RESEARCH ARTICLE

Resilience and adaptation of third sector organizations (TSOs) during crisis situations: Insights from a West African economy

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Abstract

Across the globe, third sector organizations (TSOs) have long been recognized for their significant contributions to community support and sustainable development. However, their vulnerability to socioeconomic challenges, exemplified by the Covid-19 pandemic, prompts a deeper examination. This study employs semi-structured interviews to explore the resilience and adaptation strategies of TSOs operating in Nigeria, a West African country facing unique challenges. Findings reveal an intricate blend of traditional and innovative approaches, including strategic capabilities, digital citizenship, cultural dynamics, and community participation, employed by TSOs to navigate the uncertainties triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic. By uncovering these less-explored resilience dimensions, the study offers valuable insights for TSOs, policymakers, and scholars seeking to understand and enhance organizational resilience in challenging economic and social contexts.

KEYWORDS
Covid-19, culture, community, digital citizenship, resilience, third sector organizations

1 | INTRODUCTION

In the context of global socioeconomic responsiveness, third sector organizations (hereafter, TSOs) have emerged as key actors in addressing the diverse needs of communities, a role extensively documented in the scholarly literature (Campanale et al., 2021; Kassem et al., 2021). TSOs, comprising entities such as community groups, voluntary organizations, charities, cooperatives, and social enterprises, are distinct from state-owned, profit-maximizing enterprises (Daff & Parker, 2021; Henderson & Lambert, 2018; Hyndman, 2020; Connolly et al., 2013). Driven by their commitment to values, TSOs channel their resources to tackle socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental challenges. Their trajectory has seen notable growth in financial strength, as highlighted by Chapman (2022), who reports a substantial increase in TSOs' financial assets from £35 billion to approximately £60 billion in the Northeast and Cumbria regions of the United Kingdom between 2001 and 2019. This financial prowess significantly shapes their societal impact (Kober & Thambar, 2023). The extensive literature on TSOs underpins their indispensable role in advancing sustainable development goals worldwide, including poverty alleviation (Kistruck & Shulist, 2021; Brass et al., 2018), gender equality promotion, livelihood enhancement, and broader societal contributions (Chung, 2021; Kassem et al., 2021; Baur & Schmitzm, 2012). Moreover, TSOs' substantial financial support for government endeavors, as evidenced by Chapman's (2022) findings on their substantial contribution to England and Wales' social and economic welfare in 2022, further emphasizes their significance.

Despite their extensive impact, TSOs are consistently exposed to environmental and other complex challenges. MacMillan (2020) argued that these challenges are multifaceted, encompassing resource availability, operational challenges, and increased demand from vulnerable communities. These problems have led to the closure of over 1000 infrastructure-based TSOs between 2010 and 2021 in the United Kingdom (Kane & Cohen, 2023). Further evidence suggests that TSOs managed by minority ethnic groups are less resilient to these challenges, with many contemplating the cessation of their operations (Murray, 2020). In particular, the recent Covid-19 pandemic has exposed their fragility and vulnerability to economic downturns (Clifford et al., 2023; Thiery et al., 2021). A survey by the Institute of Fundraising, the National Council of Voluntary Organizations, and the Charity Finance Group (2020) validates this view, revealing that a significant portion of TSOs lost a third of their income during the pandemic, thereby impeding their charitable activities and threatening their continuity.

Although the global impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on TSOs exhibits a relatively consistent pattern, it is crucial to underline the profound disruption experienced by TSOs in West Africa. In this setting, TSOs have historically played pivotal roles in sponsoring social and health policies, humanitarian endeavors, and developmental activities. The pandemic brought about a significant reversal of achievements in community healthcare support, with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) noting that 32 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa were thrust into extreme poverty in 2020, and per capita income regressed by nearly 7 years (IMF, 2021). Moreover, EpicAfrica's Report (2020) reveals that TSOs in the region grappled with limited resilience, with over 80% indicating a low capacity to adapt to pandemic-induced disruptions and 69% scaling back or discontinuing their engagement with vulnerable individuals and communities. The pandemic's repercussions were so severe that TSOs, such as African Initiatives, which had made significant strides in disability advocacy, livelihood improvement, education, healthcare, and poverty reduction, were compelled to suspend their operations. This crisis posed one of the most formidable challenges TSOs have faced in decades (Hyndman, 2020).

Although scholarly attention has been devoted to TSOs' roles, accountability, and financial stability in both developed (Conaty & Robbins, 2023; Kober & Thambar, 2023) and developing (Appe, 2022; Obadare & Krawczyk, 2022) economies, there remains a paucity of research focusing on their resilience and adaptation strategies during times of crisis (Kingston et al., 2023; Kober & Thambar, 2021), particularly within the West African setting. It is worth noting that the existing literature on TSOs in many parts of Africa predominantly focuses on their contributions to social development rather than their resilience strategies during crises. Although some studies investigate TSOs' responses to specific challenges, such as funding constraints or governance issues (Ashiru et al., 2022; Fatoki, 2018; Nakpodia et al., 2024), there is a notable gap in understanding how TSOs overcome uncertainty within their local contexts, particularly during crisis situations such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, there is a need for research that examines

explicitly the unique strategies and influences contributing to the resilience of TSOs in West Africa during times of crisis. Moreover, another lacuna in the literature lies in the lack of attention to the diverse contextual factors that shape TSOs' resilience strategies in West Africa. Existing literature (e.g., Hayton, 2021; Pape et al., 2020; Witmer & Mellinger, 2016) often overlooks the intricate interactions between socioeconomic, cultural, and political dynamics within specific local contexts, significantly influencing TSOs' responses to crises. Given the alarming prevalence of extreme poverty in West Africa, the region is in dire need of TSOs that can adapt and remain resilient amidst crises to drive positive change (Buffett & Eimicke, 2018). This research gap underscores the significance of studies exploring the resilience and adaptation strategies of TSOs during crisis periods.

In contributing to the literature investigating TSOs' resilience and adaptation in times of crises, we draw upon insights from resilience theory (Liñares-Zegarra & Wilson, 2023; Pape et al., 2020; You & Williams, 2023) and network theory (Binder, 2019; Wellman, 1997; Xie et al., 2022). By employing an interdisciplinary approach rooted in resilience theory, we aim to understand how TSOs manage various crises, be they financial, political, cultural, or economic. We recognize that crises are inevitable in the ever-evolving landscape of TSOs, and we emphasize the need for these organizations to be proactive and adaptive rather than merely reactive in the face of turbulent times. Furthermore, by incorporating network theory, we delve into the underexplored concept of stakeholder interconnectedness (Wellman, 1997). In this context, we argue that stakeholders are not isolated entities but rather interconnected networks that can form collaborative alliances to effectively overcome the consequences of crises. Thus, our research seeks to address the critical question:

> How do TSOs in a West African economy navigate uncertainty within their local context, and what unique strategies and influences contribute to their resilience during crisis situations (e.g., Covid-19)?

Drawing on the economic, social, and political influence of countries in West Africa, we focus our research on Nigeria. The choice of Nigeria as our empirical setting derives from some key economic and social variables. It is the largest economy in Africa (Bloomberg, 2023; Business Insider Africa, 2023), and Goldman Sachs (2022) projects its potential to become one of the world's top five economies by 2075. McKinsey Global Institute (2023) stresses the critical role Nigeria has played in the broader economic landscape of West Africa. Furthermore, Nigeria's unique economic challenges, coupled with the pressing need to support its growing population of vulnerable individuals, accentuate TSOs' significance in this setting. As indicated by a World Bank (2024) Report, Nigeria's human capital index ranks among the lowest globally, and it holds the distinction of having the world's second-largest impoverished population after India. The similarities in economic, cultural, and political traits between Nigeria and other emerging nations, along with their shared goals and domestic challenges, further reinforce Nigeria's suitability as a compelling research setting, especially considering the limited literature on TSOs in developing economies (Nakpodia et al., 2024). It is also critical to note the impact of Covid-19 in Nigeria has been far-reaching, significantly affecting various socioeconomic facets. The pandemic strained Nigeria's healthcare system, exacerbating infrastructure and resource challenges (Ejiogu et al., 2020). Economic disruptions led to job losses and GDP decline, whereas socially, fear and social distancing altered relations. Education faced disruptions with widespread school closures. Covid-19 exposed vulnerabilities in Nigeria's systems (Ashiru et al., 2022), emphasizing the need for resilience-building efforts, especially among TSOs, to overcome the crisis effectively.

