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Original Article

Navigating Entrepreneurial Resilience: A Phenomenological Study of Small Business Owners in Tandag City, Surigao del Sur

[1]MARTINEZ, Danalyn Dones DBA
[1]Department of Business Management, North Eastern Mindanao State University-Lianga Campus, Philippines.

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Abstract: *The study is about Tandag City, Surigao del Sur small business owners living and surviving various challenges of urban entrepreneurship.To do with resilience in just these circumstances, this study first uses a qualitative phenomenological method to try and get examples of the entrepreneur's display and nature.Resilience is a concept that, for the entrepreneurial designer, has to be constantly dealt with. It results from the interplay between ends (such as financial pressure, bureaucratic encumbrances and the habitats that man today has) and the approaches to achieving ends used internally within oneself. The detailed interviews with entrepreneurs reveal seven themes: Cash flow problems and financial stress; bureaucratic barriers and regulatory compliance; The reliance of entrepreneurs on their own resources in difficult times; Depending heavily for support on the social community; The adaptation of new technologies and digital innovation to the development of small businesses; Emotional coping strategies in stressful situations as well as surviving these crises of spirit without killing oneself off by accident; They expect or hope that government institutional structures such as banks and the People's Sithubric Region Agent will give them help when they eventually decide to go winding down their businesses into retirement or else leaving altogether from town to start in some other place (which doesn't actually make much money at all).The findings suggest that resilience of small business owners in Tandag City relies not so much on the entrepreneur's personal characteristics but is instead an ongoing adaptative process that is fed by tolerance and skillful living.The study illustrates that improving entrepreneurial resilience requires proactive government policies, digital literacy programs, and support systems that address both structural and personal aspects of entrepreneurship.This paper gives new meaning to an ongoing discussion about rural entrepreneurship: The development of a local company through resilience is as much a factor on which success rests as is the investment climate.*

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial Resilience, Phenomenology, Small Business, Rural Entrepreneurship, Tandag City, Surigao del Sur.*

I. INTRODUCTION

A multitude of converging hardships confront small entrepreneurs in the rural Philippines, predicaments that imperil their very survival and their chances of expanding further. Post Matter content The unpredictability in cash flow of many enterprises is exacerbated by a fluctuating demand for clients and by seasonal variations, while at the same time rising operating costs including rent, utilities and raw materials (Mondragon, Casinillo & Salabao, 2023; Palacios, Janaban & Martir, 2025). However, all this has to be weighed in with the regulatory and bureaucratic obstacles that enter the small entrepreneur´s life like a nightmare: interminable permissions renewals, obscure documentary requirements which are prone to variant readings, changes in legislation on taxes (Triple i Consulting, 2025; PIDS, 2021). Meanwhile the covid-19 epidemic and various other shocks have exposed the defects of traditional company models, offering up entrepreneurial force entrepreneurs face choice adaptation or closure (Francisco, Romero & Flaminiano, 2023; Flores, Sumague & Cabildo, 2024). These hard situations illustrate that survival is not a choice; rural companies have to keep on reviving themselves.

This study operationally defines resilience by small business entrepreneurs -- defined as the ability of individuals to cope with their own adversity, adapt and recover, in good times and bad-- based on a number of interconnected factors: financial adversity and unpredictable cash flows, regulatory burden Covid crisis Resourcefulness and improvisation Family support systems Digital adaptation and innovation, emotional resilience. The conceptual framework of this study is that these internal and external factors influence the results of efforts to promote resilience. For example, large regulatory burdens may increase stress and lower perceived control, but strong social support networks may buffer negative impacts and improve adaptive ability, as seen in other Philippine MSME research (Moreno, 2021; Mondragon et al., 2023).

Despite existing research on entrepreneurial resilience and MSME challenges in the Philippines (e.g., Francisco et al., 2023; the Southern Leyte MSME resilience research [Mondragon et al., 2023]; and research on capability portfolios amid disruptions [Zapanta, 2021]), there is a noticeable gap in in-depth qualitative, phenomenological accounts from rural cities such as Tandag. Many studies use quantitative designs or focus on catastrophic occurrences; few document the daily lives of rural small business owners outside of crisis periods. This study aims to close that gap by discovering rich, contextualized narratives that highlight not only what resilience looks like, but also how resilience is manifested in the daily difficulties of businesses in Tandag City.

