (2010) defined customer engagement

as a customer behavioural manifestation towards a firm beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers such as positive word-of-mouth recommendations, influencing potential customers and writing products and services reviews. According to Kumar and Pansari (2015) and Kumar et al. (2010), customer engagement comprises customer purchasing behaviour, customer referral behaviour and customer knowledge behaviour.

Brodie et al.'s (2011) fundamental proposition (FP4) views customer engagement as a multifaceted concept comprising cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions subject to context, incorporating social dimension. Hollebeek et al. (2019) defined customer engagement in the context of customer relationship management. Other studies identified the processes of customer engagement (Brodie et al. 2013), types of customer engagement behaviours (Jaakola and Alexander 2014), engagement dimensions (Dessart et al. 2015) and the scale for measuring customer engagement (Dwivedi 2015; Hollebeek et al. 2016). Marketing research recognises customer engagement contributions in developing long-term relationships with customers beyond monetary transactions to achieve sustainable competitive advantage (Kumar and Pansari 2016; Venkatesan 2017). Pansari and Kumar (2017 p.295) developed the theory of engagement based on various theoretical supports, arguing that customer engagement is the outcome of a satisfied and emotional connectedness with customers and defined customer engagement " *as the mechanics of customers value addition to the firm through direct and indirect contribution*".

#### 4.5.2 Engagement Marketing

The impact and significance of research on engagement have been highlighted theoretically and practically (Harmeling et al. 2017; Venkatesan 2017). The concept of engagement has been studied in various academic disciplines and recently has been adopted in marketing (Verhoef et al. 2010; Brodie et al. 2011; Jaakkola and Alexander 2014; Hollebeek et al. 2016). Engagement marketing is characterised as emotional bonding that extends beyond loyalty and satisfaction (Kumar and Pansari 2016). Engagement marketing accommodates the various forms, definitions and constructs of customer engagement, including cognition (skills, knowledge and strategy), innovation (tacit knowledge, knowledge exchange) and collaboration (co-creation). According to Harmeling et al. (2017 p. 312), engagement marketing

"represents a firm's deliberate effort to motivate, empower and measure customers' voluntary contribution to firms marketing functions beyond the core economic transactions." This definition explains engagement marketing as deliberately initiated and managed by organisations.

Harmeling et al. (2016) identified five engagement marketing characteristics that distinguish engagement from transactional and relationship marketing. Firstly, engagement marketing allows various networks to contribute actively and participate in a firm's marketing functions. Secondly, engagement marketing effectiveness depends on the firm's ability to identify and utilise network resources (Hollebeek et al. 2016). Thirdly, the information flow in engagement marketing is networked among network members and firms (Kumar et al. 2016). Fourthly, engagement marketing facilitates network members to take up new roles as pseudo-marketers and contribute to marketing functions. Finally, engagement marketing relinquishes control and allows value co-creation in marketing functions among network members (Hollebeek et al. 2016).

Engagement marketing consists of three core elements: contribution of networks to the firm's marketing practices, empowering and motivating network actors to be involved and committed to a firm's marketing. Harmeling et al. (2017) classified engagement marketing initiatives into two forms: task-based and experiential engagement marketing. *Task-based* engagement initiative includes word-of-mouth marketing (Kozinets et al. 2010), crowdsourcing (Howe 2006) and social customer relationship management (Malthouse et al. 2013). Customers are involved in structured tasks such as introducing new customers and providing product and services feedback. *Experiential* engagement involves firms generating positive emotions and heightening psychological network connections by using events to motivate autonomous network contributions. Experiential engagement initiatives bring network members together and make them feel valued as part of the firm with a sense of purpose and desire to contribute (Schouten et al. 2007; Pink 2011; Harmeling et al. 2015). Successful engagement process depends on the owner-managers ability to identify network resources and engage network members.

## 4.6 Small Business Marketing Evolution

Customer management has evolved over the years from transactional marketing to relationship marketing (Morgan and Hunt 1994), which entails “*all marketing activities directed towards establishing, developing, and maintaining successful relational exchanges*”. Relationship marketing aims to establish a long-term relationship with customers for productivity and cooperation (Pansari and Kumar 2017). Until the 1990s, marketing focused on customer transactional measures, and small businesses profited from customers’ value, share-of-wallet, frequency, and monetary value (Pansari and Kumar 2017). With the rapidly changing demands and needs of customers, small business owner-managers have discovered new ways to be in constant and direct contact with customers. Marketing in small businesses has evolved from a transactional marketing perspective to relationship marketing with the critical norms of trust and commitment (Morgan and Hunt 1994; Berry 1997). Commitment-trust theory (Morgan and Hunt 1994) allows the development of relationship marketing with firms’ core marketing objectives to establish a positive relationship with customers. The primary purposes of relationship marketing have been to develop a long-term relationship with customers.

Kumar and Pansari (2016) argued that the lifetime value of a customer and customer satisfaction was not enough to keep customers profitable and loyal. A higher level of differential and sustainable competitive advantage is required. Small business marketing practices evolved from relationship marketing to engaging customers in business processes in all possible ways, leading to customer engagement. Engagement is discussed as direct and indirect activities of customers towards business performance such as customer purchases, customer referrals, feedback and suggestions (Kumar et al. 2010; Brodie et al. 2011; Vivek et al. 2012). Customer engagement expands the traditional customer role and includes the value-adding process by allowing small businesses to understand customers’ unique needs and involve them in the product development process (Sashi 2012).

Although customer engagement has not been fully developed in small business marketing, small businesses embrace customer engagement approaches and marketing strategies. Customer engagement (CE) is a component of relationship

marketing (RM) aimed at attracting, building, maintaining, and enhancing the relationship with potential and existing customers (Vivek et al. 2012). It is a deliberate effort to motivate and empower customers toward voluntary contribution to the firm's marketing (Harmeling et al. 2016). Customers have become pseudo-marketers with significant influence, lower cost, and broader reach (Kozinets et al. 2010). Customer engagement is a multidimensional concept, subject to the context and stakeholder-specific expression of cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and social contexts (Pansari and Kumar 2017). According to Kumar et al. (2010), customer engagement is customer activities towards a firm. Vivek et al. (2012) describe customer engagement as the intensity of customer participation with the firm. Customer engagement's principal objective is to encourage customers to participate actively and contribute to the firms' marketing (Kumar and Pansari 2015). Table 7 presents the evolution of small businesses' marketing practices, the definitions and objectives of various marketing approaches and the theoretical underpinnings.

Table 7: Differences between Transactional Marketing, Relationship Marketing, and Engagement Marketing.

	<b>Transactional Marketing</b>	<b>Relationship Marketing</b>	<b>Engagement Marketing</b>
Definitions	Small businesses use special offers and promotions to raise customers' interest and influence the focal product's purchase versus competitors' products (Wierenga and Soethoudt 2010).	Small business marketing activities are directed towards establishing, developing, and maintaining successful relational exchanges (Morgan and Hunt 1994, p. 22) with focal customers (Palmatier et al. 2006).	Business owner-managers deliberate effort to motivate, empower and measure network members' voluntary contribution to business marketing functions beyond core economic transaction (Brodie et al. 2016; Harmeling et al. 2016).
Marketing Objective	Induces single transaction	The objective is mainly for the retention and motivation of customers for future and repeated transactions.	Encourage customer's active participation and contribution to business marketing activities such as word-of-mouth and referrals (Malthouse et al. 2013).
Customer Value	Purchasing power and customer share-of-wallet	Customer lifetime value is predicted from customers' previous transactions	Access to customer-owned resources and potential future contributions to business marketing functions through a long-term relationship.

Value creation	Customer control is negotiated with business, which affects outcomes relevant to the focal customer-firm relationship.	The customer has no control over value creation.	Customer exercises high control, which can affect outcomes relevant to the broader customer population.
Theoretical foundation	The universal theory of marketing	Commitment-Trust theory	Relationship marketing, network theory, process theory, social capital theory, Service-Dominant logic
Information Flow	There is bilateral communication between customers and firms.	It is mainly one-directional communication from firm to customers.	Networked two-way communication among Networks and firms.
Customer Learning	Understanding the distinctive norms of exchange relationship	They are informing customers on how to buy and use focal products/services.	Encouraging customers on how to contribute to the firm's marketing functions

Source: Adapted from Kumar and Pansari (2015)

## 4.7 Conceptual Framework

Engagement marketing is a relational concept that extends relationship marketing through trust and commitment (Morgan and Hunt 1994; Vivek et al. 2012). Although engagement marketing is rooted in relationship marketing and shares similar attributes and processes, engagement marketing takes network actors involvement and participation with businesses to a higher level of relationship (Brodie et al. 2013). Customer engagement is a process of building trust and commitment, satisfaction and emotional connectedness with customers (Brodie et al. 2013). Furthermore, engagement marketing is beyond transactional marketing to include various networks involvement and participation in a firm's marketing (Brodie et al. 2015). Engagement involves processes (Bowden 2009a), antecedents (Hollebeek et al. 2016) and consequences (both direct and indirect) of the contributions of network members.

Brodie et al. (2013) suggested the integration of theoretical concepts to explain engagement marketing. The social elements in relationships synchronise networking processes and social capital attributes, employing networks and social capital concepts to explain engagement processes (Vivek et al. 2012; Laud and Karpen 2017). According to Gonzalez et al. (2014), social capital is an essential element in relationships. Social capital is employed in terms of trust and commitment, which are the key elements of relationship marketing to explain customer engagement (Brodie et al. 2011; 2013). Networking is the process of building and accessing social capital. The bonding and bridging of social capital describe relationship building and customer engagement antecedents (Anderson et al. 2007; McKeever et al. 2014; Kumar and Pansari 2016). Networking theory informs the processes for building long-term relationships with network actors to access social capital (Miller et al. 2007; Jones et al. 2013). Networking is the antecedent for engagement and relationships with shared social resources (Laud and Karpen 2017; Hardwick and Anderson 2019). Although engagement shares characteristics with social capital, it is more practical and directed towards marketing.

According to Conduit and Chen (2017), co-creation is a transcending perspective of marketing that requires bonding and bridging social capital concepts to inform engagement marketing practice. Process theory depicts the time, events, and

activities required for successful relationships. Networking and process theory explains the processes of accessing social capital embedded within networks, while social capital theory offers an understanding of engagement outcomes. The marketing literature has examined customer engagement mainly in the business-to-customer (B2C) context. Recent research has indicated that the concept of engagement involves multiple actors beyond customers (Kumar and Pansari 2016; Reinartz and Berkman 2018; Vivek et al. 2018; Brodie et al. 2019).

Customer engagement is a component of engagement, and engagement is a component of relationship marketing and social capital utilisation in networks. Empirical research investigating engagement from small business owner-managers perspective as a firm-strategic resource for marketing is relatively limited. The introduction of multiple actors' engagement extends the scope of engagement marketing beyond customer-provider dyads and recognises actors' span in the service ecosystem to include suppliers, distributors, formal and informal network actors (Vargo and Lusch 2011; Brodie et al. 2016; Storbacka et al. 2016). Small business networks consist of customers, suppliers, business partners, and internal networks and processes to access social capital through relationship ties. Social capital is formulated and utilised in networks for marketing relationship with the fundamental norms of trust and commitment. In pursuit of a loyal and long-term relationship with network actors, small business owner-managers involve them in a social, interactive, and reciprocal relationship to develop an emotional bond. Studies on engagement have somewhat been restricted to definition (Brodie et al. 2011; Hollebeek 2011), the conceptualisation of customer engagement (Van Doorn et al. 2010; Brodie et al. 2011; Vivek et al. 2012) and different dimensions of customer engagement (van Doorn et al. 2010; Hollebeek et al. 2014; Vivek et al. 2014; Dessart et al. 2016). Empirical research investigating engagement processes from a managerial perspective (Hollebeek 2017; Calder et al. 2018) and applying the concept of engagement in small business marketing can be useful.

The conceptual framework presented in Figure 4 is constructed to explain the interrelation between the concepts and theories underpinning engagement marketing. Networking informs social capital processes and attributes; social capital perspectives explain how social resources in networks can be accessed through

bridging and bonding. Trust-commitment theory enables the development of a long-term relationship with customers, known as relationship marketing.

Extant research posits the foundations of customer engagement as a multidimensional phenomenon comprising emotional, cognitive, and behavioural components that resonate with networking and social capital outcomes (Brodie et al. 2011; Jaakkola and Alexander 2014). Engagement behaviours reflect network members specific resource investment voluntarily beyond transactions (Harmeling et al. 2017), and networking theory offers explanatory leverage for engagement processes. The social capital theory, content and process perspectives explain the engagement processes. The outcome, engagement marketing, involves multiple networks (customers, suppliers, internal networks, social networks, and business networks) who effectively depend on the network resources for mutual benefits (Vargo et al. 2008). They all interact with each other in resource integration and resource exchange for value co-creation (Lusch and Vargo 2014).

With the evolution in the marketing environment, organisations now benefit from network contributions to marketing functions. Firms are intentionally strategizing on how to stimulate engagement with networks. The two forms of engagement marketing are task-based and experiential engagement. The task-based engagement initiatives involve voluntary networks contributions to firms marketing functions such as writing reviews, customer referrals and customer support to increase revenue and lower cost (Schmitt et al. 2011; Malthouse et al. 2013). The experiential engagement initiatives are centred on intrinsically motivating customer contributing through experiential events to stimulate emotional connections to the firm, which often generates long-lasting memories. This approach fosters emotional attachment to the firm and supports long-term engagement (Harmeling et al. 2017).

Engagement marketing considers a broader network in business experience at different levels and influences each member's connection (Kleinaltenkamp et al. 2012; Vargo and Lusch 2016). As network members enter a network, engage at different levels based on the available social resources, and disengage and leave the network, networks evolve and manifest the dynamics of engagement among network members (Chandler and Lusch 2015; Juric et al. 2016). The study of engagement from a multiple network perspective has been limited, especially in small business.

The conceptual works by Chandler and Lusch (2015) and Storbackka et al. (2016) provide the initial framework that guides this exploratory research on multiple networks engagement in continuous and interrelated networks for value co-creation and collaboration. The understanding of how engagement improves small business marketing shed light on the process as to how engagement evolves in the networks of multiple actors.

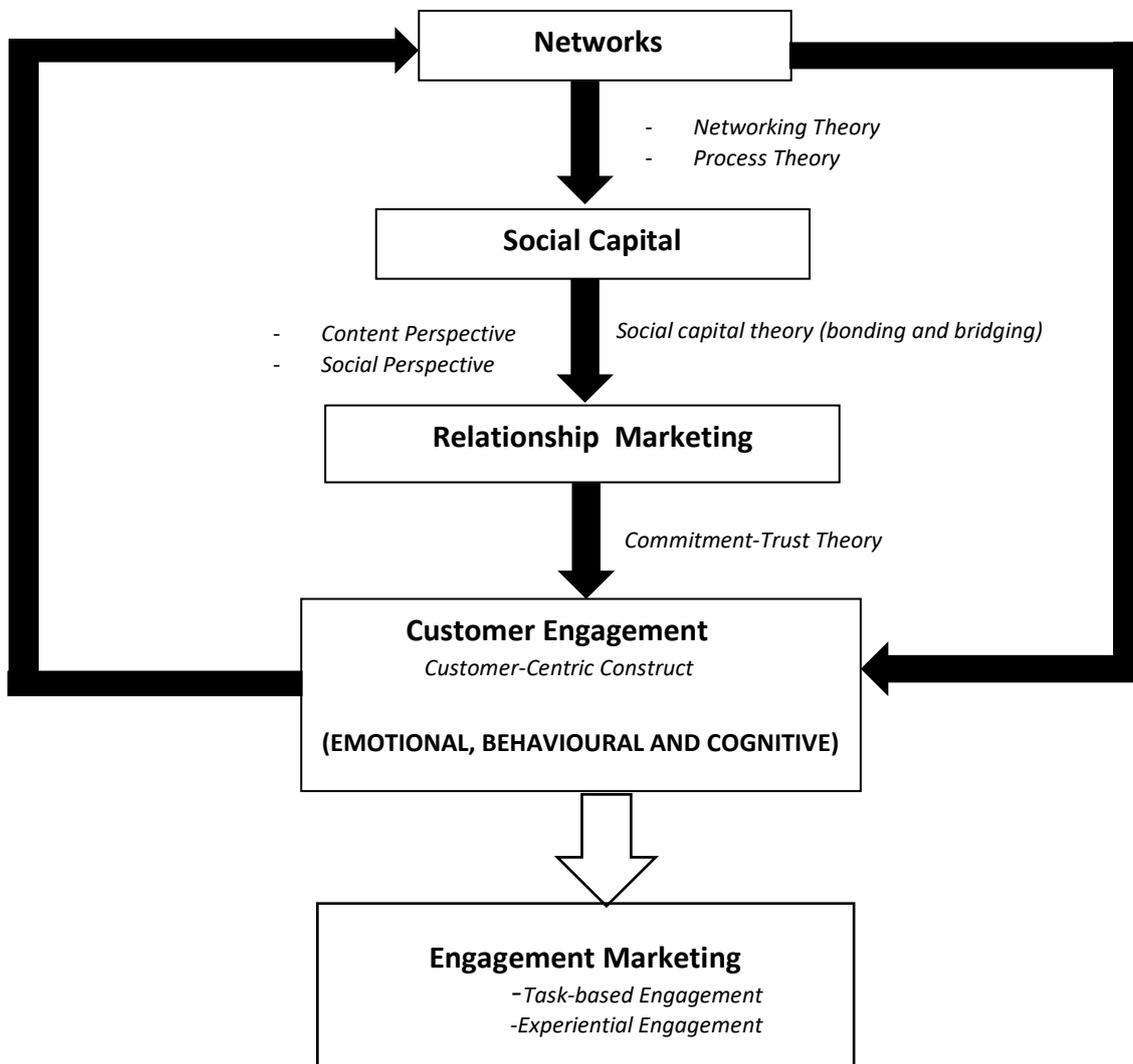


Figure 4: The Conceptual Framework

## 4.8 Chapter Summary

Studies on how small businesses access network resources to market goods and services are limited, especially in developing countries such as Nigeria (Watson 2007; O'Donnell 2014; Resnick et al. 2016). The strength of ties as network closure

in the social capital formation process is adopted to investigate the processes of accessing marketing resources in networks. Small businesses engage with networks through customer relationships, business-to-business relationships, intra-organisational relationships, relationships with industries, and other stakeholders. This chapter explores the theories and concepts underpinning a mutually beneficial long-term relationship between businesses and networks characterized by trust and commitment. Due to the contributions of engagements to the firm's marketing performance, it is imperative to understand small business marketing engagement processes and outcomes. Social networking theory and process theory are adopted to explain social capital formation in small business marketing. In response to the call to investigate the concept of engagement in a multi-actor business context (Kumar and Pansari 2016), acknowledging the social, interactive, reciprocal and collective nature of engagement processes (Chandler and Lusch 2015; Li et al. 2017). This study applies social capital and engagement process in Nigerian small businesses' context to understand the processes and contribution of social resources in small business marketing.

# Chapter 5 - Research Methodology

## 5.0 Introduction

The research methodologies are the approaches and strategies a researcher adopts for a research process. It provides a framework for research data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations for the study (Saunders et al. 2012; Collis and Hussey 2013). It is a critical part of the research that shapes how the research is carried out. There are three aspects to deciding on research methods: knowledge claims, strategies of inquiries and methods of collecting data. How research is carried out is based on the researcher's knowledge, procedures of inquiries, methods of data collection and analysis (Creswell 2007; Punch 2013). This chapter reviews the philosophical underpinnings and discusses the choice of research design and methods adopted. The research methodology was briefly discussed in section 1.4 of chapter one and elaborated within this chapter. This chapter is structured as follows: Section 5.1 describes different philosophical assumptions, explaining the philosophical theories and assumptions underpinning the research. Section 5.2 discusses different research paradigms and social constructionism as the chosen paradigm. Section 5.3 explores in detail different research designs for social constructionism. Section 5.4 discusses the research methods adopted and provides a detailed explanation of the research context, sampling strategy, sample size, data collection techniques, and the chosen research strategy's limitations. Section 5.5 explains the data analysis methods adopted. Section 5.6 critically evaluates the research trustworthiness. Section 5.7 provides a detailed explanation of ethical considerations during this research, and finally, section 5.8 presents the chapter summary.

## 5.1 Philosophical Assumptions

According to Saunders et al. (2012), research philosophy is a system of belief and assumptions about the development of knowledge. Research philosophy is about the abstract ideas and beliefs that inform the research processes (Denzin and Lincoln 2011; Creswell 2013). It is a model or framework that shapes what we see and how we understand what we see (Babbie 2007). Research philosophy explains the research theory and the assumptions that underpin the research (Blackmon and

Maylor 2005). It also reflects on how the belief and values of the researcher guide the research process. Research philosophy focuses on developing knowledge and how knowledge relates to the research (Saunders et al. 2018). Assumptions are made at every stage of a research process. These assumptions shape how the researcher understands the research questions, how the researcher seeks to answer questions, research methods adopted and interpretation techniques (Crotty 1998; Creswell 2013). There are four underlying philosophical assumptions: ontological assumptions, epistemological assumptions, axiological assumptions and methodological assumptions (Denzin and Lincoln 2011; Cohen et al. 2013; Saunders et al. 2012).

### 5.1.1 Ontological Assumption

The ontological assumption is concerned with the nature and characteristics of reality and what is there to know. '*The nature of the social world, and what is there to know about it?*' (Ritchie et al. 2014; Ormston et al. 2014). There are four ontological positions: *realism*, *internal realism*, *relativism* and *nominalism* (Easterby-Smith et al. 2012). *Realism* assumes that the physical and social world exists independently of perception or belief, and facts exist and can be revealed (Blaikie 2007). *Internal realism* assumes that the world is real and independent of the human mind, but it is impossible to observe. Thus, truth exists but is obscure. *Relativism* is the social sciences approach, which suggests that laws are created by people embedded in a context, and facts depend on individuals' viewpoints and cognition (Cohen et al. 2013). *Nominalism* views reality as being created by individuals who do not exist independently of their perception. The nominalism stance is adopted as the phenomena under study are perceived differently by research participants. The social world consists of people's shared social constructed meaning representation in a context (Ormston et al. 2014; Bryman and Bell 2015). This assumption shapes how the researcher perceives and studies the research participants (Creswell 2007; Saunders et al. 2012). Through the lived experiences and interaction of research participants, multiple realities are constructed (Creswell and Poth 2018).

### 5.1.2 Epistemological Assumption

The epistemological assumption is concerned with different ways of knowing and learning about the world. Epistemology is about understanding and finding out about

the social world, the limits to knowledge and what constitutes adequate valid knowledge (Saunders et al. 2012; Ormston et al. 2014). Various arguments influence the epistemological assumptions on how knowledge is acquired, what is considered acceptable knowledge, what constitutes quality data and what kind of contribution to knowledge research can make (Guba and Lincoln 2008; Cohen et al. 2013; Saunders et al. 2012). It is also concerned with the nature of knowledge and ways of enquiring into the physical and social world and its relation to the nature of the phenomenon under investigation (Cohen et al. 2013; Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). There are two major epistemological assumptions: *positivism and social constructionism*. *Positivism* assumes that the social world exists externally, and the properties are measured rather than being inferred through reflection or intuition (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). *Social constructionism* assumes that people and external factors determine reality. It appreciates the way people make sense of their experiences and beliefs. Social constructionism is deemed suitable for this research. It allows the researcher to gather rich data to understand the meaning participants attach to a social phenomenon, their beliefs and perceptions (Burns and Bush 2010; McDonald et al. 2017).

### 5.1.3 Axiological Assumption

Axiological assumption refers to the role of values and ethics required at all social inquiry stages (Saunders et al. 2009). It incorporates how the researcher deals with personal values and research participants (Saunders et al. 2018). Cohen et al. (2013) explain the axiological assumption from human nature's perspectives based on the relationship between the researcher's personality and the environment. The axiological assumptions are based on two main views of human nature: determinism and voluntarism. *Determinism* views humans as responding mechanically to their environment, and *voluntarism* views human actions as initiated freely. This research adopts the voluntarism view to allow the researchers to interact closely with social actors' values. In qualitative research, the researcher enters the research participants' world and attempts to understand the world through their perspective. The researcher also acknowledges that research is value-laden, and bias is possible based on the researcher role in the study (Creswell and Poth 2018). Axiological assumptions also consider ethical and moral behaviours that guide the nature of information gathering (Cohen et al. 2013; Creswell 2013). Therefore, the researcher

discusses the values that shape the narratives and interpretations of findings (Creswell 2013).

#### 5.1.4 Methodological Assumption

Methodological assumptions consist of the researcher's views regarding the appropriate research methods adopted for empirical inquiry of knowledge (Creswell 2013). Methodological assumption can also be referred to as research strategies (Saunders et al. 2009), strategies of inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln 2011) and traditions of inquiry (Creswell and Poth 2018). There are three broad research methodologies: quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. *Quantitative* research is concerned with the discovery of facts about social phenomena. Quantitative research assumptions are fixed and measurable, and data are analysed through numerical comparisons and statistical inferences. *Qualitative* research is concerned with developing a deep understanding of human behaviours from research participants' perspective. Data collection is usually through participant observation and interviews. *Mixed research methods* allow the researcher to use both qualitative and quantitative approaches to gather and analyse data. Table 8 summarises the characteristics of different philosophical assumptions adopted.

Table 8: Summary of adopted philosophical assumptions

<b>Philosophical Assumptions</b>	<b>Description</b>
Ontological: Nominalism (nature of reality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complex, rich, socially constructed through culture and language.</li> <li>• There are multiple realities, interpretations, the flux of processes, experiences and practices.</li> <li>• The nature of reality can be explored through interaction and meaningful actions.</li> <li>• Understand how research participants make meaning of their social worlds through daily activities, conversations, and interactions with others around them.</li> </ul>
Epistemological: Social constructionism (what constitutes acceptable knowledge)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on narratives, stories, perceptions, and interpretations.</li> <li>• Participants in the research process socially construct knowledge by experiencing real-life or natural settings.</li> <li>• Inquirer and the inquired are together in an interactive process of talking and listening, reading and writing.</li> </ul>
Methodological: Qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is the understanding of human behaviour from the research participant's perspective.</li> <li>• Data collected through semi-structured interviews.</li> <li>• Data analysed by themes from descriptions by research participants.</li> </ul>
Axiological: Voluntarism (role of value and ethics)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Value-bound research</li> <li>• Researchers interpretations are key to contributions</li> <li>• Researchers reflexive</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted from Thomas (2010) and Saunders et al. (2012)

## 5.2 Research Paradigm

The research paradigm is a system of interrelated practice and thinking that defines the nature of enquiry (TerreBlache and Durrheim 1999). It incorporates the assumptions discussed earlier and signals an appropriate research design for the study. Research paradigms are sets of ideas, values, and beliefs that predispose how the researcher views the world, the questions they ask about it, and the method they feel is appropriate to answer the research questions (Robson 2002). Different dimensions of research paradigms shape the philosophical stance for research processes (Meredith et al. 1989). These dimensions focus on the nature of reality, which is logical and independent of the researcher and whether reality is subjective and socially constructed. There are five significant paradigms in business and management research: positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, postmodernism and pragmatism (Saunders et al. 2018). The two most contrasting research paradigms are positivism and interpretivism (otherwise known as social constructionism).

### 5.2.1 Positivism

The positivism paradigm investigates human and social behaviour through refining and extending what is already known (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). Positivism is a philosophical stance that the social world exists externally, and its features can be measured and known through objective methods. Positivism assumes specific and accurate knowledge using techniques designed to generate data and facts that are not influenced by human interpretations or bias (Saunders et al. 2018). Positivism views social realities as physical objects and natural phenomena as facts and regularities through measurements that lead to credible and meaningful data. Causal relationships in data create law-like generalisation. The positivist assumes universal rules and laws explain and predict behaviour and events in organisations (Saunders et al. 2018). Positivism philosophy adopts an existing theory to develop the hypothesis to be tested in expectation of confirmation. Positivism researchers use highly structured methods such as questionnaires and structured observation to facilitate replication.

### 5.2.2 Social Constructionism (Interpretivism)

Social constructionism and interpretivism have been used interchangeably by various researchers (Easterby-Smith et al. 2012; Collis and Hussey 2013; Saunders et al. 2018). Social constructionism relates to the study of social phenomena in natural settings. In management research, social constructionism is relevant, particularly in studying organisational behaviour, marketing and human resource management. Social constructionism understands the fundamental meanings attached to organisations or groups of individual lives and explains human roles as social actors (Kelemen and Rumens 2008; Saunders et al. 2018). In social constructionism research, the researcher seeks to understand the world in which participants live and work to develop subjective meanings of participant's experiences (Creswell and Poth 2018). This study tackles the how and why questions by investigating how small business owner-managers engage with various networks.

A social constructionism stance was deemed suitable as it allows the researcher to understand the implications attached to networking and participants' beliefs and perceptions (Saunders et al. 2009; Burns and Bush 2010; McDonald et al. 2017). This paradigm allows for a richer understanding and interpretation of the social world, processes and contexts. Social constructionism research analysis captures the accounts of research participants and reflections to explore and interpret the meaning (Ritchie et al. 2014). In social constructionism research, the researcher is a participant who engages and discerns the implications of actions as expressed within a specific social context (Thomas 2010). Table 9 summarises the differences between positivism and the social constructionism (interpretivism) research paradigms.