Using a qualitative, interview-based research methodology (Hammarberg et al., 2016), our research suggests that Nigerian TSOs leverage strategic capabilities, digital citizenship, cultural dynamics, and community participation to manage the Covid-19 crisis. These key strategies include scenario planning techniques, crowdfunding via the digital space, activating perpetual crisis mode, fostering symbiotic alliances with stakeholders, remote volunteering engagement, and acknowledging culturalization. For example, the persistent presence of institutional and regulatory uncertainties (Nakpodia et al., 2023) necessitates that TSOs maintain organizational flexibility to retain their resilience and navigate unanticipated crises (e.g., Covid-19). Our findings substantially contribute to the TSO literature and offer valuable insights for policy development within the third sector. This study stands as one of the pioneering efforts to adopt an eclectic approach to exploring the resilience and adaptation strategies of TSOs in the West African region.

Previous research predominantly focused on TSO activities in developed economies, examining issues like financial constraints in the wake of adverse events (Balsam & Harris, 2014), postcrisis voluntary disclosure (Guo et al., 2023), and the interplay between accountability and management control systems in crisis scenarios (Conaty & Robbins, 2023; Kober & Thambar, 2023). In contrast, our research addresses a lacuna in the literature, shedding light on TSO resilience in lesser-explored contexts through the lenses of resilience and network paradigms.

In the next section of this paper, we discuss the theoretical anchors of the study, followed by a review of the challenges that TSOs encounter and their responses to adverse events. We then present the research methodology, whereas findings and discussions are detailed in the subsequent sections. The final sections of the paper provide a reflective analysis of the study's contributions, acknowledge its limitations, and identify avenues for future scholarly inquiry.

2 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 | Resilience theory

The resilience notion in the business and management literature evolved from Meyer's (1982) seminal work, which examined how organizations respond to environmental shocks. Resilience is "a desirable characteristic" for organizations (Linnenluecke, 2017) because it presents a potent construct for managing adversities triggered by external events (Williams et al., 2017). You and Williams (2023) acknowledged resilience as a valuable organizational competence that enables firms to react to and recover from disturbances with minimal effects on their operations. Resilience theory, which builds on the resilience concept, explores the ability of organizational systems to withstand, adapt, and thrive in the face of shocks, disturbances, or changes (Southwick et al., 2014). The theory offers insights into how firms build adaptive capacities to manage and recover from disruptive events, such as Covid-19 (Ashiru et al., 2023). The theory acknowledges that disruptions and uncertainties are inherent in convoluted business systems. Thus, Meyer (1982) explained that the theory demands that organizations enhance their capacity to anticipate, respond to, and learn from crises. It is critical to note that resilience traverses merely bouncing back from shocks and crises. It encompasses the concept of "bouncing forward" (Manyena et al., 2019) emphasizing the ability to adapt, transform, and build better systems and processes in the aftermath of unanticipated events.

Resilience theory offers a robust mechanism for exploring TSOs' resilience (Pape et al., 2020). According to Liñares-Zegarra and Wilson (2023), resilience theory sheds light on how TSOs confront economic fluctuations, political instability, and cultural diversity while highlighting the importance of adaptive responses, collaboration, and utilizing local resources and networks to sustain their services. For TSOs in challenging environments, prevailing cultural issues further enrich the value of resilience theory (Pratt, 2015). Cultural norms, local knowledge, and community networks offer strategic resources that maximize TSOs' adaptive capacities. In this light, resilience encompasses TSOs' ability to integrate and engage these cultural assets effectively. It is also crucial to note that collaborative efforts with other entities, within and beyond the third sector, enhance the sharing of knowledge, resources, and best practices. Such collaboration is critical in economies where systemic and acute disruptions are commonplace. Given its dynamism, resilience theory offers a robust framework to examine how Nigerian TSOs deal with unforeseen challenges and maintain their operations. By analyzing the mechanisms TSOs employ to absorb shocks, adapt, and collaborate, this theory accelerates a deeper understanding of the resilience tools that drive the ongoing endeavors of these entities within a challenging setting.

2.2 | Network theory

Networks have attracted growing traction in organizational and management research (Binder, 2019). The interest has found its way into the literature investigating resilience (Kim et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2022) and TSOs (Lyth et al., 2017).

Network theory aids the investigation of the economic significance of networks in organizational research. The theory stresses the interconnectedness of organizations and the influence of their relationships in shaping their behavior, strategies, and responses to challenges (Thornton et al., 2013; Tröster et al., 2014). Although a consensus view of network theory is lacking, Wellman (1997) articulated five fundamental principles that provide the required intellectual footing for the theory. He noted that people's behavior is best predicted by investigating the web of relationships in which they are embedded, the focus of analysis should emphasize the relationship between entities, analytic methods should assume interdependence among the study population, the understanding of a social system demands knowledge that stretches beyond dyadic ties, and lastly, the acceptance that the building blocks of organizations are not discrete groups but rather overlapping networks.

Network theory holds significant relevance for understanding how TSOs overcome adversity. It casts insights into how TSOs strategically deploy their networks to access critical resources (e.g., funding, expertise, and information) to build their resilience (Lyth et al., 2017). Network theory offers a robust theoretical foundation to examine the interconnectedness and interdependencies among TSOs in a developing economy as they deal with uncertainty and reinforce their adaptability and flexibility during crisis situations. The theory explores how TSOs establish and leverage relationships with various stakeholders, including other organizations, government agencies, and community groups, to access resources, share information, and coordinate collective responses. By engaging their networks, TSOs can adapt their strategies, implement new initiatives, and sustain their operations regardless of economic and social turbulence (Liñares-Zegarra & Wilson, 2023). They can also act as brokers between diverse networks, thereby expediting the flow of resources and information across otherwise disconnected entities. This intervention can activate innovation, adaptive capacity, and collective problem-solving, contributing to organizational resilience. Besides, by analyzing TSOs' network structures and dynamics, this study aims to uncover the key mechanisms driving resilience within the TSO ecosystem in a developing economy.

In sum, network theory offers a comprehensive framework for investigating how TSOs in a weak institutional setting build and sustain networks, forge strategic collaborations, and access shared resources to enhance their resilience. By delving into the interaction of relationships, trust, and resource sharing within networks, this theory enriches the understanding of how TSOs navigate complexities in an uncertain economic landscape.

3 | LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 | Organizational resilience

Resilience is the ability of organizations to absorb disturbances, adapt, and transform to achieve their goals and thrive in the face of challenges (Barasa et al., 2018). Beyond bouncing back, organizational resilience focuses on emerging stronger from changes and innovation. Two broad dimensions, that is, planned and adaptive, define organizational resilience (Walker et al., 2019). Planned resilience relies on precrisis plans, such as risk management and business continuity, to avoid or reduce the effects of a crisis. In contrast, adaptive resilience involves developing capacities to respond to challenging conditions postcrisis (Walker et al., 2019). Adaptive resilience, the focus of this study, is more prominent during times of crisis. Organizational networks, collaboration, staff engagement, information sharing, and financial resources are crucial for promoting resilience during turbulent times. For example, Walker et al. (2019) identified key factors influencing organizational adaptive resilience as internal and external collaboration, learning from experiences, staff engagement and wellbeing, and effective leadership skills. Barasa et al. (2018) also acknowledged factors that facilitate organizational resilience during acute shocks, including financial, material, and technological resources, effective planning, information management, alternative action plans, decentralized governance processes, learning, innovation, creativity, staff engagement, and wellbeing, as well as collaborations and social networks. More importantly, Barasa et al. (2018) clearly distinguished between the "software" and "hardware" components of organizational resilience. They emphasized that elements such as leadership, collaborations, and social networks hold

greater importance compared to the "hardware" represented by financial and material resources. The "software" is crucial for effectively harnessing the potential of the "hardware." Likewise, Jia et al. (2020) found that precrisis external networks and collaborations played a critical role in enhancing adaptive resilience in supply chain management following natural disasters, whereas Richtnér and Löfsten (2014) emphasized the significance of emotional and cognitive resources, including trust, collegiality, support, knowledge, and competence, in developing the capacity for organizational resilience. Although these studies highlight the fundamental role of organizational resilience during uncertainties, firms must exhibit resilience to succeed and thrive during and following environmental disasters, economic crises, geopolitical instability, and rapid technological advancement (King et al., 2016).