This sort of research is obtainable only from the phenomenological perspective, which actually tries to find out what it means for a small shop owner living in these remote areas how they live and experience their management struggles with entrepreneurship. The framework explains how a multitude of internal and external factors can affect Entrepreneurial Resilience. External elements are constraints on entrepreneurs true productive capacity. Some are conditionally insurmountable F these include economic conditions, political climate, market trends and institutional systems. Meanwhile, internal parts refer to the mental, psychological and characteristic functions that adaptively include entrepreneurs in adversity. These external and internal elements are inextricably interwoven through the life experiences of entrepreneurs, which is the phenomenological basis for our research. The entrepreneurs constantly learn from and change their world. This dynamic interplay yields entrepreneurial resilience. Entrepreneurial resilience comes from this continuous cycle of experience and adaptation. It creates a base (as it were) for long-time business operation and personal growth among Tandag City's small, local entrepreneurs.

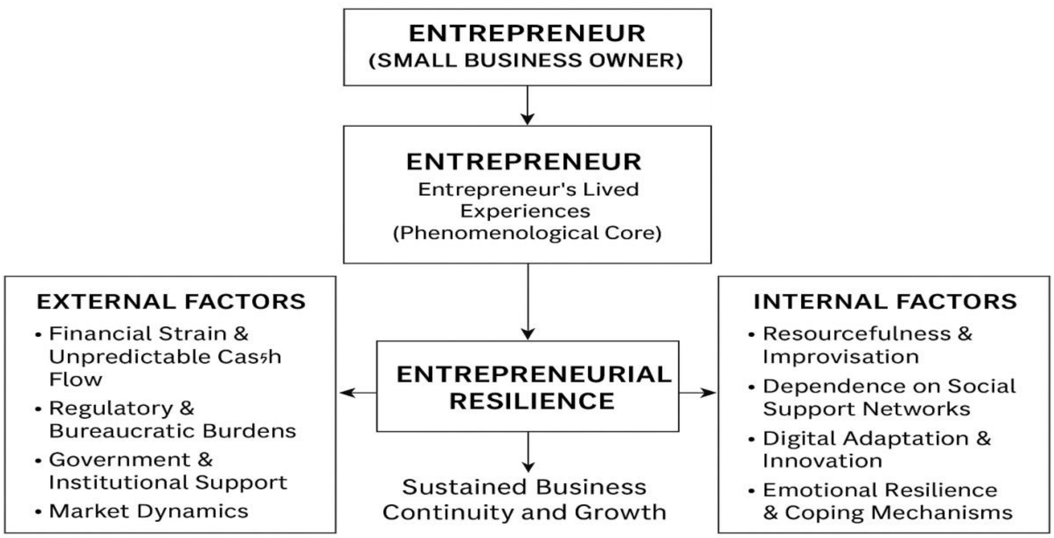

Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

A) Research Questions

The following questions were devised to lead this research:

i. What challenges do small business owners in Tandag City experience in managing their enterprises?
ii. How do these entrepreneurs cope with and adapt to these challenges?
iii. What insights can these lived experiences offer to improve support and policy interventions for local business management?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A) Financial Strain and Unpredictable Cash Flow

MSEs often face the problem of unstable income, which has an impact on its continuation and development: it also puts constraints on growth prospects. The studies show that the unpredictability of cash flow and difficulties in obtaining funds are still serious obstacles for numerous small enterprises, especially those in developing countries. Fluent demand, marketplaces that are affected by seasons, and delayed payments have long plagued entrepreneurs with financial pressures and they must give priority to short-term survival over long-term strategy. Palacios, Janaban, and Martir (2025) found that poor liquidity management leads to burnout and low business resilience This indicates that financial instability is a structure problem rather than isolated incident, affecting how rural entrepreneurs maintain their operations.

B) Regulatory and Bureaucratic Burdens

Administrative complexity and governmental inefficiency are major "pressure" to business formalization and compliance among small businesses. Cordes et al. (2022) suggested excessive paperwork and the unclear regulations that resulted are felt most heavily by MSEs which lack administrative capabilities of their own. Similarly, Usmany (2024) stressed that local government units (LGUs) subject rural business proprietors to repeated regulations, hindering orders and pushing up costs. For instance, in the Philippines Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS, 2021) found that too many municipal governments have not yet shifted to digitized processes, thereby adding to difficulty in doing business. These bureaucratic problems tire entrepreneurs by pulling time and energy away from productive tasks.

C) Resourcefulness, Bricolage, and Improvisation

When resources are scarce, small business proprietors often resort to fragmente the inventive combination of whatever materials are available to help solve problems. Park(2024) defined bricolage as the process of "making do" with what is available to ensure company decontinuation. Similarly, Reddy (2023) discovered that entrepreneures use improvised decision-making as a way of getting around capital limitations. Wang et al. (2025) found that while this adaptation does improve short-term resilience, without external institutional support it may not ensure long-term viability. Filipino entrepreneurs coal their own terms for this kind of creative problem-solving habit, calling it "diskarte." It is a cultural expression of resilience based on adaptability and invention.