Table 9: Difference between positivism and social constructionism

	<b>Ontology</b>	<b>Epistemology</b>	<b>Axiology</b>	<b>Methodology</b>
<b>Positivism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Real</li> <li>• External</li> <li>• Independent of the research participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scientific method</li> <li>• Observable</li> <li>• Measurable facts</li> <li>• To identify causal explanations, predictions as the contribution</li> <li>• Confirmation of theories</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Value-free and unbiased</li> <li>• Neutral researcher</li> <li>• Objective research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hypothesis and deduction</li> <li>• Highly structured</li> <li>• It is a random selection of a large sample size.</li> <li>• Quantitative methods of analysis</li> <li>• Extensive surveys, questionnaires and multi-cases.</li> </ul>
<b>Social constructionism (Interpretivism)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complex</li> <li>• Rich socially constructed</li> <li>• Through culture and language</li> <li>• Multiple meaning</li> <li>• Flux of processes</li> <li>• Experiences and practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Theories and concepts</li> <li>• Focus on narratives</li> <li>• Stories, perceptions</li> <li>• Sense-making</li> <li>• New insights and understanding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Value-bound research</li> <li>• Subjective research</li> <li>• Researchers interpretations are key to the research contribution</li> <li>• Researcher reflexive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is an inductive gathering of ideas from data.</li> <li>• Small sample size is included in the study for specific purposes.</li> <li>• In-depth investigation</li> <li>• Qualitative methods of analysis.</li> <li>• Participant observation</li> <li>• Semi-structured interviews</li> <li>• Engagement and reflexivity.</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted from Saunders et al. (2018)

## 5.3 Research Design

The research design, otherwise known as a research strategy, is the inquiry mode derived from research rationale, objectives and aim (Myers 2019). Research design is the framework that shapes research processes, from research rationale to data collection, analysis, interpretation and discussion (Denzin and Lincoln 2011; Ritchie et al. 2014). Research designs present how the researcher is going to answer the research questions. They are distinctions about the nature of knowledge: how one understands the world and the ultimate purpose of the research (Thomas 2010). Research design is on two levels: *level one* considers research strategies such as experiments, survey, case study, narrative, grounded theory, ethnography and *level two* consider quantitative and qualitative research approaches (Bryman and Bell 2015). The decision to choose between the research designs depends on its suitability to answer the research questions. Quantitative research measures and analyses causal relationships between variables, while qualitative research explores and examines the meaning individuals attached to a social phenomenon (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). Table 10 summarises research design implications from quantitative and qualitative approaches, the sampling techniques, data collection and data interpretation methods. The following section will discuss the research design adopted.

### 5.3.1 Social Constructionism Research Designs

Social constructionism research designs assume that verifiable observations are potentially subject to different interpretations. Researchers should illuminate truths and establish how various truth and reality claims become socially constructed in participants' everyday lives (Easterby-Smith et al. 2012). There are five main research designs: narrative research, grounded theory, ethnography, case studies and phenomenological research (Creswell 2014; Creswell and Poth 2018). *Narrative design* is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher studies the participants to understand their lived experiences (Riessman 2008). The *grounded theory* formulated by Glaser and Strauss (1999) is a research inquiry design from sociology. The researcher derives a general abstract approach of process, action, and interaction grounded in participants' views (Creswell 2014). It involves using multiple data collection stages and refinement of information categories to develop

a comparative method (Corbin and Strauss 2014). *Ethnography* research is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher studies the shared pattern of individuals' behaviour, language, and actions over a prolonged period. The data collection emphasises gaining access to the perspectives and experiences of individuals. *Case studies* strategy involves investigating a contemporary subject in a real-life context using multiple data sources (Saunders et al. 2018). *Phenomenological research* design describes the collective meaning of individuals lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon.

The phenomenological research approach is employed to understand the essence of people lived experiences about the phenomena in their world (Szkudlarek and Wu 2018). The phenomenological approach assumes a non-dualistic reality where the objective and subjective worlds are inter-linked (Svensson 1997). Data are obtained from participants who have experienced the phenomenon and can describe and explain their experiences. The research explanation consists of what research participants experience and how they experience it (Creswell and Poth 2018). The continuous interplay of participants with others, environment, and context are socially constructed. Phenomenological research has strong philosophical underpinnings, which typically involve conducting semi-structured interviews and participant observations (Moustakas 1994; Giorgi 2009; Ormston et al. 2014). The phenomenological research strategy is concerned with capturing research participants' accounts and reflections to explore and interpret the meaning attached to their lived experiences (Easterby-Smith et al. 2012; Ritchie et al. 2014).

### 5.3.2 Qualitative Research Strategy

The philosophical assumptions underpinning research affects the design and strategy adopted to carry out the research. Social constructionism philosophy often informs a qualitative research strategy. Social constructionism views reality as being socially constructed and focuses on participant's interpretations of their social world. Qualitative research strategy allows the researcher to understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social problem (Creswell 2014). Qualitative research enables research participants to be studied in their entirety; the researcher gets closer to the participants, penetrates realities, and interprets perceptions (Shaw 1999). The complex nature of networks and networking requires qualitative

methods suitable for exploring social processes (Curran and Blackburn 2001; O'Donnell 2004). Qualitative research methods are used to understand soft issues which are not measurable and have subjective meanings (Hammersley 1992; Anderson and Jack 2002; James et al. 2021). Qualitative data sets are characterised by detail for in-depth analysis, and contexts are related to emergent themes for well-grounded and contextualised explanations (Saunders et al. 2018).

Table 10: Different perceptions in Quantitative and Qualitative research

<b>Quantitative Research</b>	<b>Qualitative Research</b>
The researcher is independent of the research.	The researchers are immersed in the research.
Theory testing (deductive)	Theory generation (inductive)
The research analysis is designed to examine the relationship between variables.	The researcher studies participants' attributes, meanings and associated relationships.
Uses probability sampling techniques to ensure generalisation.	Non-probability sampling techniques.
Data collection are highly defined and structured.	Data collection method are mostly unstructured.
Data collection results in numerical and standardised data	Non-standardised data, mostly in words, images and audio, are collected.
Large sample size and relatively low cost	There is usually a small sample size and potentially high-cost research.
Meanings are derived from numbers.	Meanings are derived from words and images through generating patterns and themes.

Source: Author generated

### 5.3.3 Justification for the chosen research approach

A qualitative research approach was chosen as a process of inquiry to understand the complex and social issues (Yin 2017; Creswell and Poth 2018). Qualitative research enables researchers to gain insight into the social phenomenon and access in-depth knowledge of participants' experiences in a specific subject area and the meaning of social actions (Jack et al. 2004; Burns and Bush 2010; Creswell 2013). Social scientists employ qualitative research approaches to explore complex human experience and behaviours (Creswell 2013). Qualitative research builds a complex,

holistic picture, detailed report and analysis of the world in a natural setting (Creswell 2013). There have been many requests for more qualitative research within the general management field, particularly for entrepreneurial network research (Hoang and Antoncic 2003; Jones et al. 2013). Qualitative research has been argued to be the preferable design when addressing networks processes and dynamics (O'Donnell et al. 2001; Lechner and Dowling 2003; O'Donnell 2014; James et al. 2021) and marketing networks (Hill et al. 1999).

Jack (2005) study of the role, use and activation of strong and weak network ties adopted a qualitative ethnographic approach to explore entrepreneurial network activities in a rural area of the Highlands of Scotland. The study demonstrates how strong ties are instrumental to small business activities and extends business and personal reputations. Also, Hampton et al. (2009) adopted the exploratory qualitative research approach to study female entrepreneurial networks and networking in technology-based ventures, Ireland. In-depth interviews were employed to understand the nature and dynamic of female entrepreneurial networks and networking at various business stages. McGowan and Hampton (2006) identified some key features of female networking in new and established businesses through qualitative research. The results highlight the importance of ties, illustrating how a rigorous qualitative approach produces a fine-grained understanding of networking as a practice.

Social constructionism (interpretivism) methodology has been employed to study small business marketing practices. O'Dwyer et al. (2009) adopted an interpretivist approach to explore small business innovative marketing using convergent interviews and observation techniques to build a picture of SMEs' perception in innovative marketing and SMEs' practice nature. Qualitative semi-structured interviews are used to understand how and why entrepreneurial marketing orientation may lead to small firms growth in challenging markets (Jones et al. 2013). O'Donnell (2014) conducted longitudinal qualitative research with small firm's owner-managers to investigate networks' role in small firm marketing in Northern Ireland. The findings demonstrate the different network actors' contribution to small firms marketing and suggested further research into understanding small business networking processes.

Recently, Hardwick and Anderson (2019) conducted an empirical study using an in-depth interview with biotechnology SMEs owner-managers from suppliers' perspective of video-conferencing engagement through social networking theory. They further suggested more research on exploring engagement relationships with SMEs in other industries and different countries. Previous studies on customer engagement have been conceptual or theoretical reviews (Van Doorn et al. 2010; Kumar et al. 2010; Brodie et al. 2011; Vivek et al. 2012; Pansari and Kumar 2017). However, the qualitative research approach is adopted to understand engagement processes in small business networks. It explores engagement in Nigerian small businesses to understand the construct, antecedents and contributions to marketing performance.

Networking has been recognised as one means by which small businesses market products and services. Research on small business networks and networking has received significant attention in developed countries. However, the process of accessing social capital in networks has not been given much attention in developing economies. Thus, the researcher adopts a qualitative approach to explore the social capital formation processes in Nigerian small businesses networks. This approach allows for a detailed analysis of network and engagement processes (Creswell 2012). The qualitative research method allows the researcher to explore the meanings that lie behind the actions of Nigerian small business owner-managers network relationships (Hammersley 1992; Saunders et al. 2012). This research focus on how and why rather than measuring how many (Oinas 1999; Gartner and Birley 2002; Pratt 2009; Bryman 2016). The qualitative research approach is employed to provide contextual sensitivity (Glaser and Strauss 1999) and investigates the natural setting phenomena (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). The qualitative approach allows complexities of the socio-cultural world to be interpreted and understood in a setting and seeks findings that can be replicable to other contexts (Marshall and Rossman 2011; Merriam and Tisdell 2015). Table 11 presents the rationale for adopting a qualitative research strategy and details the objectives, purpose, data collection methods chosen, study population and data analysis approach.

Table 11: Rationale for choosing qualitative research approach

	<b>Qualitative Research Strategy</b>
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To understand the underlying reasons, beliefs, and perspectives of the research participants.</li> </ul>
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To access participants in their social context.</li> <li>• To understand the social situation from participants' perspectives.</li> <li>• To answer why and how questions.</li> <li>• Provide an opportunity to explore the phenomena researched</li> </ul>
Data collection methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The research methods and processes are flexible, able to adapt to knowledge acquired during the process.</li> <li>• Data are words, the narratives of participants. These are supplemented by contextualising observations</li> <li>• Themes emerge as data are collected.</li> <li>• Participant observation</li> <li>• Semi-structured interviews</li> </ul>
Study population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The researcher is immersed in the research and context setting.</li> <li>• Purposive (selected based on criteria) and snowball (referred to by participants) sampling methods</li> </ul>
Data analysis and Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thematic Analysis</li> <li>• Constant comparative method</li> </ul>

Source: Author generated

## 5.4 Research Method

Research methods consist of data collection methods, data analysis methods, and data interpretation methods that the researcher adopts. The conceptual framework is derived from the literature review to understand the phenomena and inform research questions using multiple qualitative data collection techniques: participants' observation and semi-structured interviews (Gartner and Birley 2002; Saunders et al. 2012).

### 5.4.1 Research Context

The research context can be viewed as a group of people, events or things of interest that the research is designed to generate knowledge (Jensen and Laurie 2016). The South-South geopolitical zone in Nigeria, which comprises six states (Akwa Ibom State, Bayelsa State, Cross River State, Delta State, Edo State and Rivers State), was chosen context (Pratt 2009). The participants' context, such as political, social, and historical features that influence participants' experiences (Maxwell 2013), are considered. Most researches on social capital and engagements are often in large organisations or small businesses in developed countries, so this context opens the opportunities to understand small business marketing in a different context. Chapter 2 discussed the research context in detail.

The purpose of choosing this location was to access the required information based on the rapport between the researcher and research participants in this region (Creswell and Poth 2018). According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1996), the criteria for choosing research participants is to understand social activities and the context that leads to various forms of behaviours. The researcher has lived in this region for over ten years. Although this region consists of oil-producing states, the local economy depends mainly on commerce and primary industries such as fashion design, electronic servicing, medical facilities, education and retailing. The research location creates a natural and ideal social and geographical setting for social interaction between small business owner-managers and the social context, making social patterns easier (York and Venkataraman 2010; McKeever et al. 2014). The following section discusses the sampling methods adopted.

### 5.4.2 Sampling Strategy

The sampling strategy allows researchers to reduce the amount of data and consider data from a subgroup, enabling the researcher to answer the research questions (Saunders et al. 2012). There are generally two types of sampling techniques in social science research: probability and non-probability sampling (Bryman 2016). In probability sampling, the chances of selecting cases are known, and survey research strategies are usually adopted (Saunders et al. 2012). Probability sampling is often used in statistical research. There are different probability sampling methods,

including simple random sampling, systematic random sampling, and multiple-stage random sampling (Bryman 2016). These were not appropriate for this study.

Non-probability sampling is typically used in phenomenological research for detailed information. The selected participants' characteristics are similar, allowing the researcher to explore the subject matter in-depth (Patton 2002; Saunders et al. 2012). Selection of units in non-probability sampling strategy is deliberate to reflect features of individuals or groups within the sample population. The basis of selection is the characteristics of the population. There are various non-probability sampling methods, including purposive sampling, convenience sampling and theoretical sampling. The purposive sampling is employed to select participants based on peculiar features and characteristics for detailed exploration and understanding of the phenomenon (Ritchie et al. 2014; Bryman 2016). A researcher called this approach judgement sampling others argue that it should be called criterion-based sampling, but purposive sampling is the most used term (Bryman 2016). In purposive sampling, samples are chosen with "purpose" to ensure all the key constituencies relevant to the subject matter are cover and diversity is included to cover the impact of characteristics explored (Ritchie et al. 2014).

Purposive sampling was adopted to select Nigerian small business owner-managers in Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone for "rich" descriptive information pertinent to understanding the research problems (McKeever et al. 2014). Purposive sampling allows researchers to choose participants based on the strength of their knowledge and experience of the phenomenon under study (Patton 2007; Collis and Hussey 2013; Bryman 2016; Saunders et al. 2018). Participants were selected primarily through contacts made at small business networking events at the research location.

In addition to the purposive sampling of participants, the research participants also recommended potential participants. This practice is known as snowballing. Snowballing sampling was adopted to recruit new participants by utilising the relationship with already recruited participants (Henn et al. 2013; Sharafizad and Standing 2017). Snowballing sampling allows the research participants to refer the researcher to others in their network who could potentially participate in the study. The research participants were selected based on the following criteria:

- The research participant must be a small business owner-manager employing between 2 to 49 persons.
- The research participant has to be a Nigerian small business that has been active in business for over five years to accumulate significant social resources through relationships (Mu et al. 2008) and willing to share their experiences in detail.
- Participants were selected across various business sectors to avoid the specifics of one industry.

Thirty-two Nigerian small businesses were selected that met the above-stated criteria. Table 12 below summarises the sampling methods adopted.

Table 12: Sampling methods adopted

<b>Sampling methods</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
Purposive sampling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows the researcher to exercise explicit judgment to select participants who will offer valuable insights (Jensen and Laurie 2016).</li> </ul>
Snowballing sampling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To identify interest cases from people who know the potential participants who were willing to share their experiences.</li> <li>• It enables trust and credibility establishment during data collection (Jensen and Laurie 2016).</li> </ul>

Source: Author generated

## Sample Size

The sample size is a crucial decision for sample strategy during data collection. It is dependent on factors such as time, cost and heterogeneity of the population and analysis techniques (Bryman 2016). Qualitative research is mainly dependent on the purpose of inquiry, which will be valuable, credible, and what can be done with the available time and resources (Jensen and Laurie 2016). Qualitative research intends

not to generalise the information but to elucidate the specifics (Pinnegar and Daynes 2007). The researcher conducted a pilot study, semi-structured interviews with thirteen Nigerian small business owner-managers in Aberdeen, United Kingdom and 32 semi-structured interviews with small business owner-managers in Nigeria. Dworkin (2012) recommends between 25–30 research participants in semi-structured interviews as the minimum sample size to reach saturation and redundancy in qualitative studies. The researcher paid attention to the exciting and unanticipated line of inquiries as they emerged during data collection. The researcher focused on gathering detailed, contextualised knowledge about the experience of the interviewees. The initial phase of the interview was to understand whom small business owner-managers network with and the role of networks in small business marketing. The next phase was to explore social resources in networks and small business owner-managers engagement with various networks to promote marketing performance. Table 13 presents the number of research participants in each States of the South-South geopolitical region, Nigeria, to capture different small business owner-managers perspectives.

Table 13: Research participants in different States of the research region

<b>States under the research Region</b>	<b>Number of interviews conducted</b>
Akwa Ibom State	6
Bayelsa State	5
Cross River State	4
Delta State	5
River State	7
Edo State	5

Source: Author generated

#### 5.4.3 Data Collection Techniques and processes

Data collection techniques and processes involve ethical considerations during research, recording information, responding to problems during data collection and storing research data securely. Different data collection methods include interviews,

observations, diary records, questionnaires, archival records, and documentation (Saunders et al. 2009). This research adopted multiple data collection techniques: participants observation and semi-structured interviews (Saunders et al. 2012). The data collection processes were carried out at various stages, ranging from the pilot study to follow-up interviews.

#### 5.4.3.1 A pilot study (Stage 1)

A pilot study is a small-scale of the actual data collection and analysis process of an investigation. The researcher interviewed thirteen Nigerian owner-managers of small businesses living in and operating businesses in Aberdeen, North East of Scotland. Preliminary interviews (pilot study) are used to recognise and analyse emerging themes. The pilot study allows the researcher to learn interview processes, techniques, assess the research questions, and assess the chosen data collection method (Yin 2014; Bryman 2016). The pilot study guided how the research participants would interpret interview questions, which gave the researcher ideas on reframing interview questions (Saunders et al. 2018). It also enabled the researcher to develop and test the adopted research techniques' suitability and relevance to ascertain the possible research limitations, uncertainty, and potential issues during the study (Saunders et al. 2009).

During the pilot study, the researcher contacted research participants via network groups and referrals (snowballing). Each interview lasted between 60 to 120 minutes. Table 14 presents the profile of pilot study participants. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim immediately (Carson et al. 2001). Data analysis conducted on pilot data provided the researcher with hands-on experience working with qualitative data and revising the research approach and objectives. It also uncovered potential challenges in the analysis techniques, such as timing. The pilot study provided an initial set of categories and themes on how small businesses engage network actors in marketing functions. The pilot study experience was remarkable for the researcher. It enables the researcher to learn how to handle the audio recorder for quality and clarity and develop probing skills for in-depth knowledge of participants' lived experiences. It also allowed the researcher to understand the process and better estimate the time required for data collection and analysis. The researcher also learned listening and allowing the participants to express themselves while probing for more information and clarity.

Table 14: Pilot study participants

<b>Assumed Names</b>	<b>Years in Business</b>	<b>No. of Employees</b>	<b>The age range of participants</b>	<b>Interview Participants</b>	<b>Business type</b>
James	7	8FT	35 - 40	Owner	Office and house Cleaning
Joyce	5	2PT 3FT	35 - 40	Owner	Children party organiser
Carol	5	3PT, 5FT	35 - 40	Manager	After school club
Dara	6	2FT, 1PT	25 - 30	Owner	Fashion retail and wholesale
Ernest	7	3FT	41 - 45	Manager	Charity
Frank	6	6FT	35 - 40	Manager	Inspection Control
Richie	10	20 FT	25 - 30	Owner	House letting and sales
George	8	6 FT, 6PT	35 - 40	Manager	English school
Ian	12	2FT, 4PT	61 -65	Partner	Business angels
Victor	7	2FT, 2PT	41 - 45	Owner	Web designs
Stanley	6	4 FT	45 - 50	Owner	Networking event coordinator
Jackie	12	6 FT, 3 PT	45 - 50	Manager	Storage Service
Martha	32	8 FT, 6 PT	61 - 65	Manager	Printing

#### 5.4.3.2 Informal Preliminary Interviews (Stage 2)

Interviews have been viewed as the most common and powerful approach to understand people (Fontata and Frey 1994). This research employed informal interviews initially as a tool to identify potential research participants and to explore their understanding of the proposed interview questions. The researcher contacted potential research participants through phone calls and online chats to initiate a relationship and check suitability (Ritchie et al. 2014). Informal interviews enabled the researcher to contact potential participants ahead of time.

#### 5.4.3.3 Participant Observation (Stage 3)

There are generally three observation methods: participant observation, structured observation and internet-mediated observation. This research adopts the participant observation method, where the researcher enters the social world of research participants to participate in their activities while systematically viewing participants behaviour. Previous research in networks and networking highlighted participant observation's importance (Bollingtoft 2007; Jack et al. 2015). Participant observations are useful for understanding participant behaviour and rely critically on the researcher as an instrument. Participant observation offers a way of becoming familiar with the context and generates a good rapport between the participants and the researcher. The researcher used the first week on arrival at the research location to explore and acclimatise with the study location and the research participants to establish contacts, develop rapport and promote trust. During this process, the researcher observed small business owner-managers behaviours and activities by attending network meetings to identify participants for interviews. The researcher participated in small business networking events to observe how small businesses owner-managers engage with various networks. The researcher gathered contextual data to support and guide the interview process and broaden understanding of the participants' situation. The researcher carried out the participant observation in two ways:

- The researcher attended small business owner-managers network meetings in diverse communities to observe how potential participants relate and interact with network members. The researcher was able to participate in

five different network meetings across various business sectors. During these meetings, the researcher observed how small business owner-managers promote, interact, share business ideas and experience with network members. The researcher selected potential research participants that met the research criteria at these network meetings and later contacted them for semi-structured interviews.

- The researcher also visited selected participants' business premises an hour before the interview to observe how owner-managers interact with staffs, customers and suppliers during regular business hours. The researcher was involved in various business activities such as product packaging to develop rapport.

During the observation, the researcher was immersed in the networking environment to understand small business owner-managers practical experience. It was an opportunity to witness small businesses' informal management style, flexibility to customers' needs and inter-personal relationship among employees. The researcher recorded the behaviour and activities of the participants in field notes. Participant observation enabled the researcher to have the first-hand experience with research participants networking. During participant observation, the researcher identified and selected research participants purposively for semi-structured interviews, gained entry, and established rapport with research participants to facilitate openness during the interview process. The researcher was also able to observe participants' networks interaction and interrelation with various networks.

#### 5.4.3.4 Formal Interviews (Stage 4)

The phenomenological interview was employed to investigate and understand small business networks, the role of networks in marketing, social capital formation process and engagement marketing (Cope 2005; Mason 2010). In phenomenological research, the process of collecting information involves semi-structured interviews (Creswell and Poth 2018). Semi-structured interviews facilitate interactive dialogues between research participants and the researcher (Halcomb et al. 2006; Rubin and Rubin 2011; Brinkmann and Kvale 2015). Semi-

structured interviews allow researchers to understand participants' experiences and knowledge based on reflections and interpretations (Hennink et al. 2010). The semi-structured interview is an effective strategy in entrepreneurial studies, and knowledge is constructed in the conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee (Cope 2005; Brinkmann and Kvale 2015; Lam and Harker 2015).

Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to uncover the meaning that lies beneath the participant's experiences and gain an in-depth understanding of complex social capital and networks processes (Henneberg et al. 2006; Gaddefors and Anderson 2009). It allowed small business owner-managers to interact and collaborate with the researcher (Curran and Blackburn 2001). The research participants were selected during the researcher's visit to network meetings. A total of thirty-two semi-structured interviews on small business owner-managers across various sectors in the South-south geopolitical zone, Nigeria, was carried out. The researcher was open-minded to concepts and themes as they emerge during the interview. During interviews, the researcher had the opportunity to meet small business owner-managers face-to-face, discuss relationship experiences, and hear their narrative stories (Patton 2002). It also allowed for understanding the participants' perception of the phenomenon (Gubrium and Holstein 2009). Research participants were interviewed on stable relationships and the contribution of various networks to marketing. Semi-structured interviews enabled research participants to explain in detail and reflect on network practices and experiences (Saunders et al. 2012). Table 15 summarises the strengths and weaknesses of semi-structured interviews.

Table 15: Strengths and weaknesses of semi-structured interviews

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
Semi-structured interviews provide a detailed understanding of the basis for your participants' thinking, feelings, memories, and behaviour.	Face-to-face interviews are expensive and time-consuming to conduct.
It allows the researcher to probe and follow-up participants on emerging in the interviews.	The researchers must be excellent interviewer, probe participants' view during the interview and maintain a good relationship.
The researcher can adjust the direction of the interview as themes unfold in response to participant's narratives.	Interview samples are relatively small, raising the risk of generalization from a critical segment of the population. However, purposive sampling mitigates this risk.
The researcher can develop initial analytical thinking about the participants' response and follow-up questions to clarify unclear responses.	The researcher's demeanour and way of framing questions can affect the participants' responses. Data collected is intertwined with the researcher's behaviour.
The relative privacy of one-to-one interviews encourages participants to be open and honest.	Direct comparison of data from interviews can be challenging as everyone is different.

Source: Author generated

The following interview processes were adopted:

- Each interview started with the researcher introducing herself, the subject matter to be discussed, the research aims, objectives and anonymity in reporting data obtained (Saunders et al. 2012). The introduction creates a warm and acceptable environment for both the researcher and research participant (Hennink et al. 2010). The researcher questioned the participants in a free and open-minded manner.

- Each interview lasted approximately 90 to 120 minutes. The researcher gathered data about participants interactions and relationships with networks. The researcher considered the following topics during the interview:

1. Networks and relationships
2. Small business marketing
3. Network development process.
4. Engagement with networks
5. Engagement processes
6. The contribution of network resources to marketing

- The researcher probed research participants on networking to ensure and confirm information received reflected the actual situation using prompts and cues (Creswell 2007). The researcher grants the participants ample time between questions to reflect or rephrase responses for clarity and understanding. An interview protocol was used to provide a sequence based on the research aim and objectives.

- The interview protocol directed conversations, allowing participants to give individual accounts of network experiences and how network resources contribute to marketing. Appendix C presents the interview protocol guide used.

- The research interviews were carried out at the participant's business premises to allow open discussion. Table 17 shows the profile of the research participants. All interviews were digitally audio-recorded, and the researcher also wrote notes during the interviews (Saunders et al. 2009). After the researcher switched off the recorder, most participants continued to ruminate on the topic of interest and frequently say more exciting and valuable information about networks. At this point, notetaking was essential.

- Transcription was done verbatim and immediately after each interview to capture the participants own words, phrases and expressions (Hennink et al. 2010). The process of transcribing involved listening to the audio records repeatedly. The researcher first listened to the recording immediately after each interview, which allowed the researcher to get closer to the data, be aware of the

emerging theme, the similarities and differences of each participant, and inquire in subsequent interviews.

#### 5.4.3.5 Follow-Up Interviews (Stage 5)

After the primary thirty-two interviews, transcription and initial analysis, the researcher further carried out informal follow-up interviews (member-checking) with seven research participants over the phone and through e-mails. It enables collaboration with participants to understand emerging themes and clarify issues such as inconsistencies, particularly emotive and highly descriptive narratives (Creswell and Poth 2018). Follow-up interviews generated additional information and provided more understanding and clarity on network engagement processes. Table 16 summarises the approaches of data collection and analysis methods adopted.

