



## Pandemic to Endemic: A Review of Key Enablers of Small Medium Enterprise Resilience

<sup>1</sup>Zam Zuriyati Mohamad, <sup>2</sup>Juliana Abu Bakar, <sup>3</sup>Sharmeela Banu Syed Abu Thahir, <sup>4</sup>Hatijah Mohd Salleh, <sup>4</sup>Khairunnisa Ishak

<sup>1</sup>Department of Commerce & Accountancy, Faculty of Business and Finance, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman

<sup>2</sup>Department of Economics, Faculty of Business and Finance, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman

<sup>3</sup>Department of Marketing, Faculty of Business and Finance, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman

<sup>4</sup>Department of Business and Public Administration, Faculty of Business and Finance, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman

\*Corresponding Author Email: [khairunnisa@utar.edu.my](mailto:khairunnisa@utar.edu.my)

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### ABSTRACT

The existence of various COVID-19 variants from Delta to Omicron has led to speculation that the spreading of the virus will continue; hence, the endless battle to fight it persists. The uncertainties in its progress from pandemic to endemic, renders it necessary to understand the applied mitigation and adaptation strategies amongst SMEs to build their future resilience as they are vulnerable and have limited resources. This study aims to develop a conceptual framework of the key enablers of SMEs' resilience during the pandemic. Specifically, these enablers will be examined from the point of view of strategies and capabilities. A reviewed research articles from the Scopus database has been conducted focusing on selected keywords in 2020 and 2021. The findings reveal that financial resources, government support, embracing digital technologies and changing business approach are the key enablers for SMEs' resilience. This study further provides a unique snapshot of business decisions and expectations particularly during this pandemic. It is suggested for the policy makers to consider designing recovery aids as they contemplate the scale of the required interventions. Significantly, this study also explores and provides deep understanding on the survival strategies; adaptive strategies and dynamic capabilities of SMEs during the pandemic and most importantly it directs and points out their path, present and in the future.

**Keywords:** Small Medium Enterprise, Resilience, Financial Resources, Government Support, Digital Technology, Business Approach

### OPEN ACCESS

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Entering 2022, the world is hoping to move from pandemic to endemic. Nonetheless, the existence of various COVID-19 variants from Delta to Omicron has led to speculation that the spreading of the virus will continue; the battle to control the disease have not ended yet. Thus, the survival strategies that have been learned over the past two years of the pandemic continue to be important. COVID-19 has not only taken millions of lives, but also has major consequences for the global economic. The suspension of economic processes has a serious effect, including the temporary or permanent disappearance of many businesses (Cepel, Gavurova, Dvorský & Belas, 2020; Rodríguez-López, Rubio-Valdehita & Díaz-Ramiro, 2021). The management of all types of business have been forced to make a series of difficult decisions in the face of the sudden crisis. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are particularly vulnerable because they have limited resources to face the crisis (Rathore & Khanna (2020). They encounter problems such as paying rent, retaining workers and reinvesting in the infrastructure (Ramanathan, Aluko, & Ramanathan, 2021). Individual

households, as well as business owners and policy makers, are trying to find a way to survive and divert their focus towards the post-pandemic world. Some countries learned an important lesson in the early days of the pandemic, as they rushed to strengthen their small enterprises. It became clear that fostering business resilience in good times would help firms ride out crises, reduce the likelihood of bankruptcy and improve the state of the economy (SME Competitive Outlook, 2020).

Loss of daily income, disruption to business operations, and laying off workers due to shortage of cash flow during the movement control order (MCO) are among the difficulties faced by SMEs (Omar, Ishak & Jusoh, 2020). Additionally, SMEs which are located in rural areas experience even more challenges because distance prevents easy access to infrastructure, labour and financial resources (Fabeil, Pazim & Langgat, 2020). Although most of the SMEs engaged in supplying products to meet domestic needs are classified as essential industries, they still facing logistics difficulties in obtaining supplies and meeting unexpected operational costs. The MCO has led to financial distress or permanent closure for some small