3.2 | Multifaceted challenges confronting TSOs during crisis

Crises, such as global economic crises, insecurity, wars, and natural and human-made disasters, have devastating effects on humans, the environment, and the economy. In the last few months, the world has witnessed a series of natural disasters, including floods in Libya, China, and the United Kingdom; earthquakes in Morocco, Turkey, and Syria; wildfires in North America and Europe; a cyclone in Mocha; and tornadoes in the United States. These events sparked a severe humanitarian crisis. For example, the United States had reported 24 climate and weather-related disasters, resulting in 373 deaths and a total cost exceeding 57.6 billion dollars (NOAA, 2023). Alouf and Wright (2023) also informed that early skirmishes in the Israeli-Palestine war have accounted for over 2500 deaths, 5000 injuries, and 338,000 displaced people. These crises produce food insecurity, separation from family, and supply chain disruptions, activating health, emotional, and economic problems. Although governments and international bodies commit resources to alleviate these problems, TSOs are crucial in providing relief to those affected. However, as Parker (2023) contends, the spate of crises, notably the Covid-19 pandemic, threatens TSOs' viability.

The Covid-19 pandemic generated unprecedented challenges worldwide. The disruptions triggered by the pandemic strained the networks supporting TSOs' activities. Lockdown restrictions were imposed, disrupting economic activities. Organizations were compelled to confront the pandemic's multiple impacts in varying ways, catalyzing the emergence of rapid response strategies and putting firm adaptability and resilience to a rigorous test (Khlystova et al., 2022). These developments severely impacted TSOs, as fundraising events were cancelled, charity shops closed, property rental income diminished, and social distancing measures were enforced, thus devastating TSOs' income streams, forcing them to curtail activities and tap into their reserves (Hyndman, 2020). In terms of the financial impact of the pandemic, Clifford et al. (2023) reported that, on average, TSOs experienced a 13% decrease in real annual income. The reductions in revenue during the pandemic were higher than those reported during the Great Recession. Smaller organizations were significantly more affected by the declining income due to their limited ability to be resilient during crises (Hadjielias et al., 2022). This is aggravated by the fact that smaller organizations (such as TSOs) with fewer resources and narrower support networks have been particularly susceptible to financial strain. This has ripple effects across the network, as TSOs rely on each other for mutual aid and collaboration. Although researchers (Clifford et al., 2023; Hyndman, 2020; Thiery et al., 2021) reported depleting financial resources among UK-based TSOs, some U.S. TSOs experienced a substantial increase in donations. Amid fears that TSOs might not survive the pandemic if they have limited access to funding, donors entrusted them with funds without scrutinizing the use of the resources (Choi et al., 2023). This indicates that the pandemic's impact on TSOs' finances varies, depending on location and donor attitudes.

Due to the financial constraints encountered by TSOs, some furloughed their employees as they could not pay staff salaries (Hayton, 2021). They also experienced problems sourcing human resources. The problems were exacerbated by TSOs' inability to retain and build their volunteer base, which they relied on to provide critical services prior to the pandemic (Chapman, 2022). In the United Kingdom, volunteering levels dropped as more individuals left their roles and fewer volunteers took on new ones (Dederichs, 2023). Dederichs (2023) hinted further that older volunteers were more likely to quit their positions, whereas individuals with higher education were less likely to start volunteering

roles. Similar findings were reported in the United States, where volunteer coordinators faced challenges rebuilding their in-person volunteer base due to concerns about transmitting the virus. Besides, Choi et al. (2023) stated that a notable proportion of volunteers expressed unwillingness or inability to resume in-person volunteer roles. These worsened TSOs' human resource concerns, as many firms had only a few staff members to manage their operations. Concurrently, TSOs faced a considerable rise in demand from beneficiaries for their services (Liñares-Zegarra & Wilson, 2023). This surge in demand was primarily driven by the growing need for support in mental health and social welfare, intensified by the effects of social isolation and financial insecurity (Hyndman, 2020; Thiery et al., 2021). As a result, TSOs grappled with difficult decisions amid shrinking income, a reduced workforce, and escalating service demands, leading to a three-dimensional problem (Deitrick et al., 2020; Macmillan, 2020). In reacting to these challenges, TSOs had to develop innovative strategic responses and adapt to the changing environments.

3.3 | TSOs adaptation and resilience strategies during crisis

Although lockdown restrictions interrupted face-to-face exchanges and stifled the core activities of TSOs, there was rapid development in remote working, unveiling opportunities for technology in service delivery (Agostino et al., 2021; Castka et al., 2020). The deployment of digital technologies was crucial in building the resilience required for organizations' survival during the pandemic (Nakpodia et al., 2024). In particular, technology proved pivotal in facilitating communication, forging bonds with stakeholders, promoting collaborations, and enabling innovation (Ashiru et al., 2023; Fuller & Rice, 2022). TSOs' deployment of digital technology ensured safe interactions between their staff and clients, allowing them to comply with social isolation regulations. These were achieved through online video calls, dedicated Facebook groups, and regular Zoom meetings (Choi et al., 2023). This supports the network theorization postulation, which suggests that, during crises, TSOs often operate within extensive networks of collaboration and support. These networks enable TSOs to access resources, expertise, and information necessary for effective crisis response. Besides using WhatsApp and Facebook to stay in touch with target groups, audio recordings were also employed to deliver multilingual, accessible, and prompt information to individuals with limited online communication skills (Raeymaeckers & Van Puyvelde, 2021).

Moreover, the creation and use of "tele" social work process for scheduling online appointments with service users proved helpful in facilitating TSOs' operations (Shi et al., 2020), whereas telemedicine enhanced the provision of medical services to populations in difficult-to-reach areas (Santos & Laureano, 2022). To surmount the financial difficulties triggered by the pandemic, TSOs used social media channels, notably Twitter and Instagram, to communicate crowdfunding initiatives. They also used video recordings featuring prominent social media personalities to narrate the importance of their interventions (Raeymaeckers & Van Puyvelde, 2021). Remarkably, the features of the technology, including privacy, reliability, security, and trustworthiness, influenced donors' attitudes toward online charitable giving (Bin-Nashwan et al., 2022). TSOs' use of digital technology for community building, communications with stakeholders, and timely dissemination of information contributed to their ability to maintain core operations and develop new collaborations during the pandemic (Fuller & Rice, 2022; Maserat et al., 2020), as well as create new or strengthen existing networks. As a result, TSOs were able to meet the growing demand for their services while adhering to safety measures.

Collaboration within TSOs and with other organizations was another strategy deployed during the pandemic. This strategy allowed TSOs to acquire resources and capabilities that enhanced their resilience (Bonner, 2020; Waerder et al., 2022). As Finchum-Mason et al. (2020) noted, about 80% of U.S. foundations collaborated with other foundations, whereas 56% collaborated with state and local governments in reacting to the pandemic. TSOs strategically formed partnerships with businesses to ensure the availability of critical resources, some of which were in short supply; engaged in collaborations with public authorities to facilitate information sharing and address staff shortages; and established collaborative relationships with other TSOs to exchange ideas, knowledge, and experiences (Stötzer et al., 2022). Preexisting relationships and social capital were essential in establishing these collaborations (Cook et al.,

2023). Moreover, TSOs served as information intermediaries by collaborating with public authorities. According to Basson and Sallé (2023), TSOs leveraged their close integration with vulnerable populations to collect and share vital information with public authorities, earning them a place at the table of policymakers and enhancing their legitimacy. This resonates with other findings where participants reported that the coordinated response between TSOs and public authority raised the reputation of TSOs (Cook et al., 2023; Thiery et al., 2021).

