

CROSS-EXAMINING ENTREPRENEURIAL SUCCESS TRAITS ACROSS ENTREPRENEUR GROUPS IN A COMMON ECOSYSTEM

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Received: 18 August 2025. Revision received: 28 October 2025. Accepted: 15 November 2025

ABSTRACT

Six key characteristics provide a strategic competitive advantage to Somali entrepreneurs in South Africa, enabling them to attain superior entrepreneurial performance. This explanatory research employed empirical validation through systematic benchmarking and assessment of these traits within a carefully stratified cohort of South African entrepreneurs operating in a comparable entrepreneurial ecosystem, aiming to determine the extent to which these traits are inherent. A sample of 257 was surveyed through a one-on-one approach using a 5-point Likert-type scale questionnaire. The results from the One-Sample Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicate that. The results from the One-Sample Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicates that, while the examined entrepreneurs generally are adaptive to their business environment and customer-oriented, the notable lack of collaborative venture orientation, informal networks, and sense of community, likewise resilience traits, consistent with a neutral stance, may hinder their ability to compete with their foreign counterparts in similar entrepreneurial typologies, given equal market opportunities. The findings provide valuable insights for recalibrating entrepreneurial development strategies and enhancing the competitiveness of South African enterprises, ultimately benefiting policymakers, stakeholders, and local business owners. It outlines strategies to enhance local guidance on building localised resilience, market competitiveness, and innovation. A relative increase in these attributes will contribute to improved business survival rates and effectiveness among local enterprises by supporting South Africa's broader developmental objectives. Success traits are considered essential for inclusion in South Africa's entrepreneurship development framework. Further empirical research is recommended to explore the receptiveness of these observed factors among local entrepreneurs.

KEYWORDS: Efficacy, entrepreneurial, innovative, strategic marketing, traits.

JEL CLASSIFICATION: M21, O31, Q2, R2.

Reference: Iwara, I. O. (2025). CROSS-EXAMINING ENTREPRENEURIAL SUCCESS TRAITS ACROSS ENTREPRENEUR GROUPS IN A COMMON ECOSYSTEM. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Knowledge*, 13(2), 54–74. <https://doi.org/10.37335/ijek.v13i2.337>

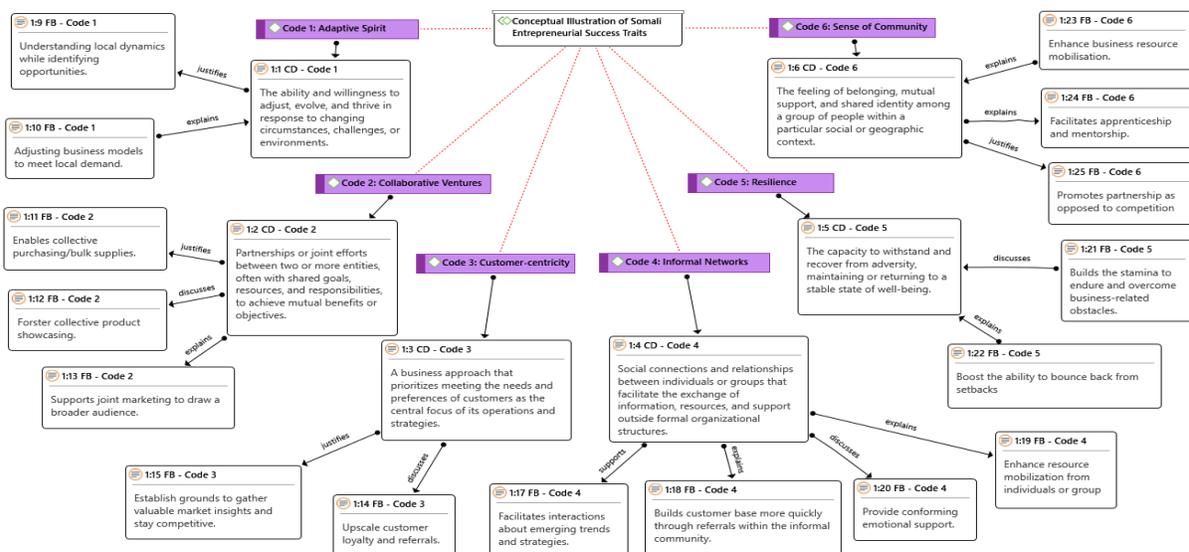
INTRODUCTION

Amid the high failure rate of small to medium enterprises (SMEs) in South Africa (Fatoki, 2021; Madzimure & Tau, 2021; Iwara, 2024), the achievements of Somali entrepreneurs operating within similar entrepreneurial contexts have been remarkable (Grant, 2013; Moyo, 2014; Charman & Piper, 2012; Angu, 2019; Kilonzo & Iwara, 2023), highlighting their exceptional marketing orientation in a highly competitive environment. A recent empirical inquiry provides valuable insights into the entrepreneurial success attributes of this cohort in the host country (Figure 1). While these insights may not be generalisable beyond the scope of the study, they offer a foundational basis for developing informed policy interventions.

Figure 1 presents an Atlas-ti network diagram that conceptualises six entrepreneurial success traits (represented as codes) inherent to Somali entrepreneurs operating in South Africa. It further illustrates the contextual definitions (CD) and the functional benefits (FB) associated with each trait. Code 1 refers to adaptive spirit, which defines the capacity to respond to changing circumstances, challenges, or environments.