businesses; operational disruption results in no sales (no revenue), although they faced unexpected increases in production costs (Cassia & Minola, 2012). Various appropriate actions have been taken to preserve and generate cash (such as deferring payments and expediting receipts), but SMEs still experience a shortage of business funds that prevents them from continuing operation. Government stimulus packages, such as job retention schemes or business interruption loan schemes, may take too long for some firms to access, and not all companies will meet the eligibility criteria. Other refinancing options from lenders are limited, take time to arrange or may be exhausted (OECD, 2020). During the first phase of the MCO, the temporary closure for non-essential business and restriction on mass movement nationwide led to 50% drop in business for more than 70% of SMEs in Malaysia. However, there is huge increase found in digital business during the same period with 53% increase in online shopping for non-food items, 144% increase in online purchase for grocery and 61% increase in demand for food delivery (Tong & Gong, 2020). Many SMEs remain fragile and facing insufficient cash reserves to survive without government intervention and support. For many SMEs Malaysia, poor performance was mainly due to decrease in sales, poor market access, higher operational cost as a result of oil price continuously rising and due to depreciation in ringgit. Despite governmental initiatives to boost digitisation, SMEs having lack of funds and the know-how needed to adopt technological tools, with only 25% of businesses in Malaysia have accelerated their digital transformation plans (Tong & Gong, 2020). Thus, this study will be useful to address the issues of SMEs in Malaysia.

Despite all the challenges faced by SMEs during the pandemic, little is known about their survival strategies, and the key enablers of resilience remain unexplored. Bearing in mind the uncertainties in progressing from pandemic to endemic, it is necessary to understand the mitigation and adaptation strategies applied to build future resilience. The current study was therefore conducted to develop a conceptual framework of the key enablers of SMEs' resilience during the pandemic. Specifically, these enablers will be examined from the point of view of strategies and capabilities. SMEs were selected for this study for their contribution to economic growth.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Resilience Framework

Resilience is conceptualized from several disciplines. From the psychological perspective resilience refers to the ability to react successfully to overcome an adverse situation (Ran et al., 2020). It focuses on the emotional and mental behavioral effort in adapting and recovering from difficult conditions. On the other hand, spiritual resilience refers to the ability to sustain individual wisdom through a set of beliefs when facing trauma, adversity and stress (Manning, Ferris, Narvaez Rosario, Prues, & Boucard, 2019). It emphasizes 'bouncing back' through positive spiritual religiosity. Physics acknowledges resilience as elasticity in material science, while in the business resilience refers to crisis management or strategies for business stability and adaptability during disasters (Sharma, Thomas, & Paul, 2021). The essence of all these concepts is visualizing

resilience as a survival process and the ability to continue during unpleasant circumstances.

The term resilience has evolved to be applied to various adverse situations including stress, natural disaster, economic downtrend and now, the COVID-19 pandemic. Like it or not, individuals, communities, scientists and businesses have to handle the situation by applying their own forms of resilience. Despite the long list of research, the current pandemic has started a new episode in understanding resilience. Fighting the pandemic has not only ended with millions of fatalities but has also led to mental stress, unemployment and business losses. Thus, the current study applies the concept of resilience to develop a framework for SMEs during the pandemic.

Chen, Liu and Zhou (2021) suggested the main theories included in the organizational resilience research are system resilience theory, power change theory, and dynamic capability theory. System resilience theory is of two types, firstly, ecological resilience and secondly, mechanical resilience. Mechanical resilience denotes the period for a system to return to equilibrium or steadiness after a disturbance, focusing on stability, predictability and efficiency. Whereas ecological resilience was built based on mechanical resilience taking into account the total amount of disturbance which can be absorbed by the organization before the system's function remain unaffected by focusing on change, sustainability and unpredictability. Ecological resilience is based on multi-stability whereby mechanical resilience is more on homeostasis (Chen, Liu & Zhou, 2021).

Chen, Liu and Zhou (2021) further mention, scholars for contingency theory or power-change theory combined the closed system in traditional approach with open-system approach which recognises the influences of external factors. This is based on: (i) changes in the environment affect changes in organizational structure; (ii) fitness of structural and environmental variables affect the organizational; and (iii) the nature of the environment in which the organization is located is the main concern in organizing. They referred to Paul et al. (1967) who proposed the power change theory and argued that different environments place different requirements on the organizations that survive in them. Learning the relationship between the organization and the environment and evaluating the internal structure of the organization, revealed uncertain and rapidly changing environments require flexibility and dynamism in the organizational structure. Besides, stable environments allow greater centralization and formal organizational forms. They added that every sub unit of the organization should be adapted in dealing with stability or uncertainty of each own environment. Chen, Liu and Zhou (2021) also contended that the power change theory is very germane to the study of organizational adaptation during crises. While many power-change theories usually ponder the external environment as gradual and permanent, yet intermittent and short-lived crises can have an impact on organizations although the environment may return to its original state. Hence, power-change theory is pertinent in explaining organizational responses in crisis environments.

