Sheffield Hallam University

A Sheffield Hallam University thesis

Making Sense of Co-Opetition in a Post-Colonial Entrepreneurial Landscape: Nigeria's Fashion Industry.

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Sheffield Hallam University's award of Doctor of Philosophy

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November 2022

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2. None of the material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.

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Dedicated to:

The Eternal GOD.

Fidel: the wind beneath my wings.

Jasmine, Jade, Heavenly.

In loving memory:

Florence Akimbom Yufanyi Fusi.

Bella Francisca Njoumbessi Kamga

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

smile on my face. You had such lofty hopes for me. I am proud to say that I am happily walking the path to the true freedom and expression of self that you so desired.

Most importantly, I dedicate this thesis to my husband, Fidel, the wind beneath my wings, thank you immensely. You have loved and nurtured me gently, holding space for me throughout this journey and believing in me unconditionally. You have listened to me ramble on about my research excitedly. You have also noticed when the spark in my eyes waned, and you have fanned my flames endlessly. I could not be here without you Fidel.

Indeed, it takes a village.

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November 2022

ABSTRACT

In response to calls for more co-opetition studies that address micro-macro foundations of co-opetition, this study examines the sensemaking of entrepreneurial co-opetition networks of formal and informal fashion sectors in a post-colonial entrepreneurial landscape in Nigeria. The aim is to provide a holistic understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of co-opetition which is largely determined by underlying institutional and socio-historical configuration of the environment within which entrepreneurs operate, and which shape meaning-making, interpretation, and enactment of co-opetition.

Specifically, within a post-colonial, developing economic context like Nigeria, an examination of institutional and socio-historical influences on entrepreneurial co-opetition sensemaking processes addresses the contextualized nature of co-opetitive relationships; thus, filling existing gap in co-opetition studies which cite limited accounting of the institutional and Institutional environment. Additional insights from Bourdieu's Practice theory and Fanon's post-colonial concept of 'Othering' are also incorporated to generate a much broader understanding of historically conditioned norms and co-opetitive behaviours of entrepreneurs operating within a post-colonial context like Nigeria.

This research is designed as an embedded case study. Multiple qualitative data collection and ethnographic techniques (e.g., interviews, observations, informal chats), and some secondary data (e.g., documentation), were employed to select participants from formal and informal entrepreneurial networks in Nigeria's fashion industry who were sampled through snowballing strategies. A thematic data analysis process was adopted.

Findings from this study describe the sensemaking process of entrepreneurial co-opetition network as the selection and extraction of cues from situational and concrete institutional contexts, which shape the development of co-opetition mindsets that inform enactments of co-opetitive behaviours and assumptions of participants. Institutionally grounded sensemaking resources are articulated as regulatory triggers, normative primers, and cultural-cognitive editors. Finally, the outcome of

sensemaking processes resulted in the construction of maintained and temporal co-opetition mindsets. The formal fashion sector engaged in co-opetition networking based on economic outcomes such as the generation of a combination of short/long-term (individual and collective) benefits. Within the informal sector, co-opetition provided a means to generate non-economic outcomes of embedded agency that renders co-opetition as a taken-for-granted strategy.

The findings in this study makes several contributions that relate to the capturing of contextual complexities of co-opetition which are often overlooked. The findings further demonstrate the role of sensemaking in co-opetition, especially how individual entrepreneurial actors develop interpretive mindsets that give meaning to their co-opetitive network environment. The importance of co-opetition in entrepreneurship is also emphasized, citing limited exploration of co-opetition within entrepreneurial contexts. Finally, the findings highlight the iterative relationship between micro and macro-level factors in co-opetition which is yet to be significantly explored in co-opetition research.

Keywords: *Co-opetition, entrepreneurial networks, sensemaking, institutions, post-colonialism, Nigeria's fashion industry.*

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

JM	Journey Man
MC	Master Craftsman
D	Dyad
SMEADAN	Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria
BoF	Bank of Industry
CBN	Central Bank of Nigeria
IN	Informal Network
FN	Formal Network
IIR	Informal Institutional Regulators
FIR	Formal Institutional Regulators

INDIGENOUS TERMS AND PHRASES

Figagbaga	Rivalry/Strife
Idije	Competition/contest
Fowo so wopo	Cooperation
Amuni Dara	The collective action of beautifying
Agbo Ile	Lineage Compound
Egbe Alaso	Network of fashion entrepreneurs
Occupational Egbe	Entrepreneurial networks
Pikin	The local term for child

Table of Contents

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Entrepreneurs in Nigeria's fashion industry have contributed to the growth and development of the economy by demonstrating unique abilities to adapt to the challenging industry and institutional environments. From pre-colonial times, these entrepreneurs have been able to leverage on network relationships to better manage industrial challenges (Kisumua, 2021) and institutional voids (Khanna & Palepu, 1997; Omeihe et al., 2021).

Interestingly, these network relationships reveal an inherent paradox: the simultaneity of cooperation and competition, which is now generally referred to as 'co-opetition.'

Co-opetition, which is commonly defined as *"a paradoxical relationship between two or more actors, regardless of whether they are involved in horizontal or vertical relationships, simultaneously in cooperative and competitive interactions" (Bengtsson & Kock, 2014),* highlights the simultaneity of competition (e.g. self-interests) and cooperation (e.g. mutual interests) within business relationships (Crick & Crick, 2021).

Historically, the concepts of cooperation and competition have been studied separately, as competition was viewed as a zero-sum strategy for lowering prices and creating innovation (Walley, 2007), while cooperation was viewed as a positive-sum strategy for mutual benefits. However, there is growing recognition that relationships among firms can exhibit both cooperation and competition simultaneously (Nalebuff & Brandenburger, 1997; Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 2021).

The growing number of coopetition relationships reported in literature seem to suggest that coopetition leads to superior performance. (e.g., organizational learning, cost sharing, shorter lead times, access to

superior infrastructure, opportunity for scale economics (Gernsheimer at el., 2021). Existing research also suggest that these relationships are quite prevalent and continue to be a major component in the growth of the global economy; thus, making it an important and timely research topic that is witnessing increased academic interest in recent times (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 2021; Gernsheimer et al., 2021; Crick & Crick, 2021).

The relevance of researching the fashion industry cannot be overemphasized. Recent works by Madichie (2022), Madichie & Hinson, (2022), reveal that creative sectors like the fashion industry are beginning to receive international and national focus as sources of innovation and economic growth. Since the introduction of the diversification policy, the fashion industry has received tremendous interest as an avenue for shifting focus from oil dependency (Kalagbor & Harry, 2021; Ajekwe, 2017). A previous report by Nwankwo (2018) reveals high allocation of funds by the federal government of Nigeria to support the fashion industry. Yet, there is limited discussion and documentation of Nigeria's fashion industry which requires a more nuanced and contextualized approach (Nwankwo, 2018).

The presence of co-opetition in the fashion industry is also beginning to receive some scholarly interest. Examples include Rafi Ul-Asan (2020)'s study which advocates for the implementation of co-opetition to better manage fashion supply chain challenges and compliance with institutional requirements in the United Kingdom by operating in socially acceptable ways that enable the attainment of legitimacy (Oliver, 1991).

Admittedly, interactions with institutions prevalent within Western and non-Western environments reveal stark differences. In contrast to the West, non-Western firms in co-opetitive network relationships appear to be less dependent on formal institutional structures, with more dependency on informal institutions. Additionally, entrepreneurship in Nigeria mostly occurs in the informal sector (Madichie et al., 2021; Omeihe et al., 2021); with a large amount of fashion firms operating within the

informal sector (Ogunsade & Obembe, 2016) which accounts for sixty-five percent (65%) of the country's GDP Madichie et al., 2021). Moreso, these firms wield their agency by attempting to change formal institutions through network relationships that are structured based on informal institutional guidelines (Omeihe et al., 2019; Ogunsade et al., 2016), through which they aim to access more favourable opportunities and competitive advantages (Battilana, 2006). This reliance on informal institutions is amplified by burdensome formal regulatory constraints, poor functioning capital markets, and underdeveloped infrastructures (Omeihe et al., 2019).

While there is some research which have explored the influence of institutions on co-opetitive relationships (e.g., Mariani, 2007; 2018; Monticelli et al., 2019, 2021), there is little understanding of how informal institutions shape meaning and understanding of co-opetition within entrepreneurial network relationships (Darbi & Knott, 2021). An understanding of how institutions shape entrepreneurial network co-opetition is important because co-opetition is a paradoxical concept which requires ongoing cycles of perception, interpretations, and actions (Weick, 1995; Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016a; 2016b; Pattinson et al., 2018). Specifically, the embedded nature of network relationships implies ongoing sensemaking and enactment to establish the next course of action.

In other words, the unpredictable and paradoxical nature of co-opetitive network relationships initiates a process of sensemaking through which co-opetitors draw from plausible modes of responses in their social and institutional context in order to create a shared sense of what co-opetition means (Weber & Glynn, 2006). Summarily, sensemaking enhances a social construction of co-opetition.

Focusing on the fashion industry thus presents a timely opportunity to showcase its trends and challenges and stimulate its institutional environment towards providing enabling policies that would

support co-opetitive network strategizing with a view to repositioning the industry and improving its international profile.

Additionally, despite significant advancements in co-opetition literature, there has been little academic theorising of co-opetition within the context of *small entrepreneurial networks*, even though this is a previously identified research gap (Granata, Lasch, Le Roy, & Dana, 2018; Gernshiemer et al., 2021). Paying attention to firm size in conceptualising co-opetition is important because the size of a firm shapes its activities and not in the least, its strategic activities, such as co-opetition (Krommendijk, 2016). As small entrepreneurial firms are typically characterised by liabilities of smallness (Aldrich & Auster, 1986), newness (Stinchcombe, 1965), and risk-taking behaviour (Galkina et al., 2017), co-opetition may provide an opportunity for entrepreneurs to explore and exploit opportunities to improve overall performance (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Granata et al., 2018).

This chapter therefore sets the scene for the relevance of researching co-opetition within small entrepreneurial relationships in the Nigerian fashion industry. Entrepreneurs may demonstrate specific forms of co-opetitive practices which differ from the codified, conventional practices typical of large multinationals (Bettoil, Di Marcia, & Finnoto, 2012). Unlike large multinationals where strategic decisions are managed by specialist teams (Bettoil, Di Marcia, & Finnoto, 2012), entrepreneurs function as key decision makers who manage the strategic decisions and functions of the enterprise. Consequently, understanding co-opetition within entrepreneurial relationships may require an examination of sensemaking processes which entrepreneurs undergo to develop co-opetition mindsets that give meaning to co-opetition (Galkina et al., 2017; Lundgren-Henrikksson & Kock, 2016a; 2016b).

This chapter also establishes an argument for researching the macro – institutional and sociocultural context of co-opetition considering that co-opetition and co-opetitive actors do not exist in isolation of

their macro environment which often shapes and influences co-opetitive interactions and engagements. (Mariani, 2007; 2018; Monticelli et al., 2017; 2019; 2021; Darby & Knott, 2022).

Consequently, this research converges critical aspects of co-opetition by examining the intersection between micro (sensemaking processes) and macro (institutional influences) level aspects of co-opetition. The relevance of this convergence is drawn from identified research gaps by prominent authors such as Bouncken et al., (2015), Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah (2016), Pattinson et al., (2018), Klimas et al (2022) who emphasize the multifaceted nature of co-opetition. Rather than separating these levels of analysis, therefore, this study makes a notable contribution to existing knowledge by developing a theoretical framework that considers the multifaceted nature of co-opetition. Essentially, this is considered a timely effort to further unpack the nature of co-opetition practices across the globe.

The discussions present in this chapter therefore establish the rationale for entry into the subject, where I draw on my previous experience as a fashion entrepreneur in Lagos, Nigeria. Through this reflection, I argue that the sensemaking of co-opetitive network interactions of my colleagues in the fashion industry can be better understood through an exploration of the institutional context within which they operate, and which may differ significantly from Western societies. Afterward, the background to the research problem is established through a discussion that emphasizes the importance of co-opetition within small entrepreneurial networks. Finally, the research aims, objectives, questions and theoretical underpinnings are discussed to provide an understanding of the structure and contributions of this study.

1.1 Personal Motivation

My interest in understanding the sensemaking of entrepreneurial network co-opetition stems from my experience as a fashion designer within both formal and informal sectors of the fashion industry in Nigeria. At the time, I was faced with the realities of cooperating with competitors within network

relationships and experienced how these interactions were shaped by formal and informal institutional structures. My journey into the fashion industry started in the informal sector, where I had been enrolled by my mother to become an unpaid apprentice to a Master craftsman. The term *'master craftsman'* refers to owners/managers of small firms in the informal sector who had also trained through the apprentice system (Adeya, 2008).

Grounded by an informal institutional norm of servitude and respect, my experience of the apprenticeship system of learning involved performing obligatory services to the master craftsman such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, and running errands ((Obidi, 1995; Kanu, 2020), alongside learning the craft of fashion design. After successful completion of the training, I was customarily expected to attend an elaborate 'freedom' ceremony at my master's house where symbolic items (food, drinks, honey, and kola nut) were provided by my family to the master craftsman to gain their blessings for my success as a newly qualified fashion designer.

Customarily, the end of an apprenticeship provides the newly qualified fashion designer with options to either receive a small amount of funding from the master craftsman or trade association to establish an independent enterprise or develop a partnership with the master craftsman where both actors interact co-opetitively. Yet, an unspoken expectation exists within the informal sector whereby the newly qualified fashion designer is expected to choose the route of partnership with the master craftsman. In this relationship, the newly qualified fashion designer is referred to as a 'journeyman' whose new partnership with the master craftsman provides the 'journeyman' with more legitimacy than if they had adopted the route of independence. During this period, the role of network relationships and social interdependence as bedrocks for co-opetitive interactions became more apparent.

Through the trade association, resources such as loans, infrastructure, and market information were easily accessed without resorting to formal procedures. In addition, interactions between the journeyman and master craftsman were coordinated on a network level, through the implementation

of strict informal guidelines such as sanctions and ostracism in cases where a member acted opportunistically.

At the end of this partnership and trade association membership which lasted 2 years, I relocated to the suburbs of Lagos state, where I attended a formal fashion institute. Given the formal nature of this institute, my experience was completely different from that of the informal sector. For instance, as opposed to dyadic and asymmetric partnerships experienced in the informal sector, co-opetitive partnerships were conducted between symmetric partners at fashion events and coordinated through formal procedures, such as the use of contractual agreements. Although there was a professional trade association in the formal sector, the intensity of social interdependence among participants was less than I had experienced in the informal sector.

After several years of practicing as a fashion designer and participating in co-opetitive network relationships, I became interested in understanding why co-opetitive relations differed within both formal and informal sectors. While fashion entrepreneurs in the informal sector relied strongly on network relationships as a form of social capital and protection against non-complying actions, fashion entrepreneurs in the formal sector, relied heavily on formal institutional structures in their interactions and relationships. In line with this, I noticed the clear gap between fashion designers operating within the formal and informal sectors. This gap was based on different accumulations of capital which Bourdieu (1977; 1985; 1986) argues to create a distinction between members of society.

Fashion entrepreneurs in the formal sector were characterized by larger accumulations of economic (e.g., money and tangible assets), cultural capital (e.g., formal/ westernized education), social capital (associations and networks, and symbolic capital (reputation, social position, social recognition), in comparison to fashion entrepreneurs in the informal sector. This difference tended to manifest in co-opetitive interactions among fashion entrepreneurs. For instance, I remember several years ago, being a member of the formal network granted me access to participate in a fashion exhibition and the

possibility of sharing the cost of a stall with a fellow member. Our interactions at the fashion exhibition were coordinated through a contractual agreement and documentation of processes. Outside of this collaboration, we both operated separate fashion businesses where we competed heavily.

In contrast, fashion entrepreneurs in the informal sector engaged in network relationships, where I found their interactions to be also descriptive of co-opetition. Co-opetition occurred on both dyadic levels (i.e., between a master craftsman and a journeyman), and a group level (among members at co-located sites). They relied on their social capital, characterized by accepted shared norms, codes of conduct, and collective action which shaped the interactions and relationships. Indeed, as Omeihe et al., (2021) observed, there exists an institutional misalignment between the needs of entrepreneurs and the formal institutions which drives most entrepreneurs to rely on alternative, informal institutional arrangements.

As such, I started to reflect on why the co-opetitive interactions and relationships within the fashion industry differed and what factors influenced these differences. As an advocate of creative arts, I have always been interested in ways that the fashion industry could diversify the Nigerian economy's income and reduce reliance on crude oil. I decided to pursue a Postgraduate Degree in International Business Management in England to gain further understanding of the theoretical explanations behind entrepreneurial interactions and relationships, which has led to the development of this thesis.

My Post Graduate degree began with research into the relationships and activities of SMEs in the Nigerian fashion industry. As I did not yet have the language to conceptualize cooperative-competitive interactions, I started by investigating topics such as the history, relationships, and internationalization activities of SME fashion entrepreneurs in Nigeria. Through my master's dissertation, I encountered the concept of co-opetition which I found to better explain the paradoxical interactions I had witnessed in the fashion industry. I commenced a Ph.D. program, with the topic of co-opetition being central to my study.

My meeting with my supervisory team Dr. Diana Sharpe and Dr. Martin Owens was very instrumental in streamlining and identifying a clear research area. Dr. Diana Sharpe's (2006; 2018) articles inspired my adoption of a qualitative research approach that could enable access to both formal and informal social practices which are considered relevant in understanding the social life of a research phenomenon. My consideration for reflecting the cross-cultural language potential of my research context was also inspired by Morgan, Kelly, Sharpe & Witley's (2003) study on the *'Internationalization and Management of Japanese Financial Institutions'* where the researchers highlighted the role that language plays in knowledge construction by clarifying interview questions to Japanese interviewees in their original language.

In the same vein, several works by Dr. Martin Owens whose research interest centres on institutions and internationalization of enterprises and MNEs inspired the theoretical foundation for my study. Particularly, Martin's papers on '*Institutional Forces in Adoption of Joint Ventures: Empirical evidence from British Retail Multinationals'* (Owens & Zueva-Owens, 2013) *and 'International Entrepreneurship from Emerging to Developed Markets: An Institutional perspective'* (Nuhu, Owens, & McQuillan, 2021) inspired my awareness of the social context of organizational relationships and activities. Thus, in my bid to understand how actors within the formal and informal fashion sectors made sense of co-opetition, I realized that the cognitive process of co-opetition sensemaking could be better explained through an examination of the larger institutional (regulatory, normative, and cultural-cognitive) context.

Picture 1.1 Researcher with colleagues at a formal fashion institution in Lagos, Nigeria (2013)

Picture 1.2 Researcher sewing a peplum bodice (2013)

Picture 1.3 Researcher with the tutor during fashion illustration session (2013)

Picture 1.4 Researcher threading an industrial sewing machine (2013)

1.2 Background to the Research

Co-opetition is fast becoming a popular concept within business network studies, business-to-business marketing, and entrepreneurship. The central theme of the concept of co-opetition is the simultaneity of cooperation and competition in interactions by rival firms to create greater value than if firms only cooperated, or competed (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000). In fact, in one of the earliest research projects done on the topic, Brandenburger and Nalebuff (1996) through a seminal paper on co-opetition metaphorize the concept as *a game where each partner gets a larger slice of the pie.'* This metaphor, therefore, highlights the paradoxical yet strategic interdependence which may exist between and/or among competing firms due to a combination of divergent and convergent interests (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000).

The prevalence of co-opetition as a global phenomenon can be put into context by drawing on current global occurrences. In a recent article in the Harvard Business Review, Brandenburger and Nalebuff (2021) refer to examples of co-opetition such as the collaboration between Apple and Samsung, where cooperating with a strong rival as Apple within the high-end smartphone industry (by supplying Apple with its new Super Retina edge-to-edge OLED screen for the iPhone x), gave Samsung access to Apple's expertise in improving supplier quality (which its rivals would not have access to). More recently, a report by Bloomberg law (2020) highlighted the benefits of co-opetition captured by several large and small pharmaceutical companies to develop and produce vaccines to manage the coronavirus pandemic.

Co-opetition is therefore interpreted in existing literature as a valuable strategy for firms who increasingly capitalize on its synergistic benefits (Gernsheimer, Kanbach, & Gast, 2021). The field of co-opetition studies has therefore gained enormous academic and practical interests since its introduction to management studies and prevalence across various organizations, industries, and sociocultural settings (Bengtsson, Raza-Ullah, & Srivastava, 2020; Lundgren-Henriksson & Tidstrom, 2021). Numerous conceptual and empirical studies have provided deep academic insights and practical

implications for firms to better capture their benefits and manage their challenges (Gernsheimer, Kanbach, & Gast, 2021).

Despite its advantages, the duality of two opposing logics creates cognitive challenges. Specifically, studies like Bengtsson et al., (2010) draw on the opposing nature of cooperation which is grounded in trust and commitment, and competition which is grounded in notions of pride and prestige. Thus, entrepreneurs may experience goal ambiguities in mutual entrepreneurial value creation and individual value appropriation, knowledge sharing, and protection (Bouncken, Laudien, Fredrich, & Gomar, 2017; Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016b). Consequently, co-opetitors may be at risk of opportunistic behaviour and face tensions arising from these (Bengtson, Kock, Lundgren-Henriksson, & Nasholm, 2016; Bouncken, Laudien, Fredrich, & Gomar, 2017; Czakon & Czernek, 2016).

To make sense of this conflicting mode of interaction, entrepreneurs refer to institutionally derived cues to perceive, interpret and extract plausible courses of action (Weber & Glynn, 2006). This is even more relevant in the context of a complex institutional environment like Nigeria where protection mechanisms that encourage effective and efficient market transactions are generally regarded as weak and unreliable (Webb, Khoury, & Hitt, 2019; Khanna & Palepu, 1997). Complementing formal institutions, however, are informal institutions that are grounded in a society's culture, norms, values, and belief systems (Webb et al., 2019; Omeihe et al., 2020). Informal institutions not only enable entrepreneurs to operate outside the confines of the formal economy (Kinyanju, 2006; Webb et al., 2019; Omeihe et al., 2020) but may also provide alternative sensemaking codes through which entrepreneurs deal with the complexity of co-opetition. Indeed, institutions are the feedstock for sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Weber & Glynn, 2006) and are therefore highly important in co-opetition sensemaking studies.

Notably, several studies have started to identify and discuss the role of institutions. In particular, some researchers have examined the role of formal institutions such as when a government's political, economic, and legal/regulatory institutions induce a consortium of Italian theatre firms to co-opete

(Mariani, 2007), promote outward Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) by emerging markets (e.g., Luo et al., 2010), promote co-opetition among co-located companies (Mariani & Kylanen, 2013), promote co-opetitive action in tourism destinations (Kylanen & Mariani, 2014), promote export from Brazil (Monticelli et al., 2018), and coerce airlines to co-opete by providing a strict regulatory framework, enlarging their shared benefits, and reducing their costs (Nakanishi, 2020), Adjacent to these studies is the examination of non-governmental formal institutions on internationalization (export) activities from an emerging economy (Monticelli, Garrido, Vieira, Chim-Miki, & Carneiro, 2021).

Adopting a different approach, Bouncken et al (2017) liken co-opetition co-working spaces to normative institutions based on social interactions and exchanges established within such environments. There is a growing concern in co-opetition studies regarding the relationships between co-opetition and institutions (Mariani, 2007; Bengtson, Kock, Lundgren-Henrikson, & Nasholm, 2016; Bouncken et al., 2017; Monticelli et al., 2018; 2021).

Except for a recent publication by Darbi & Knott (2022) who examined the institutional and relational dynamics of co-opetition within a cluster of informal small businesses in a developing economic context, there has been little political, theoretical, and empirical interest in the informal sector which is a common field of entrepreneurship in developing economies like Nigeria (Omeihe et al., 2020). This is strikingly surprising as some co-opetition studies have called for further investigation of the sociocultural context in which co-opetition occurs (e.g., Mariani, 2007; Kylanen & Rusko, 2011; 2012; Bouncken et al., 2017).

The predominantly informal characteristic of businesses in developing nations like Nigeria conceptually distinguishes its business environment from developed economies (Webb, Ireland & Ketchen, 2014; Webb Khoury & Hitt, 2019; Omeihe et al., 2020; 2021). This one-sidedness implies that researchers may be tempted to adopt theoretical stances which may not provide a true representation of the researched (Wilmot & Tietze, 2020). This study takes a first step towards reflecting the implications of the institutional context on differences in entrepreneurial co-opetition

networks by unpacking both formal and informal institutions which drive co-opetition sensemaking processes. As co-opetition has been argued to improve entrepreneurship (Bouncken, Laudien, Fredrich, & Gormar, 2017), researching co-opetition in context proves to be a highly interesting and timely advancement to International Business knowledge.

1.3 Research Gap: The Need for an Integrated Perspective on Co-Opetition Network Sensemaking

Since the introduction of co-opetiton to management studies, several research efforts have been undertaken by management scholars to understand and explain its phenomenon. As such, research in co-opetition has evolved in several directions; characterized by a diverse range of theoretical fields, research streams, levels of analysis, and methodological choices (Bengtsson and Raza-Ullah, 2016; Dorn, Schweiger, Albers 2016; Gnyawali & Song, 2016; Gernsheimer et al., 2021). Although these research efforts have provided solid grounds for understanding the dynamic and paradoxical nature of co-opetition (Czakon et al., 2014), they have resulted in different, yet, contradictory typologies of co-opetition (Luo, 2007; Tidstrom, & Hagberg-Andersson, 2012; Bengtsson & Kock, Lundgren-Henriksson, & Nasholm, 2016) which present the field as lacking in conceptual coherence (Gnyawali & Song, 2016), and lacking in the convergence of critical aspects underlying co-opetition (Bengtsson & Kock, 2014; Bouncken, Gast, Kraus & Bogers, 2015; Dagnino & Mina, 2018), such as the integration of multiple levels of analysis (Bengtsson et al., 2016; Pattinson et al., 2018).

Studies like Bengtsson et al (2016), and Pattinson et al (2018) have been inspired by the sensemaking theory in bridging micro-meso-macro levels of co-opetition analysis. In Pattinson et al's (2018) study, this resulted in the description of co-opetition as an emergent strategy within science based SMES in the UK. The social constructionist foundation of sensemaking was revealed in this study through the construction of diverse co-opetition mindsets within the case study consisting of science-based SMEs.

In another study, Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock (2016a) adopt a sensemaking and strategy-as-practice (SAP) approach to explain the differences in managerial co-opetitive frames. In the same vein, a study

by Dahl (2014) examines micro foundations of co-opetition such as how norms and rules for shared co-opetitive interactions are constructed. Consequently, there is growing research interest in understanding of micro foundations of co-opetition (Gernsheimer et al., 2021). Exploring sensemaking is particularly relevant within ambiguous or paradoxical situations where a variety of contrasting events on both organisational and societal levels appear plausible in isolation, but are intrinsically interdependent (Pentilla, Ravald, Dahl, & Bjork, 2020).

Drawing from the paradoxical nature of co-opetition which would normally be viewed as implausible, the combination of cooperation and competition as conflicting modes of interactions trigger a process of sensemaking for co-opetitive actors to enact meaning in their environment (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Weick, 1995; Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016b). In addition, the dynamic and embedded nature of entrepreneurial network relationships implies an ongoing meaning making and enactment, which are basic mechanisms of sensemaking (Weick, 1995). In fact, it is like Weick (1995) asserts: '*by making sense of what is happening, assumptions about the next course of action can be developed.*' The sensemaking perspective could therefore provide a backdrop for understanding the collective negotiation of acceptable versions of the experiences of actors (Weick, 1979). From this sensemaking perspective, fashion entrepreneurial firms can be argued to be constituted by systems of meanings and social processes of making sense, through which meanings are assigned to experiences or events.

The exploration of co-opetition from a micro-level call for a process perspective (e.g., Dalh, 2014; Pattinson et al., 2018; McGrath, O Toole, & Canning, 2019) to describe the dynamic interplay of cooperation and competition. Accordingly, co-opetition process is identified as one of the three key research areas in co-opetition research (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016). Understanding the processual nature of co-opetition sensemaking requires that research focus on the individual level, rather than the firm level. Admittedly, previous studies have found that co-opetition begins with individual level cognition. For instance, Tidstrom (2008) refer to a pioneering study by Yami, Lehmann-Ortega, & Naro (2008) that highlighted individual mental models as origins of co-opetitive dynamic capabilities.

In another study, Raza-Ullah et al (2014) adopt an emotional ambivalence perspective to explain the emotive aspects of co-opetition as being triggered by cognitive and emotional response from co-opetitive actors. Going further, Gnyawali, Madhavan, & Bengtsson (2016) address the cognitive and emotional aspect of co-opetitive felt tensions due to conflicting demands of cooperation and competition. Along these lines, Lascaux (2020) suggests that the development of interpersonal trust in co-opetitive interactions is likely to be influenced by sensemaking processes through which actors interpret and ascribe meaning to their conflicting cooperative and competitive experiences.

Despite this understanding, research on the individual (micro) level is scant and requires further investigation (Lundgren-Henriksson et al., 2016; Tidstrom & Rajala, 2016). Understanding of internal drivers of co-opetition would therefore require micro-level theoretical lenses such as sensemaking theory to highlight the cognitive dimension of co-opetition research (Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016a; 2016b; Pattinson et al., 2018; Bengtsson et al., 2020; Lundgren-Henriksson & Tidstrom, 2021).

This is especially important for studies on entrepreneurial firms, needing to acknowledge the individual manager role of the entrepreneur as key decision maker within the entrepreneurial firm. In this vein, the entrepreneur is often responsible for managing several functions which would otherwise be managed by specialists within a large firm context (Bettiol, Di Maria, & Finotto, 2011). Entrepreneurship is thus viewed as an activity conducted by an individual actor who is tasked with the responsibility of recognizing and exploiting opportunities (Alvarez and Barney, 2007), such as within co-opetitive relationships. Drawing on the independent nature of entrepreneurship, therefore, exploring individual-level issues of entrepreneurial co-opetition can provide richer analysis. (Bouncken et al., 2015; Dorn et al., 2016).

Overall, the intersection between co-opetition, entrepreneurship, (Bouncken et al., 2015), and strategy (e.g., Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016), could potentially make a great contribution to research in co-opetition (Gernsheimer et al., 2021; Darbi & Knot, 2022). The sensemaking theory is especially useful for understanding macro levels such as entrepreneurial network relationships within developing

economies. Specifically, entrepreneurial networks in Nigeria provide entrepreneurs with opportunities to overcome their vulnerabilities of smallness and susceptibilities to institutional complexities (Omeihe & Amoako, 2019).

Within the co-opetition literature network relationships are also argued to provide superior value to co-opetition actors than single dyads (e.g., Ritala et al., 2014; Czakon & Czernek, 2016; 2018). Yet, there is a dearth of insights into how these actors construct network frames, with notable exceptions like Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock's (2016a, 2016b) study regarding network co-opetition. A consistent argument in the network approach is the complexity of multi-actor interactions which is different from dyads (Czakon & Czernek, 2016).

These assumptions above are also central to the sensemaking theory which emphasizes the importance of understanding co-opetition as an interaction which is influenced by micro-level cognition (Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016a, 2016b, Pattinson et al., 2018; Lundgren-Henriksson & Tidstrom, 2021). For instance, in pivotal studies adopting the sensemaking theory, Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock (2016a; 2016b) refer to the creation of co-opetitive network pictures of managers in the Finnish media industry by revising and matching old frames of competition to an emerging frame of co-opetition. This sensemaking process was triggered by declining revenue in traditional print media and growing competition from digital media which required strong rivals in the media industry to cooperate through material exchanges (Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016a).

The sensemaking theory highlights the role of the social context (Weick, 1995) but does not explicitly account for how institutional factors influence the sensemaking and enactment of co-opetition. This has resulted in limited understanding of macro-level drivers which have mostly been characterised as network, market, and industry related factors external to the focal co-opetitive relationship (Tidstrom & Rajala, 2016). This narrow conceptualisation of macro-level factors ignores the institutional

environment which has been identified as significant in the co-opetition process (Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016a; 2016b; Pattinson et al., 2018; Darbi & Knott, 2022).

This limitation is addressed by exploring the potential of drawing insights from the institutional theory and sensemaking theory to understand how social processes of sensemaking are caught up in institutionally constructed concerns of legitimacy. There is growing research interest in understanding the role of institutions as a key constituent of the co-opetition process. These have primarily conceptualised institutions as formal frameworks of an economic environment such as the law, rules, policies, and regulations through which business objectives are monitored and guided (Monticelli et al., 2019; Mariani, 2007; 2018).

These studies however fail to show how the social context of institutions shape the sensemaking of co-opetition; particularly, the shared understanding needed to achieve satisfactory engagement in co-opetitive interactions. In other words, co-opetition literature lacks an understanding of the contextually bound patterns of institutional rules which come into play in these interactions. Co-opetition research therefore needs to consider how multiple relational connections in the broader environment in which a firm is embedded, influences entrepreneurial network co-opetition (Czakon & Czernek, 2016). Discussions on the institutional context is further strengthened by drawing perspectives from the post-colonial theoretical lens. As a notable Nigerian writer opines, *'the past does not merely tell us what happened yesterday. It also illuminates what happens today'* (Chimamanda Adichie, 2019). Post-colonial perspectives provide insights to the past to understand to how history shapes current events.

The perspective adopted in this study is both processual and institution based. As a processual study, micro-level cognitive factors of co-opetition networks are analysed to reveal sensemaking processes, and outcomes related to the construction of co-opetition mindsets. Likewise, this study highlights the underlying institutional structures that drive sensemaking processes.

In this vein, examining micro and macro levels of co-opetition through an integrated theoretical approach also provides an opportunity to address the three core co-opetition research streams: drivers, processes, and outcomes (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016; Gernsheimer et al., 2021). Accordingly, this reveals the dynamic nature of co-opetition processes, drivers, and outcomes which are constructed by each other in a continuous cycle, in the same way that entrepreneurial co-opetition network relationships shape and are shaped by the institutional context in which they occur.

The framework above could therefore be viewed as an illustration of the boundary conditions within this thesis. The specification of boundary conditions in co-opetition research has been identified as an existing gap that currently blurs theoretical development. Specifically, studies like Gnyawali & Song (2016) and Bengtsson et al., (2016) identify boundary setting as a condition for achieving rigour and *'extending the roots'* of co-opetition research. Setting this boundary condition in this study is therefore a timely contribution towards clarity of meaning and further progress in the field (Bouncken et al., 2015; Gnyawali & Song, 2016).

1.4 Research Aims and Objectives

Research Aim

This thesis aims to examine coopetition within small entrepreneurial network relationships in Nigeria's fashion industry. The choice of considering entrepreneurial small firms is to highlight the prevalence of co-opetition as a small firm strategic alliance for strengthening market positions (Thomason et al., 2013), and understand the diverse ways in which co-opetition manifests across different industries, firm size, and institutional contexts (Crick and Crick, 2020; Gernsheimer et al., 2020). Further, exploring co-opetition within the fashion industry provides a basis for uncovering new dimensions of co-opetition research that reveal sensemaking patterns of co-opetition shaped by the underlying institutional context. Consequently, this study aims to bridge the gaps in micro and macro level

understanding of co-opetition and increase knowledge on the sensemaking of co-opetition within network relationships small entrepreneurial firms in a post-colonial, developing economy like Nigeria.

Research Objectives

To address the research aims above, three key research objectives were developed as follows:

RO1: To identify and examine institutions that influence sensemaking of entrepreneurial network co-opetition in Nigeria's fashion industry.

RO2: To understand how entrepreneurs make sense of entrepreneurial network co-opetition In Nigeria's fashion industry.

1.5 Research Questions

> *"Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity"* - (Adichie, 2009)

The Co-opetition literature is beginning to acknowledge the *'dangers of a single story'*, which portray concepts like co-opetition from only a one-sided, Western perspective. Specifically, co-opetition research has ignored the role of informal institutions within which most entrepreneurial activities in developing economies occur (Darbi & Knott, 2021), as well as the underlying socio-historical context which ground the evolvement of such institutions. Gaining a holistic understanding of co-opetition that captures both Global North and Global Southern perspectives is necessary for advancing authentic knowledge on the sensemaking of co-opetition.

Through a qualitative case study of the formal and informal fashion sectors in Nigeria, therefore, two broad research questions in relation to entrepreneurial network co-opetition were developed to extend contextual and theoretical insights on co-opetition:

RQ1: How do institutions shape sensemaking processes of co-opetition within entrepreneurial networks in post-colonial Nigeria's Fashion industry?

RQ2: What are the outcomes of sensemaking processes on the construction of entrepreneurial co-opetition network mindsets within the post-colonial Nigerian fashion industry?

The significance of these questions stems from the notion that there is limited theoretical and empirical insights which have explored the concept of co-opetition from a non-Western perspective. Hence, answers to these questions would provide much needed insights to the dynamic nature of entrepreneurial network co-opetition within a context of weak, inefficient formal institutions. This also has the potential to extend academic knowledge on the nature of co-opetition from a West-African perspective and provide the foundation for subsequent studies.

1.6 Methodological Approach: Qualitative Case Study

This thesis is based on an embedded case study of formal and informal sectors in Nigeria's fashion industry. This thesis draws from qualitative approaches, based on a social constructionist standpoint which assumes that the social world is socially constructed by individuals who contribute actively to its creation (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). From this standpoint, it was important to generate knowledge from empirical fieldwork. Although a theoretical pre-understanding of entrepreneurial co-opetition had been established, it was important to keep an open mind in approaching the selected cases during fieldwork. This implied letting the cases *'talk to me'*, rather than forcing my pre-conceived knowledge, assumptions, and theoretical framework on the studied subjects.

For this reason, although the initial plan was to examine the concept of co-opetition within the formal fashion network association in Nigeria, it became apparent that this would present a one-sided view of the co-opetitive situation in the fashion industry. As such, it was necessary to adopt an embedded case study approach by investigating both formal and informal subsets of the fashion industry.

The methods chosen for data collection were interviews, direct observations, and documentation as primary data sources. By designing interviews as semi- structured and open-ended, participants could have considerable influence over our conversations, while I ensured to keep conversations within the overall theme of my study. An initial interview guide helped me steer the interview conversations towards areas of interests. I met with participants privately at locations of their choice. In addition, direct observations of network meetings and events gave me further access to the processes of co-opetition as they occurred.

The network level itself, is of special interest since actors here must make sense of their co-opetitive activities as well as the dialogues and ideas presented at this level. Moreover, the empirical study of individual and network levels has not received adequate academic attention from a sensemaking perspective (Lundgren-Henriksson and Kock, 2016a; 2016b). Overall, I was able to interview forty-eight (48) participants in total, whom I considered relevant to the study; many of whom I met with more than once. I also interviewed external stakeholders who were involved in the coordination of co-opetition on a network level such as members of the council of elders, government, and bank officials.

Finally, a core aspect of academic writing relates to the stance adopted by the researcher in expressing the underlying epistemic and attitudinal positions adopted (Hyland, 2002). Although adopting first-person pronouns are strongly advised against, the qualitative backdrop of my study necessitated a negotiation of both formal and informal styles rather than a strict adherence to the detached impersonal stance of fact-stating which could potentially minimize the context-driven nature of my research study (Hyland & Jiang, 2017). In this vein, this study provides an authoritative insight through an interpretivist stance that acknowledges my role as an insider and close relationship to the researched (Hyland & Jiang, 2017).

1.6 Positioning of Thesis and Intended Contribution

The purpose of this study is to espouse the notion that there is little understanding of entrepreneurial network co-opetition. With this in mind, and based on the rich theoretical and empirical insights, this thesis aims to uncover key dynamics of entrepreneurial network co-opetition in ways that may otherwise have been unattainable, by integrating micro and macro-levels of analysis of co-opetition. This thesis also presents a fundamental challenge to prevailing perspectives on network co-opetition which have predominantly favoured Western models that do not speak to the realities and dynamics of entrepreneurial network relationships within a post-colonial, developing economy like Nigeria.

To this end, this thesis makes several contributions: First, it extends the field of co-opetition research by integrating knowledge from the institutional theory and sensemaking theory to understand how entrepreneurs make sense of network co-opetition. Research Question One addresses the macro-level (institutional, socio-historical) factors which shape co-opetition sensemaking processes within the formal and informal fashion entrepreneurial networks in Nigeria. Research Question Two addresses the outcome of co-opetition sensemaking on the construction of co-opetition mindsets.

Although each theoretical perspective has its own explanatory potency, the combination of the sensemaking and institutional approaches facilitates a much richer understanding of co-opetition sensemaking by linking micro and macro levels of analysis (Jensen, Kjærgaard, & Svejvig, 2009). The sensemaking theory which integrates cognition and action, is largely concerned with how actors individually and collectively appropriate and enact their realities of co-opetition (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Brown, Colville & Pye, 2014). Additionally, the sensemaking theory serves as a useful lens for providing rich theoretical insights into how co-opetitive actors cope with the ongoing complexity of co-opetition, both cognitively and behaviourally (Gnyawali et al., 2016; Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016a; 2016b).

The Institutional theory outlines the reciprocal influences of institutionalized practices on co-opetition sensemaking. Particularly, it resides in macro-level structures as emergent from, and antecedent to

sensemaking (Weber & Glynn, 2006). The institutional theory therefore complements the sensemaking theory in this thesis as an integral aspect of sensemaking which is embedded in social space and time (Weber & Glynn, 2006). From a methodological angle, the complexity of formal and informal institutions in the Nigerian environment provides rich insights to how co-opetition actors navigate formal and informal economies to maximize their potentials as well as how these may serve as constraining factors on entrepreneurial co-opetition.

In line with previous findings, this thesis identifies the outcome of sensemaking processes as the emergence of co-opetition mindsets (Pattinson et al., 2018; Lundgren-Henriksson & Tidstrom, 2020). However, this thesis also extends this perception by acknowledging institutional drivers of sensemaking processes and argues for a consideration of the institutional context in assessing co-opetition sensemaking processes.

This thesis also extends methodological approaches to co-opetition research by addressing *'how'* questions (Bengtsson et al., 2016). Such qualitative studies as this, may be more appropriate to gain deeper insights into the dynamic, contextual and multilevel nature of the sensemaking of entrepreneurial co-opetition by explaining how individual level activity such as actor cognition (e.g., Henderson, 1989; Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016; Klimas Czakon & Fredrich, 2021) aggregate to the collective, network activity. This is in line with the call for further studies to combine micro level perspectives (e.g., Lundgren-Henriksson et al., 2016; 2018; Pattinson et al., 2018) with a network, contextual perspective (e.g., Gnyawali & Madhavan, 2006; Bengtsson et al., 2018; Monticelli et al., 2019; Nakanishi, 2020; Hidalgo et al., 2020; Garri, 2020).

The qualitative methodological design of this thesis allowed the researcher to delve deep into the unique and contextualized realities and experiences of individual actors, and as such, would prove very useful to further knowledge on the sensemaking of entrepreneurial co-opetition, which is a contextual, rather than generalizable phenomenon. The sensemaking and institutional theories enable an analysis

of the practical co-opetitive activities of real individuals engaged in tangible manifestations of social action. As such, the theoretical background of this study is strongly associated with the interpretive, social constructionist and processual nature of this study and thus makes an influential contribution to the contextual turn in co-opetition studies and overall international Business research.

An integral part of this study is the notion of entrepreneurial networks which provide opportunities for entrepreneurs, and within which co-opetitive interaction reside. In this vein, the study of the formal and informal sectors of the fashion industry provides a rich contextual approach to uncovering co-opetition in context and thus supports the growing importance of contextual research in International Business. From a theoretical angle, studying entrepreneurial networks continue to serve as relevant avenues for co-opetition, even though the entrepreneurial context has been largely ignored in existing literature.

The role of co-opetition as a strategy for enhancing entrepreneurial opportunity recognition and exploitation is also well discussed. This thesis therefore provides rich theoretical insights into the contextual and dynamic nature of co-opetition, which manifests differently in different contexts. This is particularly relevant, because a multi-level study which examines co-opetition within the influential context of entrepreneurship in a developing has received less attention compared to developed economies (Darbi & Knott, 2022) and would serve as a strong foundation for future research in this area.

This thesis also provides both practical and policy implications. From a practical perspective, this thesis reveals that fashion designers are willing to engage in co-opetitive interactions and would greatly benefit from a clear articulation of co-opetitive interests and practices. From a policy perspective, this thesis unearths the activities of fashion designers in the informal sector who have been greatly marginalised and whose activities have remained largely undocumented. In this vein, this thesis calls for the formulation of future policies that cater to the bespoke needs of fashion designers in the

informal sector. Likewise, this thesis calls for the formulation of policies that could encourage co-opetition between the formal and informal sectors so that benefits are more effectively harnessed by practitioners as well as institutional stakeholders.

1.7 Summary and Outline of Thesis

This thesis consists of eight chapters. This chapter (Chapter 1) introduces the thesis and provides an overview of the thesis content and structure. It frames the research aims and questions, as well as provides an overview of methodological choices adopted in this thesis.

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of literature related to co-opetition in entrepreneurial networks and identifies inherent gaps in literature exploring this stream of research.

In Chapter 3, the contextualized sensemaking conceptual framework is introduced for studying entrepreneurial co-opetition networks. Discussions draw upon the sensemaking theory and institutional theory. Further insights are also drawn from post-colonial concepts and Bourdieusian concept of practice.

Chapter 4 details methodological choices that have guided this research and presents a rationale for adopting a social constructionist philosophical positioning. It also provides a discussion on the data collection, sampling and analysis techniques adopted and justify the need to focus on the naturalistic setting of research participants through observations of their activities within their stores, fashion-based events, and trade association meetings. To accomplish this, I used a range of ethnographic techniques such as semi-structured interviews and participant observations. I also provide a review of the processes taken to interpret and make sense of data collected in the field.

Chapter 5 presents initial findings related to how the socio-historical context influence co-opetitive interactions within entrepreneurial relationships in the fashion industry. Particularly, the colonial and socio-historical development of the Nigerian economy is discussed to reveal the development of different social groups that have resulted in a distinction between the formal and informal fashion sectors. This chapter also highlights the indigenous practice of co-opetition and key contextual

characteristics of co-opetitive interactions in entrepreneurial relationships. This chapter thus sets the context for answering the research objectives.

Chapter 6 responds to the first research question which considers how institutional factors shape sensemaking processes of co-opetition in fashion-based entrepreneurial networks in Nigeria.

Chapter 7 responds to the second research question related to the outcome of sensemaking of co-opetition on the construction of co-opetition mindsets in fashion-based entrepreneurial networks in Nigeria.

Chapter 8 concludes this thesis by presenting and discussing the theoretical model developed based on the research and findings which provide a new contribution to existing body of knowledge on entrepreneurial co-opetition networks. In this final chapter, implications for practice and policy holders are also discussed, as well as the limitations of the study and recommendations for future study. This chapter closes with concluding remarks that synthesizes the major reflections on the findings and contributions to co-opetition research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Co-Opetition in Entrepreneurial Network Contexts

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide a conceptualization of entrepreneurial network co-opetition as a socially constructed phenomenon. In this vein, this chapter highlights the growing significance of co-opetition in relation to entrepreneurial network relationships (e.g., Sanou, Le Roy & Gnyawali, 2014; McGrath & O'Toole, 2019; Granata, Lasch, Le Roy, & Dana, 2018) in an emerging economic context (e.g., Darbi, & Knott, 2022). To this end, section 2.1 reviews the theoretical foundation of co-opetition and delineates it from similar strategic alliances which is a necessary step towards establishing its relevance (Yami et al., 2010).

Following on from this, a definition of co-opetition is elucidated in section 2.2 through considerations of contextual mechanisms (Bengtsson & Kock, 2002; 2014; Bengtsson et al., 2010) such as the entrepreneurial environment in Nigeria which is characterized by complex institutions (Omeihe et al., 2019; 2021). The three sections above provide a foundation for exploring the core theme of this thesis which is entrepreneurial network co-opetition. Consequently, gaps are identified as the need for more research integrating micro and macro level factors to understand the meso-level construct of co-opetition within a network relationship.

The literature review chapter is therefore essential to establish a rationale for the research questions. Specifically, within the co-opetition literature, the merging of two contrasting logics of cooperation and competition is complex (Meena et al., 2022), and this has resulted in the adoption of several and contrasting theoretical and empirical findings which further increases its ambiguity (Bouncken et al., 2015; Dorn et al., 2016; Gernsheimer et al., 2021). Overall, this chapter sets a new direction for advancing current academic discussions on the co-opetition phenomenon, as well as implications for how firms could better maximize benefits and manage challenges of co-opetition.

2.2 Theoretical Foundation of Co-Opetition

An important step in gaining clarity on the concept of co-opetition is to understand its theoretical foundation. To this end, it is important to examine the two contrasting streams of research which have provided the theoretical foundation for co-opetition. These contrasting streams are drawn from the paradigms of cooperation and competition. Within the cooperative paradigm, interdependent organizations collaborate to attain mutual benefits through a 'positive-sum' or 'win-win' game (Brandenburger and Nalebuff, 1996).

Several studies address the role of cooperation between firms, drawing from several theoretical perspectives such as the network theory and the resource-based view. Accordingly, these studies argue that firms are embedded in relationships with other firms in order to gain access to relevant resources (Kock, 1991; Hankansson & Snehota, 2006). In such relationships, relational rents or collaborative benefits are highlighted (Dyer and Singh, 1998).

The limitations of the traditional cooperation paradigm have however been highlighted by authors such as Luo (2007) who bring to light the disadvantage of a loosely governed cooperative structure which could create difficulties in managing opportunistic tendencies of cooperative partners. For instance, participants may become more dependent on others and may lose their competitive positions at the end of cooperative relationships (Luo, 2007).

To further emphasize the limitations of the cooperative paradigm, Kock (1999) refers to difficulty in managing conflicts which may arise from multiple and contrasting views on shared goals and outcome of the relationship. Instead, a relationship which involves combined cooperation and competition could present firms with greater opportunity to maximize both mutual and individual interests simultaneously (Afuah, 200; Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Bouncken et al., 2015).

In contrast to cooperation which prioritizes mutual convergent interests, the competition paradigm prioritizes divergent interests, opportunism (Bengtsson, Raza-Ullah, & Vanyushyn, 2016), and market dominance (Bengtsson & Lundgren-Henriksson, 2018). The theoretical foundation of competition can be traced to the works of Porter on competitive strategy (Porter, 1980) and competitive advantage (Porter, 1985). The central theme of Porter's (1980; 1985) arguments is the attainment of a *'zero-sum'* game structure, where the loss of one partner is the profit of another partner (Padula & Dagnino, 2007).

Debates also point to the incongruent views on the benefits and risks of competition. While studies like Lado, Boyd & Hanlon (1997) suggest that the constant race to identify new opportunities and maximize resources could increase firm efficiency, authors such as Bengtsson & Kock (2000) highlight the risk of rigidity and complacency which may arise due to high relative value of resources between competitors which may expediate its application by a competitor with little or no investment, compared to its original creator (Gnyawali & Charleton, 2018).

Further echoing the limitations of the competition paradigm, authors such as Gnyawali, Srivastava, & Asgari, (2018) highlight risks of absorptive capacity which may arise due to resource leakage. Overall, competition implies incompatible market positions (Porter, 1980) which breeds distrust, suspicion, hostility, and rivalry between firms in a constant race to outdo the other (Porter, 1985; Gnyawali & Charleton, 2018).

Advocating for the simultaneity of cooperation and competition, therefore, is the primary intent of the co-opetition research stream (Bengtsson & Kock, 2014). The co-opetition theory thus aims to clarify this hybrid construct based on the simultaneity of both paradigms which vary based on the relationship (Charleton and Gnyawali, 2018). To understand simultaneity in co-opetition, two dimensions of intensity and balance have been examined.

Authors like Bengtsson & Kock (2000), Park et al., (2014), Luo et al (2016), and Gnyawali & Charleton (2018) provide a starting point for understanding simultaneity through the intensity construct by suggesting that the potential for shared benefit is stronger within a co-opetitive relationship characterised by moderate levels of cooperation and competition. Going further, the authors also point to reduced opportunities to create value in co-opetitive relationships characterised by weak cooperation and competition (Gnyawali & Charleton, 2018). In cases where the intensity of cooperation and competition is strong, Gnyawali & Song (2016) highlight complexities and risk which may arise as a result of difficulties to nurture mutuality within such a relationship due to the inherently conflicting elements of cooperation and competition (Bengtson & Kock, 2000).

In discussing the second dimension of balance, Luo et al (2016) suggest that a perfect balance between both elements is difficult to achieve. As such, where the intensity between cooperation and competition is weak or high, the co-opetitive relationship is described as unbalanced (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000). Most studies however suggest that the ideal co-opetitive relationship would require an ideal balance between cooperation and competition, whereby actors pay similar emphasis on each element which enables the generation of positive co-opetitive outcomes (Das and Teng, 2000; Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Park et al., 2014; Gnyawali & Charleton, 2018).

For instance, the presence of similar levels of mutuality and rivalry could also increase the potential for opportunistic behaviour to be curbed through self-enforcing safeguards. As such, potential challenges are reduced as one element addresses the cost of the other (Das & Teng, 2000; Park et al., 2014; Gnyawali & Charleton, 2018). Some studies have however criticized the generalized descriptions to achieving balance in co-opetition. For instance, Chiambaretto, Maurice & Willinger (2020) argues that the specificities of attaining balance in co-opetition have hardly been explained and apply a game theoretical approach to argue that strategic uncertainty in managers' decisions to co-

opete in an innovative environment influences the balance in the allocation of budgets for value creation activities and value appropriation activities for each participant.

Through this framework, they suggest that tension arises out of the uncertainty surrounding co-opetition, which needs to be managed. In other words, achieving a balance between cooperation and competition in a co-opetitive relationship requires effective management of tension (Chiambaretto et al., 2020). Regardless of the approach to simultaneity adopted, the consensus across literature is that co-opetition is better understood through an analysis of the simultaneous occurrence of cooperative and competitive activities.

The conflicting theoretical dimensions of co-opetition has also led to confusion in distinguishing the co-opetition strategy from other similar strategies such as co-existence or collusion, for instance (e.g., Bengtsson & Kock, 1999). Yet, relationships characterized by co-existence do not include any direct relationship or interaction among competitors, which is necessary within a co-opetitive relationship. Rather it involves the acquisition of power based on an actor's dominating position or strength (Easton & Araujo, 1992). On the other hand, collusive relationships are characterized by indirect relationships or what Granovetter (1973) refers to as *'forbidden triads,'* where two competitors come together to present a strong opposition against a third competitor.

Collusive relationships do not include economic exchanges but rely on exchange of information and social services (Easton & Araujo, 1992) however, the actions taken to secure competitive positions of firms are conflicting since the interests of involved firms cannot be achieved simultaneously. Due to this, collusive relationships are often confused with co-opetitive relationships because both relationships involve cooperating with a competitor (Gnyawali and Charleton, 2018; Padula and Dagnino, 2007).

However, both relationships can be distinguished in terms of how they create value: unlike collusion where the goal is to achieve mutual benefit and only occurs when mutual benefits are threatened by

individual goals, co-opetition is aimed at creating value for all partners through a combination of mutual and individual goals for all competing partners. The consideration of the simultaneity of cooperation and competition is important because it would enable deeper understanding of how actors can effectively navigate the differing logics of cooperation and competition in a business relationship, and further induce an alertness among actors to recognise and act upon opportunities for co-opetition, and for maximizing potential positive outcomes of co-opetition (Gnyawali & Charleton, 2018). In the proceeding table, differences and similarities between cooperation, competition, collusion, and co-existence are presented to further illustrate the distinctiveness of co-opetition.

TABLE 2.1 COOPERATION, COMPETITION, COLLUSION, CO-OPETITION

Forms of Interactions	Key Players	Relationship Goal	Description	Core Features	Strategic Objective	Advantages	Constraints and Limitations	Theoretical background
Cooperation	Cooperators	To maximize mutual interests	Cooperation throughout the relationship	Mutual trust, reciprocity, harmony	Positive sum: resource sharing to access new markets and increase competitive advantage	Mutual interests: Conflicts are resolved by all actors moving towards a common purpose	No personal benefits: success for one is dependent on success for all. Does not recognize competitive actions	Resource-Based View (RBV)
Competition	Direct rivals	To maximize individual interests	Competition throughout the relationship	Conflict, bargaining power	Zero-sum: One partner's loss is another partner's gain	Increased competitive advantage	Personal benefit only: Success is dependent on the failure of another firm. Absence of cooperation among competitors	Distinctive competencies, Competitive advantages
Collusion	Cooperators and competitors	To maximize mutual interests	Cooperation in downstream activities		Win-win: Creation of new opportunities and neutralize threats	Mutual: Players are motivated to capture mutual benefits	No competitive goal	Transaction Cost
Co-opetition	Competing cooperators	To maximize both mutual and individual interests	Cooperation in upstream, and/or midstream activities Competition in downstream activities.	Interdependence *(Relationships are based on business needs rather than trust)*, simultaneity, paradox	Positive-Sum: Creation of new opportunities and neutralize threats	Mutual and personal: Players are motivated to create 'additional' benefits. Facilitates the development of unique products	Opportunism and power imbalance	Game theory, Resource-Based View (RBV), Transaction Cost Theory, Paradox Lens

From the table above, a major distinction between co-opetition and traditional strategic alliances illustrated in the table, is the presence of competitive behaviour, which contrasts the expectation of cooperation in strategic alliances (Webb, Beldona, & Swartz, 2021). A co-opetitive alliance requires a simultaneous engagement in cooperation and competition within a single relationship (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000). This simultaneity of cooperation and competition indicates the combination of contradictory logics of interaction which causes behavioural challenges that need to be understood to ensure intended outcomes of value creation and appropriation are achieved Gnyawali & Charleton, 2018).

2.3 Defining Co-Opetition

Although various studies allude to the importance of co-opetition as a fundamental strategy for increased performance and stronger competitive positions for firms (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1996; Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Bouncken et al., 2015; Czakon, Srivastava, et al., 2020), several definitions have been applied to the concept which creates ambiguity (Bengtsson et al., 2016; Gnyawali & Song, 2016; Gernsheimer et al., 2021). Specifically, most of these definitions have focused on describing the structure and functionality of co-opetition. From this perspective, this thesis draws from two influential studies of Bengtsson & Kock (2000) and Bengtsson & Kock (2014). According to an earlier definition, Bengtsson and Kock (2000) define co-opetition as:

"a dyadic interplay between two firms who cooperate and compete simultaneously."

Studies which have adopted this definition have tended to focus on the paradox generated by simultaneity in co-opetition and inherent tensions in such relationships (Raza-Ullah, Bengtson, & Kock, 2014). While this makes substantial contributions to understanding the functionality of co-opetition, and in depth understanding of the interactions which unfold during the paradoxical exchange (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016), it presents a restrictive view (Robert, Chiambaretto, Mira, & Le Roy, 2018) by limiting analysis to the inter and intra firm levels, thereby ignoring the contextual nature of co-opetitive relationships which could manifest on a network level, for instance.

From a theoretical perspective, analysis from the firm level may restrict deeper insights to the understanding of co-opetition. For instance, in Raza-Ullah et al's (2014) study, the role of positive and negative emotions is emphasized as key underlays of tension in co-opetition. While emotions allude to the cognitive experiencing of co-opetition, restricting analysis to the relational, firm level limits the potential of uncovering micro level cognitive experiencing of co-opetition. In furtherance to this, the authors, like similar studies (e.g., Gnyawali & Park, 2011), draw examples from large multinationals in high technology sectors whose motivation to co-opete is primarily based on economic gains.

Finally, this definition suggests intense rivalry between competitors, which does not a holistic description of all co-opetitive relationship, particularly since the phenomenon of co-opetition on a dyadic, or network level manifests differently despite sharing similarities (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016). Accordingly, Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah's (2016) description of *'Activity School of Thought'* encapsulates research adopting the above narrow definition of co-opetition as a one-to one, direct relationship between rivals.   The challenge with this definition of co-opetition is articulated in Bengtsson et al's (2010) study as a division of cooperation and competition between actors. Adopting a different approach, Bengtson & Kock (2014)'s more integrative approach provides a more holistic definition of co-opetition as

"...a paradoxical relationship between two or more actors simultaneously

involved in cooperative and competitive interactions, regardless of whether their

relationship is horizontal or vertical."

In the above definition, the multiplicity of actors in a co-opetitive relationship is accounted for (Bengtson & Raza-Ullah, 2016). This definition which draws from Brandenburger & Nalebuff's (1996) original illustration of network relationships as 'value nets,' acknowledges the interdependency among multiple co-opetitors with differing levels of rivalry who may be made up of competitors,

complementors, suppliers, and customers (Bengtsson et al., 2010; Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016). This definition encapsulates the role of environment factors influencing co-opetitive interactions and behaviours of actors and is broadly referred to the contextual approach in co-opetition (Bengtson et al., 2010; Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016; Pattinson et al, 2018).

Unlike the activity school of thought, this definition encompasses situations where cooperative and competitive interactions occur among actors who are not always direct competitors (Bengtson & Raza-Ullah, 2016). Brandenburger & Nalebuff (1996) provide a fitting illustration of contextual co-opetition through an example of a focal firm cooperating with some actors and competing with other actors within a value net. The complexity of interactions on this level therefore suggests more of a co-opetitive situation than a co-opetitive interaction due to difficulties in identifying clear boundaries within each specific situation (Bengtsson et al., 2010; Bengtson & Raza-Ullah, 2016).

The contextual approach or '*Actor school of thought'* is more aligned with the interests of this study. Specifically, this definition recognises that the process of multi-actor co-opetition differs from a direct one-to-one co-opetition relationship (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016). More importantly, the contextual approach to studying co-opetition acknowledges the role of the external environment as influencing co-opetitive actions and behaviours. When considering the high vulnerability of small firms to environmental factors (e.g., Gnyawali & Park, 2009; Czakon, 2009), then the contextual approach may provide a suitable lens to explore co-opetition in entrepreneurial relationships; an area which is beginning to attract research interest (Bengtsson & Johansson, 2014; Galkina et al., 2017; McGrath t al., 2019).