Indeed, the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted TSOs' activities globally. The reviewed studies show that TSOs adjust their operations in the constantly changing environment to survive emergent crises. Beyond adaptation, they deploy innovative strategies, highlighting their resilience and enabling them to bounce forward. Although extensive studies have explored the effects of the pandemic on TSOs' operations in Europe and the United States, this study seeks to build on the extant literature as we address how Nigerian TSOs deepened their organizational resilience and managed the uncertainties elicited by the pandemic.

4 | RESEARCH METHOD AND DATA

This study adopts a qualitative, interview-based research methodology to understand how Nigerian TSOs managed uncertainties while delving into the distinctive approaches and factors contributing to their resilience during the pandemic. Hammarberg et al. (2016) contended that qualitative methods help address questions about experience, meaning, and perspective, most often from the participants' standpoint. They further note that qualitative methods are appropriate for studies investigating beliefs, attitudes, and concepts of normative behavior to understand a condition, experience, or event from a personal perspective. Although Hammarberg et al.'s (2016) articulation connects with the premise of this study, related prior literature (e.g., Connolly et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2022; Bynner et al., 2022; Guo et al., 2023) has adopted a similar methodology.

4.1 | Study participants

Consistent with the central research objective and the methodology adopted in this study, participants for this research were selected from TSOs in Nigeria. We followed a purposive sampling strategy (Campbell et al., 2020), targeting individuals with considerable experience (a minimum of 5 years) in managing TSOs. We relied on three sources to recruit participants. First, as one of the researchers had considerable working experience in Nigeria and is also a member of the Rotary Club (the largest charity organization in the world), the initial participants were contacted via email, outlining the study aims and an invitation to participate in the research. Next, we draw on the growing use of LinkedIn among scholars (Stokes et al., 2019) to identify and recruit participants who fit the agreed profile. We contacted 46 potential participants on LinkedIn. Twenty-seven of those contacted responded, but only 21 accepted the invitation to participate in the research. Lastly, we recruited a further set of participants through snowballing. Woodley and Lockard (2016) explained that snowball sampling allows increased access to individuals that may otherwise remain inaccessible. This proved helpful as we were able to engage our personal and LinkedIn recruits to reach individuals who met the desired participant profile.

To this end, our final sample (see Table 1) consisted of 38 participants, aged between 33 and 64 (average ≈44 years) and with experience ranging from 7 to 29 years (average ≈14 years). Moreover, per Table 1, 61% of participants (i.e., 23) were women, and all the participants were either top-level (76%) or middle-level (24%) managers. The sample also shows a healthy geographical spread, with 57% of participants based in Lagos (the commercial center of Nigeria), whereas the others operate outside Lagos (see Table 1). The geographical diversity enables us to account for TSOs practices across the country. It is worth noting that the number of participants in this research is consistent with related studies, for example, Connolly et al. (2021) and Guo et al. (2023).

TABLE 1 Participants profile.

Participant	Years of experience	Age	Gender	Position	Location
P1	7	35	Female	Top-level	Lagos
P2	7	35	Female	Middle-level	Outside Lagos
P3	7	33	Male	Top-level	Outside Lagos
P4	8	34	Female	Top-level	Lagos
P5	8	38	Female	Top-level	Lagos
P6	8	37	Female	Top-level	Lagos
P7	8	40	Male	Top-level	Lagos
P8	9	35	Female	Top-level	Lagos
P9	9	38	Female	Top-level	Lagos
P10	9	33	Male	Top-level	Outside Lagos
P11	10	40	Male	Top-level	Lagos
P12	11	41	Female	Top-level	Lagos
P13	11	42	Female	Middle-level	Outside Lagos
P14	11	38	Male	Top-level	Lagos
P15	11	39	Male	Top-level	Outside Lagos
P16	11	44	Male	Top-level	Outside Lagos
P17	12	38	Female	Top-level	Lagos
P18	12	44	Male	Middle-level	Outside Lagos
P19	14	43	Female	Top-level	Lagos
P20	14	49	Male	Middle-level	Outside Lagos
P21	15	42	Female	Middle-level	Lagos
P22	15	40	Female	Top-level	Lagos
P23	15	47	Female	Top-level	Lagos
P24	15	42	Female	Top-level	Lagos
P25	17	43	Female	Top-level	Lagos
P26	17	47	Female	Top-level	Outside Lagos
P27	17	48	Male	Middle-level	Outside Lagos
P28	18	44	Female	Top-level	Lagos
P29	18	48	Male	Middle-level	Outside Lagos
P30	19	46	Male	Top-level	Outside Lagos
P31	21	55	Female	Top-level	Lagos
P32	21	50	Female	Top-level	Lagos
P33	21	59	Female	Middle-level	Outside Lagos
P34	21	52	Male	Top-level	Lagos
P35	22	57	Female	Top-level	Outside Lagos
P36	22	60	Male	Top-level	Lagos
P37	24	64	Male	Top-level	Outside Lagos
P38	29	62	Female	Middle-level	Outside Lagos

4.2 | Data collection: semi-structured interviews

Once participants were identified and the research aims communicated to them, we commenced the interviews. According to Cullingworth et al. (2022), interviews provide a valuable data collection technique for exploring the experiences, perspectives, and strategies of TSOs amidst uncertainty. They offer nuanced responses tailored to Nigeria's local context. Interviews allow for the capture of rich qualitative data that reflects the complexities of TSO operations and facilitates a thorough understanding of resilience dynamics during crises. Moreover, the scarcity of research in this domain, particularly concerning less-developed countries, necessitates a methodology that permits direct engagement with stakeholders instead of relying on unavailable or insufficient secondary data.

We opted for semi-structured interviews because it is the most used data collection method in qualitative studies (Kallio et al., 2016). A primary benefit of the semi-structured interview method is facilitating reciprocity between study participants and interviewer (Galletta, 2013), enabling the interviewer to improvise follow-up questions based on participants' responses (Polit & Beck 2012). This advantage is critical to this research, considering the need to rely on participants' extensive knowledge of the operating environment to extend the frontiers of existing knowledge.

Ahead of the interviews, an interview guide (see Appendix 1) was emailed to participants to allow them to familiarize themselves with the interview questions (Fox, 2009) as well as minimize ethical concerns relating to deception, invasion of privacy, lack of informed consent, and harm to participants (Diener & Crandall, 1978). The interviews were conducted over 17 months between November 2021 and March 2023. Seven of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, whereas the others (31) were via the Zoom videoconferencing platform (Archibald et al., 2019). All the interviews were recorded after obtaining consent from the interviewees. We interviewed all 38 identified participants, opting to stop after the 38th interview as limited fresh insights emerged from the last set of interviews (Guest et al., 2006). Each interview lasted approximately 40 to 85 min (about 55 min on average).

4.3 | Analyzing the data

We used a dual-step process (i.e., pre-coding and coding) to generate information from the data. The pre-coding stage involved preparing the data for analysis. We commenced the pre-coding by converting (transcribing) the recorded interviews to text data. We transcribed the data using the Otter.ai software. Otter.ai is a digital platform that allows users to transcribe audio recordings into text notes (Gray et al., 2020). The text output was reviewed while repeatedly listening to the recordings to make necessary corrections and ensure the output was fit for analysis. This procedure enhanced data familiarization and immersion. The transcribed interviews, which generated 231 pages of text, were then uploaded to NVivo (a qualitative data analysis software) to enable the coding of the text data.

Following the preparation and loading of the data to NVivo, we embarked on a coding process to code the data and categorize emergent codes (see Figure 1). To minimize the challenges associated with analyzing enormous amounts of unstructured data, we used NVivo software to take advantage of the tools provided by the software (e.g., categorizing, sorting, and organizing the data) to uncover themes and patterns (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019). We used the "explore" and "word frequency" functions of NVivo to generate a word cloud displaying a pictorial representation of the data to aid the labeling and organizing of the data to uncover relationships. This process, that is, first-order coding or sub-categorization, ensured a broad and in-depth investigation of the data (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2022) and uncovered themes that elicited considerable attention among interviewees (second-order coding or generic categorization). This procedure produced themes such as strategic capabilities, digital citizenship, cultural dynamics, and community participation.