Table 16: Different data collection process and purposes

	Different data collection processes				
	Pilot Study	Informal Interviews	Participant Observations	Formal interviews	Follow-up interviews
<b>Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understand the interviewing processes and techniques.</li> <li>Develop relevant interview questions</li> <li>Test suitability and relevance of the adopted research techniques</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify research participants</li> <li>Explore proposed participants' understanding of the phenomena under study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To gain entry and establish rapport with the research participants.</li> <li>To identify and select research participants</li> <li>To develop interview questions in the language and manner that will make sense to the participants during interviews.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To explore the research objectives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clarify issues such as inconsistencies after initial data analysis.</li> <li>To generate additional information and understanding for clarity.</li> <li>Triangulation of data.</li> </ul>
<b>Methods</b>	Semi-structured interviews	Telephone interviews/online chats	Participant observation	Semi-structured interviews	Telephone calls/e-mails

Source: Author generated

Table 17: Interview participants

	<b>Assumed Names</b>	<b>Business Activity</b>	<b>Participants' Age in years</b>	<b>Firm Size</b>	<b>Firm Age in years</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Customer base</b>
<b>1</b>	Ann	Fabric sales (Ankara) (Retail)	40 -45	2FT	9	BSc. Statistics	Female	Over 40 customers
<b>2</b>	Benita	Cake baking (catering services)	35 - 40	4FT 2PT	7	BSc. Microbiology	Female	Over 50 customers
<b>3</b>	Carol	Saloon and beauty shop	35 - 40	3FT	5	BSc. International relations	Female	Over 20 customers
<b>4</b>	Daniel	Grocery (Retail)	45 - 50	8FT	10	BSc. Mass communication	Male	Over 40 customers
<b>5</b>	Evans	Borehole drilling and construction	45 - 50	6FT 2PT	12	HND Engineering	Male	Over 13 clients
<b>6</b>	Frank	Civil engineering construction	45 - 50	8FT	26	MBA project management	Male	Over 10 clients
<b>7</b>	Grace	Market on wheel (mobile food vendor)	35 - 40	3FT	5	OND	Female	Over 18 clients
<b>8</b>	Helen	Fashion and industrial tailoring	30 - 35	4FT	6	BSc. Marketing	Female	Over 60 customers
<b>9</b>	Irene	Lady's and children Boutique	40 - 45	2FT	6	HND Business Admin	Female	Over 40 customers
<b>10</b>	Jeff	General health care services (General practitioner)	40 - 45	10FT 8PT	10	Medical Consultant	Male	Over 30 clients
<b>11</b>	Caleb	Children healthcare services (Paediatrician)	40 - 45	18FT 10PT	8	Medical consultant	Male	Over 50 clients
<b>12</b>	Lizzy	Early education	50 - 55	40FT 30PT	14	PhD Children Education	Female	Over 400 clients
<b>13</b>	Moses	Sales of electrical products	35 - 40	2FT	10	BSc. Engineering	Male	Over 30 customers
<b>14</b>	Nathan	Oil servicing Contractor (instrumentation)	40 - 45	1FT	6	BSc. Engineering	Male	3 customers
<b>15</b>	Oliver	Consultancy	40 -45	6FT	8	MSc Supply Chain Mgt.	Male	14 customers

<b>16</b>	Peace	Mini-filing Station (Kerosene)	30 – 35	3FT	6	BSc. Mathematics	Female	Over 40 customers
<b>17</b>	Queen	Telecommunication Provider	35 – 40	2FT	11	BSc. Computer Science	Male	Over 30 customers
<b>18</b>	Reeve	Real Estate (Sales and rentals)	45 - 50	3FT	6	BSc. Computer Engineering	Male	10 for now
<b>19</b>	Peter	Property development	40 - 45	2FT	6	BSc. Geology	Male	7
<b>20</b>	Steve	Beauty and Health (Networking)	35 – 40	1FT	6	MSc. Engineering	Male	Over 20 customers
<b>21</b>	Todd	Construction and paintings	45 -50	8 FT	18	HND. Engineering	Male	12 customers
<b>22</b>	Udeme	Event planner	40 – 45	2FT 4PT	8	BSc. Chemistry	Female	Over 15 customers
<b>23</b>	Venice	Marine Services	50 -55	12FT	12	HND. Marine Engineering	Male	Over 10 customers
<b>24</b>	Williams	Block Moulding	40 – 45	4FT	8	OND Business Admin	Male	Over 23 customers
<b>25</b>	Xander	Sewage and waste management	40 -45	8FT	11	OND Science Lab Tech	Male	Over 30 customers
<b>26</b>	Yeye	Welding and Fabrication	40 -45	4FT	13	OND Economics	Male	Over 40 customers
<b>27</b>	Zoe	Printing and designs	35 – 40	5FT	8	MSc. Information Engineering	Female	Over 50 customers
<b>28</b>	Mike	Online market for groceries	40 -45	8 FT	6	MSc. International Business	Male	Over 80 customers
<b>29</b>	Dayo	Cement (distribution)	40 – 45	3FT	7	HND Business Finance	Male	Over 30 customers
<b>30</b>	Dorothy	Child Minding	35 – 40	6FT	11	MSc Children Education	Female	Over 18 customers
<b>31</b>	Bernard	Shoemaker	45 – 50	4FT	16	OND Business Admin.	Male	Over 20 customers
<b>32</b>	Goody	Caterer	40 – 45	3FT	8	OND Mass Communication	Male	Over 30 customers

#### 5.4.4 Limitations and challenges of the chosen research strategy

Qualitative research design does not allow for a large sample size to be included in the study, and consequently, empirical results cannot be generalisable. This study does not argue that the social capital and engagement development processes discussed apply to small businesses. The results are based on the participant's experiences in networks that are subjective, albeit informed by the extensive literature. However, it allows for rich data and a detailed description of the development processes of social capital and engagement outcomes in the context under study (Jack et al. 2010; Chetty et al. 2014). Furthermore, qualitative research deepens the understanding of the meaning behind every interaction and discussion with participants (Creswell 2012). Moulton and Anderson (2005) argued that qualitative research might be theoretically generalisable. The generation of theoretical models or propositions in developing broader theory and other settings is referred to as theoretical generalisation. A larger-scale quantitative study could be undertaken to establish the extent of the social capital development processes and the resultant engagement marketing outcomes identified.

The major challenge associated with qualitative research methods is that it is a time-consuming process. The data gathering to data transcription, data interpretation, and analysis might take several months (Saunders et al. 2016). The varied perspectives recorded are analysed and interpreted based on the researcher's understanding and experience (Maxwell 2013). There are, of course, limitations to any data collection method. The adoption of participant observation and semi-structured interviews offers the potential to promote understanding and triangulate various data sources. Although participant observations are useful for understanding network behaviour, they are localised as the process depends mainly on the researcher as an instrument (Musante and DeWalt 2010; Balsiger and Lambelet 2014). Likewise, semi-structured interviews are artificial interaction that can be influenced by memory lapses, impression management, and the rapport between the interviewer and interviewee. The research data were obtained from owner-managers, which is only one side of engagement partnerships. The research model developed serves as a foundation for further research into small business engagement marketing. The sample size is relatively small, with a focus on the South-South geopolitical region of Nigeria. Further studies may seek to collect data from networks and a larger sample of small businesses in other developing countries.

## 5.5 Data Analysis

This section details the data analysis method and process adopted. There are various data analysis methods, including content analysis, grounded theory analysis, and thematic analysis. The *content analysis* aims at drawing systematic inferences from qualitative data that are structured by sets of ideas and concepts (Ritchie et al. 2014). It is relatively a deductive method of analysis, where codes are predetermined and systematically searched for in data. *Grounded Theory analysis* aims at developing theory from categories identified by systematic data analysis. The grounded theory analysis is more holistic than content analysis. The aim is to derive structure from data by comparing different data fragments with another, rather than framing data from the pre-existed structure. *Thematic analysis* is the interface between content analysis and grounded theory analysis. Predetermined codes from literature reviews do not directly influence the emerging codes and themes during data analysis but act as guides.

### 5.5.1 Thematic Analysis method

This research adopted a thematic analysis method with a literature review guiding the analytical process. Thematic analysis method allows for a systematic, flexible and accessible approach to analyse data (Braun and Clarke 2006). The thematic analysis method allows the researcher to integrate related data drawn from different transcripts and notes. The analysis criteria were developed previously from literature and were amended, considering the emerging empirical understanding (O'Donnell 2004; Creswell 2007). The data analysis process was an interplay between theory, concepts, data collection and modification. This technique is known as the constant comparative method, a series of iterations between data and theory (Jack et al. 2015; Anderson and Jack 2015). The researcher adopted a constant comparative analysis method to identify the meaning that lies within the data. With substantial evidence, the researcher was able to understand the situations of the research participants. According to Eisenhardt (1989), the thematic analysis process is highly iterative. The researcher constantly compares data with emergent themes to generate a theory that closely fits the data. Thus, connecting theory with practice (Brodie et al. 2008).

The data collection process generated a large amount of qualitative data, which were sorted and sifted before analysis. Data from semi-structured interviews and participants' observation were transcribed and integrated. The researcher read the data transcript repeatedly to familiarised with the data. This process also stimulated theoretical thinking

and analytical strategies (Easterly-Smith et al. 2012). Literature and conceptual understanding sensitised data collection, but knowledge from the literature did not constrain data analysis processes. Braun and Clarke (2006) documented thematic analysis as a six-phase method. The analysis phases are explained as a linear process but carried out iteratively and recursively (Nowell et al. 2017). The different analysis phases enabled the researcher to develop an explanatory account to theorise Nigerian small business network engagement for marketing.

**Phase 1:** The first phase of analysis was to familiarise with data through reading the transcript repeatedly, searching and sifting through the data, discarding irrelevant information and bringing together what seems important (Eisenhardt 1989; Halinen and Tornroos 2005; Saunders et al. 2018). The researcher integrated data from semi-structured interviews and participant observation to improve research interpretation credibility (Lincoln and Guba 1985). A computer-assisted software program for qualitative data analysis, QSR Nvivo was used to assist data management. Nvivo was employed to transcribe, organise, store and retrieve data. The actual analytical process was researcher-driven and carried out manually.

**Phase 2:** The researcher identified initial codes after reading and familiarising with data (Braun and Clarke 2006). The focus at this stage was on the specific characteristics of data. Coding was carried out by reflecting and interacting with and making sense of the data (Nowell et al. 2017). During this phase, the researcher structured data for sensemaking and idea development (Morse and Richards 2002). The use of codes brought order, structure and meaning to data (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

**Phase 3:** This phase involves collating and sorting all the potentially relevant codes into themes (Braun and Clarke 2006). Research themes and sub-themes were identified inductively at this phase without fitting into the pre-existing conceptual framework. Data was structured and organised into meaningful units essential to the understanding of research problems. Memos were written against each group to remind the researcher about the interpretation logic (Shaw 1999).

**Phase 4:** The coded data extracts in phase 3 were reviewed at this phase. The validity of themes and subthemes were reconsidered to determine the accuracy of the meaning identified in research data (Braun and Clarke 2006). At this phase, the researcher identified

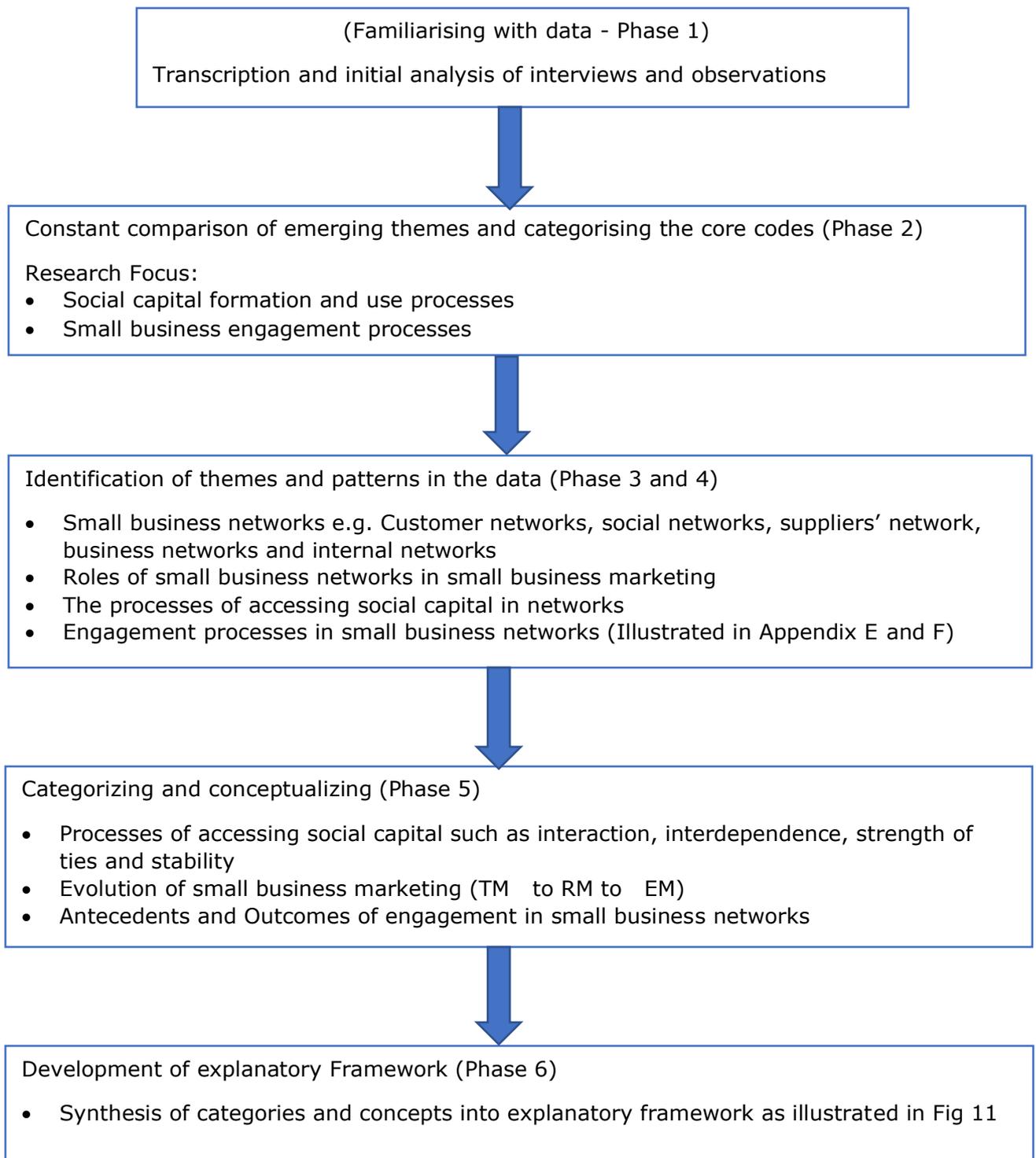
inadequacies in initial coding and themes. This analysis stage instigated another data collection (member checking) through telephone calls and emails to clarify inconsistencies and ambiguity identified during analysis. The back and forth approaches of induction (data to theory) were employed (Suddaby 2006). The method of analysis at this stage is called the constant comparative method. The constant comparison involves reading and re-reading transcripts and field notes and comparing data collected at this phase and the previous analysis to develop categories and concepts through fragmentation and comparison (Boeije 2002). Some codes were regarded as irrelevant and discarded, and all relevant codes were pulled together into categories and concepts (Glaser and Strauss 1999). By coding individual transcripts, fragmentation was achieved, which allows the use of quotes for the analysis. The data comparison was carried out at different stages, between interviews, within and between emergent themes and categories. The following themes were identified: Nigerian small business networks, networks' roles in small business marketing, social capital formation and use in networks and engagement processes in small businesses.

**Phase 5:** At this phase, the second-order concept of analysis was applied to identify themes and patterns for discussion. The analysis was deepened by interpreting the relationships between core categories and seeking explanations between relationships. The constant comparative method was applied again; this time, the researcher engaged in a more systematic comparison of similarities and differences between data units and relevant network concepts. The researcher linked and connected the findings to theoretical concepts, research aim and objectives. The following categories were identified and conceptualised: the process of accessing social capital in networks, the evolution of small business marketing practices, antecedents and outcomes of engagement in small business marketing.

**Phase 6:** The data analysis process provided a concise, coherent and exciting account of the data within and across themes (Braun and Clarke 2006). The researcher used direct quotes from transcripts to highlight significant issues within findings to demonstrate the prevalence of ideas (King 2004; Nowell et al. 2017). This phase involves the iterative process, which allows the researcher to refine categories and present the summary of themes with concepts as an explanatory model. Figure 5 summarises the data analysis processes. Previous entrepreneurial research (Jack 2010; Leitch et al. 2013; McKeever et al. 2014; Jack et al. 2015; James et al. 2021) employed thematic analysis using the constant comparative method for data analysis to develop explanations. There was a continuous comparison of emerging themes from literature and other related theoretical concepts that

fit the data. It was a dance between theory and literature. The constant comparative method involves iterative reviewing of data with emerging categories and concepts (Silverman 2010; Jack 2010; Alvesson and Skoldberg 2017) and identifying the meaning of data with enough evidence and context to allow the researcher to develop an understanding of the participant's situation.

Figure 5: Analytics Process



Source: Author generated

## 5.6 Research Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a related term used in measuring the quality of qualitative research. Research trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry is determined by the following criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Bryman and Bell 2015; Creswell and Poth 2018). The evaluation of data collection, analysis and interpretation methods are critical in examining qualitative research trustworthiness.

### 5.6.1 Credibility

In qualitative research, external validity (representation) is often traded for internal validity (credibility) (O'Donnell 2014). This research enhanced external validity by interviewing Nigerian small business owner-managers across various industrial sectors as acknowledged by Curran and Blackburn (1994) that there is sectoral diversity in small businesses. Although the aim is not to generalise the research findings as small businesses are different even in the same industrial sector. The researcher adopted the following criteria to enhance internal validity:

- The corroborating evidence of multiple data sources (participant observation and semi-structured interviews) confirms the emerging findings. Apart from interviewing the participants, the researcher attended five network meetings and visited the participant's business premises to observe how participants relate to various networks (Guba and Lincoln 2012).
- The researcher explains the study processes and methods to make the research findings reproducible in other contexts and situations (Guba and Lincoln 2012; Abdalla et al. 2018).
- The researcher critically reflected on her role in the research process and demonstrated an awareness of this and how it would influence the findings by identifying bias and preconceptions in an account of researcher experience in Appendix G. The researcher clarified bias at the onset of the study by reflexivity (Merriam and Tisdell 2015; Bryman and Bell 2015).

- Member checking or member validation was employed to solicit and corroborate participants' view of data interpretation and research findings (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Bazeley 2013). The researcher contacted seven research participants on the phone and by emails to clarify inconsistencies during data analysis.

*"The member check, whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of the stakeholding groups from whom the data were originally collected, is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility. If the investigator is to be able to purport that his or her reconstructions are recognisable to audience members as an adequate representation of their realities, and it is essential that they can react to them" (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p. 314).*

### 5.6.2 Transferability

Qualitative research entails the intensive study of a small sample of individuals sharing similar characteristics, and depth is traded for breadth. Participant observation and semi-structured interviews were conducted with Nigerian small business owner-managers across various industrial sectors, with caution to clarify research questions, probe meanings and explore responses and themes to provide rich, detailed data for description and analysis (Jack et al. 2004; Saunders et al. 2012). The thick description of data offers the database for making judgments about possible transferability (Guba and Lincoln 2012). While the study results are context-based, understanding the participants' lived experience is useful for Nigerian small business networks' engagement processes and can be applied in other business contexts.

### 5.6.3 Dependability

Research dependability is determined by the consistency of data collected with research findings (Merriam 1998; Merriam and Tisdell 2015). The data analysis technique (constant comparative method) enabled the researcher to verify and validate emerging themes' reliability. A logical, traceable, and documented research process ensures dependability (Tobin and Begley 2004).

#### 5.6.4 Confirmability

This research was carried out in the South-South geopolitical zone, Nigeria, with small businesses' owner-managers. The methodology adopted inhibits generalisation (Larson 1992; Creswell 2013). However, this research quality lies in providing insights and a detailed explanation of how Nigerian small businesses engage in networks to promote marketing performance. The researcher considered the diversity of demographics and viewpoints while selecting research participants, as evidenced in Appendix D. Direct quotes are used to show a clear link between data and interpretation to build transparency of the thick description illustrating ideas and views of participants concerning the phenomena (Roller and Lavrakas 2015).

#### 5.7 Ethical considerations

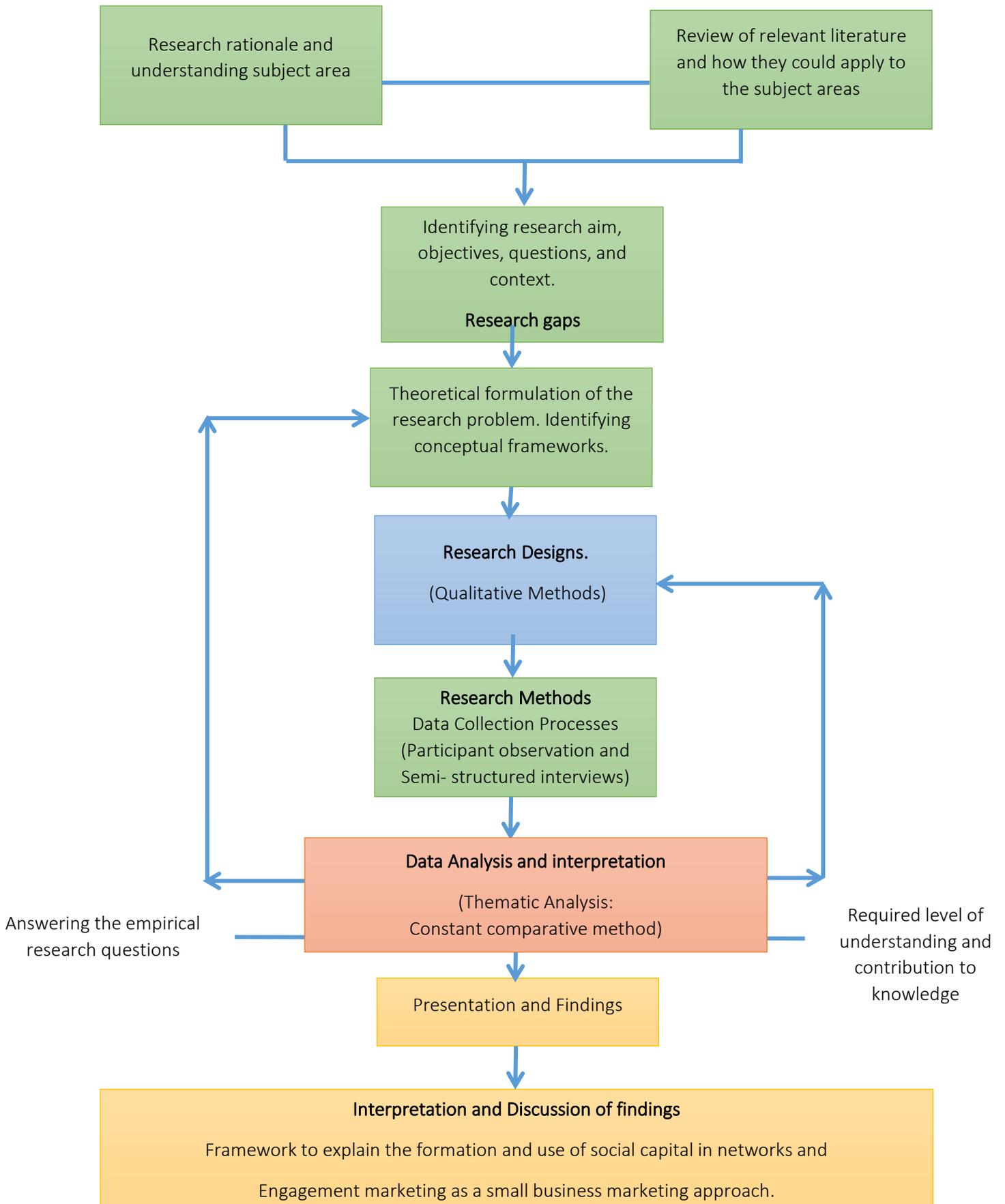
According to Saunders et al. (2012), ethical considerations are the appropriateness of researchers' behaviour concerning the rights of those who become subject to the research. Oliver (2010) advises that research participants should be treated with respect, not be harmed under any situation. In line with Robert Gordon University guide and ethical practice on research and to ensure compliance with necessary legal and ethical requirements, the following legal and ethical requirements were considered during data collection and analysis:

- The participants were provided with an introductory letter with details of the research aim, objectives, and each interview's time scale to allow participants to make informed decisions (Silverman 2010).
- The researcher obtained informed consent from the participants on the process and assurance of data privacy before conducting an interview.
- The researcher obtained permission to record the interviews from participants.
- Participation was voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw from the research if they were not happy with the questions or interviews at any point (Collis and Hussey 2013).
- Anonymity and confidentiality of data were assured at every instance in a non-attributive manner (Saunders et al. 2012).
- During transcription and analysis, the researcher anonymised the data and made sure the participants were not traceable. All research participants' names were changed and are not identifiable with the data provided.

## 5.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter detailed the research process, showing the decisions and procedures used to maintain rigour during the study. It explains the various methods of qualitative inquiry employed to address research aim and objectives. This chapter discusses the data collection process, the analysis phases of the data obtained, and the limitations of the research approaches adopted. Table 18 summarises the different data sources, the analysis method, and the purposes of the methods used. Figure 6 presents the road map, showing the different research processes adopted. The research process consists of varying research stages, commencing from the research rationale, understanding the research subject, and identifying the study's relevant literature and scope. The next two chapters will present the interpretations of the research findings.

Figure 6: The Research Process



<b>Data Source</b>	<b>Data collection and analysis methods</b>	<b>Purposes</b>
Pilot study	13 semi-structured interviews - Constant comparative method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For testing the research approach and methods. For developing preliminary categories and refinement of the research approach and design.</li> </ul>
Desk Research	Literature Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To identify relevant literature, studies, theories and concepts applicable to the study.</li> <li>• To validate theory and concepts.</li> </ul>
Informal interviews (semi-structured)	Telephone and online chats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact potential research participants.</li> <li>• To develop preliminary themes and patterns.</li> <li>• Member checking for clarification.</li> </ul>
Participant Observation	Observational data (field notes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To identify potential research participants for interviews.</li> <li>• To develop a rapport with the research participants.</li> <li>• To observe network interactions.</li> </ul>
Formal Interviews (Semi-structured)	32 semi-structured interviews - Thematic Analysis method - Constant comparative method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To generate rich, detailed data for analysis.</li> <li>• To make sense of the meanings small businesses attached to the phenomenon under study.</li> <li>• To understand the emerging concepts and development of a conceptual model.</li> </ul>

Table 18: Summary of Research Methodology

Source: Author generated

## Chapter 6 - First Encounter with Data

### 6.0 Introduction

Chapter six and seven presents the research findings. Chapter six presents the first encounter with data and explains whom Nigerian small business owner-managers network with and the role of networks in Nigerian small business marketing. Chapter 7 presents the second encounter with data and sorts the emerging themes into explanatory accounts of Nigerian small business networking and engagement process. The literature review in chapters 3 and 4 posits small business marketing as a dynamic social practice. Small business experience and capability facilitates relationship building and utilization of network resources. This chapter presents the findings of participant observation and semi-structured interviews of thirty-two small business owner-managers in the South-South geopolitical zone, Nigeria.

The themes and categories identified are responses of Nigerian small business owner-managers networks and engagement practices using the constant comparative method of thematic analysis (Silverman 2006). The researcher adopted an inductive approach to identify emerging themes on small business network development and engagement process (Lockett et al. 2012). Data obtained during interviews and participants observation were transcribed verbatim. The researcher familiarised with the data through reading repeatedly and discarding irrelevant materials to focus on what appears to be network and engagement processes (Moustakas 1994). Data were analysed and compared iteratively to identify networking and engagement categories for description and explanation.

Initial themes were identified from relevant literature: networks, small business marketing, social capital and engagement marketing. The analysis process of going back and forth between data and theories involved an iterative process of reviewing data with emerging themes and categories (Fram 2013; Corbin and Strauss 2014). Table 19 presents the summary of themes and categories identified and illustrate the linkages between themes from literature and emerging themes to explain the plausible links, connections and relationships. Appendix E presents how themes were identified from data, and Appendix F demonstrates how quotes were chosen

and interpreted. This chapter is structured to examine various Nigerian small business networks and their roles in small business marketing. Section 6.1 presents the analysis of various Nigerian small business networks and marketing resources available in networks. Section 6.2 presents the findings on networks' contribution to small business marketing based on available social resources. Finally section 6.3 provide the chapter summary.

Table 19: Data Analysis themes

<b>Themes from Literature</b>	<b>Emerging themes from data analysis</b>
Small business marketing challenges	Small business networks and their roles in small business marketing.
Contribution of networks to small business marketing	The formation and use of social capital in small business marketing.
Small business network marketing practices	The evolution of small business marketing
Relationship and engagement marketing	Engagement in small business marketing.

Source: Author generated

## 6.1 Small Business Networks

This section seeks to examine Nigerian small business networks and networks' roles in small business marketing by answering the research questions – *Whom do Nigerian small business owner-managers network with? What is the role of networks in small business marketing?* All research participants engaged in different networks for marketing. Networking is important to overcome small business marketing

constraints and improve overall business performance. Nigerian small business networks consist of all the relationships in which an entrepreneur participates. Small business owner-managers attend network meetings, contact network members through phone calls, emails, and social media. Nigerian small business owner-managers are immersed in different networks to access various marketing resources. The networking process enables the owner-manager to gather valuable information in marketing decisions, evaluate current market situations and identifies sales and market opportunities. Carol describes networking as a regular activity where owner-managers interact with various networks.

*"I speak to everyone about my business every day; anyone can become my customer" (Carol).*

Network actors presented in this section are the ones that contribute to various small business marketing functions. Participants use networking to develop contacts with different networks and engage them in marketing functions. Goody connects with colleagues to improve his business performance.

*"I started cooking for my colleagues at work before I opened my restaurant. I speak with my colleagues about my business for ideas". (Goody)*

Research participants identified potential customers and initiate relationships for initial and repeated sales. Helen connects with potential customers that are influential with the ability to introduce others to the business.

*"We target big shots in the city, who will become our customers and introduce others to our business." (Helen)*

At the business establishment stage, small business owner-managers utilized networks to create stronger collaboration and alliance. Lizzy describes how networking with customers and suppliers contributes to marketing functions.

*"Our customers now suggest new products and services for the school, and sometimes even the suppliers try out new products with us." (Lizzy)*

Small business owner-managers relate differently with various networks based on the individual or organizations' value and personality, as described by Steve.

*"Based on different customers' needs, I relate with my customers personally and on different levels."* (Steve)

Ann proactively relates to create and maintain cordial relationships with customers. Findings revealed owner-managers strategically position themselves in networks to access social resources.

*"I know I need customers and others in my business to make a profit, so I relate with people cordially and carefully."* (Ann)

Small businesses access marketing resources in networks such as market information, new business opportunities, new business ideas, referrals, repeated sales from loyal and committed customers. Small business owner-managers recognize and seize opportunities for relationship building. The following subsections will discuss whom Nigerian small business owner-managers network with and network contributions to marketing. The research participants established and maintained relationships with the following networks: existing and potential customers, suppliers, family and friends (social networks), other small business owner-managers and government agencies (business networks), and internally with employees (internal networks).