Taking this context definition of co-opetition to the field of entrepreneurship, an influential study by McGrath et al. (2019) draws attention to the relational (network) environment of co-opetition in the micro brewing industry in the USA and define co-opetition as *“entrepreneurial involvement in simultaneous cooperative and competitive interactions with business network actors within a*

relational environment." In line with Bengtsson & Kock's (2014) definition, this definition captures the uniqueness of contextual co-opetition in terms of the multiplicity of actors and relational environment of actors (e.g., network level), however it ignores the crucial role of the external environment within which micro (e.g., cognitive) and meso, (relational) level co-opetitive activities aggregate (Bengtsson et al., 2016).

To further buttress the importance of the external environment, Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, (2016), suggest that competing firms may be compelled or forced to engage in co-opetition due to pressures from technological, industry, and external stakeholders. In line with this, Ritala (2012) argues that competitors may cooperate to create more security in an unstable or highly regulated industry, or in response to technological uncertainty. Additionally, influential buyers may create interdependencies among competing firms which may result in co-opetition (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016).

In these arguments, words such as 'force,' 'compel' suggest that the decision to co-opete may not always be deliberate and intentional. This applies a heightened awareness of the nature of co-opetition which may be triggered by external environmental factors (Mariani, 2007; 2018; Kylanen & Rusko, 2012; Monticelli et al., 2019; 2021). The table below provides a summary of various definitions of co-opetition:

TABLE 2.2 DEFINITIONS OF CO-OPETITION

Year	Authors	Definition of Coopetition
1996	Brandenburger and Nalebuff	Creating a bigger pie to increase benefits for all players by cooperating (a focus on market growth) and dividing the pie among the players by competing (a focus on market share).
1997	Lado, Boyd, & Hanlon	Syncretic rent-seeking behavior to achieving dynamic balance between cooperative and competitive goals
1999	Bengtsson & Kock	A dyadic and paradoxical relationship between two firms cooperating on some activities and competing on other activities
2000	Bengtsson and Kock	A dyadic and one to one relationship between a pair of firms, such that firms cooperate in activities far from their customers, while simultaneously competing in activities close to the customers.
2001	Gnyawali & Madhavan	Simultaneous cooperation and competition
2002	Dagnino & Padula	Simultaneous cooperation and competition to manage partially convergent and divergent interests to create value
2006	Gnyawali, He and Madhavan	Coopetition is a collaborative relationship among multiple players of an industry through a bilateral or multilateral agreement
2007	Mariani	Coopetition as induced; influenced by environmental factors.
2007	Luo	Simultaneous cooperation and competition between global competitors
2010	Bengtsson et al	Co-opetition as a contextual situation
2011	Gnyawali and Park	Coopetition is a strategy that embodies simultaneous cooperation and competition between firms."
2011	Rusko	Coopetition as the interplay between competition and cooperation whereby companies collaborate with their rivals via the sharing of resources and capabilities.
2012	Ritala	Retaining some competitors in a firm's alliance portfolio for strategic purposes
2014	Raza-Ullah et al.	Coopetition is paradoxical relationship that involves the contradictory logics of cooperative and competitive

		interactions simultaneously and materializes (i) when existing competitors create a new cooperative venture for common goals, or (ii) when one of the collaborating partners introduces a new product into another partner's market.
2014	Bengtsson & Kock	coopetition is a paradoxical relationship between two or more actors simultaneously involved in cooperative and competitive interactions, regardless of whether their relationship is horizontal or vertical.
2015	Bouncken, Gast, Kraus & Bogers	A strategic and dynamic process where economic actors jointly create value through cooperation, and compete simultaneously to capture that value
2016	Lundgren-Henriksson et al.	Coopetition is the existence of simultaneous cooperation and competition between the same actors in a network
2016	Akpinar & Vincze	Coopetition is a stakeholder relationship involving multiple actors
2016	Volschenk, Ungerer & Smit	Coopetition refers to cooperation with competitors and other stakeholders
2017	Oni	Coopetition is a process of knowledge sharing that provides a key source of competitive advantage, even though the knowledge gained through cooperation may also be used for competition.
2018	Gnyawali & Charleton	Coopetition refers to simultaneous competition and cooperation among firms with value creation intent
2018	Chiambaretto, Le Roy, Mira & Robert	a paradoxical relationship between two or more actors simultaneously involved in horizontal co-opetitive interactions and vertical or horizontal cooperative interactions regarding activities that are close to the market
2019	McGrath, O'Toole, & Canning	Entrepreneurial Involvement in simultaneous cooperative and competitive interactions with business actors in a relational environment
2020	Czakon, Srivastava, et al., 2020	Coopetition refers to "*simultaneous collaboration and competition between firms with the intent to create value*

The identified components of the external environment however present a one-sided view. Specifically, they ignore factors in the institutional environment such as institutions which significantly influence entrepreneurial activities (Webb et al., 2019; Webb, 2021) and need to be explored to elicit an appropriate definition of co-opetition that acknowledges the institutional context in which co-opetition is being studied. This is especially useful considering that most studies on co-opetition research have been based on Western developed economies (Yadav et al., 2022), with little research which have considered the peculiarities of Sub-Saharan African economic contexts like Nigeria. Based on this gap, the importance of context in co-opetition research is discussed in the next section; from which a definition of co-opetition that is relevant to this thesis is elicited.

2.4 Co-Opetition and Entrepreneurship

Based on the importance of entrepreneurship to economic development, the field on entrepreneurship has been studied across several disciplines. In co-opetition research, there has been no clear connection between entrepreneurships. Several topics have been iinvestigated within the field of entrepreneurship and cut across a wide range of social science disciplines such a psychology, anthropology, economics, politics, geography, history, sociology, and strategy. In other words, the field of entrepreneurship can be described as a multi-disciplinary reach field (Curran & Blackburn, 2001).

This study aligns with the strategic entrepreneurship discussions in locating co-opetition as an entrepreneurial strategy. This is because the core argument of strategic entrepreneurship is that entrepreneurs require strategy to exploit discovered opportunities. Specifically, studies such as Hitt & Ireland (2001) emphasize the interconnections between entrepreneurship and strategic management and argue that advancement of the field would require considerations of development in both fields of study. As entrepreneurship concerns the exploration and exploitation of market opportunities (Venkataraman, 1997), the field of strategic management discusses some strategies or methods through which entrepreneurial firms create and capture market value (Venkataraman & Sarasvathy, 2000).

The defining objective of entrepreneurship is opportunity recognition (Teece, 1998; Browne & Eisenhardt, 2000; Shane & Venkataraman, 2003) to create wealth (Ireland, Kutako & Covin, 2003) within emerging, developing and developed nations (Zahra, Ireland, Gutierrez & Hitt, 2000). Similarly, the core of strategic management is to understand the reasons behind different wealth creation of firms in various economies (Mintzberg, Farjourn, 2002). Thus, while entrepreneurship is concerned with firm growth, effective growth occurs through the application of an effective strategy like co-opetition, which would enable small firms to exploit opportunities and threats within their environments (Bengtsson & Johansson, 2012; Gnyawali & park, 2009).

Although the fields of entrepreneurship and strategy have developed separately, some management studies are increasingly acknowledging the connections between them, drawn from the combination of advantage-seeking (strategic; exploitation) and opportunity-seeking (entrepreneurship; exploration) behaviors of entrepreneurs (Hitt, Ireland, Camp, & Sexton (2001). In one of such studies, Rensburg (2013) conducts a review of current developments and identified common topics which both fields explore, such as organizational renewal, competitive advantage, wealth creation and innovation.

These differing perspectives from which the intersection of strategy and entrepreneurship are argued, share a common understanding which hinges on the need for the implementation of strategic decisions for entrepreneurial firms due to the increasing competitive landscape for small and entrepreneurial businesses (Hitt & Ireland, 2000; McGrath and MacMillan, 2000; Hitt et al., 2001). This new understanding has led to the development of a new field of study referred to as '*strategic entrepreneurship'* (e.g., Venkataraman & Sarasvathy, 2005; Hitt et al., 2000; Ireland et al., 2003), and has been explored within both developed and developing economic contexts worldwide (e.g., Zahra, Ireland, & Hitt, 2000).

An ensuing debate in the intersection of both fields contain differing perspectives. On one hand, some studies argue for the dominance of strategic management over entrepreneurship (Baker & Pollock,

2007). This perspective has been greatly criticized by Meyer (2009) who highlights the importance of aiming for a contextual analysis of any strategic entrepreneurial phenomenon. Another perspective posited by Browne & Harms (2003) suggests that strategy is a sub-set of entrepreneurships, and not the other way around. In another view, Andreiuscenka (2003) suggests that strategic entrepreneurship is an advancement of strategic management. The *'courtship'* perspective of Venkataraman & Sarasvathy (2005) proves to be particularly useful in conceptualizing the intersection of strategy and entrepreneurship for the purpose of this thesis, because it describes both fields as complementary, rather than opposing.

Irrespective of the differing approaches, the common theme in all these discourses is that the adoption of strategies by entrepreneurial firms is necessary for entrepreneurial firm survival (Hitt et al., 2001). As co-opetition itself presents a strategy for organizational growth, the entrepreneurial context provides a useful arena in which to understand how entrepreneurs explore and exploit opportunities. To this end, there is growing interest in co-opetition as an entrepreneurial strategy, based on the perception that small firms need to engage strategically within relationships to manage the limitations of their small size and resource needs (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Semrau & Werner, 2014; Granata et al., 2016; Nasholm, Bengtsson and Johansson, 2018; McGrath, O'Toole & Canning, 2019).

Generally, co-opetition is viewed as a specific kind of inter-organizational collaborative strategy which small firms are increasingly engaging in, whereby two or more firms are involved in, and benefit from simultaneous cooperation and competition (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Bouncken, Gast, Kraus & Bogers, 2015). As small firms are particularly vulnerable to economic changes (Morris, Kocak & Ozer, 2007; Gnyawali & Park 2009), challenges by the liability of smallness, and lack adequate resources to innovate their products, services, and processes, or react fast enough to the changing economic landscape (Kraus Schmid, & Gast, 2017), competing small firms cooperate to increase their access to the resources of their partners (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Kraus et al., 2017). In addition, small entrepreneurial firms may be able to identify market opportunities but are less

successful in building economies of scale and competitive advantages, in contrast to large firms who are relatively more effective in developing competitive advantages (Ireland et al., 2003).

To provide clarity on co-opetition within the context of entrepreneurship, it is necessary to first examine the approaches taken to define the concept of entrepreneurship. Although several definitions have been alluded to the concept of entrepreneurship, this study views Venkataraman's (1997) definition of entrepreneurship as a starting point: '*discovery, evaluation, and exploitation of future goods and services.*' (Venkataraman, 1997; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000).

Accordingly, this definition suggests that the field of entrepreneurship is concerned with understanding sources of entrepreneurial opportunities, the processes involved in discovering and evaluating these opportunities, as well as the individuals who discover and exploit entrepreneurial opportunities (Shane & Venkataraman, The Promise of Entrepreneurship as a Field of Research, 2000). In other words, to understand co-opetition in entrepreneurship, it is necessary to understand the role of the individual and the context within which entrepreneurial co-opetition occurs. Studies like Audretsch (2012) have identified distinguishing features of entrepreneurship, using organizational criteria such as age (e.g., new, or old), size (e.g., small, or large), ownership structure (e.g., individual, business, family), as well as formal and/or informal status.

From an institutional perspective, the European Commission (2005), and the World Bank provide generic definitions, entrepreneurial SMEs are defined based on the local banking contexts. The European Commission's (EC) introduced a set of numerical parameters to distinguish small firms as enterprises with annual turnover levels not exceeding 50 million euros, limits of 249 staff headcounts, and a balance sheet value that does not exceed 43 million euros. Through these parameters, small businesses are classified as micro enterprises (10 or less), small enterprises (10-49), and medium-sized firms (50-249) and generally referred to as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Stokes and Wilson, 2010).

In contrast, SMEs in Nigeria are defined by the Central bank of Nigeria (CBN) as

"Enterprises with an asset base of five million naira (excluding land and buildings), and

employees between 11- 200".

According to this definition, SMES are categorized based on a median maximum turnover of sixty million naira for small enterprises (N38 million in first quartile, and N322 million in third quartile), and four hundred and eighty million naira for medium enterprises (N200million in first quartile and N2500 million in the third quartile). The parameters set in the third quartiles lean towards the definition proposed by the world bank (Berg et al., 2012). These categorizations have also been made more explicit by the National policy on Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) which recognises the activities of micro enterprises with an employee set of 1-10. The table below provides characteristics of SME definitions by Commercial banks in Nigeria:

TABLE 2.3 DEFINITION OF SMEs IN NIGERIA

Size	Median	1st Quartile	3rd Quartile
Micro Enterprise	10	8	29
Small Enterprise	60	38	322
Medium Enterprise	480	200	2,500

Source: Central bank of Nigeria (2020)

In another definition, the Small and medium Enterprises Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) ignores the stipulated account turnover volumes used by the commercial banks. Rather, they adopt similar criteria as the Central Bank of Nigeria however, employing tiered thresholds:

TABLE 2.4 SMEDAN DEFINITION OF SMEs IN NIGERIA

Size	Employment	Assets
Micro Enterprise	Less than 10	Less than 5
Small Enterprise	10-49	5 to less than 50
Medium Enterprise	50-199	50 to less than 50

Source: SMEADAN (2020)

Based on the above, it is pertinent to note that the threshold set by local institutions in Nigeria in defining SMEs are lower than those set by the European commission. To further delineate contextual differences in perceptions of entrepreneurship, it is important to provide a picture of the entrepreneurial scene in Nigeria. Several authors such as Effiom & Edet (2018), Omeihe et al (2019; 2021) and Ogunsade et al (2017) highlight the significance of entrepreneurship to the Nigerian economy. Specifically, SMEs are reported to account for seventy percent of employment opportunities (Effiom & Edet, 2018). Further, about eighty seven percent of enterprises in Nigeria fall under the categorization of SMEs and account for an estimated sixty one percent of the country's GDP (Effiom & Edet, 2018).

Yet, insights from authors such as Okpara (2011) highlight formal institutional voids in Nigeria such as absence of infrastructures, corruption, lack of access to finance), as necessitating a push into entrepreneurship as a form of survival strategy (Ogunsade & Obembe, 2016). (Omeihe, Simba, Rae, Gustafsson, & Khan, 2021) (Madichie, Gbadamosi, & Rwelamila, 2021). In the same vein, informal institutions are identified as characterizing entrepreneurship in Nigeria. For instance, Ogunsade & Obembe (2016), Madichie et al (2021) and Omeihe et al (2021) reveal that most entrepreneurial activities in Nigeria occur within the informal sector due to the formal institutional voids highlighted above.

Thus, the institutional environment is highlighted as a driver of entrepreneurship (Ogunsade & Obembe, 2016). This supports the assertion by Shane & Venkataraman (2000) that defining entrepreneurship requires an analysis of the connections between individual, opportunities, and the macro environment because entrepreneurs are driven by the surrounding institutional environment. As such, it is also necessary to understand the institutional context of entrepreneurship in Nigeria.

2.5. Institutions and Entrepreneurial Co-Opetition in a Developing Economy

Within the context of a developing economy like Nigeria, understanding the role of institutions is particularly important because entrepreneurship is recognised as a context-dependent process (Omeihe, Simba, Rae, Gustafsson, & Khan, 2021) whereby entrepreneurial behaviour and strategy are largely influenced by the institutional conditions of a society (Nuhu, Owens, & McQuillan, 2021). Important to note here, is the fact that the functioning of institutional environments varies across societies. For instance, developed economies are typically characterised by strong, reliable formal institutions which enable entrepreneurial firms to thrive (Omeihe, Simba, Rae, Gustafsson, & Khan, 2021).

In contrast, inefficient formal institutions such as bureaucratic government policies, inadequate capital, and weak property rights (Nuhu, Owens, & McQuillan, 2021) may provide an unsupportive environment for entrepreneurs. This is clearly ironical, because the centrality of entrepreneurship to economic growth in Nigeria has been recognised on the governmental level and illustrated through the introduction of policies to accelerate the growth and viability of the entrepreneurial sector in the economy (Effiom & Edet, 2018).

Examples of these abound, a few of which are the establishment of agencies such as the Bank of Industry (BoF) and Small and Micro Enterprise Development Agency (SMEADAN) to provide low interest loans and technical support to entrepreneurial small firms, directives given to commercial banks in Nigeria to invest ten percent of their profits in SMES through the Small and Medium Enterprise Industries Equity Investment Scheme (SMIEIS), and the Two Hundred and Twenty Billion Naira intervention fund launched by the Central bank of Nigeria in 2014 to support the activities of the entrepreneurial sector in Nigeria.

Despite these efforts, here is consistent record of decline of the entrepreneurial small firm sector in Nigeria (Effiom & Edet, 2018). Some of these allude to the hesitation of financial institutions to provide credit to entrepreneurial small firms due to perceptions of SMES as high risk. For instance,

Effiom & Edet (2018) highlight lack of collateral due to lean capital and assets base, poor documentation and accounting procedures, and higher vulnerability to unstable market dynamics which make it difficult to appraise entrepreneurial small firms. Additionally, corrupt practices, inconsistent monetary policies, charges of high interest rates, stringent requirements for business registrations and licenses and high taxation have been identified as a deterring factor for entrepreneurs which impede entrepreneurial growth (Effiom & Edet, 2018). In the same vein, authors like Nnanna (2001) identify additional challenges of the formal institutional environment which relate to low inability to access relevant technology due to high cost and low competence, and little to no formal education.

The attendant challenges and insignificance of formal institutions ultimately push entrepreneurs to rely on alternative informal institutions where the codes for socially acceptable behaviours are embedded within the society's values, beliefs, and norms (North, 1990; Webb et al., 2019). To buttress the relevance of informal institutions in Nigerian entrepreneurial environment, a recent study by Madichie, Gbadamosi, & Rwelamila (2021) reports that the informal economy accounts for around sixty-five percent of the national GDP. A recent forecast provided by Etim & Daramola (2020) projects that the informal economy in Nigeria would grow from 46.99 in 2020, to 47.93 by 2025, which is twice the projected growth of South Africa (estimated at 23.59 y 2025), and the global world (estimated at 22.35 by 2025). (Etim & Daramola, 2020).

Although the informal sector in Nigeria is still a disregarded segment of the economy (Madichie, Gbadamosi, & Rwelamila, 2021), it presents a significant sector to be understood within the context of entrepreneurship in a developing economic context (Ogunsade et al., 2017; Etim & Daramola, 2020; Omeihe et al., 2020; Madichie et al.; 2021). It is noteworthy that the informal sector does not refer to illicit business operations. Rather, it describes entrepreneurial or economic activities which are unregulated and uncovered by formal institutional security mechanisms (Etim & Daramola, 2020).

(Webb, Bruton, Tihanyi, & Ireland, 2013). To further delineate both sectors, Etim & Daramola (2020) provide the following distinguishing factors between the formal and informal sectors in Nigeria:

TABLE 2.5 DISTINGUISHING FORMAL AND INFORMAL SECTORS IN NIGERIA

Formal Sector (Formal institutions)	Informal Sector (Informal Institutions)
Labour relations based on contractual agreements	Labour relations based on personal and social relationships
Difficult entry requirements	Minimal/easy entry requirements
Ownership through corporation	Ownership through family/kinship
Large scale enterprise	Small scale enterprise
Dependent on imported/overseas resources	Dependent on local/indigenous resources
Capital intensive operation	Labour intensive operation
Formally acquired skills	Informal skills acquisition

Source: Adapted from Etim and Daramola (2020).

Taking a different view, studies like Webb et al (2019) suggest that reliance on informal institutional structures may simultaneously constrain productive entrepreneurship. These voids which are defined by Webb et al (2019) as *"the inability of norms, values, and beliefs, as well as their localized representations to facilitate stable, efficient, and effective transactions"* suggests unjust manipulation of the use of relational mechanisms, (e.g., social, co-opetitive networks) to exclude specific groups or individuals, or when transactions through relational contracts are diminished by limited trusts (e.g., Omeihe et al., 2020; 2021).

In this vein, studies such as Ajekwe (2017) and Effio and Ubi (2015) identify informal institutional voids on entrepreneurial activities in Nigeria as culture, religion, ethnicity, communal spirit, trust, respect for seniority and authority, belief in destiny, and the paradox of 'plenty' which provide the social capital stock that governs entrepreneurial behavior and strategy.

The significance of the institutional context is not lost on co-opetition research. Notable among these are studies by Mariani (2007) who identify formal institutional stakeholders as inducing co-opetition among a consortium of opera Houses in Italy, Kylanen & Rusko's (2012) study which described the unintentional nature of co-opetition in the Finland service industry due to inducing formal

institutional constraints, Mariani & Kylanen's (2013) study on coopetition in the tourism sector induced by incentives provided by the institutional context, Yami's (2016) study on the telecommunications sector in Europe which reports that co-opetition can be an effective response to environmental threats and opportunities, Monticelli et al.,'s (2017) and Monticelli et al.'s (2021) study on internationalization of firms within the Brazilian wine industry where formal institutions were identified as significant drivers of co-opetition by providing firms with access to new resources and capabilities, and facilitating increased competitiveness of firms within their domestic markets.

More recently, however, some studies, albeit very few, have begun to point to the significance of informal institutions in co-opetition studies. Notable among these is the study by Darbi & Knott (2022) who adopt a socio-cultural perspective to explain macroenvironmental antecedents and drivers of co-opetition (e.g., institutions) in a cluster of small informal enterprises in Ghana. In this study, co-opetition is conceptualised as a socially embedded strategy which is influenced by multiple factors (e.g., Dahl et al., 2016) that make it neither a deliberate nor emergent strategy, but a taken-for-granted culturally legitimate assumption where actors possess varied degrees of control over the strategy (Dahl et al., 2016). Yet, this study presents only a limited perspective of institutions.

Overall, there is an inherent bias on the role of institutions in co-opetition as most have focused on examining formal structures where adherence to government and private organisational agents are argued to provide legitimacy to firms, grant access to needed resources and offer opportunities for growth (Monticelli, Garrido, Viera, Chim-Miki, & Carneiro, 2021). In contrast, research which highlights the informal aspect of institutions is scant. Considering the institutional environment in Nigeria which is characterised by high participation in informal economy and formal/informal institutional voids, a one-sided view of institutions would not suffice to present a holistic understanding of the institutional context of entrepreneurial co-opetition.

2.6 Entrepreneurial Co-Opetition Network

Despite the importance of the network context in co-opetition, recent review by Gernsheimer (2021) points out that the inter-firm level accounts for 47% which is almost half of the entire body of work on co-opetition. In contrast, network co-opetition accounts for only 25% of entire research on co-opetition, even though there is growing acknowledgement of the importance of co-opetition on a network level. Network theory has gained importance within the fields of strategy and entrepreneurship (Slotte-Kock & Coviello, 2010). Networks simply refer to a set of actors *(nodes)* connected through a specific *tie* or friendship (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011). These ties yield specific structures, also determined by the positions *(centrality)* occupied by nodes within the network structure.

Although there is some confusion around what the network perspective entails, the relevance of the network theory for co-opetitive strategy and entrepreneurship arises from the understanding that economic activities are influenced by the context in which they are embedded (Granovetter, 1985; Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986; Hoang & Antoncic, 2003). One study which has attempted to capture the multiplicity of actors in a co-opetitive relationship is Brandenburger & Nalebuff's (1996) value net typology, where they describe co-opetition as a game among multiple actors (customers, suppliers, competitors and complementors) who cooperate to create value and compete to appropriate value in a value net.

A useful framework for conceptualising co-opetition networks is Sanou, Le Roy, and Gnyawali's (2016) study which draws on the concept of embeddedness (Granovetter, 1985) to argue for the role of the socio-economic environment in shaping firm behaviour. The authors provide a definition of co-opetition networks as: *"Several dyadic and multilateral relationships in an industry between firms who compete for market, resources, and customers."*

This definition which draws heavily on Gnyawali & Madhavan's (2001) study, provides a partial view of co-opetition networks because it infers only meso-level constructs such as resource needs, and

network centrality while ignoring the multi-dimensional, contextual nature of co-opetition. Considerably, prior conceptualisations of network co-opetition have been drawn from the strategic alliance perspective where networks are viewed as a collection of formalized cooperative relationships between firms who simultaneously provide resources and constrain firm behaviour (Gnyawali & Madhavan, 2001; Sanou et al., 2016).

A critical feature of co-opetition networks is the fact that unlike dyadic relationships, not all firms at network level may be in a co-opetitive relationship (Sanou, Le Roy, & Gnyawali, 2016). From this perspective, the contextual definition of co-opetition as a *'co-opetitive situation'* may be more suitable to capture network level manifestations of co-opetition. To delineate cooperation networks from co-opetition networks, Sanou et al (2016) provide a very useful set of indicators: nature and purpose, dynamics, and outcome of relationship:

TABLE 2.6 DISTINGUISHING CO-OPETITIVE NETWORKS FROM COOPERATIVE NETWORKS

Network Relationship	Nature	Purpose	Dynamics	Outcome
Cooperation Network	Cooperation as dominant logic of interaction (rational intuitive)	Mutual benefits	High levels of trust Low levels of tensions, Conflict avoidance	Win-win Long term benefits Risk of stagnation
Co-Opetition Network	Combination of cooperation and competition (irrational, counterintuitive)	Mutual and individual benefits	High levels of trust and distrust manifesting simultaneously High levels of tensions, Conflict management	Win-win, win-lose, or lose-lose. Short term benefits Development of absorptive capabilities

Source: adapted from Sanou et al (2016) and Gnyawali & Madhavan (2001)

In relation to entrepreneurship, cooperative network relationships have often been viewed as advantageous to entrepreneurs (Martinez & Aldrich, 2011). However, several points allude to the suitability of co-opetition networks to entrepreneurship. First, co-opetition indicates high levels of uncertainty and risk taking due to its paradoxical nature. In this vein, studies like Galkina et al (2017)

present co-opetition as an entrepreneurial process which is characterised by the risk-taking attitude of entrepreneurs in exploring and exploiting opportunities.

Thus, while entrepreneurs may value social cohesion for resource access, their goal of entrepreneurial independence often necessitates the development of competitive interests (McGrath et al., 2019) which may not be easily achievable in a cooperative network. As an addendum to this, the cohesive nature of cooperation networks may result in complacency and stagnation due to limited access to diverse views (Sanou et al., 2016). Rather, the diverseness of network actors and contrasting interests may enable entrepreneurs to develop absorptive capabilities by taking advantage of resources made available through an extensive social network of diverse actors (Martinez & Aldrich, 2011). The divergent motivations and goals of actors in a co-opetition network corresponds to the diversity theme in network literature which highlights the importance of strong and weak ties- in network relationships (Granovetter, 1985).

This also links back to the fact that not all members in a co-opetition network are engaged in competition (Sanou, Le Roy, & Gnyawali, 2016). As such, this presents another delineating factor between multi-actor and dyadic co-opetition where intense one-to-one rivalry is a key indicator of co-opetitive interactions. In this vein, co-opetition has generally been categorized as a dyadic (inter-firm) relationship between two competitors, or a network (multiparty) relationship among three or more cooperators.

Essentially, the dynamism and complexity of co-opetition on both levels differ. Actors within a business network are connected through ties that enable direct relationships which influence their perceptions of each other (Bengtsson & Kock, 2014). From a business network perspective, Hankansson & Snehota (2002) suggest that these ties are also developed when network actors cooperate to create shared assets (e.g., joint distribution system, development of unique resources)

through industry associations (Bengtsson & Kock, 2014), and compete simultaneously to market unique firm-specific resources (Ritala & Saino, 2014).

Essentially, cooperating competitors integrate their resources to co-create value (Bouncken et al., 2015) which is often greater than could be achieve within non-competitive inter-firm relationship (Granata et al., 2017). Specifically for SMEs, network co-opetition enables small firms to improve their overall performance and competitiveness by strategically combining activities (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Gnyawali et al., 2009; Granata et al., 2018).

On a dyadic level, firms are likely to cooperate within activities far from the customer and compete in activities close to the customer (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000). However, on a network level, more studies are beginning to observe the dynamic nature of co-opetition, whereby firms may cooperate in activities close to the customers and compete in activities far from the customer (e.g., Wilhelm, 2018). The distinctions between co-opetition within dyadic relationships and network relationships needs to be clearly specified, as according to Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah (2016), co-opetition manifests differently across these two levels.

Overall, while cooperative relationships are naturally inclined towards mutual value creation, co-opetitive networks provide actors with higher opportunities to increase the creation and appropriation of value. The creation and appropriation of value on a network level adopts a more complex and interconnected pattern (Ritala & Tidstrom, 2014). In addition, the complexity surrounding value creation and appropriation on a network level has the potential to further develop understanding of the distinctive and dynamic nature of co-opetition as a strategic relationship that offers increased potential for firms to reap benefits of strategic relationships, such as the possibility of adopting leaner structures (Gnyawali & Park, 2009), the acquisition of similar market positions (Chen, 1996), greater access to relevant industry-specific knowledge and information, and institutionalization of markets

through agreements on common standards, rules and principles which foster the growth and functionality of markets (Ritala & Tidstrom, 2014).

Network co-opetition enables firms to acquire several types of synergies to create value (Moller & Rajala, 2007; Ritala & Tidstrom, 2014) which results in higher value created for the end customer (Ritala & Tidstrom, 2014). The *'co-opetition network'* concept may therefore provide a much more suitable lens to understand meso-level enactment of co-opetition within entrepreneurial relationships.

An interesting consideration of network co-opetition in the literature relates to the role of contextual mechanisms in shaping co-opetitive interactions on a network level (Randolph, Hu, & Silvernail, 2020). This is in alignment with the growing concern across all co-opetition research on the influence of macro-level factors on co-opetition (Klimas, Czakon, & Frederich, 2022).

This concern relates to the presence of a diverse range of external environmental factors which may drive co-opetition processes and outcomes (Bengtsson et al., 2016; Dorn et al., 2016). Examples of these can be drawn from Sanou et al's (2016) study which identifies actor centrality in co-opetition network as a prerequisite for firm success. The source of such centrality; manifesting as possessing higher status and power (Gnyawali & Madhavan, 2001) is however nor clearly articulated in this study.

Some studies address the relational structure of network co-opetition, for instance Grasulund & Hammershoy (2022) elaborate on the relational structure of social networks to identify divergent patterns of co-opetition interactions as passive, reactive, or proactive among three Tourist definitions in co-located spaces.

Highlighting normative mechanisms such as trust between co-opetitive network partners, studies like Czakon, Klimas & Mariani (2020), Mariani (2016) hint on the contextually grounded nature of co-opetition network, while Czakon & Czernek (2016) identify the role of partner reputation in stimulating network co-opetition. Cognitive aspects of co-opetition have also been addressed such as

Mathias, Huyghe, Frid & Golloway's (2018) study on co-opetition network of Belgian craft Brewers found that the construction of collective identities and shared beliefs drives co-opetition overtime (Mathias, Huyghe, Frid, & Galloway, 2018).

Taking a broader approach, Randolph, Hu, & Silvernails's (2020) study identifies a collection of network social capitals (e.g., trust, legitimacy, norms, resilience) as fundamental to sensemaking processes and determinants of co-opetition outcomes within SME network relationships. In this study, the authors imply cognitive processing of co-opetition by individual network actors whose perceptions are influenced by a wider range of institutionalised factors (shared norms, beliefs, values).

In all these studies, a combination of micro, meso, macro, and even meta-level drivers (Grauslund & Hammershøy, 2021) of co-opetition are discussed. As such, they all provide very insightful knowledge on the nature of network co-opetition. Nonetheless, these levels of analysis have been presented in a fragmented manner which is one of the core criticisms of co-opetition research (Gernsheimer, Kanbach, & Gast, 2021).

Secondly, and more specific to co-opetition networks, this thesis argues that the network perspective is not elaborate enough to clearly consider the broad range of, and complexity of various socio-economic environments due to its limitations in accounting for the origins or sources of these institutional mechanisms identified. Paying attention to the developing economic context within which entrepreneurial co-opetition is being explored in this thesis, section 2. 4 notes the prevalence of formal and informal institutional factors which combinedly shape entrepreneurial behaviour and provide the social capital or stock for enacting co-opetition on a network level.

In tandem to this, the post-colonial nature of the Nigerian society suggests that other institutional factors (e.g., culture, history) may jointly shape entrepreneurial behaviour in relation to co-opetition. Consequently, there is a need for further examination of macro environmental factors which go beyond the network level to explore the role and depth of contextual mechanisms in entrepreneurial

co-opetition. The table below provides a summary of research discussed in this chapter which mostly

address entrepreneurial co-opetition networks from micro, meso, and/or macro levels of analysis:

TABLE 2.7 SAMPLE OF STUDIES ADDRESSING MICRO (INDIVIDUAL) AND MACRO (NETWORK, INSTITUTIONAL) LEVELS OF CO-OPETITION

Year	Author (s)	Theoretical Framework	Levels of Analysis	Methodology and Context	Central Arguments
2009	Gnyawali & Park Dahl et al	Resource-based-view, game theory, network theory.	Micro (individual), meso (firm level)	Conceptual. SMEs in high technology sector	Development of SME managerial mindset to perceive opportunities and manage dynamics of coopetition. Past experience influences opinions of coopetition
2014	Raza-Ullah, Bengtsson Bengtsson, Raza-Ullah, & Vanyushyn Fernandez et al; Le Roy & Fernandez Nasholm & Bengtsson	Paradox, emotional ambivalence	Micro(individual) and meso (firm) levels	Conceptual (case examples from large firm e.g., apple, google)	Actor's cognitive evaluation of co-opetition elicits both positive and negative emotions. Mediating role of managerial ambidextrous orientation in experience of tension in co-opetition relationships. Ability of individuals to internalize co-opetition tensions. Individuals hold multiple and contrasting perceptions of coopetition
2016	Czakon & Czernek; Czernek & Czakon Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock Tidstrom & Rajala Sanou, Le Roy, & Gnyawali	Trust, network Sensemaking, strategy as practice. Strategy as practice Competitive dynamics, network theory	Micro (individual), meso (firm), macro (network, environmental characteristics) Micro (individual). Micro(individual), meso (firm), macro (network, environmental characteristics). Macro (network) level	Case study of 5 tourism networks in Poland Qualitative case study of co-opetition network in Finnish media industry (SMEs). Single qualitative study of MNE and supplier (dyad). Quantitative – global mobile phone industry (sample of 193 mobile operators from 70 countries	Co-opetition formation facilitated by individual level drivers (e.g., emotional bonds, trust, and personal commitment Individual managers construct different co-opetitive frames by drawing on varying past/present experiences, and future expectations. Coopetition develops overtime due to interrelated strategic practices and praxis on multiple levels. Competitive behaviour of firms shaped by network position, which enhances firms' ability to compete aggressively and achieve higher benefits of co-opetition
2018	Pattinson, Nicholson, Lindgren, Mathias, Huyghe, Frid, Galloway	Sensemaking Collective Identity	Micro (individual), meso (firm), macro (network) levels. Macro (network, industry)	SME network in high-tech sectors in UK. Qualitative – inductive study of Craft beer industry in Belgium	Processual model to understand how co-opetition mindset effects the emergence of co-opetition at individual, firm, and network levels. Social and non-economic motivations of network co-opetition (e.g., reciprocity), is driven by collective identity, shared norms and beliefs
2020	Bengtsson, Raza-Ullah, & Srivastava.	Social psychological (TMT diversity), cognitive.	Micro (individual).	Quantitative. Sample of 315 Swedish firms	Micro foundations of co-opetition capability emerge from positive (e.g., deep level) and negative (surface level) contributions of TMT diversity.

	Raza-Ullah, Bengtsson, & Gnyawali.	Emotional ambivalence.	Micro (Individual).	Conceptual -affective events theory and similarity-intensity model	Multiple, conflicting emotions develop in individuals and influence collective strategic behaviour and outcome.
	Randolph, Hu, Silvernail	Social capital	Micro (individual), macro (network)	Survey of 1250 participants from 15 non-profit SMES in network co-opetition at a university in the US	Technology-enabled knowledge sharing promotes knowledge sharing among embedded network actors, and can be captured by cognitive, relational, and structural social capital and promotes strategic alignment among embedded network actors.
2021	Grasulund & Hammershøy	Social network	Macro (network)	Mixed – 3 co-located Tourist destinations	Network coopetition manifests on micro (individual), meso(firm), macro (network), and meta (political/institutional) levels. Patterns of co-opetitive interactions as passive, reactive, and proactive.
2022	Darbi & Knott	Strategy as practice, social practice.	Micro (individual), macro (institutions)	Case study of a business cluster of small informal printing in Ghana	The actions of individual agents and institutional factors determine varying forms of small business co-opetition strategy.

Source: Researcher's compilation

2. 7 Research Gaps: Multi-Level Foundation of Entrepreneurial Network Co-Opetition Sensemaking

In the introductory chapter, this thesis refers to the lack of in-depth research in co-opetition that considers the interlink between multiple levels of co-opetition. Studies which have discussed macro factors of co-opetition tend to review these as isolated constructs. Additionally, studies which discuss micro foundations of co-opetition approach this as a single independent construct. Yet, as has been found by studies such as Klimas et al (2022) suggests, macro factors are multifaceted and may aggregate onto overarching categories such as micro level categories. Thus, rather than the linear division between micro (internal, endogenous) and macro (external, exogenous) categories (Klimas, Czakon, & Frederich, 2022), there is a need to adopt a theoretical lens that could potentially combine these diverse levels of analysis in order to provide a coherent understanding of multiple level factors which may influence the ways that entrepreneurs experience and engage in co-opetition. The sub-sections below outline both micro and macro levels of analysis and makes a case for the adoption of an integrated theoretical approach which is further discussed in proceeding theoretical framework chapter.

2.7.1 Micro-level Analysis

Several studies are beginning to recognise the importance of analysing the individual level, particularly regarding the cognition of co-opetition. As an example, Bengtsson et al (2021) point to the importance of understanding the micro foundations of co-opetition for management purposes. In this study, the authors identify two attributes of management team diversity as surface level (e.g., age, gender, nationality) and deep (e.g., knowledge and experience) levels of team diversity; suggesting deep level diversity as a more significant indicator of co-opetition capability.

In other words, the authors recommend diversity within TMT to be based on prior knowledge and experience of co-opetition for firms to effectively manage the complexities of co-opetition (Bengtsson,

Raza-Ullah, & Srivastava, 2021). Like most studies, however, the firm level adopted in this study can be assumed to be a large firm, due to the terminologies and arguments presented by the authors, such as management team, co-opetition capability, team diversity, etc. While these provide very useful knowledge in the understanding and management of paradoxical co-opetition, it however presumes a generic 'one-size-fits-all' solution which may not apply within the context of an entrepreneurial firm. This is because enterprises and specifically, SMEs are mostly characterised by single ownership where the owner is also the manager.

In this vein, decision making often rests within the discretion of the owner/manager. Further, SMES are characterised by smallness and newness and as such, may not have the prerequisite knowledge and/or experience of co-opetition. Consequently, and as argued in the beginning of this chapter, the firm level context in co-opetition studies needs clear delineation. In addition, this thesis argues that the context of entrepreneurship provides a useful arena for exploring micro cognitive processes of co-opetition, which is argued to be an essential starting point of capitalizing on the benefits and managing attendant risks.

The exploration of the entrepreneurial context enables an understanding of individual-level micro cognitive factors such as the construction of a co-opetition mindset. Entrepreneurial firms have been argued to be more likely to engage in co-opetition and as a result, develop co-opetition mindsets (Mathias et al., 2018; Pattinson et al., 2018). Mindsets have been identified as essential parts of a firm's culture, which provides an insight to what actors believe are essential drivers of their performance (Crick, 2021). A Co-opetition mindset describes the assumptions, values, and beliefs which firms have about cooperating with competitors (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1996; Gnyawali & Park, 2011; Crick, 2021).

Within the context of entrepreneurship, co-opetition mindsets refer to the relational choices or motivations made by entrepreneurs within co-opetitive interactions (McGrath et al., 2019). Several

theories have been adopted to capture this interdependent mindset, with a goal to explain the processes through which co-opetitive actors balance the logics of cooperation and competition. Majority of these studies have adopted firm-level theories in explaining co-opetition mindsets. From a transaction cost perspective, co-opetition is argued to be driven by self-interest, individualistic motivations and relative absorptive capabilities of competitors which create higher risks of opportunism (Park & Russo, 1996; Park & Ungson, 2001; Padula & Dagnino, 2007), for instance, the need for social belonging or professional identity (Mathias, Huyghe, & Frid, 2018); and the need to develop social ties (Bengtsson & Kock, 2014; Nasholm & Bengtson, 2014). The presence of conflicting interests may incur coordination costs as firms assume increased protection of their transactions (Quintana-Garcia & Benavides-Velasco, 2004). As such, co-opetition through a transaction cost theory may be viewed as a less viable form of organizing between firms (Charleton, Gnyawali, & Galavan, 2018).

Another perspective adopts the resource mindset to suggest that competing firms cooperate to access otherwise inaccessible resources of their rivals or other firms (Gnyawali & Park, 2009) that enhances their competitive advantage. For example, Luo (2004) draws on the resource dependence theory to develop a conceptual framework of the co-existence of cooperation and competition (co-opetition) between multi-nationals and their host governments. In another study, Gnyawali & Park (2009) also refer to the resource-based view to argue that small firms are driven by firm-level factors such as the need to reduce the time and cost associated with internal development, and as such, is a beneficial relationship for small firms' pursuit of technological innovations.

Like the transaction cost theory, research following the resource perspective also highlights the presence of high absorptive capacity (e.g., Cohen & Levinthal, 1990), which may be beneficial for firms in terms of their ability to identify and apply newly accessed resources of co-partners (Gnyawali & Park, 2009) however, it this may create room for misappropriation of resources (Charleton et al., 2018).

Another popular theory applied to understand the co-opetitive mindset, is the game theoretical perspective whose premise is based on the development of a new 'win-win' mindset whereby firms jointly create and obtain larger slices of a pie (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1996). In other words, the goal of co-opetition is to move from a 'zero-sum' competitive game to a 'positive' or 'non-zero' sum game where the sum of the game is increased through collective action (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1996). Studies which follow this tradition address issues such as the creation and appropriation of value, for instance, Ritala & Hurmelinna-Laukkanen (2009) who suggest that co-opetition can be a rational choice for high-tech firms to improve or create new products and services in collaboration with competitors to potentially increase market size or create new ones (Ritala & Hurmelinna-Laukkanena, 2009). All these studies adopt firm-level theories to explain the co-opetitive mindset to be based on internal firm drivers such as firm reputation (Gnyawali & Park, 2011), bargaining power and perceived vulnerability due to limited resources (Gnyawali & Park, 2009).

In extending knowledge on the construction of an entrepreneurial co-opetition mindset, this thesis follows the recommendation of Bengtsson, Kock, Lundgren-Henrikson, & Nasholm (2016) who call for the application of micro-level-oriented approaches. Eisenhardt et al (2010) define micro-level approaches as *"underlying individual-level and group-level actions that shape strategy, organization, and more broadly dynamic capabilities, and lead to the emergence of superior organization-level performance."* From this definition, micro-level theories explore the individual level cognition or mindset of co-opetition and has the potential to increase insights on how individuals make sense of co-opetition and leverage cooperative and competitive interactions individually and collectively. Some studies have adopted micro-level approaches such as the sensemaking theory to understand the reasons behind divergent co-opetitive frames of managers (e.g., Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016).

Through the application of a micro-level theory, the authors found that managers made sense of an emerging co-opetitive relationship within the Finnish media industry in different ways. Here, they refer

to co-opetition as an emergent strategy whereby managers draw on past, present, and future to modify established competitive frames and industry practices in ways that accommodate the emerging co-opetitive frame. In another study, Dahl (2014) adopts a micro-level approach to understand the norms and rules for shared co-opetitive interactions which change overtime.

Investigating the entrepreneurial mindset is incredibly important because it provides an understanding of the patterns of events, activities, and choices which entrepreneurs make within co-opetitive interactions, as well as the mechanisms driving these processes. Yet these have mostly been discussed from an organizational level, even though novel studies are beginning to highlight the importance of taking other contextual factors into consideration. This individual level approach is even more relevant to understand within the context of entrepreneurship, considering that the entrepreneur's goal is often to achieve entrepreneurial independence (McGrath et al., 2019).

In all of these, the importance of cognition as a micro foundation of co-opetition is emphasized. According to Porac & Thomas, (2002), cognition is the link between the individual's perception of the business environment, perception of their own business, perception of its position within the business environment and perception of the strategic decisions adopted. This cognitive model is usually upheld by both positive and negative emotions which determine how they behave in co-opetitive interactions (Bengtsson et al., 2016). Negative emotions usually stem from fear and uncertainty of co-opetitive outcomes for the individual (Raza-Ullah et al., 2014). Understanding processes such as the co-opetition mindset of entrepreneurs therefore offers useful insights on the micro-level processes of co-opetitive interactions in business relationships. It also enables co-opetitive actors to better comprehend the relationship and develop actions to proactively capitalise on the benefits of such relationships (Bengtsson et al., 2016.

2.7.2 Macro Level Analysis

Over the years, there has been increasing calls for the consideration of context in International Business research (Reuber & Fischer, 2022), and nonetheless, co-opetition research (Bengtsson et al., 2010;

Bouncken et al.,2015; Dorn et al., 2016; Pattinson et al., 2018; Hidalgo et al., 2022; Darbi & Knott, 2022). In these cases, the emphasis has been on the need for theoretical explanations of co-opetition which are embedded within the context of a study. Essentially, the embeddedness of theoretical discussions within contexts is necessary to show the impact of context of different theoretical explanations (Reuber & Fischer, 2022). The notion of context can be problematic due to the multidimensional nature of contexts.

For instance, Askegaard & Linett (2011) identify a myriad of empirical contextual characteristics such as nationality, history, temporality, geography, materiality, and culture. In their arguments, they emphasize the need for researchers to carefully select contextual characteristics and conditions that are relevant to the theoretical conversations. In this vein, a review of literature on co-opetition reveals limitations in contextual considerations (Bouncken et al., 2015; Gernsheimer et al., 2021). For instance, there seems to be a bias towards high technology and knowledge intensive industry sectors (e.g., Gnyawali & Park, 2009, 2011; Bouncken & Kraus, 2013).

The characteristics of such large, profit-oriented industries include high capital needs, R & D expenditures (e.g., Gnyawali & Park, 2009; 2011), and a high level of uncertainty which may motivate firms to develop co-opetitive relationships for cost and risk-sharing opportunities (Gnyawali & Park, 2011; Bouncken & Kraus, 2013; Bouncken et al., 2015). Admittedly, there is a growing consideration of contextual issues which go well beyond industry contexts to consider entrepreneurial contexts (Bouncken et al., 2015; Galkina et al., 2017) and diverse institutional contexts (e.g. Kylanen & Rusko, 2012; Mariani, 2007; 2018; Monticelli et al., 2019; 2022; Darbi & Knott, 2022). These emerging contexts are recognised as very promising fields of study which may enable researchers to account for institutional explanations of the varied patterns of co-opetition strategies in existence (Czakon, Mucha-Kus, Rogalski, 2014).

FIGURE 2.1 *GRAPHICAL ILLUSTRATION OF CORE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND GAPS IN CO-OPETITION RESEARCH*

Trust
Mutual benefits
Firm Embeddedness
Multiple/contrasting views
on shared goals
Opportunism

Distrust
Divergent interests
Rigidity/complacency of
competitors
Absorptive capacity

Cooperation

Network theory

Resource-based
theories

Competition

Game theory

Transaction Cost

. Maximization of
mutual/individual interests
. Joint value
creation/appropriation
. Varied balance an intensity
(weakness/strength)
between cooperation and
competition
Tensions & Conflicts

**Co-Opetition as a
Meso (firm)level Construct**
(game, paradox, resource, network)

**Micro
(individual) level**

Emotional Ambivalence

Sensemaking

**Macro
(environmental)
level**

Network theory

Institutional theory

Stakholder Theory

Co-opetition is
cognitively
experienced on ar
individual level.

Network- trust,
norms, legitimacy,
reciprocity,
collective identity)

Formal (regulatory),
informal (normative)
institutions, industrial
characteristics, external
stakeholders induce co-
opetition.

Research Gaps

- Micro and Macro level factors have often been presented as isolated constructs in co-opetition research (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016; Klimas et al., 2022).
- Network perspective does not holistically address interrelationship between formal regulatory) and informal (normative, cultural-cognitive) institutional factors.
- Combination of micro and macro level factors could be better understood within non-large firm sectors such as entrepreneurship which require individual level cognition and action (Galkina et al., 2017; McGrath & O'Toole, 2019; Gernsheimer et al., 2021).
- Nascent (institutional, industry) contexts could provide new insights into the contextual nature of co-opetition (Bouncken et al., 2015; Dorn et al., 2016; Dahl et al., 2016; Darbi & Knott, 2021).

2.8 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, co-opetition has been discussed as an entrepreneurial activity. Specifically, entrepreneurs are argued to be more inclined to constructing co-opetition mindsets (Mathias et al., 2018; Pattinson et al., 2018) and engage more often in co-opetition (Klimas, 2016; Galkina, et al., 2017) within network relationships (Gnyawali & Madhavan, 2001; Sanou et al., 2016; Randolph, Hu, Silvernail, 2020; Grasulund & Hammershoy, 2021).

Network co-opetitive relationships differ from dyadic co-opetitive relationships due to the presence of multiple partners. As such, co-opetition maybe be defined through a contextual approach that accounts for the dynamism of multiple actors and levels of analysis (Mathias et al., 2018; Bengtsson et al., 2010; Pattinson et al., 2018).

This chapter also makes a case for a conceptual framework that could potentially address the identified gaps by examining the connections between micro and macro levels of co-opetition. In other words, this thesis challenges the assumption that co-opetition levels of analysis are independent of each other (Bouncken et al., 2015; Dorn et al., 2016; Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016). Rather, co-opetition actors construct mindsets or frames of references (e.g., Klimas et al., 2022) by drawing on a combination of relevant micro and macro factors which are institutionally elicited. Based on this understanding, there is a need to offer empirical examination of the relative importance of both levels of analysis to understand the sensemaking of co-opetition within the entrepreneurial sector.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework

The 'Contextualized Sensemaking' Approach

3.1 Introduction

In chapter 2, this thesis establishes the need for a multi-level, contextual research that acknowledges the multidimensional nature of co-opetition within entrepreneurial networks. Chapter 2 has argued that co-opetition research could benefit greatly from an exploration of micro foundations of co-opetition from an individual level, to understand processes of interpretation and meaning production within entrepreneurial network relationships. Consequently, and in acknowledgement of the importance of co-opetition macro foundations, Chapter 2 has also argued for simultaneous exploration of macro level institutional factors such as institutions which may influence the sensemaking of co-opetition.

Understanding the micro and macro foundations of co-opetition on an individual level is important to gain in-depth knowledge on how entrepreneurs make sense of co-opetition. Most studies on entrepreneurial co-opetition report that individuals undergo a process of sensemaking to create a co-opetition mindset; that is, creating a shared sense of what co-opetition means by drawing from plausible modes of responses within their social context. This also highlights the importance of understanding the institutional context and how it shapes sensemaking of entrepreneurial co-opetition.

What this means for my thesis, is that, to understand how fashion-based entrepreneurs make sense of co-opetition, I would need to dig deep into their experiences (past, present) and future expectations (Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016; Pattinson et al., 2018), which are shaped by a range of institutional, and socio-historical factors which shape the construction of mental models or frames to create a shared understanding of co-opetition at any level in which it manifests. Indeed, as Weick (1995) noted, '***to feel alive and have a sense of meaningfulness,***' individuals engage in an ongoing series of sensemaking and sense giving. Patriotta and Brown (2011) support this notion by stating that sensemaking occurs on a *'daily or even moment-to-moment basis and is relevant to very mundane interaction and action.'*

Thus, Sensemaking is not only associated with times of crisis, shock or puzzlement based on Weick's (1995; 2005) initial conceptualization of the process, but as Weber & Glynn (2006) have reminded us, sensemaking is shaped by the larger social and historical contexts as an ongoing process. With this understanding, Weick (1995) emphasizes the individual and social or collective processes of sensemaking, Maitlis & Christianson, (2014) emphasize the discursive processes of sensemaking, Corley & Gioia (2011) suggest that sensemaking is not simply a retrospective process, but can also be future-oriented, and Weber & Glynn, (2006, p1640) call for the consideration of institutions as a necessary part of sensemaking which they argue, is an *'implicit but undertheorized component'* of the sensemaking concept.

Even Weick himself implies this, when he says that *'sense may be in the eye of the beholder, but beholders vote and the majority rules.'* Essentially, actors in co-opetitive relationships develop mental modes of co-opetition by drawing from underlying values, roles, shared interests, and common understandings triggered by the institutional configurations and socio-historic background of the environment in which they operate.

To this end, the organization of this chapter is as follows: Section 3.1 facilitates an understanding of sensemaking as a process of creative authoring by individuals and groups in an attempt to *'...construct, filter, frame, create facticity . . . and render the subjective into something more tangible'* (Weick, 1995). In capturing the richness of the sensemaking theory, this chapter draws on a diversity of sensemaking perspectives (e.g., Weick, 1995; Mills, Thurlow and Mills, 2010; Weber & Glynn, 2006). Section 3.2 attempts to review perspectives to the institutional theory and particularly draws from Scott's (1995; 2005; 2007) sociological perspective to illustrate the social constructionist nature of institutions.

In section 3.3, emphasis is placed on Weber & Glyn's (2006) sensemaking framework which acknowledges the role of institutions in sensemaking processes and as such, provides a useful starting

point for examining sensemaking from a contextualized perspective. Finally, section 3.4 provides a summary of this chapter by discussing the underpinnings shaping the understanding of entrepreneurial network co-opetition. This integrated approach could therefore address several separate gaps in the literature highlighted in Chapter 2, such as providing in depth understanding of co-opetition from an entrepreneurial perspective (Galkina et al., 2017; McGrath et al., 2019), and strengthen the contextual knowledge in co-opetition research (Bouncken et al., 2015; Pattinson et al., 2018; Darbi & Knott, 2022).

3.2 Several Perspectives to Sensemaking Theory

Several studies within the social constructionist research paradigm have found the concept of sensemaking really influential in explaining how individuals make sense of their realities (e.g., Weick, 1995; Holt & Cornelissen, 2014; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). While there is no single agreed definition of sensemaking, the consensus is that sensemaking is the process through which individuals seek to plausibly interpret new experiences that are unexpected or uncertain (Weick, 1995; Maitlis and Soneshein, 2010). The central argument of the sensemaking framework is that the activity of organizing is largely an ongoing cognitive process of framing lived experiences as meaningful.

In this vein, Weick argues for the importance of uncovering the social psychological processes that determine organizational outcomes (Weick, 1995; Mills, Thurlow and Mills, 2010). Essentially, the sensemaking framework aims to understand how different meanings are ascribed to the same experience (Weick, 1995; Mills et al, 2010). As an iterative process, sensemaking occurs through the extraction of cues which allow individuals decide a plausible course of action (Salancick and Pfeffer, 1978). These extracted cues provide a point of reference for actors to link ideas to a broader network of meanings.

Additionally, they manifest as familiar structures or frameworks from which actors develop a larger sense of what may be happening (Weick, 1995). Overall, these studies suggest that sensemaking occurs through the perception of cues, the making of interpretations, and engagement in actions (Maitlis and

Christianson, 2014; Browne et al., 2015). Within the field of organization studies from which the sensemaking theory emerged, scholars have adopted this perspective to explain the formation of professional and organizational culture (e.g., Bloor & Dawson, 1994), the formation and maintenance of identity (e.g., Humphreys & Browne, 2002), change processes (e.g. Balogun & Johnson, 2004; 2005).

Likewise, the turn to micro level cognitive foundations of co-opetition in co-opetition research has led researchers to adopt sensemaking theory to explain individual level differences in the construction of co-opetitive frames within a firm (e.g. Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016a), the impact of time and history on the emergence of co-opetition with the context of an SME network (e.g. Pattinson et al., 2018), and the cognitive management of co-opetition tensions (e.g. Stadtler & Wassenhove, 2016; Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016b; Lundgren-Henriksson & Tidstrom, 2021).

However, these approaches to sensemaking, as well as co-opetition studies grounded by the sensemaking perspective, seem to have a fragmented approach to the conceptualization of sensemaking. For instance, there is no clarity on the conceptualization of sensemaking as either a purely individual cognitive phenomenon, a collective-social phenomenon or even a discursive process (Browne et al., 2015). Secondly, there is lack of clarity on the view of sensemaking as either daily occurrence (e.g., Patriotta & Brown, 2012) or a process specifically triggered by shock (e.g., Weick, 1995).

Thirdly, some efforts have been made towards identifying the prospective nature of sensemaking process (e.g., Corley & Gioia, 2012; Brown, Stacey, & Nandhakumar, 2008), which does not fit into Weick's (1995) traditional view of sensemaking as a retrospective process. Finally, there is lack of agreement on the nature of interactions among individuals involved in sensemaking process: while some argue that individuals may share similar and consonant understandings (e.g., Brown & Diguid,

1998), others argue that sensemaking among individuals in a group can be discrepant because sensemaking emerges from institutions (e.g., Brown, Stacey, & Nandhakumar, 2008).

This means that sensemaking – either based on retrospection or prospection, does not occur in vacuum (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Rather, it is highly dependent upon several contextual factors. Secondly, although the concept of sensemaking has the potential to explain the micro-level processes of entrepreneurial co-opetitive relationships, it fails to explain what drives these processes. In addition, the description of the sensemaking process as a rational action determined by a set of definite activities, tilts towards the positivist notion of certainty which is in contrast to the interpretive and reflexive nature of the sensemaking process (Johnson and Duberly, 2000).

Furthermore, the view of Weick (1995) in describing sensemaking process suggests a democratic process where all actor voices are considered equally legitimate however, issues of power, hierarchy, and individual agency exist which influence they ways in which actors make sense and give sense of complex organizational phenomena like co-opetition (Brown, Colville, & Pye, 2014) (Mills, Thurlow, & Mills, 2010) (Weber & Glynn, 2006).

As opposed to the conventional approach to sensemaking as a linear process, a considerable body of literature have started to discuss temporality as a foundational aspect of sensemaking (Dawson & Sykes, 2019). This area of research specifically highlights the retrospective nature of sensemaking which draws from past experiences to make sense of the present (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2011). Essentially, temporality in sensemaking alludes to the conceptualisation of time as a multiple and fluid, rather than singular construct, based on the fluid interconnections and continous re-imaginations between past and future in making sense of an emergent present event (Dawson, 2014; Dawson & Sykes, 2019; Lundren-Henriksson & Tidstrom, 2021).

This view of the overlapping nature of past, present, and future events has been minimally addressed in co-opetition research. In line with this understanding, studies such as Pattinson et al (2018) and

Lundgren-Henriksson & Tidstrom (2021) contributed to discussions on the emergent, rather than deliberate nature of co-opetition, whereby managerial mindsets are argued to reflect continous re-imaginations of cooperative and competitive pasts, present, and future interactions.

In further emphasizing the role of temporality in sensemaking, Wiebe (2010) draws attention to the philosophy of time as an important but negelected aspect of temporality. In his arguments, he criticizes Western cultural perception of time as a linear, objective, and measurable concept external to, and controlled by individuals. Instead, he argues that this perception of time limites understanding of the process of change and temporality in organizational change, which in this case, would manifest as the switching from cooperative to competitive frames in an ongoing, simultaneous manner as managers make sense of the unfolding co-opetitive experience by configuring and reconfiguring the relationship between past, present, and the future (Weibe, 2010; Lundgren-Henriksson & Tidstrom, 2021). These arguements further emphasize the processual, and contextual nature of co-opetition sensemaking and as such, gives further credence to the importance of uncovering contextual influences on co-opetition sensemaking which is the aim of this study. It is on this basis that the concept of institutions is discussed in the next section, to provide further insights to the contextualized nature of co-opetition sensemaking which acknowledges how past, historical events shape sensemaking processes.

3.3 Institutions

Institutions are broadly defined as the *'rules of the game'* or *'humanly devised constraints'* that govern economic, social, and political interactions (North,1990; Scott, 1995). In this vein, institutions place pressures on businesses to conform in certain ways to achieve legitimacy (Oliver, 1991) and produce desirable outcomes (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The underlying argument of the Institutional Theory is the recognition that society shapes and guides entrepreneurial transactions through the provision of rules and structures (North, 1990; Webb, Ireland, & Ketchen, 2014).

 Conceptualizing co-opetition as a social phenomenon provides an opportunity to draw on well-developed general literature on institutions. Likewise, the sensemaking literature accepts that

sensemaking should not be solely viewed as an organizational construct, but one needing to be investigated in relation to several interrelated elements, such as institutions (Weber & Glynn, 2006; Brown et al., 2008; Mills et al., 2010).

The concept of institutions contains diverse perspectives. A major advancement to the understanding of institutions can be traced to North's (1990)'s seminal which paper classifies institutions as formal (emerging from officially sanctioned state systems to promote order) and informal (emerging from social-constructed acceptable norms and behaviours). Formal institutions dictate guidelines for behaviour due to their codified, routinized and taken-for-granted nature (Holmes, Miller, Mitt and Salmador, 2011). Formal institutions require enforcement to ensure non-compliance is sanctioned (Voigt and Engerer 2002).

Enforcement does not mean that sanctions are automatically imposed. Rather, there is a probability that violating an institutional rule will lead to sanctions. Countries typically differ in their level of "institutional enforceability". This is the extent to which formal institutions are efficiently and effectively protected by regulatory authorities, agencies through formal enforcement mechanisms (Williamson 1991). Indeed, in many developing African economies, like Nigeria, formal institutions are characterized by an absence of a strong rule of law (Carney et al., 2016).

This absence of strong governmental structure or 'Institutional Voids' presents a hampering effect on the effectiveness of markets which may result in opportunism, higher costs, and market power (Doh, Rodrigues, Saka-Helmhout & Makhija, 2017). This approach to the institutional theory explains that institutions are the rules of the game in any society, which reduces transaction costs and uncertainty in human behaviour. North (1990) categorizes these institutions as formal and informal. In describing formal institutions, North (1990) identifies structures such as the legal, and constitutional frameworks of a society.