The final activity in data coding is the systematic categorization of related themes from the data, consistent with Gioia et al.'s (2013) recommendations. This required that the second-order (generic) codes were continually reviewed, revised, and, in specific cases, combined to produce a robust account of the data vis-à-vis the research
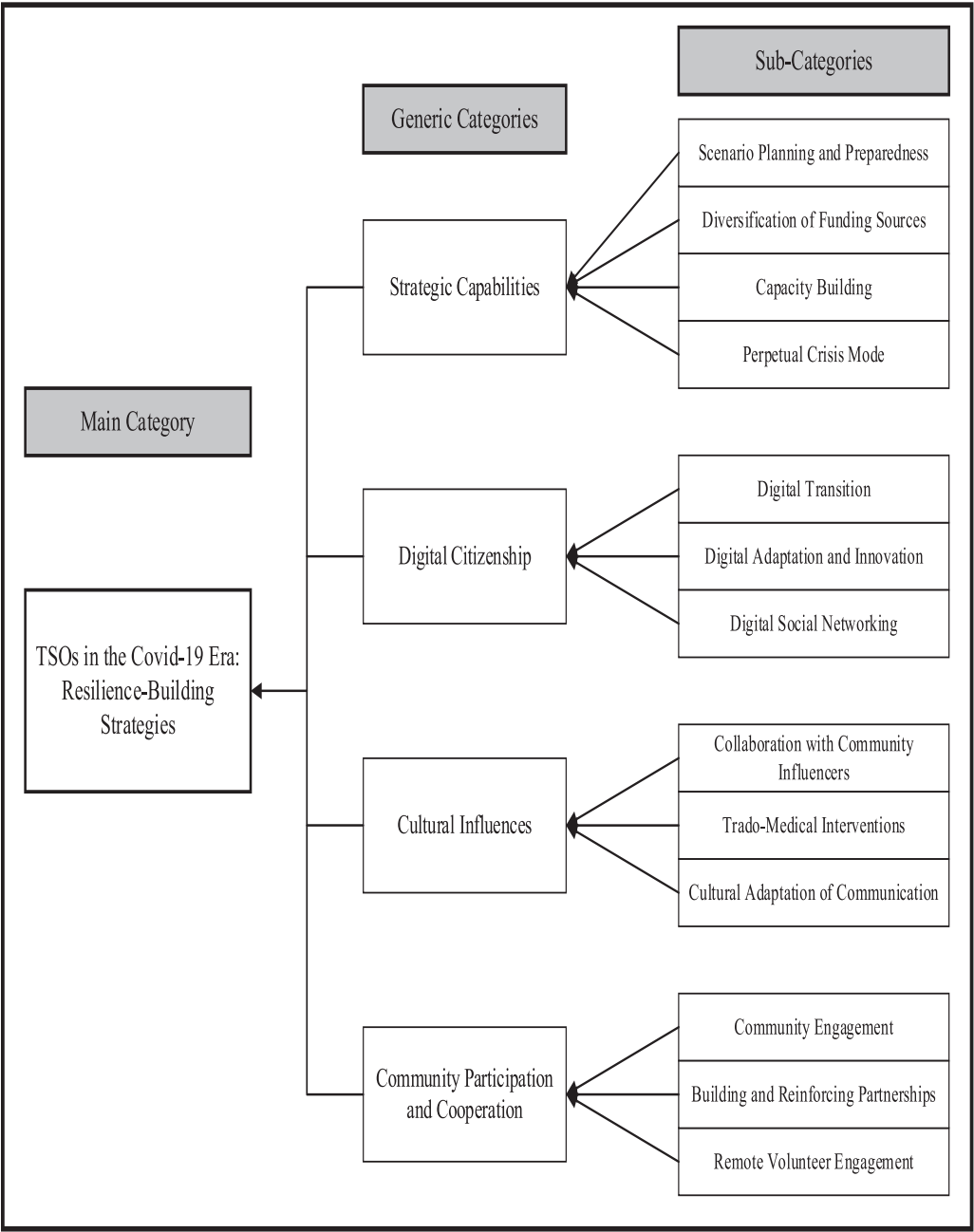
FIGURE 1   Coding framework for research findings.

goals. For instance, themes such as adaptation, innovation, and digitalization were merged as participants employed these terms to describe similar concepts. The thematic categorization process assisted in understanding how Nigerian TSOs address uncertainties and external shocks within their local contexts and the strategies employed to build their resilience during crises (Figure 1).

5 | PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Our data uncovers the distinctive approaches Nigerian TSOs deployed to manage the uncertainties activated by the Covid-19 pandemic and how these strategies helped TSOs build and strengthen their resilience. Using supporting extracts from our anonymized data (P1-P38), the findings are categorized into four themes, that is, strategic capabilities, digital citizenship, cultural dynamics, and community participation and cooperation (see Figure 1).

5.1 | Strategic capabilities

Scholars (e.g., Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011; Kim, 2021) have suggested that firms tend to draw on their internal competencies to combat unanticipated events. Our data resonates with this suggestion, enabling us to document four themes (i.e., scenario planning and preparedness, diversification of funding sources, capacity building, and perpetual crisis mode) summarizing how Nigerian TSOs utilized their internal capabilities to reinforce their corporate resilience.

5.1.1 | Scenario planning and preparedness

Our data points to the use of scenario planning among TSOs to prepare for adverse occurrences and strengthen their organizational resilience. This links with Chermack et al. (2017), who claim that scenario planning presents a legitimate tool for maximizing organizational resilience. We unpack how charities engage in proactive scenario planning to anticipate crises and develop contingency plans. As P18 notes:

> Our internal risk management system helps us identify possible challenges and formulate response strategies. Because of this, we can respond swiftly and effectively when a crisis arises.

P28 and P3 provide specific examples of how their organizations employ scenario planning. According to P3:

> We (a healthcare-focused charity) collaborate with medical experts and public health authorities to develop a detailed response plan outlining the steps to take in case of a disease outbreak.

In their view, P28 commented that:

> My organization operates in an area prone to natural disasters…… We regularly work with disaster management agencies and environmental experts to identify potential disaster scenarios, like floods or earthquakes, and their impact on local communities and ecosystems.

Such scenario planning enhances TSOs' resilience as they are positioned to expect crises and swiftly mobilize resources to provide relief to affected individuals and communities.

5.1.2 | Diversification of funding sources

Despite the economic challenges prompted by the pandemic, participants reported a positive shift in their finances due to increased charity giving. When asked how this was achieved, many pointed to the increased opportunity to diversify funding sources. For instance, P37 offered that:

> We usually work with companies on our children's and young people's projects. At the start of the pandemic, many individuals contacted us to either volunteer or provide financial support. …. Some days, we raised hundreds of thousands of naira (the Nigerian currency). …. We had never experienced such financial support from individuals.

P5 discussed the use of another previously unpopular funding source:

> The Covid-19 pandemic opened our eyes to the benefit of using social media to launch online crowd-funding campaigns. We used social media to share stories, images, and videos about the affected areas and people. The response was (massive) as we received generous donations from donors worldwide that enabled us to provide food and medical support to those in need.

TSOs were also able to improve the funds available for projects as the lockdown meant they could save costs. According to P32:

> With the lockdown, we were able to minimise our costs. In particular, we saved a considerable amount on transport and feeding costs as we usually reimburse our volunteers for these costs.

5.1.3 | Capacity building

Unlike other forms of enterprise, TSOs seek to bring together people who care about a cause to make a difference (Macmillan & Ellis Paine, 2021). Thus, the nature of their responsibilities often prepares them to cope with unexpected shocks. As the data shows, TSOs invest in training and capacity building for their staff and volunteers to equip them with the skills needed to navigate the challenges, such as those posed by the pandemic. P11 and P21 allude to this point. Per P11:

> Our charity (which focuses on mental health) had long realised the need to adapt our services to the digital realm before Covid-19. We regularly organised online training sessions for our counsellors and volunteers to improve their online counselling and support skills. (During the pandemic), we had little problem asking our staff and volunteers to offer services virtually.