### 6.1.1 Customer Networks

Small business owner-managers often make a conscious effort to include customers and potential customers in their networks. All research participants are actively developing and maintaining long-term relationships with existing and potential customers. The existing customers suggest new services/product ideas and improvements in existing products. Owner-managers understood the principal purpose of establishing and maintaining customer networks, as described by Mike.

*"Customers are everything to us. They suggest new products and services to us".*

(Mike)

Customer networks contribute to small business marketing in various ways, including keeping existing customers, recommendations, positive word-of-mouth, referrals, repeated sales, new product ideas, and market information gathering. The relationship between the owner-manager and customers is primarily personalised. Small business owner-managers use social and mobile technologies to enhance face-to-face interactions.

*"We text our customers with their names on the text, and we relate with them on personal levels". (Xander)*

Small business smallness has marketing relationship advantages; it allows for close relationship building with customers, flexibility in attending to customer's needs, and easy access to market information. Goody describes how attending to customised customer's needs is essential in maintaining a close relationship.

*"I deal with each customer differently, according to their dietary requirements, health issues, choice of diet and financial capability." (Goody)*

Proactive networking enhances network development, owner-managers seize and create opportunities for more network linkages. Customer aftersales services are the principal means through which small business owner-managers interact with existing customers and develop a close relationship. Helen interacts closely with customers during service delivery to create a stronger bond. On further probing, she mentioned that personal interaction with customers promotes customer satisfaction which often deepens customer relationship.

*"I get to know my customers when they call for aftersales services or repairs. That is when we can have a conversation". (Helen)*

Zoe states that customer feedback and suggestions are avenues to access customer information on satisfaction.

*"Through feedback from customers, I discover what they want to buy and what they are not happy about." (Zoe)*

#### 6.1.1.1 Potential Customers

Potential customers have not yet made purchases but are within the target market of the business. Small business owner-managers used avenues such as network meetings to advertise and introduce business offerings to potential customers. During network meetings, different businesses displayed products and had the opportunity to introduce product and services to potential customers. Potential customers are providers of valuable information about competitors. Small business owner-managers access market information from the potential customer while introducing products and services. Moses explains how potential customers provide competitors and pricing information. Information from potential customers also enables small business owner-managers to understand the business environment and customers' requirements.

*"Many times while am discussing with someone I feel might needs our product, to convince them to buy, they will just start telling me about other products that are competing with mine and most of the times they will tell me exactly what they need and the price in the market." (Moses)*

Small business owner-managers use various tactics to attract potential customers and introduce products and services. Irene invites potential customers into her shop for drinks whenever there is new stock.

*"From time to time, I invite my friends and their friends into my shop for some drinks and snacks when we have new products, and this is how we get new customers." (Irene)*

Jeff invites potential customers into his hospital for free medical tests and minor ailment treatments. Small business owner-managers strategically position themselves to attract new customers through product introduction.

*"We carry out free medical missions to introduce potential customers to their services, they come in and see what we are doing, and we can talk to them face-to-face." (Jeff)*

Lizzy, who owns a primary school, invites potential customers (parents) for an open day to see the facilities and meet with current students. The open day allows potential customers (parents) to communicate with current students and inquire about the school.

*"We organise open days in the school towards the end of every school year, for potential customers to see our facilities and the current students and also tell us their expectations." (Lizzy)*

Referrals and recommendations are identified as the means of attracting trusted customers based on positive referee words. Reeve's existing customers introduce new customers to the business.

*"Although we have a signpost at our business premises, we mostly get new clients from the existing customers our happy customers tell others about us." (Reeve)*

Research participants acquire new customers by attending network meetings, trade fairs, and visiting customers to introduce products and services. Steve, a distributor of skin care products, offers pampering sessions to potential customers to try the new products.

*"I host pampering sessions for new customers, I apply the products on their skin, once they like it, they may make purchases, and I also give out free samples for them to try on their own." (Steve)*

Small business owner-managers also use their products personally for advertisement. Ann wears Ankara (the fabric she sells) to work and on special occasions.

*"I wear my fabrics to work, to church, everywhere, and people will walk up to me and admire my outfits, and I will tell them I sell them, and they make their orders."*

(Ann)

#### 6.1.1.2 Existing Customers

Existing customers are those who are actively purchasing goods and services and contributing to marketing functions. The existing customer network is closely related to the relationship marketing strategy. Small business owner-managers contact existing customers for repeated sales and marketing resources. The existing customers contribute to small businesses beyond product purchase to include new customers introduction and product reviews. Grace customers provide recommendations and referrals to potential customers.

*"Most of our new customers are introduced by previous and existing customers.*

*We relate very well with our customers to remain in the market. They help us spread the news far and wide". (Grace)*

Existing customer networks provide opportunities for small business owner-managers to launch into new markets through feedback and suggestions. Customer networks facilitate continuous sales, idea generation on business offerings, recommendations, and referrals, as explained by Goody and Benita.

*"We practically changed our line of product or business through feedback from one of our customers, and this single act improved our business." (Goody)*

*"We relate closely to our customers by asking questions and getting feedback, what they would prefer in our services. These provide us with some strategic insights into customers' needs and how we can satisfy them, which is very crucial for continuous sales". (Benita)*

Williams acknowledges the importance of networking with customers to promote customer satisfaction and word-of-mouth recommendation.

*"Am very close to some of our customers, they tell us exactly what they want, and we try to deliver it. They tell others about how we operate and bring in new customers for us". (Williams)*

Small business owner-managers adopt a bottom-up approach to marketing. Research participants introduce new lines of products and services through ideas or requests from existing customers.

*"Through suggestions and trying to meet the needs of my customers, the line of my business has changed to satisfy my existing customers, and they also introduced new customers." (Dorothy)*

Dorothy describes how she changed business offerings due to customers' demands and suggestions. Lizzy also confirmed that new business ideas are identified through suggestions and feedback from existing customers.

*"We have a committee called Parents-Teachers-Association, where parents give feedback and make suggestions on what they expect or hope to be in the school. We also have the school WhatsApp group with parents for open and daily discussions and suggestions". (Lizzy)*

Furthermore, existing customer network contributions to marketing include repeated purchases, customer satisfaction, customer retention, and customer loyalty. Initially, small business owner-managers focused on identifying and satisfying the customer's needs. Satisfied customers are retained, which led to loyal customers. Loyal customers develop a feeling of intimacy and emotional attachments to business. Steve relates to customers beyond sales to establish emotional connections through personal contacts and closer relationships. He listens interestingly to existing customers to understand their personalities and expectations.

*"I do follow up on my customers through phone calls and visits, over time relationship blossoms and we can have deep conversations, where I get to know them personally." (Steve)*

### 6.1.2 Suppliers Networks

Suppliers networks consist of businesses or individuals that provide raw materials, services, and products to small businesses. Research participants relate closely with suppliers to collaborate on the quality of goods and for price negotiation. Owner-managers relate with suppliers to access value products and services at a reduced cost. Udeme explains relating with suppliers based on understanding to grant access to resources such as agreed payments plan.

*"Most of my suppliers are my informal business partners. When I started, I didn't have any capital, so I gathered different suppliers, and we understand and work together. We have a payment plan. I make payments for services or products one week after every event". (Udeme)*

Suppliers networks provide owner-managers with information about competitors, as Venice suppliers provide information about competitors and quality of service and products.

*"Suppliers often discuss what is happening in other firms with me, so I always imagine what they would say about me. Conversations like this keep me in check with business matters and contract terms such as payments ". (Venice)*

Suppliers networks seem to be more on contractual terms at the initial stage and primarily transactional. However, over time, based on understanding, small business owner-manager engages suppliers in various marketing functions. An example is Jeff, who has a good relationship with suppliers that also spread positive word-of-mouth. Through connections over time, Jeff has also benefited from credit arrangements with suppliers.

*"Most of our suppliers have quality products, but what I have gained most from suppliers is the relationship, they supply products to us, and we pay them on instalments at the end of the month." (Jeff)*

Of course, this close collaboration does not always happen. Peace had to replace suppliers due to poor relationships. She explains how the current supplier is more involved by providing credit for business expansion and staffing recommendations.

*"I had to replace some suppliers I have worked with for years. My current supplier encourages me. She gives me products on credit and asks for payments after sales, and she also recommends staff for my business". (Peace)*

As Lizzy explained, small business owner-managers go through various processes to refine and select suppliers for a long-termed relationship. Incompetence and unreliability are the main challenges in owner-managers ties with suppliers.

*"With suppliers, we have had to try a lot. Some had outstanding products but poor delivery services, others were not okay at all, but over time we have been able to get suppliers who supply uniforms and other materials with a cordial relationship". (Lizzy)*

Building useful collaborative links with suppliers requires time and effort. The process involves trial and error to find suppliers that are willing and interested to get beyond a transactional relationship. Trust and quality of product and services are significant to promote suppliers network relationship. Ann expresses her confidence with a supplier after several years of establishing a close relationship.

*"I will start by saying I trust where I get my fabrics. I have known my supplier personally for years; that's why I can assure my customers of the durability of the fabrics". (Ann)*

The spirit of mutual and cooperation in the supplier's network extends beyond product reliability and confidence. Dayo and Steve are product distributors, and they benefit from the supplier's brand name and reputation. Steve access various marketing resources such as free training, free product samples, advertisement materials, and reduced cost; up to 40 per cent discount price on products.

*"Mostly, what I gain from my suppliers are the discounts they give to registered distributors up to 40% price reduction. I also enjoy free advertising materials for trade fairs and exhibitions, free product samples for testing's and availability of business development materials ". (Steve)*

*"I only deal with a few suppliers that I trust, and they also give discounts based on volume, and promotions are available sometimes. I sell brand names, and my customers know the names that are quality". (Dayo)*

Zoe's suppliers introduce new products, markets and engaged in some form of partnership for business expansion.

*"My supplier introduces us to different products in the market, especially new technologies. Machines used in this business are costly. When we wanted to go into large format printing, it was capital intensive, and the banks were not willing to give loans, so we had to go into arrangements with one of our major suppliers".*  
(Zoe)

Small businesses access the following marketing outcomes from supplier networks: improved product and service quality, information about competitors, acquisition of saleable products, supplier's brand name and reputation, supplier's expertise and knowledge, customer acquisition, and new product ideas.

### 6.1.3 Business Networks

The business network comprises different small business owner-managers, business partners, banks, and accountants. The business network enables the pooling of resources among small businesses to develop new products and services through collaboration and synergy in product development and delivery. Business network relationships were mostly initiated at network meetings where different business owner-managers meet twice every month. Caleb collaborates with other medical experts to improve service offerings.

*"I partner with other specialists and general practitioners so we can run an ideal hospital. We share ideas, expertise, and business experiences". (Caleb)*

Nathan explained that business network members promote each other and sometimes engage in partnerships and sharing orientation for mutual benefits. Shared norms and values facilitate a close relationship among business network members.

*"I have a team of engineers I work with any time we have a big contract; we partner together. They are my close friends; we go out together to drink and chat about family and other issues of life". (Nathan)*

Most of the research participants' relationships with government agencies appeared unproductive, and some criticized the government agency for lack of support and clarity. However, few participants who engaged with government agencies benefitted from financial aid and formal business training, such as Yeye.

*"Government through microfinance banks have sponsored my business after graduation from college." It was a great experience as I could not afford the equipment to start my business". "The bank to have been very supportive with loans and training from small business support agencies". (Yeye)*

Some participants collaborate with experts in various fields based on competence and trust. Jeff collaborates with other medical practitioners and partners among business network members to promote business performance.

*"I stay connected with my colleagues, especially those that have pinched a niche for themselves in this business. I also partner with them for the successful running of the hospital". (Jeff)*

Relationship with experts allows small business owner-managers to acquire and share business information, market knowledge, and experiences. Jeff relates with successful colleagues to develop and share business knowledge and skills. Benita contacts business network members for creative designs and training.

*"I contact others in my network of bakers, through a Facebook group for training and other information concerning the industry. It is becoming very trendy these days". (Benita)*

Udeme connects and collaborates with several other small businesses. This connection and collaboration approach could be described as a 'network business' where small businesses work closely with network members for a shared goal.

*"I partner with other businesses such as the bakers, DJs', tent builders, dancers to plan successful and beautiful events, so I have my team members, and we work together." (Udeme)*

For business expansion, Evan collaborates with required experts

*"Before, we only drill boreholes for customers in my community and the neighbourhood, but the moment we started getting jobs in the swamps and waterlogged areas, we needed a treatment expert to treat the water after drilling and other logistics." (Evans)*

Business networks include both existing and potential business partners. As with supplier networking, this suggests that one of network practice characteristics is the continuous search to extend networks. Moreover, maintaining links is essential in building long-term relationships. Steve develops and maintains business relationships through phone calls, emails, face-to-face contact, visits, and attending networking events. Relationships among networks are built through continuing interaction and participating in various network events and programs. Business networks' marketing outcomes include collaboration and partnership, acquisition of skills and knowledge, personnel, and market information access.

*" Most of my business partners have contributed to the business's growth in different ways; one of them is an accountant and has put me through some short courses and especially how to use my laptop to store up my customers' database and other information." (Steve)*

#### 6.1.4 Social Networks

Social network actors include friends, family and relatives, colleagues and other social acquaintances. Most business owner-managers acknowledge family and friends as first customers who primarily act as brokers to provide contact and recommendations. Social networks with strong ties facilitate quick access to market and market information. Helen explains how social networks extend connections to various network members.

*"This business started with my friends, and they introduce their friend as well".  
"My husband introduced me into the fashion business, my friends took my  
business out and spread the news". (Helen)*

The ripple effect of social networks facilitates and spreads positive word-of-mouth, referrals and recommendations. Steve is typical, he started his business by selling to family and friends, and they introduced others to the business.

*"I started with family and friends, who used our products and liked them and also  
told their friends ". (Steve)*

Small business owner-managers extend social network through various avenues such as attending trade fairs, churches and charity meetings. The social network proved very useful for small business owner-managers, especially at the business start-up stage. Social networks provide new business ideas and opportunities. Some of this support is direct Yeye access business opportunity in the social network.

*"When my uncle was building his house, I volunteered to help the workers with  
welding works because of my flair for it. So, my uncle sent me to a technical  
college to learn welding and fabrication, he was very proud of me, and this  
encouraged me". (Yeye)*

Social networks also grant access to market information and an understanding of customer's expectations. According to Goody, his colleagues at work enable him to access customers' information and expand his business.

*"I started cooking for my colleagues at work who were too busy to cook their meals before opening a restaurant. During those times, I was able to identify my customers' needs and how to approach them". (Goody)*

Social network members also include former work colleagues. Peter mentioned that his former colleagues are his major customers as they have known him over the years and trust his quality of service. Former colleagues also provide new business ideas; for example, Dorothy was advised by her friends to start up a business after years of unemployment and was supported financially too.

*"My friends talked me into business as I was nursing my babies and could not get full-time employment, and they also supported me financially to start". (Dorothy)*

Peter told a similar story.

*"I worked with an oil company, after we were laid off from work, my colleagues and I teamed up to start property business from our payoff". "Most of our marketing is in the company we worked for, we go back to our former colleagues, they buy from us, and since they know us in person, they believe in us, and they tell others about us". (Peter)*

Social networks act as business brokers by providing recommendations and positive word-of-mouth. Marketing resources available in social networks include promoting entrepreneurship, business opportunity identification, business ideas generation, financial and emotional support, marketing information, access to competitors' information, referrals and recommendations.

#### 6.1.5 Internal Networks

Small business owner-managers with informal structure and operation dynamics are integrated internally, mainly through face-to-face communication, word of mouse (shared emails) and phone calls. The actors in internal networks include employees in the business, business partners, sub-contractors and team members. Internal

network members are closely knitted and work collaboratively to meet customer's needs. The researcher visited research participants' business premises an hour before the interview to observe internal network relationship. Small business owner-managers relate very closely with internal networks, sharing ideas and having meals together. Internal networks' benefits include information sharing, open communication, idea sharing, shared experience, and reassurance. Ann relates cordially with internal network members through frequent communication.

*"I have two ladies working for me. We understand each other and meet every day for updates, especially on prices."* (Ann)

Jeff explains a close relationship with his employees and other internal network members. The importance of transparency and openness in networks are the antecedents for trust formation. Interestingly, network transparency is furthered with the use of the internet. Jeff uses company email that every member of the team can access to enable idea and experience sharing.

*"We meet every morning for hand over and updates on every situation, not just about the patients. I will say we have integrated, we are very open to each other, and I mean transparent and easy to talk to". "Here, all the doctors have a shared email that is we all have access to what everyone is doing through a common company email, so we get to contribute or make suggestions whenever it is necessary".* (Jeff)

Grace engages her team in networking. She invites internal network members to events and meetings, making them feel valued and part of the business, facilitating loyalty. It also works practically to extend and develop contacts.

*"When I am going for any networking event, I usually go with one or two members of staff. I can't meet everybody in the room alone".* (Grace)

Internal networks facilitate action and create value. Udeme similarly encourages team members to go networking and searching for contracts, and she rewards them financially for motivation. Internal networks allow members to be recognised and involved in every business process.

*"I give extra tips to my staff who introduces new customers, or if a customer testifies of my staff quality of service, I usually acknowledge it and give rewards. I listen to my team for new ideas and suggestions to improve our services or introduce new services in our portfolio". (Udeme)*

Regular face-to-face meetings serve as a means of solidifying internal network relationships. Internal networks allow members to share and discuss marketing challenges and experiences. Moreover, owner-managers seek advice and discuss matters about marketing internally before implementation. Owner-manager often seeks confirmation of business decisions and engaged internal network actors in business processes. The internal network members explore new product development ideas, knowledge of competitors, information and advice, acquisition of new customers and keeping existing customers.

The summary of various small business networks and marketing outcomes is presented in Table 20. Small business owner-managers engage customers, employees, suppliers and business partners, colleagues, and family members in marketing.

Table 20: Small business networks and marketing outcomes

<b>Small Business Network Actors</b>	<b>Small Business marketing outcomes</b>
Potential customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ideas for new products and offerings</li> <li>• Competitors information</li> <li>• Customers suitability</li> </ul>
Existing customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Product information</li> <li>• Customer referrals / recommendations</li> <li>• Products and services co-creation</li> <li>• Customer knowledge and expectations</li> <li>• New products and services ideas</li> <li>• Existing product improvements</li> <li>• Repeated sales and business</li> </ul>
Suppliers Networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suppliers brand name and reputation</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing limited resources</li> <li>• Good relations and supplies</li> <li>• Information on market competitors</li> <li>• Acquisition of new customers through referrals</li> <li>• New product/services offerings</li> <li>• Product negotiation and pricing</li> <li>• Potential new customers</li> </ul>
<p>Business Networks (other business owners, business agencies, banks, business advisers)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership and alliances with professionals</li> <li>• Collaboration/partnership</li> <li>• Access to venture sponsors</li> <li>• Market planning</li> <li>• Word-of-mouth</li> <li>• Resources sharing</li> <li>• Product co-creation</li> </ul>
<p>Social Networks (Friends, family, colleagues, social acquaintances)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Word-of-mouth recommendations</li> <li>• Attracting investors</li> <li>• Business ideas</li> <li>• Opportunity recognition</li> <li>• Marketing information</li> <li>• Competitors information</li> </ul>
<p>Internal Networks (team members, employees)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creative ideas generations</li> <li>• Sharing marketing ideas and experiences</li> <li>• Market information sharing</li> </ul>

Source: Author generated

## 6.2 The role of networks in small business marketing

Small business owner-managers networks comprise multiple actors directly and indirectly to improve marketing performance. This section discusses the findings on networks' roles in small business marketing and explains how networking grants small businesses access to social resources. Small business owner-managers adopt entrepreneurial marketing strategies and employ core functions and processes of marketing. Small businesses are flexible, proactive and innovative in recognising business opportunities to market products and services through relationship

building. They access the following marketing resources from networks: market access, access to limited resources and access to marketing information and knowledge.

### 6.2.1 Market Access

Networks grant small businesses access to the target market and a better understanding of customers' requirements. Small businesses limited impact on the market is related to the limited number of customers and employees. Owner-managers creates and shapes new markets through networking and satisfying existing customers. Zoe implements entrepreneurial marketing strategies with customers to increase sales volume and promote business offerings.

*"I relate with my customers and friends to understand what they require of our services. Feedback and suggestions have improved our offerings and increased the number of orders". (Zoe)*

Networking promotes understanding of customer requirements, which led to customer satisfaction. Zoe made this point and added that she utilised feedback and suggestions from customers to improve on service offerings.

*"Some of our customer's critic our services which opened up avenues for new products, improve our existing products and have led to business and market expansion". (Nathan)*

For example, Nathan confirms that relationship with some customers is beyond transactions. Customers' critics through suggestions and feedback led to improved existing products and the introduction of new products and services. Networking with customers for satisfaction improve business performance and increase customer base through word-of-mouth recommendations.

*"My main purpose is to satisfy my customers, and once they are happy, they can introduce me to their friends and family; that is how I increase my clientele". (Helen)*

It is interesting to note how small businesses employ social media for maintaining relationships.

*"Most of my customers are my friends on Facebook, and they also follow me on Instagram. I interact with them frequently to understand them and try to meet their needs. They introduce new products to my business, and I can reach their friends and family on social media". (Benita)*

Benita uses social media to connect and relate closely with customers to understand and attempt to satisfy them. Social media extends the reach of small businesses and maintains a close relationship with network members.

*"Most of my satisfied customers post product reviews on social media and our webpage and advertise our products to others on their network" (Mike).*

Satisfied customers engage with firms online through product reviews and posts, influencing extended networks to make purchases. Mike explained how most new customers are acquired through products and services reviews by satisfied customers online. More generally, the indirect benefits were recognised among network members.

*"Not to take softer issues (relationships) seriously is dangerous to the business. Knowing people and telling them about what you do is very important as it expands your market. The relationship allows people. I mean your customers to know you and trust you and tell others about you". (Frank)*

Frank acknowledges relationship building as essential. He calls it "softer issues". On further probing, Frank explains how service quality and competence should be balanced with relationship building. Frank believes in a long-term relationship for marketing and understands the importance of interaction to promote trust and commitment.

*"This business works with numbers. The more people you know, the more customers and more sales. We relate with lots of our customers and the ones we think will require our products as well". (Steve)*

The following marketing resources are available in small business networks for market access: introduction to new customers, new product ideas, repeated sales, increased sales volume, business expansion, marketing information, products and services improvements.

### 6.2.2 Access to limited resources

Access to limited resources refers to the availability of resources in networks that are not readily available to small businesses. Network relationships grant owner-managers access to limited resources. Most of the participants access limited resources such as finance, expertise, skills and knowledge.

*"At times, my husband too helps me, mostly financially. He is very supportive".*  
(Ann)

Close and robust ties relationships provide emotional and financial support. Ann explains how her husband supports her business financially.

*"I don't work alone. Event planning requires different businesses, so I have a team such as a caterer, the bakers, the dancers, the DJ's, and it depends on the type of event. My husband is very proud of me".* (Udeme)

Udeme utilises numerous weak ties relationships to improve business performance. She engages other small business owner-managers for the effective running of her business. Some of the research participants access government and bank loans, although most small business owner-managers finds it difficult.

*"I have accessed government loans through microfinance banks".* (Yeye)

*"I meet with others in early learning education that are using British standard. Relating with them opens me up to information and resources I need, such as qualified teachers, educational materials and activities and how the sector operates".* (Lizzy)

Networking with others in the same business grants access to information, required skills and resources to promote business offerings. Lizzy relates to other business owner-managers in the same business to access resources relevant to the sector.

*"My fathers' friends helped me to set up my business. I work with them on big projects, share ideas and knowledge with them. They also introduce me to associations I need to register in" (Frank).*

Social networks grant access to shared ideas and knowledge. Frank relates to his fathers' friends in the same business to access the business's shared experience and norms. Small business owner-managers engage in some form of partnership and collaborates to execute projects.

*"Relationship with customers has benefited my business in different ways, financially, information about the environment and general knowledge. I even have a customer who grants me access to loan facility to acquire a delivery van at a reduced cost". (Williams)*

Williams was able to access financial and intellectual resources in network relationships to improve marketing performance.

### 6.2.3 Access to Market information and knowledge

Different network actors played various roles in contributing to small business marketing expertise. Small business owner-managers are usually generalist and tend to have limited marketing information and knowledge.

*"We collaborate with others based on their expertise". (Caleb)*

Caleb collaborates with teams of qualified experts to administer treatment or procedures to patients. This approach boosts the customer's confidence and allows owner-managers access to market knowledge and environment information. Benita explains how service improvement and products up to date with trends are achieved by networking with business networks. Through attending training and participating in networks, knowledge and experience are shared and accessed.

*"I registered in network group for bakers in Nigeria, baking is more like fashion now, it's trendy, new designs are posted on the group Facebook page and training will also be arranged". (Benita)*

Williams explains how marketing information from friends and customers introduce potential customers and grant access to information required to access new markets.

*"Business ideas and information mostly come from my friends and others that know my type of business, they introduce me to their family and colleagues, informs me of where there are a new development and other information that I need". (William)*

Table 21 summarises various network roles and marketing resources available in small business networks.

### 6.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter sought to address the research questions: with whom do Nigerian small business owner-managers network with and why do they engage in networking? Small business owner-managers network mainly to market goods and services through building a long-term relationship with network members. Consequently, research participants developed and utilised network resources to overcome marketing challenges. Networking facilitates the development of new products and services. Small business owner-managers used different approaches to connect with various network actors, both offline and online. Social media enable a quick and real-time process to maintain existing connections rather than forming new relationships.

Despite the different types of small business networks, the focus is to market goods and services. Interaction and relationship building strategies tend to be the focus of small business owner-managers marketing approaches. Small business owner-managers develop a trusted relationship with network members through regular interaction. The analyses in this chapter show that various networks are involved in small business marketing. Figure 7 illustrates the dynamic and interactive nature of small business networks involving different networks, directly and indirectly, contributing to small business marketing. The next chapter will discuss the process of networking and engagement in small businesses.

Table 21: Summary of the roles of networks in small business marketing

<b>Roles of networks</b>	<b>Network resources</b>	<b>Marketing outcomes</b>
Access to limited resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to information</li> <li>• Access to finance</li> <li>• Access to knowledge and skills</li> <li>• Access to business facilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunity recognition</li> <li>• Business expansion</li> <li>• Improving products and services</li> </ul>
Access to market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customers satisfaction</li> <li>• Customer orientation</li> <li>• New products ideas</li> <li>• Feedback and suggestions</li> <li>• Word-of-mouth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer retention Acquisition of new customers</li> <li>• Repeated sales</li> <li>• Products ideas</li> <li>• Products improvements</li> <li>• Referrals and recommendations</li> </ul>
Access to information and knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration with others in their networks</li> <li>• Teamwork</li> <li>• Knowledge and skills sharing</li> <li>• Information sharing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Product co-creation</li> <li>• New products ideas</li> <li>• Product improvement</li> <li>• Opportunity recognition.</li> </ul>

Source: Author generated

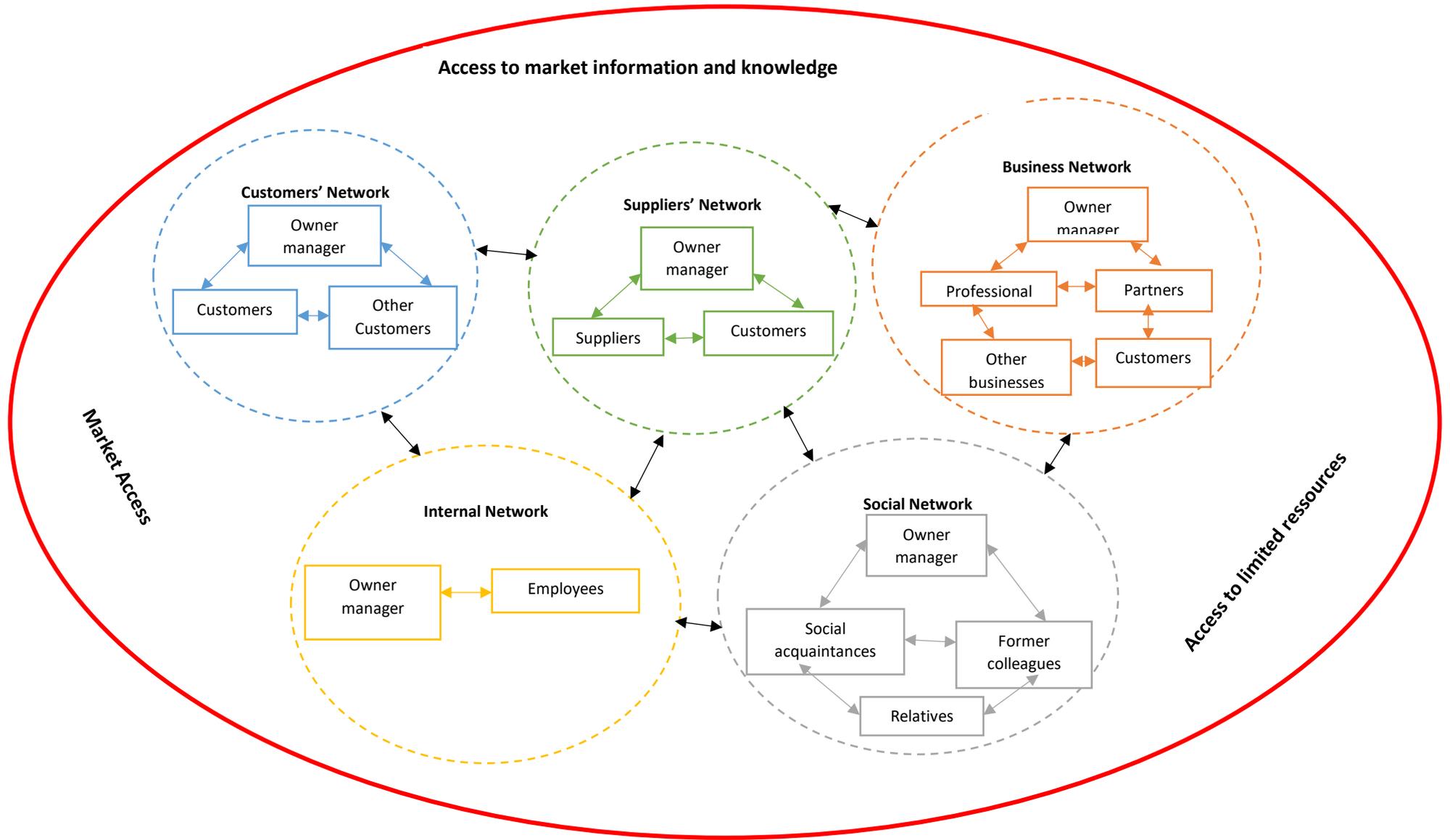


Figure 7: Small Business Networks and their roles in small business marketing

## Chapter 7 – Second Encounter with Research Data

### 7.0 Introduction

In chapter 6, five different interconnected network categories for Nigerian small business owner-managers were identified: existing customer networks, potential customer networks, supplier networks, business networks, social networks, and internal networks. Due to small businesses' size, limited resources, and limited market impact, Nigerian small business owner-managers turn to social resources to overcome marketing constraints. Chapter 7 employs the conceptual framework developed in chapter 4 to demonstrate the relationship between relevant concepts and themes identified during analysis. This chapter builds on the previous chapter to illustrate the processes Nigerian small businesses adopt to access social resources in networks and how small businesses engage with various networks to improve marketing. The analysis in this chapter explains networking employed by Nigerian small business owner-managers to promote marketing performance. This chapter answers the following research questions: *How do Nigerian small businesses access and use social resources for marketing? How do Nigerian small business owner-managers market goods and services, and what factors influence marketing performance? Finally, this chapter will explain engagement processes in networks to promote Nigerian small business marketing.*

To answer the above research questions, the researcher analysed participants lived experience narratives of relationship-building processes to identify the patterns and themes concerning social capital formation and utilisation. Data were re-examined, but this time with a focus on the process of network connections. The emerging themes enabled the researcher to develop an explanatory model for the Nigerian small business relationship development process and access to social resources in networks. This chapter is structured as follows: Section 7.1 presents the analysis of the formation and utilisation of social capital in Nigerian small business networks. Section 7.2 presents the findings on Nigerian small business marketing's evolution, and Section 7.3 is the chapter summary.