Informal institutions, on the other hand, are uncodified, flexible (DiMaggio, 1988) and change incrementally as the culture of a society is passed down from one generation to another (Holmes et al., 2012) through cultural mechanisms such as oral tradition, teaching, and imitation (Pejovich, 1999). Some studies identify the interactions between formal and informal institutions. For instance, Helmke & Levitsky (2004) argue that informal institutions are sometimes treated as alternatives to formal institutions in situations where formal institutions are weak. Informal institutions can therefore be used to reinforce, complement, substitute, or undermine formal institutions (Helmke and Levitsky, 2004; Amoako and Lyon, 2014; Effiom & Ubi, 2015; Doh et al., 2017; Omeihe, Dakhan, Khan, Amoako and Gustafsson, 2019).

North (1990)'s interpretations of the institutional theory is however criticized for presenting institutional actors as rational beings who require the implementation of clear rules and sanctions. In other words, criticisms which trail North's (1990) interpretations of institutions contend that he provides insufficient elaborations on the nature and definition of institutions. Some of these criticisms include Hodgson (2006) who argues that institutions are durable systems of embedded and established social rules which structures social instructions, studies such as Meyer and Rowan (1977) and Helmke and Levitsky, (2004) who argue that many societal and organizational codes of conduct exist beyond the borders of formally sectioned systems; Giddens (1984) who argues that institutions are structural arrangements which shape individual and collective behaviour and where legitimacy and interpretations to patterns of behaviour are created by social order; Djankov et al., (2002) who argue that the formal institutions of a society can only be understood through the existence and operations of its informal institutions.

Following the postulations of Hodgson (2006), Meyer and Rowan (1977), Helmke and Levitsky (2004), Gidens (1984) and Djankov et al., (2002), this thesis surmises that institutions are established systems of socially transmitted rules that govern economic interaction. These socially transmitted rules

in turn, are dependent upon a social culture that prioritizes norms of behaviour and social practices. As such, institutions may define what is considered appropriate or unacceptable behaviours within a society (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991).

These early interpretations neglected the social context which later theorists found to be important to collective life (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; March and Olsen, 1989). Another contribution to the institutional theory can be drawn from DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) perspective which considers how organizational actions are shaped by their institutional settings to be isomorphic; for the purpose of gaining the legitimacy that would allow them to access relevant resources and mobilize support (Owens, Palmer, Zueva-Owens, 2013). Legitimacy, in this case, refers to the implicit and explicit actions of a firm that reveals its adherence to the norms and bounds of societal expectations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Owens et al., 2013). Isomorphism describes the constraining processes which forces organizations to possess qualities in common to others facing similar condition.

In other words, diverse organizational characteristics are modified to be compatible with environmental characteristics. This perspective which draws immensely from the new institutional theory introduced by Meyer and Rowan (1977) and Bourdieu's (1977) practice theory, highlights the role of culture and cognition in discussing environmental pressures which force organizations to adopt similar qualities with other organizations facing similar challenges. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) identify three mechanisms through which these 'isomorphic' changes exist: coercive isomorphism which results from formal (e.g., legal, regulatory influences) and informal (e.g., cultural expectations) pressures within the environment. Secondly, mimetic isomorphism which is the emergence of imitation among organizations in response to environmental uncertainty.

Finally, normative isomorphism which results from the collective effort of organizations to define work processes and conditions by adopting similar organizational structures and procedures and/or conforming to internal routines and past successful behaviours. Overall, this neo-institutional approach

rejects rationality as the explanation for organizational behaviour and action. Rather, they lay emphasis on legitimacy rather than efficiency as an explanation for the survival and success of organizations (Thornton and Ocasio; Tolbert and Zucker, 1983). Yet, these have also been criticized for lacking actor interest nor a basis for individual agency in terms of the individual's subjectivity, reasoning, interests, and bases of actions (Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury, 2012).

Indeed, much research has investigated the effects of formal institutions (e.g., regulatory rules and legal frameworks) on various aspects of business operations (Salinas, Muffatto and Alvarado, 2018) such as its influence on co-opetition for internationalising firms (e.g., Monticelli et al., 2019), and its inducement of co-opetition within non-tech industries (e.g., marina, 2007; Kylanen and Rusko, 2012). Yet, some studies point to the variation of institutions among countries. Unlike developed economies, emerging and developing economy institutions are known to be complex, uncertain, (Welter and Smallbone, 2011) and characterized by institutional voids. Notably, two major characteristics of institutions in emerging markets are institutional voids and informality (Khanna and Palepu, 1997; Rottig, 2016; Igwe et al., 2018).

Within the International Business (IB) Literature, institutional voids are conceptualised as the absence or underdevelopment of institutions which influence market interactions, enhances the risks of opportunism and prevailing power mechanisms (Khanna and Palepu, 1997; Doh et al., 2017). Such institutional frameworks or institutional voids are constrained by the absence of a legal structure which enable arbitrary discretion actions by regulatory officials and as such, foster corruption or non-compliant behaviour of entrepreneurs (Welter and Smallbone, 2011), such as relying on informality.

Unlike other institutional perspectives which focus on exogenous institutional differences, the institutional void perspective highlights actions taken by organizational actors in reaction to the absence of a strong rule of governmental law (Carney et al., 2016). From this perspective, firms are motivated to mitigate the absence of institutions or institutional void by relying on informal institutions

which operate through culturally constructed and transmitted processes (Scott, 1995) such as culture, religion, ethnicity, family or kinship, trade groups or cooperative networks, and religious affiliations (Amoako & Lyon, 2014; Omeihe et al., 2020).

3.3.1 Informality

As previously discussed, new institutional economics defines informal institutions as a collection of socially shared, unwritten rules and norms which are enforced outside officially sanctioned systems (North, 1990; Helmke and Levitsky, 2004). A review of literature on entrepreneurship suggests that informal commercial activities account for a large amount of economic activity globally (Williams and Nadin, 2010; Thai and Turkina, 2013; 2014), irrespective of level of economic development. Although its concept was first introduced by Hart (1973), it is characterized by various meanings ranging from unregulated, unobserved, or unorganized economy, (e.g., Webb et al., 2012; Ogunsade and Obembe, 2016) to corrupt or illegal practices (e.g., Smith and Christou, 2009).

A notable contribution to the understanding of informality is William and Nadin's (2010) review which described informality as the participation in legitimate production and sale of goods and services which are unregistered or hidden for tax purposes (Ogunsade and Obembe, 2016) or as an attempt to defy formal regulatory control (Nwabuzor, 2005). Such activities are noted to occur within the boundaries of informal institutions (Webb et al., 2012). Within sub-Saharan African emerging markets, most informal sectors are dominated by creative SMEs such as clothing and apparel, metal work, hair dressing, tailoring, metal work, carpentry and building construction, among others (Ogunsade and Obembe, 2016).

Interestingly, a large part of research on informal institutions finds its roots from the field of social capital through notable works such as Granovetter (1973), Bourdieu (1985; 1986), Coleman (1988), Burt (1992) and Putnam (1993), which emphasize the importance of social organizations or network memberships in improving economic efficiency (Granovetter, 1985; Zane & DeCarolis, 2016; Salinas

et al., 2018). Societies with large stocks of these social capitals are argued to be more motivated to develop cooperative relationships and reduce transaction costs (Putnam, 1993).

Thus, informality encourages participation in social networks which are relevant for the mobilization of relevant resources, access to information and knowledge (Coleman, 1988, Salinas et al., 2018). Accordingly, some co-opetition studies like Granata et al., (2018) suggest that the smallness of the firms increases the possibility of informal networking. From an entrepreneurial perspective, studies like Kim and Aldrich (2005) suggest that entrepreneurs who participate in extensive social networks have greater opportunities to exploit entrepreneurial opportunities.

Further studies also reveal that such relationships are dominant within emerging market contexts where informal rules substitute or replace formal ones (North, 1990; Helmke an Levitsky, 2004; Amoako and Lyon, 2014; Omeihe et al., 2020). Supporting these arguments on the role of informal institutions, Salinas et al (2018) suggest that social networks may be responsible for the monitoring and enforcement of contracts, thereby substituting formal institutions and enabling entrepreneurial activity in volatile institutional environments. The literature on institutions and social capital further identifies two key elements of informal institutions which are trust (e.g., Putnam, 1993; Gambetta, 1996; Keefer and Knack, 2008), Tonoyan et al., 2010) and norms of behaviour (Akerlof and Kranton, 2005).

3.3.2 The Role of Trust

The concept of trust has been studied across various disciplines as a key aspect of individual and organizational behaviour (Dietz, Gillespie and Chao, 2010). Accordingly, various approaches to the conceptualisation and analysis of trust exist (Rousseau et al., 1998).

Major contributions to the understanding of trust however can be drawn from Dietz et al's (2010) and Rousseau et al's (2006) works which conceptualise trust as a meso-level construct. In other words, the authors combine both micro-level psychological processes (i.e., inter/intrapersonal) and macro-level organizational processes (i.e., group dynamics, societal/institutional structures) of trust. From this

perspective, trust is defined as a psychological state which comprises of the willingness to be vulnerable in risky situations.

Tonoyan et al., (2010), defines trust as the mental model of one's expectation from others in the absence of personalized information about them. Essentially, individuals need a cognitive representation of agents with whom they interact and is important for reducing opportunistic behaviour within business interactions (Smallbone and Lyon, 2002). Dietz et al (2010) however distinguish trust from trustworthiness, trusting behaviour and the propensity to trust. Accordingly, trust worthiness is defined as a subjective collection of beliefs which a person has about another individual and their relationship with the individual which motivate their decision to trust.

Mayer et al., (1995) further distinguish three aspects of trustworthiness as ability (the skills and competencies that form an individual's sphere of influence), integrity (the perception that the trustee abides by a set of principles which are acceptable to the trustor, such as fairness and honesty), and benevolence (the perception of a positive orientation of the trustee to the trustor such as through expressions of care and concern). On the other hand, the propensity to trust or 'generalized trust' is described as a person's susceptibility towards trusting others (Dietz et al., 2010).

Here, reference is made to works of Hofstede (1991) and Rotter (1967) who suggest that such propensities to trust are based on cultural background and early developmental experiences which remain reasonably constant throughout adulthood. Finally, trusting behaviour is described as the act of making oneself vulnerable to another individual (Mayer et al., 1995; Dietz et al., 2010). In another study, Gillespie (2003) identifies two dominant aspects of trusting behaviour are revealed as reliance (e.g., on the skills and expertise of another) and disclosure (e.g., sharing of sensitive work-related information).

Thus, trusting behaviour is often an outcome of trust however, other contextual factors may influence trust behaviour, such as power relations, culture, perception of risk in the situation, institutions. Essentially, when members with a shared culture interact, the processes of extracting and interpreting

'cues' for trust is relatively simple (Dietz et al., 2010). This is because individuals with a shared culture are more likely to have a shared understanding and set of expectation about what is needed to develop and maintain a trusting relationship. Thus, culture influences the formation of trust cues in any relationship. Shapiro et al (1992) further classify trust into three categories: deterrent based trust which arises out of fear of the penalties for violating trust, cognitive-based trust which arises out of first impressions and expectations, and knowledge-based trust which arises through the prediction of trustful behaviour by a partner.

Unlike developed economies, trust relationships within emerging market contexts are limited to the boundaries of family and kinship (Putnam, 1993), which suggests high level of trust on informality (Gambettam 1996; Salinas et al., 2018). Trust within these contexts is viewed as a solution to the issue of lack of trust or deficiencies in formal institutions (Baumol, 1990; Helmke and Levitsky, 2004; Salinas et al., 2018) however it may also be the source of problems (Salinas et al., 2018). Based on the foregoing, there is a widely held assumption that trust, and distrust are related mechanisms.

Studies like Saunders and Thornhill (2004) however refute the above notion by suggesting that trust and distrust are separate but co-existing constructs. To differentiate both, Lewicki et al., (1998) provide a matrix to distinguish relationships with high levels of trust from those with low levels of trust, or distrust. In their analysis, they suggest that high-trust relationships are often characterized by faith, hope, assurance, initiative, and confidence). On the other hand, low-level relationships are characterized by watchfulness, fear, vigilance, and scepticism.

Trust is also considered an important element within strategic inter-organizational relationships. Trust perceptions are argued to be based on individual network members and the efficacy of the network (Randolph et al., 2020). Child (2001) believes that trust is an essential element for the coordination of strategic partnerships and exchanges. The presence of trust among partners at network level reflects the social capital generated through engagement in co-opetition networks. In this vein, network trust

enhances the establishment of norms and standards of behaviour which encourage collaboration and transparency, and reduces opportunism within the network (Randolph et al., 2020).

For example, a study by Khanna and Palepu (2000) found that the creation of business groups in response to institutional voids in Chile, was motivated by the presence of trust mediated through solidarity rules of behaviour. Welter and Smallbone (2011) suggest that trust reduces the risks of business transactions within institutionally volatile environments where contracts are not effectively enforced (Knack and Keefer, 1997). The embeddedness of entrepreneurs in social networks (e.g., family, kinship, religious and business groups) may also promote mutual trust between co-opetitive partners who share common rules, values and beliefs to manage co-opetitive relationships (Tonoyan, Strohmeyer, Habib & Perlitx, 2010).

Further studies on strategic alliances and co-opetition have discussed trust as a governance mechanism for the reduction of conflict and risks (Morris et al., 2007; Czernek & Czakon, 2016; Lascaux, 2020; Czakon, 2020). Czakon & Czernek's (2016) also find that trust can have a negative effect, such as the exclusion of non-indigenes which ultimately affects the ease of cooperating with competitors. As such, a negative relationship may exist between trust and co-opetition as they may also be breeding grounds for opportunism by reinforcing nepotism, ethnic rivalry, and favouritism (Tonoyan et al., 2010). This generation of in-group and out-group is influenced by culture which serves as a sensemaking device that shapes individual and group behaviour (Smircich, 1998). As such, the foundations of trust and trustworthiness can be better understood by examining culture (Zaheer and Zaheer, 2006).

Within dyadic co-opetitive relationships, studies like Dorn et al., (2016) provide a comprehensive review of trust as a conditioning factor for the formation of co-opetition between competing firms (Dorn et al., 2016; Lascaux, 2020). Czakon & Czernek (2016) and Morris et al (2007) however argue that trust in co-opetition is better understood within the context of social embeddedness (Granovetter, 1985) where the balance between self-interest versus mutual interest is managed. In this case, trust is

defined as the vulnerability of members to trust the positive intention of other members within network co-opetition (Randolph, H& Silvernail, 2020).

Essentially, trust is widely regarded as a key element within co-opetition networks. By developing trust, actors can commit valuable knowledge and resources with the confidence that opportunistic behaviours will be curbed (Randolph et al., 2020). Yet, the processes through which trust is created has not been fully examined (Rousseau et L., 1998). Further, there is limited understanding of the cognitive dimensions of trust which is essential considering that most of the processes of trust creation and action is cognitive (Blomqvist, 1997). Also, the nature of trust may vary across different national contexts (Dietz et al., 2006). Yet, most studies on trust have adopted an etic perspective, which suggests that trust in a universally applicable construct (Zaheer and Zaheer, 2006). In this vein, Noorderhaven (1999) argues for an emic understanding of trust which considers its perception according to specific culture. Zaheer and Zaheer (2006) also call for an integrated approach which combines both emic and etic perspectives of trust.

3.3.3 The Role of Norms

Norms are generally believed to be shared expectations of behaviour among a group (Putnam, 1993; Bruton et al., 2010; Amoako and Matlay, 2015; Omeihe et al., 2019). Some studies also suggest that norms are underpinned by culture through socialisation (Heide and John, 1992). For example, the intrinsic motivation to pay taxes may be seen as a moral obligation in societies where people trust their political and economic institutions (Salinas et al., 2018). In such cases, operating within the context of formality is viewed as beneficial, while operating within the context of informality is viewed as expensive and risky. Therefore, complying with formal regulatory structures becomes a social norm (Salinas et al., 2018). In contrast, the evasion of tax and other regulations in developing economies is seen as socially acceptable, due to a lack of trust in the institutional framework of the society (Salinas et al., 2018). AS such, the incentive to operative within the context of informality is high.

Accordingly, norms are argued to exist when actions are socially constructed by a group of individuals (Coleman, 1990); thus, forming the basis of the development of cooperation (Bruton et al., 2010; Amoako and Matlay, 2015). Taking a different perspective to explaining norms, studies like Elster (2002) emphasizes the role of powerful actors who sanction the violation of such norms. These sanctions which are agreed upon by social consensus, may be carried out through shaming, threats to reputation and community exclusion (Porter and Lyon, 2006; Amoako, 2019; Omeihe et al., 2020). This therefore reflects the interplay between norms and outcomes, whereby conformity to habitual behaviours such as norms are incentivized by social approval or disapproval (Akerlof, 1976; Faulkner, 2010; Omeihe et al., 2020).

Akerlof (1976) further illustrates incentive for compliance to social norms by highlighting factors such as the fear of social ostracism and fear of social sanction, which further point to the role of powerful actors or enforcers. On the contrary, studies like Elster (1989) argues against the perspective of external sanctioning of norms, by suggesting that the conditioning feature of norms is guided behaviour, whereby failure to comply naturally attracts shame and guilt on the individual which motivates compliance.

Within the literature on co-opetition, some studies also discuss the development of shared norms and social relationships as fundamental explanations behind co-opetitive relationships. For example, Bengtsson, Hinttu and Kock, (2003) report that the existence of cooperation between competitors suggest a shared interest to work together towards a shared goal. Such relationships are often built through formal or informal activities among an embedded group of network actors. While such relationships may be formally developed as strategic alliances, they may also be based on informal structures such as trust and mutual interests (Bengtsson et al., 2013); thus, emphasizing the importance of social relationships. Notably, such relationships may also be characterized by conflicts and disagreements among competitors due to different opinions on common goals (Kock, 1991).

In line with reasoning from the business network literature, some co-opetition studies have described co-opetitive relationships as based upon agreed norms for interaction between competitors (Bengtsson and Kock, 1999; Dahl, 2016). Such norms may be accumulated from experiences of past interaction (Ford and Hankansson, 2006) either through formal agreements or trust (Bengtsson and Kock, 1999). As Bengtsson and Kock (1999) suggest, norm-based relationships such as co-opetition are helpful because they provide trade opportunities, market information, knowledge and resource access needed by competitors involved in such relationships.

Extending these arguments, more recent studies highlight the importance of shared norms for increasing co-opetition network legitimacy. Here, network legitimacy is argued to be a fundamental factor for successful collaboration (Randolph, Hu & Silvernail, 2020). Individual network actors need to be able to view the network, as well as fellow network members as legitimate partners, to proactively engage in such relationships even in the absence of immediate access to value. Thus, network legitimacy also reflects the expected standard of interaction and normative behaviour among members of a co-opetitive network.

Yet, the emergence of norms is also argued to be dependent upon an informal background of relationships (Harris and White, 1996; Omeihe et al., 2020) which are strengthened through religious, family, or cultural institutions (Lyon and Porter, 2009; Omeihe et al., 2020). For example, when highlighting the influence of social norms on co-opetition, Sahlan, Abu-Hussin and Hehsan (2018) reveal that Muslim SMEs in the Halal Mart retail sector in Malaysia relied on religious identity as incentive to co-opete. In such cases, co-opetition with a non-Muslim was highly unlikely due to the high prioritization of brotherhood for the development of trust in business activity and consumerism. Consequently, the varying culture, norms, rules, and beliefs (Bruton et al., 2010) across economies may influence co-opetition. Based on the forgoing, the process through which norms shape SME network co-opetitive relationships in a developing economy has been inadequately examined

(Pattinson et al., 2018). Yet, norms play an important role as SMEs in network relationships rely on norms to build trust and engage in co-opetitive network relationships. Thus, the empirical element of this thesis is required to illuminate understanding of norms in relation to the alignment of goals and collective behaviour in SME network co-opetition.

Overall, institutions are a collection of flexible and rigid knowledge incorporated into an individual's mindset. Essentially, institutional elements of norms and trust are largely characterized by the culture of a society, which is closely related to its institutional environment (Hitt, Franklin & Zhu, 2006). Accordingly, culture is responsible for the establishment of norms of behaviour which represent the institutional environment of a society. Supporting this argument, Granovetter (1985) suggests that the strategic and economic behaviours of SMEs are embedded within networks of social interactions represented by the institutional environment. If this is the case, then, it can be argued that the institutional environment of a home country largely influences the strategic behaviours of firms (Hitt et al., 2006).

By interacting with institutions, therefore, the institutional repertoire of an actor broadens, and becomes valuable when incorporating other actors' experiences and understandings into their own repertoires or create shared understandings. This thus describes the cognitive/inter-cognitive nature of culture (Mouzas and Henneberg, 2015) and describes the processes of sensemaking and sensegiving. From this perspective, culture can be viewed as an internal cognitive variable that serves as a sensemaking tool for guiding and shaping behaviour (Smircich, 1983). This conceptualisation of culture thus implies a need to further understand how groups such as SME networks create and make sense of their own distinctive cultures and strategic behaviours, rather than being influenced by external cultural variables. Yet, in previous analysis of institutions, culture and cognition are hardly addressed. To expound on this highly important but missing dimension of institutions, this thesis uses Scott's (1995) institutional framework as the main guiding institutional concept for interpreting SME

sensemaking in co-opetition networks, because of its consideration of the cognitive aspects of culture in shaping individual and organizational behaviour. This is discussed in the next section.

3.4 Scott's Institutional Framework

Scott (2007) provides a particularly useful framework for understanding the role of institutions in the strategic actions of entrepreneurs, particularly within a developing economic context (Ahlstrom et al., 2008). This framework builds on previous works such as Bourdieu's (1977), discussions on institutional isomorphism from fields such as sociology (e.g., DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), economics (e.g. North, 1990), organization studies (e.g. Meyer & Rowan, 1991), and political science (e.g., Bonchek & Shepsle, 1996) who combinedly argue that organizations become homogeneous by conforming to common institutional pressures such as professional norms, laws and regulations of an economic environment. \

Essentially, Scott (2007) expands these varied arguments by categorising institutional forces into three categories as regulatory/coercive, mimetic, and normative. The normative pillar of institutions is described as the socially constructed framework of norms and values which govern individual and collective behaviour (Bruton et al., 2010). and are further strengthened through socialization processes e.g., through religious institutions or family ties (Lyon and Porter, 2007). The regulatory pillar describes the legal governmental framework which provides the rules and guidelines for organizational actions. Finally, the cognitive pillar describes the taken-for-granted values and beliefs which guide individual and collective behaviour. Here, the importance of culture is emphasized as socially symbolic meaning systems which shape the individual and collective behaviour (Scott, 1995; Bruton et al., 2009) and provide the cognitive templates through which individual perceptions and decisions are framed (Durkeim,1961).

Scott (2007) however extends this framework by differentiating two types of informal institutional pillars as normative and cultural- cognitive to emphasize the importance of the cognitive role of culture on individual and collective behaviour (Scott, 1995; 2005; 2007; Bruton et al., 2009). He describes

the cultural-cognitive pillar of institutions as a culturally shared perception of social reality through which meaning based on cultural values is drawn (Scott, 1995; 2005; 2007). On the other hand, normative institutions refer to prescriptive and obligatory dimensions of social life based on a shared logic of appropriateness (Scott, 2008; Weick, 2001). Essentially, these obligations or expectations are based on existing dominant practices within a specific culture (Scott, 2005; 2007; Bruton et al., 2010).

Interestingly, Scott's (1995) emphasis on culture suggests that institutions are not mutually exclusive. Rather their significance is based on the context in which they occur. Further, the fact that organizational (entrepreneurial) actors are motivated by logic of appropriateness rather than consequence (March and Olsen, 1989) suggests that organizational behaviours are products of interplay between actors and their respective institutional structures. As such, this framework provides a potentially flexible heuristic for understanding how institutions influence the sensemaking of SME behaviour such as co-opetition.

3.4.1 Regulatory Institutions

Several studies on the institutional theory and firm strategy emphasize the role of the regulative aspect of institutions as constraining on organizational behaviour (Scott, 1995; Owens et al., 2013). Regulative pressures suggest that firms conform to formal, legal pressures of a market economy as the basis for legitimacy (Owens et al., 2013). Within the co-opetition literature, we also identify a stream of research that describe regulative pressures on co-opetitive strategies of firms. These studies broadly describe co-opetition as an induced strategy based on formal regulative control over the actions and behaviours of firms. For example, Mariani's (2007) case study found that the introduction of new regional policies made it mandatory for opera houses to develop co-opetitive relationships by establishing co-production arrangements.

In another study, Kylanen and Rusko (2011) refer to the unplanned nature of co-opetition based on regulative/coercive pressures. Monticelli et al.'s (2019) case study of the Brazilian Wineries argue that institutions provide country-specific advantages for co-opeting MNEs such as bilateral treaties,

promotion policies, and funding opportunities. These studies have described co-opetition as a mechanism of organizational change through institutional isomorphism. They suggest that co-opetitive relationships are a by-product of institutional control over the actions and behaviours of firms (e.g., Monticelli et al., 2018; Kylanen and Rusko, 2011; Mariani, 2007) and institutional changes in the environment prompt firms to adopt an institutional logic of co-opetition (e.g., Fong, Wong and Hong, 2018).

Yet, this may be different for entrepreneurs in a developing economic (African) context whose activities are constrained by weak formal institutions and characterized by a reliance on informal forms of institutions (Omeihe, Dakhan, Khan, Amoako and Gustafsson, 2019; Amoako and Lyon, 2014). Formal institutional procedures for accessing governmental support are rarely successful within the local, cultural contexts and as such; do not often meet the needs of the entrepreneur in these areas (Chamlee,1993). For example, when seeking access to loans, entrepreneurs are often required to have a well-documented credit history in order to prove their credit worthiness, which are processes that support the Western-Style settings (Chamlee,

Being vulnerable to these factors, small firms turn to informal institutions which members of the society consider legitimate enough to reinforce, complement, or undermine formal institutions (Omeihe et al., 2019; Helmke and Levitsky, 2004). The social fabric of informal institutions is however rooted in strong habitual actions based on social interactions such as religion, ethnicity, family, kinship, and group membership (Omeihe et al., 2019; Amoako and Lyon, 2014; Bouncken et al., 2015), which members of the society consider legitimate enough to exist to reinforce, complement, or undermine formal institutions (Omeihe et al., 2019; Helmke and Levitsky, 2004).

This supports assertions by Meyer and Rowan (1977) and Helmke and Levitsky, (2004) who found that many societal and organizational codes of conduct exist beyond the borders of formally sanctioned systems. This sentiment is also shared by Djankov et al., (2002) who argue that most indicators used in the measurement of the link between institutions and economic outcomes are deficient in their lack

of attention to the informal, socially shared rules that shape the effectiveness and manifestation of formal institutions (Effiom & Ubi, 2015; Helmke & Levitsky, 2006; Djankov et al., 2002). Specifically, the institutional framework in Nigeria is characterized by informal institutional pressures such as social inequality, status differences, ethnic differences, patriarchy, and hierarchical structures which influence organizational behaviour (Adisa et al., 2020; Nwagbara, 2020). Thus, arguments on the institutional theory collectively acknowledge the influencing role of institutions on human behaviour and strategic actions.

3.4.2. Normative Institutions

Scott (1995) differentiates informal institutions as normative and cultural-cognitive (Scott, 1995; 2005; Bruton et al., 2010). Normative institutions refer to the prescriptive and obligatory dimensions of social life based on a shared logic of appropriateness (Scott, 1995, 2005). This socially constructed framework of norms and values govern individual and collective behaviour (Bruton, Ahlstrom, & Li, 2010) and are further strengthened through socialisation.

Very few studies on co-opetition refer to the effect of normative institutions on co-opetition. Exceptionally, Bouncken, Laudien, Friedrich & Gormar, (2018) reveal that the adoption of similar business processes and structures in co-working spaces is based on a shared value of collaboration, community, openness, and accessibility. The interaction among entrepreneurs within such social spaces also serves as an important mechanism for the fostering of entrepreneurship, co-creation, and innovation through lowering transaction costs and providing access to relevant resources (Bouncken et al., 2018). Consequently, social networks are viewed as important normative agents through which entrepreneurs mobilize co-opetitive interactions to access human and financial resources, entrepreneurial opportunities, information, knowledge, strengthen kinship ties (Bengtsson and Kock, 1999; Dahl et al., 2016; Salinas, Muffatto, Alvarado, 2018) and overall legitimacy (Owens, Palmer, & Zueva-Owens, 2013). The embeddedness of entrepreneurs in social networks (e.g., family, kinship,

religious and networks) also promotes mutual trust between co-opetitive partners who share common rules, values and beliefs to manage co-opetitive relationships (Tonoyan, Strohmeyer, & Perlitz, 2010).

3.4.3 Cultural - Cognitive Institutions

Like normative institutions, the cultural-cognitive dimension of institutions draws on culturally shared perceptions of reality associated with the cultural values of a society (Scott, 1995). It is important to point out at this stage, that culture is a multi-dimensional concept and as such, its effect on individuals and groups would vary according to individual features (e.g., capabilities, propensities and preferences), and group features (e.g., group history and homogeneity). To understand the multiplicity of culture, Scott (1995) introduced the cultural-cognitive dimension which explains how mental frames, schemas, scripts, and taken-for-granted structures may constrain the strategic actions of individuals and groups within a particular society (Scott, 1995; Bruton et al., 2010).

The concept of culture has been used overtime to explain complex characteristics of social group relations (Shein, 2004). Several understandings of culture exist in current literature. For instance, Hofstede (1992) refers to culture as the relatively conventional responses of members within a group based on thought process that has been formed through years of socialisation. In similar vein, studies like Jenssen & Kristiansen (2004) highlight constructs such as beliefs, values, and norms as part of a society's culture. Overall, these studies define culture based on the values and identities that shape social groups. Dietz et al (2010) also support this argument by suggesting that the cognitive aspect of culture relates to a system of shared cognition. Here, organizations or groups are described as a network of subjective meanings or shared frames of references which members collectively make meaning of, but which may appear complex to understand for an external observer (Smirich, 1985).

Thus, culture expresses the values, beliefs, and societal norms which convey a sense of identity among members of a group. In line with this view, Shein (2004) classifies culture as based on three factors: artifacts (e.g., language, values, mannerisms, emotional display) according to Shein (2004) are aspects

of a society's culture which may be visible to an outsider but difficult to understand. For example, respect and honesty are key attributes for business among the Yoruba indigenes based on an agelong fear of two powerful gods Orunmila and Obatala who are believed to be responsible for the formation of the Yoruba empire. A second element of culture, according to Shein (2004) is espoused beliefs and values which reflect the sensemaking of a group, as determined by powerful actors (e.g., religious leaders or elders) to manage an internal functioning of the group.

Overtime, however, these become transformed into rigid, non-debatable rules that guide social interaction and compliance. Finally, Shein (2004) refer to basic assumptions which are acquired from childhood and reinforced through cultural socialization. In such cases, they become taken for granted beliefs which are modified through the participation of a new group member who share their own cultural experience and history with the group. Thus, from a group perspective, culture is characterized by interpersonal relationships such as teamwork and loyalty (Knein, Greven, Bendig, & Brettel, 2020). These relationships increase mutual trust which eases the flow of information, resource, and knowledge exchange among different network actors. In such culture, cooperation is argued to be high based on the strength of ties (Granovetter, 1983). Thus, various social groups display varied responses to a variety of actions, based on their cultural identity and values (Dietz, Gillespie, & Chao, 2010).

Within the co-opetition literature, culture has mostly been analysed as an organizational construct term of how corporate culture influence the behaviour of individuals (Knein, Greven, Bendig, & Brettel, 2020). While organizational culture may explain the norms and values on an organizational level which drive choices of individual behaviour, national culture is more aligned to explaining the link between social and societal values and strategic outcomes (Knein, Greven, Bendig, & Brettel, 2020). Both foundations of culture therefore present different conceptualisations. Cultural schemas provide the knowledge and reference points for individuals in detecting cues and making sense of important interactions which serve as a guide for action (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Culture can be viewed as the template for cognitive processes and the internalization of norms which are used for processing

information about individual experiences and about others (Dietz, Gillespie, & Chao, 2010). Essentially, culture influences the cognitive filters or schemas which individuals use to make sense of their experiences. As such, culture can explain the cognitive processes for uncovering, interpreting, and accommodating sensemaking frames.

3.5 Sensemaking and Institutions

A useful framework for capturing the role of institutions in sensemaking processes is Weber & Glynn (2006)'s framework which extends the sensemaking theory by emphasizing the role of the institutional context as a vital part of sensemaking. In their conceptual work, the authors argue that sensemaking is embedded in social space and time rather than being a context-free phenomenon. Yet, the role of the larger social and historical context in sensemaking processes has not been thoroughly investigated. To illustrate the importance of context in sensemaking processes, the authors integrate both micro (i.e cognition) and macro (i.e. institutions) processes of sensemaking by drawing on Barley & Tolbert's (1977) and Hedstrom and Swedberg's (1998) social mechanism framework, which highlight interrelationships across three specific mechanisms (context, action-formation, and transformation) to explain how institutions serve as contextual mechanisms through which ongoing action-formation and transformation of sensemaking occurs. In other words, sensemaking is viewed as a process which maps several mechanisms in ongoing cycles of perceptions, interpretations, and actions (Weick et al., 2005; Weber & Glynn, 2006).

Barley & Tolbert's (1977) conceptualization of institutions was based on the traditional perception of institutions as 'taken-for-granted.' In other words, institutions where perceived as *'rules of the game'* (e.g., North, 1991) such that ideas of agency or alternative ways of thinking and acting were precluded and deemed implausible (Weber & Glynn, 2006). This one-sided view of institutions is also criticized by Scott (1995; 2007) whose expansion of the institutional theory into regulatory, normative, and cultural cognitive institutions acknowledges the presence of informal (normative and cultural-cognitive) institutions also represent powerful sections of the society that shape legitimate behavior

within that society. Weber & Glynn (2006) identify informal (cultural-cognitive) aspects of institutions as contextual mechanisms which function as originators of and emerge from sensemaking processes (i.e transformational mechanisms). In this new framework, Weber, and Glyn (2006) introduce three broad concepts of priming, editing, and triggering to explain how actors make sense *with* institutions, rather than outside or in spite of institutions (Weber & Glynn, 2006):

3.5.1 Institutions as 'primers' of Sensemaking

In priming sensemaking, Weber & Glynn (2006) assert that institutions provide the conditions for sensemaking to occur. Specifically, institutions provide a range of cues which according to Scott (1995) could be drawn from the regulatory, normative, or cultural-cognitive environment. Once noticed, these cues initiate sensemaking processes which gradually accumulate in the framing of identities, mindsets, and role expectations for a particular situation (Weick, 1991). In contrast to the conception of co-opetition as a rational strategy, therefore, it can be argued that the construction of co-opetition mindsets takes a more emergent or inducing nature as actors notice and filter a range of institutional cues which have implications for how they act in a co-opetitive network. The process of noticing, filtering, and extracting cues is not necessarily straightforward (Weber & Glynn, 2006) but gradual and cumulative overtime.

Scott's (1995) discussions on the organizational field is also especially useful to further understand the priming nature of institutions. In contrast to the linear description of firms as 'production systems' therefore, Scott (1995) uses the analogy of 'fields' to introduce the creation of a meaning system within a firm or group of who interact frequently with each other within the field (Scott, 1995). To capture the importance of the 'field' concept, Web & Glynn (2006) identify the presence of two contexts – the immediate *situational* context, and the macro, *concrete* context which altogether provide the foundation for sensemaking to occur. While concrete institutional context provides a wide range of plausible, institutionalized roles and action scripts, the situational context (or field) guides the filtering and extraction of appropriate institutional norm to adhere to (Weber & Glynn, 2006). From this

perspective, the priming of sensemaking also highlights the element of 'plausibility' in sensemaking processes since plausibility suggests that actors preclude alternative frames and rely on the most plausible or legitimate frame related to a confusing event (Weber & Glynn, 2006).

Through the 'priming' construct, a more in-depth approach to understanding institutional contexts in sensemaking processes can be adopted. To illustrate this, if a co-opetitive actor internalizes cooperation in network relationships, the actors' actions within the network field would most likely be elicited towards this taken-for-granted behavior of cooperating, regardless of the situational and environmental stimuli. In contrast, a co-opetitive actor's sensitivity to the situational context would manifest in their reliance on cues of cooperating and competing which are generated within the network. Thus, if the notion of competing in cooperative relationships was discussed and engaged openly within the network, for instance, this situational context may provide a greater number of cues for plausible action, irrespective of the macro, concrete institutional context.

In sensemaking processes, therefore, there is the possibility that institutionalized expectations (i.e institutional logics) of behavior are not simply drawn from the macro environment but are also highly influenced by the normative situational context (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008) or field (Scott, 1995). The role of institutions as sensemaking primers therefore presents an opportunity to further extend current knowledge on contextual influences on co-opetition sensemaking.

3.5.2 Institutions as 'Editors' of Sensemaking Processes

Within this mechanism, two core events are identified: the possibility of actor deviance from institutionalized expectations, and the social policing of actions through the presence of powerful actors.

Institutional Agency through Deviance

An insightful aspect of Weber & Glynn's (2006) framework is the recognition of the richness and relevance of Scott's (2001) cognitive pillar of institutions which provides a basis for reinforcing the notion of actor agency developed through social feedback processes. Agency in institutions suggest that rather than being passive agents within institutionalizing process, actors undergo subjective interpretation of institutionalization through sensemaking processes which facilitates deviance to institutionalized norms and expectations.

Notable among studies which address the role of agency in institutionalization processes is the work of Oliver (1991) who gives more focus to how actors view, act strategically, and contribute to institutional changes. Through the concept of *'deinstitutionalization,'* Oliver (1992) identifies a set of organizational and environmental predicative factors which enable institutional erosion. Specifically, Oliver (1992) lays emphasis on regulatory pressures resulting from changing government regulations and sanctions placed on non-compliance to legal expectations as precursors for deinstitutionalization. In a sense, this highlights the role of informal institutions as mechanisms of agency (Meagher, 2007). In this sense, informal institutions are argued to manifest as spheres for enacting defiance to formal institutional pressures, voids, or disintegration (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004). For this reason, the role of informal institutions is particularly relevant in understanding sensemaking processes.

The notion of agency also alludes to the phenomenon of institutional entrepreneurship; a concept often used to highlight the role which actors (as individuals or organizations) play in institutional change (Battilana, 2006). Maguire, hardy, & Lawrence (2004) provide a succinct definition of institutional entrepreneurship as *'the activities of actors within specific institutional arrangements who leverage resources to create new institutions or transform existing ones.'* The concept draws on DiMaggio's (1988) discussions on the creation of new institutions through the identification, exploration, and exploitation of opportunities by powerful actors to shape institutions.

Yet, an ensuing confusion exists within the neo-institutional stream which is centered on the paradox of embedded agency (Holm, 1995). Battilana (2006) reveals this as the paradox between institutional embeddedness and ability of actors to distance themselves from constraining institutions and act strategically towards innovation. In this vein, the risk-taking nature of entrepreneurs can be drawn upon as a necessary resource for identifying, exploring, and exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities. While Oliver's (1992) work which theorized from organizational and institutional levels provides useful insights on the concept, it is more likely that the paradox of embedded agency could be better understood from an individual level to understand what conditions may be conducive for actors to act as institutional entrepreneurs (Battilana, 2006). In this vein, Battilana (2006) refer to actor's social position and psychological factors as two essential constructs of human agency in institutional entrepreneurship.

Sense-Giving through Social Policing of Actions

Considerably, agency is dependent upon the ability of institutional entrepreneurs (as powerful individuals or groups) to engage in social policing of actions (Webb & Glynn, 2006). Accordingly, Browne et al., (2015) have argued that sensemaking is both an effect of, and productive of power relations which are continuously negotiated. Specifically, power relations manifest through the social policing of actions of institutional actors, based on institutionalized expectations which structure the process of sensemaking (Weber & Glynn, 2014). Indeed, the phrase *'internalized cognitive constraint'* which Barley and Tolbert (1997) use in describing institutions, highlights power relations which narrow how and what sense can be made. As Vlaar, Van den Bosch & Volberda (2006) also note, *'sensemaking is not free of power issues and self-interested behaviour.'*

Existing theoretical perspectives on power present a nuanced view of the concept. For example, the structural model of power describes it as ideological and hegemonic because it shapes the way social agents perceive, make sense of, and accept their role in the existing order of things (Lukes, 1974). The behavioural perspective of power describes it as a matter of individual agency, where power is seen to

reside in individuals rather than organizations (Clegg, 1989; Dahl, 1961). Accordingly, power exists to the extent to which it can be empirically observed and quantified based on how people respond to it.

This perception has been criticized by post-structural and critical theoretical traditions. For instance, Foucault (1979) argues that power is a complex and evolving web of social relations rather than structured. Accordingly, organizations or institutions are an uneven playing field where players are embedded within predefined and fixed set of rules and meanings which continuously construct and reconstruct power relations that are designed to benefit one of players. (Clegg, 1989). Power, therefore, is seen to be accrued to some individuals based on their institutional role and socio-economic status, gender, or ethnic identity.

Power is also seen as a significant trust motivator. In some conceptualisations, trust and control co-exist such that trust exists because of the presence of power and control (Dietz et al., 2010). In another view, the presence of power and control creates distrust. However, the ways in which power and control manifest vary across cultures (Dietz et al., 2010). For instance, some cultures may rely on formalized institutional forms of power and control while others may rely on more informal, normative forms of control to promote trust (Thompson, 1996). Within business relationships, studies like Elster (2002) refer to the presence of powerful actors who direct the sensemaking and sense-giving of norms and habitual behaviours, whereby failure to comply may attract social disapproval through acts such shaming, threats to reputation and community exclusion (Porter and Lyon, 2006; Amoako, 2019; Omeihe et al., 2020).

Akerlof (1976) further illustrates incentive for compliance to social norms by highlighting factors such as the fear of social ostracism and fear of social sanction, which further point to the role of powerful actors or enforcers. Thus, power is inherent in the structuring of sensemaking where it is described as guiding and controlling sensemaking processes (Browne et al., 2015). Adopting a more critical

approach to sensemaking, Mills, Thurlow, & Mills (2010) address the presence of different power potentials of individual actors within organizations who may provide the guidelines or dictates of meaning-making of organizational members. As such, organizational power differences may priviledge certain identities over others, thereby determining what identities, roles and behaviours are regarded and accepted as meaningful. Like the traditional sensemaking perspective, attention is also drawn to the pivotal role of identity construction to the sensemaking process.

Here, Mills et al (2010) suggest that the ways in which actors extract cues to make sense of interactions and events is based on their perception of their professional and organizational identities (Mills et al., 2010; Weick, 2005; Mills, 2003). Considerably, this process of identity construction is determined by the distribution of power among actors and the ways in which language in used in the sensemaking process (Balogun and Johnson, 2005). For instance, the identity of a legitimate actor within an SME network might be priviledged through language, texts and organizational rules which accentuate the traits of such identity.

Within the co-opetition literature, the concept of power has been discussed when exploring sensemaking processes. For instance, a study by Lundgren-Henrisksson and Kock (2018) use the concept of sense-giving to emphasize dimensions of power. They describe sense-giving as activities related to the influencing of others view of reality. Thus, sensemaking is not only a tool for dealing with uncertainty but is also viewed as a source of legitimacy for actions and interactions.

The argument is that powerful individuals within co-opetitive relationships may steer the dominant view of co-opetition in a certain direction. As such, powerful actors within a co-opetitive relationship also engage in sense-giving after creating a new understanding of the co-opetitive relationship for themselves. Thus, certain experiences, languages and events are regarded as more meaningful for actors than others (Mills et al., 2010). This points to the intersubjective nature of the sensemaking process which may provide different outcomes for different individuals due to the influencing, albeit,

restrictive nature of the formative contexts that determine the cues that actors extract, the texts and narratives which actors consider as plausible and the nature of actor enactments (Unger, 1987; Mills et al., 2010).

Outside this study, the bulk of studies examining power within co-opetitive relationships have tended to neglect the social fabric in which they are embedded. For example, Bouncken, Friedrich, Ritala and Kraus (2020) describe power as a firm's capability to contribute higher value in co-opetitive relationships. In their arguments, the expert power of a partner was one of three factors that could negatively moderate the relationships between co-opetition and the value-creation/capture equilibrium within New Product Development alliances. Akpinar and Vincze (2016)'s case study on the dyadic co-opetitive relationship between Volkswagen and Porsche between 2001 until 2012, Bengtsson and Johansson (2014)'s study on dyadic co-opetition between small and large firms, all examine the concept of power from a firm-level. In all these studies, power has been theorized from a firm-level through the resource dependence perspective. Here, results have suggested that bargaining power in co-opetitive relationships is determined by the level and quality of an actor's technological and organizational capabilities/resources which it exploits to gain greater advantage. Yet, their findings do not account for the socio-historical background of power which structures and shapes co-opetitive interactions.

Thus, there is an absence of an empirical account of the subjective or inter-subjective processes of sensemaking and sense-giving. In other words, the social construct of power in co-opetitive relationships is hardly a relic of the present but is necessarily shaped by past socio-historical experiences.

Overall, the editing mechanism emphasizes the role of institutions as prerequisites of filtering between initial enactment (agency) and reasoning within social negotiations (sense giving). To illustrate this, Weick's (1995) asserts that *'sense may be in the eye of the beholder, but beholders vote and the*

majority rules.' Thus, while individual enactments are necessary, they are not sufficient for institutionalizing environments. Indeed, Weick & Daft (1983) also assert that *'it is only by testing our interpretations back on the environment that we can know if they are reasonable.'*

Essentially, while actions may be prompted by practical concerns and social cues, they may be simultaneously regulated through feedback loops within the situational context which makes some enactments more plausible than others (Weber & Glynn, 2006). In this vein, the idea of institutions as 'cognitive constraints' on sensemaking processes only manifests at this end of the evaluation of action (Weber & Glynn, 2006). The editing mechanism discussed here, therefore draws on the duality of cognitive process of sensemaking where action and meaning are contextually moderated (Rousseau, 1995; Weber & Glynn, 2006). Yet, this has been hardly explored within research exploring the role of institutions in sensemaking processes (Weber & Glynn, 2006).

Institutions as 'triggers' of Sensemaking Processes

In Weick's (1995) conceptualization of sensemaking, institutions are described as providing the '*occasion'* for sensemaking to occur. What this means, is that institutions provide a dynamic context which requires continuous attention, and simultaneously creates contradictions which require sensemaking (Weber & Glynn, 2006). In this vein, institutions are said to trigger sensemaking. Bourdieu's (1984) provides a particularly apt description of this by referring to the dynamic (rather than static) nature of symbolic distinctions of social hierarchies and status. In this description, Bourdieu (1984) suggests that cultural taste and lifestyle preferences which were once considered 'high' for example, may become irrelevant overtime within an evolving context.

In an effort to stabilize institutionalized roles and maintain distinctiveness from the masses, therefore, higher status actors or elites require ongoing sensemaking to deal with the changes and associated ambiguities (Weber & Glynn, 2006). This perspective also hints on Weber & Glynn's (2006) categories of *typified identities* (i.e., who am I), *frames* (i.e., what is going on), and *expectations* (i.e., how am I expected to act). Through these categories, the authors refer to the contradictions experienced

by actors due to the selective nature of typified identities and frames providing an incomplete framework for understanding actor and situation-specific experiences (Weber & Glynn, 2006). This particularly highlights the central role of identity in the construction of a frame that guides plausibility of action. Such plausibility may, according to Bourdieu (1984), be drawn from the habits, tastes, and social disposition of actors. Specifically, actors may search for conformity to institutionalized identities which specify what frames and expectations are plausible within a situational context (Weber & Glynn, 2006).

 To further understand this, I refer to Bourdieu's (1985) concept of class system through his work on Habitus, Capital, and Distinction. Accordingly, he identifies the 'habitus' as responsible for the creation and shaping of status differences and meanings which in turn, shapes the habitus and which manifests as variations in the lifestyles or social status of individuals. Specifically, these variations in lifestyles of individuals are characterised by differences in accumulation of economic, social, and cultural capital, which create a symbolic boundary between individuals occupying different positions within a class structure in an institutional context.

With this understanding of the importance of identity in sensemaking process, it became increasingly necessary to examine the socio-historic context and how it shapes the research questions and objectives. Considering that this research project is positioned within a post-colonial location like Nigeria, drawing insights from post-colonial theories could enable deeper understanding of the spill-over of a colonial history on sensemaking of co-opetition within entrepreneurial networks. Post colonialism generally refers to the period of independence of Ex-colonial empires from colonial rule. Theoretically, post colonialism captures several theoretical perspectives which seek to explain the complex nature of power relations existing between the coloniser and the colonised (Prakash, 1992; Bhabha, 1994).

Several contributions to the post-colonial theoretical perspectives have been made by authors such as Said (1978; 2000); Bhabha, (1994), Spivak (1994) and Fanon (Fanon, 1968; 1984) however Fanon's (1952; 1967) concept of Othering provided a particularly useful lens in which to capture the construct of identity within the context of fashion entrepreneurs in Nigeria and how this may shape sensemaking of co-opetition. Within this perspective, Fanon argues that even after colonisation, colonial subjects are still colonised internally and psychologically. In other words, while the colonised may be liberated from colonialism, they are not necessarily free.

Fanon particularly refers to the colonised bourgeoise who replaced colonial rule and substituted it with their own forms of coercion, surveillance, and dominance by adopting the coloniser's vocabulary of power and 'master-slave' narrative (Rizvi et al., 2006). Through this, the elite group *'other'* their fellow colonised through the internalised prejudices of the coloniser (Fanon, 1952), who in turn, continue to feel marginalised and stigmatised. Accordingly, Fanon refers to this group of elites as having **'…black skin, white mask.'**

In terms of how this relates to the core question of my thesis, I refer to Weber & Glynn's (2006) summation that while actors within a specific field may rely on situational contextual cues, access to these cues may not be distributed randomly at the concrete institutional level. In other words, some cues may be more relied upon than others depending on the identities, frames, and social distribution of actors within the larger field (Weber & Glynn, 2006). This is because institutions do not only connect identities, frames, and expectations (actions) in sensemaking processes but also influence the distribution of actors, identities, frames, and cues within the broader institutional environment (Weber & Glynn, 2006).

To illustrate this, I draw from my experience as a fashion designer in Nigeria where two groups of fashion designers operated in the formal and informal sector respectively. Actors in the formal sector can be described as a social group of fashion entrepreneurs who identify as an 'elite group due to

having attained financial affluence and are more able to mobilize social, cultural, and economic capital to secure access to unique, exclusive educational experience (Bourdieu, 1980). Boyd (1973) provides a framework for understanding the characteristics this group of elites: high occupational status, minority status, a distinctive lifestyle, group consciousness/openness, exclusiveness, functional capability/responsibility, moral responsibility, and power of varying degree. In contrast, actors in the informal sector represent the non-elite group who's co-opetitive interactions are managed and coordinated by traditional/indigenous institutions.

Although Bourdieu (1984) asserts that the acquisition of elite status is not simply defined by economic capital alone, the combination of social, cultural and symbolic capitals (e.g high educational status, high occupational positions) provided entrepreneurs in the formal sector with higher status and exclusivity, functional ability, a distinctive lifestyle and power to varying degrees (Body, 1973) which made them more superior to actors in the informal sector. Thus, they attempt to re-create their identities and adorn the *'white masks'* of their colonisers (Fanon, 1972), by looking down on actors in the informal sector.

These perceptions are embodiments of coloniality and colonialism which makes it imperative to apply insights from post-colonial theory to fulfil the research objectives of this study. Taking the post-colonial context into consideration allows for situating the analysis of empirical data within the broader co-opetition context. These theoretical perspectives are even more relevant for discussions centred on the fashion industry which is ironically a major source of the creation of subaltern subjectivities. Fashion consumers within a post-colonialist setting like Nigeria attempt to mask their third world subjectivities by adopting Western fashion choices to disguise themselves and pass the test of social acceptability. Castle (1986) captures this fact through his statement:

> *"Clothing has always been the primary trope of deceitfulness of the material world: a*
>
> *mutable, shimmering tissue that veils the truth from human eyes".*

Thus, in line with the social constructionist roots of this thesis, sensemaking requires an exploration of remote historical and institutional legacies which influence interactions within a situational context or field (Weber & Glynn, 2006). The triggering role of institutions therefore manifests as institutionalized expectations which may be contradictory between institutions (Weber & Glynn, 2006). In this vein, the juxtaposition of two opposing logics of interactions (cooperation and competition) suggests two different expectations of actions. Such institutionalized expectations of actions may create institutional gaps and loss of meaning (Weber & Glynn, 2006) through ambiguity (i.e requiring different co-opetition mindsets or identities) or inadequacy (i.e providing unclear guidelines for balancing the opposing logics of cooperation and competition). Consequently, increased sensemaking activity is required to restore meaning (Weber & Glynn, 2006).

3.6 Discourse in Sensemaking Processes

The constructions of sensemaking processes discussed in the preceding sections have privileged 'action' at the expense of 'discourse.' Yet, as Jorgensen, Jordan & Mitterhofer (2012) note, the sensemaking of events, actions, and objects rely on an interpretive scheme which occurs either as a routinized, day-to-day activity or in searching for plausible responses to due to unusual events such as organizational change (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). This highlights the discursive nature of sensemaking, which Weick et al., (2005) suggest, is largely an issue of *'language, talk, and communication.'* Thus, as Hardy (2005) notes, the social construction of inter-organizational phenomena (e.g., relationships), cannot be fully addressed by this dominant sensemaking approach. Rather, the interpretive nature of sensemaking calls for an understanding of the communicative construction of meaning within inter-organizational contexts (Jorgensen, Jordan, Mitterhofer, 2012).

This turn in organisation studies is in line with the famous question asked by Weick (1995) *'how can I know what I think until I see what I say?'* which has inspired research that investigates the discursive elements of sensemaking. Some studies have conceptualised discourse as within the confines of institutions and described institutionalized sensemaking processes as a *'textual affair,'* (Munir &

Phillips, 2005). Others like Taylor & Van Every (2000) have revealed that *'sensemaking involves turning circumstances into a situation which is comprehended explicitly in words.'* The fundamental principle is that discourse- through language, narrations, and stories- is a fundamental part of the social processes within organizations, institutions and societies which help us to make sense of practices within them (Fairclough, 2015; Browne et al., 2015).

As the sensemaking perspective suggests that actors develop an understanding of their reality by drawing from past experiences retrospectively, through which they adopt appropriate or plausible forms of responses to a given situation, language is identified as a key resource for naming events and influencing and understanding the actions of organizational actors, which is an ongoing process (Taylor and Robichaud, 2004). Thus, text is a necessary resource for the construction of conversation (Taylor & Robichaud, 2004) actors may construct convergent frames to make sense of collaborations within inter-organizational relationships (Hardy, 2005), there is also the possibility that organizational actors may construct divergent frames of these events (Jorgensen et al., 2012). For instance, study by Piekkari, Vaara, Tienari, & Santti (2005) revealed how the adoption of a common corporate language within a cross-border merger created disintegration rather than integration, based on an implicit symbolic language on the division of power between both parties. This perspective and the fundamental role of *'talk'* has also found way into co-opetition research. For instance, Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock (2018) revealed that the sense of co-opetition between top managers in inter-organizational meeting, differed greatly from the sense produced within intra-organizational between top, low level, and other employees. In another study, Lundgren-henriksson and Kock (2016b) illustrate the importance of communication and language as influencing factors of differing network frames and interpretations of co-opetition.

In their analysis of three media firms in Finland, they suggest that activities such as the expression of opinions, gossips, rumours and defense of personal opinions, influence the ways in which others make sense of an event (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis, 2005; Lundgren-Henriksson and Kock,

2016b). To understand sensemaking processes, therefore, it is important to also consider the influencing role of language as an institutional factor which shapes sensemaking processes.

3.7 Developing the Conceptual Framework: The Contextualized Sensemaking Approach

The conceptual framework adopted in this study, describes a contextualized sensemaking approach. This term helps to illuminate how sensemaking may be shaped by institutional factors which became clear during the collection of data for this study.

Accordingly, this study adopts a multidisciplinary approach by exploring the sensemaking of co-opetition within a rich and nascent industry and economic context. Acknowledging the multidisciplinary approach of co-opetition could potentially provide a more holistic and richer picture of the dynamic nature of co-opetition which has been identified as needing further investigation (Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016; Dahl, 2014, 2016). Following on from discussions in this chapter which identifies distinctive aspects of institutions and the institutional context as collectively driving the sensemaking process of co-opetition within SME relationships, the table below maps common themes which have influenced the development of research questions useful towards the development of a conceptual framework:

TABLE 3.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND CONCEPTUAL THEMES

No	Research Questions	Research Objectives	Conceptual Theme	Theoretical Perspectives	Indicative Literature
RQ1	How do institutions shape sensemaking of entrepreneurial co-opetition networks in Post-Colonial Nigeria's fashion industry?	To consider what factors within the institutional environment shape sensemaking processes of co-opetition within fashion-based entrepreneurial networks in Nigeria	Drivers and Processes of Co-Opetition	Institutional theory *(Scott, 1995; 2005).* Distinctions *(Bourdieu, 1984)* Post-colonialism *(e.g., Fanon,1991)*	Institutions may determine nature of co-opetition as emergent, induced, deliberate, or plural *(Mariani, 2007; Monticelli, 2019; 2021; Darbi & Knott, 2021).* Institutions as the feedstock for sensemaking *(e.g., Weick, 1995; Weber & Glynn, 2006).* Macro factors need to be examined in tandem with micro factors *(e.g., Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016; Klimas et al., 2021).* The institutional context drives sensemaking processes of co-opetition *(e.g., Pattinson et al., 2018).*
RQ2	What are the outcomes of sensemaking processes on the construction of entrepreneurial co-opetition network mindsets within the post-colonial Nigerian fashion industry?	To assess the outcomes of sensemaking processes on the construction of co-opetition network mindsets among fashion entrepreneurs in Nigeria	Processes and Outcome of Co-Opetition	sensemaking theory *(Weick, 1995)*	Co-opetition is cognitively experienced on an individual level *(Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016a; 2016b; Pattinson et al., 2018; Lundgren-Henriksson & Tidstrom, 2021)* The 'owner/manager' structure of entrepreneurial firms suggests individual, rather than firm-level interpretation and experiencing of co-opetition *(McGrath et al., 2019).* Co-opetition outcomes may manifest as economic and non-economic (Darbi & Knott, 2022)

Source: Author's compilation

Another important aspect of developing a conceptual framework, is to present a graphical summary of the key constructs and their interrelationships within the frame of each research question. Shane and Venkataraman (2003) specifically emphasize the value of a conceptual framework to predict and explain the empirical domain of the research questions which lack conceptual clarity. Specifically, this would require the construction of a unified framework that provides both narrative explanations and graphical illustration of key interlinked constructs (Miles & Huberman,1994).

Conceptual frameworks are key constructs within research studies that provide both narrative and graphic explanation of key research phenomena (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It reflects the thinking of the research process (Ravich & Carl, 2016) and represents a system of concepts, theories, beliefs, and expectations which form an integral part of the research study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The underlying importance of the conceptual framework is its ability to present a coherent and logical explanation and/or illustration of the assumptions and ideas of the research study (Adom et al., 2018).

Most management research rely on Miles and Huberman's (1994) approach to building a conceptual framework for consolidation of research knowledge. While this approach has proved useful, it adopts a causal approach to social reality by testing research phenomenon against reality (Poole & Van de Ven, 1989).

Further, it defines what research questions are most important, defines how answers can be achieved, and predicts research outcomes (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Miles et al., 2014). In contrast, the multidisciplinary nature of social reality suggests that a qualitative approach is useful because it provides 'soft' interpretations of reality, rather than 'hard facts' (Levering, 2002). In this vein, this thesis aligns with Jabareen's (2009) definition of a conceptual framework as a *'network or plan of linked concepts that together, provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon.'*

Admittedly, the development of a conceptual framework based on multidisciplinary literature as used in this thesis, describes a process of theorization, which involves the grouping or categorization of

similar data according to themes. In this thesis, the distinct theories are drawn from the sensemaking, institutional, and post-colonial perspectives which I now refer to as the *'contextualized sensemaking'* approach. The core argument of this theoretical approach is that co-opetition is a cognitive process influenced by institutional and institutional factors, from which actors draw their understanding and acceptance of plausibility (Weber & Glynn, 2006). They describe how socially constructed institutional and historical structures provide meaning to the entrepreneur's understanding of reality.

In this vein, the contextualized sensemaking approach presuppose a richer understanding of the dynamics of entrepreneurial co-opetitive behavior located within a developing economy with a pre-colonial history. Ultimately, the integration of these theories has the potential to fill existing theoretical gaps such as the sensemaking theory's neglect of the larger social, historical, and institutional context which drive sensemaking processes (Weber & Glynn, 2006). Specifically, and as argued in this chapter, sensemaking is not simply the source material for institutionalization. Adopting this perspective implies an exaggeration of the role of agency in sensemaking (Weick, Sutcliffe, Obstfeld, 2005). Rather, organizational actors are socialized into 'expected sensemaking activities' (Weick et al., 2005) whereby response is shaped by the regulatory, normative, and cultural-cognitive forces which are derived from and enforced by powerful actors within the broader situational and concrete contexts (Weick et al., 2005; Weber & Glynn, 2006).