5.1.4 | Perpetual crisis mode

An interesting theme from the data is the acknowledgement that Nigerian TSOs are perpetually dealing with crises. This argument draws from the institutional difficulties confronting TSOs in discharging their services. In this sense, P29 explained that:

> The government is not interested in the activities of charities. What regulation is there to support us? What financial or logistic support does the (government) offer us? Even operating a bank account (as a charity) can be …..frustrating as the banks ask for too many documents.

Although P3, P7, and P19 expressed similar concerns, P7 claims that:

> Because we constantly deal with (country and institutional) challenges, it was not much of a problem coping with Covid-19. We needed to change our operating model (which we have always done in response to major unforeseen developments) to deal with the new problem.

Consistent with Karman (2020), P7's comment demonstrates how Nigerian TSOs rely on their corporate flexibility to strengthen their resilience in dealing with sudden threats and crises such as Covid-19.

5.2 | Digital citizenship

Scholars (e.g., Agostino et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021) have discussed how organizations engaged with digital technologies to overcome the multiple challenges prompted by the pandemic. In doing this, Wang et al. (2021) and Nakpodia et al. (2024) demonstrated how using digital technologies during crises strengthens firm resilience. Substantial evidence from the data (about 83% of participants) suggests that TSOs invested massively in digital technologies to deal with the crisis. We classify participants' comments into three areas, that is, digital transition, digital adaptation and innovation, and digital social networking.

5.2.1 | Digital transition

Participants suggest that the extent of deploying digital technologies pre-Covid-19 was negligible. Despite the (initial) apathy to embrace digitalization, they acknowledged that there was little scope to overlook digitalization in the evolving pandemic era. P27 explained that:

> We had to adopt digital technologies. Most of the technologies were freely available, and we mainly worked with youths who were already familiar with these technologies.

Although P27's comments emphasize cost, ease, and familiarity as incentivizing the transition to digital technologies, P9 focuses on service delivery:

> Using digital technologies was a lifesaver for us. We had previously engaged minimally with these technologies. We realised we could use technologies such as Zoom to deliver our services and maintain contact with our service users, donors, and volunteers.

5.2.2 | Digital adaptation and innovation

Once sufficient rationale was established to deploy digitalization, participants noted that they had to adapt their operations and innovate to accommodate digital technologies as the pandemic intensified. P12 was informed that:

> We adapted our operations by moving in-person workshops and training sessions to virtual platforms. …… This ensured we continued to deliver training and support despite the pandemic.

P10 offered further evidence of digital adaptation prompted by the pandemic:

> We launched a telemedicine initiative, which provided a dedicated hotline and online platform where individuals could consult healthcare professionals remotely. This allowed us to provide medical advice and prescriptions without requiring physical hospital visits.

P31, P17, and P4 shared additional accounts of how they used digital technologies to adapt and innovate. According to P17:

> One of our directors suggested we organise virtual fundraising events. We had never done this. After persistence from the director, we organised the event using Google Meet. ……. The event was successful. We recorded the highest number of participants at our fundraising events.

P31 also presents how they used digital technologies to alter service delivery:

> Due to the stay-at-home order, we had to find a way to survive and remain relevant. We transitioned to remote service delivery. We used Zoom to provide counselling, educational seminars, and support services to our beneficiaries.

5.2.3 | Digital social networking

Participants' responses suggest that an element of digitalization that proved effective in strengthening TSOs' resilience during the pandemic was social media platforms. These platforms allowed TSOs to connect with their service users while complying with social distancing guidelines. P10 remarks that:

> We …… used Facebook (a digital social media platform) to respond to queries from our service users.

Moreover, according to P21:

> Due to school closures, students lacked access to physical classrooms. My company (a nonprofit organisation focused on providing educational support to disadvantaged students) used digital social networks Facebook and WhatsApp to create virtual classrooms where teachers (volunteers) could post assignments and study materials for each grade level and subject.

5.3 | Cultural dynamics

Researchers (Castellacci, 2015; Jung, 2017) have established how firms relied on institutional and contextual characteristics to overcome unanticipated external shocks as well as build their resilience. Jung (2017) demonstrated how firms draw on external resources to address entrepreneurial challenges. Participants indicate that TSOs rely on various institutional frameworks to deal with their problems. Specifically, most interviewees discussed how their organizations deploy cultural resources to manage Covid-19 effects. We present these strategies under three categories, that is, collaboration with community influencers, trado-medical interventions, and cultural adaptation of communication.

5.3.1 | Collaboration with community influencers

TSOs collaborated with key community stakeholders to connect with service users. We observe that TSOs specifically targeted traditional and religious leaders during the pandemic. P15 discussed how their organization enlisted the support of traditional leaders:

> Our charity promotes good hygiene among locals. The pandemic brought about a lot of fears among the people, so dealing with them was challenging. But we knew they would always obey their traditional rulers, hence we sought their help.… These rulers were always able to get them to engage with us.

Similarly, P1 adds that:

> We sought the help of local traditional chiefs to encourage adherence to safety protocols and distribute accurate health information within communities.

P1 and P15's comments are unsurprising given the role of traditional leaders, as Nakpodia and Adegbite (2018) have examined their influence among Nigerian firms. Traditional leaders are perceived as custodians of the local culture, which explains their influence in the community. It is worth noting that P3, P16, P27, P35, and P38, who also reflected on the role of traditional leaders, represent charities based outside Lagos.

Similar to collaboration with traditional leaders, our data also indicates that TSOs acknowledge the role of religious leaders as community influencers, thus enlisting their support to connect with beneficiaries. Such practice is predicted in a high-religiosity country such as Nigeria (Nakpodia et al., 2020). P24 shares how they worked with religious leaders:

> Because of our people's religious beliefs, we thought working with religious leaders would help us reach (service users). With the cooperation of religious leaders, we visited churches and mosques to provide medical advice and distribute face masks.

5.3.2 | Trado-medical interventions

A primary concern during the pandemic was the rapid development of vaccines, for which many individuals were skeptical. Given the long-standing trado-medical practices in Nigeria (Ojua et al., 2013), TSOs employed various forms of culturally informed traditional medical methods to reestablish their relevance in Nigeria, especially as the effects of the pandemic hit harder. P13 reflected on how TSOs exploited their traditional healing expertise:

> In the community, many locals were hesitant about Covid vaccines. They were more open to local medication …… We decided to work with traditional medical practitioners to incorporate their knowledge into our health education initiatives to improve trust among locals.

P26 provided further evidence of traditional medication:

> During the pandemic, we offered mental health support using culturally sensitive methods based on traditional counselling techniques…… For example, we used narrative therapy sessions where we help individuals reframe their personal narratives by sharing stories of local gods and how these gods overcame challenging times.

5.3.3 | Cultural adaptation of communication

A critical issue during the pandemic was the modification of communication styles (de Villiers & Molinari, 2022; Nan et al., 2022). This is particularly crucial in multicultural settings, for example, Nigeria, as it ensures that communications are not only understood but also accepted and embraced by recipients. Our data reinforces this practice, as TSOs were compelled to tailor their Covid-19 awareness campaigns to resonate with local cultural beliefs and practices to ensure that health information was conveyed in a culturally sensitive and relatable manner. P6 and P14 explain how their organization achieved this objective. Per P14:

To promote Covid-19 vaccination in the local communities, we incorporated indigenous symbols and languages into our promotional materials. We rewrote our messages to draw on analogies from the community and their belief systems. By aligning our communication with the community's culture, we enhanced the chances of receiving the message positively and encouraging vaccination.

P6 also notes that:

We developed a series of promotions and adverts in the local language that were based on popular local proverbs emphasising the value of good health. While this meant more people could read and understand the message, it also encouraged people to be health conscious and to consider taking the vaccine.

5.4 | Community participation and cooperation

Our data underlines how TSOs drew on community participation and cooperation to foster connectedness with their local communities during the pandemic. Weber et al. (2023) argued that organizations are able to strengthen their resilience when the local community can access the needed resources, even during crisis times. While the need to control the spread of the Covid-19 virus necessitated lockdowns, TSOs had to explore opportunities to connect with their users and local communities (Liñares-Zegarra & Wilson, 2023). From our data, we articulate three strategies Nigerian TSOs adopted in engaging with their communities, that is, community engagement, building and reinforcing partnerships, and remote volunteer engagement.