Code 2 is collaborative venturing. This trait highlights the synergistic value derived from shared resources, skills, expertise, and market access, which collectively enhance operational efficiency, competitive advantage and business efficacy. Code 3 is concerned with customer-centricity, a trait in which customer needs and preferences are central to strategies and operations. Code 4 is informal networking. It unpacks how Somali entrepreneurs in South Africa leverage community associations, religious networks, kinship ties, and socio-ethnic connections to access resources, share valuable business opportunities on the market, and foster professional trust. These resources, woven together, build competitive advantage, entrepreneurial efficacy and resilience in the local economy. Code 5 denotes resilience—the ability to endure and recover from adversity. Sense of Community, as depicted in Code 6, defines entrepreneurial drivers such as business solidarity, mutual support, and shared identity.

Figure 1 Conceptual illustration of somali entrepreneurial traits



(Source: Author's illustration based on Kilonzo & Iwara, 2023)

Empirical evidence reinforces the validity and rigour of Somali entrepreneurial illustrations in South Africa. The cohort demonstrated resilience and adaptability (Angu, 2019), outperforming local counterparts through strategic use of social capital and cross-cultural competencies. This phenomenon can be analysed through the lens of institutional entrepreneurship, wherein Somali migrant entrepreneurs exploit their transnational networks and knowledge asymmetries to navigate regulatory challenges and market entry barriers more effectively (Basardien et al., 2014; Kilonzo & Iwara, 2023). Their skill in social bricolage—innovatively recombining resources in constrained settings—combined with strong entrepreneurial self-efficacy (Bokolo, 2018), underscores their capacity to build competitive advantages in saturated markets. This dynamic exemplifies how Somali entrepreneurial agency, underpinned by embeddedness in transnational social fields, can influence superior performance outcomes amidst a milieu characterised by stiff endogenous and exogenous competition. These empirical summations raise a pertinent question: Are local South African entrepreneurs more likely to exhibit successful entrepreneurial characteristics comparable to those of their Somali counterparts?

This question warrants empirical investigation. Previous studies on this phenomenon have primarily focused on the qualitative perspective, with a strong emphasis on the traits of Somali entrepreneurial success. This

study examined the entrepreneurial success strategies employed by Somali foreign entrepreneurs in South Africa, which enable them to garner a competitive advantage, in comparison with those of local entrepreneurs operating in the same environment, using a quantitative approach. The findings may offer critical insights to recalibrate entrepreneurial strategies and revitalise South Africa’s competitive landscape, benefiting policymakers and local business owners.

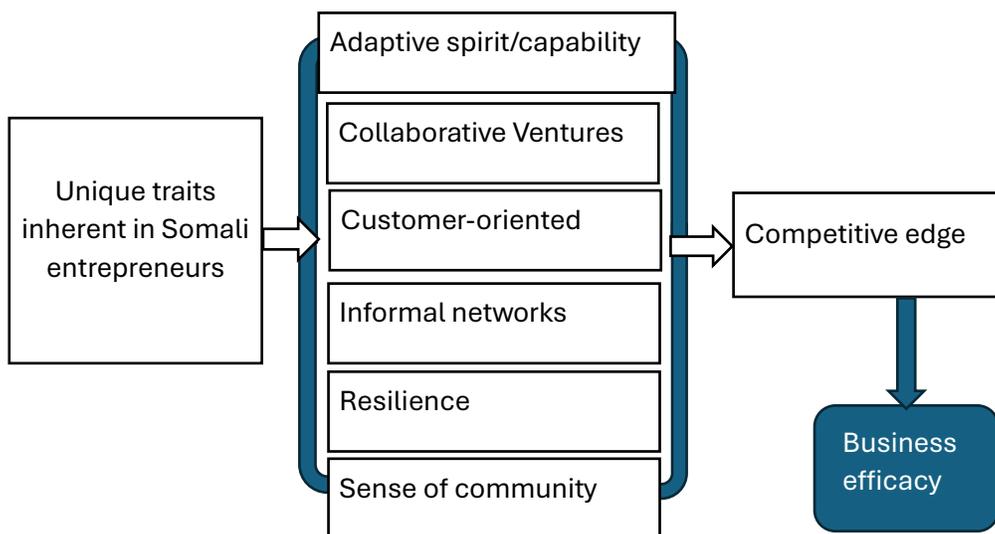
Identifying successful traits, as exemplified by Somali entrepreneurs, is vital for promoting resilience, competitiveness, cross-cultural exchange, and innovation. From an economic perspective, a relative increase in these attributes will increase business survival rates, efficacy and returns to scale (Cavaco & Machado, 2015; Lv et al., 2018; Musa & Enggarsyah, 2025), thereby contributing to the country’s broader developmental objectives. The empirical perspective highlights the importance of creating enabling environments that foster entrepreneurship through policy reforms and capacity-building initiatives, in line with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

This article further elaborates on the conceptual framework, which primarily defines the six entrepreneurial success traits as conceptualised by Kilonzo & Iwara (2023). The following section outlines the methodology employed to conduct the study. This is followed by the presentation of results and discussion of findings. The article concludes with an examination of the research implications derived from the key findings.

1 CONCEPTUAL MODEL

In the 2021 fiscal year, South Africa witnessed the emergence of approximately 2.3 million active ventures, which substantially contributed to the national economy (Statistics South Africa, 2022). Notably, more than 1.5 million of these entities operated in the informal sector, collectively generating approximately 9.7 million jobs (Statistics South Africa, 2022). Recognising entrepreneurship’s potential for economic growth, particularly in terms of job creation and income generation, the South African government, like many other economies, invests robustly in local entrepreneurial initiatives (State of the Nation Address (SONA) 2023).