As such, this thesis views the neo-institutional framework by Scott (1995) as particularly relevant because it provides a holistic model for understanding the interconnections between micro and macro-level aspects of co-opetition. It is important to note here, that there are several theoretical perspectives which address the role of context in sensemaking processes. A notable example is Gioia & Thomas's (1996) and Gioia et al's (1994) inquiry of sensemaking and sense-giving during strategic change within an organization. Nonetheless, the similarity of the sensemaking theory and Scott's (1995) institutional theory which both pay attention to the connections between meaning and action (Weber & Glynn,

2006) makes the integration of both theoretical perspectives particularly essential to answer the overarching research question in this thesis.
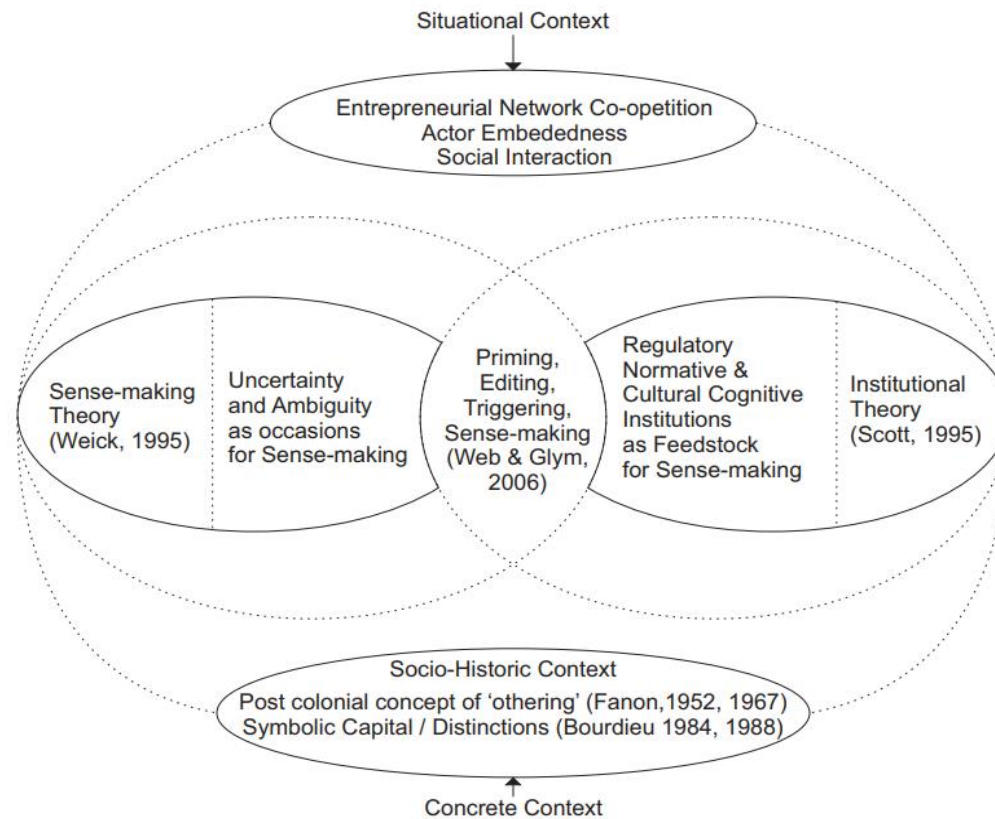
Source: Author's Illustration

3.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter presents a summary and graphical illutsration of the key constructs to be studied. Of particular interest to this study is the multidimensional nature of co-opetition in entrepreneurial network relationships. The sensemaking theory provides a useful lens to explore how actos respond to co-opetition within network relationships. Specifically, sensemaking is discussed in this chapter as involving iterative processes of noticing and bracketing co-opetitive interactions which is marked by convergent and divergent competitive and cooperative expectations and experiences, interpreting and evaluating cues in co-opetitive interactions by constructing co-opetition mindsets or frames, and finally enacting their understanding or perception of co-opetition (Weick, 1995; 2005).

This process is often intersubjective; occuring on an individual level as the sensemaker cognitively extracts divergent cues from their institutional environment (e.g. Weber & Glynn, 2006) and evaluates these retrospectively (Weick et al., 2005). Such inter-subjective sensemaking is also shaped by social interactions at a macro environmental level where institutional actors as sense givers prime, edit, or trigger sensemaking or meaning construction processes (Weber & Glynn, 2006).

Such sensegiving could be fragmented, minimal, or highly systemmatic (Maitlis, 2005). Through the integration of multilevel theories and levels of analysis (sensemaking and institutions) thereofore, a more indepth view of the role of the institutional context is presented.

The interpretive processes of sensemaking is also addressed through the concept of sensegiving (Lundgren-Henriksson and Kock, 2016). Here, sensegiving is defined as intentional or unintentional actions and utterances of powerful network actors, which influence the ways in which other network actors view co-opetition as a strategy. These are reflected in the language and power structures that characterise SME network co-opetition. For instance, the discursive power of certain actor(s) in

determining how the combination of cooperation and competition (i.e co-opetition) in dyadic and network relationships should be made sense of, influence what actors regard as plausible. Thus, sensemaking and sense-giving take place iteratively at an individual and collective level (Lundgren-Henriksson and Kock, 2016). This understanding increases the experiential and heuristic nature of sensemaking and espouses the notion that the socia-historic context may also shape the ways in which network actors make sense of co-opetition.

This chapter also provides a graphical illustration of the key arguments in this research, through a conceptual framework. Conceptual frameworks also embody philosophical assumptions about reality such as ontology, epistemology, and methodology. In line with the qualitative nature of this study, the conceptual framework follows an iterative but abductive process to provide a context-based, process-oriented description and explanation of the sensemaking of co-opetition, rather than an objective or static description. As such, the conceptual framework in this study does not aim to be all encompassing. Rather, it represents a dynamic and multidisciplinary phenomenon that can be revised according to new insights from the data and literature accordingly. The dominant perspectives presented in the conceptual framework will also enable the selection of an appropriate methodology, data collection, and analysis techniques, which are discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Methodology
Qualitative Case Study

4.1 Introduction

In this thesis, Chapter 1 outlines the key research objectives and questions to research the sensemaking of entrepreneurial co-opetition in fashion-based entrepreneurial networks in Nigeria. In chapter 2, the foundations for understanding co-opetition in entrepreneurial networks has been provided.

Chapter 3 provides an outline of the conceptual approach which draws heavily from the theoretical perspectives of neo-institutionalism and sensemaking through Weber & Glynn's (2006) integrated framework. Each chapter has therefore been crucial in shaping the methodological position of this thesis. Specifically, through the three chapters above, there appears to be less knowledge on the role of contextual factors such as the impact of the colonial history of Nigeria on institutional structures which shape sensemaking processes.

Building on this perspective, this chapter presents an overview of the research methodological positioning adopted in this study. It also explains why a qualitative methodology is suitable for uncovering the interpretive process of sensemaking within a contextually driven environment such as Nigeria. Methodology refers to the process and strategic choices of acquiring knowledge of the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). From an objectivist standpoint, methodological strategies focus on the collection of standardized data collection techniques that enable an objective understanding of the research phenomenon through developing hypotheses, measuring concepts, identifying relationships, and accepting or falsifying the outlined hypotheses (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Guba & Lincoln, 1998). In contrast to this, methodological strategies from a subjectivist standpoint highlight the relativistic nature of the social world by focusing on the subjective experiences of individuals and how they interpret the world (Burrell & Morgan, 1979).

Selecting a suitable methodology requires a logical examination of the entire research process, i.e, a consideration of the substantive theory, research design, data collection, data analysis processes (Townsend1994), and the researcher's philosophical assumption (Creswell, 2009; Blumberg et al., 2014). Tracey & Glidden-Tracey (1999) capture this crucial argument by suggesting that researchers move away from only asking questions such as *"How should I test this/what measure should I use,"* to asking questions such as *"what do I wish to be able to say?"* In asking myself *'What do I wish to be able to say'* through my research questions, I find Creswell's (2009) framework as a useful starting point to illustrate my underlying philosophical assumptions, the strategy of inquiry or methodology, and the specific methods or procedures adopted.

In addition to this, I draw on Tracey & Glidden-Tracey's (1999) and Piekkari et al's (2011) emphasis on the role of theory in research processes. Drawing on the above literature would enable me to achieve logical consistency across all components of the research (Townsend, 1994) which has been identified as a much need gap to be filled in co-opetition research (Gnyawali & Song, 2016). These components are discussed in the following sections:

4.2 Social Constructionism

This study is grounded by a relativist ontology and a social constructionist epistemology. Ontology generally refers to perceptions and beliefs about the nature of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). The role of ontology is to question what is there in the world, such as the relationships that exist between people and the social world (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Thus, arguments on the ontological positioning of any research focuses on the phenomena which is being investigated (Saunders et al., 2016; Shane and Venkataraman, 2000; Blumberg et al., 2014).

TABLE 4.1 ONTOLOGICAL POSITIONS IN NATURAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

Ontological Position	Description	Perception of Truth	Perception of Facts
Realism	Perceives the world as real and existing independently of perceptions. Science based on observation of real phenomena. Observable behaviour	Single truth exists.	Facts considered as hard facts which exist and can be revealed.
Internal Realism	Perceives the world as real and independent of human mind. Impossible to observe the real world directly because understanding of its structures is a function of the human mind. Discovery of scientific laws are perceived as absolute truths.	Truth exists but is obscure.	Facts are concrete but cannot be accessed directly
Relativism	Scientific laws are created by humans embedded within a context. Truth is in the eye of the beholder.	Many truths exist.	Fact depends on viewpoint of the observer.
Nominalism	Perceives reality as created by humans and as such, reality does not exist independently of human perception.	There is no truth	Facts are all human creations

Source: Easterby-Smith et al., (2021).

The diagram above presents a continuum of four different ontological assumptions within natural and social sciences. Within natural science, main ontological debates are often centred on realism and relativism (Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe, & Valizade, 2021). Reality, according to the realist ontology, views the world as concrete and external and as such, existing independently of individual interpretations and action (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Within the realist ontology, such reality can be accessed through observations that directly correspond to the phenomena being investigated (Easterby-Smith & Jackson, 2015). This core assumption corresponds to the internal realism ontology where reality is viewed as a single, absolute entity. Differences however lie in the fact that the internal reality ontology argues that reality cannot be directly accessed but requires collection of indirect evidence which help to accentuate what is going on within fundamental physical processes (Easterby-Smith M. T., 2015). Within natural sciences, epistemology grounded by realist/internal realism ontologies focus on providing explanations or predictions of the studied

phenomenon by identifying causal relationships and regularities between elements (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). This perspective underscores the positivist epistemology which in turn, tends to produce quantitative research methodologies and adopts numerical data collection methods and procedures (Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe, & Valizade, 2021).

Within social sciences, however, the core debate centres around relativism, and nominalism. According to the table above, relativism suggests that no single reality can be discovered. Rather several perspectives of reality exist, which are dependent upon the cultural, historical context (Cunliffe A. , 2011). Finally, the nominalist ontology perceives reality as dependent upon the meanings and purposes which actors attach to events. In highlighting this point, authors like Burrell (1988) argues that no single truth exists. Rather, social reality is merely a construction of different versions of truth through language and discourse (Cunliffe, 2001).

A second important aspect is an understanding of the epistemology. Epistemology generally refers to the theory of knowledge. It deals with how the researcher acquires knowledge about the nature of the social world, and how this knowledge is communicated to others (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Saunders et al., 2016). In other words, epistemology constitutes the relationship between the *'knower'* and the *'known'* (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). The underlying epistemology of this study is social constructionism which argues that the social world can only be understood by considering the context of actors and their individual interpretations of the research phenomenon (Burrell &Morgan, 1979). Unlike the positivist epistemology, constructionist epistemologies suggest a qualitative research methodology, grounded by qualitative data collection methods and procedures (Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe, & Valizade, 2021). Within this tradition, therefore, the researcher occupies a *participant* stance in the knowledge construction process (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), as against the distant, '*objective-observer'* stance of the researcher with a positivist epistemology. Further, as against the context-free focus of the positivist epistemology, the constructionist

epistemology acknowledges the prevalence of multiple truths and interpretations of reality (or research data) which are all equally meaningful (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

In selecting an appropriate philosophical stance for this research study, I reflect on the above distinctions between a positivist and constructionist/interpretivist epistemology, and underlying ontologies. Within the positivist epistemology, reality exists and is measured objectively, rather than reflexively (Easterby-Smith, 2015; Crotty, 1998). A researcher with an objective (realist/internal reality) ontology therefore sets out to identify existing theory from which a set of hypotheses are developed and tested to determine generalizability of findings.

As such, aspects of a research phenomenon which do not fit the existing hypothesis are disregarded (Bloomberg, 2014). Authors like Guba & Lincoln (1994) however highlight limitations of the objectivist/positivist tradition. These include *'context stripping'* through exclusion of other variables which may exist within the context and could potentially alter findings. Secondly, there is a potential for reduced relevance of meaning and purpose in objective/positivist research due to a lack of reference to human behaviour. In aligning with these criticisms, I refer to the importance of the institutional context in my research which has been identified as important indicators for understanding co-opetition (Darbi & Knott, 2021).

Additionally, since the core research question of this thesis alludes to the sensemaking of co-opetition, it implies an examination of individual level, cognitive processes which unlike physical objects, cannot be understood without reference to meanings attached to it by the human actors involved (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Cunliffe, 2008; 2011; Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016a; 2016b; Pattinson et al., 2018). In this vein, a subjective (relativist/nominalist) ontology is most suitable because it views the nature of reality as not separate from human beings but is constructed through a continuous and interwoven process of making meanings, shaping, and being shaped by each other's everyday interactions (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Cunliffe, 2008).

In other words, reality according to the subjective standpoint is an output of social and cognitive processes which, according to Eriksson & Kovalainen, (2008), changes overtime. The table below provides a summary of corresponding epistemological, methodological, and data collection approaches which guide the different ontological positions discussed:

TABLE 4.2 PHILOSOPHICAL POSITIONS AND CORRESPONDING METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

Ontology	Epistemology	Methodology	Methods and Techniques
Realism	Strong Positivism	Discovery Hypothesis Experiments	**Data Types**: Numbers and facts **Analysis/Interpretation:** Verification, falsification **Outcome**: Confirmation of theory
Internal Realism	Positivism	Exposure Propositions Large surveys Multi-cases	**Data Types:** Mainly numbers (with some words) **Analysis/Interpretation:** Correlation and regression **Outcome**: Theory-testing and generation
Relativism	Constructionism	Convergence Questions Cases and Surveys	**Data Types:** Mainly words (with some numbers) **Analysis/Interpretation:** Triangulation and comparison **Outcome**: Theory generation
Nominalism	Strong Constructionism	Critiques Inventions Engagement Reflexivity	**Data Types:** Discourse and experiences **Analysis/Interpretation:** Sensemaking; understanding. **Outcome**: New insights and actions

Source: Easterby-Smith et al (2021).

Although it is not the goal of this chapter to review all existing philosophical/methodological positions, it is important to state that several philosophical positions may be useful for research grounded within the interpretivist tradition, such as this. However, the aim of this chapter is to clearly justify why social constructionism is crucial to answering the research questions which is to understand entrepreneurial sensemaking processes of co-opetition network. Social Constructionism in management and organizational studies is traced to the Berger and Luckmann's (1966) book *'The Social Construction of Reality*,' where the authors drew from prevailing perspectives on the sociology of knowledge to analyze the social construction of reality. Accordingly, their central argument stems from the view that reality is socially constructed, and meaning is derived from individuals in daily interactions with others

(Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe, & Valizade, 2021). This suggests that there are several versions of reality, as opposed to the positivist view of a single reality.

It is noteworthy that although the positivist/objectivist and social constructionist/subjectivist positions are often presented as stereotyped traditions, there are several philosophical and methodological positions associated with each position. To clearly justify a philosophical position, therefore, it is necessary to explore the dimension of research engagement or detachment from the research context, as illustrated by different philosophical positions. In this vein Easterby-Smith et al (2021) identify a range of philosophical positions which position the researcher as detached or engaged with the research context. Specifically, the authors highlight the combination of both positivist and constructionist traditions which result in mixed methodologies as a useful indicator to assess researcher engagement and/or detachment (Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe, & Valizade, 2021).

Some examples of possible alternatives to social constructionism include critical realism, which, like the constructionist approach, emphasizes the role of agency and assumes that human actions are determined by their social context. Yet, the critical realist perspective differs in its assumptions of reality as a single, entity characterized by multiple interpretations of it (Bhaskar, 1989; 1998). In other words, the critical realist may disregard some interpretations of participants as a distorted perception of reality which is problematic from a sensemaking perspective because it suggests that there is a single privileged voice which dictates our understanding of the world. Rather, social constructionism assumes that it is only through understanding and analyzing the multiple constructions of reality that socially and politically sensitive accounts can be produced (Newton, Deetz, & Reed, 2011).

Another example points to the hermeneutics tradition which provides a means of interpreting textual material (Ricouer, 1981; Gadamer, 1989). According to this tradition, context, and culture within with textual materials are sourced, are crucial to gaining understanding. This approach is mostly used in management studies based on corporate documents such as analyzing annual reports, for instance.

Since my research aims to uncover cognitive processes of participants rather than written texts, this approach would not suffice. Secondly, the hermeneutics approach can be time consuming because it requires separate analysis of text references in each report in relation to the socio-economic, and cultural context (Gadamer, 1989). Within the interpretivist traditions to which social constructionism belongs (Habermas, 1970), other interpretivist methods exist such as grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) provides two contrasting views of reality.

Within the Glaserian approach, reality is assumed to be objective and external, and the researcher is required to rely on theoretical sensitivity in investigating the research phenomenon without preconceived theories or research questions (Glaser, Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis: Emergence vs. Forcing, 1992). In other words, theories emerge strictly from the data. This approach largely resonates with the objectivist paradigm (Chamaz, 2000)and critical realism approach (Su, 2018) because the researcher acts as a neutral observer which is indicative of detachment from the researched. In contrast, the Straussian approach allows the guide of pre-defined research questions and theories and adopts an abductive reasoning to continually validate findings until the researcher arrives at a most plausible interpretation of the observed data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

In other words, data and theoretical analysis are viewed as an interconnected activity within this stream, which has been related to the relativist, constructivist positions (Su, 2018). Nonetheless, adopting this philosophical position would change the focus of the study which is to examine entrepreneurial cognition and sensemaking processes of co-opetition network. This requires an approach that would focus on the voices of interviewees and shared meanings of co-opetition network relationships. Using a grounded theory would therefore generate different findings which would not align with the research questions.

Post Structural theory presents another useful lens through which sensemaking can be understood. Specifically, post structuralism addresses the relationship between agency and social action. Although

sharing similarities with structuration theory (Giddens, 1984), Post structuralism deviates from a focus on normality of structures and models within structuration approaches to a focus on difference, disorder, and change (Derrida, 1967; 1988; Foucault, 1983; Williams, 2005). Specifically, post structural theory highlights notions such as power, agency, and subjectivity (Benozzo, 2018). Although similar to social constructionism in holding a perception of the world as socially constructed, the post-structuralist views meaning as generated through differences rather than through similarities.

This presents a problem in examining sensemaking processes of entrepreneurial network actors which are theorized to be co-constructed through social interaction. Specifically, actors extract cues within their environment in order to ascertain plausible actions (Weick, 1995). This search for plausibility implies some level of normativity which the post structuralist argues against. Consequently, the social constructionist philosophical stance seems most suitable to answering my research questions which are: *(1) How do entrepreneurs cognitively experience and construct co-opetition mindsets in formal and informal fashion-based networks in Nigeria, and (2) How do institutions drive sensemaking processes of co-opetition in formal and informal fashion-based networks in Nigeria?*

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to gain in depth understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of network co-opetition by examining micro level (sensemaking) and macro-level (institutions) factors which shape entrepreneurial co-opetition networks (Sanou et al., 2016). In Chapter Three, this thesis has discussed the paucity of research adopting a multi-level perspective in researching co-opetition. As such, Chapter Three addresses the need for theoretical integration of the sensemaking and institutional theoretical perspectives (e.g., Weber & Glyn, 2006) to clearly illustrate the interlinkages between micro and macro level factors on co-opetition sensemaking.

Although there is no single definition of social constructionism, the central argument is that meaning is derived from socially constructed perceptions. Social constructionism has been described as an interpretive method (Habermas, 1970) which is underpinned by three basic principles; (1) the social

context as constructed and given meaning subjectively; (2) The researcher as a part of what is observed; (3) the research study as driven by interests (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Interpretivists therefore share the view that aspects of the social world should be described through a detailed account of specific social relationships or settings (Habermas, 1970).

A more comprehensive overview of social constructionist assumptions is provided by Burr (1995; 2015). These assumptions are grounded upon a critical, rather than taken-for-granted view of reality, the role of history and culture, knowledge creation as a social process, and the prevalence of power dynamics in knowledge creation. These core assumptions underpinning the social constructionist philosophy align with the theoretical framework design of my thesis which stresses that to understand sensemaking processes of entrepreneurial co-opetition networks in the Nigerian fashion industry, it is important to consider the specificities and diverseness of institutional environments which goes beyond examining institutions and culture, but also acknowledges the role of social relations, history, power, culture, institutions, and agency in sensemaking processes.

In this vein, this thesis focus on the network level of co-opetition interactions acknowledges the social process of knowledge creation, whereby individuals are argued to construct their own reality through daily interactions. Thus, social interactions are a precondition for thought and as such, vital within the social constructionist tradition. In furtherance to this, the role of history on institutions and sensemaking is accounted for through Fanon's (1961; 1963; 20004) post-colonial ideas on othering and alienation which highlight the hybridity of the colonised 'elite' whose attempt to adorn the mask of the white man results in an identity crisis and exclusion of the 'other' who is viewed as subordinate.

In addition, Bourdieu's (1984; 1991) discussions on symbolic power and habitus highlight the dynamics of power relations which manifest in social disparities between the dominator and the oppressed. Altogether, these discussions provide a foundation for unearthing the institutional context within which the 'rules of the game' as institutions, are situated. This consideration of history helps to

avoid the adoption of an imperialist attitude of imposing one system of knowledge upon other cultures which according to Burr (2015), is akin to colonization by supplanting indigenous ways with Western ideas.

The social constructionist approach also acknowledges the importance of agency, power, and discourse (Burr, 2015; Easterby-Smith et al., 2021), which have been identified as core constructs of sensemaking and institutional processes (e.g., Oliver, 1991; Weber & Glynn, 2006; Browne et al., 2014). These constructs allude to Berger & Luckmann's (1966) argument that society is endowed with both an objective and subjective reality. As an objective reality, society assumes habitual and meaningful actions which have become typified and as such, institutionalized (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

As a subjective reality, individuals become members of a society through primary and secondary socialization, whereby roles and attitudes are internalized through a cognitive, emotional process (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In this vein, individuals are not simply controlled by their environment, but exist in an interactive relationship such that they are also capable of influencing their external environment simultaneously (Oliver, 1999; Battilana, 2006).

None the less, social actions have implications for what is acceptable or frowned upon for diverse cultures which determine the legitimacy of how people treat others. As a socially embedded research methodology, therefore, knowledge is viewed as culturally and historically specific within the social constructionism tradition. It does not subscribe to the qualitative/quantitative distinction of traditional empirical methods. Rather, it provides a more pluralist method of research inquiry that emphasizes value reflection (axiology), representation of multiple views and standpoints, legitimization of the subject's voice through the method adopted, collaborative participation between the researcher and the researchers, and finally, representational creativity that allows more populist forms of research representation (Gergen, 2004; Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). This is important especially within

collectivist societies with communal traditions where emphasis is placed on collaborative construction rather than Western individualism (Gergen, 2014).

4.2.1 Researcher Positionality

One of the key recommendations for researchers in qualitative international business research, as suggested (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Burr, 2015), is for researchers to become aware of their own and other's biases in research encounters. This suggests a consideration of the researcher's personal experiences, and positionality in terms of the researchers' engagement with the research context (Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe, & Valizade, 2021). Specifically, Locke (2015)'s asserts that researchers often encounter tensions in their interactions with the research context, especially within a multi-dimensional context where individuals are characterised by diverse socio-economic, and institutional backgrounds.

Tensions have the power to initiate researchers to rethink and readjust their stances in research contexts. Specifically, multi-dimensional contexts where researchers encounter participants with different socio-economic backgrounds is a particularly fertile ground for these discussions. This requires an understanding of how the researcher can be acutely tuned-in to the experiences and meaning systems of others—as an insider—and at the same time to be aware of how one's own biases and preconceptions may influence what the researcher is trying to understand. The broad term of research positionality thus captures the researcher's stance in relation to participants in a research inquiry.

The insider researcher, according to Merton (1972), describes an individual who shares the characteristics, identities, roles and experience under study with the research participants. Alternatively, the outsider describes a researcher who is culturally neutral and views the research context objectively; in what is commonly referred to as *'science of the other,'* to describe a researcher who has no intimate knowledge of the group being researched prior to their entry into the group (Griffith, 1998). General view is that researchers are either positioned as outsiders or insiders, and each

position is characterised by specific advantages and disadvantages (Merriam et al., 2001). As an insider, it is often assumed that the inside, tacit knowledge informs the research in producing a different knowledge than that available to the Outsider. yet, this position could also come with its own disadvantages.

For example, drawing from the experience of Adu-Ampong &Adams (2020), they found that their insider status meant that some information was withheld from them because it was assumed that they would instinctively know the answers to the issues which they were researching. Thus, although this shared status can be very beneficial as it affords access, entry, and a common ground from which to begin the research, it has the potential to impede the research process as it progresses. On the other hand, being an outsider suggests a detached, non-participatory role of the researcher to the researcher, and is often favoured by the positivist tradition which calls for objectivity of the researcher to generate quantifiable accounts of field experiences (Chavez, 2008).

FIGURE 4.1 RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

Insider
- Emic: Shared identities
- Research done in familiar context

Outsider
- culturally neutral
- science of the 'other'

In-betweener
- Total insider: multiple identities shared
- Partial insider: single identity shared
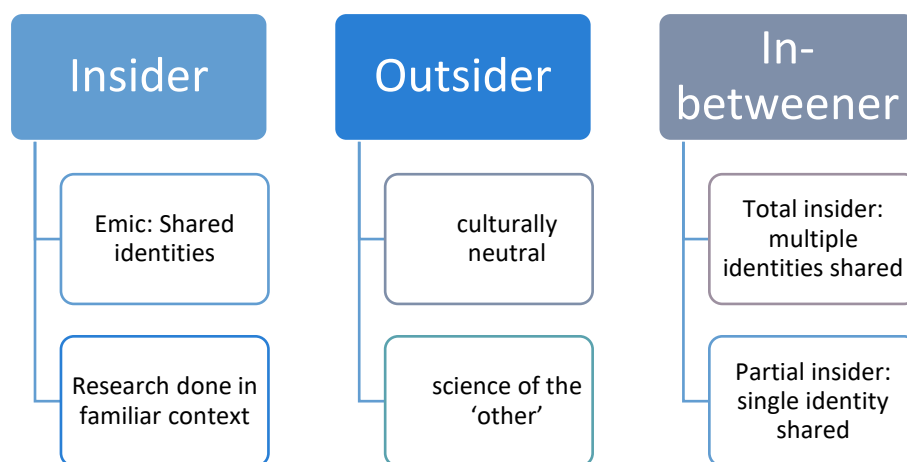
Adapted from Greene et al., (2014) and Chavez, (2008).

This linear conceptualisation of 'insider' and 'outsider' has been largely contested for being insufficient to explain the multi-dimensional and shifting interactions which field researchers constantly navigate (Lu & Hodge, 2019; Barnes, 2021). For instance, although there were common denominators between myself and my research participants which could situate me as an insider,

arguably, a total insider. (For example, shared experience of both worlds of fashion, membership in trade association, understanding of research participants culture, language and mannerisms, experience of both formal and informal sectors in the fashion industry), there also existed elements of detachment such as the fact that I was no longer a functional part of the industry which meant that when colleagues shared new, unique experiences, I could only stand more as an outsider looking in.

For example, I witnessed the high-handedness of the police force on a fashion designer whose equipment's had been seized and was being driven away by the police while the man hung onto the bonnet of the van. People around found this to be a norm even though I reacted very strongly against this and my complaints about the situation revealed aspects of my *'outsiderness'* which further detached me from the realities of my participants experiences. In reflecting on this dichotomy of research positionality, I adopted more of an 'in-between' position (Chavez, 2008), where I could simultaneously be a total insider and a partial insider. The figure below illustrates detached or engaged positions of the researcher based on ontological/epistemological interpretive positions:

FIGURE 4.2 INDICATIVE MAPPING OF POSITIVIST-CONSTRUCTIONIST CONTINUUM
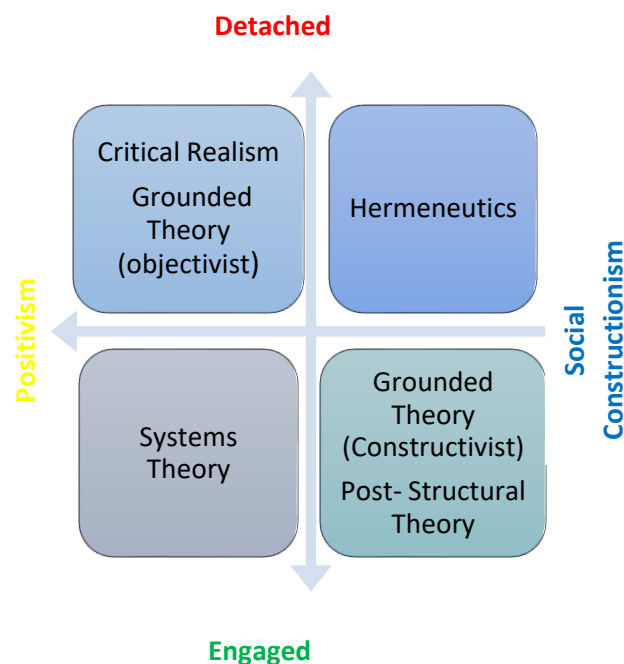
Source: Compiled from Cassell et al., (2018); Easterby-Smith et al (2021).

This reflection on researcher positionality not only reveals the inherent institutional and institutional factors that shape sensemaking in the Nigerian society but exposes the fact that within a social constructionist tradition, the researcher or observer cannot be separate from sensemaking processes. In other words, the theories which apply to the subjects of study, also apply to the researcher undertaking a study (Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe, & Valizade, 2021). From a social constructionist standpoint, therefore, my experience during field work contributed to shaping my perception of reality and vice versa.

As this experience influenced my decisions and behaviours while in the field, they illustrate the social constructionist ideology on the interrelation between knowledge construction and action. My initial experience in the field also brings to light the role of the institutional setting which influence how people individually and collectively make sense of any situation. These elements are one of the most promising elements for sensemaking of co-opetition in a multi-ethnic and highly institutionalized post-colonial environment like Nigeria, thus supporting the recent call for co-opetition-based studies that consider the socio-environmental and cultural contingencies of co-opetition (e.g., Pattinson et al., 2018; Volshenk, Ungerer, & Smit, 2016; Darbi & Knott, 2020). From this therefore, the social constructionist position would enable me to answer the question of *"what I wish to be able to say"* through my research questions.

As a way of acknowledging support of participants to my thesis and ensuring that my research reflected the reciprocity potential of research endeavours which I consider an important part of research that is hardly emphasized, I promised to facilitate a skills workshop for the group, which they gladly accepted. Accordingly, Manson (2004) recommends participatory research to ensure trust, respect, reciprocity, mutuality of interests, collective benefit, and long-term commitment with participants, yet this is hardly discussed within most qualitative research endeavours. Some studies may argue however, that this could influence my ability to be objective but considering my underpinning philosophy as a social constructionist, and my positionality as an inside researcher, I was more interested in being a part of

the knowledge creation process. This process of knowledge sharing created the foundation for the strong rapport and trust that developed between myself and research participants and as a result, increased my engagement with the research context which highly contributed to a successful field project.

4.3 Qualitative Methodology

The second important element in research design processes highlighted by Creswell (2009) is methodological choices. Research in co-opetition has been characterized by a combination of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodologies (Bouncken et al., 2015; Dorn et al., 2016; Gernsheimer et al., 2021). A recent review by Gernsheimer et al (2020) which outlined research output ranging from 2015 until 2021 showed that although empirical research in co-opetition was largely dominated by quantitative methodologies, scholars are beginning to appreciate the need for qualitative methodologies which dig deep into the interactions and complex nature of coopetition (Dorn, Schweiger, & Albers, 2016); (Gernsheimer, Kanbach, & Gast, 2021):

FIGURE 4.3 METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES IN CO-OPETITION RESEARCH BETWEEN 2015 – 2021
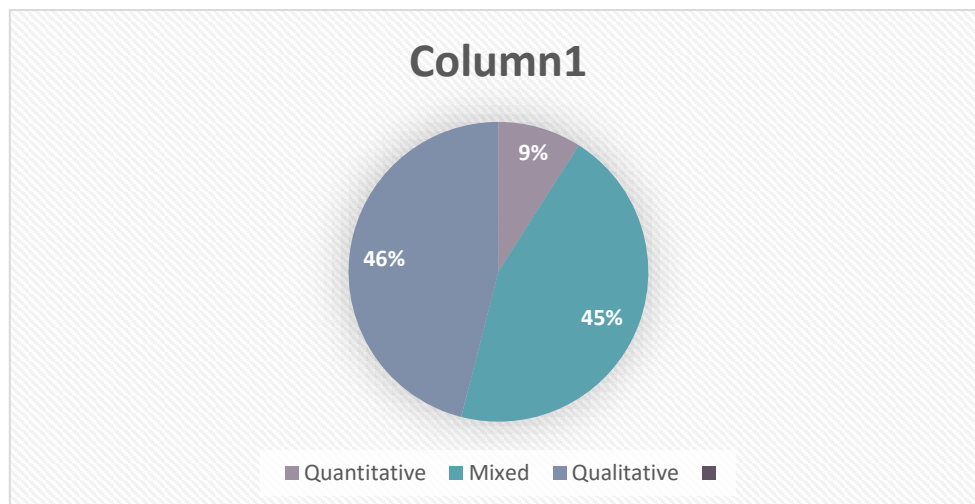
Source: Gernsheimer et al., (2021).

Co-opetition research grounded by quantitative methodologies have tended towards testing theories and hypothesis, with the aim to increase the validity and generalizability of research findings (Bouncken et al., 2015; Meena et al., 2022). These studies have mostly adopted the '*activity school of*

thought' perspective in defining co-opetition (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000), where interests align with firm-level, activity-driven constructs such as strength, intensity, and/or balance of cooperation and competition (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000).

Although quantitative studies have contributed to the growth of co-opetition research (Gnyawali and Song, 2016; Bengtsson et al., 2016), such method would be inadequate to provide the contextual explanation of co-opetition which this thesis aims to explore because quantitative methods lack attention to contextually rich elements and meanings associated with the research participants' viewpoints (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005; Merriam, 1998).

In addition, the numerical measurement of data characterizes the major challenge of quantitative methods. This is further amplified by the difficulty of measuring an abstract concept such as the sensemaking of co-opetition or the subjective nature of creative products in the creative industry whose quality and value are mostly determined by the symbolic meanings embedded within the products (Chang et al., 2021), rather than based on objective examination of their functionality and utility.

Further, the paradoxical nature of co-opetition (Bengtsson & Kock, 2014) suggests that it can hardly be measured or described in terms of strengths and balance of each opposing logic. As such, it may be difficult to gain relevant information through standardized data collection procedures. In contrast, a qualitative method provides more flexibility to gain in-depth insights into a complex social process such as co-opetition. In addition, it allows for the development of theory in moving beyond predefined theoretical perspectives which is useful for underexplored fields or topics (Patton, 2015) such as co-opetition.

Interestingly, and in line with research studies describing qualitative-quantitative methodologies as representing different ends of a continuum, rather than polar dichotomies (Creswell, 2009) some co-opetition studies have advocated for mixed methodologies which reside in the middle of qualitative-quantitative continuum and incorporates elements of both approaches (Creswell, 2009). For instance,

Crick & Crick (2019)'s study on the sporting industry adopts a mixed methodology to construct a new measure of co-opetition (the COOP scale) as a useful framework for testing and validating the antecedents and consequences of co-opetition on multiple levels, with a goal towards generalizing (transferring) findings to similar empirical (industry rather than economic) contexts.

Nonetheless, my research questions do not seek to explore activity-driven or meso-level constructs. Rather, it aims to uncover the complexities of individual (cognitive) processing of co-opetition, which is shaped by a combination of socio-cultural (culture, institutions, history) factors (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), and enacted through social interaction on network level (Weber & Glynn, 2006). In this vein, a qualitative methodology is best suited to uncovering the lived experiences of co-opetition actors and the range of institutional settings in which they function (Yami et al., 2010; Darbi & Knott, 2021). The table below presents differences between qualitative, quantitative, and mixed research methodologies:

TABLE 4.3 QUALITATIVE, QUANTITATIVE, AND MIXED METHODOLOGIES

	Qualitative	Quantitative	Mixed
Philosophical Assumptions	Social constructionism	Positivism	Critical realism/ Pragmatism
Quality Criteria	Authenticity, plausibility, criticality	Validity, reliability, generalizability	Validity, reliability, credibility, generalizability
Data Type	Qualitative data (participants' views, opinions, interpretations, and perceptions of the world) Small sample for in depth understanding	Quantitative data such as statistics and numbers Large sample	Qualitative and quantitative data
Data Collection Methods	Interviews, focus groups, observations, photo elicitation, vignette, qualitative questionnaires	Surveys and other scientific equipment's for collecting numerical/statistical data	Sequencing, dominance, pure mix
Strengths	Values multiple data sources Enables generalization beyond present sample. Greater efficiency Outsourcing potential Good for uncovering processes and meanings Flexible and good for theory generation Data collection is less artificial	May provide highly convincing results. May provide wide coverage of research phenomenon. Easier to justify. Fast and economical	Combination of confirmatory and exploratory research Integration of theories and greater diversity of views
Weaknesses	Difficult to gain access. Cannot accommodate institutional and cultural differences. Challenges with reconciling conflicting information Can be very time consuming. Analysis and interpretations can be challenging.	Focus may be narrow. Social experiments are difficult to implement. Alternative explanations of results are hard to control. Rigid, unable to generate meaning, process, or theory. Implications for action are not obvious	One method may provide window dressing for the other. Contradiction between paradigms underlying different methods (paradigm incommensurability) Replication is difficult. Time consuming and takes up a lot of resources

Source: Compiled from Miles and Huberman, (1994); Cassell et al., (2018); Easterby-Smith et al., (2021).

Another important factor in considering research methodology is the theoretical foundation upon which a study is based. Indeed, as explained by Eisenhardt (1989) and echoed by Piekkari et al (2011), irrespective of the grounding research paradigm adopted by researchers (e.g., deductive, inductive, or abductive), researchers cannot have a clean theoretical slate. In the same vein, Merriam (2001) advocates for all research to originate from an implicit or explicit theory of the phenomenon being

studied. The theoretical foundation of this thesis is based on an integration between the sensemaking and institutional theories.

The aim of this theoretical foundation is to uncover how micro (sensemaking), and macro (institutional) processes inform co-opetition within entrepreneurial networks in Nigeria. As such, a suitable methodology would need to examine the natural setting of co-opetitive action (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Morgan & Smircich, 1980; Gernshiemer et al., 2021). This aligns with the contextual, processual, *'actor school of thought'* definition of co-opetition (e.g., Bengtsson & Kock, 2014; Bengtsson et al., 2010; Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016; Pattinson et al., 2018; Darbi & Knott, 2021) that acknowledges the role of the individual actor as products of, and producers of their constantly changing institutional environment.

The theoretical underpinning of this study therefore suggests that the subjective experiences of co-opetition actors are the focus of this research inquiry, and as such, their self-reports will be crucial in revealing how they experience co-opetition in entrepreneurial network relationships. It is noteworthy that the approach to theory in this thesis is not to test (confirm or falsify) theory (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015; Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015). Rather, having a preliminary theoretical background demonstrates a general understanding of the research topic of interest which is linked to the theory building objective of this thesis (Patton M. Q., 2015) objective of this thesis.

4.4 Strategy of Inquiry: Qualitative (Constructionist) Case Study

The strategy of inquiry is a case study of Nigeria's fashion industry. Although there is no standard definition of a case study, a useful definition is provided by Piekarri, Welch, & Paavilainen (2009) who define case study as *'a research strategy that examines, through the use of a variety of data sources, a phenomenon in its naturalistic context, with the purpose of confronting theory with the empirical world.'* This 'confrontation' of theory could be achieved through adopting methodologies that either aim to test, build, or generate theory ((Piekkari, Welch, & Paavilainen, 2009). Considering the categorization of research methodologies into qualitative (interpretive/constructionist),

quantitative(positivist) and mixed approaches, therefore, case studies can also be designed using either of these categories within social science research.

Robert Yin (2003; 2013) is identified as a notable advocate of the positivist case study approach in social sciences. In his arguments, Yin (2003; 2013) suggests that case studies can achieve the rigour and generalizability of natural science research through careful consideration of several factors such as providing clarity on the main research question or proposition, identifying the unit of analysis, describing the link between the research propositions and data, and detailed description of the process of data interpretation (Yin, 2003; 2013). In contrast to the quantitative/positivist approach proposed by Yin (2003; 2013), a more qualitative approach to case studies is outlined by Stake (1995; 2006), who argues for the focus of case studies to provide interpretive/constructionist knowledge of the life and behaviour of the research phenomena.

Further approaches to case studies in social sciences follow the mixed approach, which indicate a combination of positivist and interpretivist/constructionist philosophical positions. A notable advocate for such mixed approach to case studies is the work of Eisenhardt (1989; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). These authors advocate for more flexible approach to case studies which include the use of multiple data sources, establishing clear research design at the outset, and conducting both within and across case analysis.

A core feature of the mixed case study approach is the way that it approaches hypothesis development. Accordingly, Eisenhardt (1989) suggests that hypotheses are developed through clear identification of the basic underlying constructs of the research, and then engaging in an iterative movement between the constructs and data. Afterwards, emergent relationships between constructs are verified by ensuring that they fit with evidence from each case. Finally, theories and emergent concepts are compared with the existing literature.

In order to determine the suitability of any approach to case study, it is important to acknowledge the ontological and epistemological positions of each method. In consideration of my social constructionist philosophical position in understanding sensemaking processes of entrepreneurial co-opetition networks, I could not consider Yin's (2003; 2013) positivist approach which suggests that the researcher commences with theoretical propositions.

This approach implies a deductive theorising through theory testing or refining hypothesis and as a result, unaligned with the goal of this study which is to uncover meaning. Secondly, Yin's (2003) argument for triangulation of multiple sources of evidence to achieve single explanation, suggests objectivity and positivist goal of generalizable findings. This does not align with my social constructionist position which rejects the existence of a single reality. Additionally, the issue of triangulation is problematic because it ignores the incommensurability of findings (Halinen & Tornroos, 2005) which does not align with a social constructionist ontological position.

In the same vein, the underlying goal of providing causal explanations and generalization of findings which characterize most mixed case study approaches do not correspond to the interpretive nature of my research. Although case studies grounded by mixed methodologies and philosophical assumptions acknowledge the effect of context, the search for single explanation also ignores incommensurability of findings, which is problematic with a social constructionist assumption of multiple realities. This research is a qualitative study on sensemaking processes within selected entrepreneurial networks in the Nigerian fashion industry. The empirical study for this thesis is best suited for a qualitative case strategy because it involves the study of complex phenomena within its natural context (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which aligns with an interpretive, social constructionist assumption (Stake, 1995).

Stake (2006) further distinguishes qualitative case studies into two categories: *Instrumental* case studies which involve focusing on specific cases to develop generalizable principles, and *expressive* case studies which aim to examine unique features of a case which may not always be generalizable.

In reference to the overarching research question guiding this study which seeks to understand sensemaking processes of entrepreneurs in co-opetition networks in the Nigerian fashion industry, this suggests an interest in understanding unique features of co-opetitive interactions in Nigeria's fashion industry. In this respect, the fashion industry as the case study can be described as expressive. However, instrumental elements also exist since this study is interested in understanding institutional influences on sensemaking processes of co-opetition networks.

Asides case studies, other strategies of inquiry were considered, such as (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and Corbin & Straus's (2015) constructionist approach to grounded theory, and ethnography. However, I discounted these methods for the following reasons: grounded theory requires that research questions evolve after preliminary data collection and analysis and sampling is set from the beginning. This did not align with my study because I had implicitly developed research questions and theory, and sampling occurred through an emergent process.

On the other hand, ethnography was also discounted because it would have required spending longer time in the research field which I could not afford, considering that I was pregnant during data collection period, and I could not be away from my family for too long at a time. The qualitative case study design I adopted was adequate for researcher engagement and this was also enhanced by my prior experience on the field. In addition, the longitudinal design of my study through multiple visits to research participants during my field work strengthened findings and attainment of theoretical saturation.

Another important factor for consideration is clarification on the generalizability or contextuality of my research findings. Case studies with generalizable goals aim to ensure that findings in one context can be applied to a larger population or different circumstance, which is a critical feature of positivist assumptions. On an intermediate level, mixed case studies aim for universality of knowledge by

ensuring that findings from one organizational setting is applicable to other settings of context (Eisenhardt, 1989).

In contrast to these, the constructionist approach aims for local, contextual knowledge which recognises that findings within a specific setting or context may not always be applicable to other settings or contexts. The importance of contextual knowledge to my research cannot be overemphasized. Specifically, constructionist approaches emphasize the significance of contextual knowledge which may be limited through strict application of dominant western constructs like the institutional theory to understand sensemaking processes, without considering this in tandem with institutional factors which include history, and culture.

In other words, to understand the role of institutions in sensemaking processes, it is necessary for institutions to be examined alongside institutional factors of history and culture, which has been highlighted in Chapter 3 as a contribution to the existing framework developed by Weber & Glynn (2006). The table below provides a summary of key differences in designing qualitative case studies design:

TABLE 4.4 CASE STUDY DESIGN IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Positivist	Mixed	Constructionist
Prior design	Flexible design	Emergent design
Sample up to 30	Sample between 4 and 10	Sample 1 or more
Cross-case analysis	Cross, and within case analysis	Within case analysis
Theory testing	Theory generation	Theory building (Action)
Triangulation to generate single explanation	Single explanation in consideration of natural context	Multiple explanation in consideration of natural context
Generalized knowledge	Universal knowledge	Contextual (local) knowledge which may be transferrable

Source: Compiled from Piekkari et al., (2009; 2010)

4.4.1 Sampling Strategy

Another important consideration in research design is ensuring that findings are based on evidence to highlight the trustworthiness of any research (Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe, & Valizade, 2021). To achieve this, I discuss the importance of sampling and sampling strategy adopted in my thesis. First, it is important to highlight the difference between the terms 'sample' and 'population' which are often

conduced in research ((Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe, & Valizade, 2021). In discussing populations, I refer to the overall set of entities which findings from my research may apply to.

In this case, the fashion industry in Nigeria can be viewed as my population because it represents the overarching sector within which entrepreneurial networks is being explored. From this population, a subset of entities is used to provide evidence of the overall findings. These subsets of entities are what I refer to as samples in my thesis. Sampling in case studies includes a set of decisions which emerge and support the research questions, the theoretical purpose and theoretical logic of the case study (Patton, 2015).

Within the co-opetition literature, Gnyawali & Song (2016) suggest that methodological and empirical rigour in co-opetition case studies can be achieved by justifying the selected cases in relation to the research questions. While it is important to note that there is no best practice in case study selection that fit all purposes and circumstances, the credibility of any case selection depends on a discussion of how it fits the researcher's purpose and alignment or deviations to the pathways described above should be justified (Fletcher et al., 2018).

In contrast to quantitative studies which adopt probability sampling procedures in order to generalize findings to a larger population, the qualitative, constructionist nature of this thesis requires non-probability strategies, which could be convenience sampling, quota sampling, purposive sampling, or snowball sampling (Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe, & Valizade, 2021). Convenience sampling was not considered for my study because although convenient and easy to recruit participants, sample may not be representative of the population of study. In the same vein, quota sampling was discounted because it categorizes a population of study from which a sample is drawn from each category.

This would be more suitable for research with a larger or multiple populations where the research is exploring differences across entities such as countries of origin, gender, etc. Purposive sampling was also discounted because it requires having an established sample unit which is achieved through an

initial checking and discounting of recruited participants. This could not suffice for my study because it suggests easy access to participants which would have been difficult to achieve in my study. Although I had prior experience in the fashion industry which would normally ease access, the complex and sensitive nature of my research questions exploring cognitive processes and perceptions emphasized the importance of building trust and rapport with participants to gain entry and access to a representative sample. In view of this, I settled for snowballing by identifying a participant who met the criteria for inclusion in my study and eased my access to other participants who could be eligible.

This principal participant was the president of the Formal network with whom I was familiar with due to my previous membership in the network. The president then introduced me to other members of the network. It would have been difficult for me to access these other members of the network because the network had evolved overtime and had new members who were not familiar with me. In reference to the phenomenon-driven, emergent nature of my case (Dubois & Gadde, 2002), experiences during field work required that I also draw samples from the informal fashion network in the fashion industry, to have a representative population.

Here, snowballing was also used to access relevant participants through my rapport and familiarity with a member of the informal network called Lily– a prominent fashion designer and owner/manager of a successful fashion outlet in the rural areas of Lagos, Nigeria. Lily and I met several years ago during my years as a fashion entrepreneur in Lagos. She provided my first basic training in fashion design and our relationship grew from student-teacher to becoming very close friends over a period of ten years. My relationship with Lily laid the foundation for the positive reception that I got from informal network.

Based on the above, my case study was designed as an embedded case study (Dubois & Gadde, 20002; Eisenhardt et al., 2021) because I examined two sub-units (formal and informal networks) within a single case (the fashion industry). This was necessary in order to avoid *sample bias* (Easterby-Smith,

Jaspersen, Thorpe, & Valizade, 2021); which would have resulted from excluding the informal sector in my overall sample. Although a group of people may share similar experiences, perspectives and worldviews, individuals would ultimately have their own unique experiences positions and roles within a social system.

This is particularly crucial when dealing with a fragmented setting like the fashion industry in Nigeria which is characterised by a formal and informal sector, where participants may hold fundamentally different perceptions of their social world and co-opetitive interactions. To account for these differences, I was conscious of designing a sampling strategy that would allow me access to key individuals and groups in both formal and informal sectors within the fashion industry that could provide rich insights on the sensemaking of co-opetition networks within both sectors in the fashion industry (DeWalt & Dewalt, 2011).

4.4.2. The Embedded Case Study: Nigeria's Fashion Industry

The fashion industry in Nigeria offers a fertile context to study sensemaking of co-opetition in entrepreneurial network relationships due to unprecedented changes which have evolved in the industry over the past 20 years (Kim, 2013). Changing dynamics include the fading of mass production, altered structural conditions of the fashion supply chain, and short lifecycle of the fashion industry (Kim, 2013). The flow of information and trends within the fashion industry has become fast-paced, leading to high levels of uncertainty and fluctuations in customer demands (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). These conditions have forced actors within the fashion industry to undergo a '*sense and respond'* process which is argued to be essential for the adoption of appropriate levels of responsiveness (Franks, 2000) to maintain profitability in such an increasingly unpredictable market (Kim, 2013).

Within the Nigerian context, deeper environmental challenges plague fashion firms. Studies like (Kisumua, 2021) refer to challenges such as the domestication of international standards from Westernized economies which create an unsuitable business environment for domestic fashion firms.

Consequently, the fashion scene in Nigeria projects a highly competitive environment due to the influx of foreign brands which influence the change of lifestyle for consumers prioritizing western styles over domestically made designs, thus threatening the competitiveness of domestically owned fashion firms.

The regulatory framework of Nigeria is also argued to be a disincentive for SMEs due to ineffective policies to safeguard the growth of domestic firms (Kisumua, 2021). Fashion-based SMEs in Nigeria operate in a business environment characterized by inadequate finance, poor infrastructure, lack of support from relevant governmental institutions, poor information dissemination and increasing market competition (Ofili, 2014). Although the fashion industry in Nigeria possesses a large market as well as cheap labour, its overall growth is stalled by limited government participation (Radwan & Pellegrini, 2010). As such, fashion entrepreneurs in the sector are tasked with the responsibility of managing the challenges of a hostile economic environment with unavailable infrastructure, as well as growing competition from foreign brands (Aderibigbe, 2014).

Although the Nigerian federal government's move to diversify the economy placed high emphasis on SMEs within the agricultural and creative industries through the implementation of several funding initiatives such as the Lagos Employment Trust Fund (LETF), The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency (SMEADAN). Bank of Industry fund (BOI), most of these initiatives have not provided the necessary solutions to fashion industry-specific SMEs due to the unregulated and fragmented nature of the fashion industry.

Considering minimal regulatory protection such as the absence of a comprehensive legal framework governing the Nigerian fashion industry or the availability of a specific legislation protecting fashion brands in the fashion industry (Nwabachili & Ezeokeke, 2021), fashion entrepreneurs within the economy have found a way to manage the shortcomings of the regulatory framework, by turning to collaborative strategies to minimize the ineffectiveness of the regulatory system. Typically, domestically owned SMEs in sub-Saharan African nations like Nigeria tend to develop long-term

business network relationships underpinned by formal and informal ties to engage in mutually beneficial exchanges with one another (Tajeddin & Michael, 2018).

In similar vein, competing fashion SMES in Nigeria develop co-opetitive interactions within entrepreneurial relationships to manage domestic market challenges, exploit new opportunities and introduce new products and services (Filion, 1999; Ratten & Ratten, 2014). Essentially, these firms capitalize on the strength of numbers to create and appropriate more value than would have been achieved through dyadic or bilateral relationships (Tajeddin & Carney, 2018; Czakon, 2018). The prevalence of co-opetition in the fashion industry is also supported by existing literature which advocates for fashion stakeholders to deploy their synergies through local networking and cooperative arrangements to deal with the growing competition in the marketplace (Battaglia, 2014). Supporting the benefits of collaborative interactions among stakeholders in the fashion industry, Kim (2013) reveals that SMEs are unable to effectively satisfy constantly changing and diverse customer requirements, while maintaining quality and speed to market simultaneously. Responsiveness to the changing environment thus requires maintaining close relationships with rivals.

Formal Fashion Network

The first sub-unit within this case study is the formal fashion-based network in Nigeria. From conception, the formal network has been regarded as the formally recognised body for fashion designers in Nigeria, with state chapters all over the country. Membership is based on an annual subscription fee of N10,000 for students, N25,000 for emerging designers (within five years of operation), and N50,00 for professional designers.

I was able to recruit twenty (20) participants from this network. During my interactions with participants within this network, I found that co-opetition occurred on a multi, group-level at co-located sites such as the 2019 edition of Fashion Finest Event, Fashion Show and the GTB Fashion Event. According to the literature, co-location refers to the 'spatial concentration' of multiple private and public network actors who exist in proximity to each other; forming mutual service chains,

144

interactions, and network (Mariani et al, 2014). In the fashion industry, fashion events in co-located sites were generally set up to provide fashion entrepreneurs in the formal sector with opportunities to network and improve their brand strategies through a combination of cooperative and competitive activities.

Informal Fashion Network

The second sub-unit refers to the informal fashion network in Lagos consisting of over 100 relatively autonomous SMEs. My interaction with entrepreneurs within the informal network revealed that participants often co-opeted on a dyadic level, and these interactions were institutionally and socio-historically grounded.

Within this network, I also recruited twenty (20) participants who consist of master craftsmen and skilled workers. In this thesis, Master craftsmen refer to participants in the informal sector who train young individuals for a period of time in trade, farming, catering, and craft (Alike & Umunze, 2019). These trainees are referred to as apprentices whose status evolves to that of a skilled worker upon completion of their training with the master craftsman. The apprenticeship system is an age-long indigenous form of educational institution which originated in pre-colonial Nigeria, as a form of passing down cultural heritage from one generation to another (Alike & Umunze, 2019). After the eradication of colonialism and the growth of Nigeria's private enterprise economy, the apprenticeship system transformed into an informal system of learning; guarded by informal structures such as custom, kinship, and rituals (Alike & Umunze, 2019).

In pre-colonial times, most young men were expected to learn their matrilineal craft, and this was used to easily identify different lineages. The term *'oga'* was popularly used to refer to the master craftsman, while terms such as *'omo-ise'* in Yoruba, or '*Nwaboyi'* in Igbo, were reserved for the role of the apprentice. Both actors usually established an agreement for a period ranging from 4-7 years during which the apprentice is expected to serve and learn from the '*oga*' or master craftsman. The period of

learning and servitude usually ended with an elaborate ceremony referred to as 'freedom' which suggests a successful completion of the apprenticeship training.

Depending on the settlement agreement between both parties, the skilled worker is customarily expected to either be provided with resources to start up a separate business or continue to work with the master craftsman as a 'journeyman' for a period of time. The period of being a journey man is seen as necessary to acquire further business knowledge, relational skills, and access to the social networks of expert craftsmen in the community. The master craftsman provided the journeyman with an opportunity to cooperate in sharing resources (such as rent, sewing tools, etc.), while competing in marketing and sales activities, simultaneously.

4.4.3 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis in this study is the perceptions of cooperating with competitors held any participants within both formal and informal networks. In other word, the unit of analysis focuses on a micro, individual level. While following the advice of authors such as Patton (2015) who suggests that the selection of a unit of analysis depends on what the researcher wants to say about the research phenomenon, it is important to note here that the broad theme of co-opetition could only be generated from the analysis (Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016a).

Units of analysis provide a guide as to what is being analysed in a research study. While this needs to be clearly specified in quantitative studies, it is not essential in qualitative studies grounded by constructionist philosophical assumptions (Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe, & Valizade, 2021). Nonetheless, I find it useful to specify the unit of analysis in my study due to the unstructured nature of data in constructionist studies such as this.

4.5 Data Collection Methods

Within qualitative case studies, several data collection methods have been recommended. For instance, Yin (2014) suggests that archival records, interviews, direct /participant observations, physical artifacts, and documentation are the most applied techniques for collecting research data. In Co-

opetition research, Lundgren-Henriksson and Kock (2018) have suggested ethnographic methods (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) as suitable for collecting data related to sensemaking. Balogun, Jacobs, Jarzabkowski, Mantere & Vaara (2014) further suggest the use of PowerPoints, artefacts within both formal and informal settings. Essentially, these studies call for data collection techniques which allow the researcher to move closer to the social interaction and meaning creation processes.

The selection of research methods such as data collection and analysis, is determined by the research objectives, and methodology design. In this study, the research objective is to provide a socio-historically grounded account of how entrepreneurs make sense of co-opetitive interactions within network relationships in Nigeria's socially stratified fashion industry. Thus, in line with the social constructionist philosophical background of this study which argues that our ways of understanding the world is dependent upon exploring the subjective past and present realities of actors (Berge & Luckmann, 1991; Schwandt, 2003; Burr, 2015), and the qualitative methodology which aims to view social phenomenon holistically (Creswell, 2003).

To develop a contextualised understanding of the research phenomena, therefore, I have chosen to adopt a pluralist data collection method using in-depth interviews, participant observations, and documentary analysis. Although multiple sources of data are often used for triangulation purposes in Co-opetition research (e.g., Lundgren-Henriksson and Kock, 2016a), the combination of these data sources was not for the purpose of data triangulation to produce a single explanation of the research phenomena (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Instead, it was to afford the researcher the benefit of flexibility in navigating the research field, access a greater level of detail and capture the multiple but complementary perspectives of co-opetition in accordance with a social constructionist underlying assumption.

This pluralist data collection approach would enable me to focus on the everyday behaviour, action and interaction of participants in relation to their socio-historic background, to gain a holistic insight

and provide rich accounts of social phenomena. In addition, it was important for me to identify how each component of my research methodology will enable me to acquire the data that answers my research questions (Maxwell, 2009). As such, it was important for me to select data collection techniques that could contribute towards answering my research questions. To achieve this, I adapted Maxwell's (2009) data planning matrix as an initial step to link my research questions with appropriate methods for data collection. This matrix proved useful for developing interview questions and linking these to appropriate methods of data collection. In addition, it helped to provide insight into how my data collection techniques will work in practice.

TABLE 4.5 DATA PLANNING MATRIX

What do I need to know	Why Do I need to know this?	What kind of data will answer the questions?	How can I find the data?	Timeline for Acquisition
How do institutions shape sensemaking processes of entrepreneurial co-opetition networks in Post-Colonial Nigeria's fashion industry?	To assess the role of the institutional context in shaping the sensemaking of co-opetitive relationships within formal and informal sectors in Nigeria's fashion industry	Formal and informal interviews, personal field notes, observations	Field Activity (attending network meetings, visit individual fashion entrepreneurs)	May- June 2021 (8 weeks)
What are the outcomes of sensemaking processes on the construction of entrepreneurial co-opetition network mindsets within the post-colonial Nigerian fashion industry?	To examine the outcomes of sensemaking on the construction of entrepreneurial co-opetition network mindsets	Formal and informal interviews, personal field notes, observations, and secondary data, document analysis	Field Activity (attending network meetings, visit individual fashion entrepreneurs, institutional actors	May- June 2021 (8 weeks)

From the above, observations, semi-structured interviews and documentation were deemed most suitable to enable researcher engagement in understanding the sensemaking of entrepreneurial co-opetition.

4.5.1 Participant Observations

Observations in qualitative research describe a data collection technique for monitoring selected activities personally (Proctor, 2000). According to Karreman & Alvesson (2001), our understanding of reality construction in, between, and around organizations can be improved by accessing interactions as they happen. Through observations, a researcher can record the behaviours, activities, events, mannerisms, and artefacts of a social setting to produce a deeper understanding of a subject matter (Marshall and Rossman, 1989). This process demands rigorous preparation and researcher immersion in the field (Dewalt and Dewalt, 2002).

Following Lundgren-Henriksson and Kock's (2018) recommendations on the usefulness of observations in capturing the processual nature of co-opetition, and Eriksson & Kovalainen's (2008) advice for a researcher to glean viewpoints from the researched individuals by becoming a member of the studied group, I conducted observations to gather first-hand experiences, meanings and interpretations of actions and reactions of my key participants.

Several approaches to collecting observational data have been introduced, however for the purpose of this thesis, I draw from Gold's (1958) four approaches namely participant as observer, observer as participant, the complete participant, or the complete observer. Considering the qualitative nature of this thesis, I found the observer as participant approach to be most suitable because it allows for the researcher to be truly immersed in the research setting to gain rich insights of the experiences of the research participants. Through this approach, I was able to immerse myself and familiarise with participants. I began by observing the social world of participants before engaging in interviews to further explore my observations. Initially, I mentally recorded my observations with curiosity, as I tried to make sense of the study context and phenomenon. For instance, within the informal sector, co-

opetitive interactions occurred between an expert craftsman and a qualified apprentice, as well as during their association meetings and trade events. I was able to engage in informal conversations with participants occasionally which was helpful in gaining clarification on my interpretations of what I had observed. Although several meetings were scheduled to observe participants in the formal network, there was hardly anybody who attended these meetings. Nonetheless, the combination of these various categories of observations provided valuable insights and guidance for formulating my research questions afterwards.