Besides, another theory is known as resource-based view theory (RBV). RBV scrutinizes and construes internal resources (firms' input) of the organizations; emphasizes resources and capabilities in formulating strategy to achieve sustainable competitive advantages. The firms will determine their strategic choice while competing in the business environment based on their internal resources and capabilities. Competitive advantage occurs only when there is a situation of resource heterogeneousness and resource immobility. The firms' capability also allows them to add value in customer value chain, develop new products or expand in new marketplace (Madhani, 2010). The RBV ponders firms as a collection of all resources. The achievement of firms' competitive advantage lies in the valuable, scarce, and irreducible resources that the firm possesses. Nonetheless, this theory's shortcoming is that, it just only points out the source of the firm's competitive advantage without discussing on how the firm maintains its competitive advantage in a rapidly changing environment (Chen, Liu & Zhou, 2021). Warnier, Weppe, and Lecocq, 2013 as cited in Hamdan, Kassim and Lai (2021) adopted the RBV and mitigation approaches which accepted the eccentric styles, organizational resources, and certain internal factors as firm tools in enhancing the efficiency and sustainability of the firms. Applying strategies and mitigation approaches during calamity and disaster is indeed essential in evaluating firm decision making, competitive advantages, efficiency, and performance (Azmi, Aida, & Diana, 2020; Mahani & Suraiya, 2019 as cited in Hamdan, Kassim & Lai, 2021).

In addition, Chen, Liu and Zhou (2021) also suggested another theory known as dynamic capabilities which reflect

the firms' ability to systematically solve problems, perceive threats and opportunities, make timely decisions and get their resource base changed. This is based on evolutionary economics and recourse-based view. Following the research of Hamdan, Kassim and Lai (2021) and Alberti, Ferrario and Pizzurno (2018) our research use and apply the RBV and mitigation approach as earlier mentioned that it accepted the unusual styles, organizational resources, and other internal factors as firm tools in enhancing the proficiency and sustainability of the firms.

Therefore, in this resilience framework, adaptive strategies and dynamic capabilities are theorized as the key enablers for SMEs' resilience, adapted from the study conducted by Alberti, Ferrario and Pizzurno (2018). The adaptive strategies proposed in their study are embracing digital technology and changing the business approach. During the pandemic, digital devices such as smart phones, computers and drones have become essential for shopping, communication, meetings and entertainment. SMEs similarly need digital technology to sell and promote their products and services online, and Alberti and colleagues suggest changing the business approach to pricing and product range as strategies. At the same time, the current study proposes that the availability of financial resources and government support will lead to resilience. The link between these two resources and resilience is supported by Magar, Pun, Pandit and Rola-Rubzen (2021) and Hamdan, Kassim and Lai (2021). The proposed SMEs' resilience framework is presented in Figure 1.

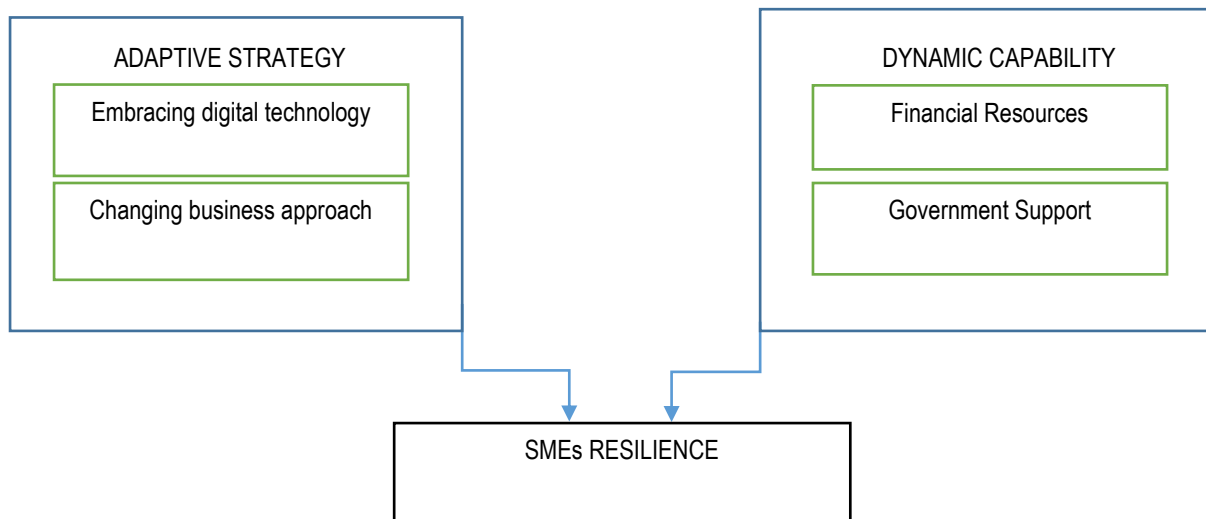


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

### Relationship between Government Support and SMEs' Resilience

The increasing number of COVID-19 cases worldwide daily forces governments to implement lockdown. Stuck between combating the infectious disease and economic destruction, governments have introduced various stimulus package to support the community, businesses and the nation. Government support is not only in terms of financial aid but includes training, safety and subsidies. In Egypt, for example, the government has implemented tax cuts and