Figure 2 Conceptual framework of the study



(Source: Author’s illustration)

Agencies such as the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA), the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA), and the Small Enterprise Finance Agency (SEFA) form part of a broader network of structures strategically established to advance this agenda and enable local entrepreneurs to realise their potential (South African Government, 2021).

Despite substantial government support, many enterprises underperform (Rens et al., 2021; Matekenya & Moyo, 2022). A significant number of enterprises prematurely exit, while many that persist struggle to compete on par with their Somali counterparts (Nkondo, 2017), even when presented with equal market opportunities. This disparity raises critical questions about the underlying factors driving such differences and the distinctive attributes that enable foreign-owned enterprises to succeed. Subsequently, the six resultant success traits in Figure 1 were tested. The conceptual model of this study comprises the following elements: collaborative ventures, a sense of community, informal networks, an adaptive spirit, resilience and a customer-oriented business orientation (Figure 2).

Six hypotheses, reflecting Somali entrepreneurial success traits, were developed to assess their prevalence among South African entrepreneurs in a similar ecosystem:

- H0₁: South African entrepreneurs are less likely to exhibit adaptive capacity than Somali entrepreneurs. H0₂: South African entrepreneurs are less likely to exhibit a collaborative spirit than Somali entrepreneurs.
- H0₃: South African entrepreneurs are less likely to exhibit a customer-oriented culture than Somali entrepreneurs.
- H0₄: South African entrepreneurs are less likely to exhibit informal networking traits than Somali entrepreneurs.
- H0₅: South African entrepreneurs are less likely to exhibit resilience spirit than Somali entrepreneurs.
- H0₆: South African entrepreneurs are less likely to exhibit a sense of community than Somali entrepreneurs.

H0₁: Adaptive spirit/capability

Adaptive spirit and related capabilities are vital for organisational resilience. This spirit reflects an entrepreneur's capacity to innovate and proactively respond to evolving challenges (Friedman, Carmeli, & Tishler, 2016; Lin & Yi, 2023), including environmental changes, market fluctuations, technological disruptions, economic downturns, and unforeseen challenges. To address these complexities, literature identifies several key factors that entrepreneurs must possess, such as flexibility, innovation, problem-solving skills, resilience, learning mindset, situational awareness, effective communication, and visionary thinking (Eshima & Anderson, 2017; Pongtanalert & Assarut, 2022; Lin & Yi, 2023; Kraa et al., 2025). These behavioural and psychological attributes enable entrepreneurs to continuously distil learning points from feedback, benchmarking, observation, and pivot their business strategies, capitalise on emerging opportunities, and foster a proactive approach to uncertainty.

Scientific evidence suggests that adaptive-oriented entrepreneurs are more likely to succeed in a complex and highly competitive entrepreneurial landscape (Basu, Munjal, Budhwar & Misra, 2022). This premise is grounded in the strong relationship between adaptive capabilities and cognitive flexibility - the ability to interpret, improvise, and modify thought and action patterns in response to emerging information or circumstances, which are essential for survival. Adaptive entrepreneurs effectively navigate and manage disruptions by swiftly adjusting their venture models to conform to the existing status quo. Cultivating such a mindset fosters a culture of experimentation and continuous improvement, driving agility in volatile

entrepreneurial ecosystems, promoting innovation and long-term growth, mitigating risks associated with rigid planning, and enhancing sustained competitive advantage.

H0₂: Collaboration ventures

Collaboration can present challenges, such as decision-making conflicts, trust and relationship building, resource allocation, and performance measurement. However, when supported by high levels of “collectivism, long-term orientation, power symmetry, and uncertainty avoidance, it can yield significant benefits (Acquah, 2023). Collaborative culture is fundamental for business growth, expansion, and efficacy, and importantly, building organisational strength in the current complex environment. In entrepreneurship, collaboration encompasses business partnerships, strategic alliances, or joint initiatives formed between entrepreneurs or with other stakeholders to leverage complementary capabilities, specialised expertise, resources, and market access (Kantis et al., 2023; Sutrisno, 2023).

Entrepreneurs must recognise that individual efforts alone cannot address today’s complex challenges; collaboration fosters innovation and accelerates shared goals. For instance, amid supportive infrastructure deficits and policy support shortfalls, a group of entrepreneurs can pool diverse resources of comparative advantage, including funds, expertise, and time to establish a thriving venture. In parallel, this culture allows entrepreneurs to accelerate innovation, harness their networks to expand their geographic reach, and access new customer segments more efficiently than in their independently operated businesses (Srisathan et al., 2022; Sutrisno, 2023). These factors are essential for fostering competitive advantage, sustainability, long-term business growth, and stability in complex and dynamic environments.

H0₃: Customer-oriented

A customer-focused culture is central to business success. Businesses with a strong customer orientation demonstrate greater market responsiveness, innovation, and customer loyalty (Tuominen et al., 2023), ultimately leading to competitive advantage and long-term profitability. This study defines customer-focused culture as prioritising customer needs and expectations in strategic decisions and value creation. As they interact with customers, they can identify emerging market trends and adapt their offerings accordingly, creating a virtuous cycle of continuous improvement, innovation, and competitive resilience (Afaq et al., 2023; Iwara, 2024a; Septiano et al., 2025). This practice has the potential to increase relevance and differentiation in the marketplace. Similarly, by aligning business processes and offerings with customer insights, entrepreneurs can reduce market uncertainties and enhance their value proposition in highly dynamic environments (Aslam et al., 2025). Drawing insights from these scientific premises, cultivating a mindset that promotes customer engagement, feedback collection, and personalised service delivery is critical. Beyond market positioning, these qualities collectively foster stronger relationships, improve customer satisfaction, retention and sustained revenue growth.