D) Social Capital and Community Support Networks

To remain resilient, small business owners heavily draw on the social capital of their friends and neighbors. For capitalists vulnerable groups consist mainly of the urban poor, low and middle-income households in rural areas as well entrepreneurs Sibhat and Ayenew (2021) describe life in rural communities as comforting. Family members, neighbors and friends assist entrepreneurs with providing emotional support during business downturns. Even small affairs can round out subsequent failures when another loan is offered. (Mondragon et al. [2023]) As informal financial institutions, community networks loan out small amounts or lease labor base other arrangements. There is no such thing as co-operative labor in present-day agricultural society for most areas of the continent. (Mondragon et al., 2023) The theory of social capital, formulated by Putnam in 2020, points out that trust and community engagement promote collaborative problem-solving. This helps businesses pull through crises. However, placing too much reliance on the development of informal networks might mean that when these networks are themselves in straitened circumstances, businesses will receive been exposed rather than shield from this damage as was assumed by the earlier proposition. (Gano-an, Cubin, and Campos, 2023)

E) Digital Adaptation and Innovation as Survival Strategies

Escaping from lockdowns and travel restrictions, digitalization has become an important indicator of entrepreneurial resilience--especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Dwivedi et al. (2021) revealed that digital technologies such as social media marketing and mobile payment platforms can enhance the competitiveness customer engagement quality of smaller businesses. They also retail inexpensive on-line marketing options (Khurana et al., 2022). In the Philippines, digital entrepreneurship empowered small businesses to continue operations in the face of restrictive public health measures and restricted mobility. (Francisco, Romero, & Flaminiano, 2023) However, Wang et al. (2025) found that low levels of digital literacy and poor internet infrastructure are obstacles towards realizing full benefits from digitalization for rural economies.

F) Emotional Resilience and Psychological Coping

Besides financial and operational challenges, emotional resilience is also seen as a significant predictor of business success. Bullough and Renko (2019) defined resilience consists in the capacity to recover and remain optimistic under adversity. Actually depends on the person s self-efficacy, mindfulness and positive reframing of their situation, business owners who do this sort are more likely to ride out crises according to (Koporcic, 2025). Furthermore, Reddy (2023) notes that emotional stability enhances better decision-making even in times of insecurity. Actaully depends on the person s self-efficacy, mindfulness and positive reframing of their situation, business owners who do this sort are more likely to ride out crises according to (Koporcic, 2025). Furthermore, Reddy (2023) notes that emotional stability enhances better decision-making even in times of insecurity.

G) Institutional Support and Policy Reform

Institutional contexts also significantly affect entrepreneurial resilience. Cordes et al. (2022) stressed rescue administration registration, flexible funding programs and fair rules to guarantee the sustain ability of small businesses. As the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) notes in 2021, programs in government and financial literacy may promote inclusive entrepreneurship. (OECD, 2021) The desire for legitimacy and new energy from other sources that could help small businesses are cross-generational themes compared thus it was equally true with the Japanese who started businesses 40 years ago as it is Westerners today here at home. (Park, 2024). Workshops organized by collaboration between agricultural schools, local government units, and the Department Of Education (Within the Filipino jurisdiction this confluence produces results one would not expect) can guide rural entrepreneurs to avoid disobediences and draw closer touch with what is proper. Now then, can it be only the influence of habit and experience entangle the former director of an indigenous school with- echoed a young man from Pang-lao during a seminar at the conference room of BIR? If we talk of farming methods in the mountains like this, there must be some things that are related to regular habit and others which are influenced by many different factors (Wang et al. 2025).

III. METHODOLOGY

A) Research Design

The phenomenological qualitative design was used to delve deeply into the lived experiences of entrepreneurs managing small firms in Tandag City.

B) Research Locale

Tandag City's combination of coastal trade, local agriculture, and micro-entrepreneurial culture makes it a good location for studying rural business resilience.

C) Population and Sample

Ten (10) small business entrepreneurs, each operating a firm in Tandag City for at least two years, were purposefully chosen to ensure sector diversity and scalability.

D) Research Instrument

A semi-structured interview guide will prompt participants to relate their experiences with problems, emotional responses, adaptive methods, and comments on local support systems.

E) Data Collection

One-on-one interviews (45-60 minutes each) will be conducted in person or by video call to collect data. With approval, all sessions will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for thematic analysis.