reduced electricity and gas costs to ease businesses' financial burden (Sobaih, Elshaer, Hasanein, & Abdelaziz, 2021), and in New Zealand, a large wage subsidy and loan guarantee scheme has been implemented. In Malaysia, a RM250 billion PRIHATIN package was announced to assist micro enterprises (Shah et al., 2020), indirectly providing emergency liquidity to enable micro businesses to continue their operations over a short period.

### **Relationship between Financial Resources and SMEs' Resilience**

A firm's accumulated financial resources are efficient tools for business sustainability during the crisis period, while other assets and skills allow them to react to the new business opportunities (Omar, Ishak, & Jusoh, 2020). Maintaining financial flexibility such as liquidity is one way to ensure the firms have adequate resources when experiencing financial shock. SMEs often face difficulties in managing debt and obtaining loans from financial institutions, causing them to take shortcuts to obtain unsecured loans with relatively high interest rates (Mulyantini, Jubaedah & SitiHidayati, 2020). Hamdan, Kassim and Lai (2021) found financial aid from Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM) help SMEs mitigate the negative effects of the deteriorating economic situation during implementation of the MCO. Wiatt, Lee, Marshall and Zuiker (2021) found that cash flow problems and financial intermingling did not play a role in short-term survival, but have an effect on long-term resilience. Cash flow problems and financial intermingling impacted recovery and resilience differently. Recovery was a short-term state measured by a business operating (as opposed to being closed), while resilience embodied a longer-term, stable and thriving state. Another study, conducted in India, related to the impact of the pandemic on small businesses, identified the need for more support from government and economic and non-economic agents to ensure their survival (Sahoo & Ashwani, 2020).

### **Relationship between Technology and SMEs' Resilience**

The importance of introducing information systems to encourage firms' resilience was recognized by Riolli and Savicki (2003) and Wang et al. (2010) as cited in Annarelli and Nonino (2016): firms depend heavily on timely information and would be more dynamic with an internet connection. This is supported by Omar, Ishak, and Jusoh (2020), who suggested prompt changes of marketing channels via online resources and innovative marketing platforms and technologies, as evidence of resilience in the unexpected scenario. Indonesian entrepreneurs and SMEs have seized the opportunity presented by technology for their business survival (Hidayat, Latief, Nianti, Bahasoan, & Widiawati, 2020). Entrepreneurs' survival during the current pandemic requires the ability to side-step the restrictions by embarking and focusing on technology, including but not limited to digital marketing, website development and placement of products on e-markets. Utilizing technology and becoming familiar with it will ensure businesses continue to grow and survive during the pandemic. Over time, SMEs need creative solutions to problems to ensure their continued success and achievement.

### **Relationship between Changing Business Approach and SMEs' Resilience**

The implementation of strategies and protection mechanisms as a key organizational tool for assessing company decision making, competitive benefits, effectiveness and performance are crucial for SMEs' resilience during disaster and crises (Azmi, Aida, & Diana, 2020; Amat & Ishak, 2019). McCarthy (2003) indicated that

entrepreneurs were becoming more realistic and directed by structured decision making in managing crises. As such, entrepreneurs have adopted a variety of techniques through promotion and pricing marketing development (Naidoo 2010); alternative distribution networks (Yu-lian 2008); and product redevelopment and using low-cost and resourceful online marketing campaigns (Bourletidis & Triantafyllopoulos 2014). SMEs are also adopting fundamental mitigation approaches in their business strategies by generating new products to meet current customer demand (Fabeil et al., 2020, Lai, 2020), making use of digital marketing and e-commerce methods, acquiring electronic payment facilities, and providing cash on delivery (COD) payment transactions (Palmatier, Sivadas, Stern, & El-Ansary, 2020) to lessen the impact of the pandemic. As a result, many SMEs are able to adapt quickly to the changing business environment that influences their resilience.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

The methodology for this study follows the suggestion checklist provided in Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analysis (PRISMA). The current study reviewed research articles from the Scopus database, which includes the most journals indexed in the Web of Science (Mongeon, & Paul-Hus, 2016) and is a reliable source. The search was limited to 2020 and 2021 as both are years of pandemic. Specifically, the search processes are divided into four steps by using four main keywords which are 'financial resources', 'government support', 'digital technology' and 'business approach'. The first search process begins by combining the four main keywords with the keyword 'resilience'. Second search process is by combining the four main keywords with the keyword 'COVID'. The third search process extended the previous search processes by using the four main keywords, COVID and resilience and the final search process added the keyword 'SME' into the main four keywords, COVID and resilience.