H0₄: Informal networking

In many countries, especially emerging economies, entrepreneurs face a wide range of business uncertainties, largely shaped by their country's unique socio-economic, political and infrastructural landscape. Access to funding (Asongu & Odhiambo, 2020), regulatory and bureaucratic hurdles (Odeyemi et al., 2024), high operating costs (Ngwu et al., 2023; Kulu et al., 2024), skills deficiencies (Mer & Viridi, 2024), limited market reach, volatility and stiff competition (Iwara, 2024b) are notable red tape discouraging new startups, delaying the operations of existing ventures and contributing to business failures in these economies. While formal

networks play a crucial role in addressing these challenges and facilitating business activities, the complexities associated with accessibility, accountability and delivery in most emerging communities present challenges that influence the trajectory of entrepreneurial endeavours. Informal networks provide critical support amid these uncertainties and economic shifts. In an entrepreneurial environment, informal networks refer to the web of personal relationships, social connections, and peer interactions that are harnessed to access resources, knowledge, and entrepreneurial support, especially amidst formal institutional constraints.

Informal networks operate outside formal structures, offering alternative channels for resource mobilisation and bypassing bureaucratic barriers (Osaghae et al., 2025). These networks, rooted in shared cultural norms and familial ties and characterised by their organic, voluntary, and often trust-based nature, facilitate rapid market information exchange, social capital, collaborative problem-solving initiatives, access to resources and business opportunities. From these arguments, cultivating and leveraging such entrepreneurial resources is beneficial; firstly, increased access to critical resources such as market intelligence and cultural insights that are critical for operating in competitive and dynamic market conditions; secondly, alternative funding opportunities, especially in contexts where access to formal financial institutions proved ineffective; thirdly, strategic business alliances, which are often limited or ineffective through formal channels. These factors, when combined, can increase the likelihood of long-term efficacy.

H0₅: Resilience

In most African economies, resource-constrained and institutionally weak market landscapes pose both theoretical and practical challenges to entrepreneurs. Civil unrest, crime, and corruption are contemporary issues that have deeply penetrated the continent's entrepreneurial landscape, posing a risk to physical assets, business integrity, and growth (Ifeoma et al., 2015; Adeola et al., 2025). These issues are even more concerning in countries like South Africa, where xenophobic tendencies, racial capital/hierarchy and ethnic divide unfold within the entrepreneurial spaces, discouraging innovative endeavours among citizens and migrants (Chekenya, 2024; Madondo, 2025). Poor service delivery and resource insecurity, for instance, frequent infrastructure vandalism, the worsening water crisis, and load shedding hurdles, tend to slow down, if not disrupt, productivity, raising business running costs and increasing the likelihood of liquidation (Mabasa, 2024). High enterprise attrition rates resulting from homogeneous offerings, market saturation, and stiff competition are topical in the country and many other African economies. Amid these barriers, resilience and local adaptation are vital for sustainable growth.

Resilience in this context refers to the capacity to withstand uncertainties, recover from business setbacks, adapt to adversity, and effectively maintain the pursuit of long-term goals despite facing significant internal and external barriers. The expression above reflects an empirical summation that resilient entrepreneurs, especially those with strategic agility, financial and operational resilience, are more likely to adapt, engage in proactive problem-solving, learn from failures, demonstrate perseverance during downturns, and maintain business continuity more than their counterparts in the same entrepreneurial landscape (Susilawati, 2024; Sangboon & Schjoedt, 2025). This conceptualisation explains reasons we see some entrepreneurs better positioned and equipped to manage risks, recover quickly from crises, and seize new opportunities emerging from disruptions, hence providing practical insights for enterprises and stakeholders responsible for entrepreneurship capacity development.

H0₆: Sense of community

A sense of community is a critical yet underexplored business driver. This trait is indicative of shared identity, mutual support, emotional bonds, and collaborative spirit among individuals within the broader socio-economic ecosystem. The invaluable, yet frequently underestimated, entrepreneurial factor benefits entrepreneurs in at least two dimensions. For instance, entrepreneurial opportunities increase through resource sharing. Entrepreneurs embedded within cohesive communities benefit from increased social support, access to local networks, and collective resilience, drivers of entrepreneurial success. Working together offers access to scarce resources, promotes mutual learning, and creates collaborative opportunities such as joint marketing, pooled funding, and local support networks. These factors strengthen resilience, enhance effectiveness, and foster sustainable growth (Ebewo et al., 2025). On the other hand, patronage plays a critical role. When an entrepreneur gives back to the community—through mentoring talented youth, offering fair-wage employment, donating to charity, sponsoring community projects, or volunteering time and expertise for development initiatives — community members often respond with solidarity and support for the business (Kilonzo & Iwara, 2022; Omonijo, 2025). In other words, entrepreneurs operating within a cohesive community are more likely to experience increased motivation from peers and society, as well as access to critical resources—factors that significantly influence their capacity to innovate, adapt to uncertainties, and thrive in competitive markets.

2 METHODS

An explanatory quantitative design was adopted to validate entrepreneurial success traits. This approach investigates causal relationships and underlying mechanisms within a defined context. In this context, the study aims to investigate the presence of Somali entrepreneurial success traits among South African local entrepreneurs operating within a comparable entrepreneurial landscape. By examining how attributes interact to shape outcomes, this approach offers a comprehensive understanding of entrepreneurial dynamics. Consequently, it facilitates uncovering nuanced contextual insights into the dynamics at play in this specific South African entrepreneurial environment.