Before commencing my observation, I reflected on my participant as observer approach which meant that I would be in close interaction with participants and observe their regular interaction. Here, I used a combination of techniques such as descriptive observation, where I observed everything and tried to familiarise myself with the context and identify key patterns. For example, when I attended the informal network meeting, I noticed that meetings were held in an abandoned primary school, at the heart of a busy road surrounded by motor cyclists and dilapidated transport buses calling out to passengers. Upon entry, I was initially stopped and queried by two uniformed men who asked who I was. I was quickly relieved by the president who signalled to them to allow me access. I walked in and noticed that women sat separately from men. I found an empty seat among a few women, shared pleasantries in the Yoruba language, and settled into my seat.

Secondly, I used focused observation, which allowed me to pick up on nonverbal communication such as body language, facial expressions role performances, nuances in speech, dress codes, emotions, and other relevant behaviours. For instance, I noticed how women curtsied when the president and members of the council of elders walked past them to occupy their seats at the front of the room. I also observed at the end of the meeting when I had walked up to a man to have a chat, he kept moving away from me. I later understood that he was Muslim, and their religion did not permit men to stand too close to a woman who wasn't their wife. In addition to this, I noticed how some members willingly gave up their seats to others who came in late. This, I later understood, was mostly newly qualified

apprentices (*later referred to as journeymen in this thesis*) who gave out their seats to a group of distinguished members *(later referred to as master craftsmen in this thesis)* whom they had trained under, as a sign of respect.

Finally, I used selective observation to enable me to understand the differences in the activities and behaviours of participants. For instance, I probed the voluntary offering of seats by qualified apprentices to the expert fashion entrepreneur. Here, I was made to understand that although qualified apprentices had become legitimate fashion entrepreneurs within the community, having successfully completed their period of training and freedom ceremony, they were still required by custom, to serve the expert fashion entrepreneur for a while, before they could set up their fashion stores independently. With further probing, I was made to understand that the qualified fashion entrepreneur was viewed as equal members of the network and the extended relationship between the expert fashion entrepreneur and qualified fashion entrepreneur was simply strategic. This meant that both actors worked collaboratively on an inter-organizational level to share resources and reduce the cost of operating independently. This suggested the possibility of co-opetitive interactions which I was interested to explore further. Yet, based on my prior experiences as an apprentice in the informal network before I joined the formal network, I was conscious of the power disparity between both actors. The combination of these approaches enables a deeper penetration and analysis of the interactions in the formal and informal networks.

I also conducted observations at the formal network, which was my initial case study focus. Through my familiarity with the network, as already established in chapter one of this thesis, I immediately got an appointment to visit the president at his store in the highbrow area of Lagos. For this visit, I was careful to switch up my look by adoring designer outfits. This is the group where Westernized qualities and appearances would attract attention. Here, I was able to collect a sample of 18 participants who co- opeted on a group level at co-located fashion sites such as the Fashion Finest and Fashion Show events.

Establishing Rapport with Participants in the Informal Network

To establish rapport with research participants within the informal network, I considered how participants would perceive me. My experience of this group of marginalised people is one of suspicion and distrust for outsiders like me. This became evident in their behaviours towards me when I visited some of them at their stores. For instance, I found that some expert fashion entrepreneurs appeared cautious with their words and tried to mask their subalternity by speaking in English language, even though I continued to respond in the local Yoruba and pidgin dialect.

I also noticed that their apprentices who would normally speak freely to me in the absence of their 'masters,' suddenly seemed guarded and avoided me when their masters returned to the stores. After a few days, however, I started to experience changes in their mannerisms, especially as I had started to help within the stores with sewing, ironing, joining apprentices to fetch water from nearby boreholes and running other errands for the expert entrepreneurs. I realised that the more I familiarised myself with them, they became more open and accepting of me. They started to divulge more information about their interactions within the stores, and on a group level. Simultaneously, their 'masters' started to seem less bothered by my presence as we continued to engage in activities as normal. This, way, I was able to build trust and rapport with the fashion entrepreneurs at their stores, and they started to recommend other fashion entrepreneurs whom I could speak to.

In the same vein, I attended a few network meetings. These meetings often started with the chairman saying prayers in the Christian, Muslim, and non-religious traditions. I asked a member why they said three payers, and I was told it was to recognise the various religions which members belonged to different religions. Next, the group stood up to respond to the chairman's call *'Amuni Dara'* (together, we make beauty). This was the motto of the association which very member was obliged to respond to. Afterwards, attendance was taken and members who were absent without giving prior notice were

visited by the association's policemen (*olopa*)[1] who were authorized by the council of elders to seize machineries and work tools from absent members' stores or lock up their stores.

Participants spoke mostly in the Yoruba language, which is the predominant language of South-Western Nigeria. I observed that a woman was called out to show her attire to the group and describe the process of achieving the style which she had made. She got up, cat-walked round the hall while we all cheered her on. After applauding her, she carefully explained the process of achieving the design she had created. However, I noticed that a few members grumbled about the facilitator's use of *'cm'* measurements instead of *'inches,'* and other terms like *'carry-board'* which they were not used to. Some members complained about the fact that she has facilitated in English language rather than Yoruba language which in their opinion, meant that she was trying to create an impression of superiority.

I was introduced in brief by the president to all attending members as a researcher. Following this introduction and my participation in an ongoing training workshop, some members approached me and expressed their interests as potential participants, while also finding out what their participation would involve. At the end of the training workshop, I separated this group of potential participants into another empty space in the hall. This group thus provided the informal focus group where I was able to identify suitable participants for my research. During these initial conversations, it was evident that members were not familiar with the term 'co-opetition,' as I had expected. However, members narratives of interactions within the networks described simultaneous cooperation and competition, even though my probing on competition was frowned upon, as revealed in the following comments:

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[1] Olopa – informal law enforcement officer. Literal meaning is 'a person who holds a stick' (Describes a policeman who is authorized to use a stick to enforce law) During pre-colonial period, policemen in Nigeria were not allowed to use guns, but carried sticks.

[…] we are competing, but not in that sense. Because, if you talk about competition is like saying you have to kill or be killed. But we don't agree with that because we see each other like family. So, we are not really into that competing attitude. […]

[…] if you talk about competition, it's like saying we want to cheat the other. Because if you are competing, then it means you have bad mind for your fellow member. So, you can only compete with yourself, by making your own products unique that will bring customers. But to say you want to compete with members, that one is not good […]

[…] Àmó, Mo maa ń daarapò mó àwon èèyàn gan. Mi ò kí n se olójú kòkòrò èèyàn. Inú mi maa n dùn láti pín […][2]

Based on my realisations of the negative connotations attached to the word competition, I decided to rephrase. I asked them how they managed to work together, since they all mostly catered for the same clientele and since most of them had the same specialty which meant that customers could choose either one of them, or they could lose their customers to fellow tailors. Some of the responses I got pointed towards customer sharing as one of the rules of the network.

For instance, when a designer had a customer who needed a particular service that wasn't the specialty of the designer, he was required to accept the service and pass it on to another union member whose area of specialty could cater for the service needed. In a different case, where a customer is known to be a particular designer's customer overtime, other designers would refuse to attend to that customer. They all knew each other's special customers and would not cross those boundaries. These conditions for interaction were set by the council of elders who, worked collaboratively with the president.

There were some members who seemed to benefit from favouritism because of some personal affiliations they had with local government officials or were related to members of the union's committee. Issues like religion and ethnic diversity came up. For instance, one woman categorically told me that although she spoke Yoruba, some of the tailors referred to her as '*omo ghana'* because she was originally from Ghana but had lived in Lago since childhood. Referring to her in that way, meant that in some way, they still saw her as an outsider and that influenced the way some of them

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[2] I'm not greedy, I'm always happy to work collaboratively.

interacted with her. She found it easier to relate with the Igbos in the union. She suspected this was because like her, they also felt like 'outsiders' among the Yoruba's who were the majority. Yet, she didn't bother much about this because through the rules of the network, she was also able to access benefits such as customer sharing, price fixing, access to new markets, dispute resolution, protection from corrupt government official, member support in life events and also knew that her apprentices were safe with her and wouldn't be poached.

Within this network, cultural structures, and values such as religion, family, kinship, and loyalty, provided access to the union's loan facilities. Essentially, it was obvious that the fashion designers had developed an understanding of co-opetition based on trust. For instance, most transactions and interactions were conducted verbally and as such, formal contracts were avoided.

This collectivist behaviour thus infused a significant amount of cooperation and competition which was induced by network directives, thus consistent with Mariani's (2007) view that co-opetition is sometimes induced by institutional forces. There was no clear distinction in terms of how cooperation and competition occurred. For instance, competition could be said to occur in upstream activities such as the planning's and construction of designs, where designers are motivated to create a unique and outstanding design that would place them in more favourable positions before their customers. Co-operation also occurred in upstream and downstream activities where members would jointly pay for a stall and refer customers to each other.

Establishing Rapport with Participants in the Formal Network

The process of recruiting participant from the formal network a much more complex one. I had been invited to attend the 3-day Fashion Finest exhibition in 2019 at the Federal palace in Lagos State, Nigeria; a high-end hotel and leisure centre in Lagos where a group of elite fashion entrepreneurs from the formal network hosted a fashion show. One of the things I observed as I interacted with this group of fashion entrepreneurs, was how willing they were to interact with me when I capitalized on my identity as an **'outsider.'** I observed that when I approached this group of elite fashion entrepreneurs to discuss my research agenda, they initially appeared very dismissive until I mentioned my affiliation to a British University.

This affiliation thus distinguished me from the non-elite group whom according to Bourdieu (1984), the elite constantly struggle consciously and unconsciously to distinguish themselves from and presented me as an individual who is aligned as their perceived equals (Bourdieu, 1984). As Bourdieu further highlights, the acquisition of 'attributes of excellence' is important to strengthen this distinction and these can be determined by the superior aesthetics, mannerisms, ways of walking and speaking, as well as dressing. I made a conscious effort to dress flamboyantly (such as holding a Western designer bag, designer clothing, speaking with a British accent and strapping a canon camera round my neck), which attracted their attention and interest to speak with me.

Through my observations at the Fashion Finest and Fashion show events, I was able to recruit 18 participants to be interviewed. These participants can at best be described as belonging to the elite group of individuals in Nigeria, who possess a disproportionate control of resources (Khan, 2012; Vergara, 2013) and constantly seek to distinguish themselves from the rest of the society (Vergara, 2013). Here, Dubois (1992) refer to this group of individuals as the '*colonized elite'* who exist in a world where the worlds of the colonizer and colonized overlap and exchange. Using the term 'economic elites,' Isumonah (2012) suggest that this group of individuals comprise the entrepreneurs and successful businessmen who, according to Fanon (2004) have displaced and replaced the colonizer through their replication and reliance on European culture.

Researcher at Fashion Finest and Fashion Show Events

Establishing Rapport with Formal Institutional Regulators (FIR)

Based on the explanatory nature of my research, it was important for me to reflect diversity in choice of research participants. I managed to gain access to some institutional regulators such as the Director General of the Lagos State Council for Arts and Culture, the Director of Research and Development at the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency (SMEADAN) researchers at the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics, and the Creative Manager of the Bank of Industry (BOI) Creative Industry Fund.

First, let me start by pointing out the challenges I encountered in gaining access to these officials. To access the Lagos States Council for Arts and Culture, I contacted a former colleague whom I had worked with in the entertainment sector. He gave me the telephone number of an administrator who

worked in the media and broadcasting section of the institution. This 'gatekeeper' took me to the part of the building designated for the creative arts sector, introduced me to another administrator and left. I was not sure what to do here because it was a bit different from speaking to fashion designers. Government officials can be very intimidating and if you do not say or do the right things, you could easily lose any opportunity to gain their attention.

When I saw the administrator and other staff in office, I thought that even though this was a governmental institution, speaking English language may not give me the attention I needed. Also, I thought stressing the fact that I was from a university outside Nigeria, would be to my disadvantage. I was a bit confused on how to proceed and the cold reception in that office didn't make it any easier for me. So, I spoke in Yoruba language. I got a little bit of attention as we exchanged pleasantries.

However, when I started to talk about the purpose of my visit as research-based, the administrator seemed to lose interest and just focused on the computer Infront of her. In between, she would turn to talk to a colleague, eat something, walk around the office, continue working on her computer without really paying any attention to me. When I had finished introducing myself, she did not say a word. After a while, she told me the Director General was not available and she didn't know when it would be possible for me to see this person. I then asked if I could speak with any other relevant person, and she said I would have to come back the next week. I handed her a copy of my information sheet and consent form and thanked her for her time, while she glanced through the front page of my information sheet, with no interest at all…as I could tell from the expression on her face and her mannerisms.

However, things changed very quickly: to my surprise, she quickly looked up at me and asked again what university I was from: I told her again. Her expression changed, she looked at me more closely and her accent slightly changed. She then asked why I did not mention that I studied abroad. She got up from her seat quickly and told me to come with her. We crossed over to another side of the building

as we chatted for a bit. She asked what I was studying, how long I had been in Sheffield and how long I was in Nigeria for.

We finally got to another office where she introduced me to another administrator and told them to book me in immediately to see the Director General!! I could not believe it. I thanked her and waited. Within a few minutes, I was introduced to the Director- General who spared a few minutes to talk to me about the role of her office in promoting the creative arts sector, the kinds of policies and support systems available for sectors such as fashion and how these influenced the ways in which fashion SMEs worked interacted with each other.

During my interaction with these officials, I discovered that there was a general belief that most fashion entrepreneurs within the local communities operated illegally and lacked the necessary education that could enable them benefit from the support which the government provided. On the other hand, entrepreneurs operating within the confines of formality did not always meet the requirements or refused to participate to access government funding and support. For instance, the government official at the Bank of Industry stated that most fashion entrepreneurs within the local communities did not prepare their loan applications correctly and did not have the right government-issued identity cards as a requirement for loan application.

Supporting this perception, the Director of Research at SMEADAN reported that the fashion segment of the institution organized free clothe-making programmes and legal clinics which usually recorded very low turn outs. Others mentioned that they worked with regional unions to create fashion-specific developmental programmes and trainings, identify talented creative fashion designers whom they support by providing access to funds and international exposure. Specifically, several fashion designers are selected regularly from the represent the country at local and international fashion and tourism-based events.

However, on speaking with the fashion designers, the information I got did not support what had been revealed to me by the Government officials. Rather, corruption and politics (favouritism) were cited as factors responsible for the lack of access to government support. In addition, the criteria for accessing loans were difficult and as such, it was essential for fashion designers to co-opete within their networks to strengthen their borrowing power access available government funding and support. The goal of these co-opetitive interactions within networks was to stablish a common production, training and tools/machinist-renting hub which they lacked.

My conversation with these government officials also enabled access to secondary publications on Nigeria's fashion industry history and patterns of entrepreneurial activities and relationships. The snapshots of SMEADAN, BOF and the Lagos State Council for Arts and Culture are shown in the pictures below:

Researcher's visit to Lagos State Council for Arts & Culture

<u>Researcher's Visit to SMEADAN Office</u>

<u>Researcher's Visit to Bank of Industry (BoF)</u>

Establishing Rapport with Informal Institutional Regulators

To commence my research, I visited the president of the IN with my contact, Lily. I explained that I was currently studying at a university in 'London' and was interested in speaking to him about how fashion designers within the network interacted. From his attire, accent, and mannerisms, I could already tell he was a very traditional Yoruba man. AS such, I spoke in the Yoruba language. I paid

my respect by kneeling, as is the respectable way of greeting in Yoruba culture. He also seemed happy to receive us; because he signalled to a young boy to get us some chairs as he said in Yoruba *'haa, alejo nla ni mo gba'*[3]

I asked if the young boy was his son and he told me the boy was an apprentice. The system of training in Lagos followed the pre-colonial practice of 'master' and 'slave;' although not explicitly. Young boys and girls who desired to become fashion entrepreneurs had to 'serve' under a 'master' for a period of two to four years; sometimes shorter depending on how fast the apprentice learns. These apprentices paid their masters a certain amount of money for the training and received no payment from their masters.

The apprenticeship was only completed when they got 'freed' from their masters. Usually, an apprentice cannot leave his or her master until he or she gets this 'freedom.' This freedom was usually celebrated in a grand ceremony, where the apprentice must do and provide whatever their masters request, provide food and drinks to the association and the immediate community. This ceremony signals the apprentice's confirmation as a certified fashion entrepreneur which means they can then go on to join the association, create their own fashion businesses and receive support from their previous masters.

For apprentices who do not complete the training period or leaves before receiving their freedom, they are looked down upon by the community and cannot create fashion businesses within the area. In most cases even if this apprentice moved to a different area within the mainland area of Lagos, they would be asked to provide their 'freedom' certificate, the name of the union or association they are/were affiliated with, and thorough checks would be carried out before they are accepted within a new community of fashion entrepreneurs. In other cases, these apprentices are asked to pay a fine and

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[3] (Literal meaning: *I have received big strangers'* but, in this context, he meant important people had found him worthy to be visited).

provide some drinks and other items to appease their former masters, to be allowed to move on to another master. There was no compromise when it came to creating a fashion business. Every fashion entrepreneur must have gained freedom. This conversation gave an insight into the influence of Nigeria's colonial history and culture on operations within the fashion industry in Lagos.

<u>Researcher with Informal Sector Gatekeeper and President</u>

4.5.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Based on the social constructionist positioning of my research, it was important for me to have a diverse range of key research participants to gain multiple perspectives and interpretations of the research phenomenon. Accordingly, Gergen (2004; 2014) argues for the multiplicity of reality as an essential feature of social constructionism. Since the overarching research question also highlighted institutional drivers of co-opetition, (Mariani, 2007; 2018), I also interviewed key regulators within formal and informal institutional settings to gain a holistic understanding of their role in shaping the policy and implementation processes of co-opetition strategies within the fashion industry. Overall, from my observation and initial conversations with participants, I was able to recruit twenty (20) participants from the informal sector who co-opeted in dyads, twenty (20) participants from the formal sector who co-opeted on a group level at co-located fashion site, and eight (8) institutional actors who regulated the formal and informal sectors of the fashion industry. This made up a total sample of forty-eight (48) participants within the case study.

In consideration of the social constructionist positioning of this research which emphasizes the importance of the historical, institutional, and sociological shaping of entrepreneurial co-opetition, I found interviews to be very valuable. Through interviews, I could pay attention to the lived experiences of individuals within their social contexts and as such, grasp the social construction of participants' realities (Kvale, 1996; Berg, 2007). Specifically, interviews could enable me pay attention to the discursive practices through which participants produce meaning and make sense of their daily lives. This includes an exploration of the meanings attached to text, language, and power structures in relation to the socio-historical context of this research (Gergen, 1994).

The appropriateness of interviews for exploring the sensemaking of entrepreneurial co-opetition lies in its flexibility to allow the researcher develop fluid conversations to discover situations that were not previously noted, gain in-depth information, and establish a level of trust and rapport with each participant (Kvale, 1996; Berg, 2007). In addition, interviews build a holistic snapshot of the reported

views of participants, while giving them the power to *'speak in their own voice and express their own thoughts and feelings'* (Berg, 2007).

In qualitative research methods, however, several factors influence how many interviews are enough for analysis. Flick (2011) considers time constraints as a factor (in terms of time given to finish the research, time needed for finding and contacting participants and ethical considerations) and the methodological and epistemological considerations of the research which supports the assertions of Cohen, Manion & Morison (2007) that the number of interviews needed for a research project changes as the researcher continuously restructures the ideas of the study.

Most importantly, certain factors should be considered such as the phenomena being explored and the research questions which would determine the methods or number of interviews that will reflect or reveal information about the phenomena being studied. In this study, like most qualitative studies, the aim is to uncover contextual influences of entrepreneurial network co-opetition within the Nigerian fashion industry. In other words, this thesis needs to be able to generate subjective understanding of 'how' and 'why' people hold the perceptions of co-opetition, and they have.

Interview sessions were conducted in several non-contrived venues such as network sites, fashion event sites, and participants' stores. Thee interviewes were chracterized by openness (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Lundgren-Henriksson and Kock, 2016a) and informality, which gave participants the opportunity to speak freely, candidly, and gave me the freedom to probe deeply and uncover new dimensions of SME network co-opetition through the lens of the participants.

Interview Protocol
Following recommendations by Berg (2007), I designed an interview guide *(see appendix 13.3)* as a basic checklist with a set of core questions, themes and topics related to the central research question, which helped to reduce bias and allow participants freely describe their experiences, while remaining within the confines of the research area being explored. The questions mapped the key actors within

the entrepreneurial co-opetition networks and focused on revealing the nature of co-opetition among competitors regarding their activities, motivations, long term orientation, frequency of contact, perceived dependence, perceived risks, knowledge sharing, and external influences.

The design of my interview guide also provided allowance for open-ended questions through which I was able to explore participants' experiences while providing the possibility of clarifying issues which arose during the research process (Leedy & Ormord, 2010). In addition, I followed the suggestions of Gioia & Chittipeddi (1991), Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld (2005) and Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock (2018) who emphasized that sensemaking is not a static concept as it occurs through continuous cycles of cognition and action.

To reflect the relevance of different temporal states of co-opetition sensemaking, I designed interview questions to capture past, present and future states of co-opetition sensemaking among participants. Interviews were conducted with key participants where sensemaking narratives about specific events were evoked. For example, questions like '*Could you describe…,' 'Could you please tell me a detailed story of how your network relationship developed…,' 'Can you remember and describe some of what you feel are the most critical events in your interaction with other network members.*'

The interview schedule was inspired by a prior pilot interview which I conducted to ensure that I reduced the possibility of risky research activities which may be harmful to participants, identify potential problems which may arise during interviews and enhance the feasibility, credibility, and authenticity of my study (Blumberg, 2014). The pilot interviews were conducted with two fashion entrepreneurs in the formal sector, and two in the informal sector and provided an opportunity for me to revise my research questions and build rapport with participants.

For instance, pilot interviews with participants in the informal sector sensitized me to the need to revise my interview questions and use words which they could understand. It also became clear that speaking in the native dialect to participants in the informal sector was a more effective way to establish rapport

and trust. In contrast, I did not experience any challenges with my line of questioning directed at participants within the formal sector because participants confirmed that the interview questions were clear and understandable.

Overall, conducting pilot interviews gave me an opportunity to clarify research themes and redesign the interview protocol such as participant information sheets and consent forms where details such as interview- duration, pseudonymity of participants, and the option to opt out of participation were clarified to ensure participants were fully aware of the requirements for participation, and could make informed decisions on their willingness to participate or not. Based on this, the interview schedule was redesigned and readjusted to the following seven (7) phases to probe an understanding of entrepreneurial network co-opetition:

- Perceptions of network interaction
- Perceptions of cooperation
- Perceptions of competition
- Perceptions of the network's role in coordinating co-opetition
- Perceptions of formal institutions
- Perceptions of informal institutions
- Perceptions of present and future collaborations in network

Interview Management

I ensured that interviewees were aware of the voluntary nature of participation (Ackroyd and Hughes, 1992). In addition, I ensured to provide sufficient information about myself, my research rationale, how interview data would be used and issues on confidentiality. Starting off with general questions about participants was an effective way of beginning the interview process. These questions include details on the name of fashion SME, date of establishment, motivations for choice of career, educational backgrounds, number of employees, participation in trade association and key competitors within the trade association.

As a part of my semi-structured interview, I infused the critical incident technique (Bryman and Bell, 2015), which provided me with an opportunity to refer interviewees to specific critical co-opetitive interactions in their network relationships whereby I could gain further understanding of how these participants made sense of co-opetition, as well as capture how institutional structures influenced co-opetitive interactions among participants. In acknowledging the role of reflexivity in qualitative research (Mollering, 2006), I was sensitive to the dynamics of the circumstances surrounding each interview. As such, I was careful not to ask misleading or close questions that would reflect my personal bias.

These interviews were held at various locations and lasted between 40 – 80 minutes. Rather than intervening in the flow of the story, I decided to prompt further clarification by asking questions such as *'what happened after/before?'* but this only occurred when there were pauses so as not to interrupt the story (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). Some interviews were conducted within the association meeting venue to trigger sensemaking of participants and provide in-depth understanding of how participants were able to draw from past experiences within the research setting, which allowed the me to understand previous and present states of co-opetition network relationships and in some cases, project future developments (Halinen and Tornroos, 1995; Gioia and Mehra, 1996).

In deciding an overall sample size, I was careful not to make assumptions regarding sample size which is often described as small in qualitative research. Rather, I allowed the field to guide what sample size was required. Specifically, I applied Glaser & Strauss's (1967) technique of 'theoretical saturation' to determine my sample size. This means that I continued to recruit and interview participants until I was satisfied that I had covered all aspects of my research question and no new theoretical insights were developing. Initially, 40 interviews were conducted.

However, when I began to work with the interview data, 3 additional interviews were conducted with 2 participants and 3 institutional actors from both sectors. The additional interviews were conducted

over the phone and were necessary because during the process of translating and transcribing, I discovered that there was a gap in information on how these participants viewed cooperation and competition. In addition, these participants had not clarified how institutions affected their sensemaking of co-opetitive relationships. These additional interviews were also designed as semi-structured and covered the missing information gotten from initial interviews.

Considering the multicultural structure of Nigeria, I was motivated to represent as many cultural groups as possible to reflect participant heterogeneity however, the geographical location of my field work in South-Western Nigeria meant that most of my participants were Yoruba indigenes. Nonetheless, I was able to include other members who identified with other cultural backgrounds. Thus, data was representative of two of the three major cultural blocs in Nigeria. I intended to also capture the experiences of Hausa indigenes who characterize the third major cultural bloc in Nigeria however I found that Hausas created their own closed network relationships. In displaying my sensitivity to gender issues, I was cautious of how gender and sexual orientations re viewed within the Nigerian society and particularly, within the South-Western region.

Essentially, the Nigerian society only accommodates gender identities as male or female, and sexual orientation as heterosexual. This accommodation goes beyond the formal, legal framework of the society to reflect the influences of informal dispositions where the languages, religion and culture are structured to ignore the possibility of any other gender or sexual orientation. Consequently, my considerations for a representative gender data were limited to women and men. As such, I ensured that each case had an average of participants who identified as either women or men.

4.5.3 Documentation

Documentary evidence was collected during field work to support evidence collected through interviews and observations (Yin, 2014). These consisted of recordings of key events and expressions from interviews and observations in my personal field notes and weekly reflexive reports. Another form of documentary data collected was secondary data gathered from governmental agencies such as

SMEADAN, Bank of Industry (BOF), Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and Lagos State Council for Arts and Culture. These documents include newspaper articles, periodicals and journals which could not be accessed electronically. Documents such as annual reports, minutes of meetings and marketing materials were particularly useful to gain a better understanding of the history, funding status and ongoing co-opetitive interactions of members and their respective networks.

In addition to these, electronic documentary data was gotten from the internet through social media pages and WhatsApp group page of the formal network. Due to the strong rapport, I established with members of the network, I was granted access into their private WhatsApp group where co-opetitive interactions and exchanges were executed. I was able to gain access to the group by paying the yearly membership fee. Here, using the focused approach, I paid attention to the languages and discursive elements in relation to co-opetition.

I also contributed to interactions and discussion within the group, for instance, as part of the monthly virtual training session, I facilitated a session on *'Business Collaboration'* which lasted for 40 minutes and received very positive feedbacks. The president felt this topic was important because one of the challenges the network had faced was hesitation from members to work together within the network. In his opinion, my identity as an 'inside' outsider might bring a fresh perspective to the topic which may motivate members to appreciate the benefits of collaboration. I was able to collect a total of 28 posts that were relevant to this study. This formed part of my documentary data which increased my data set and helped me identify inconsistencies between social media information and interview transcripts and these were clarified during subsequent interview.

Through this engaged approach, I was able to really immerse myself into the phenomenological complexity of co-opetition and record my observations in my notebook. My ability to obtain accounts of real co-opetitive experiences and reflexively engage in the research process provided me with a richer understanding of the sensemaking and institutional impact on co-opetitive relationships which

could provide immense contribution to the understanding of co-opetition and as such, emphasize the valuable contributions of this thesis.

TABLE 4.6 TWENTY (20) PARTICIPANTS FROM INFORMAL NETWORK

Co-Opetitive Alliance Pseudonym: Dyad 1

Length of Relationship: 2016 – Ongoing

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Role	Educational level	Religion	No of Employees	Network membership
Dubaka	48	Male	Master craftsman	Primary/ apprenticeship	Muslim	6	8 years
Ismaila	36	Male	Journeyman	Primary/ apprenticeship	Muslim	2	1 year

Co-Opetitive Alliance Pseudonym: Dyad 2

Length of Relationship: 2017 – Ongoing

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Role	Educational level	Religion	No of Employees	Network membership
Alhaja	53	Female	Master craftsman	Primary/ apprenticeship	Muslim	8	7 years
Akani	36	Male	Journeyman	Apprenticeship	Christian	1	1 year

Co-Opetitive Alliance Pseudonym: Dyad 3

Length of Relationship: 2017 – Ongoing

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Role	Educational level	Religion	No of Employees	Network membership
Wily	48	Male	Master craftsman	Apprenticeship	Muslim	5	7 years
Koka	31	Male	Journeyman	Secondary	Christian	0	2 years

Co-Opetitive Alliance Pseudonym: Dyad 4

Length of Relationship: 2017 – Ongoing

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Role	Educational level	Religion	No of Employees	Network membership
Osho	48	Male	Master craftsman	Apprenticeship	Muslim	4	7 years
Pupo	24	Male	Journeyman	Apprenticeship	Muslim	0	1 year

Co-Opetitive Alliance Pseudonym: Dyad 5

Length of Relationship: 2017 – Ongoing

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Role	Educational level	Religion	No of Employees	Network membership
Ola	42	Female	Master craftsman	Primary/ apprenticeship	Muslim	4	4 years
Kotun	26	Female	Journeyman	Apprenticeship	Christian	1	1 year

Co-Opetitive Alliance Pseudonym: Dyad 6

Length of Relationship: 2017 – Ongoing

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Role	Educational level	Religion	No of Employees	Network membership
Jimi	44	Male	Master craftsman	Primary/ apprenticeship	Muslim	6	6 years
Muria	23	Female	Journeyman	Apprenticeship	Muslim	3	2 years

Co-Opetitive Alliance Pseudonym: Dyad 7

Length of Relationship: 2017 – Ongoing

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Role	Educational level	Religion	No of Employees	Network membership
Kola	49	Male	Master craftsman	Primary/ apprenticeship	Christian	6	6 years
Wale	36	Male	Journeyman	Apprenticeship	Christian	1	2 years

Co-Opetitive Alliance Pseudonym: Dyad 8

Length of Relationship: 2017 – Ongoing

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Role	Educational level	Religion	No of Employees	Network membership
Zete	38	Female	Master craftsman	Primary/ apprenticeship	Christian	4	4 years
Koye	23	Female	Journeyman	Apprenticeship	Christian	2	2 years

Co-Opetitive Alliance Pseudonym: Dyad 9

Length of Relationship: 2017 – Ongoing

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Role	Educational level	Religion	No of Employees	Network membership
Iyada	51	Female	Master craftsman	Primary/ apprenticeship	Muslim	5	7 years
Oban	31	Female	Journeyman	Apprenticeship	Christian	1	1 year

Co-Opetitive Alliance Pseudonym: Dyad 10

Length of Relationship: 2017 – Ongoing

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Role	Educational level	Religion	No of Employees	Network membership
Alani	55	Male	Master craftsman	Primary/ apprenticeship	Muslim	5	8 years
Tayeh	30	Female	Journeyman	Apprenticeship	Christian	1	1 year

TABLE 4.7 TWENTY (20) PARTICIPANTS FROM FORMAL NETWORK

Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Educational Level	Religion	SME	Year Established	Employees	Network	Co-opetition Site
FN1	Female	Yoruba	35	Graduate (International)	Muslim	Kitan	2017	3	2 years	Fashion Finest/FN
FN 2	Female	Igbo	36	Graduate (Local)	Christian	Didi	2014	6	4 years	Fashion Finest/FN
FN 3	Female	Yoruba	34	Graduate (Local)	Christian	Ope Stitches	2012	5	6 years	Fashion Finest
FN 4	Female	Yoruba	29	Graduate (International)	Christian	Ayin Designs	2018	2	1.5 years	Fashion Finest/FN
FN5	Female	Yoruba	46	School cert/apprenticeship	Christian	AD Fashion	2014	6	3 years	Fashion Finest
FN6	Female	Igbo	35	Graduate (International)	Christian	C-Red	2011	8	5 years	Fashion Finest
FN 7	Female	Yoruba	33	Graduate (International)	Christian	Roske	2018	6	2 years	Fashion Finest
FN 8	Male	Yoruba	35	Graduate (Local)	Muslim	AFP	2014	6	3 years	Fashion Finest
FN 9	Female	Yoruba	44	Graduate (International)	Muslim	Foye	2017	9	1 year	Fashion Finest/FN
FN 10	Female	Calabar	32	Graduate (Local)	Muslim	Ekanem	2015	5	3 years	FN
FN 11	Female	Benin	31	Graduate (International)	Christian	Adire	2017	6	2 years	Fashion Finest
FN 12	Male	Yoruba	58	Graduate (Local)	Muslim	K-Kud Design	2009	6	4 years	Fashion Finest
FN 13	Male	Igbo	40	Graduate (Local)	Christian	Twayne	2010	5	3 years	Fashion Finest/FN
FN 14	Male	Igbo	51	Graduate (Local)	Christian	Noye's Desgn	2010	6	3 years	Fashion Finest/FN
FN 15	Female	Yoruba	32	Graduate (International)	Muslim	Fehin Stitches	2012	7	2 years	Fashion Finest/FN
FN 16	Female	Yoruba	35	Graduate (International)	Muslim	OSC Fashion	2013	8	3 years	FN
FN 17	Female	Yoruba	34	Graduate (Local)	Muslim	Bisi Threads	2010	6	2 years	FN
FN 18	Female	Delta	34	Graduate (International)	Christian	Viva Fashion	2014	7	2 years	FN
FN 19	Female	Yoruba	34	Graduate (International)	Christian	Zoza Designs	2014	8	2 years	Fashion Finest/FN
FN 20	Male	Igbo	34	Graduate (Local)	Christian	Gozy's Finest	2016	8	2 years	Fashion Finest

TABLE 4.8 FORMAL INSTITUTIONAL REGULATORS

Participant Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Religion	Role	Organization	Years in Role
Regulator 1	Female	Yoruba	40-50	Christian	Director-General	Lagos State Council for Arts and Culture	1 year
Regulator 2	Female	Yoruba	40-50	Muslim	Director of Research & Development	Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency (SMEADAN)	3 years
Regulator 3	Male	Yoruba	43	Christian	Creative Industry Financing Initiative (CIFI) Project Lead	Central bank of Nigeria (CBN)	2 years
Regulator 4	Female	Igbo	45-50	Christian	Creative Manager (Creative Industry Fund)	Bank of Industry (BOI)	4 years

TABLE 4.9 INFORMAL INSTITUTIONAL REGULATORS

Participant Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Religion	Role	Network	Years in Role
Regulator 1	Male	Yoruba	56	Muslim	President	IN	3 years
Regulator 2	Male	Yoruba	46	Muslim	Council	IN	1 year
Regulator 3	Female	Yoruba	43	Christian	Chairwoman	IN	8 months
Regulator 4	Male	Yoruba	45-50	Muslim	Council of Elder	IN	2 years, 5 months

FIGURE 4.4 GRAPHICAL ILLUSTRATION OF SAMPLES FROM EMBEDDED CASE STUDY
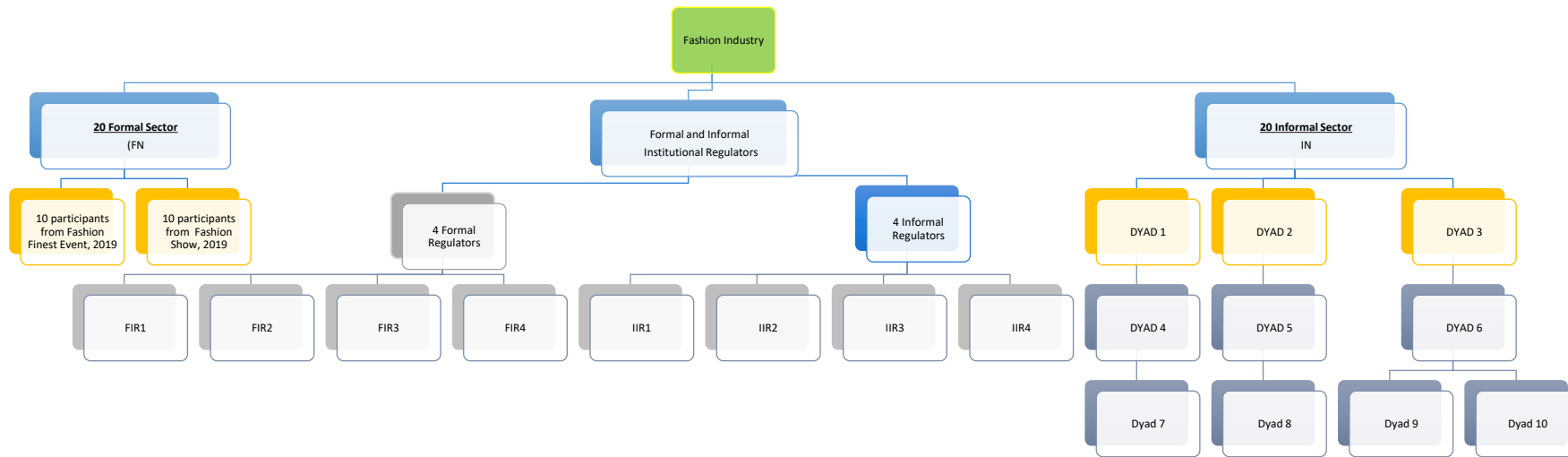
4.6 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was found to be a useful technique for analysing my data. The thematic analysis enables the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These patterns also referred to as *'themes,'* are what provide an interpretation of various aspects of the research topic. One of the benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility in dealing with data collected at different times or phases during the research (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This process of organizing data into meaningful patterned themes is an important aspect of qualitative research (Holloway & Todres, 2003) and is arguably the starting point for most qualitative, text-based analyses.

Importantly, discussions around the process of discovering themes from data corpus have often assumed a passive account of the actual process where researchers play an active role in the process. Rather, as Ely et al (1997) argues, *'...themes reside in our head from our thinking about our data and creating links as we understand them.'* This suggests that as a researcher, it is important to acknowledge my underlying philosophical assumptions (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Grounded within the social constructionist position, therefore, a suitable analytic approach for my research requires that I as the researcher, play an active role in the research process.

Further, thematic analysis covers a broad spectrum of approaches which include Thematic Decomposition Analysis (DA), Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), Discourse Analysis (DA), grounded theory, narrative analysis, to say the least. These methods all share similar goal which is to search for themes or patterns across an entire data set, rather than from within a data item (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Yet, as opposed to the flexibility of thematic analysis, these complementary approaches mentioned above are heavily reliant on a pre-existing theoretical framework which suggests lack of flexibility in the process (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In applying my thematic analytical approach, I followed Braun & Clarke's (2006) guidelines for reflecting on several choices in order to make the process of coding and reporting the process and

details of analysis as explicit and transparent, as possible (Attride-Stirling, 2001). These choices are discussed below:

4.6.1 Familiarization with Data

In qualitative research, analysis of data begins with data familiarization. For the purpose of my thesis, therefore, I began to familiarize myself with the data from the observation stage, and through the process of transcribing interviews. I was able to identify information-rich accounts in relation to my study. Thus, although I had a total of fifty-six (56) interviews, I selected forty-eight (48) interviews across the broad range of informal and formal co-opetitive actors, formal and informal institutional actors. I read through each interview several times to gain deeper understanding of the co-opetitive interactions that unfolded in the relationships of fashion entrepreneurs in both sectors of the fashion industry. I also started to see how the socio-historic context shaped these interactions.

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed into text in original languages to capture local meanings and cultural connotations (Brannen, Piekkari, R., & Tietze, 2017). Handwritten field notes and reflexive diary were converted into developed narratives. This means that experiences of participants which were discussed in native, local dialects were kept in their original form. This is because the social constructionist approach of this study demanded an understanding of local language and knowledge to conduct a meaningful study (May & Mumby, 2005). This local knowledge was derived from interpreting, translating, discussing, and engaging in the lives of participants, which enhanced my understanding of the richness and peculiarities of how co-opetition is made sensed of in Southwestern Nigeria. I paid attention to the interpretations of co-opetition in key Yoruba and Pidgin meanings. By understanding the vocabularies and engagement of participants' worlds, my findings were more coherent and interconnected.

The process of data collection, interpretation and initial analysis occurred simultaneously, as this helped me further understand where my research was going - who was relevant to speak to in terms of

sampling and what questions were necessary to explore. I continued this process until I got to a point of theoretical saturation. Accordingly, Mouratidou, Crowder & Scott (2020) suggest that communication and interpretation (or translation) are interlinked processes in meaning making from intra-lingual or inter-lingual languages (Steiner, 1995).

Although intra-lingual language techniques are the most used form of communication, Mouratidou et al., (2020) argue that a word can often have several meanings and as such, making sense of a word becomes a contextual process. Accordingly, Shuttleworth (2014) identify two approaches to interpretation as *simultaneous* and *consecutive*. Simultaneous interpretation occurs as a speaker is talking, while consecutive interpretation involves the interpreter summarising the essence of a discussion at points where a speaker pauses while talking.

In most field study endeavours, consecutive interpreting has often been applied by researchers to makes sense of discussions with research participants through field notes (Mouratidou et al., 2020). I adopted this method as it enabled a free flow of speech by the participant without any interruption from me (Mouratidou et al., 2020). In addition, consecutive interpretation also provides an opportunity for the researcher (or interpreter) to think about the meaning of the conversation and its implications.

Essentially, in debates around translation, Pocke (2012) suggests that translator's resort to different strategies to manage the metaphoric images is based on the content of the discourse. Here, Venuti (1998; 2017) prescribes two strategies as foreignization and domestication. Within foreignization strategies, a translator retains the cultural codes within the translated language while domestication strategies are used to present an illusion of transparency by erasing the foreign characters of the original text (Venuti, 1998; 2017; Pocke, 2012).

Considering the multi-lingual nature of my thesis, I had to decide when the perfect time was for translation. I opted to translate immediately after transcription to enable closer engagement with the data, since the conversations were still fresh in my memory (Mouratidou et al., 2020). Next, I had to

decide how translation should be undertaken. In ensuring that translated text is like the original text, I decided to use Venuti's (1993) foreignization strategy which allowed me to preserve the contextual consistency rather than verbal consistency between the source and target languages (Xian, 2008; Marschan-Piekkari and Reis, 2004).

In this vein, interviews were initially transcribed verbatim to incorporate culturally specific metaphors and sayings that provide an understanding of deep seated cultural and institutional differences of social thoughts and attitudes (Patriotta & Brown, 2011). These include the use of idioms, proverbs, polywords, filler words, and phrasal words (Steen, Dorst, Hermann, Kaal & Krennmayr, 2010; Poucke, 2012). This way, texts were translated according to their meanings embedded in the interviews in other to capture the experiences and feelings of the interviewees. Words that interviewees mispronounced were transcribed as pronounced. In situations where mispronounced words could complicate the understanding of texts, the correct words were inserted in brackets.

Then, I translated the transcriptions into English language. As I had full records of original conversations with participants, I was able to revisit the data repeatedly to listen and further develop a fuller understanding of participants narratives, which allowed me to further identify new avenues for exploration, in relation to my research questions. I also used footnotes to explain historical events and social phenomena related to the texts to ease understanding of data presented in local dialects (Xian, 2008). In some cases, I drew from Ivir's (1987; 2004) substitution strategy or what Pocke (2012) also refers to as 'neutral strategy' by using similar phrasing of statements to maintain meaning in cases where words had exact English conceptual equivalence in contextual meaning and as such, did not present a problem with translation (Pocke, 2012; Mouratidou et al., 2020).

This is in line with the current movement away from the emphasis on conceptual equivalence in existing literature, towards a more pluralistic approach that preserves the purpose and function of discourses in their original culture and context (Mouratidou, Crowder & Scott, 2020). Specifically,

within this study, I found that many statements made in Yoruba and pidgin dialects by participants had no direct English equivalence. These issues are presented in the examples below:

TABLE 4.10 DIFFERENCES IN MEANINGS

Yoruba or pidgin word/phrase	Literal translation	Contextual meaning	Other meanings
Figagbaga	The act of raising shoulders (to say a person is being pompous)	Rivalry/strife/competition (negative perception)	Pompous, enforcing social class/status difference
Idije	Contest	Contest	competition
Fowo so wopo	Use a hand to tie other hands together	Cooperation	Togetherness, unity
Amuni dara	The act of making a person look good/attractive	fashion designers	Other professionals in the beauty industry
Agba jowo lafin soya, (owo kan ole gberu d'ori)	It is only when you put your two hands together that you can boldly beat your chest (one hand cannot carry load on the head)	Benefits of groups /trade association	Confidence and trust come from working with others. In unity lies our strength
'Shake body' (pidgin slang)	To dance, to move your body	Compliance to bribery	Coded language for requesting financial support from a familiar associate while maintaining personal integrity
haa, alejo nla ni mo gba	I have received a big visitor	Important people have found me worthy of a visit	sarcasm

What becomes obvious based on the examples above, is that while translation has the potential to provide an equivalent meaning in English language, there is an absence of a single correct meaning. In cases where translation is accurate, it may not always convey the same meaning due to the inherent social and cultural contextual differences (Su & Parham, 2002; Tarozzi, 2013; Moudatidou et al., 2020).

Further, it is not always possible to achieve linguistic equivalence due to differences in cultural background. For instance, Tarozzi (2013) refers to the English expression "it is raining cats and dogs" which may be difficult for an outsider to understand even if they speak English fluently. These emphasize the challenges faced by a researcher and hence, the need for a subjective process to translation (Wong & Poon, 2010; Fairhurst & Putnamn, 2018; Moudatidou et al., 2020).

Another key challenge during translation is deciding who should translate (Moudatidou et al., 2020). According to Nurjannah, Mills, Park, & Usher (2014) translation should be done by a person who is fluent in the language. In addition, Tarozzi, (2013) argues for the direct involvement of a translator within the research to capture context and clarify terms which may otherwise remain ambiguous. While I was confident in my understanding of the Yoruba language, the high use of metaphors and proverbs within this language presented a significant challenge, as I found it difficult to decode exact contextual meanings of these sayings.

To ease this challenge and to truly reflect the authenticity of this study, I clarified parts of the conversations with participants which I found to be unclear. In addition, I engaged the help of a native Yoruba patron, who was able to provide further insights to the deeper meanings, history and cultural connotations behind the metaphors and proverbs that characterises the Yoruba language. As such, I sent a few samples of my interview transcriptions to a patron who provided his own translations without viewing the original interview transcripts.

Afterwards, I made a comparison of both translations and found that most translations were similar but not identical. Although essential meanings were prevalent in both translations, some contextual nuances were lost in some of my translations. However, this was not a major challenge as the focus was to understand and unearth the meanings being conveyed (Baker, 2018). The figure below describes the cyclical process of interview data collection, interpretation, and translation:
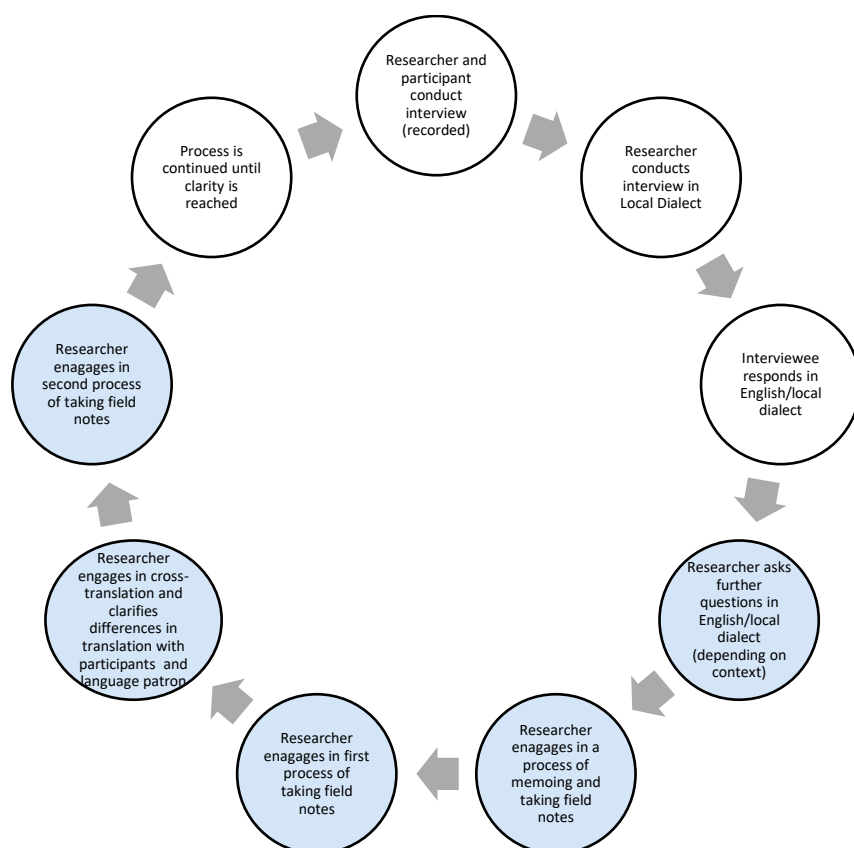
Source: Adapted from Mouratidou, Crowder & Scott (2020)

This process of translation presents the researcher's role as central to the translation process and enables the fulfilment of ethical responsibility to participants by authentically representing their voice and story (Chidlow, Plakoyiannaki, & Welch, 2014). However, this process also presented difficulties. From my perspective as a researcher, it would have been much easier to collect all data in English language, which some participants spoke fluently.

However, conducting interviews only in English language would have compromised the data especially for participants who were not fluent in English language (Mouratidou et al., 2020). For instance, Xian (2008) found that restricting participants to one language may create a situation where participants may not use the correct grammar to fully express themselves, rather they may use words which they find most important to them but may not clearly reveal important cues about their

underlying experiences and thought processes. In addition, the contextual nature of this study demanded an understanding of the culture and lived experiences of participants.

As such, restricting participants to a language which they were not confident in might have robbed participants of the necessray control they needed, and created a structure of hierarchy between the researcher and the researched which I wanted to avoid at all costs. In addition, it would have negatively impacted on the trustworthiness and authenticity of this study. This justified my need to conduct in languages which participants felt comfortable to use, for the benefit of data quality. Languages spoken by participants include Yoruba, Pidgin and English languages.

The consideration of language therefore provides a starting point for data familiarization and also to encourage International Business researchers to engage in critical reflection of their positionalities and biases, and how these impact the achievement of credible (Adu-Ampong & Adams, 2020) and authentic (Xian, 2008) representation of the lived experiences of the researched whose voices should be visible and heard within research accounts (Westwood, 2006; Milner, 2007; Wilmot & Tietze, 2020).

4.6.2 Generating Initial Basic Codes

I had to decide what type of analysis I wanted to conduct. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), thematic analysis enables one of two options which is either to provide a rich description of my entire data set or provide a detailed account of each theme within my entire data set. I opted to provide a detailed account of my overall themes within my data set because this would enable richer identification and examination of participants' underlying ideas, assumptions, and sensemaking of entrepreneurial network co-opetition. This description of latent (rather than semantic) aspects of my themes is more suited to my research questions which first, seek to examine underlying institutional influences on sensemaking processes of entrepreneurial network co-opetition and second, determine the implication of these on the construction of co-petition mindsets. This also aligns with the abductive approach to coding adopted in this study which, while acknowledging the fact that coding does not

exist in an *'epistemological vacuum'* (Braun & Clarke, 2006), does not subscribe to a rigidly set analytic preconceptions of the researcher. To illustrate this process, analysis was conducted in different stages, and categorised using three major steps of basic, organizing and global themes as recommended by Attride-Striling (2001)'e thematic network model.

In being consistent with the abductive nature of my study, the process of coding was data-driven; indicating that the development of themes was based on both data and preliminary theory. Bearing in mind the overarching research focus to understand sensemaking of entrepreneurial network coopetition), the research questions, conceptual categories which developed from the interview guide (Creswell, 2003), and participants' responses to interview questions, I began the production of initial codes by working systematically through the entire data set to identify repeated patterns of interesting features of the data which revealed meaningful interpretations based on participants own words and expressions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process of coding involved engaging in a constant iterative and recursive process of reading, coding, re-reading, and comparing key words or phrases across the entire data set to gain a sense of familiarity (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The first stage involved highlighting sections of data from transcripts and making notes to clearly identify and connect each code to the data. For example, the basic code 'institutional trust' was derived from participants statements in transcripts such as *'...we always believe one thing in union, that, **ka fi owó sowópò**...that is, to work together, to put our hands together...'*

Coding was performed manually through writing notes on transcribed texts; using highlighters to color-code and identify potential patterns within my data extracts. I used an identifier listing to highlight specific information such as the duration of interview, date, time, and some key perceptions revealed by participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Here, I used different colours such as yellow to identify basic codes, amber to identify organizing themes, and green to identify global themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

To ensure that all data within my data extract had been coded, I copied extracts from each transcript and collated them according to codes which I saved on separate files on my computer. Through this process, I was able to reduce the bulk of my data into manageable pieces. Important to note here is that I did not ignore any aspects of my data during the process of coding. This is because I wanted to gain as much insight from my entire data corpus as possible (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

As such, I was able to move beyond a surfaced examination of my data engage to uncover the hidden and unspoken assumptions of entrepreneurial co-opetition networks in Nigeria's fashion industry. In addition, I coded inclusively by leaving relevant surrounding data around my data extracts. This was done for clearer understanding of the context within which each extract was generated. Following Braun & Clarke's (2006) recommendation, I coded for as many themes and patterns as possible in order not to miss out on some interesting data. Appendices 10.5 and 10.6 provide examples of how texts from transcripts have been sorted into groups to develop organizing and global themes.

The figure below provides an example of how a thematic network is structured, and figure provides a detailed illustration of the thematic network developed from data analysis in this study:

Fig. 4.6: Thematic Network Structure
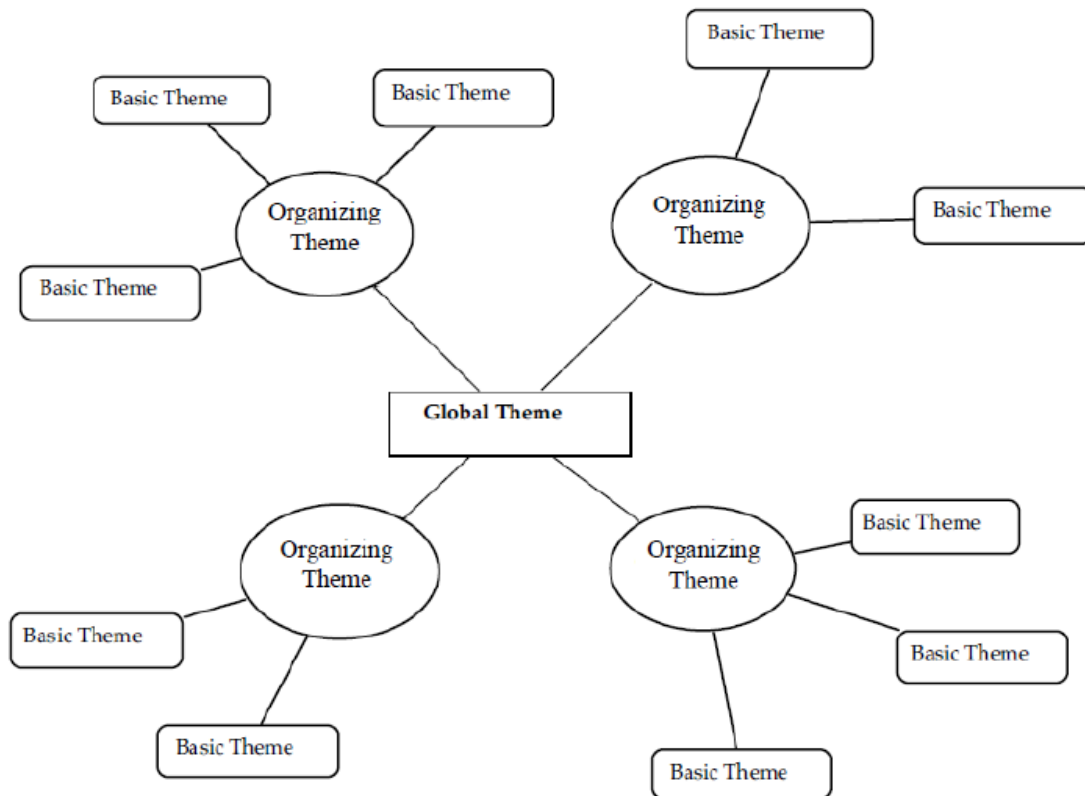
Source: adapted from Attride-Stirling (2001)

The basic themes represent the lowest order themes derived from the transcribed texts and is used to highlight specific attributes of the data. As such, meaning from these basic codes can be uncovered by an iterative review of accompanying basic themes. Table 4.12 provides some examples of basic themes derived from the data and used for the development of organizing and global themes:

Table 4.11. Some Basic Codes and Descriptions

Basic Code	Description
Past experience	Indicates the influence of previous experiences on personal and professional relationships among fashion designers on the construction of co-opetition mindsets
Trust	Implies trust among members in both formal and informal networks, between networks, and trust in

	formal and informal institutional representatives and systems
Opportunism	Implies undesired knowledge transfer, keeping an eye on other's activities and selfish interests
Power disparities	Indicates marginalization within the fashion industry and its implications for co-opetitive interactions within networks
Internalized domination	Implies compliance to power disparities present in co-opetitive interactions among network members
Changing customer preferences	Relates to the perception of co-opetition as induced by external economic factors
Economic incentives	Implies influence of formal institutional influence on co-opetitive interactions among network members
Institutional voids	Implies arbitrary and unsupportive actions of formal institutions and their impact of co-opetitive interactions among network members, and between networks and formal institutional agents.
Negative social construction of competition	Implies the role of informal institutions in making sense of co-opetition

In the next diagram below, organizing themes are presented, which were drawn from clusters of basic themes presented in appendix 10.5. These organizing themes explain the key ideas of the basic themes in line with the broader overarching themes in the transcribed texts. The organizing themes in this study fall into five categories as follows:

1. Temporal Co-Opetition Mindsets

2. Maintained Co-Opetition Mindsets

3. Normative Institutional Primers

4. Cultural-Cognitive Institutional Editors

5. Regulatory institutional triggers.

The third stage of the network map provides the global themes which are derived from the organizing themes and summarize the core issues of the overall themes generated. In other words, the represent the main ideas within the entire data set. Based on the complexity of the data set, two global themes

emerged, which, according to Attride-Stirling (2001), is normal. Global themes derived in this thesis are:

1. Divergent Mindsets of Co-Opetition Network

2. Institutional Drivers of Co-Opetition Sensemaking

The diagram below provides a full illustration of all basic code, organizing, and global themes derived from the entire data set:

Fig. 4.7: Thematic Network Map of Basic Codes, Organizing and Global Themes

shared 'immediate and long-term' benefits.

private 'immediate' and 'long-term' benefits

Digitization of Fashion

Changing Customer Preference

Religion

Family/ Kinship

Temporal mindset

Normative Primers

social embeddedness

Divergent Mindsets of Co-Opetition Network

Sensemaking of co-opetition in fashion-based entrepreneurial networks.

Institutional Drivers of Co-Opetition Sensemaking

Cultural Cognitive Editors

shared experiences and power disparity

Maintained mindset.

Regulatory Triggers

Loyalty, Service, trust, and Reciprocity

co-opetition as coping mechanism

Negative Social Construction of 'Competition'

Taken-for-grantedness.

Institutional Voids

Institutional Inequality

Although the use of computer-assisted qualitative data analytical software (CAQDAS) such as NVivo is increasingly becoming of interest in qualitative research as a useful tool for researchers to sort and categorize data (Richards & Richards, 1994), I found that in line with Gibbs et al's (2002) suggestion, the use of CAQDAS could restrict findings in research involving narrations and discourse analysis. Like Fowler & Kress (1979) argue, CAQDAS requires the researcher to lift research discourses and practices out of their naturalistic setting to be considered in isolation, and as such, are unable to provide cultural analysis which involves a nuanced analysis of socio-cultural, institutional texts (MacMillan, 2004), which is what I aimed to uncover with my research.

4.6.3 Generating, Reviewing and Defining Themes

After the coding process, I began the broader level of analysis which involved the development of themes. To do this, I sorted each code from the table above into potential themes and collated data extracts within each specified theme. I used a mind map to visually present the sorting of different codes into themes, where I started to identify relationships between codes, between themes, and between different levels of themes such as main themes and sub-themes. I was sensitized to the fact that there is no rigid rule for deciding what count as a theme in qualitative analysis such as this (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Instead, and aligned with the flexibility of thematic analysis, I, as the researcher needed to base my decision of a theme on factors such as its ability to capture relevant aspects of my research question which is to understand the sensemaking of entrepreneurial network co-opetition. Through this activity, I was able to sort the codes developed in the previous activity into themes and sub-themes, using a mind map.

After the development of candidate and sub-themes above, it was necessary for me to refine my themes. I continued to work through my themes and sub-themes until I was satisfied that each theme adequately captured my coded data. The outcome of this phase is presented in the thematic mind map

(**see appendix 13.7**). Afterwards, I re read my entire data set and checked that each theme accurately reflected the meanings within my data set. This was to ensure that I had not missed out on any code, and I was providing an accurate representation of participants' experiences related to the sensemaking of entrepreneurial network co-opetition.

Figure 4.8: Data Analysis Process

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5	Stage 6
• familairisng with data to generate intial themes	• generating initial codes of data categories and exploration of emergent relationships, patterns, and themes	• theme generation: collating and classifying codes into similar themes	• Reviewing themes: final emergent themes into categories, subthemes, and themes.	• Defining and naming themes	• Producing the report

4.7 Ethical Considerations

Blumberg *et al.* (2014) define ethics in a general sense as "the moral principles, norms, or standards of behaviour that guide moral choices about our behaviour and our relationships with others". Within research, ethics is the appropriateness of a researcher's behaviour regarding the rights of research subjects (Saunders et al., 2016). Thus, research ethics involves the moral and responsible execution of the formulation and clarification of research topics, the nature of the research, research design, data collection, processing and storage of data, data analysis on the part of the researcher (Saunders et al., 2016). I now discuss considerations around consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and storage of personal data next.