## 7.1 Social capital formation and use process

Social capital is dynamic and dependent on network development. Social capital increased or decreased as small business owner-managers deepen existing relationships, establish new relationships or terminate problematic ones. This section presents the findings in relation to research objectives to understand the social capital formation process and use in Nigerian small business networks. It explains Nigerian small business owner-managers abilities to build and access socially based resources in networks. Understanding network processes is vital to small business owner-managers as network relationships influence small business access marketing resources. Relationship building is a deliberate process. Carol consciously relates to network members to access marketing resources.

*"I had to redefine my relationship with friends since some of them did not support my business". (Carol)*

The process of social capital formation enables small business owner-managers to develop and maintain contacts with network actors for business development purposes. All small business owner-managers that participated in this research actively build, manage and access network resources for marketing. Moses acknowledges the social resources in networks and the need for collaboration.

*"No one can do everything on their own, and we need our customers, suppliers, and others". (Moses)*

Small business interaction with network members is key to understanding and building relationships. Todd explains how close relationship with customers grant access to market knowledge and information.

*"I relate cordially with the staff of the companies we offer our services. We agree on the standard of operations, we call for pep-talks to understand each other, and they also introduce new services every time we have such discussions".  
(Todd)*

The following subthemes are used to explain social capital development and utilisation: network interaction, the strength of network ties, network stability, and network interdependence. These processes facilitate the formation and use of social capital in networks. Social capital is illustrated as a glue that promotes cooperation, resources exchange, innovative approaches to marketing, and a lubricant that initiates and sustains relationships. Network members relationships are established and maintained over time through various avenues such as phone calls, emails, face-to-face contacts, networking events and social media platforms. Frequent interaction, shared norms and values, mutual support and resources exchange are essential in building and accessing network resources.

### 7.1.1 Network Interaction

Frequent communication with network members facilitates trust formation and loyalty and enables customers to be committed and involved in businesses. Face-to-face interaction is a unique selling point for small business owner-managers and an avenue to initiate relationships. During community network meetings, the researcher observed how participants interact with other small business owner-managers to introduce and advertise product and services. They had different business stands to display products and service. Nigerian small business owner-managers use interactions in networks to understand customers and customers' requirements. It creates an avenue for small business owner-managers to develop a close relationship with network members. Queen interacts with network members to acquire knowledge and a better understanding of service offering. Network interaction also grants small businesses new market and business opportunities.

*"I relate with our customers and others that influence our businesses positively, am learning new approaches to improve my business and better ways to deliver services. Some customers have opened new markets and opportunities for us".*

(Queen)

Todd meets with customers, "the heads of the community", to deliberate and understand how to serve them. Values and norms of the community are recognised as respect to authorities. This approach grants Todd access to social resources such as acceptance, referrals, commitment and involvement.

*"Through communication, I get to know my customers and understand their terms. I spend hours deliberating with the heads of the community to understand their needs and inform them about the construction that is about to take place in the community". (Todd)*

Similarly, Steve meets with customers on appointments face-to-face for close interactions to identify personal needs and preferences. Active listening to customers allows for the development of intimate and personal customer relationships.

*"I book an appointment with my customers where we can have time to chat and interact; get to know them individually to be able to attend to them according to their personal needs. I listen very keenly to customers to understand their needs and desires. People generally love it when they know you are interested in them and their needs, especially the ladies". (Steve)*

Continuous interaction is the central idea behind a long-term relationship. Small business owner-managers engages in ongoing interaction that constitutes the antecedent for maintaining value exchange among network members. Mike frequently communicate in real-time on social media with customers.

*"My business is purely online, feedback, reviews, and orders made online. I attend to my customers regularly online". (Mike)*

Communication with customers enables small business owner-managers to identify customers' preference. Carol communicates with customers proactively to ensure service satisfaction. Jeff meets with internal network members regularly for updates on business progress.

*"Most times, I come into the salon and deliberately engage my customers in conversations, so I can know if they are happy with the services or what they will love differently. I look at them and try to understand their body languages as well". (Carol)*

*"I meet with the team of medicals and other of our staff every morning for hand over and for appraisal and any other upcoming events or issues that need attention". (Jeff)*

Research participants interact with network actors that are directly involved in marketing. Carol explain face-to-face interaction as an effective way of seeking information, knowledge and clarifying ambiguities through visual cues. Small business owner-managers use the internet and technology to maintain resource exchange among network members. Research participants regularly contact network members through phone calls, WhatsApp messaging, Email, Facebook, or Instagram. Network members continuous exchange facilitates the establishment of a long-term relationship. The internet augments and sustains social capital as a form of engagement. Restrictions in time and space are fast disappearing as real-time interactions become more accessible among network actors. Network interaction promotes understanding among network members, facilitates the improvement of existing products, and creates new products or services. Xander, through communications, was able to identify customers' requirements and approaches to satisfy them.

*"We are online and communicate with our customers and suppliers on the go. Through communication and understanding, our relationships get better now we know what they expect of us". (Xander)*

Collaboration among network actors facilitates access to social resources such as word-of-mouth recommendations and repeated sales. In effect, Udeme explained social capital as a feature of networks that enables coordination and cooperation among network members for mutual benefit.

*"I coordinate other service providers and resources for the success of events. Effective communication is required for smooth running of my business". (Udeme)*

Social capital binds network members together through interaction and resource exchange. A high level of collaboration and goodwill within network members lowers transactional cost, enable small business owner-managers to be understood, promotes trust development and resource sharing.

### 7.1.2 The Strength of Network Ties

The strength of network ties depends on the frequency and duration of interaction, the level of intimacy and the reciprocal resources available within relationships. However, significant networks consist of both strong and weak ties. Frank level of connection with various networks differs in terms of frequency and intimacy.

*"Some of our contractors are only for business, and we don't contact them except we have a business for them", we also have some that we are friends with, business or no business we hang out together and have some things to share".*

(Frank)

Small business networks are made up of nodes (network members such as customers, suppliers, friends and employees) and ties (connections or relationships between network members). Networks consist of direct and indirect ties; the strength of ties broadly defines the quality of the relationship between members. Strong ties are characterised by frequent communication, intimacy, and reciprocity based on shared norms, culture, and goals. In contrast, weak ties involve less frequent interaction and lower resource exchange. Nigerian small business owner-managers engaged proactively with network members. Both strong and weak ties connect small businesses to valuable marketing resources. Ann connects closely with business networks based on shared norms and values. Regular communication strengthens ties for resource sharing.

*"Am very close with my designer. We speak more than three times in a day, we are now friends and business partners, we have a lot in common".* (Ann)

Steve relates intimately with network members to understand and deals with them based on their distinct personality.

*"Some of my consultants are very close, and they can even call me at midnight, anytime they need me, for both the business and personal matters. We are like a family now, looking out for each other".* (Steve)

The strength of ties indicates the extent to which contacts are interconnected. Strong ties between actors facilitate trust development, shared norms and identity. Both

strong ties and weak ties are utilised to access resources in different contexts. Moreover, the demonstration of competence and transparency in business relationships enables credibility and reliability, often leading to strong ties.

*"We started on a business level, but over the years we now work together for a common goal, sometimes we have to put out our resources together before payments". (Udeme)*

Udeme strong network ties develop over time facilitates trust formation. The strength of networks ties influences the flow of information and resources among network actors. Ties strength promote trustworthiness and reduce transactional risks among network members. Evans developed strong bonds with customers over twelve years of relationship. Frequency of contact with network member is also essential in building network ties.

*"Most of my customers are the ones we acquired when we came into Warri over 12 years ago, and we discuss pricing, especially now with the recession".  
(Evans)*

*"In this location, I know almost everyone, because of where my shop is, I greet them almost every morning as they are driving out to work". (Dayo)*

Nigerian small business owner-managers maintain a close relationship with network members to share ideas and recommendations. Dayo exchange compliments with network members to build a relationship. The strength of network ties facilitates the development of high relational and cognitive social capital. Regular interaction allows network members to express genuine interest and value. Strong ties connect small business owner-managers with fine-grained marketing resources compared to weak ties. The strength of networks promotes interpersonal relationships and increases feelings of reciprocity and trust. The nature and content of word-of-mouth depend on the strength of ties existing between network members. The next section discusses time as a factor in building network relationships.

### 7.1.3 Network Stability

Stability is the duration of a network relationship and a critical indicator in the accumulation of goodwill in networks. Network stability involves the level of continuity in social structures. It facilitates clarity and visibility of mutual obligations among network members. Benita collaborates with network members over a period. Length of time in a relationship allows network members to understand each other and share resources.

*"I have a colleague of mine in the neighbourhood, over time I have found out she is a sincere and intelligent person, and we have done some projects together like co-chairing training and events". (Benita)*

Building social capital in networks requires a significant amount of time to establish and maintain links.

*"I have known our major supplier for six years now". (Lizzy)*

Lizzy invested six years in building a relationship with a supplier. Relationship building is a process, and network value emerges and blossoms over time. Research participants invest time to understand network members and discuss product offerings. Social capital is dynamic and can develop through interactive and trustworthy relationships built over time. Mike customers are no longer afraid to make online transactions, as most online businesses' uncertainties have gradually been dismissed. Customers have developed confidence and trust in small businesses over time.

*"When I started this business, customers were afraid to make online payments before delivery. I was also afraid my staff would run away with the goods assigned to them to deliver. There were many uncertainties due to our business environment, but we gradually earned trust over time. When customers testify how quick and safe the payments and delivery processes are online, it builds confidence and allows others to make a purchase online". (Mike)*

Stability allows networks to evolve and increases trust and values among network members. Ann established trust and confidence in suppliers' offerings after a period.

*"I trust where I buy my fabrics from - I mean my suppliers. We have been in business for over the five years, I have confidence in them, and I can assure my customers of the durability of the fabrics". (Ann)*

*"I have been working with them with this company since 2001, and they don't delay payments. Therefore, I can get loans from the bank to execute their projects, knowing full well when the payments are coming. This country is challenging to trust people; that's why I rarely go into partnership; people are not straight forward". (Todd)*

Todd, through a long-term relationship characterised by stability and durability, has developed trust with customers. Indeed, Todd uses the benefit of a long-term relationship as a guarantee for loans with the banks. Peter's comments were typical expressions of trust formation through obligations and reliability forged over time.

*"Most of my customers are my former colleagues and family members who have known me for years; they trust me and believe I will not disappoint them". (Peter)*

Xander establishes trust with customers after three years of transactions. Stability promotes understanding among network members and clarifies mutual obligations.

*"Establishing a good relationship with our first customer took us over three years. After that, they spread the word about us in the industry". (Xander)*

Cooperation, coordination, as well as principles of reciprocity and exchange, are also increased over time. Zoe explains the importance of time in building relationships with network members to understand shared values and access social resources.

*"It takes a while to understand people and what they stand for". (Zoe)*

*"This business is over seven years, and my customers trust my services, so they introduce me to others. People are afraid for service providers to visit their homes because of security issues in this State, but since they know me, they are comfortable for me to come to their homes to set up or update their devices".*

(Queen)

Over time Queen's customers have developed trust in her business. Existing customers introduce and recommend products to potential customers. Moses transparency and honesty promote trust formation.

*"When you are a man of your words, in a little while, people will know you and trust you and your products. If I am not sure of the quality of what I am selling, I tell my customers straight away".* (Moses)

Stability enhances understanding of shared values and behavioural norms, which facilitates integration and cohesion. Nigerian small business owner-managers invest time to build long-term relationships with various networks to create and maintain an enduring structure of ties. Stability among network members facilitates and deepens social capital formation and highlights interdependence. Although most participants invested time and continuous communication to access social resources in networks, there are exceptions where research participants earned trust almost instantly. Dorothy explains how face-to-face interaction and emotional connection with network member grant access to trust immediately.

*"I was so surprised one day; a lady worked in here to register her child in our creche. We had a few conversations, and she provided the required documents for registration. We fixed a date for the child to resume, but she asked if she could leave her child behind for a few hours before leaving. I could not believe myself. She can back to pick the child after a few hours, the next day, she recommended two of her friends".* (Dorothy)

#### 7.1.4 Network Interdependence

Interdependence is a reciprocal obligation of network members to share resources. Exchange activities create bonds between network members, as Caleb explains the importance of network members and the marketing resources available in networks. Small businesses partner with each other to share resources and for mutual support.

*"We need each other, you satisfy the customers, and they tell others about your business. Without my partners, there will be no business, we are here for each other, and we understand that". (Caleb)*

Interdependence is vital in small business network development and practised by joint problem solving and shared resources and interest.

*"My delivery truck was faulty. One of my loyal customers, who was developing an estate at a time, introduced me to a company that sells used trucks. I was able to get a good truck at discounted prices and was allowed flexible payments with him as a guarantor." (Williams)*

Williams accesses social resources for business efficiency and expansion through business networks. Lizzy describes interdependence in networks for mutual satisfaction.

*"I think the relationship is mutual, and we depend on the parents to bring their kids to school and give out their word-of-mouth. These days, they even recommend events and activities for the school". (Lizzy)*

Apart from the transactional part of the relationship, customers are involved in business activities such as service improvements and new customer acquisition. Building engagement begins with the process of knowledge exchange between customers and business. Small businesses provide customers with information about products, services, and customers provide marketing information such as preferences and demographic information. The understanding between customers and business owner-managers sustains the relationship. The knowledge of network members and business owner-managers creates values, alignment of needs and

expectations. A high level of mutual interdependence among network members works as bonding social capital. Jeff and Udeme depend highly on various network resources and expertise to improve business offerings.

*"My business is made up of several experts, and we need each other for the smooth running of the business. Even my staff are vital, and everyone is important for success". (Jeff)*

*"As an event organiser, I bring different businesses together for an event to function. We all need each other". (Udeme)*

Findings reveal that when network actors no longer depend on each other, the relationship tends to diminish. Carol redefines relationships with network members to those supportive and involved in her business.

*"The moment I noticed; my friends were not supportive. I did not bring them into my business again". (Carol)*

Zoe's idea of interdependence is bilateral; she affirms the importance of internal networks.

*"We are made up of different departments, the designers, the marketing, delivery and others, we work together for a common goal, without each other we kind of stress out or not be able to meet our target. Everyone here is equally important". (Zoe)*

Small business daily activities depend on the input of every individual in the organisation and various networks. Network interdependence was identified as directly associated with reciprocity and mutual benefits.

*"As an engineer, I do not know how to write proposals and filling of all the forms at the different company procurement departments, so I work with my partner, he*

*does all the writing and interpretations of contracts while I mobilised the staff and went to the field to work". (Todd)*

Network interdependence occurs when network members share tangible and intangible resources for mutual goals. These include improving on an existing product or services, collaboration and co-creation of new products. Todd collaborates with business partners, internal networks and customers. Network interdependence in small business networks exists within the organisation (internal networks) and outside the organisation (external networks). Common interest and goals, shared codes and paradigms among network members promote integration and collective responsibility. Trust and shared norms of reciprocity increases the exchange of ideas and information among networks.

#### 7.1.5 Summary of social capital formation and use

Nigerian small business owner-managers interact with network members to understand and establish a long-term relationship. This section explains the social capital formation process through network interaction, network stability, strength network ties and network interdependence. The identified processes enable small business owner-managers to translate social capital into concrete performance outcome for small business marketing. These processes facilitate engagement with various networks to access marketing resources. Figure 8 demonstrates the processes of relational exchanges; each variable in the model initiates and sustains network relationships. Irrespective of business stages, small business owner-managers interact with networks to access marketing resources. Face-to-face and online approaches were utilised by participants, although the trust formation process is quicker through face-to-face interaction. Frequent interaction also facilitates trust formation, loyalty and enables network members to be involved in small business marketing.

The strength of network ties determines the level of intimacy, emotional connectedness between network members and influences access to social resources. Tie strength depends on the frequency and duration of network interaction. Network duration and subsequent stability are required to nurture relationships to access goodwill. Time allows for clarity of purpose, visibility of mutual obligation and expectation, promote the exchange of knowledge, values and trust establishment in

relationships. Network interdependence shapes the degree of shared vision and goals development among network members. The reciprocal exchange of resources among network members is the essence of networking and sustains network relationships. However, network relationships tend to diminish when network members no longer benefit from each other.

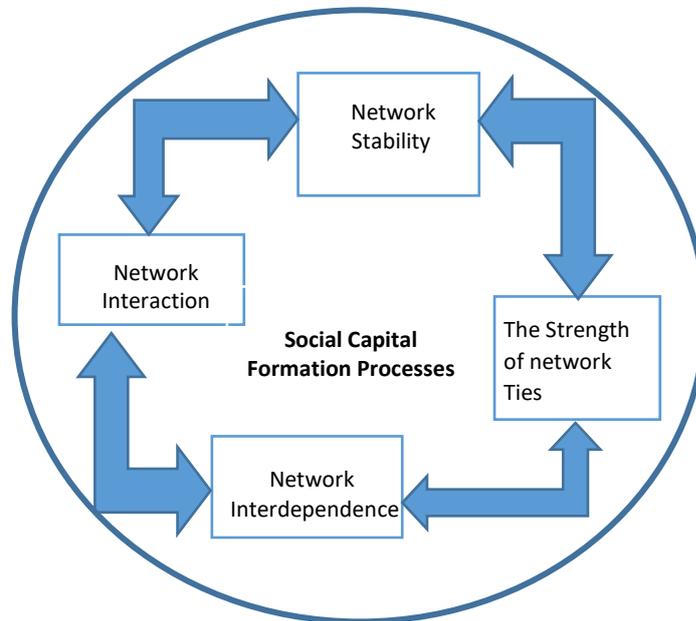


Figure 8: Social Capital Formation Process

## 7.2 The Evolution of Small Business Marketing

This section discusses the findings on the evolution of small business marketing from transactional marketing that focuses on attracting customers by providing superior value and price reduction to engagement marketing. Nigerian small business marketing requirement and approaches continue to evolve as the business progresses. Small business owner-managers develop long term relationship with customers for repeated sales based on trust and commitment. Small business marketing approaches evolve from relationship marketing to engagement marketing during the business developmental stage, where network members are engaged in value-adding processes. Small business owner-managers indicate that initial customers and other network members are mostly family members, friends, co-

workers or former colleagues. Relationships that existed before business (temporal connection), with the focus on sales. As business progress and approach the development stage, marketing requirements evolve. Small businesses extend networks to include business networks, suppliers' network and internal network. The next section discusses Nigerian small business owner-managers transactional marketing and factors that influence marketing relationships.

### 7.2.1 Transactional Marketing

Transactional marketing focuses on introducing products to customers for initial sales. Customer-centric marketing approaches are adopted to determine the value-added resources required to meet customers' needs. Mostly satisfied customers repeat sales. Ann initiates relationships with new customers for sales. Yeye explained how satisfied customers return for repeated sales.

*"When I am talking with new customers, I hardly get angry because I want to make sales at least for the first time". (Ann)*

*"We try to satisfy our customers. if we do a good job, they will come back". (Yeye)*

Some participants established relationships before transactions. Steve organises events, so potential customers get to try out products and make a purchase if they are happy with them.

*"I initiate a relationship with my potential customers by organising the event for sample trials, and if they like it can make their purchases". (Steve)*

*"Once I notice a new customer, I introduce more items to them and also give them some discounts". (Daniel)*

Daniel introduces new items in the shop to customers. Small business owner-managers use reduced price and discounts to initiate sales. William displays products to potential customers that would lead to a transaction.

*"I visit development sites to speak with the developers, I go there with different block samples for them to see my products, and if they like it, they make orders". (Williams)*

Transactional marketing is used mainly by Nigerian small business owner-managers to introduce products and services to customers and for initial purchases. Developing a long-term relationship with existing customers is identified as the next approach for small businesses to retain existing customers. The next section explains how Nigerian small business owner-managers transactional marketing evolves into relationship marketing to retain existing customers and acquire new ones.

### 7.2.2 Relationship Marketing

Research participant adopts relationship marketing to retain existing customers and acquire ones to improve and build relationships for repeat sales and recommendation. This section presents small business owner-managers relationship with network actors illustrating the shift in marketing from transactional exchanges to relational exchange for mutual benefit. Relationship marketing links closely to the growth of small businesses characterised by long-term customer relationships. After initial transactions, owner-managers further initiate relationships with customers. Small business owner-managers focused on regular interaction with customers to build a relationship and establish trust.

Network relationships had specific attributes that are useful and distinctive. Commitment and trust are essential elements for building a long-term relationship with customers. Research participant adopted relationship marketing as a follow up to transactional marketing, where significant customers are contacted to establish and develop a long-term relationship for future purchases. All participants indicated an interest in building network relationships with customers for valuable information and access to marketing resources. Yeye identified some customers that make substantial purchases and contact them often for repeated sales.

*"I have a few customers that I visit most, those with the potential of repeated purchase and to refer others". (Yeye)*

Relationship marketing is also used to acquire new customers while retaining existing ones. Lizzy establishes trusted relationships with various networks, such as internal members and suppliers, apart from existing customers.

*"I have a good relationship with my employees, suppliers and customer". (Lizzy)*

Research participants adopt relationship marketing to build a strong business reputation. Drivers of relationships are mainly due to owner-managers analysis of customer's values based on previous transactional data such as the monetary value of the purchase, share-of-wallet and frequency of purchase. William establishes relationships with customers through suppliers' strong brand.

*"My suppliers brand make my customers keep coming back". (Williams)*

Bernard relational customers tend to increase purchases over time and become part of the business.

*"My friends and family have helped to expand my business, they were my first customers, and now they are distributors of my products". (Bernard)*

Family members and friends who are customers have turned into distributors of products and contribute to business marketing functions. The following subthemes are identified to explain relationship marketing strategies in Nigerian small businesses: repeat encounter, communication, satisfaction, trust and commitment.

#### 7.2.2.1 Repeat Encounters

Small business owner-managers invest time and resources in building relationships with different networks, especially customers. Mike frequently interacts with customers by responding to concerns. Peter contacts customers for feedback on product experience to initiate a close relationship.

*"I respond to customers online, quickly and consciously making them feel valued to share more". (Mike)*

*"I usually contact my customers after first purchase for feedback and product experience to initiate friendship". (Peter)*

Mike empowers customers with a sense of belonging. Fond memories created with customers make them have the business in mind, which often leads to referrals. Steve explains that repeat encounter experience with customers opens avenues for repeated sales.

*"I call my customers to find out how they are enjoying the products if there is any concern with the products and for repeated sales". (Steve)*

According to Steve, repeated encounter acts as bridges for discussion and business solutions.

*"I invite potential customers to the hospital for a free test to initiate relationship". (Jeff)*

To initiate an encounter with potential customers, Jeff offers free medical check-up and tests. Introduction to business offering initiates the relationship with potential customers. Participants use different approaches to create encounters and repeated encounters with customers and potential customers to establish a connection.

*"I check on my customers, through text messages and calls, especially when they have not placed orders for some time". (Grace)*

Grace contact customers through send text messages and calls.

*"I relate with my customers mostly through after-sales services. When they call me for repairs, I use that opportunity to establish some relationship so they can have confidence in my business". (Queen)*

Queen uses aftersales services as an avenue to initiate a connection with network members.

*"What has helped us relate well with our clients is the quality of services and attitude towards work". (Todd)*

Quality of service and products also initiate a long-term relationship, as satisfied customers repeat purchases. Todd provides customers with high-quality services for a repeat encounter. Research participants recognise connection and communication with existing and new customers as a vital element for marketing. Contact with networks at this stage is often centred on repeated sales and an opportunity to initiate or deepen the relationship.

#### 7.2.2.2 Communication and Satisfaction

Communication is the interaction between network members and small business owner-managers. Satisfaction was identified as the ability of the business owner-manager to meet customers' needs and desire. Active listening to customers and other networks enables small businesses to develop closer and emotional relationships. Although relationship marketing has a dual focus on acquiring new customers and retaining existing customers, participants focused on existing customers' retention strategies to secure customers' loyalty. During relationship building, owner-managers used various forms of interaction to address legitimacy and credibility for value creation. Participants engaged in regular communication with customers and responded to customer feedback and suggestions.

*"Customer's constructive feedback and words of encouragements are welcome. My customers sometimes reference my competitors to me". (Carol)*

The researcher attended network meetings in the small business owner-managers community and noticed how participants use different approaches to interact with networks. Participants explained how established relationship allows for easy communication with customers.

*"I listen to my customers to understand their personal needs and capability to attend to them individually". (Udeme)*

*"Starting a property business is challenging. I have to communicate deeply with my potential customers to understand their needs and customised properties and additional services to meet their needs". (Peter)*

Another way of interacting with customers is by showing empathy and respect. Peter and Udeme listen to customers carefully to understand their personal needs and how to attend to them. Satisfaction also facilitates word-of-mouth referrals and recommendations.

*"Satisfied customers will also review our products, show videos and refer others online". (Mike)*

Trust and commitment building were other approaches adopted by Nigerian small business owner-managers to establish a long-term relationship with customers.

#### 7.2.2.3 Trust and Commitment

Research participants adopt different approaches in developing trust and commitment among network members. Trust was identified as the willingness of a customer to relate and cooperate with small business owner-managers. Small business owner-managers through high-quality products, competence, making and keeping promises, developed trust with customers. Network commitment is the willingness of network partners to uphold and maintain a relationship, which requires a level of obligation for relationship success. Grace respects and relates to customers based on personal and customised needs. Respect is an antecedent for customers to trust and become committed to small businesses.

*"Relating to our customers has also helped us to provide them with excellent services based on suggestions and dietary needs". "In this country, honesty and transparency are scarce, so once your customers can trust your product quality and price, they will tell others". (Grace)*

*"I don't discuss my customers, and I respect their privacy".(Grace)*

Small business owner-managers develop trust with customers through exceeding expectations. Todd explains how trust can be acquired through efficiency, which further initiates commitment.

*"I have done great jobs based on specifications through proper supervision and on time. I think that has given me a good background for a good relationship with the company". (Todd)*

*"My customers believe in the quality of my products, so it's easy for them to come back and also tell others. (Ann)*

Trust was identified as a significant influence on the quality of relationship and level of commitment. Ann establishes trust with customers through product quality. Reeve also develop customer trust and commitment through products and services quality.

*"We always do a little extra to impress our customers and win their trust and confidence". (Reeves)*

Small business owner-managers are people-focused with a dense network of strong ties and often dependent on value exchange relationships. Trust among network members is extended through referrals and recommendations. Trust enables network members to be committed to resources exchange. Relationship marketing contributes to small business marketing through strong relationships with customers. Small businesses use customised products and services, increase customer satisfaction, brand and product reputation to improve confidence and trust with network members. Trust is vital in developing and sustaining relationships.