The next procedure was to identify specific studies to support the proposed conceptual framework. All the research articles listed in the fourth search process were reviewed. Duplicate items were then eliminated. In order to avoid missing data, a cross-checking process has been conducted for the articles listed in the fourth search process before and after the elimination procedure. Thereafter, an in-depth review was conducted of the remaining studies after the elimination. A tabulation method has been used to segregate data into main and sub-component of financial resources, government support, digital technology and business approach. Finally, a model has been developed to visualise the findings for this study.

### **4. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

This section discusses the data analysis and findings of this study. The first step was to search for resilience studies using the terms financial resources and resilience, government support and resilience, digital technology and resilience, and business approach and resilience. The results presented in Table 1 indicates an upward trend in

research over the two years, with the exception of research on financial resources.

	Number of publication (2020)	Number of publication (2021)
Financial resources and resilience	11	10
Government support and resilience	178	273
Digital technology and resilience	135	244
Business approach and resilience	167	271

Table 1: Number of studies conducted for the proposed key enablers of resilience

The second stage of analysis used the terms financial resources and COVID, government support and COVID, digital technology and COVID, and business approach and COVID. Table 2 shows an increasing trend of research in these areas from 2020 to 2021.

	Number of publications (2020)	Number of publications (2021)
Financial resources and COVID	276	552
Government support and COVID	830	1,765
Digital technology and COVID	840	2,404
Business approach and COVID	298	1,014

Table 2: Number of studies conducted for the proposed key enablers of resilience and COVID

The third analysis added the keywords resilience and COVID to all four key enablers of resilience. The findings are presented in Table 3. The number of papers published again increased from 2020 to 2021 although at a lower than for studies on key enablers with COVID or resilience alone. This indicates that limited research has been conducted on COVID and resilience in a single study. Considering this gap, it is worthwhile examining how businesses manage, react and survive during the pandemic.

	Number of publications (2020)	Number of publications (2021)
Financial	15	42

resources, COVID, resilience		
Government support, COVID, resilience	2	2
Digital technology, COVID, resilience	18	91
Business approach, COVID, resilience	21	114

Table 3: Number of studies conducted for the proposed key enablers of resilience, COVID and resilience

The fourth search added the keywords SME, COVID and resilience into the resilience key enablers. The results, illustrated in Table 4, showing only 34 papers published in 2020 and 2021 together.

	Number of publications (2020)	Number of publications (2021)
Financial resources, COVID, resilience, SME	0	1
Government support, COVID, resilience, SME	1	3
Digital technology, COVID, resilience, SME	0	9
Business approach, COVID, resilience, SME	2	18

Table 4: Number of studies conducted for the proposed key enablers of resilience, COVID, resilience and SME

Based on the findings from Table 4, further analysis was conducted to identify research specifically related to the proposed conceptual framework. In this process, only four studies on digital technology, COVID, resilience, and SME were accessible, while another five were not available. As for business approach, COVID, resilience, and SME, only 10 of the 18 studies published in 2021 were available. After examining the publications, five duplicates and one still in press were removed, leaving only 15 studies to be reviewed, as presented in Table 5.

From Table 5, it can be seen that out of the 15 studies reviewed, there are three studies were reviewing papers, five studies using qualitative and quantitative methodology respectively and another two studies were using mixed methodology of both qualitative and quantitative. It shows that there is still less study was done using quantitative approach concerning this subject on SME's resilience during the pandemic. Therefore, this study will be developed in the future by collecting larger samples using a quantitative approach to test the SME resilience.