5.4.1 | Community engagement

Sizable evidence suggests that TSOs worked more with their communities during the pandemic. Participants note that this was not the case pre-Covid, but the lockdown restrictions and the need to respond to calls from the communities necessitated greater engagement. P2 states that:

During the pandemic, it was apparent that they (the local communities) needed us, and we also needed them. We had to connect with them. It was mutually beneficial.

P33 and P26 explained how they engaged with the local communities. According to P33:

We actively involved them in the decision-making process of some of the intended projects.

P26 provided an example of a collaborative community project:

We wanted to organise an education programme for residents of a nearby slum. We organised remote focus group discussions involving parents, local government officials, teachers, telecom providers and community members. ……We then designed an online education plan for children in the area to continue their education.

P20 discusses the impact of community engagement:

It helped ensure that our projects met the specific needs and preferences of the communities. The collaborative approach meant that the communities saw themselves as co-owners of the projects, leading to better engagement with the project.

5.4.2 | Building and reinforcing partnerships

In responding to beneficiaries' demands during the pandemic, our data suggests that TSOs developed new strategic partnerships and strengthened existing ones within and beyond the nonprofit sector. P8 explained the rationale for building relationships:

The partnerships aimed to pool resources, share expertise, and collectively address challenges to facilitate coordinated and effective responses.

P26 and P34 commented on deploying strategic partnerships to achieve their corporate goals. Per P26:

During the pandemic, we joined forces with other charities, government agencies and some multinational organisations to distribute medical supplies to sick people who could not come to us due to the stay-at-home order. This coalition brought synergistic benefits as we were able to pool resources and expertise to support users.

P34 adds that:

We teamed up with technology companies and educational institutions to develop online educational resources, e-learning platforms, and digital devices for students lacking access to traditional classrooms. We drew on the technological expertise of partners to ensure educational continuity is maintained despite the limitations imposed by the pandemic.

5.4.3 | Remote volunteer engagement

Our data suggests that Nigerian TSOs engaged with volunteers remotely to solicit cooperation and participation of the local community in delivering their services during the pandemic. Besides continuity of operations, P4, P19, P25, and P35 shared why they recruited remote volunteers. P35 explained that their organization embraced remote volunteer engagement because:

It provided us with a cost-effective way of engaging volunteers. We can quickly train them and adjust their volunteer roles as needed. This means we are agile in responding to our (beneficiaries).

From the data, TSOs hired volunteers to provide two primary services remotely. First, P16 discussed online tutoring:

We recruited volunteers from the community with teaching experience to provide online tutoring to students in need. They also assisted students with their homework and offered academic support. (Thus), we remained relevant as we delivered our services throughout the pandemic.

The second service supported the first, that is, remote learning. According to P36:

We contacted people with graphic design skills, writing abilities, and social media expertise to create digital content for our programmes. These (volunteers) helped educate and encourage good behaviours, all while working from their homes.

6 | FURTHER DISCUSSIONS

This study explores the techniques Nigerian TSOs adopted to tackle uncertainties orchestrated by the Covid-19 pandemic and evaluates how these techniques contributed to building and strengthening their resilience. The pandemic impacted the financial and economic activities of private and public organizations, especially TSOs (Clifford et al., 2023). Given their distinctiveness and support to vulnerable populations, Paterson et al. (2023) and Bynner et al. (2022) remarked that funding and structure are vital to TSOs' capacity to support living standards, protect lives, and promote societal development. However, TSOs encountered substantial disruptions during the pandemic, evident in declining funds, forced shutdown of operations, fallback on reserves, and high demand for services (Clifford et al., 2023; Hyndman, 2020; Macmillan, 2020).

In dealing with the threats prompted by the pandemic, TSOs had to overcome the crisis via a robust assessment of their strengths, capabilities, threats, and weaknesses to build resilience. Chermack et al. (2017) justified that utilizing scenario planning techniques during uncertain periods by firms assists in building resilience. Our data shows that potentially threatening situations are predicted through internal risk management and developing a response plan through collaborative engagement with relevant stakeholders. As previously noted, the shortage of funds prompted by the pandemic, coupled with the fact that TSOs do not have share capital like private firms, meant they had to innovate to build financial resilience. Raeymaeckers and Van Puyvelde (2021) and Bin-Nashwan et al. (2022) confirmed that TSOs were forced to embrace crowdfunding initiatives to finance their activities. Similarly, our study demonstrates that TSOs' financial resilience was sustained by unsolicited financial assistance, crowdfunding through social media platforms, and cost-cutting measures.

Although scholars have reflected on TSOs' limited and frugal budgeting, Fuller and Rice (2022) and Bellante et al. (2018) observed that TSOs operate within a strict regulatory framework, exposing them to high public scrutiny and ethical expectations. Though our data corroborates this position, we find that TSOs in Nigeria lack adequate regulatory frameworks to support their activities. This concern induces them to operate a standby system that enhances their adaptability to crisis situations. As a result, TSOs continuously leverage their internal strengths and environmental knowledge to innovate and adapt for long-term survival.

One of the innovative tools for TSOs' adaptation and resilience is exploiting the digital space through social media channels. Covid-19 accelerated digitalization within the public and private domains (Agostino et al., 2021; Ashiru et al., 2022). This development benefitted from the introduction of social distancing measures to restrict physical exchanges and curtail the spread of the virus. Although the rise and usage of digital technologies during the pandemic were not peculiar to TSOs, Deitrick et al. (2020) and Clifford et al. (2023) noted that many TSOs' revenues originated from in-person activities restricted during the pandemic. The social media and online platforms offered alternative innovative platforms that assisted in sustaining volunteer activities and bridging the gap between the physical interaction of the donor, users, and TSOs. In this sense, our findings point to the following digitalization interventions: transition from in-person workshops to remote platforms, dedicated hotlines, online platforms for healthcare professionals, virtual fundraising, online counseling, and educational seminars. There is a positive correlation between digital solutions and the TSOs' resilience, evident in the sustained delivery of services.

The literature has shown how the environment, culture, and institutions permeate the activities of profit and non-profit firms (Castellacci, 2015; Jung, 2017). It shows that TSOs with in-depth knowledge of external influences are better prepared to design sustainable, culturally sympathetic systems that address the specialized needs of the community (Ojua et al., 2013). Our findings highlight the collaboration with the local traditional chiefs for easier access and how the alliance optimizes service delivery to such community members. By acknowledging cultural dispositions and

integrating them into their community activities, TSOs implement holistic and socially sensitive solutions (e.g., health-care) for vulnerable populations. Following the Covid-19 vaccine rollout, the locals were cautious about using them. We find that TSOs employed traditional counseling techniques to encourage community members to use the vaccines. In summary, the ability to understand and imbibe the cultural nuances of the local community and communicate in a language they can relate to helps build robust relationships with local stakeholders.

Furthermore, TSOs' participation in the community and engagement of locals are vital in reinforcing their impact. As the pandemic intensified, it became imperative for TSOs to use community participation techniques to provide resources and information to stakeholders (Liñares-Zegarra & Wilson, 2023; Weber et al., 2023). Our data validates this practice, as we found evidence that TSOs developed symbiotic relations with the community, delegated critical decision-making roles to elicit a sense of belonging in the communities, and built customized projects with input from locals. This approach produced healthy cooperation and collaboration between TSOs and the community, further activating their resilience. It is worth noting that, to overcome the social distance measures placed on traditional in-person volunteering, TSOs adopted a remote volunteering workforce, creating an agile workforce that could support their activities at all times.