*"I can say competence and integrity can also make customers trust you".(Nathan)*

*"Openness and competent are crucial as well. Let people see through you and not suspect any foul play so that they can work with you". (Todd)*

Commitment among network members was identified as a higher level of relationship when customers believe that contact with small business owner-manager was essential and valued. Relationship marketing is characterised by information exchange, increased customer retention, increased collaboration with existing customers and a better understanding of customer requirements. The next phase of small business marketing is beyond repeated sales and involve various small business networks in marketing functions.

### 7.2.3 Engagement Marketing

Small businesses relate to customers, mainly for repeated sales. Due to continual changes in customers' needs, the influence of technology and development in the market. Small business owner-managers are deliberately engaging with customers and other networks for marketing. Customers' role has evolved in marketing; customers are no longer passive buyers but are now serving as pseudo-marketers. Customers contribute and participate actively in small business marketing through customer acquisition, new product idea development, knowledge and marketing information. This section explains how small businesses access marketing resources by engaging with various networks. It seeks to answer the research question: *how engagement processes in networks promote Nigerian small business marketing*. Small business owner-managers initiate and encourage network members to participate in various ways beneficial to business marketing. Network engagement's primary objective is to motivate and empower various networks to contribute to business marketing functions beyond core economic transactions voluntarily. Small business owner-managers engage with customers by taking advantage of new technologies and social media for close and timely interaction. Zoe explains the evolution of small business marketing as relationship marketing develops from transactional marketing to engagement marketing.

*"Once customers are satisfied with the services, we include them in our database and contact them for promotions and offers whenever we have one. If they repeat purchase, we send them a feedback form". (Zoe)*

Engaged customers are customers that are satisfied with the firm's offering and become emotionally connected. Engaged customers play a vital role in small business

viral marketing by providing referrals and recommendations of business products and services. Caleb engages with customers for word-of-mouth and service improvements.

*“Once customers are happy, they tell others about the hospital, and if they are services, they require that we are not providing, they will make suggestions”. (Caleb)*

Small business owner-managers connects with network members face-to-face and on various social media platforms to actively involve them in business marketing. Ann explains how satisfied customers share product videos, pictures, feedback and reviews on social media.

*“My customers upload their photos on Facebook and Instagram, advertising my products”. (Ann)*

Through engaging with customers on social media, word-of-mouth referrals become socially amplified. The following subthemes were identified as antecedents and outcomes of Nigerian small business owner-managers engagement with networks: connectedness, involvement, participation and advocacy.

#### 7.2.3.1 Connectedness

The initial process of engagement is to establish a connection with various networks. Small business owner-managers connect with network members by establishing relational exchange and emotional bonds. Connectedness is born out of positive interactions that strengthen network members affinity. Interconnection forms overall network structures which affect relationships with extended networks. Small business owner-managers provide network members with different channels of communication and access to business information. They use social media to connect with network members in real-time and engage with various networks for new contacts and the renewal of old contacts. Reeve writes customers personalised cards for celebration and recognition.

*"I write personalised birthday and seasonal cards for my clients to make them feel we value them and their contributions to our business". (Reeve)*

The internet facilitates real-time interaction with a broad reach of people and organisations to provide rich and relevant information. The more connected network members are to the business, the higher the contribution towards business offerings and solutions. Feedback from network members assists owner-managers in marketing decisions. Ann stays connected with customers on social media through post sharing and reviews.

*"Am on Facebook and Instagram every day, liking my customer's posts and everything that keeps us closer as a family". (Ann)*

*"I try to make new posts online every other day, and I reply to my customers in real-time to make sure they are acknowledged and valued". (Mike)*

Mike use digital technologies to increase collaboration and real-time relationships with customers through advertisement, blogging, reviews, and recommendations. Small businesses are socially visible to customers on social media. Small business owner-managers regularly connect with existing customers to establish stronger relationships for marketing. Zoe provides quality service to develop trust with customers for connected relationship.

*"We respect our customers and deliver based on request. Good quality service and respect is critical in retaining customers and getting them to trust your services".*  
(Zoe)

Suppliers networks also establish connections with small business owner-managers. Daniels' suppliers introduce new products for advertisements and business expansion.

*"My suppliers bring new products for me to sell, I don't pay for them. I advertise them and increase sales". (Daniel)*

*"I don't just treat patients, and I establish connections with the children, and the parents appreciate it; by connection, I mean I befriend the children and make them happy around me". (Caleb).*

Caleb connects with patients (children) and makes them comfortable while attending to their health challenges; he sings, plays, make jokes and beats in rhythm with them. Further probing, he explained how he reads children's books and watches cartoons to connect with children. Research participants also had close relationship internally (internal networks) with employees.

*"I relate with my staff and colleagues, I know how many children they have, the progress they are making, and the challenges they are facing and share in the joy and celebrations. This act makes us family, and they know I have their interest at heart". (Caleb)*

Caleb goes beyond work and business to relate closely with staff members, making the employees valued and committed.

*"I do not just sell my products to new customers, and I try it on them, give them samples to try at home, or allow them to apply products on others". (Steve)*

Steve creates a connection with customers through product samples.

*"In trying to show our customers we care, some of my staff and I attend their special events that they have printed souvenirs to encourage them and also show our love". "Another thing we have introduced is calling our customers on the phone and listening empathically to them while they make suggestions and interest. This helps us understand them". (Zoe)*

Zoe establishes a close connection with existing customers by attending customers' social functions to celebrate with them. Small business owner-managers engage in empathic calls with customers to listen carefully to customers' interests and desires. This action creates an opportunity for small businesses to establish a close connection

*"I call my important customers often, and I keep in touch with them. I also ask them to introduce our services to their family and circle of friends". "This community is well connected, and once you connect with the right people, everyone will get to hear about you and what you are doing". (Helen)*

Helen connects with customers for word-of-mouth and recommendations. Connection with customer networks increases small business reach and provides access to a broad and diverse audience range. Small businesses also connect with other networks for shared resources, facilitating network members' participation in the business value-adding process.

#### 7.2.3.2 Involvement and Participation

Networking transforms transactional customers from passive receivers of business offerings to active participants through value-adding activities such as contributing to products and services development. When involved in business processes, network members feel secure about the business and proactively visit business sites to check new products, discuss business offerings, and provide feedback.

*"Our supplier recommends new locations for us; she is interested in what we are doing". (Peace)*

Involvement is the extent to which network members are active in business decision making. Peace supplier is involved in business expansion and profitability.

*"Most of my customers are my existing customer's friends and family, and they tell others about our products". (Daniel)*

Existing customer participation connects small businesses to potential customers granting access to extensive networks and a diverse audience. Small business owner-managers motivate customers to participate in the acquisition of new customers and new product ideas. Daniel acquires new customers through network members' interpersonal ties.

*"Once I noticed my customers are satisfied with the products, I get them to host their family and friends to try out samples and some pampering sessions free".*

(Steve)

Steve gets referrals from satisfied customers; most satisfied customers volunteer to host a pampering party to introduce friends and family to the business.

*"Referred customers are straightforward to deal with because the referee has told them so much about our services".* (Queen)

Queen explains small business networks' organic nature, whereby old customers introduced new customers to business offerings.

*"Some of the expansion in my business is based on customers request for more services. Most of my customers' relationship is beyond the transaction".* (Dorothy)

Dorothy customers make suggestions for business expansion. Customers provide business ideas for business expansion and service improvement.

*"Some of my customers saw potential in my business and invested in it, and now we are now business partners".* (Yeye)

Yeye's customers are involved in some form of partnership in the business for expansion. Involvement was identified as an antecedent to necessitates network members participation in small business marketing. Social media allows regular interactions with customers and involvement in small businesses. Customers participate in small business marketing for mutual benefits and eventually become advocates.

#### 7.2.3.3 Advocacy

Advocacy is an enduring value that transcends self-interest on the small business owner-manager and networks for mutual benefits. Small business owner-managers support and recommend network members and vice versa. When customer expectations are exceeded by the quality of business offerings and services,

customers become delighted and emotionally attached. Delighted customers develop emotional bonds with small businesses and recommend business products. Mike explain how satisfied customers influence other network members to make a purchase.

*"Most of my customers are happy with our products and delivery services. Some of them go to the point of uploading videos on social media to tell others". (Mike)*

Delighted customers are prone to communicate their delights to others through positive word-of-mouth and referrals. Satisfied customers actively recommend business products to potential customers. Steve confirms satisfied customers tell others about the business offering.

*"Our customers tell their friends and family about our products and how they can use the products. Some customers volunteer to host parties in their home and invite my team and me to come in and pamper their guest and also make sales".*

(Steve)

Information from customers familiar with business product or service offering appears authentic and diagnostic to potential customers. Caleb narrates how existing customers introduce potential customers to the business. Business partners are also advocating in small business networks.

*"We get referrals from our customers that are satisfied with our services, and they tell others about us. Even my colleagues in general practice refer their customers to us as well". (Caleb)*

*"Every new person coming into this community and needs our services to get referred even by those we have not worked for because everyone knows us here".*

(Evans)

Customer knowledge of products and usage enhance marketing communication and improve customer-to-customer support. Evans expresses how community members are delighted and readily recommend potential customers.

*"My customers don't only refer new customers to me, and they will call me to explain the new customer to me and how I can satisfy them". (Goody)*

*"These days, my customers suggest new products for my business, and they also spread positive word of mouth". (Xander)*

Goody and Xander enjoy customers referrals and information on how to satisfy the potential customer.

*"There is this customer of mine that introduces us to the whole estate, everyone in that estate use our services, and they also tell others about us". (Queen)*

A delighted customer introduces Queen to numerous customers. The role of advocacy contributes to various small business marketing, including word-of-mouth, information and knowledge sharing. Due to small business limited marketing resources, they cannot practice conventional marketing. Small business transactional marketing evolves with time into relationship marketing to establish long-term relationships with customers and ensure customers satisfaction. Ties strength in networks facilitates small business acceptance into a broader community. Through repeat encounters, customers are identified for communication, enabling small business owner-managers to understand how to satisfy customers. Satisfied customers repeat purchases, and over time, trust and commitment are established. Customer satisfaction is identified as insufficient to turn existing customers into loyal customers.

Small businesses involve various networks in business decisions to transform them into active contributors in business marketing functions. Customers are no longer passive recipients of business offerings but actively participating in marketing through the interactive value-generating process. Research participants connect with network members through different approaches to establish emotional bonds. Delighted customers are voluntarily involved in small business marketing, such as feedback, referrals, and suggestions. Nigeria, as a low-trust culture, small businesses depend on referrals and word-of-mouth of network members to market goods. Figure 9 illustrates small business marketing evolution, from transactional to relationship marketing and then engagement marketing. Research findings suggest

that small business owner-managers adopts transactional marketing in the early stages of the business process. In transactional marketing, products and services are the core of marketing, with profitability measured by customers' past value, share-of-wallet, frequency of purchase and monetary value. At the developing stage, Nigerian small businesses adopt relationship marketing for repeated sales and word-of-mouth recommendations. Small business at establishment stage adopts engagement marketing strategies to involve network members in various marketing functions.

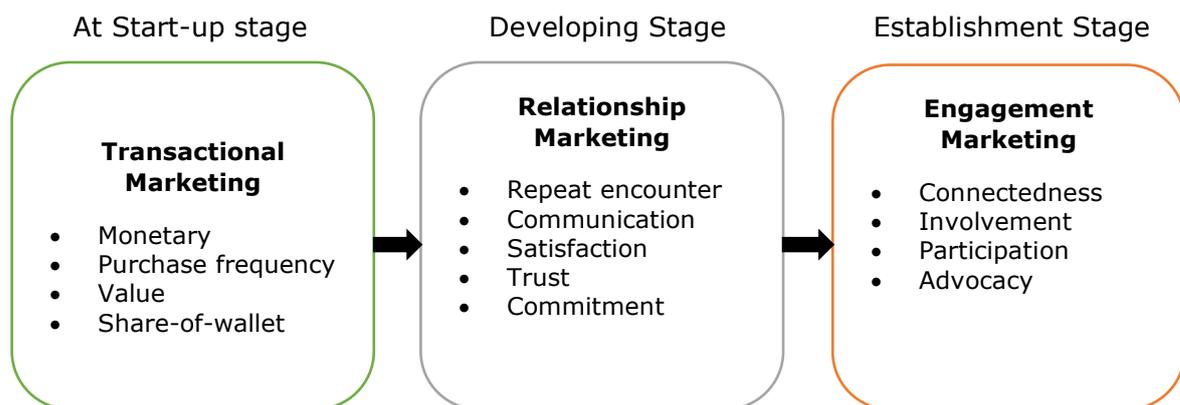


Figure 9: Evolution of Small business Marketing approaches

### 7.3 Chapter Summary

This section summarises the findings presented in chapter 6 and 7, explaining how the research questions were addressed. To answer the research question, with *whom do Nigerian small business owner-managers network, and what is the role of networks in small business marketing?* Data analysis in chapter 6 discusses small business networks to include customer's network, supplier's network, social network, internal network and business network. The identified networks contribute to various small business marketing functions, including marketing communication, recommendations, customer acquisition, product co-creation, and word-of-mouth referral. The following subthemes were identified on why Nigerian small business owner-managers engage in network activities, including market access, access to limited resources and marketing information and knowledge. *Market access:* due to small business limited orders and customer size, they tend to have a limited

impact on the market. Research participants utilised network resources to promote marketing performance. Secondly, *access to limited resources* was identified as network resources that grant small businesses access to marketing resources such as market knowledge, shared skills and ideas, finance and marketing information. Finally, small business networks grant small business *access to marketing information and knowledge*, where small business owner-managers relate with various network members to acquire marketing information, knowledge and collaboration.

To answer the second research question on how Nigerian small business owner-managers access and use social capital in networks for marketing? The formation processes of social capital in networks with the following subthemes were identified, including network interaction, network stability, the strength of network ties and network interdependence. Social capital formation processes are not linear as presented, but rather it is an interplay or iteration of relevant processes in network relationships. Figure 8 illustrates the bidirectional and iterative nature of the social capital in small business networks. Social capital in small business networks reduces transactional cost, enable knowledge sharing and co-creation.

The evolution of small business marketing is based on small business stages and peculiar marketing constraints. To answer the third research question, *how do Nigerian small business owner-managers market goods and services, and what factors influence marketing performance?* Figure 9 illustrates small business marketing development from transactional marketing to engagement marketing, including each marketing approaches, antecedents and outcomes. Small business network members are active contributors and participate in a wide range of small business marketing, including customer acquisition, customer retention, marketing information and product co-development. Figure 10 presented in Chapter 8 summarises the findings discussed in chapter 6 and 7 and answers the research question: how engagement processes in networks promote Nigerian small business marketing? Small business engagement marketing consists of small business networks, social capital formation processes, relationship marketing and engagement antecedents and outcomes.

Research participants adopt engagement marketing to reduce acquisition cost, promote network-centric product innovations and enhance post-purchase service quality. Engagement with networks improves customer satisfaction, loyalty and marketing performance. Engagement marketing is a small business marketing strategy to identify and utilise social resources in networks for marketing. It facilitates information flow among networks and motivates network members to acquire new customers, product co-creation, collaboration, feedback, and repeated sales. Engagement marketing is beyond business customers dyad relationship to include various networks such as business partners, social networks, internal networks and supplier networks. The findings identified in chapters 6 and 7 will be discussed in detail in the next chapter regarding existing literature.

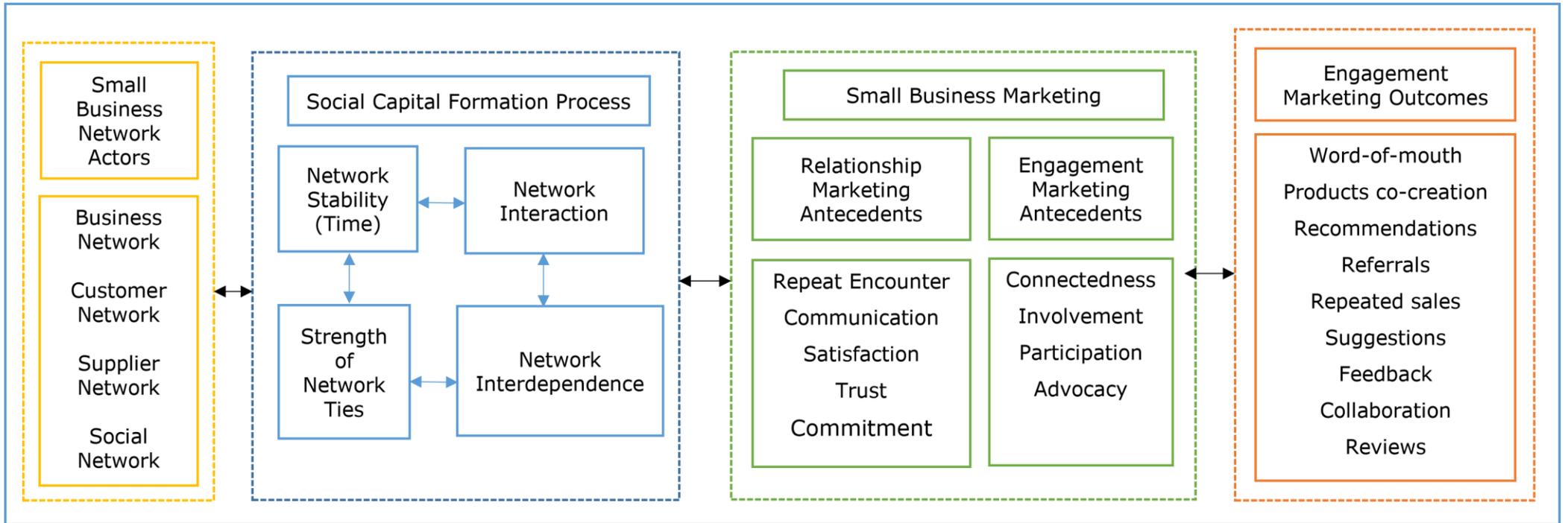


Figure 10: The processes of small business engagement marketing

Source: Author generated

## Chapter 8 – Discussion of Findings

### 8.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses and relates the research findings to reviewed literature and the conceptual framework. It seeks differences and similarities between the literature and the research findings, thus building upon the existing literature. Based on the primary categorisation of research data, Nigerian small business marketing consists of network resources (social capital), antecedents and outcome of relationship and engagement marketing. The following objectives were employed to achieve the research aim:

1. To examine various Nigerian small business networks and their roles in small business marketing.
2. To understand the processes of social capital formation and use in Nigerian small business networks for marketing.
3. To examine Nigerian small business owner-managers marketing practices and the factors that influence marketing relationships.
4. To consider how Nigerian small business owner-managers utilise social capital in networks through engagement to improve marketing performance.

The following research questions were developed to achieve the above-stated research objectives:

1. Whom do Nigerian small business owner-managers network with, and what is the role of networks in small business marketing? (Objective 1)
2. How do Nigerian small business access and use social resources in networks for marketing? (Objective 2)
3. How do Nigerian small business owner-managers market goods and services, and what factors influence marketing performance? (Objective 3)
4. How does engagement processes in networks promote Nigerian small business marketing? (Objective 4)

This chapter is structured as follows: Section 8.1 discusses various small business networks. Section 8.2 discusses the roles of networks in small business marketing, including market access, access to limited resources and access to marketing information and knowledge. In section 8.3, the research findings on social capital formation processes and use in small business marketing are discussed. Section 8.4 explains the findings on small business marketing evolution from transactional marketing to engagement marketing. Section 8.5 presents the developed research model to explain and illustrate the research findings, and finally, section 8.6 is the chapter summary.

## 8.1 Different small business networks

This section discusses Research Objective 1: To examine various small business networks and their small business marketing roles. All research participants engaged in more than four networks to market goods and services. Networking is identified as the natural way Nigerian small business owner-managers interact and participate in social and business activities. Network resources contribute to all aspects of small business marketing. Through informal, interactive and reciprocal relationships, small business owner-managers passively and proactively engage with various networks (O'Dwyer et al. 2009; Coviello and Joseph 2011). Nigerian small business owner-managers engage in network relationship for marketing due to resource requirement and small size. Network resources are identified as marketing resources for small business (O'Donnell 2011; 2014). The availability of different marketing resources available in small business networks is discussed in chapter 6 and summarised in Table 20.

## 8.2 The role of networks in small business marketing

Small business marketing constraints stimulate small business owner-managers to be innovative in building and establishing marketing relationships with network members (Miller et al. 2007; Jack et al. 2010; Wright et al. 2012). The research findings provide insights into how small businesses overcome marketing challenges by interacting and communicating in networks. The contribution of networks to small business marketing is presented in the following subthemes: *market access, access to limited resources and access to marketing information and knowledge.*

### 8.2.1 Access to market

Due to limited capacities such as fewer customers and employees, small businesses tend to have less impact in the marketplace (Carson 1985; Hill and McGowan 1999; Hill 2001; Bell et al. 2004; Jones and Rowley 2011). Nigerian small businesses employ networking to access target markets, understand the market environment and satisfy customers. Research participants networks grant access to a broader range of customers and suppliers. Networks expand product offerings and the market as small business owner-managers can quickly adapt the mode of operation and offering (Singh et al. 2008). Small business credibility in the marketplace is developed through relationship and collaboration. The use of the internet to maintain communication with network members grants Nigerian small businesses the opportunity to increase market reach through connections (Conway and Jones 2012; Shaw 2012). It also creates a communication channel of "word-of-mouth" that allows small businesses to reach the target market and promote business performance (Harrigan et al., 2012; Stokes and Nelson 2013).

### 8.2.2 Access to limited Resources

Nigerian small businesses access resources that are beyond reach in networks. They network externally and internally to access resources (Agwu and Emeti 2014; Ebitu et al. 2016) such as marketing information, finance, enhanced reputation, information and knowledge sharing (Witt 2004; McGrath and O'Toole 2013; O'Donnell 2014). Small business owner-managers access non-tangible resources such as emotional support and encouragement through networking. Social networks of family, friends and former colleagues are significant sources of resources such as finance and business opportunities (Oboh 2004; Gumel 2017).

### 8.2.3 Access to marketing information and knowledge

Small businesses are mostly owned and managed by one or two persons who perform all operational tasks and functions (Ihua 2009; Anderson and Ullah 2014). Small business owner-managers make most of the management decisions and undertake a wide range of business activities due to limited resources and the inability to employ specialists. They rarely possess all the skills and expertise required to run the firm. Networking allows small businesses access to information

and knowledge (O'Donnell 2004; 2014; Slotte-Kock and Coviello 2010). Small business owner-managers networking capabilities enable access to marketing expertise through collaborating with individuals and small businesses (Jack et al. 2008; Mitrega et al. 2012; Halinen et al. 2013). Potential customers grant small businesses access to competitors' information, ideas for new products and information on improving existing products.

On the other hand, existing customers grants provide product reviews, feedback and suggestions. Through networking, small businesses access information on market planning, thus reducing the cost of production. Existing customers and suppliers are market brokers through word-of-mouth. As small business owner-managers networking capability and capacity develops, they accumulate more network resources for marketing. Small businesses' smallness facilitates a close relationship with network members and grants easy access to market information (Sullivan-Mort et al. 2012; Halinen et al. 2013). The next section discusses the processes identified for the formation and use of social capital in small business networks.

### 8.3 Formation and use of social capital

This section discusses research objective 2 to understand social capital formation processes and use in Nigerian small business networks. The social capital formation process refers to how small business owner-managers are involved in accessing social resources in networks. Social capital consists of both network contents and network resources. Social capital is the origin and benefit of a productive and successful network relationship. The social capital theory offers insights into how social resources in networks are accessed through building relationship within social structures (Coleman 1988; Rhys 2010; Gedajlovic et al. 2013; Soetanto 2017). The fundamental proposition of social capital theory is the availability of resources within network ties (Totterman and Sten 2005; Theodoraki et al. 2017). Social resources embedded in social structures are accessed through networks of relationship (Anderson and Jack 2007; Jonsson 2015). Data analysis identified the following dynamic process perspectives to shape the formation and use of social capital in small business networks: network interaction, network stability, the strength of network ties and network interdependence.

### 8.3.1 Network Interaction

Small business owner-managers interact with various networks for information sharing, mutual understanding, building a reputation, and knowledge sharing. Previous research highlights small business owner-managers access marketing information from networks, but the processes are not very clear (Harrigan et al. 2012; O'Donnell 2014; Resnick et al. 2016). Shaw (2006) and Lee and Jones (2008) identified positive behaviours in online communication to develop the cognitive dimension of social capital and trust in networks for extensive resources. Nigerian small businesses build and maintain mutual obligation with existing customers, potential customers, suppliers, business and social networks through increased communication. They interact with various networks for resources, including product and service feedback, customers online reviews, product samples and school open day. Social media provides small business owner-managers with the ability to interact with various network actors in real-time (Sorenson et al. 2008; Hampton et al. 2009). Network interaction is the locus of value co-creation between small business owner-managers and networks.

### 8.3.2 Network Stability

Network stability is vital in social capital formation as social capital reflects goodwill over time (Bourdieu 1986; Adler and Kwon 2002). Strong ties are developed through trust, which requires a considerable amount of time and emotional investment (Sharafizad and Standing 2017). Stability is a critical dynamic factor for the development and use of social capital. Small business owner-managers are people-focused and tend to create strong ties with networks over time (Minniti 2010; Sharafizad 2014; Lefebvre et al. 2016). Nigerian small businesses invested time to build trust and develop commitment with networks to increase visibility for mutual benefits. Understanding, mutual obligation, and co-operation in networks are developed over time (Doornbosch-Akse and Van Vuuren 2019). Owner-managers maintain relationships with networks by frequently motivating and interacting with network members (Thomas and Autio 2014).

### 8.3.3 Strength of Network ties

The *strength of network tie* is defined by relationship regularity, level of maturity, degree of trust and nature of experience among network actors (Halinen et al. 2013; Johannisson 2014). The above factors determine network ties' strength and impact on networks' resources (Soetanto et al. 2018). Granovetter (1973) proposed that strong and weak ties are characterised by the amount of time, emotional intensity, intimacy and reciprocal services involved in relationships. The strength of network ties is influenced by the frequency and duration of interaction among networks (Hills et al. 2008; Anderson and Ullah 2014). The cognitive dimension of social capital, such as shared culture, languages and codes, enable small businesses to develop strong ties with networks (Inkpen and Tsang 2005; Theodoraki et al. 2017; Spigel 2017). Nigerian small business owner-managers creates new ties and reactivated old ties in relationships. The level of intimacy and frequency of interaction enables Nigerian small businesses to develop strong ties with networks.

### 8.3.4 Network Interdependence

Small business owner-managers attached meanings to relationships with expectations and implications to business profitability. Network interdependence is the extent to which network members share tangible and intangible resources by pursuing mutual strategic goals (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998; Miles and Snow 2007). Small business networks consist of individuals and organisations collaborating for common goals, reciprocal exchanges, shared values and objectives (Thomas and Autio 2013; Spigel 2017). Nigerian small business owner-managers engage in joint problem-solving, co-creation of new products and idea validation with various network members. The next section discusses the evolution of small business marketing.

## 8.4 Small Business Marketing Evolution

This section presents how social resources in networks influence small business marketing. It attempts to answer the research question: How do Nigerian small business owner-managers market goods and services and the factors that influence marketing performance. Marketing in small businesses continually evolves in response to new products and market demands to satisfy customers and long-term

profitability. Small businesses require different marketing resources at various business stages. Small business marketing practices directly influence business performance and growth (Verhees and Meulenbergh 2004; Gilmore et al. 2011). Small business owner-managers adopt different marketing strategies to overcome resource limitations and remain relevant in the market. After the initial start-up stage, transactional marketing no longer provides the required marketing resources to sustain small businesses. Owner-managers turn to network relationships for repeated sales and profitability.

Small business marketing in response to customers' changing demands and the business environment builds a long-term relationship with various networks. As small businesses develop and overcome the liability of newness, resource requirements vary. Family, friends and co-workers are less likely to provide the required marketing resources (Soetanto and Jack 2013). At this point, small businesses develop a broader base of contacts for more resources, and network members become willing to exchange resources (Hampton et al. 2009; Jonsson 2015). Small businesses are flexible and adaptable in relating to network members. Unlike customer relationship management in large organisations, small businesses carry out most customer relationship through face-to-face interaction (Stokes and Wilson 2010) and on social media (McGowan and Durkin 2002; Harrigan et al. 2012).

In response to the changing small business marketing requirements at development stages, small business marketing evolves beyond creating awareness, repeated purchase, satisfying customers and customer retention to collaborating with customers networks and other networks (Sashi 2012). Small business marketing evolution can be viewed as the continuous development and maintenance of network relationships to support small business marketing requirements.

#### 8.4.1 Transactional Marketing

Small businesses first customers are mostly family members, friends and co-workers. The marketing strategy adopted at the start-up stages is primarily transactional, focusing on customers' monetary value, wallet share, and purchase frequency (Kumar 2015; Pansari and Kumar 2017). Transactional marketing is small business owner-managers initial approach to acquire customers and introduce products and services to the market (Wierenga and Soethoudt 2010). Transactional customers had a minimal personal relationship with small businesses. At this stage, customers

are susceptible to price and prone to deals and offers. Interaction with customers is minimal and limited to only transactions with little or no relational exchange (Sashi 2009). Transactional customers are the source of relationship marketing. Enduring satisfaction turns transactional customers into satisfied customers and eventually engaged customers. Networking with existing customers is closely aligned with relationship marketing. As the business develops, small business marketing shifts focus from value-in-exchange to value-in-use and co-creation of value. The next section discusses the small business marketing approach adopted after transactional marketing.