Title	Authors	Methodology	Findings for resilient key enablers	Findings for sub-component in resilient key enablers
COVID-19 crisis and SMEs responses: The role of digital transformation	Klein & Todesco (2021)	Systematic review of 9 articles in 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Embracing digital technology</li> <li>- Changing business approach</li> <li>- Financial resources</li> <li>- Government support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Online sales, online payment, online marketing and online interaction</li> <li>- Collaborate with willing partners to share resources</li> <li>- Maintaining cash flow</li> <li>- Utilization of government subsidies in acquiring new knowledge</li> </ul>
Recovery planning and resilience of SMEs during the COVID-19: experience from Saudi	Nurunnabi (2020)	Interviews with the Chief Executive Officers of SMEs in Saudi Arabia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Changing business approach</li> <li>- Financial resources</li> <li>- Government support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lower the profit to increase sales</li> <li>- Achieving financial sustainability through managing the cost, retaining regular customers</li> <li>- Government stimulus package, payment of employees' salaries, postponement of tax payments and other fees</li> </ul>
Crisis management in the hospitality sector SMEs in Pakistan during COVID-19	Burhan, Salam, Abou Hamdan, & Tariq (2021)	Interviews with the SME business owners or managers in the Pakistani hospitality sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Changing business approach</li> <li>- Financial resources</li> <li>- Government support</li> <li>- Embracing digital technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Changes to home delivery approach</li> <li>- Close relationship with vendors and other stakeholders</li> <li>- Invest through savings and borrowings</li> <li>- Reduction in fixed cost and overheads to maintain financial stability</li> <li>- Government support on employee training to follow new norms and SOPs</li> <li>- Online market strategy</li> </ul>
What kept the boat afloat? Sustainability of employment in knowledge-intensive sectors due to government measures during COVID-19 pandemic	Hrivnák, Moritz, & Chreneková (2021)	Distributing questionnaire survey in the Slovak Republic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Embracing digital technologies</li> <li>- Changing business approach</li> <li>- Government support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Online communication, online payment.</li> <li>- Reduction in working hours</li> <li>- Finding new logistics models and suppliers</li> <li>- Change production/services</li> <li>- State compensation for employees' salaries</li> <li>- Incentive related to tax</li> </ul>
COVID-19 and the business management crisis: An empirical study in SMEs	Rodrigues, Franco, Sousa & Silva (2021)	Qualitative methodology in Portugal during the lockdown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Government support</li> <li>- Embracing digital technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social protection for firms' employees</li> <li>- Incentives such as moratorium and tax reduction</li> <li>- Tele-working</li> </ul>

The impact of COVID-19 on sustainable business models in SMEs	Gregurec, Tomičić Furjan & Tomičić-Pupek (2021)	Review of past studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Changing business approach</li> <li>- Embracing digital technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Venturing into new services, market demand and collaborators</li> <li>- Operating in digital/online environment</li> </ul>
Improving the resilience of SMEs in times of crisis: The impact of mobile money amid Covid-19 in Zambia	Nan & Park (2021)	Extracting data from two surveys: Zambia 2019 Enterprise Survey and Zambia 2020 Enterprise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Financial support</li> <li>- Embracing digital technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mobile money (MM) as a tool for access to financial resources</li> <li>- Digital payment</li> </ul>
Fostering sustainability: Reinventing SME strategy in the new normal	Hu & Kee (2021)	Review of literature and authors' practical experiences and opinions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Changing business approach</li> <li>- Government support</li> <li>- Embracing digital technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discover regional and global markets' opportunities</li> <li>- Reduce labour cost and expenses</li> <li>- Moratorium / deferred payments</li> <li>- Government export promotion programme</li> <li>- Online promotion, sales and logistics</li> </ul>
The resilience of African migrant entrepreneurs in China under COVID-19	Prah & Sibiri (2020)	Qualitative survey and semi-structured interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Changing business approach</li> <li>- Embracing digital technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Change of business hours, and presenting new menus, multiple marketing platforms</li> <li>- Online order, online marketing</li> </ul>
International relationships and resilience of New Zealand SME exporters during COVID-19	Fath, Fiedler, Sinkovics, Sinkovics & Sullivan-Taylor (2021)	Interviews with managers of New Zealand SMEs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Financial resources</li> <li>- Embracing digital technology</li> <li>- Changing business approach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sustain cash flow from professional relationship</li> <li>- Online communication</li> <li>- Operating in international / new markets</li> </ul>
The role of technology and innovation capabilities in achieving business resilience of MSMEs during COVID-19: Empirical study	Anggadwita, Martini, Hendayani, & Kamil (2021)	Quantitative survey of 400 MSME owners in Jakarta, Indonesia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Embracing digital technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Managing innovation strategy for adoption of technology</li> </ul>
Supply chain resilience and business responses to disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic	Ramanathan, Aluko & Ramanathan (2021)	Mixed methods research by collecting data from published online sources and conducting two interviews with UK retail sector representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Changing business approach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Collaborate with other businesses</li> </ul>
Analysis of factors impacting survivability of sustainable supply chain during COVID-19	Baral, Singh & Kazançoğlu (2021)	Distributing questionnaire to managers, directors and owners of SMEs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Changing business approach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cooperation among supply chain</li> <li>- Knowledge on strategic planning and innovation</li> </ul>