During the community entry and sampling process, informed consent forms were distributed to the enrolled entrepreneurs. Community entry involves engaging stakeholders in the study area, building rapport, obtaining permissions, and securing acceptance before data collection (Omobowale et al., 2024). This process is imperative, especially in participatory action research, as it helps facilitate cooperation, minimise community resistance, and enhance the validity and reliability of the data and research findings. Informed consent entails securing participants' explicit agreement, usually via a signed form, to uphold ethical and legal research standards (Nijhawan et al., 2013). It provides detailed insights into the trial, including the topic, objective, duration, potential benefits and participants' rights. This empowers potential participants to decide whether to participate.

A combination of purposive and snowball sampling strategies facilitated the enrolment of the participants. Purposive sampling is a non-probability technique in which research samples are deliberately selected based on specific characteristics. This aims to gather contextual insights from the most knowledgeable or affected segment of a population. Similarly, Snowball sampling, a non-probability method, determines a small group of initial samples who subsequently identify and recruit more potential eligible participants through referrals from the former.

Of 350 potential participants approached, 273 consented to participate (see Table 1). Consequently, one-on-one meetings were scheduled with this cohort (local entrepreneurs operating small and micro-scale

enterprises in Pretoria) to collect data. Non-probability sampling techniques were used because no comprehensive database existed to identify and systematically engage a representative sample of entrepreneurs in the study area. The purposive sampling technique facilitated the selection of knowledgeable entrepreneurs, who then referred other qualified participants through a snowball sampling approach. Although the study followed a non-probability sampling method, the sample size proxy was informed by prior entrepreneurship research in South Africa (see Farrington & Matchaba-Hove, 2011; Fatoki, 2021; Iwara, 2023).

Educational attainment decreases as frequency rises (Table 1). Elementary education accounts for over 50% of the sample—the highest proportion, while postgraduate qualifications represent only 5.4%. Arguably, the level of education in the study area determines involvement in entrepreneurial initiatives. The male participants exceeded their female counterparts by 7 percentage points. Out of the four key business resource channels, 47% had access to support entrepreneurship development organisations, business angels, and family members.

Table 1 Participant description – qualification, gender, support status

		Frequency	Percentage
Education level	Elementary	134	52,1
	High school	57	22,2
	Diploma	23	8,9
	Undergraduate	28	10,9
	Postgraduate	15	5,8
Gender	Male	138	53,7
	Female	119	46,3
Support	Supported	122	47,5
	Unsupported	135	52,5

(Source: Author's illustration based on primary data)

A self-developed 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire, based on the six entrepreneurial success traits (Figure 2), was administered to consenting participants (Appendix 1). Responses ranged from 1 (least significant) to 5 (most important). In this context, '1' represents the least ranked factor; conversely, '5' represents the highest ranked factor. The questionnaire was developed based on Somali entrepreneurial success traits identified in a prior study by Kilonzo and Iwara (2023). Of 273 questionnaires distributed, 262 were returned; 21 were invalid, leaving 257 usable responses. However, 21 responses were invalid, resulting in 257 actual responses for the analysis.

The actual responses were captured for inferential statistical analysis using IBM SPSS Statistics, version 28. First, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to assess the normality of the data, guiding the choice of

analytical methods. Secondly, Cronbach's Alpha analysis was conducted to assess the data structure and reliability checks. Third, a one-sample Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to compare six variables against a hypothesised median of 3.0. This implies that variables with observed median scores exceeding the hypothesised median show a tendency toward agreement. In contrast, those with median scores below the hypothesised median show a tendency toward disagreement. The Signed Rank Test, a non-parametric statistical method, is used to compare the median scores of a single sample to a specified hypothesised median value. It is a substitute for a one-sample t-test; however, it is used when the data is not normally distributed. The test ranks absolute differences from the hypothesised median and sums positive and negative ranks to assess significance. The one-sample Wilcoxon signed-rank test is beneficial for analysing small samples with ordinal data or non-normal distributions.

3 RESULTS

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed the dataset (six variables, 257 observations) was not normally distributed (Table 3). The scientific assumption of data normality requires a p-value greater than 0.05 from a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for the data to be considered normally distributed (Masuku, 2014). In other words, a low p-value, such as 0.001 in this study, indicates a significant departure from normality. Consequently, a non-parametric approach to data analysis was employed in the study.

Table 3 Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests of sample normality (n=257)

Variables						
	Variance	Std. Dev	Skewness	Kurtosis	Mean	Sig.
<i>Adaptive spirit</i>	2.259	11.50303	-0.313	-1.346	3.3035	<0.001
<i>Collaborative ventures</i>	1.010	1.00485	1.129	0.314	1.7925	<0.001
<i>Customer-centric</i>	1.614	1.27024	-0.402	-0.970	3.5681	<0.001
<i>Informal networks</i>	0.755	0.86917	1.265	0.885	1.6342	<0.001
<i>Resilience</i>	2.160	1.46974	0.029	-1.399	2.9961	<0.001
<i>Sense of community</i>	0.488	0.69863	2.126	3.855	1.3476	<0.001

The significance level is 0.005

(Source: Author's elaboration)

3.1 Cronbach's Alpha adequacy and reliability check

Cronbach's Alpha for six variables ($n = 257$) was 0.820, indicating strong internal consistency (Table 4). This value reflects high internal consistency and strong inter-item correlation. This result confirms that the variables collectively and reliably measure a familiar underlying construct. The coefficient exceeds the 0.70 threshold (Kennedy, 2022), confirming scale reliability. List-wise deletion was applied, with no cases excluded, confirming data completeness. This emphasised the completeness of responses across variables in the study.