#### 8.4.2 Relationship Marketing

With the change in customer demands, Nigerian small businesses evolve from transactional marketing to relational marketing for a long-term continuous relationship (Grönroos 2018). Small business owner-managers utilise relationship marketing approaches to establish long-term relationships with existing customers to acquire and mobilise external marketing resources (Parry and Westhead 2017). Relationship marketing suggests that small business marketing requires relational competence to understand customer needs and meet customers' requirements (Helander and Ulkuniemi 2006). Research participants sought out strategies to develop and manage enduring relationships with customers and are more intentional about marketing by delivering superior customer value. Nigerian small businesses establish positive relationships with customers as a strategy for repeated sales, future trade, credibility in the marketplace and positive word-of-mouth (Parry and Westhead 2017). Through personal networking, face-to-face interaction and the use of the internet and technologies, owner-managers build and develop close relationships with customers (Stokes and Wilson 2010). Small businesses at the developing stage strive to exceed customers' expectations, thereby creating positive emotions, which translates into long-term relationships (Sashi 2012).

Small businesses long-term relationship with customers grants access to information and knowledge based on trust (Hultman and Shaw 2003; Gilboa et al. 2019). Trusted relationships are built through satisfactory experiences and expectations (Ahmed and Capretz 2007; Tzokas et al. 2015; Gilboa et al. 2019). Through trust and commitment, a positive relationship with customers is established for outcomes such

as customer loyalty and word-of-mouth (Morgan and Hunt 1994; Pansari and Kumar 2017). Relationship marketing involves potential and existing customers networks. Relationship marketing is a relational opportunity of transitioning from value-exchange relationship to value-in-use relationship (Moss Kanter 2001; Tzokas et al. 2015; Payne and Frow 2017). The benefits of relationship marketing to small businesses include securing future trade, credibility in the marketplace, word-of-mouth and recommendations. Small business owner-managers adopt the following relationship marketing approaches: repeat encounter, communication (interaction) and satisfaction (competence), trust and commitment.

#### 8.4.2.1 Repeat Encounters

Contacting existing and potential customers before and after-sales is viewed as repeated encounters. The small business owner-managers had repeated encounters with customers and other networks to strengthen emotional, psychological and physical investment (Chaffey et al. 2009). Small businesses have direct contacts with customers through face-to-face meetings, phone calls, and social media use. Various approaches are used to contact network members, including offering initial free services, free product samples to introduce potential customers to products and services. Internet and social media provide quick and accessible opportunities to contact customers. Small business owner-managers updates business Facebook and Instagram pages to have a frequent and real-time encounter with networks. Research participants continue to build rapport with customers through regular and open dialogue to reduce uncertainty and increase understanding in relationships (Dwivedi 2015; Kumar and Pansari 2016).

#### 8.4.2.2 Communication and Satisfaction

Communication and satisfaction between small businesses and customer network is the core of building relationship marketing. Communication at this stage is a two-way interaction between the customers and owner-manager. Small business owner-managers use various ways to communicate with customers to promote products and services (Reijonen 2010; Durkin and Kerr 2016). They inform customers about the value of the products and services. In response, customers provide feedback on product experience. Existing customers communicate with extended networks about products and services if they are satisfied. Communication among network members leads to co-created and customised products (Ruokonen et al. 2008; Parry and

Westhead 2017). Communication among network members allows access to information about products and services, customer's queries online, reach the mutual understanding, reciprocity to validate trust, and builds a reputation (Armstrong et al. 2014; Gilboa et al. 2019). Customer satisfaction is an antecedent to loyalty. Loyal customers are prone to provide positive word-of-mouth and product reviews. Satisfied customers are advocates of business offerings and naturally communicate their delight to other network members (Sheth 2017).

#### 8.4.2.3 Trust and Commitment

Trust and commitment between small businesses and networks are critical in developing relational marketing. Trust is the confidence placed on an individual or organisation demonstrated in the willingness to cooperate (Palmatier et al. 2006; Patulny and Svendsen 2007; Swanson and Thorsson 2015). Through small business owner-managers efforts to deliver high-quality products, customised services that express care and concern for customer-specific needs, trust is established (Dagger and O'Brien 2010; Negi and Ketema 2013; Shararfizad and Standling 2017). Trust leads to commitment; small business owner-managers increased customers commitment and loyalty through trust-building relationships. The depth of customer's attachment towards a firm to maintain a meaningful relationship is based on the level of commitment (Moorman et al. 1992; Fullerton 2003; Palmatier 2008).

Trusted and committed relationship leads to brand awareness, reduced production costs and future repeated sales (Kelly 2007; Nwakanma et al. 2007; Zhang et al. 2016). Trust is essential in establishing and continuing a cooperative relationship with network members. Trust among network members overcome resource limitations, develop mutual support and resource exchange (Alam 2012; Swanson and Thorsson 2015; Izogo et al. 2016). Nigerian small business owner-managers continue to increase the trust level with customers by engaging in productive and regular communication. Small business relationship marketing benefits include understanding customer requirements and expectations, direct contact with customers, customers referrals, improved product quality, feedback, suggestions, and customer loyalty. In line with Leventhal and Zineldin (2006), referrals are a crucial source of new customers as customers acquired through recommendation tend to stay longer with the business.

### 8.4.3 Small Business Engagement Marketing

The concepts of networking and social capital provide an explanation for engagement marketing in small businesses. Small business engagement marketing practice is characterised by collaborative action, mutual and relational exchanges among networks. Engagement marketing motivates multiple networks to participate and contribute to small business marketing (Brodie et al. 2011; Vivek et al. 2012; Harmeling et al. 2017). Nigerian small businesses adopt engagement marketing approaches to develop innovative capabilities and long-lasting competitive advantage. The following antecedents and outcomes provide the conceptual model for developing engagement marketing in Nigerian small business networks: connectedness, involvement, participation and advocacy. Engagement marketing exists in a dynamic, iterative process among networks for co-creative value. Network diversity is essential in small business networks as diversification enables the owner-manager to access various marketing resources and skills at different business stages (Brodie et al. 2011; Batjargal et al. 2013; Jonsson 2015).

#### 8.4.3.1 Connectedness

Connectedness is viewed as the way Nigerian small businesses initiate a relationship with various networks. Data analysis identified temporal connection and relational connection in small business networks. Temporal connection emerged from past relationships with potential future relationships such as family members, old friends, former colleagues and co-workers (Anderson et al. 2005). The relational connections emerged from service or product experience and network activities such as attending business network, trade fairs and referred relationships (Archpru and Chandler 2011). Nigerian small business owner-managers provide interactive content on websites, Facebook, Instagram pages face-to-face contacts to connect with various networks at different levels for resource contribution and new connections (Hollebeek et al. 2016; Brodie et al. 2019). Connectedness influences the decisions of extended network relationships. Customers satisfaction and emotional connectedness serve as antecedents for engagement. The level of connectedness differs based on network members' desire and involvement with the business (Kumar and Pansari 2016).

#### 8.4.3.2 Involvement

Network involvement is the network members' level of active interest and personal relevance to the business based on perceived importance (Zaichkowsky 1985; Brodie et al. 2011; Kumar 2013). Nigerian small business owner-managers utilise different approaches to stimulate network members voluntary involvement in small business marketing through sharing gifts, dialogue, product samples and free medical services (Chandler and Lusch 2015; Jaakkola et al. 2015). The consumer value perspective suggests consumer motivations towards a brand based on the value expected (Holbrook 2006). Small business owner-managers involved network members in business processes by providing relevant, valuable information for decision-making. Previous research suggests that effective communication reduces uncertainty and risk perception and facilitates consumers' involvement in the business (Mohr and Spekman 1994; Malthouse et al. 2013; Lusch and Vargo 2017). Network members are involved in small business marketing in various emotional and behavioural dimensions (Malthouse et al. 2013).

#### 8.4.3.3 Participation

Participation was identified as a networks involvement level in small business product or services co-development and existing product improvement (Kumar and Pansari 2016). Grönroos and Voima (2013) suggest co-creation as a function of the interaction between owner-manager and networks for mutual satisfaction and resource sharing. Satisfied network members participate in small business marketing and are emotionally connected to the business. Through interaction, network members co-create products and services, provide feedback and suggestions.

#### 8.4.3.4 Advocacy

Advocacy is one of the critical outcomes of engagement when network actors attain a degree of trust. Referrals are the results of advocacy; referred customers are more profitable and naturally engage with business (Sashi 2012; Kumar 2013). Network members such as customers with an emotional relationship with the business generally spend more on the business offerings, are enthusiastic advocates of the firm, spread positive word-of-mouth, promote the business to new customers and protect the business from critics (Giovanis et al. 2015; Sashi et al. 2019). Aftersales

reviews and postings on social media are instrumental in drawing potential customers and influencing market decisions. Social media had a direct impact on the network community. Small business marketing evolution provides more understanding to small business marketing shifts and the factors that influence the transformation, such as business stages, resources constraints and different marketing approaches.

## 8.5 Research Model

The research model (Figure 11) shows social capital processes and small business marketing evolution influenced by different stages of small businesses and resource constraints. The research model presents engagement as a marketing strategy and practice for small businesses. Small business networks are for the creation and maintenance of a long-term relationship with network members. Following previous research, the enabling factors for small business marketing include the role of network relationships, small business networking capabilities and the use of information technology (Gonzalez et al. 2014; McKeever et al. 2014; Hardwick and Anderson 2019). The social capital theory explains the formation and use of social capital in small business marketing (Liao and Welsch 2003; Jack et al. 2008; Maurer et al. 2011). Based on Nahapiet and Ghoshal's (1998) study of the social capital process perspective, a high level of trust and shared norms of reciprocity increases the exchange of resources and information in networks. The social capital formation process in networks comprises four constructs: network interaction, the strength of network ties, network interdependence and network stability. These factors influence the development and flow of social resources in networks of relationships.

The social capital formation process is an iterative and interactive process that is proactive and reactive. Network interdependence enables small businesses to initiate relationships based on social resources (Jones 2015; Jonsson 2015). Stability is the time required to nurture relationships to access goodwill. Time allows network members to understand each other based on shared norms and goals for mutual benefits (Bizzi and Langley 2012). The strength of network ties determines the level of intimacy and emotional connectedness among network members (Granovetter 1985; Johannisson 1990). Effective communication and satisfaction facilitate trust-building for value exchange relationships. Trust is identified as a critical element in

relationship marketing as it acts as an antecedent for relational governance to ensure reciprocity and non-opportunist behaviours (Morgan and Hunt 1994; Vivek et al. 2012).

The engagement processes comprise of the following antecedents: connectedness, involvement, participation and advocacy. Nigerian small business owner-managers connects with various networks to identify and understand different engagement behaviours. Network interaction allows connection with network members for a higher level of participation in business marketing. Network involvement is based on members' inherent needs, values and interests. Some network members are more involved in small business marketing than others, depending on the expected value. Research participants used different strategies to engage with networks by providing collaborative activities to enhance networks participation and involvement.

Network participation in small business marketing is integral to engagement marketing and precede engagement behaviours (Hollebeek et al. 2016; Harmeling et al. 2017). Customer engagement goes beyond purchases to involvement in co-producing and delivering business services. Product co-creation offers small business owner-managers the opportunity to establish valuable relationships with networks. The intense participation and involvement of network members in business offerings and marketing is engagement. Nigerian small business owner-managers shifted marketing focus at the development stages from customer acquisition to facilitating and motivating network members to become pseudo-marketers and contribute to marketing functions.

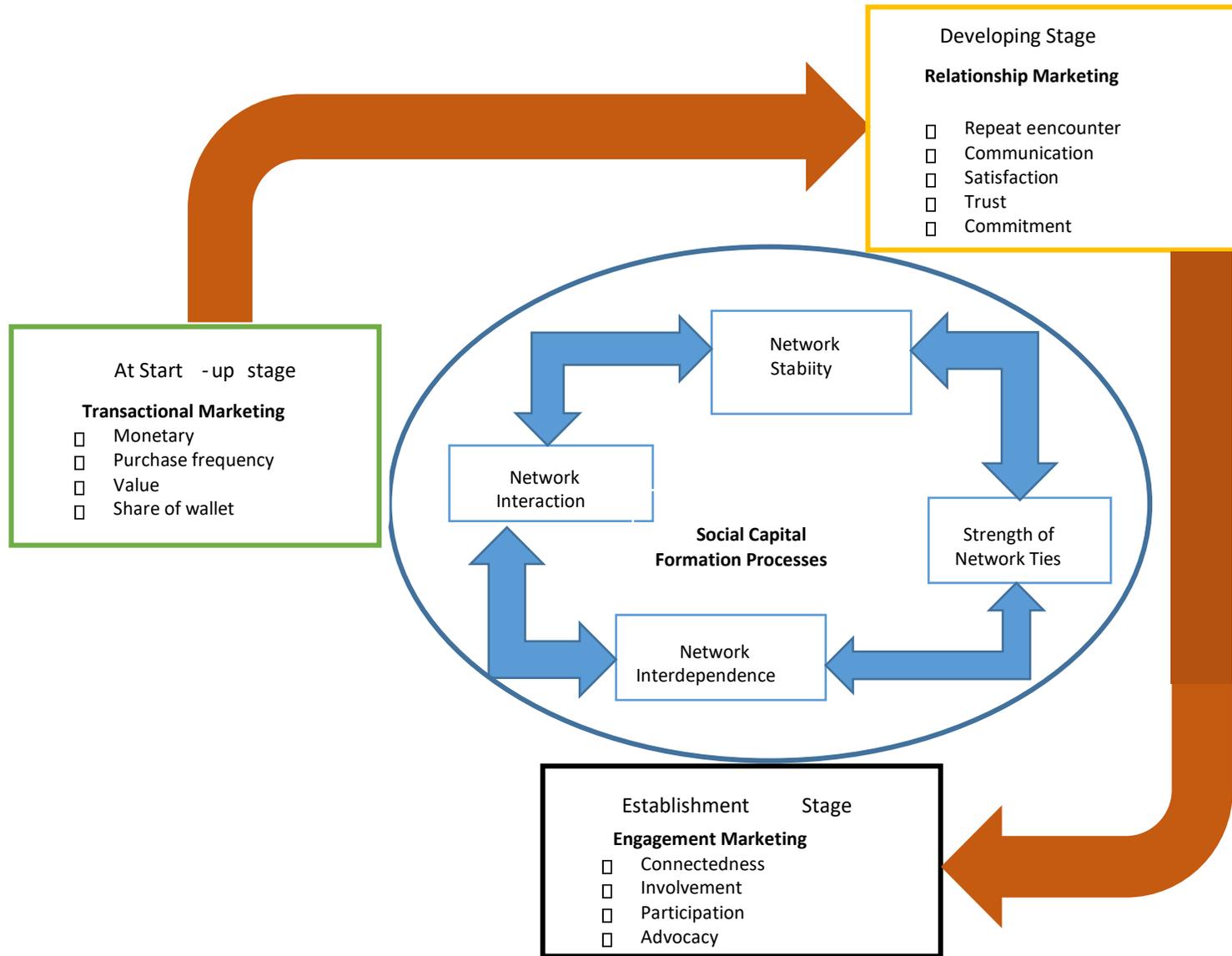


Figure 11: Research model for small business engagement marketing

## 8.6 Chapter Summary

The formation of social capital in networks and engagement marketing through frequent communication networks has been explained above. Small businesses develop network relationships in various ways depending on the context and organisational environment. In Nigerian small businesses, relationships are mostly initiated through referrals and recommendations and established through competence and credibility. Relationships developed through emotional commitment and relational exchanges are sustained by connectedness, involvement, participation and advocacy.

Small business owner-managers are highly immersed in networks to generate novel marketing ideas and opportunities. Social media enables rapid and frequent communication among networks. The following small engagement marketing outcomes were identified: networks resource contributions to small business marketing such as knowledge, skills, providing feedback and suggestions, product co-creation and collaboration. The interpretivist approach adopted allowed the researcher to capture research participants' experience and examine network processes and engagement outcomes for small business marketing. The research model in Figure 11 is not universal but rather a research model showing how Nigerian small businesses access social capital in networks for engagement marketing.

## Chapter 9 - Conclusions

### 9.0 Introduction

This study explores Nigerian small business owner-managers engagement in various networks to improve marketing performance. It examines multiple Nigerian small business owner-managers networks for marketing and explains how small businesses engage and access marketing resources through networking. Social capital is identified as a marketing asset usefully employed in small business marketing. The social constructionism research approach was adopted to explore networks and engagement processes in Nigerian small business owner-managers entrepreneurial narratives. The social capital theory, process theory and relationship marketing with the fundamental concepts of trust and commitment were employed to achieve the research aim and objectives.

Data analysis identified four dynamic factors that influence the formation and use of social capital in networks. The evolution of small business marketing approaches illustrates Nigerian small business owner-managers engagement with various networks at different business stages. This chapter is structured as follows to present research findings by reflecting on the research objectives. Section 9.1 reflects on how the researcher attempts to address the research objectives. Section 9.2 discusses the contributions of the study to the body of knowledge. Section 9.3 presents recommendations and further make suggestions for future research. Section 9.4 discusses and highlights research limitations and challenges, and finally, section 9.5 presents the thesis summary.

### 9.1 Reflection on Research Objectives

Nigerian small business owner-managers engage with various networks to improve marketing performance. This section summarises how the research objectives were achieved.

**Objective 1:** The first objective examines various Nigerian small business networks and their small business marketing roles. The following research question: *With whom do Nigerian small business owner-managers network with, and what is the*

*role of networks in small business marketing?* Small businesses utilised various networks, including potential customer networks, existing customer networks, supplier networks, business networks and social networks for marketing. Nigerian small business owner-managers utilised social resources in networks to improve marketing at different stages of business. Three main marketing resources identified in networks includes access to market, access to limited resources and access to market information and knowledge. Nigerian small business owner-managers network naturally during daily business activities and are flexible in networking approaches.

Networks extend small business access to marketing resources by tapping into external sources (Slotte-Kock and Coviello 2010; Jack et al. 2010; Mitrega et al. 2012). Potential customers grants access to information about competitors and market updates (Harris et al. 2012). Information gathered from potential customers also enable owner-managers to understand business offerings' suitability to the target market. Networking is a low-cost approach to win and keep customers and other networks (Gulati et al. 2011; O'Donnell 2014). Existing customer networks provide marketing resources such as positive word-of-mouth, recommendation, repeated sales and information about business offerings.

Supplier networks grant small businesses access to information on market competitors, new product offerings, brand name and reputation. Business and social networks enable small businesses to overcome low impact in the market and grant access to resources including partnership, collaboration, word-of-mouth recommendations and financial assistance (Slotte-Kock and Coviello 2010; Sullivan-Mort et al. 2012; Lans et al. 2015). Internal networks contributions to small businesses include business opportunity identification, creative idea generations, and sharing marketing ideas and experiences.

**Objective 2:** The second research objective was to understand social capital formation processes and use in Nigerian small business networks for marketing. It sought to answer the following research question: *How do Nigerian small businesses access and use social resources in networks for marketing?* Nigerian small business owner-managers are actively involved in networking and proactively access marketing resources in networks. The social capital process perspective enhances

the understanding of factors that influence the formation and utilisation of social capital in networks (Hitt et al. 2002; Arregle et al. 2007; Doornbosch-Akse and Van Vuuren 2019). Process theory was adapted to understand the time required to establish and maintain trust and generate strong ties among network members (Willem and Buelens 2007; Rhys 2010). Although research participants were not aware of their practices, social capital formation processes were identified as follow:

**Network interaction:** Network interactions is the level of communication between network actors. The cognitive and relational dimension of social capital facilitates interaction among network members. Interaction enables small businesses to acquire knowledge and resources available in networks (Jaakkola and Alexander 2014). Network interaction includes products or services feedback, product reviews and specific activities, such as product sampling, open days and free medical tests. Social resources available in networks are accessed through interaction over a period.

**Network stability:** Stability is the time required in the development of social capital in networks of relationship. Time improves clarity and visibility of mutual obligations among network members (Misztal 1996). It allowed for the development of trust and shared norms in networks (Hitt et al. 2002). Stability considers the network process and how relationship evolve. Small business networks are dynamic relationships constituting interactive activities among members and changing through time (Bizzi and Langley 2012; Moroz and Hindle 2012). Networking is a logical explanation of causal relationships between network members overtime to capture change and access resources. Both strong and weak ties in networks are developed and managed over time.

**Strength of network ties:** Small businesses require both strong and weak ties in networks for marketing as different ties defines relationship quality (Granovetter 1973; Johannisson 1990; Anderson and Jack 2002; Jack et al. 2008). The strength of network ties is the interconnection level among network members. Bonding (tightly knitted ties) and bridging (loosely knitted ties) social capital facilitates shared norms and access to social resources. This research confirms social capital as the glue that binds relationships and lubricates network processes (Anderson and Jack 2002; Jansson 2007; Jones 2015). The strength of ties influences accesses to the

type and value of resources available in networks. Frequent interaction, emotional connectedness, degree of trust, and interdependence among network members influence network ties strength. However, the evolution of tie strength from weak to strong and vice versa depends on the business stage and availability of social resources in networks.

**Network interdependence:** Nigerian small business owner-managers attach meanings to relationships when there are expectations and mutual obligations. Interdependence among network members allows access to tangible and intangible resources available in networks (Laud et al. 2015). Small businesses depend on network resources from suppliers, customers, internal and social networks. Network structures facilitate interaction, and a high level of interdependence drives the formation and use of social capital (Doornbosch-Akse and Van Vuuren 2019). The research findings confirm that small business networks facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit (Anderson and Jack 2002; Hardwick and Anderson 2019). Interdependence is a function of the joint and shared interest among network members to promote idea validation and collaboration.

**Objective 3:** The third objective examines Nigerian small business owner-managers marketing practices and the factors that influence marketing relationships. To address research objective three, the researcher sought to answer the following question: *How do Nigerian small business owner-managers market goods and services and what factors influence marketing performance?* The evolution of the small business marketing approach is the strategy small businesses adopt for marketing. Small businesses are more concerned with introducing business products and services to potential customers for purchase at the start-up stage, mainly through transactional marketing (Wierenga and Soethoudt 2010). Due to increasing customers' need and business development, small businesses evolves to relational marketing (relationship marketing) to satisfy customers for repeated sales, word-of-mouth recommendation and long-term relationships (Palmatier et al. 2009; Sheth 2015).

Nigerian small business owner-managers deliver customer value and satisfaction to retain customers (Zhang et al. 2016; Shararfizad and Standling 2017). Trust and

commitment are the key components of relationship marketing in establishing and maintaining relationships with networks (Izogo et al. 2016). As small businesses overcome newness liability, they engage network members in value-added marketing activities such as product co-creation and collaboration (Haemeling et al. 2016). Engagement is identified as the evolution of relationship marketing with trust and commitment as the antecedents (Pansari and Kumar 2017). Engagement in small business networks extends beyond customers to include internal networks, suppliers' networks and business networks (Brodie et al. 2019). Nigerian small business owner-managers engage with various networks in diverse interactions and resource integration (Chandler and Lusch 2015; Jaakkola et al. 2015). Social media reduces time and space constraints associated with interactions among network members and expands the connectivity scope. Engagement marketing in small business is the owner-managers deliberate effort to motivate, empower and relate with various networks beyond monetary transactions to include direct and indirect marketing contribution such as repeated purchase, collaboration, referral, feedback, and suggestions (Schmitt et al. 2011; Harmeling et al. 2017).

**Objective 4:** The fourth objective considers how Nigerian small business owner-managers utilise social capital in networks through engagement to promote marketing performance. To address research objective four, the researcher sought to answer the following question: *How does engagement processes in networks improve Nigerian small businesses marketing?* Previous researches in engagement marketing are mainly on large organisations (Chandler and Lusch 2015; Kumar et al. 2016; Hollebeek et al. 2016; 2018; Li et al. 2017). The focus of engagement marketing is on the dyad relationship between organisations and customer engagement. Small businesses engage different network actors in various marketing functions.

The research model in Figure 11 explains social capital formation in networks and the evolution of small business engagement marketing. The research model enhances the understanding of Nigerian small business owner-managers engagement with various networks to access marketing resources. It extends our knowledge of whom small business owner-managers network with, how small businesses access social resources in networks and the evolution of small business marketing from transactional marketing to engagement marketing. Engagement

marketing is inherently embedded in the networks, changes in the network process through trust, involvement, and commitment. The research findings further explain the conceptual and theoretical concepts of engagement by identifying the iterative nature and social resources in small business networks. The analysis of the definition of engagement marketing proffered by small business owner-managers links social capital theory and relationship marketing theory to develop an exploratory model of small business engagement marketing.

The conceptual domain of engagement extends from one centred primarily on customer-business engagement (Alexander et al. 2018; Reinartz and Berkmann 2018) to include various networks. The effectiveness of network engagement depends on a small business ability to identify and utilise network resources by relinquishing control for collaboration and participation among network members (Hollebeek et al. 2016). Figure 12 explains small business marketing's evolution from one primarily on a long-term customer-centric relationship (relationship marketing) to retain focal customer and motivate future and repeated sales. By adopting the social constructivism research paradigm, this study refined the initial conceptual framework in chapter 4 based on Chandler and Lusch (2015) and Storbacka et al. (2016) conceptual works to show the evolution of small business marketing. It further presents relationship marketing and the extension of customer engagement marketing to include multiple networks in small business marketing. Engagement marketing involves multiple networks, including customers, suppliers, internal, social and business networks. It shifts the focus from economic transactions with the focal customers to identify and leverage increased network resources for various marketing functions. Multiple networks grant small businesses access to a wide variety of social resources to improve marketing performance.

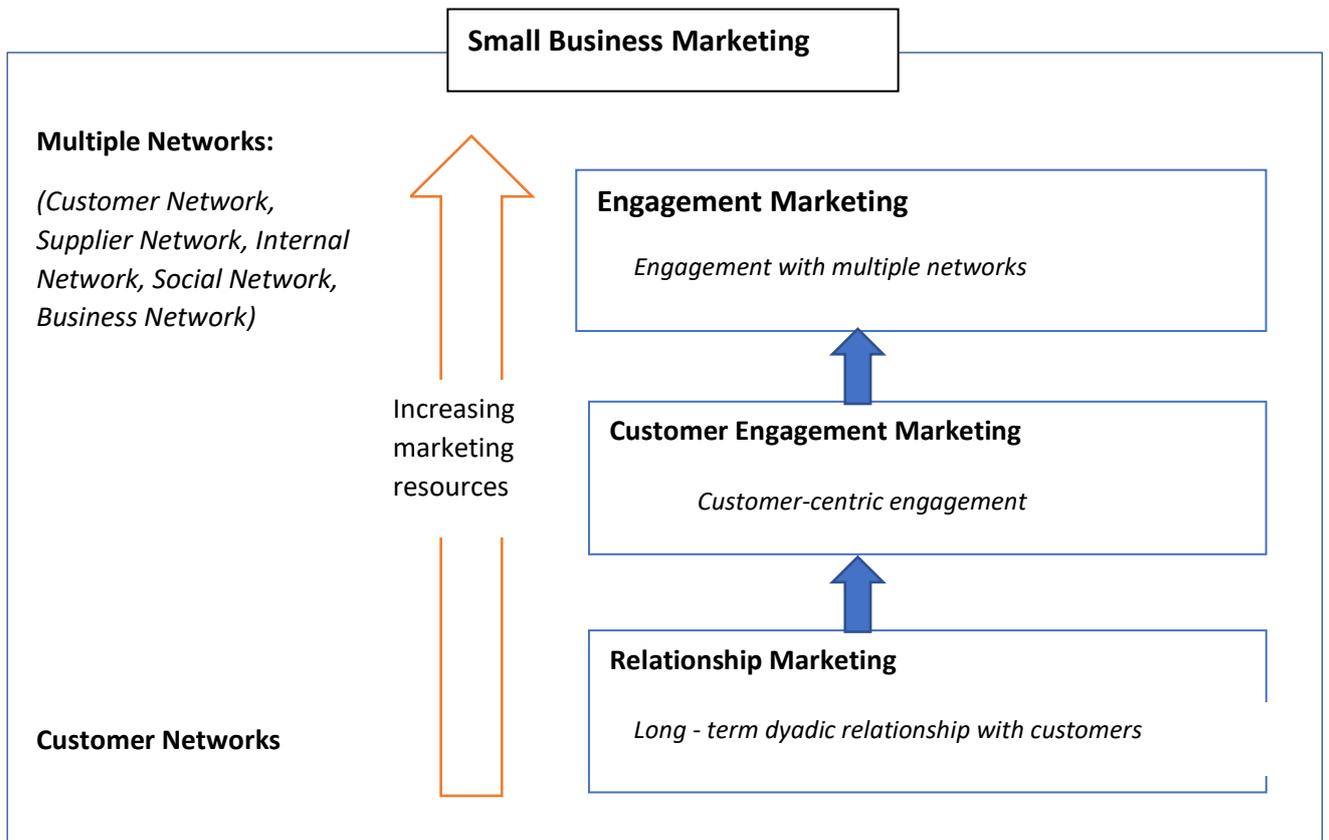


Figure 12: Evolution of Small business marketing

## 9.2 Contribution to the body of knowledge

The findings from data collected through participant observation and semi-structured interviews of 32 small business owner-managers in the South-South geopolitical zone in Nigeria are presented and discussed in chapter 6 and 7. The research findings presented in chapter 8 discussed how Nigerian small businesses access social capital in networks to engage various networks in small business marketing. The application of social capital theory, network theory, and engagement theory as underpinning concepts enables the illustration of antecedents, processes, and small business engagement outcomes. This study explores the dynamics of engagement among different small business networks for marketing. It adapts Storbacka et al. (2016) conceptual research by identifying the dynamic and iterative nature of engagement and clarifying social capital formation processes in small business networks. The study contribution is divided into three sub-sections: contribution to theory, contribution to methods and contribution to practice.