7 | STUDY CONTRIBUTIONS

7.1 | Contributions to the literature

The research enriches the third sector literature by shedding light on the hitherto underexplored resilience strategies of TSOs operating in Nigeria and similar West African economies. The third sector literature has predominantly focused on the effect of organizational practices and structures on effectiveness and impact (Hyndman, 2020; Chapman, 2022). Chapman (2022) reflected on the social implications of TSOs, noting that their effects transcend local and nationwide boundaries. However, this study advances the discourse by emphasizing the crucial role of resilience strategies as a determinant of organizational perpetuity and success. We uncover innovative and culturally sensitive approaches employed by Nigerian TSOs during the pandemic. For example, participants discussed the less-documented role of trado-medical interventions in the crisis response strategies of TSOs during the pandemic. We observe that such interventions (traditional healing practices, herbal remedies, or culturally rooted health beliefs) emerged from the collaborative efforts between TSOs and their local communities. Our data further attests to the effectiveness and cultural sensitivity of such interventions. Given the suspicions around Covid-19 vaccines, the uptake of traditional medications in the local communities was acceptable. This finding could also reinforce healthcare resilience within local contexts.

Our data further assists in understanding the intricate relationship between informal support systems, such as extended family networks and community solidarity, and formal third sector interventions during times of uncertainty. Consistent with Thornton et al. (2013) and Liñares-Zegarra and Wilson (2023), we deepen the literature on how TSOs collaborate with informal support structures to recognize their effect on resilience building. These collaborations define and impact resource allocation, social cohesion, and community resilience, offering valuable insights into the synergistic relationship between formal and informal support systems in navigating uncertainty. These contributions enrich the literature by highlighting the dynamic and context-specific nature of resilience-building efforts in West Africa.

7.2 | Contributions to theory

This paper extends resilience theorization by demonstrating how strategic capabilities, such as scenario planning, diversification of funding sources, and capacity building, are critical in building and reinforcing organizational

resilience. The main thrust of resilience theory stresses adaptability and learning from crises (Williams et al., 2017; Manyena et al., 2019; You & Williams, 2023). Although Manyena et al. (2019) explained how resilience enables organizations to "bounce forward" from unforeseen occurrences, You and Williams (2023) reinforced the notion, stating that resilience facilitates corporate recovery from disruptions. Similar conclusions are reported in this study, as we demonstrate that proactive measures, such as scenario planning, assist firms in anticipating and mitigating shocks to ease vulnerabilities. Similarly, by developing strategic capabilities, TSOs enhance their capacity to identify and assess risks, formulate proactive responses, and mobilize resources to relieve adverse impacts. This proactive approach helps TSOs to build resilience by strengthening their ability to withstand shocks, maintain essential functions, and bounce back stronger from challenges (Iborra et al., 2020). We equally find that strategic capabilities also promote organizational agility, innovation, and flexibility (Atkinson et al., 2022), allowing TSOs to manage uncertainty and capitalize on opportunities, thus reinforcing their overall resilience during crises like Covid-19. However, consistent with Pratt (2015) and Liñares-Zegarra and Wilson (2023), this research reinforces the criticality of cultural factors, including indigenous knowledge, traditional practices, and community values, in fortifying TSOs' resilience. Besides, findings such as trado-medical interventions offer novel insights into the link between cultural heritage and firm resilience, enriching resilience theorization and motivating greater scholarly interest in cultural dimensions.

The integration of network theory in this research uncovers the complexity of organizational relationships and their influence on firm resilience strategies. By examining how TSOs build and engage networks within their local contexts, the study extends network theory beyond the domain of inter-organizational collaborations (Thornton et al., 2013; Tröster et al., 2014) to encompass a broader spectrum of relationships, including those rooted in cultural and community connections (Wellman, 1997; Lyth et al., 2017). It also allowed us to offer insights into the often-discounted importance of grassroots relationships in boosting TSOs' network dynamics. By deploying scenario planning (a strategic capability), TSOs enhance their ability to collaborate, coordinate, and communicate effectively with other network members. This facilitates the exchange of resources, knowledge, and support, ensuring mutual aid and collective action to address challenges and profit from opportunities. Ultimately, strategic capabilities enhance the resilience of the entire network by strengthening TSOs' adaptive capacity and ability to respond cohesively to crises. By investigating how firms build and sustain reciprocal relationships with community members, other nonprofits, and local businesses, we articulate a "network of reciprocity" (Dufwenberg & Patel, 2017) to transmit the role of reciprocity within local networks in strengthening TSOs' resilience. Network reciprocity can offer a robust incentive for human behavior (Dufwenberg & Patel, 2017), as they show that the interaction of key variables is critical in resolving associated coordination challenges.

8　│　CONCLUSION

TSOs are important entities assisting communities and nations worldwide. Yet, a common and recurring debate in the TSO literature is their adaptation and resilience during crises. Based on a qualitative, interview-based methodology, this study examined the strategies used by Nigerian TSOs to manage uncertainties resulting from Covid-19. Additionally, we sought to assess the value of these strategies in enhancing organizational resilience. Our findings reveal that TSOs, in managing the challenges and unforeseen circumstances promoted by the pandemic, initially gain a comprehensive understanding of the prevailing conditions by conducting a thorough internal evaluation of their organizational capacities, competencies, potential risks, and areas of vulnerability. This process aims to foster the development of resilience within their operational framework.

Furthermore, we observe that potential circumstances are anticipated through internal risk management strategies and the formulation of a course of action, achieved through collaboration with local community stakeholders. Among others, we uncover how possessing the capacity to comprehend and assimilate cultural nuances in the local community might facilitate the emergence of robust communication architecture while yielding substantial effects within the heterogeneous local environments. Our study also emphasizes the utilization of community engagement

strategies by TSOs to facilitate the provision of essential support resources, thus incentivizing a sense of cooperation and collaboration between TSOs and the community. This collaborative approach contributes to the resilience of both parties in navigating the challenges posed by the pandemic. Lastly, it is evident that TSOs actively employ proactive scenario planning to assess possible disasters and formulate contingency plans to strengthen their organizational response and, ultimately, resilience.

This research is not without its limitations. Although we recognize that our sample size is small, it is sufficient for an interview-based study (Marshall et al., 2013). Nevertheless, further research is needed to evaluate how and the extent to which our findings may be applied to a broader population, either at a geographical or continental level. A further limitation of this study lies in its cross-sectional design, which offers only a snapshot of TSOs' resilience drivers and strategies within West Africa at a particular moment. This design restricts our understanding of the sustained effectiveness and evolutionary trajectory of these influences and strategies over time. This limitation presents an opportunity for further scholarly exploration, as researchers may undertake longitudinal studies to track TSOs' resilience efforts across an extended duration. Through longitudinal research, scholars can analyze temporal trends and identify factors contributing to enduring resilience among TSOs. Besides, the absence of "government" as a stakeholder in this research poses a limitation as it overlooks a significant actor in the operating environment of TSOs in Nigeria. Government policies, regulations, and interventions deeply impact TSOs' ability to deal with uncertainty during crises. Therefore, recognizing "government" as a stakeholder presents a promising avenue for further research, offering ideas into the dynamics of government-TSO interactions, the influence of policies on TSO operations, and strategies for effective collaboration between TSOs and government agencies. This exploration could enrich our understanding of TSO resilience in West Africa and inform policy recommendations for establishing a supportive environment for TSOs.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

We have read and understand the journal's policies and believe that neither the manuscript nor the study violates any of these. There are no conflicts of interest to declare.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Can you describe some of the main challenges your organization faced during the Covid-19 pandemic?
2. How did your organization adapt its operations in response to the challenges posed by the pandemic?
3. What unique strategies did your organization employ to maintain its services and support the community during the crisis?
4. Can you discuss any collaborations or partnerships your organization engaged in during the pandemic to enhance resilience?
5. How did your organization leverage digital technologies to navigate the challenges brought about by the pandemic?
6. Did your organization face any financial constraints during the crisis, and if so, how did you address them?
7. What role did volunteers play in supporting your organization's activities during the pandemic?
8. How did your organization engage with local communities to understand their needs and adapt your services?
9. Were there any cultural or contextual factors specific to your local environment that influenced your organization's response to the crisis?
10. Can you share any lessons learned or best practices that emerged from your organization's experience during the pandemic?
11. How do you envision the future of your organization in light of the lessons learned from the pandemic?
12. What support or resources do you believe are necessary to enhance your organization's resilience in similar crises in the future?
13. Are there any additional insights or experiences you would like to share regarding your organization's resilience during the Covid-19 pandemic?