Table 4 Adequacy and reliability check (Cronbach's Alpha $n=257$)

Case Processing Summary			
		N	%
Cases	Valid	257	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	0.0
	Total	257	100.0
Reliability Statistics	Cronbach's Alpha	0.820	
	N of Items	6	
a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.			

(Source: Author's illustration based on primary data)

(Table 5). As illustrated in Table 5, the observed median score obtained from performing a One-Sample Wilcoxon signed-rank test for adaptive spirit (4.00; $p = 0.02$) significantly exceeds the hypothesised median score (3.00), at a p-value below 0.05. This indicates South African entrepreneurs differ significantly from Somali counterparts in adaptive capacity; the null hypothesis was rejected. In parallel, the observed median score for the customer-centric variable (4.00; $p = 0.001$) significantly exceeds the hypothesised score (3.00), which is below the 5% statistical level of significance. This leads to the conclusion that local entrepreneurs, like their Somali counterparts, equally exhibit a customer-oriented culture. Accordingly, the null hypothesis that the examined South African entrepreneurs are less likely to show a customer-oriented culture than Somali entrepreneurs was rejected.

The median scores for the resilience variable (3.0; $p = 0.94$) provide strong evidence that the sample median aligns with neutrality and does not differ **significantly** from 3.0. On the other hand, the observed scores for collaborative venturing (Median = 1.33; $p < 0.01$), informal networks (Median = 1.00; $p < 0.01$), and sense of community (Median = 1.00; $p < 0.01$) were significantly lower than the hypothesised median of 3.0. The

statistical significance level is below 5%, indicating these attributes are less likely to be inherent among South African entrepreneurs. Accordingly, the null hypotheses of the latter three variables were retained.

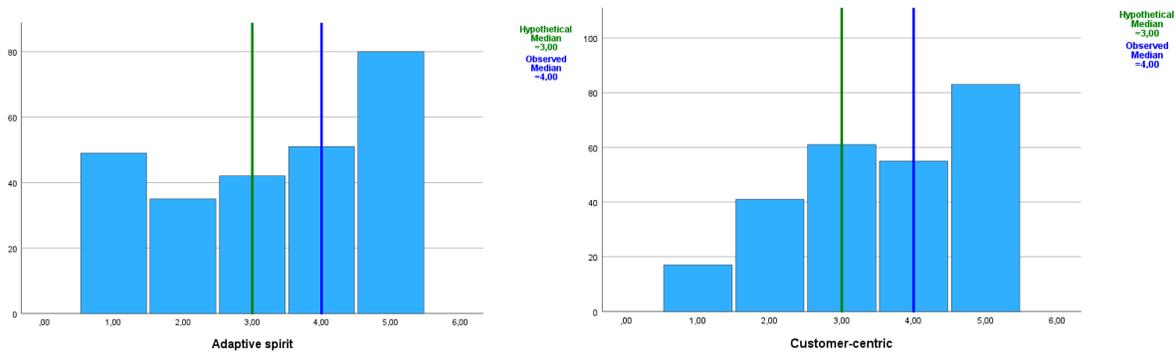
Table 5 One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test result summary (n=257)

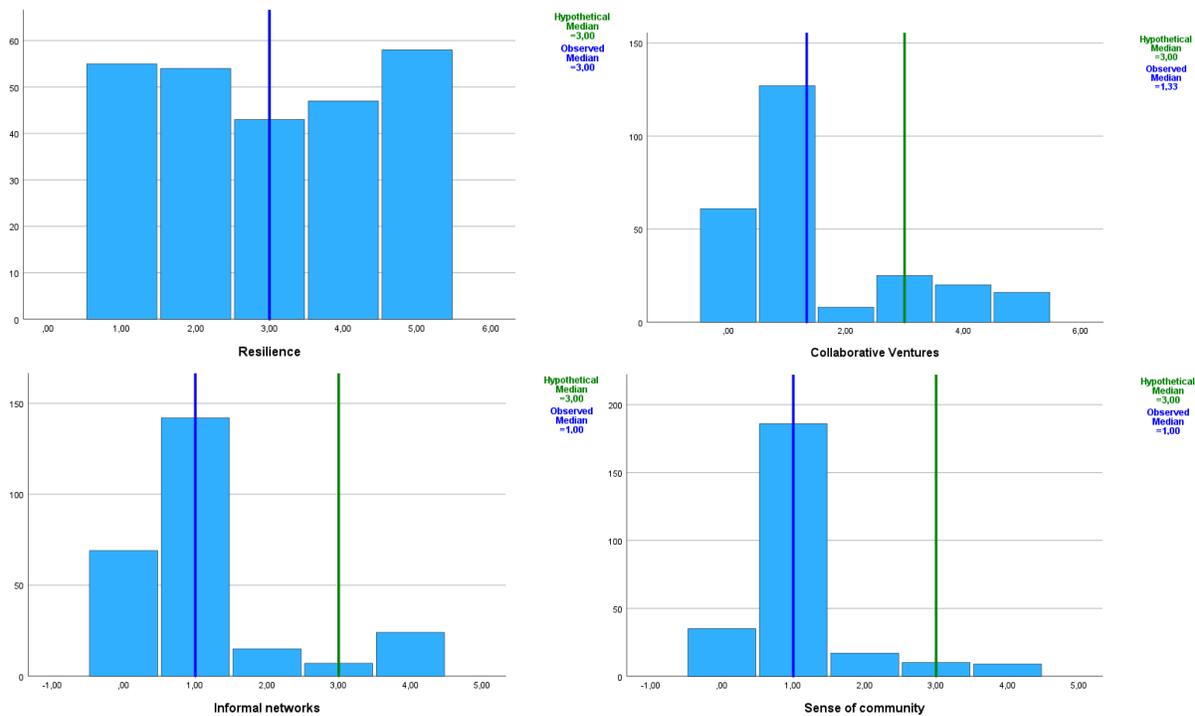
Variables	Test Statistic	Standard Error	Standardised Test Statistic	Hypothesised Median	Observed Median	Sig
<i>Adaptive spirit</i>	14298.500	880.917	3.052	3.00	4.00	0.002
<i>Collaborative Ventures</i>	1740.000	1096.718	-12.264	3.00	1.33	0.001
<i>Customer-centric</i>	14827.000	770.072	6.719	3.00	4.00	0.001
<i>Informal networks</i>	742.500	1096.535	-13.289	3.00	1.00	0.001
<i>Resilience</i>	11561.000	878.014	0.067	3.00	3.00	0.947
<i>Sense of community</i>	181.000	1084.204	-14.302	3.00	1.00	0.001