4.7.1 Consent

Consent in this study takes the form of partially informed consent to protect the integrity of research data, which can be potentially compromised if too much information is revealed to informants (Blumberg et al., 2014). First, consent was sought from the SMEs to schedule interviews. When consent was given, an information sheets were circulated to each participant. The following was explained in writing: Research topic, nature of the research, why participants had been selected for the research, research risks/benefits, rights of research subjects. The researcher also offered a verbal affirmation of the freedom of participants to withdraw occasionally throughout the research.

4.7.2 Confidentiality, Anonymity, and Storage of Data

This study does not adopt anonymity because an anonymous study is one that is impossible to trace back to the research informants not even by the researcher (Blumberg et al., 2014). This research involves the creation of codes linking participants' identity to a pseudonym, and the researcher can potentially trace this back to the participants. Thus, this study is focussed on gaining the consent of participants and limiting access to research data as the chosen alternative to anonymization. In essence, this research adopts confidentiality of personal data and is therefore considered "confidential" as opposed to "anonymous." Since this study involves confidential participation by participants, extra measures were taken to ensure that participants were protected (Blumberg et al. 2014): First, the

collected data (interview records, pseudo names, and transcripts) were secured in a password coded Personal Computer and a secured file cabinet. Only I, the researcher, had access to this information. Pseudo-names and codes were separated from the data and locked up separately. Also, no participant was named in any publications disseminated materials. Participants were also informed of these measures to ensure confidentiality. This information was provided in the written consent form they signed. Consent forms included plans to destroy the original data at some reasonable point after this research is completed as advised by the Data Protection Act of 2018. The Act requires information to be kept for "no longer than is necessary." I intend to keep transcriptions and records for up to five years after the completion of the research, mainly for further research purposes and destroy them completely, after that.

4.8 Reflections on Contingent Criteriology based on Lincoln and Guba's (1985; 1989) Trustworthiness and Authenticity Framework

The evaluation of management research has been recognised as highly necessary for the prevention of poor quality and untrustworthy research output (Saval et al., 2008; Symon, Cassell, & Johnson, 2018). The flexibility of qualitative management research to draw upon a diverse range of epistemologies (e.g., interpretivism, post-modernism, critical reality), illustrates the strength of qualitative research (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Duberly et al., 2012). However, this also presents difficulties in providing a suitable quality criterion for qualitative research (Symon, Cassell, & Johnson, 2018).

Essentially, although qualitative research is based on the premise that knowledge is socially constructed (Alvesson & Karreman, 2001), existing debates on quality criteria for qualitative research have hardly addressed the implications of differing philosophical positions that shape the different perspectives to knowledge construction (Symon et al., 2018). Rather, most studies have conformed to the institutionalization of academic practices that presents a set of quality criteria as generally applicable to all forms of qualitative research. For instance, qualitative research has been evaluated

using positivist principles of construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability (Yin, 2014).

To avoid this pitfall, this study acknowledges the existence of diverse forms of social construction of knowledge in qualitative management research and its implications for attaining clear specification of evaluative criteria based on the underlying philosophy, which has been recommended as important for assessing the rigorousness of co-opetition research (Gnyawali & Song, 2016). Further studies by Johnson, Buehring, Cassell & Symon (2006) however call for the application of contingent criteriology that enables different sets of evaluation criteria to be contingently deployed in ways that fit the researcher's mode of engagement.

In this vein, Lincoln and Guba (1985) introduce a set of alternative principles to assess the trustworthiness of qualitative research based on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. This framework was later enhanced to include the principle of 'authenticity' based on the understanding that all understanding and judgement is value-based, and as such, is subject to ideological and political forces (Johnson and Rasulova, 2017). Thus, it aims to represent what is considered to be true, and adopts a participatory approach to research, rather than a procedural preoccupation with validity (Welch & Piekkari, 2017; Symon et al., 2018). This adjustment to the original trustworthy quality framework was a result of criticisms which argued that the original framework failed to sufficiently address the philosophical contradictions between positivist epistemological positions which view the description of cultures as aligned with the researcher's inter-subjectivity, and interpretivist epistemological positions which view reality as socially constructed (Lincoln & Guba, 1989; 1998). For instance, Pretty (1994) argues that arguing for trustworthiness of qualitative research requires a positivist epistemology.

Within the revised framework, the basis for quality evaluation is negotiation among stakeholders in reflecting the basis of their values and understanding within the research process (Johnson & Rasulova,

2017). In other words, the inclusion of authenticity to the trustworthiness framework recognises the collaborative role of research participants as part of the research process and aims to reflect their voices (Johnson & Rasulova, 2017). This framework is relevant for a qualitative research underlined by a social constructionist philosophy. Essentially within social constructionsist positions, the nature of reality cannot be verified objectively. Rather, it is created through our interpretations of it.

This 'truth' which materializes from a social-constructionst study therfore, is revealed through interactions and relationships between the researcher and the researched within a particular context, rather than simply as a result of the research design. This contrasts positivist research based on an objective reality which presents the researcher as separate from the researched (Johnson & Rasulova, 2017). From this standpoint, therefore, the core principles of trustworthiness and authenticity are defined and discussed in alignment with the underlying social constructionist philosophical position of this study. In line with the criticisms of the procedural nature of 'trustworthy' criteria, I discuss its underlying principles based on how ethically it was done in relation to research participants, other relevant stakeholders and the research community, rather than based on the procedural, 'checklist' prescriptions for assessing quality in qualitative reasearch (Johnson & Rasulova, 2017).

4.8.1 Credibility and Fairness

Within qualitative research, credibility and fairness is displayed through the researcher's reflection of the plurality of truths (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; 1989).This si especially important within a social constructionist study. To achieve this, I provided participants with the opportunity to speak in languages and dialects which they found most comfortable. This provided participants with the opportunity to freely discuss and reveal their experiences of SME co-opetition that sometimes contradicted others opinions. I observed these contradictions and inherent tensions among the multiple views of participants on co-opetitive interactions and this provided me with an opportunity to establish an agenda for further action (Lincoln and Guba, 1989), such as revising my interview questions on and further exploring contrasting views.

Considering the social constructionist philosophical background of this study, a single interpretation was not achievable. Rather, sevaral data sources were triangulated to capture the multiple voices. This way, different perspectives, experiences and meanings were incorporated to provide authentication to the research process. In addition, secondary data was used to complement primary data (interviews and observations) to provide a deeper understanding of SME network co-opetition, rather than for verification pruposes (Silverman, 1993). Accordingly, the use of multiple data sources such as interviews, observations (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008), as well as secondary data (Gibbert & Ruigrik, 2008) ehnahnces the quality of the study.

4.8.2 Confirmability

This describes researcher's distance and influence on data collection and analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this vein, the researcher is required to ensure that that the research process and findings are not biased, which is challenging to achieve within qualitative research guided by a social constructionist philosophy that requires close engagement with the research field. For instance, Morse et al., (2002) argue that the engaged role of the researcher negates the use of procedures such as member checking for confirmability.

As such in this study, member checking technique was only used to ensure that transcribed data was an accurate reflection of the narrative accounts. In this case, analysed data was not sent to participants for confirmability. Instead, the researcher's experience is discussed within the study as part of the data. In this vein, I engaged in reflexive accounting of my personal experiences throughout this study, and reveal how these experiences and positionality contribute to the overall findings of this study (Bruton, Zahra & Cai, 2018; Adu-Ampong & Adams, 2019).

Unlike the dominant fixation on generating universal explanations, the methodological design of this study calls for attention to be paid to the idiosyncrasies of the research context, which suggests an engaged participation from the researcher whereby context and participants are just seen as data collection sites and subjects, but as collaborators to the knowledge development process (Boyer, 1996;

Van de Ven, Meyer & Jing, 2018). Overall, the methodology adopted in this thesis enabled my adoption of an 'insider' view by directly interacting and empathising with the views of participants in developing an understanding of SME network co-opetition that incorporates local context, language, and perspectives.

4.8.3 Dependability

Although dependability is argued to be based on positivist views (Morse et al., 2002), it was essential for me to show how the outlined conclusions on SME network co-oeption is developed from the empirical data (Healy & Perry, 2000; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Healy & Perry, 2009), for the purpose of this thesis. To reveal this 'clear chain of evidence,' (Yin, 2014; Gibbert & Ruigrik,2008), I displayed an extensive use of quotes drawn from participants comments and provided a table which summarised the different ways in which participants described cooperation and competition (co-opetition) to increase transparency.

Within the anayliss chapter, summaries of key instiutional factors that influence sme network co-oeption from the particiaponts perspectives, are also presented. Within the appendix chapter, evidence of the iterative coding process is also presented, as well as samples of secondary data and interview transcripts (Gibbert & Ruigrik,2008). The aim was to show that the research process was logical, documented, traceable (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

4.8.4 Transferability

This refers to the provision of detailed decriptive information that allow similarities from the research context to be drawn with another context (Johnson & Rasulova, 2017). However, this is in contrast to the goal of qualitative research which aims to reflect the plurality or multiplicity or truths, rather than generalize (Johnson & Rasulova, 2017; Welch & Piekkari, 2017). However, within co-opetition research, rich descriptions of the context in which co-opetition is studied has been identified as an important quality criterion to be addressed (Gnyawali & Song, 2016; Le Roy & Czakon, 2016).

Acknowledging this, thick and rich description of the context was provided in this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Specifically, the case study was explained in terms of firm size, number of employees, religious, ethinic, and educational backgrounds of owners, length of memebrship and roles within the case study. In relation to this, the fashion industry is justified as an apporopriate case study in relation to the research question (Gibbert & Ruigrk, 2008) based on its engagement in simultaneous cooperation and competition within network relationships in a developing economy characterized by a complex institutional environment. In addition, the national context was described. The purpose of providing these descriptions was not for generalizing findings, but to help the researcher identify issues before data collection, create a suitable interview guide and clarify the research context (Healy & Perry, 2000).

4.8.5 Authenticity

This is achieved when the researcher supports research members to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the research phenomenon being investigated, and help participants to accomodate the viewpoints of others. To achieve this, I was conscious of the need to provide clear defintions of co-opetition (Gnyawali & Song, 2016). Thus, I engaged in a review of previous theories and defined key concepts by reviewing literature on entrepreneurship, business networks and co-opetition.

Then, I simplified the term 'co-opetition' by separating the terms 'cooperation' and 'competition, which were discussed with participants in terms of how both interactions manifested within network relationships. Dealing with the concepts of cooperation and competition individually gave participants an opportunity to make sense of the concept of co-opetition and as such, provided a basis for which I could then examine participants experience of co-opetition.

In line with this, I focused on highlighing the impediments to empowering and stimulting action. These include the presence of power relations between research participants (sme network actors) and institutional stakeholders as reflected in the limited ability for network members to produce any relevant change. Further, stimulating change within the context of power relations and bureaucracy

within institutional structures could result in negative consequences for the network, such as the withdrawal of formal governmental support and resources, or victimization of network members.

Nonetheless, the integration of the authenticity criteria to the trustworthy criteria represents an important contribution to qualitative research and particularly, co-opetition research. Essentially, the principles which guide the evaluation of authenticity highlights the differences in value systems among groups of people, which guide their constructions. This aligns with the arguements of this study in relation to the role of institutions in the plurality of sensemaking of co-opetition across contexts.

Further, the principles of authenticity respond to the call for emphasizing the ethical and moral potentials of research whose purpose is not just to represent the world in objective ways, but to affect the world by empowering participants to improve their situations (Johnson & Rasulova, 2017). Finally, it instigates a more reflexive approach to qualitative research. The table below summarises Lincoln and Guba's (1985; 1989) principles for evaluating trustworthiness and authenticity in qualitative research:

Table 4.12: Trustworthiness and Authenticity Quality Criteriology

Qualitative Quality Criteria	Questions underpining the principles	Quantitative Alternatives
Credibility	How can we be confident about the 'truth' of the findings?	Internal validity
Confirmability	How can we ascertain that fidnings have been determined by the subjects and contexts of enquiry, rather than the biases, motivations and perspectives of the researcher?	Objectivity
Dependability	Would the findings be repeated if the inquiry were replicated with the same or similar subjects within the same or similar contexts?	Reliability
Transferability	Can we apply the findings to other contexts or with other groups of people?	Generalization
Authenticity	Have people been changed by the process? To what extent did the investigation prompt action?	

Source: Johnson & Rasulova, (2017).

Overall, the contingent criteriology above enhances the creative and flexible potentials of qualitative research. Through its emphasis on process rather than procedure, it highlights the importance of reflexivity as a source of interpretive insight in qualitaive research such as this (Cunliffe, 2003. Welch & Piekkarri, 2017; Johnson et al., 2018).

4.9 Summary

In this chapter, the data collection methods adopted in this study have been discussed in detail. To critically examine the sensemaking of co-opetition in entrepreneurial relationships, it was necessary for me to focus on the naturalistic settings where co-opetitive interactions occurred (Bengtson et al., 2016; Pattinson et al., 2018). As such, observing the daily activities of participants within their stores, association meetings and fashion events enabled a deep familiarisation with the study's context and enhanced my ability to record everyday interactions among participants in relation to my study. This, alongside my initial literature review, provided the theoretical backdrop that guided the research design of this study. Observations were also particularly useful in helping me with my sampling choices, developing my research questions and identifying further areas to probe during my interviews with participants (Dewalt and Dewalt, 2011).

The quality of data collected during interviews was further strengthened by the trust, rapport, and prior familiarity with participants and the research context. In consideration of the short time, I had to spend conducting my fieldwork, collecting data through multiple techniques such as interviews, documents, and observations proved very useful.

Based on my social constructionist underlying philosophy, data collection prioritized the role of institutions to reveal how these shaped the sensemaking of co-opetition within entrepreneurial network relationships. I also found my social constructionist philosophical position informed by Bourdieu's perspective of symbolic power useful in acknowledging the different characteristics and complexities of power relations across the broad range of participants sampled for this study, I was reflexive of my role as a researcher which helped me adjust accordingly to the power dynamics of the two broad groups of participants.

The thematic analytical technique strengthened the interpretive aim of this study by revealing both content and contextual functions of participants responses. This dynamic approach to analysing qualitative data makes an important contribution to current co-opetition literature by prompting a

reflexive consideration of data sources. The contingency approach to choosing a suitable quality criterion is adopted in this study, based on the realisation of the pluralist nature of qualitative research. The contingency approach suggests that there is no general set of guidelines or criteria for judging the quality of qualitative research. Rather, quality criteria adopted should be based on the philosophy behind any qualitative research. In this vein, Lincoln and Guba's (1985; 1989; 1994) Trustworthiness and Authenticity principles are discussed in relation to the social constructionist philosophical position of this study. This approach required participants to be viewed as collaborators to the knowledge production process; thus reducing inequality between the researcher and the researched (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Johnson et al., 2006). The advantages of adopting a contingency approach to qualitative research quality evaluation therefore promotes reflexivity and participation in research processes (Symon et al., 2018).

Overall, this chapter offers detailed discussions and justifications for the methodological choices in my study and how this has afforded me the possibility of developing a contextual insight to how fashion entrepreneurs make sense of co-opetition within their entrepreneurial network relationships. The diagram below presents a graphical summary of the methodological choices adopted within this study:

Fig 4.9 Summary of Methodological Choices

Source: Author's illustration

Chapter 5: Findings on Context

The Socio-Historical Development of Nigeria and its influence on Sensemaking of Entrepreneurial Network Co-Opetition

'The past does not merely tell us what happened yesterday,
it also illuminates what happens today'.
Chimamanda N. Adichie
The Humboldt Forum,
(September 22, 2021)

5.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses a part of the first research objective of this thesis which is to examine how institutions influence sensemaking processes of co-opetition networks among fashion-based entrepreneurs in Nigeria's fashion industry. To this end, this chapter unearths socio-historical factors which shape sense making processes of entrepreneurial network co-opetition. It is noteworthy that in attending to the socio-historical background of co-opetition within the context of the Nigerian fashion industry, there would be spill over into the institutional, and agentic aspects of the institutional environment however, these are discussed in more details in the proceeding chapters.

In the following sections, I discuss the historical development of Nigeria and the formation of the Nigerian state by providing an overview of its history, demographics, institutions, ethnic tribes, and cultures. I focus specifically on the Yoruba ethnic tribe for the following reasons: Firstly, the Yoruba tribe occupy the South-Western part of Nigeria, in which Lagos State is located. Lagos state is important to this research because it represents the fashion capital of West Africa and is the largest commercial city in Nigeria. It was the first city to develop economically due to the construction of modern transportation systems (railways and roadways) by the British colonials to ease free flow of goods across the country (Usman & Falola, 2019). Secondly, the Yoruba tribe are traditionally known for their influence on the growth of clothes making and represent the most urbanized group of

Nigerians during pre-colonial era (Usman & Falola, 2019). It is reported that Yoruba land's economic potential was the primary motivation behind European intervention and colonization and Lagos was the birthplace of colonial rule in Yoruba land and in the whole of Nigeria (Asiwaju, 1980; Usman & Falola, 2019).

Drawing from the socio-historical experiences of the Yoruba ethnic tribe in South-Western Nigeria, therefore, this chapter provides an understanding of the divergent sensemaking processes existing within the formal and informal sectors of the fashion industry. It also demonstrates how colonialism led to the emergence of formal and informal sectors due to the rise of a social class system. In so doing, I illustrate the fragmented nature of Nigeria's fashion industry constituted by two separate classes of fashion entrepreneurs which is historically conditioned. Discussions in this chapter ultimately emphasize the suitability of the research context for achieving the theoretical research objectives of this thesis.

5.2 An Overview of Nigeria

Early archaeological evidence points to the presence of human habitation and societies within all regions that now form the country Nigeria from the late stone age (LSA) to the advent of European colonialism (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Like most part of the world during this period, the indigenes within the Nigerian regions lived in primitive caves and huts and engaged in hunting of animals for survival (Ekundare, 1973).

As one of the most populous, highly fragmented yet collectivist nation in West Africa, the Federal Republic of Nigeria offers an important context for understanding how institutions influence the sensemaking of entrepreneurial co-opetitive networking activities within the West African post-colonial regions (Obadare, 2008). Since becoming a sovereign nation in 1960 from the British colonialists, the economy has grown to become one of the largest growing economies within the West

African region (Ekundare, 19767). This is evidenced by phrases used to describe Nigeria, such as 'the Giant of Africa,' especially due to its large population, economic and political strength.

The name 'Nigeria' was derived from the river Niger, which is the third longest river in Africa and runs about 730 miles long. The climate in Nigeria consists of wet and dry seasons every year. Within the Southern and more coastal part of the country, the rainy season lasts from may until around October, while the dry or harmattan season travels through the Northern part of the country to settle within the Southern areas; although mildly. Thus, the Southern part of Nigeria is warmer and more humid, with the highest amount of rainfall. This southern part also houses the capital city of Lagos State, which is identified as the largest city in Nigeria, with around 17.5 million dwellers occupying the large commercial city located in the South-Western part of Nigeria.

On a geographical level, Nigeria is surrounded to the North by Chad Republic and Niger, to the South by the Gulf of Guinea, to the West by the republic of Dahomey, and to the East by Cameroun (Ekundare, 1973). According to statistics from the United Nations World Population Prospect (UN2019), the population in Nigeria amounts to about 214 million, making it the largest population in Africa, and the seventh most populous country in the world. Further data from the United Nations World Population Prospect also project that this figure will rise to about 401.31 by the year 2050; thus, surpassing the USA to become the third most populous country in the world by 2047 (UN, 2019). Within this population, consists of around 52% urban dwellers, while the remaining 48% dwell within rural areas.

Source: United Nations, 2014

Prior to the advent of the colonialists, Nigeria used to be home to a variety of kingdoms and tribal settlements. The emergence of colonialism brought about a new kind of administration which threatened the authority of the indigenous institutions and further fuelled the need for collective action. According to Asiwaju (1980), Lagos State is regarded as the birthplace of colonial administration. Upon the arrival of the British, and appointment of Gov. H. S. Freeman in 1862 the territory of Lagos was divided into two separate administrative areas. Residents within the Yoruba interior (British protectorates) were perceived as 'British protected persons. This territory consisted of areas such as Oyo, Ife, Ondo, Ilesha, Ado-Ekiti.

The perception of the British Protectorate meant that they could continue to be ruled by their local customs and laws (Asiwaju, 1980). Within this territory, therefore, the local rulers had more independence to exert their authorities freely, with little to know interference from the British administration. This was not the case for the British Crown Colony of Lagos, which is the focus of my

research. The British colony of Lagos consisted of areas such as Ikorodu, Badagary, Lagos Island and Epe, where residents were perceived as 'British subjects.' In contrast to the British protectorate, residents of the British crown colony were subjected to coercive exercise of British rule (Asiwaju, 1980). Indigenous leaders lost the power to rule their domains and their roles were redefined as 'stipendiary chieftaincy.'

Asiwaju (1980) further reveals that Lagos was one of the few colonies which fought to resist colonial rule. However due to the lengthy wars and declining resources, Lagos was defeated in 1851. Lagos also accounted for a larger number of educated and Westernized population who had been exposed to European constitutional systems and education. A large population of the transatlantic slaves were Yorubas who also accounted for the large number of repatriates. Although the total number of Yoruba repatriates is not known, they are estimated to have been around three thousand (Akintoye, 2010).

Lagos is argued to have hosted the most substantial amount of slave trade returnees who were originally Yoruba (Law, 2004). One of the attractive features of Lagos as a suitable place of settlement for repatriates was the promise of security offered by the British who encouraged the ruling King to reduce and phase out a head tax (Law, 2004). These ex-slaves introduced new architectural designs in Lagos state. For instance, the open spaces which provided an opportunity for communal interaction, were replaced by balconies and 'boys quarters' where lowly workers are housed; thus, reconstructing the 'master-slave' stratification along the lines of ethnicity and social classes. Houses which still carried the tradition hallway designs were described in derogatory phrase like 'face-me-I-face-you.' These modern designs have now become a new measure of status and class, which further enlarges the gulf between the rich and the poor. Asiwaju (1980) notes that upon the arrival of the Europeans, they identified themselves as 'travelling commissioners' however overtime, they became known as 'residents.'

The introduction of colonial policies in Yoruba land resulted in antagonism which created constant conflicts between the traditional rulers and colonial rulers, resulting in the destabilization of the traditional institutions (Akintoye, 2010). For instance, traditional rulers faced imprisonment and banishment by the new colonial administration and were replaced by a new hierarchy of rulership where the subordinated traditional rulers became answerable to a new form of rulership. After the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914, however, two ordinances were introduced by Sir Frederick Lugard: the first Governor-General of Nigeria.

These ordinances (Native Ordinance of 1914 and Native Authority Ordinance of 1916) introduced a new kind of indirect rule system whereby the title of indigenous ruler (such as the Obas and Baales) was re-instated, however they were referred to as 'Native Authorities.' The difference between the rulership for the indigenous rulers in pre-colonial and colonial times is that during the former, indigenous leaders had absolute powers however by the introduction of the indirect rule, their roles were stripped down to carrying out and implementing colonial administration policies. The pre-colonial lineage system was also broken down or federated to allow better efficiency for the British administration (Usman & Falola, 2019). Discussions in this paragraph thus support theoretical arguments and social constructionist assumptions on the importance of agency in understanding social experiences of individuals such as institutional influences on sensemaking processes.

5.2.1 Distinctions between the Formal and Informal Sector in Nigeria

Nigeria is classed as one of the top 15 countries with the highest number of children who lack formal education (Oxfam, 2017). One reason behind this, can be drawn from the historical suspicions towards the emergence of Western Education in colonial times. A notable individual in the growth of Western education among the Yoruba Reverend Ajayi Crowther, a liberate slave who was sent to study religion in Britain and ordained as an Anglican priest in 1843 (Usman & Falola, 2019).

According to Gbadamosi and Ajayi (1980). Reverend Ajayi Crowther viewed the western educational system as closely aligned with the interests of skills acquisition to further strengthen commercial transactions (Gbadamosi & Ajayi, 1980). Through his influence, Western education recorded considerable growth, particularly within the British side of Yorubaland due to the limited governmental control that existed within these areas. The impact of this was the surge of a new literate class within the Yoruba community, who could speak English and had knowledge of international economies as well as the understanding of new skills and professions which further increased group consciousness and unity to modernise their homeland (Usman & Falola, 2019).

However, not many families sent their children to these new school structures, a problem which was higher within the Muslim areas who feared that the Western education could influence their children to convert to Christianity (Akintoye, 2010). As an alternative, the Muslims established Arabic and Islamic educational systems while others continued to rely on the apprenticeship system of education which ultimately, created the big divide that fuels social stratification (Usman & Falola, 2019).

Another reason, however, could be the result of poverty and inequality which characterised the Nigerian economy in post-colonial times. Although the gap between the rich and the poor is a worldwide problem, the scale of inequality in Nigeria is highly extreme despite being the largest economy in Africa. According to a 2017 report by Oxfam, the overall share of Nigerians living below the poverty line increased an equivalent of 69% of its entire population in 2010. In addition to such economic inequality, the report also finds evidence of gender inequality whereby discriminatory practices put women at a disadvantage.

For instance, in comparison to their male counterparts, women were found to mostly occupy casual, low-skilled and low paid jobs and were less likely to own properties in the country. In addition, 75.8% of women were found to have never acquired formal education and more likely to be poorer than men. Due to these factors, women were found to be excluded from fully participating in the economic, social

and political institutions of the country. This report goes further to emphasise the role of social stratification, corruption, misallocation, and misappropriation of resources as reinforcing factors of poverty and inequality, rather than the absence of resources. In addition to these economic challenges, there also exist a host of formal institutional forces which reinforce gender discrimination in Nigeria.

These issues arose during my conversations with fashion entrepreneurs for instance, when I realised that many of the women I interviewed, lacked basic formal education, the general reason behind this was due to the existence of religious and customary laws that reinforced practices and beliefs that were unfavourable to women. As such, most of the women I interviewed acquired their skills through apprenticeship at early ages, because of being forcefully sent by their parents to acquire these skills.

On the other hand, majority of the men whom I interviewed, had some level of formal education, and made personal decisions to acquire clothes making skills due to unemployment. To further evidence this, I observed during my attendance at informal network meetings, that authoritative positions (such as the roles of president and council of elders) were mostly occupied by men. Although the role of 'chairwoman' was created to represent the interests of women within the network interactions, there was little to no authority attached to it and it was merely an attempt to 'window dress.' I also observed that women were made to seat separately from the men and when women greeted, they were required to curtsey as a form of respect, while there was no obligation for the men to reciprocate in such a manner.

The emergence of European culture also created a class system which separated the elites from the non-elites within the society. The exposure to Western education created a new class of individualistic, elite fashion entrepreneurs in the fashion industry, resulting in the fragmentation of the fashion industry. The presence of the elite fashion entrepreneurs heightened competition and fuelled the need for non-elite fashion entrepreneurs to establish network relationships where co-opetitive interactions occurred, as a strategy towards strengthening their collective positions. The origin of the new class of

215

elite fashion entrepreneurs can be traced to the groups who were able to acquire Western education by attending British educational institutions and returned to the country as fully trained professionals in their various fields.

The acquisition of Western exposure and education empowered this new group economically and politically. For instance, Lloyd (1970) found that although the western educated elite group were a minority, their newly acquired education gave them an advantage over the locally educated minority, and this reflected in their ability to engage fully in political and leadership administration of various regions within the country (Lloyd, 1970).

In addition, they were able to reinforce and maximize the advantage of their new status by acquiring Western cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984), experiences, modes of dressing, and linguistic competence in terms of the ways in which they communicated and their sensemaking of the world, which was largely divergent from the non-elite groups who were limited to the confines of informal institutions. This, according to Fanon (1991), reveals the social status enjoyed by the colonised who had mastered the language of the colonisers, and as such, led to the devaluation of African cultures and languages and in essence, evidences the continuous presence and influence of the 'ghost of colonialism' in African societies (Fanon, 1991) who are still masked. This led me to reflect on Bourdieu's (1984, 1990, 1996) views about the concept of distinction, and how it plays a vital role in the formation and maintenance of elite and non-elite status within a field.

However, Bourdieu further emphasises that the possession of high amounts of economic (financial, political, educational) capital would not suffice to establish a distinction between an elite and non-elite group. In this case, having a Western Education would not suffice to grant me access to the elite groups whom I thought were necessary to my research. Rather, the combination of these with other symbolic and social capitals – as 'symbols of excellence,' contributes to enhancing the distinctions between elites and non-elites:

No noble title suffices in and of itself [...]. So, for example, the highest academic titles are necessary but insufficient, possible but not inevitable, conditions for access to the establishment. And wealth when it is not accompanied by the appropriate "manners" is even less sufficient.

Bourdieu (1996 p. 315)

As I reflected on the above narrative concerning the combined strengths of economic, social, and cultural capitals and how it strengthens class distinctions, it led me to think about how this manifest within the fashion industry in Nigeria. Within the fashion industry, this translated to an awareness of, and participation in Westernized fashion trends and cultural lifestyles. This fact was clearly established during my visit to the Fashion Finest exhibition in 2019 at the Federal palace in Lagos State, Nigeria, a high-end hotel, and leisure centre in Lagos where a group of elite fashion entrepreneurs hosted a fashion show.

One of the things I observed as I interacted with this group of fashion entrepreneurs, was how willing they were to interact with me when I capitalized on my identity as an **'outsider.'** I observed that when I approached this group of elite fashion entrepreneurs to discuss my research agenda, they initially appeared very dismissive until I mentioned my affiliation to a British University. This affiliation thus distinguished me from the non-elite group whom according to Bourdieu (1984), the elite constantly struggle consciously and unconsciously to distinguish themselves from and presented me as an individual who is aligned as their perceived equals (Bourdieu, 1984).

As Bourdieu (1984), further highlights, the acquisition of 'attributes of excellence' is important to strengthen this distinction and these can be determined by the aristocratic aesthetics, mannerisms, ways of walking and speaking, as well as dressing. I made the conscious effort to dress flamboyantly (such as holding a Western designer bag, designer clothing, speaking with a British accent and strapping a canon camera round my neck), which attracted their attention and interest to speak with me. As an indication of their eliteness and adoption of Westernized culture of individualism, it was revealed

through conversations that this group of participants who made up the formal sector of the fashion industry frowned as long-term collective activities such as network relationships.

I recall a conversation with an 'elite' participant who told me that the low participation in network relationships within the formal sector was because participants felt they were '*too big*' to belong to a group. This is in high contrast to the collectivist nature of the Nigerian society and highly reflective of the individualistic nature of the British society and as such, further strengthens Bourdieu and Fanon's arguments on the imitations of Westernized culture as a form of distinction, to strengthen prestige and legitimacy. Thus, although the Formal network was my initial case study before fieldwork, I allowed my findings on the field to direct the course of my research and as such, also started to also look more closely at the functioning of co-opetition within the informal network, which resulted in an embedded case study design.

Within the informal network, I soon realised that it was necessary for me to tone down my affiliation with Western culture and capitalize on the strengths of being an insider such as referencing my past experiences as a fashion designer in rural Lagos, and my experience as a member of the informal fashion network. Here, I share some of my reflections from my field diary:

One of the challenges I faced while recruiting interviewees from the informal network was the ability to develop a rapport with these group of people whose history is characterized by reliance on informal institutional systems as a result of a collective historically built distrust of the formal institutions and its players. When I mentioned that I was conducting research, many of them didn't understand what I meant by 'research.' Those who did, looked at me with suspicion. They asked if I was a government official, if I worked with a tv station, if I was an artist, etc… I started to see already that if I couldn't explain my research in a manner they could understand and appreciate, I would lose these group of participants. They had to feel like they knew me, for them to open up to me.

*I started off my telling them in different ways, that I was a Lagosian, and grew up on the mainland area of Lagos. I mentioned the name of the popular state university where I had gained my first degree, and how I had moved on to start up a fashion business while taking up other paid roles in several creative spaces in Lagos, to support my family. Thereafter, I was fortunate to get an **opportunity** to travel to 'London' to further my studies. Being sensitive to my background and experiences as a fashion entrepreneur, I knew how rich in talent the fashion space in Lagos was, the challenges it faced, the social disparity that characterised the fashion industry, the absence of reliable government support, how fashion entrepreneurs like themselves found a way to work together and manage conflicting relationships within unions and*

associations like the NUT, and how through the tools of research, I was working towards projecting their voices as a huge and important part of the fashion industry in Lagos. I wanted to give them the space to tell their own stories and teach the rest of the world something about how fashion entrepreneurs like themselves, worked together and managed relationships.

*By using the word '**opportunity;**' I was saying to them that I wasn't born with a silver spoon, and I wasn't from an elite social class. Even if I was, it wouldn't have been to my disadvantage. However, this is my reality as a person and in some way, sharing a bit about myself helped me see myself clearer in their eyes, see the reality of research as not just an academic endeavour but also a way and part of my life and even more, and value the impact these people could also have in my life.*

By sharing a bit of my life with them, I was also saying that anyone whether rich or poor, can gain access to certain life opportunities and studying in 'London' was not necessarily only available for the rich. Also, in stating the area I grew up in, they would see that I was an indigene of the 'mainland' which meant that I would easily understands their struggles, experiences and reality. Depending on how the conversation went, I shared some of my struggles as a Lagos-based fashion entrepreneur and some other life events, with them…especially the women.

Speaking in this way, opened up many of these people to me. Their language and demeanour changed. They started to address me as 'my daughter,' 'my sister,' rather than the 'Ma' that most of them had used to address me initially. Some of the women told me how proud of me they were, and that I should continue the good work I was doing and giving a good name to my family. They could see their children in me, which meant they could see that there was still hope for their children who weren't born with a silver spoon.

Beyond the access which my familiarity with these people got me, it also allowed me to truly look back on life and reflect on how far I have come, the true purpose of my research and reinforce my desire to contribute positively to the fashion industry in Nigeria, to the field of research from an emerging economic context and speaking on the realities of these people in a manner that is as authentic and considerate as possible. For me, I started to see how through my research, I would not just be giving a voice to the so-called voiceless but empowering these voices by projecting their realities in ways which they cannot or are afraid to. In many ways, I am still one of them and I want to be that part of them that hasn't surrendered to the inadequacies of the institutional environment but is actively making a positive difference.

This proved very useful in establishing rapport and developing trust with this group of participants, who had a collective distrust and suspicion for formal and Westernized systems due to past historical colonial experiences as well as the current state of inequality in the country sustained by Western-styles formal institutional systems. Faced with the uncertainty of European authority and influence on their cultural heritage, as well as the growing threat of elite fashion entrepreneurs, traditional craft makers (in this case, clothes makers or fashion entrepreneurs) resorted to collective action which was found to be a plausible course of action to such invasion and competitive threat.

The complexities which these events presented thus emphasized the need for sensemaking to occur, through which non-elite fashion entrepreneurs could develop a mind map to understand these emergent

events in order to know how to respond to them. Accordingly, Weick (1995) refers to this process as sensemaking, where actors adopt act by extracting cues within their social context retrospectively, through which they understand what is happening, the development of plausible explanations of these occurrences (Weick, 1995).

A key interest within this study, is the active authoring of the situations in which sensemaking actors are embedded in. Here, Browne, Colville & Pye (2014) suggest that people engage in overlapping processes to construct realities and make sense of them retrospectively.

> *"To talk about sensemaking is to talk about reality as an ongoing accomplishment that takes form when people make retrospective sense of the situations in which they find themselves and their creations. There is a strong reflexive quality to this process. People make sense of things by seeing a world on which they already imposed what they believe. People discover their own inventions […]*
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> *(Weick, 1995)*

5.3 The History, Geography, and Demography of Pre-Colonial Yorubaland

Nigeria can hardly be fully described without reference to the Yoruba ethnic group who are one of the three major ethnic groups and occupy a significant place in the history of Nigeria. Several versions of the origin of the Yoruba history exists. According to one version postulated by Atanda (1980) and Akintoye (2004), the Yoruba inhabited their territory through the arrival of a heavenly messenger (Oduduwa) in Ile-Ife where he planted the first seeds and founded the first Yoruba kingdom.

In another version, Atanda (1980) suggests that the Yorubas were led by Oduduwa to migrate from the East to Ile Ife, to escape the political upheavals which emerged as a result of the expansion of Islam. Further studies by Aleru (1998) and Raji (1999) however reveal that Yoruba settlements existed outside of Ile-Ife before or either simultaneous to the arrival of 'Oduduwa.' Despite the different perspectives presented, the consensus is that the Yoruba history cannot be discussed without the mitigating role of Oduduwa in establishing a kingdom (Usman and Falola, 2019).

The conceptualization of the Yoruba as a collective identity however dates to the 16th century where the various sub-groups which now constitute the Yoruba group, were employed by non-Yoruba peoples and the term 'Yoruba (which translates to mean 'cunning') was used as a form of 'othering.' (Bascom, 1969; Lovejoy and Ojo, 2015). Falola (2006) also states that the growing acknowledgement of the Yoruba ethnic group was heightened through the advent of the Christian missionaries in the 19th century when its usage began to spread.

Furthermore, the Yoruba are described as one of the most advanced groups within the eighteenth century. For instance, Willett (1969) refers to excavated materials which indicate that the Yoruba were a sophisticated and wealthy society with a monarchical form of government that existed independent of the European influence. By the middle of the nineteenth century however, it is believed that there was an outbreak of Civil War among the Yoruba's, which came to an end in 1886 due to the Lagos Governor's approval to sign a treaty that allows for the integration of the Yoruba Kingdom and freedom from the rulership of the Alafin of Oyo, who was the ruler of the entire Yoruba Kingdom at the time.

Although the modern mapping of the Yoruba hardly presents an accurate representation of the settlement and migration patterns of this group of people, most of the Yoruba reside in South-Western Nigeria, within six states of Lagos, Ekiti, Osun, Ondo, Ogun, and Oyo (Usman and Falola, 2019). Yoruba land is reported to cover around 181,300 square kilometres within three distinct ecological zones extending from the coasts which form the southern borders of Lagos, Ondo and Oyo states. The forest region on the Northern coastline such as Iwo and Osogbo, the Eastern coastline extending into Edo and parts of Ondo state, and finally the Northern coastline extending from Abeokuta, Owo, and parts of Ondo state (Buchanan & Pugh, 1955). The temperature within these collective regions consists of rainy reason from April to October, and dusty, dry (harmattan) season from November to February. The demography represented by census figures are often inaccurate. Yet, studies like Abimbola (2006),

and Usman & Falola (2019) estimate the total amount of Yorubas in West Africa to be around 40 million, thus making the Yoruba group one of the largest Sub-Saharan Africa.

Another reference point for understanding the socio-historical background is language. Several authors describe language as integral to the development of ethnic cultures, identity construction and formation of in/outgroups, due to its function as a mode of communication (Furniss, 1992). Accordingly, Weick (1995) reports that sensemaking is generated by words which are converted into discourses to generate meanings about events, or experiences. Since sensemaking occurs when the current state of the world is perceived to be different from its expected state (Weick, 1995), it requires language and discourse to generate a plausible description of the action.

In other words, sensemaking often involves an interplay of action and interpretation. However, as Weick (1995) notes, what is plausible to one group of people, might not be plausible to another group of people, and these differences can best be understood through the lens of language. This is also the case in a large multilingual economy like Nigeria, with over 400 indigenous languages spoken by various minority groups all over the country. The restructuring of Nigeria into three administrative regions of North, East and West during the British colonial administration gave prominence to the socio-political dominance of three ethno-linguistic groups – the Hausa/Fulani (North), the Igbos (East), and the Yorubas (West); representing the major indigenous national languages of the country (Agheyisi, 1984).

Among the Hausa/Fulani group in the North who represent most of the total regional population of Nigeria, Hausa language has been established as one of the regional official languages, dating back to the Emirate system of local administration by the Fulani (Adeniran, 1979). In comparison to the other indigenous languages, Hausa is viewed as a language of prestige. The language draws its origin from the Islamic/Koranic religion and embodies a high institutional relevance within the context of the Muslim heritage.

For instance, it is the official mode of instruction in primary schools and an important criterion for employment opportunities in both public and private sectors within the region (Agheyisi, 1984). The use of Igbo language is however restricted to urban areas where it is used mostly for trade purposes due to the wide variety of dialects present within the region. As such, the Igbo language has had very little impact on verbal communication between speakers of different dialects.

The Yoruba's who occupy the South-Western part of Nigeria are also characterised by a wide range of distinct local dialects associated with smaller tribal identities. On a regional level, the Arabic language is viewed as an important form of communication among several parts of the Yoruba-speaking areas in Southern Nigerian. This language which finds its foundations on the Islamic religion, and Koranic law, provides a strong and unifying tie and as such, plays a very vital role in the culture of the people. Due to the multi-lingual nature of the economy, however, and based on the influence of the British administration, English is recognised as the official mode of formal communication in judiciary, government, education, mass media, higher commerce, and international affairs across all regions of the country (Agheyisi, 1984). Notwithstanding, English is also seen as a symbol of social stratification as it is often viewed as a language of culture and prestige which differentiates the educated elite from the locals.

In line with the recognition of the heterogenous linguistic character of the Nigerian regions and a need for a unifying inter-group indigenous language to complement the English language dedicated to the elite and educated, the Pidgin English language was developed and has now become a widely used language particularly among the uneducated and multi-ethnic populations in most parts of Nigeria and is viewed as a second language. The historical development of Nigerian Pidgin English can be traced to the Niger Delta area (Adegbija, 2003) due to the absence of a common language between the indigene traders and Portuguese who monopolised trade in the Nigerian coast for over 70 years through the entry to the Niger Delta in early 1434 AD (Ryder, 1969; 1980).

Ryder (1969) further notes that the Portuguese form of Pidgin became creolised. For instance, words like *palavra* (to talk), *saber* (to know), *pequenino* (a child) and *das* (give) are found in what we now refer to as Nigerian Pidgin as '*palaba,*' '*sabi,*' '*pikin,*' and '*dash*' with the same meanings attached to these words. Scholars such as Oderinde (2007) maintain that English language thus became a symbol of being educated and was flaunted by overseas returnees who flaunted their new language acquisition to the blind admiration of the locals. Irrespective of the differences in local dialects, the Yoruba group share common cultural characteristics which Akinwunmi (2003) and Asiwaju (1983) summarize as the following: a common claim to Oduduwa as their ancestor, a claim to Ile Ife as the origin of the Yoruba, the use of praise songs (*oriki*), the acknowledgement of respect for the elderly in their language, the formation of monarchical government structures, the belief in the concept of destiny (*ori*), the belief in deities, the bespoke nature of their dressings and urbanization.

5.4. Institutionalization of Fear as Sense-Giving Mechanism in Informal Co-Opetitive Relations

Sense-giving mechanisms was found to also be historically generated. This chapter highlights indicators of sense-giving which exist within religious and institutional structures of pre-colonial Yoruba. The political and social structures of the Yorubas was characterized by political hierarchies resulting from the creation of kingdoms and empires which introduced institutions that reinforced social stratification and subordination (Usman & Falola, 2019). These are discussed in the sub-sections below:

5.4.1 Agbo-*Ile*: Pre-colonial Co-Opetition in Polygamous Family Systems

The institution of polygamy can be said to have also set the scene for the structure of co-opetition. Family structures in most West African countries are historically polygamous in nature, particularly within rural areas (Bove et al., 2004). Within polygamous settings in most West African societies, simultaneous cooperation and competition among co-wives was essential for the smooth running of the household. For example, one of the key features of polygamous contexts was the sharing of limited

resources among co-wives, whereby cooperation was vital for child rearing, farm work or domestic production.

Simultaneously, co-wives competed fiercely over the attention and affection of their shared husband, as well as splitting time shared with their husband. Bove and Valeggia (2009) describe this co-opetitive situation as cooperative conflict, whose features align with the features of a co-opetitive relationship. Due to the co-opetitive nature of such households, architectural designs of polygamous households often reflected a large rectangular open space to accommodate the large family, including extended family members. These homes were referred to as 'lineage compounds' *(agbo ile).* They also featured a hallway in the middle, with rooms on both sides, which allowed for communal endeavours such as the raising of all children as a group within the compound (Usman & Falola, 2019).

These designs ultimately reflected and strengthened the collectivist, co-opetitive nature of the Yoruba community. For instance, the hallway and open space designs was a foundation for trust building whereby families, extended families and neighbours could drink from the same pot of water, cook, and eat together, take turns to fetch water which could be shared by all, and reprimand each other's child without any adverse consequences. It was also the space where training was given, such as the importance of seniority and respect for the elderly (Usman & Falola, 2019). For instance, Eades (1980) reports that ranking among family members was determined by age.

In this vein, there were differences between senior siblings *(egbon)* and junior siblings *(aburo).* In addition, the position of a woman in her husband's family was determined by the rule of marriage such that she was required to be submissive to other women or wives in the family compound who were married before her as well as children in her husband's family compound who were born before her arrival; irrespective of her age (Eades, 1980). Yet, it was also the space where rivalry grew, for instance, the capacity of a wife to bear more children, particularly, sons for their husband, would determine her resource allocation. In addition, although women took turns to cook and ate as a family,

this shared activity provided an arena for rivalry and heightened competition as each wife aimed to outdo the other to please their husband.

5.4.2 Patriarchal Systems

Anthropologists such as like Eades (1980) and Fadipe (1970) highlight the role of patriarchy, peculiar architectural designs, as responsible for defining the political and social nature of the Yoruba ethnic tribe. From a political perspective, the Yoruba's operated a patrilineal structure of kinship such that the residence of a couple after marriage was patrilocal, whereby young men took their wives to live in their family homes. In addition to this, and most likely a practice that can arguable be termed as obsolete, a woman was required to remain in her husband's family home and marry a member of his kin group after his death (Usman & Falola, 2019).

The purpose of such practices was to secure the ties between both families and retain the rights of inheritance (Eades, 1980). In addition, the leading authority within Yoruba families rested on a council of elders who traditionally exercised over matters such as settling disputes, discipline allocation of work, lands and living spaces, as well as arrangement of marriages (Eades, 1980; Usman & Falola, 2019). Among this group of elders, is the compound head referred to as bale (father of the house) or *olori ile* (head of the house. Considering the high importance attached to men, the wives and children of a wealthy Yoruba man were considered as part of his property.

As the general rule of inheritance during the 19th century involved the passing of property between blood relatives, a man's wife and children would be inherited by his blood relatives (i.e., siblings) (Eades, 1980). Marriages involved heavy influence of parents and the bale of the community which often involved lengthy and in-depth investigation to avoid families who were known for vices. To illustrate the relevance of this underlying institutional practice and sensemaking of co-opetition networks, I share some reflections from my field diary on my observation of informal network meetings:

During network meetings, men and women sat in different areas. When I asked why this was so, nobody could offer any tangible explanation.   During one of my interviews with a Muslim man, I noticed he would not sit close to me, As the interview was conducted in his store which was by the roadside, I struggled to hear him as he responded to the questions. This made me move a bit closer to him, but I realised that each time I moved close and brough the audio tape recorder close to him, he would move further backwards. I did not understand this until I spoke with another Muslim woman (an alhaji) who then explained to me that according to the Islamic religion, it was considered improper for a man to sit too close to a woman who was not his wife. Such a man would be considered unclean. In some extreme cases, a Muslim man was restricted from helping a woman in trouble or in disaster, if she was not his wife and he was restricted by religion to touch another woman.

5.4.3 Religious Beliefs

The Yoruba tribe were traditionally known to practice a belief in Pantheons (Orishas) who are believed to be ancestors and messengers of a divine being, and to whom the people make sacrifices to (including the offering of human sacrifices) to induce favour from these deities (Alana, 2004). A new belief in the existence of God was introduced through Christianity in the colonial era, who was regarded as an 'all seeing, all knowing' being. As such, the saying **'amookun jale b'oba aye ko ri o t'orun'**[4] (Alana, 2004). Some scholars such as Abimbola (1975), Usman & Falola (2019) suggest that the core of the Yoruba religions is based on a belief in upholding a good character (*iwa*). A person who embodies *'iwa'* is therefore regarded as **'a child begotten of the Lord'** *(omoluabi).* Overall, the Yoruba tribe reflected a people who believed in the power and omnipotence of a supreme being who could provide favour or catastrophe.

The major form of power structure prevalent in pre-colonial Yorubaland was the rulership of the oba (crowned king) or the bale, (uncrowned ruler); supported by a council of elders or chiefs who collectively enjoyed privileges and the exercise of power (Usman & Falola, 2019). The Oba who was regarded as the highest ranked, held the absolute power and was often considered as semi-divine and

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[4] *He who steals in secret, even though he is not seen by earthly rulers, he is seen by the Heavenly King.*

as such, was deified and worshipped (Eades, 1980). To illustrate the high authority of the Oba (crowned king), he was often referred to as **Kabiyesi** *(Nobody questioning your authority)*. As such, it was very unlikely for people to disrespect the king or his office due to the belief that they would be disobeying the wishes of the gods and as such, risk the wraths of the god upon themselves (Afe and Abimbola, 2009).

In establishing a link between these historically grounded sense-giving mechanisms and the structure of the informal co-opetition network, I discovered that the informal co-opetition network was coordinated by a council of elders and a president who altogether, were responsible for the management and coordination of co-opetitive interactions among members. From my observations, it became evident that the council of elders within the informal network were viewed as possessing absolute power like the pre-colonial 'Kabiyesi' whose authority was historically legitimized as unquestionable. To illustrate this, I share an experience during my field study which is captured in my field diary:

I phoned the president of Informal Network today, to remind him about my intention to interview members of the network. I was quite surprised that he told me I could interview anyone I wanted and that if anyone refused to speak with me, I should let him know. I had assumed that he would implore me to seek their individual consent, but this did not happen. Yet, in adhering to the ethical standards of my research, I ensured to gain individual consent for all participants within the informal network before interviewing them.

In further reflections, I narrate my observation of the highhandedness of the council of elders, which was displayed through their access to *'olopas'* (guards) whom they often instructed to seize the working tools of defaulting members who has not attended meetings or missed paying their regular fines. When I probed why this happened, I was assured by a council of elder that this strategy was just to instill fear in memebrs to ensure that every member complied with the rules and regulations of the network and defaulting memebrs were reasonably sanctioned.

These observations highlight the normality of sense-giving within informal practices. It also brings to mind the prevalence of a hierarchical network activity which are undisputed due to inter-subjective and historically conditioned perceptions of power dynamics in sensemaking processes as commonsensical and taken-for-granted. This further supports Bourdieu's (1984; 1993) notion that symbolic power exists only through circular relations of legitimization between the dominated and the dominated agents.

5.4.4 The Apprenticeship System within Informal Fashion Networks

To further understand the sense giving mechanisms within co-opetition networks, I conducted an inquiry into the recruitment process of members. Through this, I was able to uncover the central role of the apprenticeship learning system as a key driver of both dyadic and network co-opetition within the informal network. Unlike the formal educational system introduced by the colonial rulers, education in the informal sector was acquired through parents passing down learned or acquired skills to their children (Eades, 1980), or enrolling their children into the apprenticeship system to be trained by an expert craftsman for a period (Callaway,1965a).

The apprenticeship system also provides a background for understanding the social inequality and power dynamics that exist among members within the informal sector. Mabogunje and Omer-Copper (1971) discuss the concept of servitude by highlighting compulsory services which all trainee apprentices must render to the expert craftsman (commonly referred to as 'master'). These include domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning, laundry and running errands (Onifade, 1990; Agboola & Olaoye, 2008). After successful completion of the training, the apprentice who has acquired the position of a qualified tailor, is customarily expected to attend an elaborate 'freedom' ceremony at his master's house where food, drinks, honey and Kolanut are bought and shared by his parents or sponsors.

The master then offers a prayer of blessings for the qualified apprentice's success. This ceremony of release legitimates the qualified tailor within the folds and networks of the '*occupational egbes*'

(heterogenous network associations) where co-opetitive interactions occur. This form of servitude is drawn from the institution of domestic slavery as based on the capturing and acquisition of war captives (slaves) which was the privilege of the elites. After the abolishment of slavery in 1838, the emancipation act was introduced to give slaves their freedom however this freedom was dependent upon slaves becoming apprentices and working for low wages under the authority of their former masters, training to be free men and women.

Another example is the use of pawning systems whereby individuals served as pawns to redeem debts or other informal contractual obligations, and only acquired freedom when the debt was repaid. Like the apprenticeship system, slaves from both systems were required to perform domestic roles for their 'masters' and their acquisition of 'freedom' largely depended on their character and capabilities during servitude. The possibility of acquiring early 'freedom' from an expert non-elite craftsman was largely dependent upon the trainee 'proving themselves' through their character and readiness to serve. In addition, the apprentice must be able to provide majority of all items listed on a 'freedom list' such as a 'big fowl,' palm oil, honey, kolanuts (used to bless the newly qualified craftsman, milo, beer and some amount of money, crates of eggs for the *aladura* (person who conducts the prayers), etc.

Where an apprentice is unable to provide all of these items, they are required by custom to remain in the service of the expert craftsman for a period of 6 – 12 months as a form of appreciation for the training they received, as well as to gain the much-needed legitimacy and respectability within the field (Obidi, 1995; Bourdieu, 1983), while working towards fulfilling the terms of their freedom. When an apprentice becomes a fully established craftsman, they are 'released' in the community to start operating their own fashion stores however, they are also induced by custom to join the network association of fashion entrepreneurs within the areas; failure of which would result in penalties such as confiscation of their sewing machines, locking up of their stalls by the association authorities, and even sometimes a resort to fetish activities whereby fear is used to facilitate the domination of the qualified craftsman to join network association.

The networks served as an admittance of the new Qualified Craftsman into the folds of Expert Craftsmen. However, based on the nature of the respect system of 'seniority' and 'juniority' where the person with more experience in a field is accorded more respect within Yoruba land, the newly Qualified Craftsmen were seen as subordinates within the industry and network. However due to the servitude system of learning, the co-opetitive interactions among association members also reflect characteristics of servitude, even though the roles which members occupy have now changed from trainee/master to equally qualified master. This made me to critically reflect on the reasons why this is so. To illustrate the importance of servitude on legitimacy and strengthening of group consciousness in group relationships such as network co-opetition, I draw from the following remarks of Lander (1830):

If his character be good, and his honesty unquestioned,
The slave is admitted into the house of his master,
placed on an equality with himself and male children,
thrusts his hand into the same bowl of food as they,
shares their confidence,
and participates in all their pleasures and amusement.

5.5 Naturalisation of Co-Opetition Networks in Yorubaland

Although co-opetition has arguably been described as emergent, induced, or deliberate, a recent study by Darbi & Knott (2020) highlight the naturalisation of the co-opetition phenomenon among informal actors. This is evident in the historical, pre-colonial crafts trading activities of the Yorubas who engaged in the weaving as a major form of trade among the Yorubas. The popular hand-woven fabric among the Yorubas was referred to as **'aso oke'** meaning '*cloth from up-country.'* By the onset of the colonial era which expanded trade in the nineteenth century, Lagos became the central port of the Yorubaland which connected major trade routes such as Ondo, Ijebu and Egba lands (Banwo & Damole, 2004).

Thus, the Yorubas expanded their trade network and started to develop commercial relations with other parts of the country. Trade groups commonly referred to as the '***Occupational Egbe'*** often travelled with their goods from one settlement to the other. As members of a trading group, these craftsmen received protection from the local ruling authorities of each settlement against thieves which was facilitated by the payment of taxes. These groups often held meetings regularly and had a definitive attire or uniform (***aso egbe)*** and dance that distinguished them from other groups.

These actions were structured as co-opetitive, whereby competing fashion entrepreneurs established a collaborative network where cooperative and competitive activities occurred simultaneously. These groups were widely referred to as the 'Occupational Egbes' characterised by organizations of small group or family compounds through a guild system where the head of the family/compound supervised the activities of the craftsmen within his domain. Within the fashion industry, these occupational egbes were called the 'Egbe Alaso' (Network of clothes makers). In pre-colonial times, weaving/clothes making was organized through trading groups occupational egbes, with a head of the guild/association responsible for overseeing the activities of clothes weavers within his domain.

In these activities, both men and women had to work together collaboratively to weave a total of thirty-two strips of 'aso oke' which was the amount required to make one full garment (Usman & Falola, 2019). The sales of these fabrics and attires often occurred in a central marketplace with open spaces where these clothes makers trading groups *(Egbe Alaso)* gathered to sell off their wares. Members of the trading group were bound by a common constitution (unwritten). For instance, cloth makers who were not members of the network were viewed as 'outsiders' and as such, not allowed to sell within the central marketplaces and in other case, were required to pay a fee.

Essentially, the trading group provided some form of security to the clothes makers such as functioning as a lobbying group to negotiate better market facilities from the ruling authorities, as well as colluding on sale prices (Eades, 1980). Furthermore, members of these occupational associations were bound

by a law to serve, whereby such service sometimes involved the subordination of some members considered as occupying the lower strata of the network.

In modern times, however, the structure and relations within the 'Egbe Alaso' is such that clothes makers collaborate to regulate activities within the industry in which they operate, settle disputes resulting from opportunism, collude for price regulation and quality control, as well as pressure the government to establish suitable policies, tax, and license reduction (Eades, 1980). Beyond occupational supports, these groups of competing entrepreneurs also cooperate to provide support to each other during personal events such as assisting members with expenses of naming ceremonies, weddings, or funerals (Eades, 1980). In addition, members also competed fiercely within upstream activities such as the creation of designs, and downstream activities such as securing a loyal customer base. As such, these attributes fit the description of a co-opetitive relationships as described by Bengtsson and Kock (2014).

During my observation of the structure and relations within the co-opetitive network of fashion entrepreneurs, in addition to my analysis of several secondary data, I became strongly convinced of the huge role and importance of understanding the history of a people. Specifically, I discovered that the structure of co-opetitive fashion-based networks among the non-elite fashion designers were structured based on a socially constructed experience of group consciousness or collective action, which was largely based on their pre-colonial history. This corresponds to Weick's (1995) assertion that actors take plausible courses of action to deal with ambiguity and uncertainty. In the following sub-sections, I refer to a few practices and characteristics of pre-colonial group action which have shaped the structure and relations within co-opetitive networks such as the Egbe Alaso:

The European culture, education and religion however created a decline in the traditional crafts and trading economy, particularly in relation to the crafts and trade activities. For instance, Usman & Falola (2019) note that Christianity considered African crafts as barbaric and as such new converts were

compelled to reduce their patronage of these creatives or risk being ostracized. Thus, the traditional Yoruba crafts declined and were replaced by imitations of European cultural crafts.

5.6 Towards a Definition of Entrepreneurial Co-Opetition in the Nigerian Context

In chapter 2 of this thesis, definitional differences are discussed. Specifically, these issues center around the lack of contextual considerations in defining core terms such as co-opetition and entrepreneurship. In line with the underlying social constructionist assumptions grounding this thesis, therefore, discussions in this section attempt to develop a contextual definition of entrepreneurial co-opetition network and as such, contribute to the contextual strength of co-opetition studies (Darbi & Knott, 2021; Pattinson et al., 2018; Bouncken et al., 2015).

 The core of social construction is to combine individual (micro) and institutional (macro) levels of analysis in understanding sensemaking processes and meaning making of entrepreneurship (Fletcher D. E., Entrepreneurial Processes and the Social Construction of Opportunity, 2007). Essentially, from a social constructionist perspective, organizations are fundamentally social structures (Aldrich & Martinez, 2003) and from this perspective, entrepreneurship involves the construction of social entities through engagement in systems of cooperative and competitive activities to facilitate firm survival (Aldrich & Martinez, 2003).

To synthesize and provide deeper insights into the fundamental understanding of entrepreneurial co-opetition, therefore, this thesis identifies socially constructed definitions of co-opetition from a Nigerian entrepreneurial context. Specifically, within the South-Western region, which is occupied by the Yoruba tribe, formal and informal institutions provide the codified (written) and uncodified (unwritten) schemas which actors employ when they make sense (e.g., Weber & Glynn, 2006) of entrepreneurial activities, such as co-opetition. For instance, the phrases like '*Òṣùṣù ọwọ̀ la fi ńgbálẹ̀*

tí'lẹ̀ fi ńmọ́[5] and '*occupational egbe*[6]' are used metaphorically to accomplish forms of social cohesive actions such as co-opetition. This rhetorical description of co-opetition is loosely translated to mean a firm belief in interlinkages among multiple entrepreneurs which is a key element found in Bengtsson et al (2010) and Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah's (2014) conceptualisations of co-opetition as a contextual situation. In this regard, a contextual definition of co-opetition accentuates the need to shed light on prevailing institutional structures, beliefs, and understandings. Drawing on these contextual insights therefore, this thesis assumes a working definition of entrepreneurial co-opetition as:

 "An embedded set of cooperative and competitive interactions among entrepreneurial network actors which is necessitated by respective institutional environments."

This definition is compatible with the perception that co-opetition is a contextually grounded phenomenon (Bengtsson et al., 2010; Bouncken et al., 2015; Pattinson et al., 2018; Darbi & Knott, 2022) and as such, context is central to the definition and conceptualisation of co-opetition. This definition also has the potential to clarify the long-standing vagueness of the concept which has been catalysed by blurred meaning and boundary setting of the co-opetition concept (Gnyawali & Song, 2016; Yadav, Kumar, & Malik, 2022).

The lack of contextual view of co-opetition in entrepreneurship research can be alluded to the lack of theoretical appreciation of the relational and communal nature of entrepreneurship (Fletcher D. E., Entrepreneurial Processes and the Social Construction of Opportunity, 2007). In closely examining the ontological and epistemological aspects of this thesis, therefore, there is a potential to contribute to existing research on entrepreneurial co-opetition which emphasizes its contextual dynamics. Essentially, this consideration of the empirical field and philosophical positioning of this study could

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[5] Together, more can be achieved.
[6] Co-opetitive networks

potentially aid robust analysis of the research process and intended contributions to the ongoing development of entrepreneurial co-opetition research.