pandemic: An empirical study in the context of SMEs				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Good relationship with all counterparts in supply chain</li> <li>- Monitoring the flow of goods and services process</li> </ul>
Weathering the storm: What successful SMEs are doing to beat the pandemic	Marconatto, Teixeira, Peixoto & Faccin (2021)	Online data from Brazilian SMEs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Financial support</li> <li>- Changing business model</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Managing working capital</li> <li>- Supplier and customer diversification</li> </ul>
Risk perception and determinants in small-and medium-sized agri-food enterprises amidst the COVID-19 pandemic: Evidence from Egypt	Abu Hatab, Lagerkvist, & Esmat (2021)	Distributing questionnaire to 166 Egyptian agri-food SMEs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Changing business model</li> <li>- Government support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Market and product flexibility</li> <li>- Lower interest rate</li> </ul>

Table 5: Review of specific studies related to key enablers, COVID-19, resilience and SME



Based on the findings presented in Table 5, the model shown in Figure 2 was developed. Its summarizes and categorizes the sub-components of financial resources, government support, embracing digital technologies and

changing business approach. It identifies the specific strategies and capabilities that will contributes to SMEs' resilience during the pandemic.

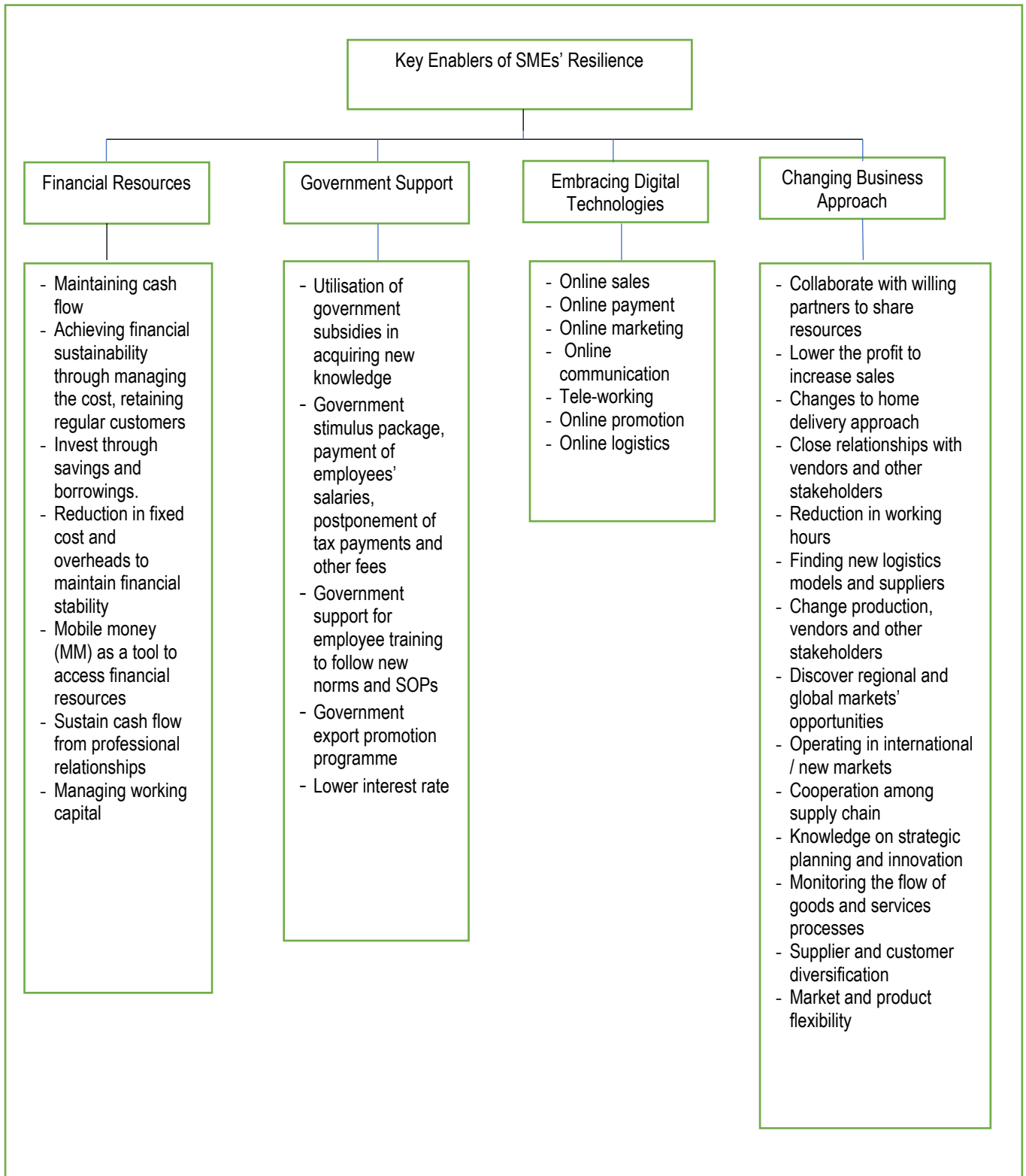


Figure 2: Key Enablers in SMEs' Resilience Model

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study examines the key enablers of SMEs' resilience during the pandemic. It identifies articles related to key enablers of SMEs' resilience and conducts an in-depth analysis of selected articles. Despite the increasing number of studies on resilience and COVID-19, specific research on key enablers of SMEs' resilience remains scarce. The shortage of studies in this area underlines the need for future studies. As for the current study, the resilience framework for SMEs during the pandemic was developed using the resilience concept. In essence, adaptive strategies and dynamic capabilities are identified as the fundamental concept underlying the SMEs' resilience. This study further concludes that financial resources, government support, embracing digital technologies and changing business approach as the key enablers for SMEs' resilience. Based on the findings of the study, sub-components of the key enablers are identified, offering SMEs guidance through specific strategies and competencies to face the pandemic. The components of the key enablers in the SMEs' resilience model will also be beneficial to future researchers in the field of resilience.