The significance level threshold is 0.005

(Source: Author’s illustration based on primary data)

Figure 2 One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank test summary, illustrating hypothetical and observed median scores





(Source: Author's illustration based on primary data)

6 DISCUSSION

Findings indicate that while entrepreneurs exhibit adaptive spirit and customer orientation, the absence of collaboration, informal networks, community cohesion, and resilience poses obstacles to competing with Somali counterparts under similar conditions. This reflects an entrepreneurial culture characterised by fragmentation, a weak market orientation, limited trust, and intense competition for scarce resources. These factors collectively undermine innovation, shared growth, and operational effectiveness, contributing to high attrition rates among South African-owned SMEs. Collectively, these factors undermine innovation, shared growth, and operational effectiveness, contributing to the high attrition rates observed among South African-owned SMEs.

These shortcomings limit South African entrepreneurs' ability to scale, access markets, and withstand systemic shocks. It also limits their ability to form strategic alliances and co-create value, as does their Somali counterparts. These realities underscore the need to rethink entrepreneurship development frameworks to embed social capital, cohesion, and community-driven approaches. There is also a need to advance policy interventions that build trust-based ecosystems for South African entrepreneurs, promote inclusive networks, and scale up incentives for cooperative models of enterprise. If South Africa reforms its capacity development instruments and invests strategically in entrepreneurial capital, the country will not only foster competition but also drive performance, resilience, and sustainable economic transformation.

In South Africa, where high attrition rates stem from stiff competition and market saturation (Iwara, 2024), adaptive spirit and customer focus alone cannot ensure sustainability; resilience is indispensable. Resilience enables ventures to adapt and recover from setbacks, shocks, and disruptions, ultimately increasing their

long-term viability and efficacy (Osman & Ngepah, 2020; Sangboon & Schjoedt, 2025). In other words, entrepreneurs with low resilience levels frequently confront significant existential threats, which manifest in diminished performance, heightened susceptibility to economic shocks, and, ultimately, a hampered contribution to society and local economic growth.

Collaboration, informal networks, and community cohesion, traits less evident among South African entrepreneurs, are crucial in competitive environments. The influence of these factors should not be undermined. To begin with, Somalis in South Africa capitalise on social capital, specifically, community-based alliances to pool resources, transfer knowledge, and access markets (Bokolo, 2018; Osman & Ngepah, 2020). This collective mode of business operation enhances their adaptive capacity, fosters innovative entrepreneurial practices, and cultivates resilience against market volatility and uncertainties. Such synergistic collaborations have not only enabled the foreign cohort to surpass their local counterparts in isolated endeavours but also to forge sustainable business models that leverage cultural cohesion and shared identity, thereby engendering a durable competitive edge in South Africa's dynamic marketplace.

Informal networks, including religious and ethnic groups, often serve as key referral channels. A pressing concern persists: to what extent have local South African entrepreneurs cultivated relational capital with their respective social networks and local intermediaries, reaching a threshold whereby they patronise, actively endorse and facilitate the dissemination of their business initiatives within an expansive and interconnected network? Somali entrepreneurs operating various enterprises in South Africa frequently leverage these co-ethnic relations to navigate market complexities, emphasising their paramount importance in the country's entrepreneurial landscape (Bokolo, 2018; Osman & Ngepah, 2020). These networks play a vital role in mobilising business capital through faith-based channels, meaningful partnerships, and a loyal customer base, all facilitated by word of mouth, referrals, and social connections.

Research has shown a positive correlation between a sense of community and business success (Kilkenny et al., 1999). When entrepreneurs frequently demonstrate a strong commitment to community engagement through practices such as social support networks and cultural preservation initiatives that foster mutual trust and collective resilience, they tend to attract consistent patronage. Similarly, contributing to local community development through creating job opportunities, participating in community events, and investing in social infrastructure, reinforces social cohesion and loyalty (Jorgensen et al., 2020). This reciprocal relationship strengthens social capital by fostering trust and enhancing reputation within the broader community. The resultant benefits cultivate a loyal customer base, mitigate operational risks associated with cultural and social dissonance, and bolster long-term sustainability by fostering a supportive environment conducive to business growth and resilience in a competitive entrepreneurial landscape.