5.7 Chapter Summary

In Chapter Three of this study, the sensemaking and institutional theories have been discussed extensively to suggest that sensemaking is a critical activity which occurs when actors confront issues, events and actions that appear confusing (Weick, 1993; 1995; Gioia & Thomas, 1996). In addition, sensemaking has been argued to be a particularly important process of meaning making within dynamic and institutionally turbulent environments such as Nigeria, where the need to establish and maintain coherent understandings and identities that sustain relationships and enable collective action is vital, yet challenging (Weick, 1993).   Drawing on the complex nature of co-opetition where conflicting modes of interactions co-exist simultaneously, it can be argued that fashion-based entrepreneurs continuously draw from a set of cues within their environment and produce discursive constructions from interactions with each other which enable them to understand the world and act collectively (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Maitlis, 2005).

What the above summation reveals, therefore, is that sensemaking is a process of social construction (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). As earlier discussed within the methodology chapter of this thesis, the primary aim of adopting a social constructionist perspective is to recommend a re-conceptualisation of co-opetition (Le Roy, Bez, & Gast, 2021; Bengtsson, Kock, Lundgren-Henriksson, 2018; Gnyawali & Song, 2016; Kumar et al., 2017) by unearthing the socio-historic context involved in rendering the phenomenon of co-opetition as socially constructed (Bouncken a & Friedrich, 2012). This underpinning methodology therefore led me to critically examine how the institutional development of the Nigerian economy potentially shape co-opetitive interactions and outcomes for fashion entrepreneurs in Lagos (South-Western Nigeria).

By examining these contextual constructs of co-opetition, this chapter reveals how co-opetitive relationships function as frameworks which reproduce class structures within the fashion industry in Nigeria. The examination of the institutional context therefore provides an opportunity to provide clarity on how context informs the creation of divergent frames and prompt divergent courses of sensemaking processes (Weick, 1995; Maitlis, 2005) of co-opetitive relationships as found in the Nigerian fashion industry.

This chapter therefore presents a discussion on the socio-historical context of entrepreneurial co-opetition in Nigeria's fashion industry. In so doing, it highlights the social status structure through which co-opetitive interactions among elite and non-elite fashion entrepreneurs unfold and are made sense of. Discussions in this chapter also highlight the colonial history of the Nigerian economy which led to the creation of elite and non-elite fashion entrepreneurs.

The socio-historical context also sheds light on the social conditions of inequality which is clearly reflected and reproduced in co-opetitive interactions among fashion entrepreneurs in Nigeria's fashion industry. Thus, this contextual focus provides an opportunity to unearth the unexplored linkages between sensemaking and co-opetition beyond the conventional notion of sensemaking as a micro-level internalized cognitive constraint, to capture meso, and macro level drivers of sensemaking processes. These are further discussed in the following three chapters.

Chapter 6: Findings

Research Question 1: Institutional Factors Shaping Sensemaking Processes of Entrepreneurial Network Co-Opetition

6.1 Introduction

This chapter further addresses the first research objective which is to understand the institutional factors that shape sensemaking of entrepreneurial network co-opetition. For this purpose, this chapter draws on findings in Chapter 5 to provide a detailed analysis of how institutions provide the cognitive frames through which sensemaking actors adopt plausible responses related to sensemaking of co-opetition networks. As established in the chapter above, sense makers may construct co-opetitive mindsets based on their historical predispositions to culture, social status, and socialisation processes in their immediate environment (Bourdieu, 1980; 1990).

In this vein, plausible and legitimate codes are enacted on a network level as institutionally defined roles and scripts in relation to situated co-opetitive interactions among sense makers (Weick, 1995). Drawing on Weber & Glynn's (2006) prescription for institutional influences on sensemaking processes, therefore, this chapter furthers understanding of how institutional factors provide ready-made cognitive sensemaking frames while also acting as tools for sense-giving through priming and editing a sense maker's ability to perceive, interpret and construct meaning (Weick, 1995) of co-opetition network relationships within the fashion industry in Nigeria.

The richness of the socio-historic considerations in the previous chapter further extends Weber & Glynn's (2006) original framework by emphasising how institutions which shape sensemaking are historically conditioned, thus, providing a more holistic and context-specific understanding of entrepreneurial network co-opetition.

6.2 Institutional Triggers of Sensemaking Processes

In line with previous academic findings (e.g., Mariani, 2007; 2018; Kylanen & Rusko, 2012; Monticelli et al., 2019; Darbi & Knott, 2021), both formal and informal dimensions of institutions were found to trigger sensemaking processes of entrepreneurial network co-opetition among participants within the formal and informal network. These are illustrated in the following sub-sections:

6.2.1 Economic Incentives & Advantages Triggering Institutionalized Expectations of Commercial Success

The presence of formal regulatory institutions was found to be fundamental triggers of co-opetition sensemaking in the formal fashion sector in Nigeria. These institutions include both private and public agents such as formal legal structures, industrial and trade agencies, financial institutions which provided support and protection for entrepreneurs in the formal sector. Participants in the formal sector shared matching narratives about support schemes which they received from public and private financial systems such as the Bank of Industry (BoF), Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Guarantee Trust bank. These include sponsorship of fashion events, free media advertisement for participants which are published on their websites and social media platforms, as well as inviting famous international designers to enhance collaboration, knowledge sharing and encourage global awareness and patronage of Nigerian fashion brands:

> *[…] that's why I moved to Lagos, because here, you see how everyone works together at these shows, even though they are competitors, but they understand the value of collaboration sometimes. And this is what makes the fashion scene in Lagos to grow. Every passionate designer, who knows their worth, they are all moving to Lagos. So, for my brand, I like to come to these fashion shows to learn from others. And why not? Free publicity for my brand. The only thing I have to pay for is my stall and registration fee. Everything else is provided by the sponsor which encourages people to come together to collaborate on a broad field like this. Lagos is such a big place. Everybody is doing the same thing, and they're all doing it in harmony […] **FN19.***

My conversations with a private sector regulator at one of the fashion events supported the participants' comment above to show how the economic incentives deployed to establish co-opetitive interactions

at co-located spaces triggered sensemaking processes among fashion entrepreneurs within the formal network. Thus, actors framed the introduction of cooperation to an existing competitive interaction within co-located spaces based on institutionalised expectations of commercial success:

[…] there is growth in the fashion industry. Nobody can ignore that now. We have policies and schemes in place to push the fashion industry forward. Yes, we sponsor fashion events, but it is not the only thing we do. We also provide soft loans for fashion designers who can meet the lending criteria. We have been sponsoring fashion shows for over 8 years now and it has helped to raise the enterprise profile of the fashion industry. Many designers look forward to these events because it gives them an opportunity to meet, share knowledge, you know, network, collaborate and all that. We also invite international designers to facilitate workshops so that our local designers can update their skills of fashion. I would say, this is a really good intervention and we have seen it to produce very positive results over the years. A lot of banks have seen what we do and now want to associate themselves with the fashion industry because they know this is the new **'oil money'** [7] *[…] FR4.*

The phrase 'oil money' used by the formal regulator above hints on the dwindling value of crude oil export in Nigeria and the federal government's promotion of non-oil sectors such as the fashion industry, to diversify the economy's wealth (Uzonwanne, 2015). Further highlighting the support from regulatory institutions, is the narrative provided by a formal regulator in the public sector who highlighted the high tourist opportunities of fashion events:

[…] here at the arts council, our work really is to promote the cultural heritage of the country, and that includes fashion. What we do, when we have tourists on official visits, we delegate a team to take them round various creative events like fashion, Nike's Arts Gallery, and others, just so that they can see what the Nigerian fashion industry is doing and also increase that awareness of the industry. You see many of them very happy and excited to see something very different from what they are used to. You know, our African inspired designs, fabrics, it creates a new experience for them and at the same time, it encourages global patronage […] FR1.

Other indicators of how the regulatory framework triggers co-opetition can be drawn from the comments of FR2 who referred to the introduction of policies to encourage the growth of the fashion industry:

[…] the government is doing a lot; I must tell you. We are doing a lot. Now, there are policies in place, like the 'made-in-Nigeria' initiative which the government introduced so people are encouraged to wear Nigerian made outfits to the office twice a week. This is a way we can re-orientate the public about the importance of projecting the Nigerian (or would I say) African culture and revive the fashion industry. We now have over ninety-five percent of Nigerians wearing 'Made-

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[7] New source of economic income

in-Nigeria' attires both globally and locally which is a huge boost to the industry and the economy. Even within the government offices, like the Lagos State house of Assembly for instance, native attire is compulsory every Friday. So subtle things like this here and there [...]FR2

In addition, the president of the formal network also commented on the global and local patronage of fashion which has increased through regulatory support:

[...] the patronage has really increased because there is now a lot of awareness as you mentioned. And social media is really doing a lot because of the publicity we get when we host these events. Also, there are some interesting policies that are helping to build up patronage. So, let me give you an example, as basic as the 'Wear Nigeria' policy by the government and that is really helping the fashion industry, from the scratch of the fashion value chain to the end, everyone is getting more occupied than before in terms of our production. So, to be honest with you, talking about collaboration, it is really essential to support what the government is doing. I would give you an example. If you have friends coming from outside Nigeria, they always ask you to help them send traditional wear from here. It's a common factor. And if you now look at the volume of Nigerians leaving the country and now resident abroad, they still want to be able to get the Nigerian fashion culture so because of that, we really need to up our game in the collaboration side of things. Fashion shows are useful yes, but we need more policies to support collaboration so that fashion designers can start thinking about having their products stocked in stores abroad. It's a new market emerging because of the fashion shows we do, but we can go beyond that and take collaboration to the next level [...]

6.2.2 Formal Institutional Voids: Corruption as Impediment to Market Participation

Unlike the formal network where the framing of co-opetition was based on formally institutionalized expectations of commercial success, such framing of co-opetition did not appear plausible within the informal network. Instead, participants in the informal sector were found to switch frames and attribute formal institutional voids based on experiences of corruption which impeded their access to market participation. This was mainly based on the weakness and corrupt nature of formal governmental structures which tended to favour actors within the formal sector over actors within the informal sector. To illustrate this, some participants revealed that there was a lack of clear consensus on how to access loan facilities provided by the formal institutional structure:

[...] yes, CBN says that we need to provide a guarantor, while bank of Industry said we need to provide two guarantors. So how can we do that when we don't even have the capital? Who is going to stand in for us? It is impossible for me to meet up to their standard. As a small business like mine, who would be your guarantor? So, you see the problem? Before you even decide to try, the system has already defeated you with all these requests that we cannot meet [...] D6JM.

Supporting the above statement, some participants mentioned further complexities surrounding access to funding which made it difficult for participants in the informal sector to fully participate in regulated market activities:

[…] the rules for getting the BOF loan is so strict so that stops a lot of us from applying for it. So, in my own opinion, if you say there is funding for the industry, yet people cannot access it, then that defeats the whole purpose, and the industry cannot grow that way […] FD17.

Through my review of documents collected from the Bank of Industry (a designated PFI of the Central Bank of Nigeria), I realised that small firms in the fashion industry were required to provide bank statements reflecting 20% of the loan amount they required, which these firms may have been unable to provide. Some participants also shared concerns about corrupt activities of the regulatory structure which tended to favour formal 'elite' actors over others. For instance, a participant revealed that to access funding from BOI, staff members of the fashion industry designated PFI needed to be made compulsory signatories to the loan accounts for these firms. Other regulatory failures were shared by participants which alluded to the complexity of regulatory processes.

For instance, some participants suggested that they were required to provide evidence of tax clearance certificates, certificate of incorporation, and governor's consent which they could not possibly get. In addition, small firms needing over N500,000 (about £1000) loan were required to provide evidence of own property with a certificate of occupancy (COO), which are difficult conditions for such small firms to fulfil. Finally, while PFIs were required by the CBN to lend to small firms at a rate of 9 percent, the fashion industry-designated PFI requested for 25 to 30 percent interest rates from fashion and tailoring-based firms as a criterion for loan access:

[…] I have gone through the whole process before. I tried it. But with all the conditions of high interest rates and all the documents they ask you to get, you would even get tired. It's a never-ending process. They just do it to frustrate us because the truth is, these schemes are not really target at us […] D5JM.

Thus, within the informal sector, the reference to economic incentives and advantages created images of distrust in formal institutions:

*[…] government doesn't help oh. Who dem help? Maybe not me sha. So that is why we help ourselves by working together. I even open bank account that time CBN is doing loan for entrepreneur, I applied, sent everything they were asking for. They sent me message that they have seen my application but since then, nothing. All that money is for their own people now. For us here, it's **audio money**[8] […] D7MC.*

The phrase ***'audio money'*** further implies the corrupt nature of formal governmental officials who fail to accomplish the role expected of them. Participants complained that although they had provided all required documentation and fulfilled all necessary criteria to access this corruption. Some of these corrupt activities which informal actors shared allude to the development of proxy companies by formal government officials through which these funds were disbursed. In addition, access to funds was dependent upon the possession of economic capital which amounted to gains for the holders (Bourdieu, 1990):

*[…] okay for instance to get a loan from CBN, they must have seen the level of investment that you have, so they can say okay you have really made it well in this business, so let's see how much we can give you. They won't just give money to upcoming. So, they will want somebody that has made it to a certain extent, and they see your workspace, see how much you have invested in the business before they can grant you a loan. And they must see your turnover. So, for somebody like me that I'm sharing workspace, and also, a situation where I don't have the requirements, they feel that the business will not thrive. In fact, ehn, to just say the truth, I feel it's just that one needs to have 'connection' before you can access these things. And since I don't have connection, I am not ready to jump the roof or do any extra thing, just for that […] I mean like sexually or breaking the bank…you know…like **oiling somebody's hands**[9], just because you want these favours. Because even some people that they say deserve it, in quote, they actually don't deserve it. They bribe their way through, whether with money, or sexually […] D3MC*

Since actors within the informal sector largely identified as economically disadvantaged; having little access to economic capital, they were unable to pay required bribes to access funding. Other deficiencies allude to the taxation processes that characterise the Nigerian economy. SMEs were

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[8] *Audio money is a Nigerian social media term for financial promises which are never fulfilled because of associated corrupt practices.*
[9] Nigerian slang for Bribery

pressured by multiple taxations due to a conflict of jurisdiction among the local, state, and federal levels of government in Nigeria. These confusion on multiple taxation created unnecessary tension:

> *[..] when the government asks us to provide certain documents, we do it, we fulfil all the necessary criteria but still we are unable to get funding due to the corrupt practices that are involved [...] D6JM.*

As such, SMEs were forced to either satisfy all the demands of formal institutions or rely on informal institutional support. These challenges were succinctly put by the following participant:

> ***[…]*** *okay for instance, to get a loan from CBN, they must have seen the level of investment that you have, so they can say okay you have really made it well in this business, so let's see how much we can give you. They won't just give money to* ***upcoming***[10]. *So, they will want somebody that has made it to a certain extent, and they see your workspace, see how much you have invested in the business before they can grant you a loan. And they must see your turnover. So, for somebody like me that I don't have the requirements, they feel that the business will not thrive. [...] D6MC*

In sharing their experience of impediments to market participation, participants referred to deficiencies within the legal system such as the long periods of wait in the dispensation of justice which were often expensive to afford:

> *[…] I don't think any one of us here can ever take an association issue to the courts. It's very rare to hear of that. Nobody trusts the court. Because it can take a long time before you get any justice from the courts or police. Especially in this part of the world. And even for that to happen, you will have to fast track things by* ***paying through the back door***[11]. *You know what I mean? And most of us don't have that kind of money. Things will always be manipulated by the other person who has more money or knows people than you. So, what is the point when we can settle our issues within the association? Because in this association, we say 'amuni dara' meaning that we are all one. No matter even if we are all in the same business and competition for each other, but first, we see ourselves as one. So, if someone from this association carry another member to the police or to court, ha,* ***'iyen le'*** *now. That means, in their heart, they are not really part of us, and we have to find ways to purge that person from our midst [...] D7MC.*

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[10] A Nigerian slang for 'nascent enterprise'
[11] A Nigerian phrase for bribery

A similar comment was offered by another participant in the informal sector:

*[…] you know these courts, you won't even understand what they are saying, because they just **blow grammar**[12] up and down, and you will be left confused. The only thing they end up doing is to take your money every day oooohh, until, ah, you will get tired by yourself now. That's how it is in this naija. The system is really, really bad […] D4JM.*

To further illustrate the complex nature of regulatory institutions, I refer to a field experience of police highhandedness during my observation of market activities of informal fashion designers:

> I had noticed an ensuing dispute between two designers whose stores were right next to each other. This dispute was caused by one of the designers taking up some floor space of the other designer, which she was not happy about. They exchanged words angrily as the other refused to move her signpost from where it stood. While this was going on, there was this loud commotion as people started running about, packing up their items and trying to lock up their stores. One of the two designers who had only just quarrelled and exchanged bitter words at each other, ran quickly to the other woman and said, '***won tin bo ohhh, e ke eru eh…***'[13]

> The use of the term *'they'* suggested familiarity with whatever was the cause of the commotion. Thinking of my safety, I ran into one of the stores as the owner quickly shut the gates. Soon, a huge van filled with police officers (or some type of government officials), drove past slowly, looking around. I asked the store owner (a participant) who they were and what was going on. I soon learned that these officials patrolled the area regularly to catch stall owners because they claimed they were operating illegally. After the commotion had ended, I chatted informally with participants in the informal sector, where I learned that participants paid a reduced levy to government officials through their association whose president had lobbied for this reduction. However, they were not protected from other government officials and although the association council of elders had met with the officials on several occasions, it never resulted into any long-term solution. Comments such as *'my sister, this is Nigeria for you oh…'* were used to justify such coercion.

> In another traumatising experience, I had returned to the community to continue my interviews with participants in the informal sector. On one such day, I witnessed a government vehicle speeding off and halting abruptly to throw off a man who was holding on tightly to the whippers of the van. I was later told that these officials had locked up the store and seized some equipment from that man and in an attempt to stop them from taking his equipment to their office *(which meant he would be passed on from one officer to the other – all of whom he would have to 'shake body' for, because his equipment are released)*, he had stood in front of their van trying to dialogue with them until they started moving their van and he was forced to climb onto the van so he would not get crushed by the van.

When asked why participants still endured these actions, many of them suggested that risks were minimal due to the intervention and rapport between the local elite (e.g., council of elders, religious leaders, etc) who coordinated their interactions with the formal governmental institutions. Through the

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[12] A Nigerian term referring to the use of high-sounding words and expressions to impede meaning.
[13] Yoruba language: a participant warning other network members to be alert due to the sudden presence of the police. The word '***won tin bo***' (meaning 'they are coming') suggests that participants shared a common understanding of an intruder.

coordinating role of the local elites within the network, members benefited from an illegally arranged reduced levy between the network elders and government officials. The illegality of this activity was based on the fact that levies paid through this means were undocumented and participants had no receipts of payment. While this proved beneficial, there were instances where some participants fell victims to the high-handedness of some notorious government officials due to their inability to provide receipts of levy payments.

6.2.3 Formal Institutional Voids: Institutional Inequality and Industry Marginalization

As discussed in the above sub-theme, the imbalanced possession of economic capital between participants in the formal and informal sector, led to a sensemaking of hierarchical relations between both sectors. Specifically, some participants referred to educational inequality which not only excluded them from fully participating in formal markets, but also limited their access to low paid skilled labour which they could provide to the formal sector:

> *[…] for me, no money to further[14] so I must learn this work. And because my English not good like that, I can't find work from other designers in Island. […] D3JM*

In furtherance to this, participants in the informal sector shared dissatisfaction with the structure of the fashion value chain in the economy which segregated them to the bottom of the value chain in terms of their legitimacy, reputation, and access to regulatory support schemes. For example, some participants revealed that although they were responsible for transforming the fashion designers' drawings into wearable clothing, they were still not given the amount of respect they deserved:

> *[…] in this work, we are the ones doing the main job for those big designers. Yet when it's time to pay, they will pay very little. Even those celebrities, they come to us, but they don't want to pay. Well, **idi ise eni ni a ti nmo eni ni ole**[15] now […] D8JM.*

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[14] Referring to inability to complete her education.

[15] Literal meaning - A lazy person can be identified by the way they perform their duties. Here, the participant meant that no matter how fashion designers try to pass off the works of tailors as their own, they lacked the skills to fully embody the role of a tailor. In other words, tailors are important players within the fashion value chain.

These 'established' small firms usually had more economic and political capital which meant that they had the necessary collateral and/or 'connection' (i.e., familiarity with government gatekeepers) to access regulatory benefits. This also explains why the economic contributions of the informal sector within the Nigerian fashion industry is often overlooked. Essentially, the informal sector is mostly made up of entrepreneurs who ventured into this line of business out of necessity (Block and Wagner, 2010; Igwe et al., 2018).

Characterised by poverty, low educational level, and a geographical disadvantage, many rural (mainland) participants are effectively positioned within the less privileged strand of the fashion value chain and lower strata of the economy, as compared to their larger counterparts located within The geographical location of participants in rural mainland area of Lagos further served as a disadvantage as they were usually unaware of the existence of governmental supports due to poor information dispersion channels, and in most cases, lacked proper understanding and education of the processes involved (Igwe et al., 2018). These ensuing difficulties in accessing government regulatory support is attributed to the Western-style regulatory processes, culture, education, and language which are complex and unfavourable for small firms within rural areas (Chamlee-Wright, 1993).

As previously established, fashion designers in the informal sector differed from those in the formal sector due to differing acquisitions of symbolic capitals. Within the informal sector, therefore, participants were perceived as the underprivileged and socially excluded group in the fashion industry. Therefore, participants framed co-opetitive mindsets that emphasized correlations between marginalization and cohesive action:

[…] even when we say we are one in this fashion business, but you can still feel the difference. They will not really respect you like that, because you're not in their clique. So, you must respect yourself and k ow your level […] D7MC.

[…] even though they say this industry is for every designer, it's not really like that. This one is not for small designers like us. They just get together and make money, and leave you out, even though you're paying your levy every year. It's the rich designers' cachous. When they don't see us as one of them, we also have to bring

ourselves together as one mind, so that we can also make them to feel our presence in this industry […]
D1MC.

Overall, the three sub-themes discussed in this section allude to the diverse sensemaking of formal institutions through a retrospective and prospective account of past and current experiences, as well as anticipation for the future. Comments shared in this section relate to participants' individual and collective experiences which describe the paradox of a formal legal system loaded with illegal practices. They also further strengthen findings in **Chapter Five (section 5.1),** where institutional voids such as poverty and educational discrepancies were highlighted as distinguishable factors between formal and informal sectors in Nigeria.

6.3 Normative Institutional Primers of Network Co-Opetition

Drawing on the divergent perceptions of formal institutions held by participants in both sectors of the fashion industry, sensemaking of co-opetition networks appeared to be distinct in both sectors. In this section, the following sub-themes elaborate on the sensemaking processes which resulted in distinctive of co-opetition network relations within both sectors. Sensemaking of entrepreneurial network co-opetition was found to be primed by social cues which materialized from changes within the global fashion industry and changing customer preferences due to the short-lived nature and unpredictable demand of fashion products. Within the informal sector, however, primers of co-opetition sensemaking were found to reside within family/kinship, religious and cultural beliefs. These sub-themes are discussed below:

6.3.1 Digitalization of Fashion and Global Competitiveness

Within the formal sector, the development of new digital technologies in the fashion industry created environmental and competitive uncertainties which primed sense makers to develop co-opetitive network relationships. Although categorized as 'contemporary elites' due to their exposure to Western systems and lifestyle, participants in the formal network were still restricted by a less developed business environment characterized by the digital divide between developed and developing

economies. Thus, reliance on manual processes presented a major concern to participants in this sector as legitimacy required an adoption of the changing industrial norms:

> *[…] Well, fashion has gone way beyond cut and sew. Fashion is now about data science, artificial intelligence, machine learning and much more. We are in a digital and technology era. **ji, ma sun!**[16] […]*
>
> *FIR4*

> *[…] there are lots of changes in this industry. So, as a brand owner, I know that, okay - this is my boundary and I need the competition. I need my competitors to be able to say, 'let's do this.' SO, we combine the competition with cooperation, and get to do what we have to do. and whatever we have to do, we take my brand, your brand, the other person's brand…it takes us all to one common point where we all want to be, which is for everybody to know that we exist […] FN3.*

Through co-opetition in co-located sites, therefore, participants were able to interact with other network members to share knowledge on new processes, build their brand images, influence public opinions and co-construct industry-wide acceptable behaviours (Owens, Palmer, & Zueva-Owens, 2013):

> *[…] everybody has to move digital. All round digital. You have to start thinking automation. It's no longer a choice, it's no longer about when you're ready. So, places like this would really open your eye to what's new in the industry. A lot of designers here are not small fries. These are bog boys in the industry. Many of us here showcase abroad. If you go abroad, nobody is doing cut and sew anymore. So, you can imagine a place like this where you meet all kinds of certified professionals in the industry. That also rubs off on you as a designer because when customers come, they know that they are meeting credible designers. And you can't get to this level all alone. That's why I keep saying to designers, make use of these fashion show. Grab the opportunity. Don't be afraid that people would steal your designs or what not. That's thinking small. we can't do everything on our own […] FIR4.*

The comment above articulates the influencing role of normative pressures on decisions to co-opete at temporal sites by fashion designers. The participant suggests that organisations can achieve higher positions in the fashion value chain through rational strategic collaborations with capable partners (Rafi-Ul-Shan et al, 2022). This also echoes findings by Gynawali & Park (2011) and Dorn et al., (2016) who highlight the normative importance of co-opetition for accessing superior core

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[16] A Nigerian Yoruba phrase advocating for alertness to environmental changes.

competencies and useful capabilities of competitors. The reference to the digitalisation of fashion on a global scale is also an indication of the volatile   unpredictable nature of the global fashion industry where co-opetition is viewed as a suitable strategy for constant exploration and exploitation new opportunities (Makhashen et al., 2019). The expression *'ji, ma sun'* loosely translated to mean 'wake up, do not sleep,' by the president illuminates the revolutionary nature of the fashion industry which requires timely response and proactiveness by fashion designers to remain relevant and competitive within such environment. According to Brandenburger & Nalebuff (1996), and re-echoed by Czakon, Klima, & Mariani (2020), co-opetition presents a revolutionary mindset for firms to explore win-win strategic opportunities which may otherwise be unavailable (Czakon, 2009; Ritala & Tidstrom, 2014; Czakon et al., 2020), particularly when faced with a rapidly changing business environment.

6.3.2. Changing Consumer Preferences

As has been found in previous studies, some normative pressure come from consumers as external stakeholders to the firm who expect a firm to follow industrial standards. For instance, some participants in the formal sector echoed the growing fickleness of customer demands in tastes and preferences, as well as customers unwillingness to pay extra which puts pressure on participants to be proactive in determining fashion trends and bringing them to market in a timely manner and as closest as possible to the customer, which is made possible by cooperating on a network level:

[…] People are still buying. But people are doing more of online buying now. Foot traffic in the malls and the stores have reduced. Before, people would come into your store and pick clothes to buy. But now that isn't happening. Everything is online now. People are still selling but, we don't have what we call ***'laulau'*** *[17]spending again […] IIR2.*

[…] platforms like this are a good place to start. Because there is so much competition from foreign brands. Most customers who come into these exhibitions are mostly from abroad. But they won't come to your individual stores. So, when you bring your products to places like this, you give customers wider options and

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[17] Nigerian slang referring to frivolous expenses.

Accordingly, the narrative in this section reveals that fashion designers are driven to co-opete to normative changes in the industry. Specifically, fashion products are characterised by short life cycle and as such, need to step up their innovation efforts and adopt similar solutions to create sustainable value for customers (Zacharia, Plasch, Mohan, & Gerschberger, 2019).

6.3.3 Family and Kinship Structures

Within the informal sector, sensemaking of network co-opetition was found to be based on institutionally conditioned heterogenous family structures such as household, kinship, network membership, and extended family (Kertzer, 1991). Specifically, family structures are considered fundamental aspects of relationships which guide behaviour through less explicit systems of indigenous norms and values (Omeihe et al., 2021). Through shared socialization processes, sense makers in the informal sector drew on shared norms and values of continuing the family legacy and protecting the family's resources and heritage (Agboola & Olaoye, 2008) by passing down the craft of clothes making:

> *[…] It is because our parents were doing this trade before, so they want the children to learn it also because they see that it is bringing money for them. Many of us here, our fathers and forefathers started this association. What you see here is generation upon generation that have passed this thing down. And our children will continue this after we are gone. And for that reason, I would say we are a family. You understand me? […]DM9MC*

As such, the lineage of an entrepreneur could be identified based on the kinds of crafts and/or business that they set up (Madichie et al., 2008; Olulu & Ideora, 2018). For example, apparel design and production are crafts predominantly found among the Yoruba tribe. The process of acquiring this apparel production (tailoring) skill was often through informal learning systems such as apprenticeship. These apprenticeship arrangements are often established between the potential

251

apprentice's family and an expert tailor who agree the financial and other terms of the relationship informally. Specifically, majority of participants relied on kinship ties as the foundation for co-opetitive interactions within networks, based on the belief that family/kinship and religious ties enhanced network exchanges:

If any member comes to me now with any problem, I will help them because we are members of the same union. But imagine if someone that doesn't belong to or union comes to me, I will think twice. So, my point exactly is that we are (pause) just like one family. God made us like this. We don't see anybody as big, or small or high or maybe he is doing better in the business or maybe he has more customers or something like that. No. everybody here is a family. With one mind. That is why I said competition does not exist for us. Egbe ni wa[18] […] D5MC

The response above reveals how participants in the informal sector rely on shared ties to foster co-opetitive interactions. Interestingly, participants did not use the word 'competitor' to refer to their network partners but described themselves as '*egbe*' which also draws on pre-colonial structure of family and kinship. In addition, statements like '*we are a family,*' was found to be commonplace among participants in the informal sector. Along these lines, participants were found to rely on culturally induced norms of trust, and respect to moderate co-opetitive interactions. To express this, the following comment was made by a Journeyman who was in a dyadic co-opetitive relationship with a Master Craftsman of the same network:

[…] In our association, me and my oga are equals. But when we come back to shop level, ah, I have to bow for him oh. Even if we are partners. Yes, I have my certificate, I've done my freedom so I can as well go and set up my shop alone. But that's not how it is done in this business. We are now partners, but I still regard him as a senior. He is more experienced than me in this business, so he knows more than me. Even when we have to make decisions on our business, I still give him that respect even if sometimes I don't really agree with. But respect is very important. So that he too can bless me when I leave to work on my own eventually. […] D5JM

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[18] we are colleagues.

As an extension to this, participants referred to informal institutions of the 'council of elders' who enforced the above cultural and normative norms of trust and respect. The council of elders was made up of six to eight experienced fashion designers in the sector, who oversaw the affairs of the network and particularly, the dyadic co-opetitive interactions between members. The leadership and coordinating roles of the indigenous elites (council of elders) included settling of disputes between/among members, setting standards on pricing within the sector, breaking down information received from the formal sector, and negotiating with regulatory officials on behalf of the network. In this vein, the indigenous elites played an important role in inducing co-opetition among members. The following excerpt is shared from a discussion with an indigenous elite which highlights their role in promoting co-opetition:

[…] everybody in this association knows there is trust here. Nobody can do anyhow and get away with it. We have had issues where some member's journeyman just run away to join another member, but we call them to order. We have our ways of dealing with these things. That's what makes us united. […] We would call the two members that have disputes together, to get to the root of the issue. If we find the person at fault, then they face a sanction, depending on how serious the issue is. Sometimes, we might have to place a fine on them. And if they are being stubborn, we use our 'olopa' to seize their tools. So those kind of negative behaviour from members, we have to shun it. Especially because when two people are in the same business and are now collaborating, it can be very sensitive […] **IIR4.**

As discussed in Chapter 5, this complex family structure stems from pre-colonial family structures of the '*Agbo Ile,*[19]' which is characterised by co-opetitive norms within structures like polygamy, and open architectural designs for communal interaction (Akintoye, 2010). Thus, normative institutional influences on sensemaking processes of network co-opetition can be said to be historically conditioned, yet this has been sparsely established in existing literature.

6.3.4 Religion
Beyond the influencing role of family/kinship institutions, a significant part of the indigenous informal structure in business relationships in Nigeria is based on religious identity. Many participants in the

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[19] Lineage compound

informal sector identified as either Christian or Muslim, of which the larger religious group were Muslim. A Master Craftsman of Dyad 4 describes the role of religious beliefs in coordinating co-opetitive interactions:

[…] I prefer to partner with my Muslim brother because we are of the same religion. So, I can sleep with my two eyes close. I won't have any fear that he would cheat me in any way. Because we both follow the Quran, and he knows what can happen if he disobeys Allah […] D4MC.

To further illustrate the influencing role of religion on co-opetition sensemaking, a journeyman explained how religion reinforced trust in co-opetitive interactions with a Master Craftsman:

[…] Yes, we have an agreement, but it is based on our Quran. Before we started working together, we first went to the Alfa to pray for us, we opened the Quran to take our oath so that alone makes all the difference. I know he would not cheat me, and he too knows I would not cheat him. We are servants of Allah and Allah commands us to do good to each other, to work together as one. So that is why you find Muslims in our association, we are all one. Even together with the Christians. We don't discriminate […] D1MC.

The evidence from the responses above indicates that the Quran represents a symbol of the Islamic religion which provides the foundation for the conduction of entrepreneurial activities and interactions. Specifically, as noted by Sahlan et al (2018), Entrepreneurs are bound by the Islamic belief system which institutionalizes cooperation as a normative action. Further probing of the normative pressures of network embeddedness on co-petition sensemaking revealed that through prior engagement with co-opetitive partners through the apprenticeship system, nascent entrepreneurs (journeymen) already developed a shared frame of cooperating with competitors. To buttress this, a journeyman in Dyad 3 made the following statement:

I've worked with him for long. I've known him since I was a child. I used to go to school, then come straight to his shop after school because I was very interested in learning the trade. That time I did not have money, so I was doing apprentice work. So, after I finished my freedom, I still stayed back to partner with him because I already know his work and I trust him to an extent. He was supporting me with jobs when I first started

because I didn't have many customers. But now, it's give and take. I have my own customers and he has his own but when we don't have time to finish our own work, we share between each other. Sometimes I just give him some of my customers when I know that he can design the clothes better. Instead of losing them, I just pass them to him, just to show gratitude for what he also did for me when I started [...] D3JM.

In this vein, entrepreneurs are socialized into co-opetitive behaviours by extracting and interpreting environmental normative cues through which co-opetition mindsets are created and enacted.

6.4 Cultural-Cognitive Editors of Co-Opetition Network Sensemaking Processes

In line with Weber & Glynn's (2006) framework, specific cultural-cognitive institutions were found to edit sensemaking of co-opetition networks among fashion entrepreneurs within the formal and informal sectors. As opposed to the internalized cognitive constraint description of institutions, the editing roles of institutions highlight the sense-giving aspect of sensemaking processes. Here, focus is placed not just on the concrete context, but also, the situational context within which co-opetition interactions occur. These institutional primers and editors are discussed in the following sub-sections:

6.4.1 Entrepreneurial Independence and Social Reputation

Narratives revealed that participants within the formal sector extracted, noticed, and bracketed cues related to the centrality of long-term competition and entrepreneurial independence to entrepreneurial success (Ribeiro-Soriano & Kraus, 2018), aligned with a frame of social reputation. These were signalled through words and phrases such as *'I am not a small designer in this industry,' 'do you know who I am?'* In other comments, some participants expressed their discomfort with collaborative activities:

[...] *we can collaborate sometimes but as a true designer, there must be signature. There should be something that runs through your work, so one has to always see the difference that signifies your own work. And that's why competition is always necessary [...] FN1.*

The comments above show that participants aligned with the view that independent innovation is a key source of competitive advantage which participants need to remain relevant within a horizontal

industry (Gnyawali & Park, 2009). Other participants also emphasized the importance of safeguarding their innovative ideas as a source of long-term competitive advantages:

[…] yes, you read about collaborations between designers every time, Because, when two designers come together to collaborate, then it means they want to co-create. But you see, but see ehn, that cannot happen here. It's like asking me to reveal my trade secrets, to open up my whole source of creativity to someone else, noo, Nigeria has not got to that level yet […] **FN2.**

When you come to a place like this, you have to be aware that the customers have come with a certain budget, so your goal is to make sure that they spend as much of their budget in patronising your own wears. So even though as I said before, we cooperate to make this place what it is, when it comes to the groundwork, competition takes over […] **FN19.**

Consequently, cooperation was viewed as destructive to competitive advantages which participants viewed as a key entrepreneurial goal. In the same vein, some participants shared difficulties around maintaining co-opetitive mindsets which reflected long-term risks associated with distrust, asymmetrical learning, opportunistic tendencies, dissatisfaction, disappointments due to unmet expectations:

[…] For instance, all they are concerned with, is holding press conferences, fashion shows, I mean, it's not about the press conferences and the self-promotion. It is about making a difference. It was such a let-down for me because FN is supposed to be the voice of the whole fashion industry but it's all politics and lack of direction. Even the so-called tailoring union that they don't want to acknowledge, they have their acts together more than we do […] **FN4.**

[…] everyone here claims to be a big designer not because they can handle the business but because of ego, title, pride and many more. Businesses survive better when we can work together, but I don't see that happening here […] **FN13.**

Others referred to restrictive practices within share spaces such as the imposition of strict infrastructure guidelines which interfered with their entrepreneurial identity construction:

[…] I would say, yes and no to cooperation and competition. I mean., it's not all bad to be honest because with collaboration, it means I don't have to bring my own model and you bring yours and all that. We can share cost for hiring them (pause), everyone has a say really in deciding (pause) or I would say to agree on what third-party vendors to hire, and all that. But on the aspect of freedom, it is stifled because you have to follow the Ts, and Cs as stated in the contract. So, you have limitation with how many staff to bring, how may

256

design you can showcase on the runway, even simple things such as choosing the kind of hairstyle or makeup you want for your model, it's difficult cos we have limited time to make all this happen because others are using the same vendors as well. So yes, cooperation is good, but just for the purpose of the event that's all. Outside of here, of you want to collaborate, you have to make sure you choose a trustworthy partner, not too many people, just one person that you can trust and feel secure with. But that is a different ball game entirely
[…] ***FN9.***

Drawing from the above, participants in the formal sector found co-opetition to be at odds with their entrepreneurial goal of independence (McGrath & O'Toole, 2013; McGrath, O'Toole, & Canning, 2019). This aligns with Sexton and Bowman's (1985) finding that entrepreneurs aim for dominance, autonomy, and independence rather than conforming to norms or relying on communal support:

[...] *we can collaborate sometimes but as a true designer, there must be signature. There should be something that runs through your work, so one has to always see the difference that signifies your own work. And that's why competition is always necessary […] FN1.*

[…] I am not a small designer in this country. Everything I have achieved today, is my own personal effort, not through FN or anybody. So, I don't really understand what this collaboration thing is for […] FN2.

Reflection on the comments above recalls Hofstede's (1980) summation that high individualism associates' identity with independence, while low individualism is associates identity with the institutional context. Thus, although both groups of participants associated co-opetition with the risk-taking entrepreneurial characteristic (Galkina et al., 2017), this perception differed.

Although studies have suggested that moderate and equal levels of cooperation and competition are required for continuous improvements (Bengtsson et al., 2010), the above comments reveal that the tenets of cooperation (trust and commitment) were perceived as hinderances to the entrepreneurial goal of success which could only be maintained by having a sustained competitive interest (Luo, 2007; Bengtsson et al., 2010; Gnyawali & Park, 2009). Specifically, the comments by FD1 and FD 2 supported the notion that co-opetition could lead to negative consequences if actors were not selective of rivals they collaborated with (Czakon & Czernek, 2016; Crick, 2021). These views align with Dahl et al's (2014) and Crick & Crick's (2019) summation that co-opetitive actors need to be aware of the

competitive nature of co-opetitive interactions and clearly identify the points at which cooperation ends and competition continues. Further, it emphasises the glaring differences between collectivist and individualist populations, where competition is highly emphasized in individualist cultures, compared to collectivist cultures which prioritize cooperation.

6.4.2 Proverbs, Metaphors, and Idioms as Discursive Editors of Sensemaking

Within the informal sector, specific sensory words and cues were identified as indicators of sense giving in sensemaking processes. Considerably, sensemaking of entrepreneurial network co-opetition within the informal sector was found to primed and edited though the use of metaphors and proverbs (Cornelissen, 2005; Patriotta & Browne, 2011) which helped to reduce the equivocality of cooperating with competitors to a certain extent. For instance, dominant languages spoken among informal network participants are Yoruba and pidgin English. In line with the descriptive and sensory nature of these languages, frames and actions are paired to motivate actors to understand and subjectively experience co-opetition differently from their formal counterparts.

For example, when describing their understanding of 'competition,' participants drew on socially constructed verbal labels which viewed competition negatively. For instance, participants described competition using terms like '*figagbaga*' which implied pride. By invoking this metaphoric label, co-opetitors within the informal network thereby interpreted their co-opetitive interactions in ways that dismissed competitive interests and goals, as can be gleaned from the comment below:

[…] No, never, I don't compete. We are all one in this association. We work together like sisters and brothers.
No competition […] D3JM

On the contrary, the word 'cooperation' was viewed as a positive attribute, illustrated through proverbial expressions such as '*fowo so wopo*'[20] which describes the act or working together in unity.

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[20] The act of joining hands together

In furtherance to this, the slogan which characterises the informal network *'Amuni Dara'* [21] also emphasizes group embeddedness among fashion entrepreneurs.

Similarly, sensemaking of co-opetition networks was found to be primed and edited through narratives and accounts through which participants translated their experiences and interpretations:

*Ti baba soro nipa idije, ni se ni o da bi eni pe eeyan so pe ní se l'oun da ju àwòn tókù. Àwa ò gbàgbó ní nkan bẹẹ. Ní ẹgbe wa, ebí kan ni wá, báákan naa ni gbogbo omo ẹgbẹ, Tí ẹnikẹni baa wà tí ó fé **figagbága** sí omo egbẹ míràn, a jẹ wípé won ò pón wa lé tẹlé ìlànà Ati òfin tí a fì n sisẹ ní ibí, a ní láti fi wón jófin.[22] [...] IIR3.*

Others made use of ambiguous statements to conceal their competitive motivations and engagements:

[...] I don't believe in that at all, but I am always careful. I do allow my members to come to my shop...even some of them will bring cloth that I should help them cut a style. Some of them may have seen a design I made, and they will want me to show them. That's the way we operate in our association. So, I can't say no, but hmn, my sister, one has to be smart oh! So, tomorrow now, they will now eat more than me in this business? Lailai oh. I no come Lagos come count bridge; (pause), You know how it is in this place now (pause) you know your people (laughs) [...] but the truth is, I love them, I love all our members and I love to cooperate. We always cooperate [...] IIR1.

The desire and ability for participants to speak freely about competition seemed to depend on situational contexts where the participant and researcher shared common knowledge and experience. Nonetheless, there was an awareness of the negative images of competition that had to be countered or dealt with for members to make sense of their co-opetitive interactions. The problematic status of competition was further illustrated in phrases and proverbs which cropped up repeatedly: *'olojukokoro,' 'figagbaga,'* etc. Competition was referred to in passive forms such as *'I don't do it,'* *'I've never done it, 'I don't' believe in it.'* This indirect usage of the word competition may indicate an attempt by participants to avoid positioning themselves as engaging in co-opetition. Also, shame

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[21] The collective act of beautifying
[22] When you talk about competition, it's just like you are saying you are better than others. We don't believe in that here. In our association, we are a family, and everybody is the same. So is anyone tries to raise shoulder for the other person, that means they don't value the way we work here, and we have to fish them out.

and fear of ostracization were revealed as implied themes, for example, regarding how other members made judgements in the network context:

*[…] we don't talk about it even though we know it exists in our association. It has to, that's normal for every business (pause) to compete. **Ayanmo taye yato si ti Kehinde**[23], so it is not supposed to be a big deal but yet, you can't address it because it would look like you have ulterior motives. You just have to compete in your own mind, which is bad for business. I believe in clarity. If we sit down to actually clarify what we are doing in this association, a lot of things would be better […] D8JM.*

From the above, verbal metaphoric labels and proverbs were used to generate interpretation through sense breaking processes that disrupted how participants understood their current situational context of co-opetitive interactions. This also describes the sense giving mechanism which Gioia and Chittipeddi (1993) define as 'an attempt to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others.'

Within the formal network, language was also used to revise prior understanding of entrepreneurial relationships which were predominantly characterized by competition. Although entrepreneurs within this sector viewed competition as necessary for entrepreneurial survival, there was a need to create room for strategically ambiguous network relationships which accommodated simultaneous cooperation. Consequently, the inclusion of cooperation within such relationships necessitated sensemaking processes which was found to be primed and edited through discursive means. For instance, a formal a network actor referred to the proverb *'a house divided against itself cannot last'* to make sense of cooperation within a competitive relationship:

*Our main problem is outside of this association. A house divided against itself cannot last oh. We have to get our house in order. So, instead of focusing on who is competing with who in the industry, it's better for everybody to **join force** so that we can have the means to push out the foreign brands that are bringing cheap imports and soiling our fashion heritage here. That's why associations like this are necessary […] IIR2.*

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[23] A Yoruba adage meaning that even though twins share similarities, their destinies are different.

Nonetheless, these relationships were found to be formalized through written rules and contracts which provided guidelines for co-opetitive interactions. Drawing on the interpretations of cooperation and competition within both networks, it becomes evident how discursive tools are applied to create inconsistency in sensemaking processes and provide an opportunity for sense-giving by highlighting some discursive elements over others and socially justifying certain actions over others (Cornelissen, 2012). Consequently, these reveal the socially negotiated and more observable role of language and discourse as primers and editors of sensemaking. From this perspective, sensemaking can be argued to reside in acts of speech which shape a sense maker's own understanding, influences the understanding of others, and serve as springboards to action (Taylor & Van Every, 2000).

6.4. 3 Domination and Compliance: Loyalty, Service, Reciprocity, and Embodiment

Although the relationship between the Master Craftsman and Journey Man had evolved into a co-opetitive partnership, it was found that the trainer 'master- slave' identities which characterized their previous relationship did not change. Rather than view themselves as fully qualified professionals within the field, Journey men still exhibited traits of dominance. For instance, they referred to Master Craftsmen as *'my master,' 'my oga,'* or *'my madam.'* In addition, they continued to render personal services to the Master Craftsman as was the norm during the apprentice stage. Observations further revealed that Journeymen accepted these unequal roles in order to avoid sanctions from the Master Craftsmen.

> *[…] hmmmn, if you challenge them ehn, they will just frustrate your life in this job. So, I don't worry about it at all. I just put my head down because I know one day, this partnership will end […] D4JM.*

> *[…] well, I see it as a normal thing. You know that here, we have our own ways of doing things that is different from the advanced world. This is our own culture, so we have to still show that respect to our oga even if we are now working on the same level as partners […] D7JM.*

Thus, journeymen found it difficult to shift positions or completely embrace their new status as qualified master Craftsmen. The Master craftsman in turn, automatically occupied privileged positions

due to their accumulation of specific cultural capital, such as age and field experience, rather than expert power (Bouncken, Friedrich, Ritala and Kraus, 2020). They assert their dominant positions through direct actions towards their co-partners, as well as through institutionally mediated means. What is quite interesting however, is the lack of questioning of the order upon which power imbalances within such informal practices rest. Secondly, membership in associations (Gnyawali et al., 2006; Czakon et al., 2020) and religious beliefs seemed to influence the acceptance of domination by the Journeyman. Thus, Master Craftsmen were culturally allowed to dominate co-opetitive relationships through sometimes heavy-handed methods as described in the table below:

Table 6.1 Informal Co-opetitive Dyads

Threats and Sanctions
Ensure exclusion of Journeymen from association economic activities
Deny access to workspace if they did not participate in association donations.
Threats of physical and spiritual violence
Access to association guards
Threats of ostracism within the community
Mockery, shaming, and teasing
Threat of curses

The table above shows that the means by which the Master Craftsman's power is exerted is based on explicit forms of coercion, threats and sanctions as well as more subtle forms of peer pressure which influence the Journeyman acceptance of a subordinate role within co-opetitive relationships. For instance, Journeymen faced the threat of being excluded from economic activities that could have provided benefits. Observations at the workspaces of co-opeting partners as well at union meetings demonstrated that the powers of the master Craftsmen were also based to a large extent on their leadership roles within the association. Many of them had acquired the role of *'Council of Elders'* which was determined based on social constructs of age and commitment to association activities.

As such, they had easy access to the 'olopa' (local guards) within the association whom they employed at will to carry out their threats. Peer pressure was also used as a subtle means of exerting power over

the Journeyman. For instance, sanctions were carried out through shame and mockery when a journeyman appeared to have broken a norm or rule of co-opetitive engagement. Based on the regularities of the shared experience of 'master-slave' which characterised previous relationship between the co-opetitive partners, power disparities manifested within these relationships which influenced the ways in which co-opetitive mindsets were developed. Further, Previous co-opetitive experiences of some Master Craftsmen also contributed to the habitual formation of co-opetitive relationships.

> *[...] to get the best from them, you have to be careful who you choose. The person I worked with before, we didn't last even 5months because of his attitude. Finally, he stole all my customer and didn't pay rent. The money he was owning me sef, he ran away with it. He nearly wanted to beat me in my own shop. But I leave him for God to judge [...] that's why this time around, I say I will only work with woman like me that I can control. Not somebody that feels that they can stand above me [...] IIR4.*

The comment above reveal that Master Craftsmen were particular about choosing highly skilful Journeymen as co-opetitive partners. The conceptualisation of cooperation and competition within the Yoruba language was found to be based on cultural cognitive norms of compliance to domination. For instance, cooperation was cognitively made sense of by drawing on cultural values such as unity, service, loyalty, respect for seniority and expectations of reciprocity (Effiom and Ubi, 2015). The general perception was that fulfilling institutional expectations of cooperation would secure a reward from God which would result in field legitimacy and entrepreneurial independence (McGrath & O'Toole, 2019). The following quotes illustrate these findings:

> *[...] even if I see chance to open shop together with another person, (pause), maybe the person has better machines or we can have better deal together, I will say no. I won't say because of money that I will disappoint my **oga**[24]. Because if I disappoint, even though she doesn't utter any statement, but action speaks louder than voice. Ondo people say **"kekere ore, osan ju li la epe lo"** [25].That is pe (what I mean is this:), somebody tell you that it shall be well with you…you know it's a common something that people use to say…ehen, and somebody now bring errr… a container of curses, that little prayer that you pray for me, it's*

[24] *Oga - Usually refers to an employer but in this context, she meant that her partner was superior to her, and this superiority was based on his age and experience in the tailoring business. The same applies to the use of 'madam'.*
[25] *(Proverb): kekere ore, osan ju li la epe lo – a small prayer is better than a curse.*

good for me, than for me to collect curse that can affect my business. Even though, maybe at times oh, maybe it's difficult, but I will trust God. so, I don't count that one as challenges…that's a normal thing. God put me through her to make me big [...] D2JM.

These shared cultural values thus explain how conforming to an imposed *doxa* based on taken-for-granted cultural institutions can effectively modify the mental framing of co-opetitive mindsets and in turn, shape the identities of co-opetitive participants. Thus, participants in this case displayed a one-sided mental framing of co-opetition which continuously reproduced the power games and opportunism that occurred between the partners.

An aspect of institutional influences which is rarely discussed in sensemaking studies (Maitlis & Soneshein, 2010; Cunliffe, & Coupland, 2021; Cornelissen, Mantere, & Vaata, 2014) relates to the role of embodied sensemaking which emphasizes how the 'body' and/or physical senses also serve as interpretive tools during sensemaking processes. In relation to this, I recall an experience during field study, where I had attempted to interview a man who would not stand close enough for my recorder to pick up his narrations. I had continued to inch closer to him while stretching out my recorder but each time I did this, he moved a few steps backwards. I would later realise through conversation with another informal network participant that some religious beliefs do not permit men to stand close to women who were not their wives. With this understanding, I rescheduled another meeting with the initial participant who revealed to me how these religious beliefs impacted his ability to interact openly with women within the network. In exploring this further and combined with my observation of the fact that men and women were seated separately during network meetings, it started to become clear how patriarchal systems discussed in the previous chapter, influenced sensemaking. In the previous chapter, it has been discussed that due to the patriarchal nature of pre-colonial Nigeria, women were not allowed to engage in clothes making activities. Rather, men were the sole participants in these activities until after the colonial era.

Also, my observation of network meetings revealed the absence of women in the network coordinating team (council of elders). In exploring this notion of embodied sensemaking, I also draw from my observation of discussions with qualified tailors (journeymen) whose facial expressions often changed into one of fear when the master craftsman was around. During such times, qualified tailors who were in dyadic co-opetitive relationships, would often reduce the level of their voice, and change their tones in conversation with me. It became clear the element of power imbalance within these relationships which I explored in further interviews.

6.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter draws from the institutional theory to explain how institutional factors shape sensemaking processes of entrepreneurial network coopetition within formal and informal fashion sectors in Nigeria. Findings reveal the bureaucratic and complex nature of regulatory institutions which create uncertainty and trigger cohesive action for participants, through which co-opetitive interactions occur. Experiences of regulatory pressures within the formal and informal sectors converged and diverged in several instances. For example, while institutional voids were experienced by all participants, they simultaneously provided the formal sector with tools to propagate their goals of exclusion. Regulatory institutions were found to sponsor destination sites of co-opetition for the formal sector. However, the informal sector struggled to access any benefits from the regulatory sector.

Thus, the formal sector seemed to have greater influence on the regulatory institutions. In terms of how this relates to co-opetition, the formal sector relied heavily on regulatory institutions to carry out their co-opetitive strategies. For instance, through accessing sponsorship for destination fashion-events which excluded the informal sector. In addition, participants in the formal sector were able to access formal financial institutions and information on government support schemes which they shared on their WhatsApp group. In contrast, the informal sector experienced exclusion due to lack of understanding of most formal processes. Thus, there were disparities in access to institutional incentives.

Informal (normative, cultural, and cognitive) norms also prevailed within co-opetitive network interactions in both sectors. Admittedly, the informal sector was more reliant on cultural mechanisms such as religion, family, and kinship through which co-opetitive interactions were indigenously coordinated. In contrast, the formal sector relied on a combination of formal and informal mechanisms such as network trust and contractual agreements to coordinate co-opetitive relationships. Contractual agreements were used within co-located destination sites due to perceived risks of proximity, while network trust was used within virtual social network spaces, due to co-opetitive distance among partners.

Chapter 7: Findings

Research Question 2: What are the Implications of Sensemaking Processes on the Construction of Entrepreneurial Co-Opetition Network Mindsets?

7.1 Introduction

Chapters 5 and 6 have provided an understanding of the institutional (micro and macro) foundations of co-opetition network sensemaking. This chapter responds to the second research question which is to examine how entrepreneurs construct co-opetition network mindsets in light of the underlying institutional context. This requires an understanding of participants' held beliefs, values, and assumptions of cooperating with competitors (Gnyawali & Park 2011; Bouncken et al., 2015; Crick, 2021) and how this fostered mindsets that combine simultaneous cooperation and competition. Mindsets are argued to be important aspects of organisational cultures (Crick, 2021) because they project co-opetitive actors' sensemaking of what drives performance.

As articulated in existing literature, when actors hold a low degree of co-opetition mindset, co-opetition is viewed as a non-performance driven activity (Bouncken et al., 2015; McGrath et al., 2019; Crick, 2021). In contrast, actors who hold higher degrees of co-opetition mindset are more likely to view co-opetition as a performance driven activity. In other words, the perceptions, values, and beliefs which actors hold about cooperating with competitors largely determines how they engage in such relationships.

Although the term 'co-opetition' is not used, conversations with participants revealed engagements in simultaneous cooperative and competitive interaction which according to Bengtson & Kock 2014), is an indication of co-opetitive interactions. The idea of diverse co-opetition mindsets emerged as participants spoke of the construction of co-opetition mindsets as not always linear or straightforward, but based on a series of past, present, and future expectations.

7.2 Temporal Co-Opetition Mindset

A clear distinction prevailed in the co-opetition mindsets of participants within the informal and formal sectors when asked about their beliefs, values, and assumptions of co-opetition. Participants operating within the formal sector perceived co-opetition as an unusual activity which interrupts normal understanding of collaboration, due to the simultaneous engagement in competitive activities. This perception thus forces a cognitive shift from relying on routing, to engaging in a cognitive process that relies on socio-cognitive resources (Bechky & Okhuysen, 2011), such as referring to protocols and rules of engagement, collective knowledge, and collective expectations.

Undoubtedly, the literature on co-opetition argues that temporal locations increase the likelihood of co-opetition among small firms in fast-paced industries (Gnyawali & Park, 2009; Bengtsson & Johansson, 2013). Narratives from participants inferred the development of synergy in co-located fashion sites that facilitated access to both private and collective entrepreneurial opportunities.

Participants in the formal sector inferred discourses which framed co-opetition as a temporal business network relationship (Das, 2006) which mostly occurred within temporal co-located sites.   This temporal space serves as an interpretive framework for rendering co-opetitive actions within the co-located area as meaningful (Barley, 1988). Consequently, reference to temporality in co-opetition network sensemaking also highlights the fundamental role of time as a sensemaking resource. In the following sub-sections, the sub-themes are discussed which illustrate the temporal co-opetition mindsets shared by formal sector participants.

7.2.1 Socializing from a Distance: Virtual Networks as Knowledge Protection Platforms

 As is typical within sub-Saharan African contexts like Nigeria, business relationships are often characterised by collaborative interactions (Murithi, Vershinina, & Rodgers, 2020) such as co-opetitive networks which is centred a sense of community. As such, actors within the formal network were found to experience a dilemma of balancing cooperative needs with their entrepreneurial independence goals where cooperating with competitors did not appear plausible. Considerably, and

in line with previous research findings, an important feature of co-opetitive relationships is that co-opetitors operate within similar industries and as such, possess complementary knowledge (Estrada et al., 2016). In such relationships, therefore, cooperation requires openness and sharing of resources and capabilities, while competition requires protecting these resources (Gast, Gundolf, Harms, & Collado, 2019).

To balance the paradox of these interactions, participants in the formal sector established a virtual platform through which cooperative activities could be conducted. I was privileged to join the WhatsApp group of the formal sector where these interactions occurred. Through my participant as observer approach, I experienced participants openly share general information such as marketing and sales, industry conditions, local business opportunities, and reflections on industry and market conditions:

The screenshots above are examples of several information fliers uploaded onto the group by different members to pass on relevant industry-related information such as opportunities for loan access, upcoming business-related trainings, and general network/industry related information. These were often received with remarks such as 'thank you,' 'God bless you,' from other participants. There were instances where participants also shared basic information on production processes as can be gleaned from the screenshots below:

From the above screenshots, participants were able to use the virtual social platform to access industry-related information. These interactions on a social platform therefore blurred the boundaries between entrepreneurs and facilitated the development of shared interests and values which in turn, facilitated cooperation (Tsai, 2002). To further buttress the importance of social networks in facilitating knowledge and information sharing, I refer to the virtual seminars often held on the virtual platform where participants took turns to share knowledge on various business-related topics. As a participant observer, I had an opportunity to facilitate a virtual workshop on '*Business Strategies in the 21st Century,*' where I focused on co-opetition strategies. This was intentional as I wanted to get in depth understanding of participants' views in a relaxed and informal space. Below are some comments which ensued after the virtual seminar:

We should begin to do a lot of collaborations, where we can call out to one another when we have "job overload" so that collectively we can change the bad narrative "Tailors/Fashion designers always disappoint".

The Chinese model is to never say no to a customer, but always collect the job and spread it within trusted network. That way everyone is busy and has a piece of the action.

In today's world you need to convert your competitors to your collaborators.

T ogether
E veryone
A chieves
M ore   21:53

> We should begin to do a lot of collaborations, where we can call out to one another when we have "job overload" so that collectively we can...

This sounds good but it needs us to standardize our pricing for labour(cutting,joining and finishing and beading etc)   21:55

Very correct. Good morning all.   09:51

Photo
PARTERNERSHIP   09:52

It's only wise to cut cost by coming together and save overheads.   09:52

It's getting more and more crazy with the high cost of running businesses these days.   09:54

If you want to RUN FAST, RUN ALONE.

If you want to RUN FAST, RUN TOGETHER.   09:54

Photo
True   09:56

Although some participants did not join the conversations, they shared screenshots of messages indicating an inclination towards co-opetition as can be gleaned from the following screenshots:

As can be seen from the screenshots of chats on the WhatsApp group, some participants were very open to the idea of cooperating with competitors. Also reflected above, some participants seemed to share different opinions to be benefits of co-opetition by suggesting the need for standard setting which may be a form of collusive behaviour. As observed few participants support the need for collaboration, I decided to explore this further in subsequent interviews with participants. In the quote below, I present a comment made by a participant who highlighted the risks of knowledge spill over as a major concern for not encouraging long -term co-opetition:

271

*[…] the problem with things like this is that you don't know '**who is who**' on the group. Everyone comes together pretending to be interested in your business, but each person is looking out for themselves. Yes, I like the idea of sharing any information we find to help other, but anything related to my trade secrets, I won't divulge. Like where I source my materials from, or the kinds of threading and beading styles I create, I can't share things like that […] FD17.*

The phrase *'who is who'* related to the difficulty of uncovering the true intentions of participants on the group, which creates cooperative restraint among participants. Thus, in accordance with previous findings, cooperation may also create tensions due to knowledge spill over (Estrada et al., 2016; Pattinson et al., 2018) through loss of unique selling points (Crick & Crick, 2021b) which further describes the opportunistic characteristic of co-opetition on the long term (Webb et al., 2021). In the same vein, some participants alluded to the effect of negative past experiences which influenced their uncertain confidence in co-opetition (Czakon, Klimas, & Mariani, 2020):

I honestly don't believe in competition, but you know, when you work with your peers on the industry and you find out that they are trying to take advantage of you, or they think you are trying to be better than them, there is always that competitive spirit so that's why I stay on my lane, right? I am so on my lane. I know what my talents are, I work on myself and keep improving every day, so that when I meet someone who has the mindset to grow, someone who has worked on themselves, then we can harness our strengths to create even bigger, bigger results. Let me tell you one for free: one time, there was one of my colleagues in this association who always made me feel under pressure whenever we worked together during fashion shows. And I always noticed that any design I bring to a particular fashion show, he would bring something similar during the next show. But how do you fight that, in this country? SO, you can imagine people like that, I mean, I don't see myself in competition with anyone but people like that who always make you feel under pressure, or the need to feel nervous, I just block them, I unfollow them on social media. I just get out. I leave that zone. Just because I don't want to be distracted by things like that. You won't believe, one day, he came back to me and told me he loves what I'm doing, that he had even told his assistant to copy anything I post on social media […] FD18.