### Managerial Implications

This study underscores the different key enablers of SMEs in Malaysia and how deeply affected they are by the current crisis. Overall, our paper contributes to understanding of the different factors: financial resources, government support, embracing digital technologies and changing the business approach due to COVID-19 in the small business ecosystem. The fate of the 48.1% of Malaysian workers who work in SMEs is closely tied to the resilience of this ecosystem to the massive economic disruption caused by the pandemic. This study provides a unique snapshot of business decisions and expectations at this time. Policy makers should consider designs to aid recovery as they contemplate the scale of the required interventions. Significantly, this research will also contribute to understanding and exploring the survival strategies of SMEs during the pandemic; adaptive strategies and dynamic capabilities are important in directing and pointing their path, now and in the future. These variables can be considered as the principal devices for business growth, developed based on their creativity and self-ability to survive the pandemic. This study therefore provides insights into survival and endurance during the pandemic.

### Theoretical Implications

Previous researchers have focused on various dimensions of resilience, including organizational, entrepreneurial and family business resilience; our theoretical study offers a new dimension of resilience, namely that of Malaysian SMEs. Hence, it enriches the literature on resilience, specifically from the perspective of SMEs, and enables the development of quantitative method-based study. In socioeconomic terms, the study aims to provide guidelines for mitigating business and financial problems. Well-designed, sustained economic and well-planned financial resources are crucial factors for the survival and growth of SMEs.

## Limitations and Recommendations

This study possesses some limitations. First and foremost, it is an exploratory literature review which focuses only on four enablers of SMEs' resilience, namely financial resources, government support, digital technology and business approach, during Covid-19 (2020-21). Secondly, given this focus, the review excludes research on larger corporations, whose results might reasonably be applied to SMEs. Next, the researchers may have unintentionally overlooked pertinent articles. Further, the approach of searching citations and references to supplement the search results may have introduced some bias, for example, in failing to locate the five studies on digital technology, COVID-19, resilience, and SMEs. Finally, searching on the key enablers was not classified by specific countries or regions. It is important to gain knowledge on SMEs by investigating relevant concepts in different environments, such as developing countries.

Indeed, we propose that future researchers consider larger corporations such as Multi-National Corporations (MNCs) and Government Link Companies in facing the pandemic and the level of their resilience throughout the pandemic. Furthermore, future researchers may also classify the results by countries or regions in order to obtain the precise performance of the companies' resilience towards pandemic. In addition to that, future researchers may involve in identifying similarities or differences in culture, geo-demographic features and history that may be pertinent to SMEs' resilience (Saad, Hagelaar, Velde & Omta, 2021). Finally, researchers may include articles from year 2022 as the country is moving towards endemic phase and the measurement of the company's resilience are essential to be taken into account during these periods.

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