CONCLUSION

Only two of the six entrepreneurial success traits identified among Somali entrepreneurs—adaptive spirit and customer-oriented paradigm—were generally evident among the South African entrepreneurs included in this study. Only two of the six entrepreneurial success traits identified among Somali entrepreneurs are adaptive spirit and a customer-oriented paradigm; these traits are generally inherent in South African local entrepreneurs included in this study. Since both cohorts operate within a comparable entrepreneurial landscape, this finding raises important questions about the specific traits that uniquely distinguish South African entrepreneurs and enable them to thrive in a competitive business environment.

Since both cohorts operate within a comparable entrepreneurial landscape, this finding raises a pertinent question about the specific entrepreneurial traits that uniquely distinguish local South African entrepreneurs, enabling them to engage and thrive in business amid stiff competition. The empirical results on resilience, an essential mechanism for survival, viability, and longevity, indicated a neutral stance, with local entrepreneurs showing ambivalence: neither fully demonstrating nor entirely lacking the requisite characteristics. The notable lack of collaborative ventures, informal networks, and a sense of community among the cohorts poses a worrying gap for entrepreneurial capacity development in the country. Integrating these traits into national entrepreneurship development strategies could significantly enhance the competitiveness of local entrepreneurs, ultimately improving their survival, sustainability, efficacy, and economic viability. An empirical analysis of the perceived receptiveness of the factors among the observed entrepreneurs in the country is recommended.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author gratefully acknowledges the local entrepreneurs in Pretoria who participated in this study. This research was supported by the National Research Foundation of South Africa (Reference: PSTD23032988088).

This paper featured at the Australian & New Zealand Marketing Academy (ANZMAC) International conference -Riding the Waves: Navigating Marketing's Dynamic Landscape – 2025.

RESEARCH ETHICS, INFORMED CONSENT, AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

This study did not require research ethics committee approval, as it involved an anonymous questionnaire survey of adult participants and did not collect sensitive personal data. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, their right to withdraw at any time, and the assurance of anonymity and confidentiality; by completing the questionnaire, they provided their informed consent. The author(s) declare no conflict of interest.

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APPENDIX 1

Cross-examining entrepreneurial success traits

This self-developed questionnaire for data collection is based on empirical insights from Kilonzo and Iwara (2023). The aim is to examine entrepreneurial success traits within a carefully stratified cohort operating in a comparable entrepreneurial ecosystem. The findings derived from primary data are expected to empower local entrepreneurs, invigorate their businesses and strengthen their market competitiveness.

Section 1: Background information

Kindly mark the applicable block with a cross [X] and, where necessary, also provide the applicable information.

1. Gender:

- Female []
- Male []
- Other []

2. Age:

- 15 – 35 []
- 36 and above []

3. What is highest education level? _____

4. What kind/nature of business do you operate? _____

5. In what sector is your business? _____

6. What year was your business established? _____

Section 2: Entrepreneurial success traits assessment

8. Kindly score each statement with 1 being the least agreed, while 5 being the strongest agreement, depending on how much you know it applies to you and/or your business.

Entrepreneurial Success Traits		Scale				
		1	2	3	4	5
Adaptive spirit/capability						
	You are flexible, able to embrace changes and adjust both personal and business strategies/approaches in response to shifts.					
	You are a visionary thinker, an entrepreneur who anticipates trends and prepares for uncertainties					
	You are curious, continuously exploring new entrepreneurial knowledge dimensions and opportunities					
	You understood the cultural, political and socio-economic dynamics of the community and interacted with them accordingly.					

Informal networking							
	You frequently tap from community groups, including local clubs, ethnic clusters, religious organisations, or social circles that offer trust-based entrepreneurial connections.						
	You interact with family, Friends and close associates for initial funding, emotional support and word-of-mouth promotion and referrals.						
	You operate with informal suppliers and customers, maintaining relationships that offer flexibility, feedback, and loyalty.						
Resilience							
	You understand the entrepreneurship landscape and prepare for its associated risks, for instance, crimes, civil unrest, prejudice, infrastructural deficiencies, economic instability, and natural occurrences.						
	You have business continuity strategies, contingency plans, and insurance coverage amid uncertainties.						
	You have access to funds and effective use of financial resources, including savings, credit, and insurance, to buffer your enterprise against uncertainties and shocks.						
Customer-oriented							
	You maintain strong customer relationships and understand their evolving needs						
	You deliver mutually beneficial functional, monetary, social and psychological values to your customers.						
	You offer heightened innovation and uniqueness compared to your counterparts in the same business environment.						
	You diagnose your venture(s) using some of the instruments below and adjust operations accordingly: Customer Effort Score Customer Feedback and Reviews Customer Retention Rate Customer Satisfaction Score Net Promoter Score First Contact Resolution Repeat Purchase Rate						

Collaboration ventures					
	You partner with other entrepreneurs to deliver your products.				
	You are involved in a joint initiative formed between entrepreneurs or with other stakeholders to leverage complementary capabilities.				
	Your current venture was jointly established by at least you and another entrepreneur who contributes resources and shares control, risks, and rewards.				
Sense of community					
	You offer gratitude to the community, for instance, by mentoring young, talented residents.				
	You employ residents with fair wages.				
	You participate in or collaborate with community causes and projects.				
	You build a healthy relationship that enables you to actively connect with your customers, employees, and local stakeholders.				
	Your business goals align with the well-being of the community.				