F) Ethical Considerations

Informed consent will be acquired, and participant privacy will be safeguarded using pseudonyms. Data will be securely stored, and the study will adhere to ethical guidelines established by the institutional review board.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic Analysis was conducted with a group of closely held business owners from the Tandag City, Surigao del Sur in this paper. Using a phenomenological perspective, this study investigated entrepreneurs' first-hand experiences when they sought to cope with the many challenges and opportunities of doing business in an out of the way location. The research uncovered seven alternatives that were simultaneously accepted opinions: (1) Sustained financial pressure and unpredictable cash flow, (2) Burdens from regulation and bureaucracy, (3) Adapting by using one's resourcefulness and improvisation, (4) Relying on social support networks, (5) Digital adaptation and innovation as survival strategies, (6) Emotional resilience in the face of stress and uncertainty, and (7) Hopes for Government and Institutional Assistance.

Table 1. Seven significant themes arose from phenomenological interviews with small company owners in Tandag City, Surigao del Sur.

Themes	Description	Sample Participant Statements	Implications
Financial Strain and Unpredictable Cash Flow	Entrepreneurs experienced inconsistent revenue streams due to seasonal demand and delayed customer payments, leading to cash shortages and operational stress.	“Sometimes we don't earn anything for weeks, but the expenses continue."	Emphasizes the importance of financial literacy programs and cash flow management training to improve business sustainability.
Regulatory and Bureaucratic Burdens	Participants reported difficulties in navigating permit renewals, taxation, and documentation processes that consume time and resources.	“renewing permits takes too long; it affects our operations and income."	Local governments should simplify processes and provide clear instructions to encourage compliance
Coping through Resourcefulness and Improvisation	Entrepreneurs adapt to challenges by improvising, reusing materials, and finding	"We make do with what we have; we just find ways to keep going"	It highlights the importance of entrepreneurial ingenuity and the possibility for training programs to improve adaptable capacities.

	creative ways to sustain operations with limited resources.		
Dependence on Social Support Networks	Family, friends, and community members serve as crucial support systems during financial or emotional crises.	. The statement "My relatives lend me money or help me sell when business is slow"	It highlights the importance of social capital and community-based entrepreneurship networks.
Digital Adaptation and Innovation as Survival Strategies	Many participants adopted digital tools such as social media, mobile payments, and online selling to sustain their business.	During the epidemic, I learned how to sell online and reach more clients.	This highlights the need of digital literacy and technological availability for rural enterprises to increase their competitiveness.
Emotional Resilience amid Stress and Uncertainty	Participants shared how they maintained hope, optimism, and determination despite multiple setbacks and business difficulties.	Even when I feel tired, I remind myself why I started this business."	Entrepreneurs can benefit from psychological assistance and resilience-building courses
Hopes for Government and Institutional Support	Entrepreneurs expressed a desire for stronger local government assistance, fair policies, and more accessible financial support.	"We just hope the government can give small businesses more attention and programs."	Institutional alliances and responsive policies are vital for boosting local entrepreneurship ecosystems.

Theme 1: Financial Strain and Unpredictable Cash Flow

At one time, income could be high and profits almost nothing. Budgeting can be difficult at times.Research also support this idea: in a study conducted by Amoako (2021), small and micro enterprises operating in poor countries are frequently up against considerable cash flow volatilities that pose the threat of drowning them even more than do competitors themselves, while Chinomona and Maziriri (2020) contend that the uncertainty of future earnings discourages reinvestment and makes it particularly susceptible to external shocks.Not only is it an operational problem for Tandag enterprises, it is a mental burden on the need to keep going.

Theme 2: Regulatory and Bureaucratic Burdens

Business owners described regulatory requirements as extremely difficult and time-consuming. One participant observed: "Every servant made eyc, "There are so many papers and procedures; it can be tiring at times, but we have to do it."

This is also confirmed by Nguyen et al. (2020), who found that extensive bureaucratic inefficiency keeps many small entrepreneurs from going formal. Similarly, McKenzie and Woodruff (2017) argued that high regulatory costs block small enterprises at every step, forcing many into gap areas instead. Not only do Tandag's regulatory requirements consume time and resources, but also divert attention from innovation and customer service.

Theme 3: Coping through Resourcefulness and Improvisation

When either finance or resources were limited, entrepreneurs turned often to creativity and temporary solutions. Another story canvassed was: "No capital? Just borrow from the neighbor or find a way around it."

This is a matter of 'bricolage.' Bricolage involves doing the best you can with available means (Baker & Nelson 2021). Pret and Cogan (2019) found that small business owners in areas short of resources adopt improvisation as a means of survival. And while this speaks to resilience it also draws critical attention to systemic-financial attacks mounted against rural companies.