### 9.2.1 Contribution to Theory

The research findings provide an insightful explanation of engagement processes in Nigerian small businesses. It develops an explanatory research model that elaborates on engagement marketing involving different networks. While the understanding and dynamics of engagement is well acknowledged, empirical studies have focused on the dyadic perspective (customer-to-business) (Vivek et al. 2012; Kumar and Pansari 2016; Hollebeek et al. 2016). The domain of customer engagement marketing is broadened beyond customers to include various networks in small business marketing. It empirically explores small business marketing practices and generates insight into effective engagement, antecedents, processes, and engagement outcomes among multiple networks. The processes of engagement evidence Brodie et al. (2011) series of aggregated states of increased closeness and significance of cognition as networks interact over time in a committed relationship. The illustration of small business marketing evolution from the start-up stage through the developmental stage shows how engagement ameliorates small business limited resources and different resource requirements at each small business development stage.

Social capital process perspective and engagement processes entailing the dynamic process of social capital formation is employed to explain the contribution of small business marketing engagement empirically. This study's novelty lies in explaining the process and use of social capital in small business engagement marketing. It further explores and develops the concept of engagement as a much stronger network relationship to involve various networks in marketing. Firstly, the research findings extend the engagement literature by exploring engagement in small business networks in the context of marketing, a gap in small business marketing. It offers an understanding of social resources in small business networks for marketing.

The research findings further illustrate engagement marketing as a dynamic dyadic interactive process that evolves in relationship rather than economic interaction. Engagement marketing in small businesses involves connection, participation, involvement, and network advocacy in a committed and long-term relationship. Previous studies focus on the contribution of networks to small businesses in developed countries with limited research on the process of accessing social capital in networks. This work adds to what we know about the nature and process of

networks as a marketing activity and further account for the roles and use of network resources in a limited resource context to fill some gaps in the literature by presenting the process of social capital formation and use.

### 9.2.2 Contribution to Methods

This study provides empirical support for the theoretical propositions on engagement marketing in a small business context. It enhances the understanding of the role of network members in small business marketing. Through networking and social capital concepts, the processes of engagement marketing in small business emerged. Adopting a qualitative research approach provides sufficient data for meaningful analysis and in-depth understanding of the social capital formation and use (Hakanen 2014). The research findings demonstrate the social constructionism paradigm's usefulness to understand small business networks and owner-managers experiences (Patton 2002).

Moreover, the concept of engagement has been studied theoretically and conceptually (Reinartz and Berkman 2018; Vivek et al. 2018; Brodie et al. 2019) but with limited empirical study. This research empirically studies the engagement process of Nigerian small business marketing. It explains how engagement is built on trust and commitment in network relationships. Networks increase closeness through interaction over time and result in a committed and collaborative relationship. The research findings empirically confirm small business owner-managers access network resources to improve marketing performance. The social capital formation process demonstrates how small businesses develop a long-term relationship with networks for marketing resources. The engagement antecedents: connectedness, involvement, participation, and advocacy explains the small business engagement marketing process.

### 9.2.3 Contribution to Practice

There has been increased interest by organisations in customer engagement over the last decade. Large organisations provide platforms for customer engagements. Small businesses maximise social resources in networks for marketing. Moreover, small businesses engage network members for extensive marketing functions other than

repeated purchase. Engagement marketing represents new and exciting research. The proposed research model provides insights for further research and empirical data to adapt engagement marketing in small businesses effectively. It contributes to small business practice by demonstrating social capital formation processes and small business engagement marketing. Small business owner-managers experiences of engagement process in marketing explain how social capital process perspective leads to relational marketing. Practically, this study builds on the research participants' actual experiences to explain how engagement works in practice. Small business owner-managers should note how the social investment of time and interaction increase inter-personal knowledge and shared cognitions for mutual benefits. Engagement marketing includes all networks contributions towards small business marketing functions. Small business owner-managers identify and engage networks through *connectedness*. Network members *participate in businesses* by providing feedback, facilitating product co-creation and *advocacy* through positive word-of-mouth.

For policymaker, the research findings demonstrate the need for support agencies in Nigeria to increase the awareness and understanding of social capital and the contribution of engagement to small business marketing. The government should organise training and mentoring schemes for small business owner-managers to encourage using the proposed research model to establish network relationships and access social resources in networks. This study explains networking as a long-term social process of identifying common interest and values, accessing resources and information. Therefore, small business owner-managers should focus on building long-term marketing perspective networks. Finally, the research findings enable the researcher to develop an empirical model for engagement in Nigerian small business marketing. Further research is required to test the proposed research model in other contexts and developing countries.

### 9.3 Recommendations

This section presents recommendations on how engagement contribute to Nigerian small business marketing. Research findings indicate that small businesses are increasingly aware of engagement as a practical marketing approach. This study recommends the adoption of engagement marketing processes by Nigerian small

business owner-managers. The recommendations are subdivided into three sections: recommendations for practice, recommendations for policy and further research

### 9.3.1 Recommendations for Practice

The following recommendations are considered useful for small business owner-managers to adopt for engagement marketing. Nigerian small business owner-managers should not focus on short-term marketing but rather a broader view into long-term relational exchange relationship for marketing resources. Owner-managers should align the perception of engagement with various networks, not just the customers, to convert network members into business advocates and co-creators of value. Small business owner-managers can create a natural and real-time opportunity for networks to interact and share views through feedback and suggestions. As customers are no longer passive buyers of products and services, small business owner-managers should motivate customers to participate in product co-creation and value proposition. Trust and commitment are required for a relational exchange. Small business owner-managers should aim at establishing trust with network actors through credibility and competence in business offerings. The research findings explain small business access to marketing resources; therefore, the Nigerian government and other stakeholders should organise trade-fairs and conferences where small business owner-managers are exposed to other businesses and customers for connection and relationship. Training and talks on how small businesses can access network resources by applying the proposed research model should be made available.

### 9.3.2 Recommendations for Further Research

Though the research aim, and objectives have been addressed, further research is required to enhance the growing body of knowledge in small business engagement marketing. Purposive sampling was adopted, where research participants were selected based on researchers' understanding of participants' networking experiences. Data generated provide a detailed categorisation of engagement marketing for small businesses that participated in the research. Qualitative research allowed the researcher to gather in-depth and insightful data in the context of small businesses. The research design resulted in inevitable trade-offs, which could limit the research findings. Further research should:

- Explore the dynamic nature of the engagement process in a longitudinal or case study research to understand small business marketing evolution.
- Use the proposed research model to validate engagement and explore engagement marketing transferability using large-scale quantitative research methods to develop a valid measure of the antecedents and outcomes to extend the generalisation across multiple contexts.
- Further, explore and empirically validate the causal relationships between engagement marketing and other related marketing constructs and the use of various theoretical perspective to investigate engagement marketing.
- Apply the proposed research model in other developing countries since culture, and social context may play a prominent role among networks and check the identified variables' controllability in engagement marketing.
- Investigate engagement marketing from the networks (such as customers, suppliers, employees and business networks) to understand cognitive, attitudinal and behavioural consequences for engagement.
- Examine engagement processes in-depth to include adverse effects of engagement marketing in small businesses.

#### 9.4 Study Limitations

This study focused on the formation and use of networks social capital in Nigerian small business engagement marketing. The data collection and data analysis methods adopted are prone to bias, necessitating that care is taken when generalising research findings. Qualitative research methods inhibit generalisability (Larson 1992; Chandler and Hanks 1994). Although the research participants are not representative of small businesses, they provided useful and rigorous data on networking and engagement processes. This exploratory research was constrained by several limitations, including the purposive sampling method that depends on researchers' understanding of research participants and the limited number of participants. The qualitative research approach explained how small business owner-managers experience networking but was limited to small business owner-

managers that operate in the South-South geopolitical zone in Nigeria. The value of the research design adopted provide insights and a detailed description of the phenomenon under study. But confirmation of the extent and practices is needed to be confident about the research findings general explanatory power.

Furthermore, this study was cross-sectional rather than longitudinal due to time and resource constraint to reflect the time factor required to understand social capital formation processes. Accordingly, the research findings presented a snapshot of small business engagement marketing practice and did not examine how it may vary over time. This study contributes to new and valuable insights on social capital formation and use and small business engagement marketing practice despite the limitations.

## 9.5 Thesis Summary

This research investigates Nigerian small business owner-managers marketing's lived experiences by engaging various networks to access social resources. Multiple concepts and theories have been adopted, including network theories, process theory, social capital theory, relationship marketing, customer engagement and engagement marketing. The research findings present small business engagement marketing as an informal, flexible, and interactive process. Social capital formation and use are rooted in the social interaction between small business owner-managers and various networks. Small business owner-managers deliberately motivate and empower network members to voluntarily contribute to small business marketing such as product co-creation, collaboration, positive word-of-mouth referrals, feedback and suggestion, repeat sales and recommendations.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Introductory letter

### Introductory letter

Dear Sir / Madam,

My name is Imaobong James, a doctoral researcher at Aberdeen Business School, Robert Gordon University, and Aberdeen. My research is on "**Social Capital and Engagement in Nigerian Small Business Marketing**". I am currently conducting interviews about the importance of relationships to small firms marketing. I would like to know how small business owners/ managers adapt and use relationships and the resources available in networks to market their goods and services, and the challenges they face while networking. This research investigates the processes involved in building relationships for marketing purposes and the owner-manager role in relationship building.

My supervisor is Professor Alistair Anderson at the Centre of Entrepreneurship, Aberdeen Business School, and he can be contacted by email at [a.r.anderson@rgu.ac.uk](mailto:a.r.anderson@rgu.ac.uk) for any confirmation required. To this end, I humbly request your permission to carry out an hour interview at a time and location suitable for you. This interview can be conducted either face to face or over the phone. The interview will be highly confidential, and all private and identifiable data will not be disclosed to any third party.

Thank you in anticipation for your acceptance.

Yours sincerely,

Imaobong James

Doctoral Researcher (Aberdeen Business School)

[i.n.james@rgu.ac.uk](mailto:i.n.james@rgu.ac.uk)

## Appendix B: Research Participants Consent Form

I have read the **introductory letter**, and I understand the details of the study. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I can ask further questions at any time. I also know that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time or decline to answer any questions during the interview. I understand I can withdraw any information I have provided until the researcher commences my data analysis. I agree to provide information to the researchers under the confidentiality conditions set out in the introductory letter. Besides, I consent to my responses being recorded by the researcher if required.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Imaobong James

Doctoral Researcher (Aberdeen Business School)

i.n.james@rgu.ac.uk

## Appendix C: Interview protocol

Semi-structured interviews were carried out based on the knowledge developed from the literature review and pilot study experience. Nigerian small business owner-managers across different sectors were interviewed based on the information gathered during the sampling and informal telephone interviews. Semi-structured interview questions were developed to provide directions and focus during the interviews while also allowing emerging themes flexibility. The focus of the study is to gain a deeper understanding of small businesses marketing activities through networking. The unit of analysis will be the small business owner-managers. General questions were generated to introduce research participants to understand the purpose of the research and for the researcher to understand the research participants and their businesses.

1. Tell me about your business (Profile: age, business type, size, activity area).
2. Tell me about yourself, age, education, marital status
3. How did you start a business? What prompted you to start your business?
4. How is your business doing? What is the volume of demand for your goods/services? Any change in the market? How did you know? How do you adapt to change?

Research Question 1: *Network Types and roles in small business marketing*

1. Whom do you tell about your business, the products or services?
2. How do you get people to know about what you are doing?
3. Who are your customers? How did you get to know them? Do you relate to them? If yes, how?
4. How do you retain your existing customers? How do you find new ones?
5. Do you have a business relationship with others not employed in your firm? If yes, who are they, and how did you relate them? What are the benefits of these relationships to your business?

Research Question 2: *Social capital in networks*

1. How do you relate with your customers, suppliers, business partners and others?

2. How do you find out what is happening in the business environment or market? Who informs you about what is happening in the marketplace, and how did you know them?
3. How do you source raw materials or new products ideas?
4. When faced with challenges, say financial, staffing. Who do you go to for help or advice in your business? What is your relationship with them? Have you been to them before and why do you choose them?

Research Question 3: *Small business marketing*

1. How do you go about your marketing generally? Do you do any form of marketing program or activities?
2. Any marketing challenges? How do you solve your marketing challenges?
3. How do you improve your product and services? Who or where do you get advice, information or ideas for marketing? Why do you go to them?
4. Have you had to change what you market and how you market?

Research Question 4: *Engagement for marketing*

1. Where do you see your business in the nearest future?
2. How do you plan to move your business to where you see it in the future?
3. How do you engage your customers and others in your network?
4. How does your network relationships influence your marketing?

## Appendix D: Detailed profile of Research participants.

Table 22: Detailed profile of the research participants

	<b>Assumed Names</b>	<b>Business Activity</b>	<b>Participants' Age in years</b>	<b>Firm Size</b>	<b>Firm Age in years</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Customer base</b>
1	Ann	Fabric sales (Ankara) - Sales of Fabric to customers both online and offline.	40 -45	2FT	9	Female	Over 40 customers
2	Benita	Bakery - Baking cakes for occasions and running training courses.	35 - 40	4FT 2PT	7	Female	Over 50 customers
3	Carol	Saloon and beauty shop – running hair beauty salon for ladies and sale of lingerie’s and cosmetics	35 - 40	3FT	5	Female	Over 20 customers
4	Daniel	Grocery – Retail of grocery in a supermarket	45 - 50	8FT	10	Male	Over 40 customers
5	Evans	Borehole drilling and construction	45 - 50	6FT 2PT	12	Male	Over 13 clients
6	Frank	Civil engineering construction – road constructions	45 – 50	8FT	26	Male	Over ten clients
7	Grace	Market on a wheel – sales and delivery of households	35 – 40	3FT	5	Female	Over 18 clients
8	Helen	Fashion and industrial tailoring	30 – 35	4FT	4	Female	Over 60 customers
9	Irene	Boutique – sales of children and lady’s wears	40 – 45	2FT	6	Female	Over 40 customers

10	Jeff	Private provider of general health care services (General practitioner)	40 – 45	10FT PT	10	Male	Over 30 clients
11	Caleb	Private provider of children healthcare services	40 – 45	18FT 10PT	8	Male	Over 50 clients

		(Paediatrician)					
12	Lizzy	Early education services – an independent provider of primary education for children aged 2 – 11 years	50 – 55	70 FT	14	Female	Over 400 clients
13	Moses	Wholesale and retail sales of electrical equipment and electrical wiring services.	35 - 40	2FT	10	Male	Over 30 customers
14	Nathan	Oil servicing Contractor (instrumentation)	40 – 45	1FT	6	Male	3 customers
15	Oliver	Consultancy – Runs consultancy for both large and small businesses.	40 -45	6FT	8	Male	14 customers
16	Peace	Mini-filing Station for household supply of kerosene	30 – 35	3FT	6	Female	Over 40 customers
17	Queen	Telecommunication Provider – private provider of internet and special television station provider.	35 – 40	2FT	11	Male	Over 30 customers
18	Reeve	Real Estate – Runs an agency for both property sales and renting.	45 - 50	3FT	6	Male	10 for now
19	Peter	Property development – independent property developer	40 - 45	2FT	3	Male	7

20	Steve	Beauty and Health – Distributor of health and beauty product.	35 – 40	1FT	6	Male	Over 20 customers
21	Todd	Construction and paintings	45 -50	8 Ft	18	Male	12 customers
22	Udeme	Event planner for weddings, funerals, graduations and conferences	40 – 45	2 FT 4 PT	8	Female	Over 15 customers
23	Venice	Marine Services	50 – 55	12 FT	12	Male	Over 10 companies
24	Williams	Blocks moulding – block moulding sales and delivery services	40 – 45	4FT	8	Male	Over 23 customers
25	Xander	Sewage disposal and waste management services	40 – 45	8FT	11	Male	Over 30 customers daily
26	Yeye	Provision of welding and fabrication services	30 – 35	4 FT	13	Male	Over 40 customers
27	Zoe	Designing and printing of souvenirs	35 – 40	5FT	8	Female	Over 50 customers
28	Mike	Online market for groceries and delivery services	40 - 45	8FT	4	Male	Over 80 customers
29	Dayo	Distributor and sales of cement	40 - 45	3 FT	7	Male	Over 30 customers
30	Dorothy	Independent provider of childminding services for children	35 - 40	6 FT	11	Female	Over 18 customers
31	Bernard	Small scale shoemaker and repairs.	45 – 50	4FT	16	Male	Over 20 customers
32	Goody	Caterer – supplies of ready-to-eat meals for families and organisations	40 - 45	3FT	8	Male	Over 30 customers

## Appendix E: Illustrative example of Lizzy transcript analysis

Table 23: Data selection and analysis sample

Lizzy (Early child learning)	Quotes	Social Capital Processes				Relationship marketing and Engagement marketing Antecedents	Small Business Marketing Functions
		Interaction	Stability	Strength of network ties	Interdependence		
	<p><b>Customers' Network</b></p> <p><i>"We involve parents in their wards learning process and morals. We educate the parents on how to assist their wards at home, and every month we have this "character pillars" for each class where they learn about kindness, peace, love etc. and awards are given out".</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involving parents in their children education</li> <li>• Connectedness</li> <li>• Transparency</li> <li>• Feedback</li> <li>• Suggestions</li> <li>• Knowledge sharing</li> <li>• Collaboration</li> <li>• The use of social media</li> <li>• Real-time interactions</li> <li>• Sense of belonging</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarity of purpose</li> <li>• Trust development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building a close relationship through frequent interactions</li> <li>• Transparency</li> <li>• Listening to customer's needs and satisfying them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accountability</li> <li>• Meeting customers' needs</li> <li>• Knowledge sharing</li> <li>• Clarifying expectations</li> <li>• Feedback</li> <li>• Suggestions</li> <li>• Knowledge of what the customer values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connectedness</li> <li>• Involvement</li> <li>• Repeated encounter</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Participation</li> <li>• Advocacy</li> <li>• Satisfaction</li> <li>• Commitment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keeping existing customers</li> <li>• Improving products and services</li> <li>• Marketing information gathering</li> <li>• Marketing planning</li> <li>• Introducing new products and services</li> <li>• Acquisition of new customers</li> </ul>

*"We have a committee called the Parents Teachers Association, where parents give feedback and make suggestions on what they expect or hope to be in the school. After deliberations, we make adjustments or plans towards implementing their suggestions or ideas."*

*"Our PTA meets is every quarter of the year, mostly during school holidays, for feedback and suggestions for the next term."*

*"We also have the school WhatsApp group with parents for open and daily discussions and suggestions".*

*"I have also noticed that getting the parents involved in the school over the years has made them have a feeling of belonging or will I say making them part of the system".*

<p><i>“There have also made referrals very easy – they tell their friends about the school”.</i></p> <p><i>“Recently the parents came in with this suggestion of children having their laptops with educational apps on them, we deliberated over it for a while, and the children in P5 and P6 are using it, and there’s been a great improvement”.</i></p> <p><i>“We have open days in the school towards the end of every school year, for potential customers to come in and see our facilities and the current students and tell us their expectations”.</i></p> <p><b>Business Networks</b></p> <p><i>“Competition is everywhere since we don’t have a standard government own schools, it’s challenging to get “standard” everyone is coming out with their standard, and it makes</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Relating to competitors and others in the industry</li> <li>● Collaborations</li> <li>● Cooperation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Relationship building</li> <li>● Increase trust and</li> <li>● value Norms of cooperation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Interactions</li> <li>● Shared norms and values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Knowledge sharing</li> <li>● Information gathering</li> <li>● Exchange of resources</li> <li>● Resources sharing</li> <li>● Emotional support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Participation</li> <li>● Connectedness</li> <li>● Communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Information gathering</li> <li>● Improving product and services</li> <li>● Market planning</li> <li>● Market information</li> </ul>
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<p><i>it difficult, so what I do is I follow the British standard, and I meet with others in Early learning that are using British standard too”.</i></p> <p><i>“There is no how you can stay in this industry. You have to relate with those that are your competitor in the real sense of business”.</i></p> <p><i>“The Headteachers too, they have their group where they meet with other Headteachers in Port Harcourt, so she comes back with really existing ideas or advice. She has some friends too from the group”.</i></p> <p><b>Internal Networks</b></p> <p><i>“We send our teachers on pieces of training even outside Rivers State to keep up with the trend in the sector and information technology”.</i></p> <p><i>“With the teachers, we have sectioned them into groups with supervisors, and these</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training and upgrades</li> <li>• Personal support through mentorship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building trust and commitment</li> <li>• A sense of belonging</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long-term relationship building with employees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvements and upgrades of products and services</li> <li>• Shared knowledge and ideas</li> <li>• Mutual obligation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involvement</li> <li>• Connectedness</li> <li>• Commitment</li> <li>• Trust</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration Competitors information</li> <li>• Market knowledge</li> <li>• Improvement of products and services</li> <li>• New products information Market information sharing</li> <li>• Innovative ideas creation</li> </ul>
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*supervisors report to the headteacher who reports to me, so some of them are doing quite well, though some are still struggling, and we are working with them to get them to do their work effectively and in a safe environment, my dear it's a process".*

**Suppliers' Networks**

*"Hmmm, with the suppliers, we have had to try and try a lot, some had excellent products but poor delivery services, others were not okay at all".*

*"Over time, we have been able to get a supplier who supplies the uniforms, we regularly speak on the phone, and it is going well; I don't even know him facially, but I know his account details. I won't say it's transactional because we have been involved in other things apart from the school*

- Relationship building
- Communication

- Clarity of purpose
- Competence
- Reassurance

- Trust building
- Trust development

- Improving services and products
- Mutual obligation
- reciprocity

- Connectedness
- Trust
- Satisfaction
- Repeated encounter
- commitment

- Managing limited resources
- Acquisition of new suppliers
- Keeping the existing suppliers
- Product negotiation and pricing

	<p><i>uniforms, just that we have never met face-to-face because he is in China”.</i></p> <p><i>“I have known my major supplier him for six years now even though we have not met face-to-face before”.</i></p>						
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Source: Author generated

Table 23 shows how data were selected for each participant and analysed. The choice of quotes was aided by the literature reviewed and the emerging themes. Each quote was read, and notes were made based on understanding the meaning that lies beneath participants' words.

## Appendix F: Illustrative example of how quotes were selected and analysed

Table 24: Representative data on engagement marketing practices

<b>Descriptive categories</b>				<b>Analytical themes</b>
<b>Names</b>	<b>Quotes</b>	<b>Notes</b>	<b>Engagement Marketing Activities</b>	
Zoe	<i>Once a customer makes the initial purchase and is satisfied with our services, we include them in our database and contact them for promotions and offers whenever we have one. If they repeat purchase, we send them our survey form to get feedback from them".</i>	Zoe express the process of engagement marketing, stating that engagement starts from transactions and then evolves to relationship marketing and then engagement.	Connectedness Involvement	
Reeve	<i>I write personalised birthday and seasonal cards for my clients to make them feel we value them and their contributions to our business.</i>	Reeve explains how he initiates a relationship with network members by creating a sense of belonging.	Connectedness	
Mike	<i>I try to make new posts online every other day, and I reply to my customers in real-time to make sure they are acknowledged and valued.</i>	Mike's data shows that engagement can be practised online. He communicates with his customers regularly	Connectedness	
Zoe	<i>We respect our customers and deliver based on what they request. Good quality service and respect is critical in retaining customers and getting them to trust your services</i>	Zoe also relates closely to her customers through respect and good quality products.	Connectedness	

Daniel	<i>My suppliers bring their new products for me to sell, I don't pay for anything, and they make me feel special while advertising their products</i>	Daniel relates closely to his suppliers and benefits from new products	Connectedness and participation
Caleb	<i>I don't just treat patients, and I establish connections with their children, and the parents appreciate it; by the connection, I mean I befriend the children and make them happy around me</i>	Caleb establishes a relationship with the children during consultation and treatment.	Connectedness
Helen	<i>I call my important customers often, and I keep in touch with them. I also ask them to introduce our services to their family and circle of friends". "This community is well connected, and once you connect with the right people, everyone will get to hear about you and what you are doing</i>	Helen also has regular contact with unique customers and seek referrals. She extends her relationship to everyone in the community.	Connectedness
Steve	<i>Once I noticed my customers are satisfied with the products, I get them to host their family and friends to try out samples and some pampering sessions free</i>	Steve's quote shows that satisfied customers are happy to get involved in marketing activities.	Customer involvement
Queen	<i>Referred customers are straightforward to deal with because the referee has told them so much about our services</i>	Queen's quote shows that existing customers advertise the firm's offerings and the brand, such that the owner-manager finds it easier to relate with the new customers	Customer Involvement and participation.
Yeye	<i>Some of my customers saw potential in my business and invested in it, so now we are now business partners</i>	Yeye's quote shows that customers also invest in small businesses with potentials and migrate to business networks	Customers' involvement and participation

Mike	<i>Most of my customers are happy with our products and delivery services. Some of them go to the point of uploading videos on social media to tell others</i>	Mike's quote shows happy customers communicate with delight to others in their networks through positive word of mouth	Advocacy
Evans	<i>We get referrals from our customers that are satisfied with our services, and they tell others about us. Even my colleagues in general practice refer their customers to us as well</i>	Evans quote shows that referrals can be done through customer and business networks	Advocacy
Xander	<i>These days my customers suggest new products for my business, and they also spread positive word of mouth</i>	Xanders' quote shows that customers are involved in new product ideas and word-of-mouth marketing	Advocacy

## Appendix G: Researchers' Experience

The researcher started with the experience of living in the South-South geopolitical zone in Nigeria and running a small business for over five years before relocating to the United Kingdom to further her education. The pre-knowledge and experience were useful in selecting research participants. It enabled me to understand their lived-experience and the context in which they operate, thus bridging possible language and cultural barriers.

In qualitative research, the researcher is the research instrument to gather, analyse and interpret data and report the research process and findings. Such personal values and experiences can influence the research process. Therefore, a reflective account of my research journey is required to expose some of the research bias. The research reflection is a section as follows:

### **Educational background**

I hold a bachelor's degree in Computer Science and a masters' degree in Information Engineering and Network management, and another in International Business. Each of these degrees has influenced my reasoning as an individual and as a researcher. My educational background and experience have shaped my understanding of knowledge, and the research paradigms adopted. During my Masters' degree in International Business, I developed an interest in small business marketing, which I researched in my master's dissertation. This process exposed me to the uniqueness of small businesses and the constraints peculiar to them. This interest motivated me to enrol for a PhD to research the small business sector to understand their marketing processes. My Bachelor's in computing has imparted my reasoning and view of knowledge. Research in the field of entrepreneurship has broadened my understanding of context and the reasons behind actions.

### **Personal Experience**

After I graduated from University, I had the opportunity to make souvenirs supplies during the election process. That opened a business opportunity for me

in printing souvenirs and customisation. At the start of business, I was making tremendous progress and acquired substantial customers. After four years into the business, I experience a low profit, and by the fifth year, I could no longer continue in business as I seemed to have lost most of my significant customers. During my Masters' programme in International business, I got thinking about what went wrong and what should have been done differently in my business. This case does not only apply to my business but also other small businesses. That was how I decided to research small business marketing and how small businesses can overcome marketing constraints to remain in business despite their context and sector.

### **Research process**

At the beginning of this research, I started with literature reviews for the research proposal. After one year of literature review, my principal supervisor advised I should conduct a pilot study to inform my literature reviews and research design. The pilot study process exposed me to qualitative research processes and potential challenges. After analysing the data collected during my pilot study, I return to the literature before the actual data collection. I set out to study networking and the resources in networks for small business marketing. However, after analysing the research data, I identified the small business marketing approach's evolution based on the business stages and the resource requirements. The adoption of the social capital process perspective to analyse the research data identified the processes small business owners undergo to access the social resources in networks for engagement marketing.

### **Research method**

The qualitative research approach adopted enabled the researcher to understand why and how small businesses network for marketing purposes. In qualitative research, preconceived ideas lead to bias (Saunders et al. 2012), which threatens the credibility of the data and the research's overall trustworthiness. The researcher adopted an interpretivist approach to construct the research findings inductively based on an in-depth interaction with the research participants. The researcher attempted the stance of neutrality by bracketing off previous

experience or pre-knowledge. The iterative and interactive nature of the research design adopted allowed the researcher to uncover the meaning behind the data collected. The researchers' knowledge of the subject area enabled the researcher to select the research participants. Semi-structured interviews and participant observation allowed the researcher to be immersed in the participants' situation. The interviews were recorded and listened to after each interview to enable the researcher to adjust the technique. Each interview was transcribed and read over and over to allow the researcher to reflect on the meaning.

### **Researchers' Competence**

The researcher designed a systematic research study that included the data collection method, interview protocols, data transcription and analysis process. The researcher's knowledge and experience to approach the data collection and analysis proactively. The Nvivo training and seminars on the qualitative research approach enabled the researcher to structure, organise the research finding, and enhance the research rigour. This reflective account of my research journey exposes some of my personal bias, which might impact the research findings.