Theme 4: Dependence on Social Support Networks

Family, friends, and community members served as essential safety nets, offering financial assistance, unpaid work, and emotional support. One person stated, "If I run out of money, my family helps; it is truly our power. Without them today, what would I do? (Mao gyud ni among kusog.")

This conclusion agrees with Putnam's (2018) work Social Capital, which demonstrates the importance of trust and networks in promoting resilience. At the same time, Sibhat and Ayenew's (2020) study echoed this point, showing that informal dealings protect small entrepreneurs when harm relief systems are not available. In the Tandag environment, the degree to which social networks are used serves as a measure both for strong local ties or relationships and how easily businesses collapse once the system becomes overloaded.

Theme 5: Digital Adaptation and Innovation as Survival Strategies

One of the couple reported that she knew about this organization only from information posted on Facebook and later joined through GCash. Another said: "I just put the stuff out there at Facebook to try and sell it. I ah got so many new customers like that." By 2012, according to surveys, nearly 4,000 e-commerce practitioners in Tandag still relied on personal social networks and assistance for their start.

This finding aligns with Dwivedi et al.'s (2020) research results which indicate that digital technologies allow SMEs to expand their reach and keep their operations going (COVID-19). Similarly, Maritz et al.'s (2020) study showed that digital innovation builds entrepreneurial resilience in unpredictable conditions. But there is no widespread use of technology innovation among backward regions such as Tandag because too many people lack the necessary literacy and infrastructure.

Theme 6: Emotional Resilience amid Stress and Uncertainty

When facing adversity, participants are not easily discouraged: for them to persist at a task despite opposition is not an idle attitude. One man summed it up: "No matter how tired and with what many problems, we must carry on; this is our livelihood."

Entrepreneurial survival was the topic of our conference, so this theme reflects well on the findings of Bullough and Renko (2019) that resilient, optimistic entrepreneurs who feel confident of their ability have psychological attributes that are essential for fighting adversity. Shepherd et al. (2020) also emphasized that emotional resilience enables entrepreneurs to learn from error and hold up in the face of doubt. However, when you experience too much pressure and there's no coping support in sight, unfortunately it may exceed your capacity for dealing with all the strain.

Theme 7: Hopes for Government and Institutional Support

Lastly, significant percentages of participants demanded financial support; they want training as well as administrative simplicity from government departments. One owner said: "If only there was more help from the government, our business would flourish far more easily".

This is consistent with Williams and Vorley's (2017) point that entrepreneurial ecosystems flourish when institutional frameworks are supportive and inclusive. The OECD (2021) similarly found in its report that government-sponsored training and finance measures for business significantly lift SMEs, especially in terms of rural economies. Tandag entrepreneurs know that changing individual resilience to collective and sustainable growth requires systematic help.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A) Conclusion

Given resource-strapped lives especially in times of difficulty, government officials and clients have acknowledged the small company entrepreneurs' efficiency in the sense that they keep struggling on. Just being able to get by becomes its own reward -- an end in itself, another virtue of these self-employed workers. The survival of such workers is accomplished by cleverness with resources and using digital means. Such adaptation is indispensable for entrepreneurs in a rural context. Social networks, emotional resilience, and local community links are all important for the success of a company. But when official aid dries up, they could mean that even then entrepreneurial operations continue to live on. The gap between entrepreneurs 'needs and the kind of institutional or government help they can get is a real challenge for the long-term healthy development of entrepreneurship outlets and their boxies (licence holders) Small company owners' resilience comes from factors both outside (regulatory systems, market environment, institutional backing) and from within (adaptability, emotional fortitude, and innovative ways of doing business).

B) Recommendations

On the basis of these findings the following policy suggestions are made:

- For small business owners, reinforce their resourcefulness and digital capabilities so they can respond to market changes. Emotional resilience and mutual aid peer groups also probably enhance coping capabilities.
- For Local Government Units (LGUs) and Agencies: Simplify the development and administrative process, scrap redundant elements in business registration if any are found, and look into giving taxes and fees seasonally or on an incomesensitive basis to suit the needs of small businesses.
- For academic institutions (e.g., BSBA Extension Programs), develop community-based courses and lectures on digital literacy, bookkeeping, entrepreneurial resilience, and death management. Teachers and students can act as facilitators in capacity-building measures.
- For Policymakers: Set up some programs to provide a variety of financial assistances for rural enterprises, including microfinance with flexible terms for repayment, grants, and low-interest loans.
- For Future Researchers: Make a long-term study of entrepreneurial resilience and vulnerability from a rural perspective.

The focus would be on how digitalisation and changes in institutions influence sustainability over the life of firms.

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