Consequently, most participants in the formal sector held uncertain views of competitors as rivals and appeared uncertain about their perceptions of co-opetition which manifested in the construction of temporal co-opetition mindsets. In contrast to this however, some participants also revealed that the relations on the social media platform facilitated familiarity among members which made it easy to collaborate at co-located sites:

[…] everyone is so busy in the industry that's why we don't really meet in meetings. If you attend a physical network meeting, you will only find one or two people here, its really difficult to network on that level. But

here, on the WhatsApp group, you can network with as many designers of your calibre, as you choose. And that really helps to break the ice and assess people's true intentions, especially when we need to work together at fashion events. I can already know if you're safe terrain for me or not, based on how you communicate on the group. I think the group communication here is really good [...] FD2.

In line with the above, current literature suggests that notwithstanding the risk of cooperating with competitors, social interactions create opportunities for familiarity development and assessment and prediction of the intention of others which determines how willing participants are to cooperation (Tsai, 2002). Essentially, such platforms provide participants with opportunities to develop knowledge of their competitors weaknesses and strength which provides participants with informed choices of collaboration partners in future co-opetitive events.

7.2.2. Synergy of Co-Location: Shared 'Immediate' Benefits

Participants shared narratives which inferred shared benefits of co-location such as providing firms with the opportunity to operate in close proximity to customers. Short term shared benefits include the ability to develop joint marketing strategies within co-located sites, co-creation of customer experience and attract footfall generation:

If you look at the flier, every brand is listed. So, when a customer sees that, and they know that when they come to the fashion show, they will see Brand A, brand B, and brand C, all their favourite brands in one place, that would even motivate them the more to come here. We call it **'cohabiting'** *and we can drastically reduce the cost of doing business when we work together in places like this[...]****FN7.***

[...] I like these events because here, nobody looks at the other as a competitor. We have to work together first to pool the kind of customers that we want. That means we have to put down our guards a bit [...] ***FN6.***

The participants reference to 'co-habiting' within a temporal site for fashion exhibition events suggests that cooperation among competitors might increase the generation of customer footfall. Cooperation was found to occur in upstream (e.g., planning and organizing), midstream (e.g., accessing supplies of hard and soft services such as runway models, securities, cleaning services, etc), and downstream (e.g., joint marketing):

We are not in the old days. Business has changed. We have to compete with the mind that it also involves cooperation sometimes. We are already doing it, so we can't deny that. When we join our finances to pay for the photographer to take pictures of different members designs, or using the same models, or invite the same media outlet to cover the entire event, what do you call that? Yes, we are competitors naturally. But in a place like this, we have to cooperate first before we even think of competition [...] FN3.

[...] I like this new trend of exhibitions because it gives us an opportunity to work together, even though it's just for a short, contracted time. But you can imagine the magic that is being made here. Not everybody can get a stall here due to the size, so doesn't it make sense to share costs on that front? Does it make sense, how do we employ separate models or photographers when we can all jointly pay for the same service in one spot? I mean, this is the best way to showcase what we have got as an industry [...] FN3.

Thus, the co-locatedness of firms was viewed as important for increasing customer attraction and providing participants with increased opportunity for profit making than if they simply cooperated in activities distant to the customer.

In furtherance to this, some participants highlighted the spill-over effect of short-term cooperation on long-term benefits such as increasing individual market powers and reducing external competition from imported (foreign) brands and preserving the heritage of Nigerian fashion:

[...] if you look at the major retail stores and shopping malls, we have here in Nigeria, they are owned by foreign companies. Look at Shoprite in Ikeja, Lekki, all owned by South Africans. Where is a common retail mall owned by a Nigerian? So, these are the issue. We fashion designers have stalls all over the place, but how many people come there? Customers are not ready to keep coming to you. You have to go to them. That's why we need spaces like this where we can all come together from time to time, to draw the customer to ourselves, and also show the international world that we have a fashion culture here in Nigeria. But we cannot do this if we don't work together. I have been to showcase in South Africa, but they never let us showcase first. Because they know that we Nigerians are on a different level. They always put Nigerian designers to showcase last. And you see, the day Nigerian designers are showcasing, the hall would be filled to the brim. What they are doing in those places is just a copy of what we have already done. Yet, they have the facilities and global presence which we don't have. And this is why we have to strategize like this. Collaborate by bringing all our resources to one place because that would strengthen the impact we want to make [...] FIR4.

To support the comment above, a formal institutional actor made the following comment:

[…] The fashion scene has taken over most developed worlds but there is no noise being made about this. And this is why we as a bank in Nigeria, put our resources together to sponsor fashion events like this so that we can lift our local fashion designers on a global scale. People all over the world need to see what is happening here in Nigeria. […] FN7

Additionally, I note from the WhatsApp group of formal network participants, a particular image was shared by president of the trade association which implied an inclination towards operating in close proximity to customers:
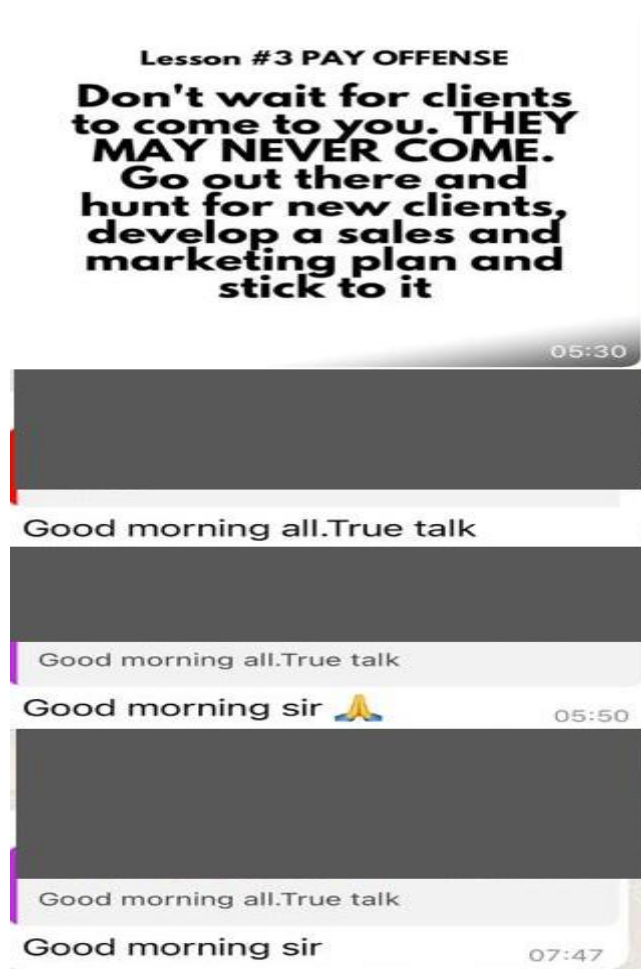
Member response to the shared message above however did not elicit any major follow-up conversation that indicated co-opetition however in exploring participants; sensemaking of this message during interviews, it became clearer that participants interpreted phrases such as '*go out there*

and hunt for new clients' and '*develop a sales and marketing plan'* as situations that required adding cooperation to competition. Specifically, some participants were able to relate this to engagement in co-located co-opetition:

> *[...] yes, this is something we already do through our fashion events which is really good for increasing our customer base [...] FN19.*

Although the sharing of resources and joint organizations and marketing activities may be alluded to cooperative interactions, however, the nature of the co-located environment allowed each participant to compete for their portion of the footfall generated through cooperation. Proximity to customers in temporal sites therefore led to improved coordination and the exhibition of mimetic isomorphic behaviour (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) through the adoption of similar management styles, similar target audience and similar marketing activities, which distant firms may not have access to (Webb et al., 2021). This also reflects the articulation of co-opetition in the tourism industry in current studies, where co-opetition scholars have found that co-locational sites are more favourable to interorganizational co-opetition networks due to high degree of complementarity among actors and fragmentation of supplies which require collaborative and interdependent arrangements among actors (Czernek & Czakon, 2016). As such fast-paced industries are characterised by decreasing time horizon of competitive advantages (Bengtsson & Johansson, 2013) such as increasing pressure for quick results and customers' need to satisfy different needs within a single location (Teller, Alexander, & Floh, 2016), co-petition offers opportunities to co-create value and increase the performance and attraction of individual actors/stores, as well as the destination itself.

Overall, the social interaction on the virtual platform showcases the importance of knowledge sharing as important for gaining new knowledge and exploiting competitive. Cooperating with competitors therefore increases the possibility of recombining complementary knowledge which is necessary for new product development and enhancement of overall capability (Tsai, 2002; Ritala & Hurmelinna-Laukannen, 2013; Estrada et al., 2016; Randolph et al., 2020). It also highlights the importance of

trust in facilitating partner vulnerability and willingness in co-opetition networks (Randolph et al., 2020).

7.2.2. Synergy of Co-Location: Shared 'Long-term' Benefits

As earlier indicated in this study, the categorization of participants in the fashion networks revealed inherent social inequality and the demarcation of fashion designers into two broad but distinct categories of elites and non-elites. These categories were ascribed based on differentials in social, economic, and cultural power or authority. Bourdieu (1985) summarises these differentials through his theory on symbolic power. The idea of elitism finds justifications in the conceptualisation of society as class-based and is viewed as the core of all societal relationships.

Accordingly, authors like Michael (1949) delve into the elitist nature of organizations by arguing that every organization is run by a minority who makes the decisions. This corresponds to the nature of the fashion industry whose organizational form is the basis of group distinction where a "moneyed class" or bourgeois exists in collaboration with the politically powerful to control the destiny of the subaltern who are classed as the poor workers of the fashion industry.

Thus, fashion designers with greater amounts of symbolic capital encompassing accents, fashion lifestyles, the use of English language, were categorized as the elites of the industry (Bourdieu, 1986). These participants shared a similar world view in terms of their class identity which gave them the feeling of superiority and separateness from the rest of the industry. They found it highly important to safeguard their power and authority within the industry and as such, viewed temporal cooperation in co-located sites as a social mechanism for the continuous reproduction of the existing social stratification system in the fashion industry. This fact was clearly articulated by FD 15 when he was asked about his perceptions of fashion designers in the informal networks:

> *[…] if you look around, you can see the calibre of designers we have here. These are not road-side tailors now. These are people who have worked hard for what they have. They have gone through the right process to learn and get the right qualifications. So, coming to a space like this, you also want to ensure that you are*

coming to work with like minds who know the value of protecting what we have worked so hard for in this

industry. There are a lot of charlatans in this industry. But when you talk about the fashion industry in

Nigeria, it is us. We are the fashion industry. I'm not saying others don't exist, don't get me wrong. What I'm

saying is, it is good to have these kinds of events where real fashion designers can come together to maintain

the type of standards we want in the industry otherwise, this industry will crumble before our very eyes. We

have to protect what we worked for. Not everybody can wake up and walk into the industry like that. People

*want to **jump the gun**. Nobody wants to put in the much-needed work but want to be seen showcasing at every*

fashion show. We that are showcasing, we had to do the groundwork. We went through serious professional

*training. No..., it doesn't work like that [...] **FN19**.*

Some participants were able to identify distinguishing factors between themselves and fashion designs

in the informal sector, by referring to different educational qualifications, for instance; while

emphasising the value of temporal co-opetition as a useful technique for restricting access to rewards

of the fashion industry to their limited circle of whom Parkin (1979) refers to as 'eligibles.'

[...] but those are not fashion designers now (laughs). How can you call a local tailor on the street a fashion

designer? This is the problem with this industry. Everybody thinks it's just about cut and so that makes you a

designer. And that's why this industry is lagging behind. What certificates do they have? What qualifications?

So, for somebody like me who took the pains to build my skill in a prestigious institution

abroad…(pause)…because…I went to London school of fashion (…) so how do you expect me to come back

and still be on the same level as those that did not invest the amount of time and effort like I did? We can't be

*on the same level at all [...] **FN18**.*

From his narrative, it is quite apparent that FD18 aligns his perception of co-opetition in relation to

social closure and maintenance/reproduction of standards of the fashion industry. In so doing, his

comments infer a discourse which frames fashion designers in the informal sector as non-elites due to

lower educational status. Here, as echoed by Michael (1949), cooperating in co-locate space provide

an opportunity for elite fashion designer to maintain their elite status, which Michaels suggests as a

huge characteristic of elite groups. This also supports Bourdieu's (1985) argument that the

effectiveness of symbolic capital is based on real communicative and interactive practices, such as co-

opetition, for instance.

To further understand the determining power of education on socialization within the fashion industry, participants in the informal sector were asked about their educational qualifications and their perception of its impact on their network relationships. The following comments from informal participants supported held views of the role of education as a distinguishing factor in the industry and network relationships with participants could access:

[…] for me, no money for school, so I go do apprentice. That's why I learn this work. To take care of my family, to put my own children to school that I did not go. Because there is difference for designer that go to school and the one that did not go to school like me [… D8JM

Further comments from informal participants however revealed that prospective new members whose mannerisms and lifestyles have become acceptable to the existing elites (Michael, 1949) were able to gain access to the formal network:

[…] some fashion designers there, if you hear their stories, some of them never saw the four walls of a school. Some of them even dropped out from school. But today, they are making waves in this business. When you see them, they are not of our level anymore. They now belong to the level of the **'big guys,'** *the* **'OGAs at the Top'** *(laughs) So, it's not about education, that doesn't determine anything. Its grace of God. Everybody has their time […] D7MC.*

Here, I also note that participants' comments on the irrelevance of educational qualifications were offered with some level of caution such as the fact that success and access to formal institutional support was based on business growth and location, as well as revelation of some level of formal education. In support of this, 6 members of the informal network acknowledged the disadvantage of lacking in formal educational training. Majority of these participants had gained informal training through the apprenticeship system, where co-opetition was portrayed as a habitual practice:

[…] government doesn't have time for people like us now. Of you don't open shop in VI or Lekki or Aja side, or belong to those big unions, it is difficult for the government to listen to you. So, you have to get to that level first before you can expect anything […] D4JM.

Overall, this sub-theme highlights the institutional antecedents of co-opetition whereby participation in different co-opetitive networks is based on mutual cognition and identification of symbolic differences and classifications which enhances symbolic distinction of social classes, reduction of the risks and uncertainties associated with co-opetition (Gnyawali & Park, 2009; Bengtson & Johansson, 2012). While theoretical endeavours on co-opetition attempt to objectively present its dynamism and benefits in business relationships, empirical analysis in this study suggests that the institutional context of inequality is highly relevant to understanding the ways in which actors within stratified communities make sense of the phenomenon.

7.2.3 Synergy of Co-Location: Quick Prosperity Syndrome

For this group of participants, the development of a temporal co-opetition mindset was drawn from a cooperative frame of 'immediate' benefits which was arguably derived from several institutionally established ways of thinking about quick entrepreneurial prosperity. This perception which has been identified in several studies to plague the Nigerian society, reveals the prevalence of scepticism towards long term cooperation:

> *[…] I'm not a charity and I can't babysit anybody. We are all designers yes, but on this ground level, it becomes every man for himself. I would say this is the **main battlefield gaan gaan**[26]. Everyone needs to grow, and places like this is the fastest way to grow. Here, it is competition to the core, not to say that collaboration doesn't exist, no, don't get me wrong. It does. But what I'm saying is, yes cooperate, but **don't sleep on a bicycle.**[27] You have to think of your business first because that is what others are also doing. So, my advice is, **work hard, but don't do 'hard work**. Do you get what I'm saying? […] FN16*

Phrases in the statement above such as *'work hard, but don't do 'hard work,' 'put your business first,' 'don't sleep on a bicycle'* all allude to the recursiveness of most participants to this frame of temporal co-opetition. In a sense, the narrative above can be interpreted as encouraging opportunism where necessary, since a major concern was the need to generate higher value than others. The use of phases

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[26] Literally, actual.
[27] Be alert.

such as **_'main battlefield'_** suggests a space of intense rivalry. Accordingly, Luo (2007) suggests that this perspective is pronounced within a horizontal industry where competitive rivalry is more intense than in vertical industries or networks.

Further comments from participants highlighted the strong presence of opportunism within co-opetitive temporal networks as co-located sites:

*[...] there is a place for everyone in the industry. It is not all about design. Everybody wants to be a designer. And that's why you see them stabbing themselves in the back. Most people who come here, are only in to see what others are doing and replicate it somewhere else. No, this **'quick' prosperity'** attitude is just not it. Stabbing others just because you want to be seen as someone who has made it. That is why collaboration cannot survive in this industry. Everybody wants to enjoy success but doesn't want to put in the work. [...]*
FN11

Consequently, participants found it difficult to justify full participation in long term cooperation. The institutionally established frame of 'quick prosperity' created a hindrance to the development of maintained co-opetition. Rather, shortening the timeline of cooperative interactions was viewed as necessary in order to avoid risks of opportunism or rivalry which can be resource consuming (Webb et al., 2021) and reduce overall performance. Overall, narratives point complement previous findings which suggest that it is impossible to establish a balanced co-opetition mindset as both conflicting logics of cooperation and competition eventually produce threats.

To conclude, participants in the formal network recognised advantages of co-opetition as an effective strategy for managing interactions with multiple actors within complex networks such as co-located sites (Grauslund & Hammershøy, 2021). Yet, their preconceived values, beliefs, and assumptions of cooperation as a temporal form of interaction limited their ability to prioritize collective interests over individual interests. Thus, as argued by Lundgren-Henriksson and Kock (2016a), the benefits of cooperating (e.g., belief in social cohesion) and competing (belief in entrepreneurial independence) simultaneously may present a contradiction which requires the creation of a new cognitive mindset for entrepreneurs involved. None the less, some studies have suggested that the development and success

of co-location sites such as fashion exhibition/tourist destinations is largely dependent on the extent to which actors work with, or against each other (Grauslund & Hammershøy, 2021). The table below summaries aspects of cooperation and competition within the formal sector, based on insights from co-located fashion sites and network interactions:

Table 7.1: Cooperative and Competitive Practices

Cooperation	Competition
Promoting field image as a whole	Attracting more customers within the field
Mutual learning	Enhancing individual brand visibility
Information sharing	Product and service differentiation
Creating holistic customer experiences	Protect firm's knowledge and other intangible assets from appropriation
Enhancing social reputation	
Division of labour	
Cost sharing	
Recommending participating competitors to customers in the field	

7.3 Maintained Co-Opetition Mindsets within Informal Network Dyads

 Within the informal sector, ten dyadic co-opetitive relationships within the informal network were selected to share their views, assumptions, and beliefs about cooperating with competitors. As already established in the previous chapter, participants within the informal sector characteristically face formal institutional pressures. As a form of agentic action, these participants were found to possess a maintained Co-opetition mindset by leveraging on the habitual sense of community within their institutional environment. Essentially, participants within the informal sector clearly reflected the view that *'no business can function as an island'* (Hakansson & Snehota, 1989; 2006). Thus, rather than aim for entrepreneurial independence, participants within this sector were found to rely heavily on social relations to improve their social and industry reputations. In the following sub-sections, this theme is further explored.

7.3.1 The Socio-Historical *'Egbe'* Syndrome

It became apparent through testimonials of participants within the case that their perception of co-opetition reflected unspoken assumptions of group consciousness where participants identified their network interactions as a taken-for-granted collectively shared ideology of belonging to the same 'non-elite' social standing and as such, viewed collective actions to improve their social status and realise collective interests. This view was shared by some participants who reflected on past historical experience of social networking within the fashion trade:

> *[...] My people say* Òṣùṣù owò la fi ńgbálẹ̀ tí'lẹ̀ fi ńmọ́[28]. *So, it's only when you put all the broom sticks together, that way, you can sweep the floor well. So, with union, if we want to succeed in this business, we have to come together to work as one [...] IN D10*

This comment highlights the practice of the 'Occupational Egbe;' a perception of group membership which originated from pre-colonial times. As detailed in Chapter 8 of this thesis, the 'Occupational Egbe' describes the guild system of group organizations where homogenous actors led by a guild, cooperated as a plausible response to inequality and marginalisation. The shared historical experiences of social inequality were found to be a triggering effect of sensemaking which promoted social cohesion by strengthening group identity, co-construction of social histories and the formation of a collective memory. This perception was also echoed by a Master Craftsman in Dyad 9 who shared his views on the inherent and resort to co-opetitive relations as a means of transcending such social disparities:

> *[..] right from time, we always know that because of our low status in the country, we cannot wait for anybody to do anything for us. We have to find solution by ourselves. Yes, all of us are fighting for the same customer but we have to stand together because we are the same in this industry, if we don't help each other, nobody will help us [...] D9 MC*

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[28] It's a bunch of broomsticks that's used to sweep the floor clean. (Together, more can be achieved)

To further corroborate this, a Journeyman in Dyad 6 shared an experience of imitation from a lite fashion designer, which motivates his need for co-opetition within local networks:

[…] I have attended their meeting before now. When they are talking about making the industry united. So, we went for their meeting. They invite us to come and showcase at one event. We went. But the only thing I noticed. They did not call my brand name there. They just show off my designs but did not call my name at all. So, from that day, I now said ehenehn, so my work is good for you abi, but me personally I am not good for you? So since then, I do not work with them. If they call me, I will just say okay, but I do not go for their shows anymore. I have seen lots of our designs which they take and rebrand it to theirs. But what can we do? We do not have the power to fight because no government is ready to help. So, we have to stand together to help each other on our own level here […] D6 JM

From the above comments, participants shared the need to organise on their own to protect themselves from opportunism in the fashion industry. Essentially, participants capitalized on the strength of numbers to create and appropriate more value than would have been achieved through dyadic or bilateral relationships (Tajeddin & Carney, 2018; Czakon, 2018). In accordance with the sensemaking theory, competitors mutually store and learn from experiences created while cooperating and competing (Dahl, 2014). Here, participants were found to extract cues from past experiences of collective action through group affiliation and as such, adopted a taken for granted assumption of network relationships as cooperative. This reduced their ability to develop plausible explanations for the presence of competition.

In the same vein, participants were found to align co-opetitive interactions with the risk-taking attitude of entrepreneurs to cope with uncertainty in exploring and exploiting opportunities (Galkina et al., 2017). Co-opetitive interactions in network relationships fit into how they perceive being entrepreneurs. Participants shared doubts about competition, however, the alignment of co-opetition with their identity as entrepreneurs triggered the plausibility dimension of sensemaking. Thus, as participants focused on the co-opetitive practices rather than conceptual underpinnings of these interactions, it enhanced its plausibility.

As a result, many participants commented that they did not feel they were in competition and that although they cooperated with competitors in their networks, competitive interests were non-existent. Rather, discussions of co-opetition focused on cooperation and how this aligned with their entrepreneurial and cultural values and identity.

7.3.2 Agentic Action

Authors such as Friedman (1989) suggest that the marginalized often engage in active adoption of coping mechanisms as survival strategies for resisting the effects of marginalization and creating opportunities for themselves. From an institutional entrepreneurship or agency perspective, this relates to the enactment of alternative actions in defiance to formally regulated systems. Such defiance or coping mechanisms are often centred around intentional self-organizing efforts for collective survival through informal institutions such as family/kinship, reliance on informal norms (e.g., trust, reciprocity, mutual obligations), and utilization of their power through networks and associations (Friedman, 1989).

In furtherance to the above findings, participants in the informal sector shared a collective awareness of their vulnerabilities based on limited finance, limited infrastructure, little to no formal education, and limited access to formal institutional structures such as bank loan systems and regulatory support systems. Specifically, some participants referred to their inability to singlehandedly acquire expensive machineries which were commonly used in the formal sector. This has impacted the quality and prompt delivery of their productions and motivated the need to share limited capacities as well as expertise among themselves:

> *[…] now in the fashion industry, if you don't have industrial machine, it is like you're just playing. But these machines are so expensive. It is not something I can afford on my own that's why association is good because maybe one person may have, and you can always send your apprentice to their shop to use it. Because we are in the same association, this is something that we normally do for members. But if you are not a member, then it's not possible for you to gain that type of advantage […] D8MC.*

In the same vein, another participant drew on the regular workshops organised within the informal network association to support members with capacity building and knowledge sharing:

[…] we have some very good designers among us. And when they come up with new designs or discover new ways of doing the business, we normally invite them to lead workshops to teach us what they know, so that we all can benefit from it and grow […] D9JM.

In reference to the above narrative, I particularly note my observations from attending association meetings that some members were often called out to deliver workshops through which knowledge sharing occurred. In similar vein, some participants shared their perceptions of benefits of cooperating with competitors:

*[…] I can't really pinpoint one specific thing to say this is all we are gaining from our relationship and that is because there is so much to gain from being in an association. It's not like we have a clear-cut expectation or rule but somehow when you join, you just get used to supporting each other because that is the main goal of the association. It's just like now, I don't have some equipment's like whipping machine because mine is broken, But I can send my apprentice to a members shop to use their machine. Even sometimes, if one of us has a huge job to finish, he or she can share it with other members. If I'm very friendly with such a person, I can even send some of my apprentice to go and help them for the day. Because that way, the apprentice is also learning. And they do the same for me too […] **D5JM.***

Thus, the association fostered a network community of informal fashion designers within this region. They play specific roles such as sharing of information on market and governmental rules, providing loans and credits for members, act as an intermediary between members and the government, regulate prices, provide welfare benefits and regulate co-opetitive relationships between members. The association also performed the regulatory role of resolving conflicts and sanctioning defaulting members:

[…] for this fashion business, there is nothing you can do without association. Because I join association now, I cannot fear that maybe my Oga will do bad for me. Because we have law within our union. Any issue with me and my oga, I will carry it go there and they will settle the matter […] D3JM.

[…] In our union, we say 'amuni dara. 'That is pe, it is well with us together. So, one person cannot stand strong, except others stand with him. So that is why, we always encourage our members to work with

journeyman[29] so that way, everybody can help themselves to stand strong. So that way too, we have more and more members. So, the more members, the more we support each other [...] IIR1.

To further understand how socialization influenced the sensemaking of co-opetition, participant observations were conducted at trade association meetings. Essentially, the informal network association within the Ikeja Local Government area of Lagos, is made up of four zonal units of Agege, Ifako-Ijaiye, Ogba and Ikeja. All participants in this study belong to the Agege Zonal Unit and were chosen purposefully. Meetings were held every Monday of the month from 12pm until when the agenda for each meeting had been discussed. During observation of meetings, I found that members engaged in knowledge sharing through training sessions organized by the council of elders. Each training session was facilitated by a member who had been chosen prior to the meeting.

Overall, social networks can be described as important normative agents through which co-opetitive behaviour is legitimated and institutionalized. Even though participants had competitive advantages such as possessing similar resources, capabilities and operating within the same sector, they did not see themselves as rivals. The interaction among entrepreneurs within such social spaces, therefore, serves as an important mechanism for the fostering of co-opetition and enabling of access to relevant resources, entrepreneurial opportunities, information, knowledge, strengthen kinship ties (Bengtsson and Kock, 1999; Dahl et al., 2016; Salinas, Muffatto, Alvarado, 2018) and increase overall firm legitimacy (Owens et al., 2013). The table below provides a summary of the association's role in fostering co-opetition:

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[29] *Local term for an apprentice who has completed training and freedom ritual. In this study, we refer to them as 'Qualified tailors.*

Table 7.2 Co-Opetition in Informal Network

Sharing of information on market and governmental rules
Establishment of a common code of operation within the community
Provision of loans and credit and pricing regulations
Reduction of massive exploitation from government systems
Provides access to new markets.
Provision of welfare benefit to members
Conflict resolution
Sanctioning of defaulting members
Regulate activities of members
Reduce exploitation from formal institutions.
Support transportation and delivery of fashion goods

7.3.2. Trust and Trusting Relationships

Trust was found to be an important factor facilitating resource and capacity sharing (Czakon & Czernek, 2016; Crick & Crick, 2021) among participants within the formal and informal sectors. For instance, D5MC suggested that participants can bear the risk of cooperation based on the development on network trust:

> *[…] we have a common belief in helping each other which makes the process of information sharing easier [...] D5MC.*

Essentially, most participants referred to a shared sense of belonging and trust as channels for the efficient and prompt exchange of knowledge and information. Simultaneously, these social capitals were strategically used to safeguard against opportunism concerns (Tsai, 2002). Thus, opposed to the use of contractual agreements which participants adopt in proximity co-opetition with fashion event sites, the use of trust in informal interactions describes the concept of **'psychological contracts' (**Crick & Crick, 2021a; 2021b) which is established among participants that facilitate cooperation. Based on the interdependent nature of such cooperative social relations, therefore, trust automatically develops and facilitates exchanges which ultimately encourages co-opetition (Jakobsen, 2020; Randolph, Hu, & Silvernail, 2020; Crick & Crick, 2021).

7.4 Summary

In this chapter, the case study findings reveal how sensemaking is a vital aspect of reality framing and constructing of co-opetition network mindsets (or pictures). It also reveals how through sensemaking, actors can construct divergent co-opetition mindsets through which co-opetitive actions are taken. This, in a way, reflects on the plurality of the 'social field' as the fashion industry with differing profiles whose positions according to Bourdieu (1980), are defined by the forms and proportionate importance of capitals (economic, cultural, social) which actors within each field possesses.

Findings in this study point to the diverseness of cultural populations within a given context. While both groups of participants associated co-opetition with the risk-taking entrepreneurial characteristic (Galkina et al., 2017), this perception differed based on adoption of individualistic or collectivist cultures, resulting from colonialism as established in Chapter Five. Enactment for participants in the formal sector was directed towards noticing and bracketing situational and concrete contextually relevant data which indicated class consciousness as a signal of professionalism and capability of co-opetitive partners to apply the necessary professional knowledge required for effective interactions within co-located sites. A plausible explanation for why most participants in the formal sector held temporal co-opetitive mindsets, is their shared assumption and beliefs which aligned with an entrepreneurial identity of individualism (Hofstede, 1980). This interpretation is supported in extant literature on the non-alignment of co-opetition with entrepreneurial goal for independence (McGrath & O'Toole, 2013; McGrath, O'Toole, & Canning, 2019). As explained by Sexton and Bowman's (1985), entrepreneurs aim for dominance, autonomy, and independence rather than conforming to norms or relying on communal support. In selecting plausible interpretations of their co-opetitive interactions, participants in the formal sector relied on past understandings of the incompatibility of cooperation and competition. As such, temporal co-opetition mindsets were constructed.

In contrast to this, enactment within the informal sector was directed towards noticing and bracketing informal (normative and cultural-cognitive) institutional cues which set in motion sensemaking

processes that result in an overall framing of co-opetition as a long-term relationship. Selection of plausible interpretation within the informal sector was based on contextually derived accounts of collectivist, cooperative behaviour (Katz, Finestone, & Paskevich, 2021). This finding resonates with Mathias et al's (2018) finding that collective identity encourages cooperativeness among competitors in a marginalized setting. Although the term 'marginalized' is not use by the authors, this is implied through a discussion on the use of coopetition to gain legitimacy, develop a unified voice to challenge the status quo and incite change (Mathias et al., 2018).

This chapter extends previous scholarly arguments on the importance of the past and present (e.g Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016a), by incorporating the institutional context in relation to the construction of co-opetition mindsets. Consequently, findings in this chapter highlight the importance of sensemaking as a fundamental process of meaning construction and its role in influencing strategic options of firms. It also reveals the individual and collective process of meaning making (Weick, 1995) which does not occur in isolation of the institutional context.

Chapter 8: Summary, Contributions, and Recommendations

8.0 Introduction

Through a social constructionist study of formal and informal networks in the fashion industry in Nigeria, the case study findings from this thesis have facilitated an understanding of entrepreneurial co-opetition network sensemaking. Specifically, the research in this study has addressed two research questions:

1. **How do institutions shape sensemaking processes of co-opetition within entrepreneurial networks in post-colonial Nigeria's fashion industry?**

2. **What are the implications of these sensemaking processes on the construction of entrepreneurial co-opetition network mindsets within the post-colonial Nigerian fashion industry?**

This chapter therefore provides a summary of key findings in chapters five, six, and seven, related to the research questions above, as well as the implications of these on theory, methodology, policy, and practice. Through the case study of the fashion industry in Nigeria, empirical findings illustrate how fashion entrepreneurs take into account their institutional context when engaging in sensemaking processes (Weber & Glynn, 2006; Browne, Colville & Pye, 2014; Maitlia and Christianson, 2014) and constructing co-opetition network mindsets.

The results gathered from this thesis also provide transferable implications which go beyond the specific case study to highlight the importance of considering the institutional contexts in research focused on distinctive sub-Saharan African economies which are largely characterised by diverse range of economic and social structures within which business relations such as co-opetitive networks are formed.

8.1 Summary of Findings

The basis of this case study is to examine sensemaking processes within entrepreneurial co-opetition networks within a Nigerian context. This research area is important considering the dearth of research on the sensemaking (micro-level) foundations of co-opetitive business network relationships (Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016a). More importantly, an exploration of institutions (macro-level) factors provides a holistic understanding of how the construction of co-opetition mindsets is shaped by the broader cultural, institutional, and historic context within which co-opetitive interactions occur. The institutional focus of this study draws inspiration from Darbi & Knott's (2022) advocacy for the investigation of socio-cultural factors on co-opetition however this study provides an extension to the understanding of context in co-opetition by providing a more elaborate view of context through the institutional concept that captures not only socio-cultural interests.

This way, findings in this study provide novel insights to the pervasive institutional environment in Nigeria which pushes entrepreneurs to draw from varying elements in constructing a frame or mindset that fosters co-opetition network relations. Consequently, this provides a guide for future research to unravel the broader contextual and societal factors which influence the assumptions, behaviours, and activities of co-opetitive actors.

Of particular interest is the sensemaking process of co-opetition networks which represent a major segment of business relationships in Nigeria. Like other economic actors, fashion entrepreneurs in Nigeria face formal and informal institutional pressures. Based on findings and analysis, this thesis identified two co-opetition network frames prevalent in the fashion industry: Maintained co-opetition mindsets and Temporal co-opetition mindsets. These are discussed below, in line with the underlying research questions which have guided the development of this thesis.

8.2 Institutions Shaping Sensemaking Processes of Entrepreneurial Network Co-Opetition

In answering the first research question, insights from the case analysis revealed that the institutional environment played an important role in shaping sensemaking processes of entrepreneurial network co-opetition. Within the formal sector, formal regulatory institutions were mostly perceived by participants to be relevant in providing economic incentives for co-opetition. Yet, some participants shared their doubts regarding the competence of the regulatory system by citing weak policy implementation and ineffectiveness of copyright laws to safeguard the fashion industry. The combination of both contrasting experiences by participants triggered sensemaking of co-opetition based on expectations of economic success.

Concrete contextual cues such as access to regulatory funding schemes, fashion-event sponsorships by both public and private formal institutional bodies triggered plausible interpretations of cooperating with competitors. Within the informal sector, the prevailing sentiments held by participants related to the effectiveness of formal institutions. Specifically, participants alluded to the pervasiveness of corruption, inequality and marginalization which triggered agentic action through co-opetition networks. Essentially, actors within the informal sector can be described as institutional entrepreneurs who engage in co-opetitive relations that extend beyond the boundaries of formal regulatory structures to create wealth. It can be argued that while formal regulatory institutions provided the necessary frames through which rational co-opetition manifested, the experience of formal institutional voids triggered a recourse to the plausibility of cohesive and agentic actions from which co-opetition emerged (Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016a; 2016b).

Situational cues from the normative environment provided priming feedstock for the sensemaking of co-opetition networks. This includes the digitization of fashion and unpredictable and growing competitiveness of the fashion industry. In line with Webb & Glynn's (2006) findings, therefore, the

priming role of institutions is mostly dependent upon situational, rather than concrete contextual factors. Further buttressing this role of the situational context, Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah (2016) highlight specific industry-related conditions which may drive cooperative actions among competitors. However, framing environmental conditions using the institutional theory allows for a deeper understanding of the multiple macro-level factors which drive co-opetition and the varying implications these may have on the construction of co-opetition mindsets.

Findings in this section also aligns with findings from Bouncken, Laudien, Friedrich and Gormar, (2018) who revealed that the adoption of similar business processes and structures in co-working spaces is based on a shared value of collaboration, community, openness, and accessibility (Bates, 2011). Consequently, normative institutions in this section allude to the reliance on a 'logic of appropriateness' within each network sector, from which co-opetition mindsets are constructed and through which co-opetitive behaviours are legitimated.

This section also reveals that normative institutional influences originate from both explicit normative influences (e.g., industry changes, religion) as well as implicit influences (e.g., network membership, customer opinions and preferences) which are historically conditioned and motivate sense makers to seek compliance with established standards for action (Scott, 1995). This section also reveals that fashion entrepreneurs do not all draw on the same normative frames (1995). In this vein, this highlights DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) refer concept of 'self-selection' which categorizes participants or sense makers into distinguishable groups based on shared similarities.

In this vein, reference is made to the historically conditioned class system described in Chapter 5, which highlighted the differences between the individualistic culture descriptive of the formal 'elite' participants, (for instance, through early exposure to Westernized education and culture), in contrast to the collectivist culture of the informal 'non-elite' participants (Akintoye, 2010). Unsurprisingly, situational cues within the informal sector were drawn from informal institutional structures such as

religion, family, and kinship structures. Specifically, these findings revealed how socially embedded networks primed the sensemaking of co-opetition as a socially constructed and acceptable phenomenon. This sensemaking of co-opetition was primed by actions and inactions which legitimated and coordinated co-opetition relations among network members.

Findings also revealed how institutions impose cognitive constraints for fashion-based entrepreneurs to narrow their sensemaking. Specifically, entrepreneurs sensemaking in this study was anchored to factors which constituted their existing institutional frames inclined towards a sense of shared identity in the informal sector, and a sense of individual (entrepreneurial) identity in the formal sector. These differences resulted from participants internalization of specific understandings and embodiment of institutional ways of thinking which is intrinsically linked to the concept of power. Specifically, actors in the informal sector had internalized their understanding of co-opetition as shared identity as a result of discourses which emerged from narratives around identity and inequality. Several participants in the informal sector therefore implied that although they no longer occupied apprenticeship positions, they still primarily saw their function as apprentices. By relying on discursive and embodied actions, co-opetition was made sense of in ways that it became an unquestioned practice.

Network co-opetition within the informal sector was framed as agentic action to manage formal institutional voids. Actors within the informal sector shared a collective awareness of their limitations in accessing formal structures and support systems. Through network relationships, therefore, competing entrepreneurs in the informal sector could leverage on cultural and social capital exchanges, rather than economic capital. The reliance on social/cultural capitals through networks facilitated the development of agency as sense makers in the informal network worked closely together in a socially conditioned manner. This also alludes to findings in Chapter 5 related to the agentic actions displayed by indigenous leaders against the unnaturalness of Western administrative systems in colonial times.

8.3 Construction of Entrepreneurial Co-Opetition Mindsets

The second research question aimed to understand outcomes of sensemaking processes on the construction of co-opetition mindsets. Mindsets reveal how individuals make sense of events and situations around them. In this vein, a mindset represents a mental frame which captures the meanings which individuals assign to them (Czakon & Czernek-Marszałek, 2020). Insights from the first research question on the role of the institutional context of co-opetition networks provides insights to how co-opetition mindsets are constructed. Findings related to the construction of co-opetition mindsets reveal the presence of two different co-opetition mindsets held by participants. Differences in co-opetition mindsets can be said to be attributed to the fact that participants in both sectors undergo different sensemaking processes. Within the formal sector, participants were found to hold temporal mindsets which manifested in leveraging on co-locatedness within fashion event sites. This was based on a need to access short term benefits of increasing attractiveness of the event field to a larger number of customers who gain a holistic experience of the entire field due to the presence of several entrepreneurial brands provided by competing actors.

This also manifested into long-term benefits of increasing visibility for firms within such fields of activities and enhancing collective social reputation. Co-opetition within fashion-based co-located fields mirrors the changes and unpredictable nature of the global business environment where inter-organizational relationships such as co-opetition are gaining precedence (Kylanen & Mariani, 2012). The co-locatedness of fashion firms can be described as a business agglomerate providing opportunities for competing firms to cooperate and compete simultaneously (Kylanen & Mariani, 2012). Such interconnectedness thus makes visible the simultaneity of cooperation and competition.

Thus, a shift from a competitive paradigm to a more collaborative paradigm was experienced within fashion-based event fields. Outside of the fashion-based event field, however, participants paid less attention to cooperation and as such, the temporality of co-opetition can be said to invoke irregular cooperation (Kylanen & Mariani, 2012). Formal sector participants also engaged in co-opetitive

interactions through a virtual network. Co-opetitive activities within the network prioritized knowledge and information sharing, as participants were found to question the importance of consistent co-opetitive interactions which they feared could lead to opportunism.

Within the informal sector, participants shared a collective awareness of their deficiencies in assessing regulatory support, compared to their counterparts operating within the formal sector. Through co-opetition, entrepreneurs within the informal sector were able to utilize and exchange resources and capabilities with competitors by working collaboratively in a socially conditioned manner that relied on social, and cultural capitals.

Consequently, cooperating with competitors became an institutionalised, taken-for-granted activity, compared to the regulatory-driven co-opetitive network relations within the formal sector. In this vein, participants in the informal sector constructed *'maintained'* co-opetition mindsets which focused on avoiding future catastrophes (retrospection) and attaining better futures (prospection). Such holistic mindset was found to foster commitment to network relations and helped participants recognize the benefits of co-opetition (Czakon & Czernek-Marszalek, Competitor Perceptions in Tourism Coopetition, 2020).

These findings provide rich insights into the shifting perceptions of co-opetition driven by constant evaluation of the benefits and possibilities of co-opetition, while taking into consideration the rich institutional contextual dynamics (Kylanen & Mariani, 2012). Combinedly, findings related to the construction of co-opetition network mindsets highlights the fact that the shift between cooperation, competition, and co-opetition is not always a linear process borne out of intentional, strategic decision, but may also involve a more complex and contextual process which adopts a more unintentional, emergent, and institutional format (Mariani, 2007; Kylanen & Rusko, 2011; Kylanen & Mariani, 2021; Darbi & Knott, 2022)

8.4 Explaining the Theoretical Framework

Following on from the evidence provided, and in line with the abductive approach adopted in this study, it becomes necessary to revise the conceptual framework illustrated in Chapter 3, due to new findings which emerged from my field study (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The revised conceptual framework in this study highlights the key role of context, particularly within the Nigerian economy characterized by weak formal institutions which tend to favor only the 'elite' formal sector. The framework shows that participants within the informal sector rely heavily on informal institutions in managing economic and industry marginalization.

Consequently, participants within the informal sector extract informal cues in shaping sensemaking processes of co-opetition, such as family/kinship, religion, language (e.g., proverbs, metaphors, idioms), loyalty, service, reciprocity, and trust. The framework also shows that participants in the informal sector relied on these norms to facilitate co-opetitive interactions. In contrast, participants within the formal sector relied on a socially constructed entrepreneurial identity of independence which 1facilitated their temporal engagement in co-opetitive interactions. This way, the framework highlights the need for a contextual understanding of entrepreneurial co-opetition networks. Findings reflected in the framework also parallel similar findings on the sensemaking role in the construction of co-opetition mindsets (Raza-Ullah et al., 2014; Lascaux, 2020).

While sensemaking processes were acknowledged in the previous conceptual framework in Chapter 3, the diverse co-opetitive experiences generated through different interpretations of co-opetition is something that was not captured. In this revised theoretical framework, therefore, two major co-opetition mindsets are identified as maintained and temporal mindsets which are developed based on varying interpretations which co-opetitive actors attach to co-opetitive events. Thus, the new theoretical framework not only explains the institutional factors that shape sensemaking of co-opetition, but further reveals the outcome of divergent sensemaking processes on the construction of co-opetition mindsets.

Specifically, the framework shows that co-opetitive situations are argued to trigger strong cognitive emotional responses and sensemaking processes from actors involved in co-opetitive interactions (Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016a; 2016b). As individuals begin to make sense of the dual consequences of cooperating with competitors from the outset of the relationship (Raza-Ullah et al., 2014; Lascaux, 2020), they construct long term (maintained) or short term (temporal) co-opetition mindsets which influences they ways in which they engage.

Therefore, through cognitively experiencing and evaluation of co-opetitive events, participants construct co-opetition mindsets based on outcomes of the sensemaking processes which may result in feelings of satisfaction and trust, or feelings of fear and distrust (Raza-Ullah et al., 2014; Lascaux, 2020). Essentially, the construction of different co-opetition mindsets stems from different sensemaking processes which entrepreneurs engage in (Lundgren-Henriksson & Tidstrom, 2021).

Also reflected in the theoretical framework is the priming role of normative institutions stemming from changing industry and environmental factors which create uncertainty for entrepreneurs in the formal sector (Weick, 1995). Within the informal sector, however, the framework reveals how social cues are drawn from structures such as family/kinship and religion as primers for sensemaking of entrepreneurial network co-opetition. In addition to these, trust is viewed as an essential normative feedstock for sensemaking processes, in terms of the entrepreneurs' convictions of how other network members balance their mutual and self-interests (Lascaux, 2020; Lundgren-Henriksson & Tidstrom, 2021). As has been articulated in existing literature, it is challenging for competitors to develop trusting relationships (Lascaux, 2020). Nonetheless, mutual trust is essential for competitors to successfully gain the benefits of co-opetitive interactions within network relationships.

Importantly, the framework shows that differences in normative primers within both formal and informal networks stem from reimaginations of past, present, and future events which shape present enactment of co-opetition. Here, the retrospective and prospective dimensions of sensemaking is also

highlighted (Lundgren-Henriksson & Tidstrom, 2021). While entrepreneurs in the formal sector prospectively make sense of current and future events, entrepreneurs in the informal sector approach sensemaking more as a retrospective activity by inserting past experiences into the present to form a coherent vision of future action (Lundgren-Henriksson & Tidstrom, 2021). The development of the contextualized sensemaking theoretical framework for sensemaking of entrepreneurial network co-opetition therefore provides a main contribution of this case study as shown in Figure 8.1 below:

Fig 8.1: Theoretical Framework of Contextualized Entrepreneurial Co-Opetition Sensemaking
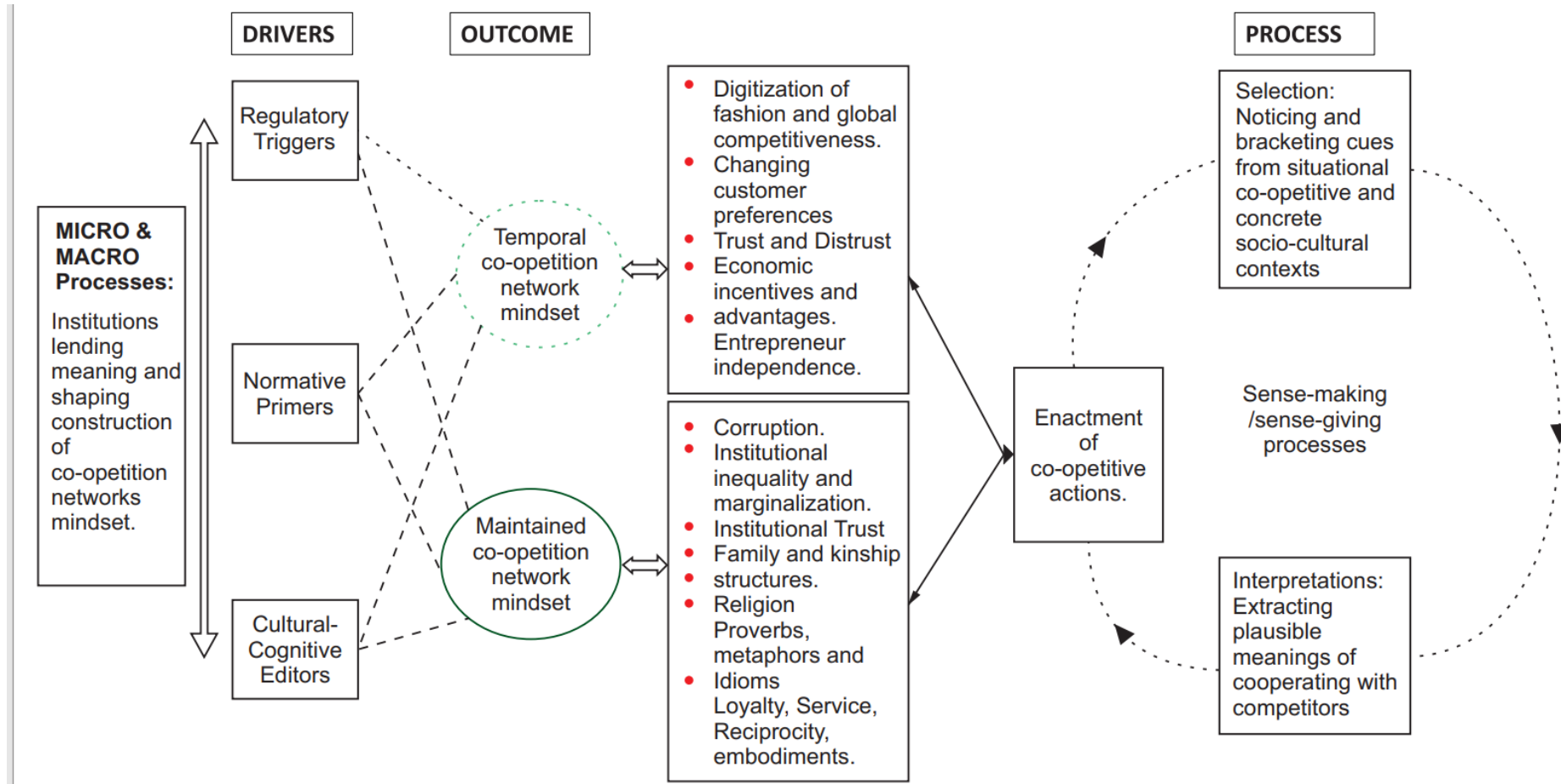
Source: Author's Illustration

8.5 Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis contributes to the theoretical development of the co-opetition concept by strengthening the inter-relationship and benefits of simultaneous cooperation and competition (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016; Pattinson et al., 2018), as opposed to traditional views of these interactions as separate and distinct from each other (Ricciardi, Zardini, Czakon, Rossignoli, & Kraus, 2021). A major recurring concern in co-opetition research is the fragmentation of conceptual and empirical understanding due to the multi-dimensional nature of the co-opetition concept (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016; Dorn et al., 2016; Gernsheimer et al., 2021). Various theoretical lenses have been applied, and various levels of analysis have been examined which have limited theoretical and empirical development of the concept, and field of co-opetition in general (Bouncken et al., 2015; Dorn et al., 2016; Gernsheimer et al., 2021).

For clarity, therefore, theoretical contributions are structured using Bengtsson & Razza-Ullah's (2016) Driver-Process-Outcome (DPO) framework which I find to be useful for providing a connected view of the three core themes of co-opetition research and establish their interdependencies. Importantly, and in contrast to Bengtsson & Razza-Ullah's (2016) framework, however, findings from the case study reveal how consideration of the institutional context unravels a vast range of drivers shaping divergent co-opetition processes and outcomes. This finding is further illuminated through the integration of sensemaking and institutional theory which combinedly, provide a more rounded view of the multi-level nature of co-opetition. In this vein, this thesis exposes the limitations of firm-level theories which provide a one-sided view of co-opetition, ignoring its micro and macro foundations. In the following sub-sections, these contributions to theory are further articulated:

8.5.1 Co-Opetition Process: The Construction of Co-Opetition Mindset

This thesis offers new and interesting theoretical insights on the process perspective of co-opetition network research by illuminating the significant role of co-opetition mindset construction processes to overall co-opetition engagements and outcomes. Existing literature have tended to focus narrowly on

the 'activity' of co-opetition itself (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016) where managers outline areas for cooperation and competition within a network or group people.

In contrast, the success of co-opetition involves instilling the right mindset that embraces widespread sensitivity to opposing actions of cooperation and competition. Drawing analysis from an individual level and illustrating how these aggregate on a group level (Raza-Ullah et al., 2014; Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016b), insights from the case study show how individual entrepreneurs within formal and informal fashion-based networks select and interpret institutionally grounded cues which trigger, prime, and edit their collective construction of co-opetition mindsets and enactment of co-opetitive actions.

This perspective also relates to the micro foundations approach where outcomes of co-opetition are argued to be dependent upon micro-level activities such as sensemaking (Lundgren-Henriksson & Tidstrom, 2021). The process perspective also moves away from the linear conceptualization of co-opetition, to unravel the inter-twined, dynamic, and multifaceted flow of past, present, and future experiences and imaginations (Lundgren-Henrisksson & Kock, 2016a; 2016b).

Previous studies such as Razza-Ullah et al (2014) and Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah (2016) highlight the importance of understanding the process of co-opetition, as process is the means through which co-opetitive outcomes and results are produced (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2014).

In this vein, Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah (2016) agree with the perception that co-opetition processes differ based on the level at which it is analyzed: at network or dyadic level. Their argument stems from the inherent differences in dyadic and network co-opetition. For instance, the co-opetition process within a network is described as complex and multifaceted, due to changes in the interdependencies among co-opetition network actors (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016).

This reasoning is based on the network level theoretical backdrop which ignores the role of individual level cognition, as well as deeper macro level factors such as the institutional context. Admittedly,

analysis of the co-opetition process on a dyadic level acknowledges the importance of cognition from an individual level, as co-opetition actors are argued to deal with, and make sense of co-opetition on an individual level before co-opetitive strategies are developed and shared (Raza-Ullah et al., 2014; Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016a; 2016b).

Yet, except for studies by Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016a; 2016b), Pattinson et al (2018) and Lundgren-Henriksson & Tidstrom (2020), the cognitive and interpretive dimensions of co-opetition has been approached using firm-level theories which limits understanding of its micro foundations (Lundgren-Henriksson & Tidstrom, 2021).

Specifically, co-opetition has often been conceptualized as a tension-filled relationship and gaining competitive advantages has been prioritized in such relationships. This is because the literature has often drawn from the competitive dynamics literature to frame the concept of co-opetition (Razza-Ullah et al., 2014; Bengtsson& Raza-Ullah, 2016). The problem with this perspective is that when the co-opetition process is conceptualized based on firm-level dynamics, recommendations for managing such relationships often prioritize formal mechanisms such as the use of contractual agreements, for instance. This may be suitable for large firms who deliberately enter co-opetitive relationships and have access to the necessary resources and capabilities to adopt such codified processes. For small firms, however, their characteristics vulnerabilities and liabilities may dissuade them from relying on codified processes.

Small firms are constantly coping with an unpredictable environment which needs to be constantly interpreted. This interpretation suggests a sensemaking process through which entrepreneurs create meaning of confusing or paradoxical situations such as co-opetition. This sensemaking is therefore a crucial entrepreneurial attribute (Galkina et al., 2017; Bettoil, Di Marcia, & Finnoto, 2012) and enabling factor for entrepreneurial success due to the owner/manager responsibility of the entrepreneur (Bettoil, Di Marcia, & Finnoto, 2012). Overall, the sensemaking theory makes it possible to

understand how the individual entrepreneur can develop adequate and plausible responses to the simultaneity of cooperation and competition (Lascaux, 2020.; Bengtsson et al., 2020; Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016a; 2016b; Pattinson et al., 2018; Lundgren-Henriksson & Tidstrom, 2021) which has not been extensively addressed in existing conceptual and empirical co-opetition research (Czakon & Czernek-Marszalek, 2020; Lundgren-Henriksson & Tidstrom, 2021).

Another notable contribution to the process perspective of co-opetition network sensemaking, alludes to the effect of time and temporality as foundational aspects of sensemaking (Dawson & Sykes, 2019). Here, reference is made to multifaceted nature of sensemaking processes which draw on a combination of retrospective and prospective events to make sense of current co-opetitive actions. As has been highlighted in sensemaking literature, navigating between planned and unplanned events provide unique challenges to firms, particularly small entrepreneurial firms. To navigate this inconsistency or disruption, entrepreneurs undergo sensemaking processes for coordinating their actions to match the uncertainties of co-opetition within temporally defined structures (Barley, 1988), such as co-located sites and networks. Here, such actors plan and engage in co-opetitive interactions on a daily basis based on temporal plans routines and schedules (Bechky & Okhuysen, 2011), as they continuously update and adjust their co-opetition mindsets based on experiences of new and past events, as well expectations of what is to occur within co-opetitive interactions. This largely deviates from conventional conceptualization of sensemaking as a strictly linear occurrence (Weick 1995; Gioia & Mehra; 1996) where sensemaking is presented as a strictly linear and retrospective process; ignoring the present which according to Wiebe (2010), is where sensemaking really occurs.

This contribution is even more relevant from a network perspective, where events such as co-opetition are identified from a social constructionist perspective (Tidtsrom & Hagberg-Andersson, 2012). This alludes to the fact that co-opetitive events may not necessarily occur in a linear structure, considering that they are largely based on individual perceptions.

8.5.2 Co-Opetition Drivers

A second theoretical contribution to co-opetition research relates to the provision of deeper understanding of multi-level drivers of co-opetition. In line with existing literature, co-opetition drivers in this study have been identified as market and industry-level factors such as the need to improve competitive positions, create niche markets, access additional resources, improve marketing activities to access a wider customer base (Kraus, Klimas, Gast, & Stephan, 2019). Similarly, findings from this study highlight strategic and cultural elements of trust, commitment, and mutual benefits as drivers of co-opetition (Czakon & Czernek, 2016); adopting a network perspective. Other studies have focused on competition intensity (Chim-Miki & Batista-Canino, 2017), industry changes and customer demand which provide market-level conditions for the implementation of co-opetition strategies (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016; Czakon, Srivasta, et al., 2020). While this hold true, they provide only minimal insights to external factors which stimulate co-opetition (Darbi & Knott, 2022).

Extending these findings, studies like Monticelli et al (2019; 2021) have drawn from the institutional theory to identify formal (regulatory) and (private) drivers of co-opetition. Combinedly, these studies provide some insights to a variety of socio-economic and environmental factors which may motivate firms to develop co-opetitive relationships. As a valuable extension to these studies, however, findings from the case analysis in this thesis provide a much deeper understanding of institutional drivers, using Scott's (1995) holistic institutional framework. Through this framework, several formal (regulatory) and informal (normative, cultural-cognitive) drivers of co-opetition have been identified, which previous literature has sparsely discussed. Specifically, previous studies which have acknowledge the role of institutions, mostly examine formal institutional structures, and ignore the depth of knowledge which an understanding of informal institutional structures could provide. In this sense, the examination of the three strands of institutions provides an especially important contribution to co-opetition research.

More interestingly, the examination of informal institutional drivers of co-opetition sensemaking in this study, revealed the need to gain insights into the socio-historic context of the case study to explain how and why the identified formal and informal institutions had the legitimacy and power to mould and shape co-opetition sensemaking of participants in the case study. In this vein, this thesis also drew from post-colonial concept of 'othering' (Fanon, 1952;1967) and Bourdieu's (1984; 1985; 1988) discussions on symbolic capital and distinctions. The Bordieuan perspective enables an understanding of classificatory mechanisms within the networks. Specifically, emphasis is placed on the influencing role of class consciousness which suggests that a set of actors with similar positions subjected to similar conditionings, are more likely to share similar predispositions (Bourdieu, 1985).

This argument was brought to light through findings from the case study which revealed predisposition to entrepreneurial independence shared by many participants within the formal fashion-based network, while the informal fashion-based sector alluded to a sense of shared identity of being the marginalized group. Further explanations of the class consciousness inherent in the fashion industry is provided through the application of a post-colonial lens to explain how the class consciousness and inequality in the fashion industry is grounded in pre-colonial and colonial history of the Nigerian economy. In illuminating how participants identities manifest from internalizations of superiority and inferiority, and the acceptance of these identities, Fanon's theory of the post-colonial subject holds the potential to extend understanding of co-opetitive drivers within a developing economic context like Nigeria.

Specifically, the concept of 'Othering' implies feelings of marginalization and alienation which compel marginalized actors within the informal sector to display agentic acts of resistance and need for change. These additional insights strengthen the theoretical ability of institutions to serve as the resource for sensemaking (Weber & Glynn, 2006). Consequently, the overall contribution within this stream relates to the multiple roles which the institutional context plays in shaping understanding of co-opetition (Darbi & Knott, 2022), and more specifically, sensemaking (Weber & Glynn, 2006) which has only been examined minimally in previous research. Taking a cue from several articulations of the

importance of the institutional context therefore (Mariani, 2007; Kylanen & Mariani, 2012; Darbi & Knott, 2022), this thesis bridges supports the view that strategic relations such as co-opetition should not only be addressed from a meso-level but should adopt a more institutional perspective to capture the motives, actions, and activities of other actors who influence co-opetition (Kylanen & Mariani, 2012).

Thus, in extending previous findings on co-opetition drivers (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016), the exploration of institutional factors through the institutional theory and additional insights from the post-colonial, symbolic capital and distinction perspectives, provide deeper insights into the multidimensional nature of external drivers of co-opetition sensemaking. This perspective is new and as such, makes very vital advancement to the field. This understanding of the institutional nature of co-opetition further reveals the complex and dynamic nature of co-opetition may unfold in an emergent, deliberate, or intentional manner (Kylanen & Rusko, 2011; Kylanen & Mariani, 2012; Pattinson et al., 2018; Darbi & Knott, 2022).

8.5.3 Economic and Non-Economic Co-Opetition Outcomes

Another interesting theoretical contribution to co-opetition research on co-opetition outcomes in relation to the cognitive capabilities of individuals (Bengtsson et al., 2016; Lundgren-Henriksson & Tidstrom, 2021) in constructing mental frames that reveals how they select, interpret, and enact co-opetitive situations. Within existing literature, major focus has been placed on economic outcomes of co-opetition. In this thesis, however, findings from the case study extend knowledge on co-opetition outcomes by addressing the importance of non-economic outcomes.

In this vein, focus is placed on the construction of co-opetition mindsets by participants within the formal and informal sector. The temporal mindsets shared by participants in the formal sector reveal a combination of positive, negative, and uncertain perceptions of co-opetition which were based on sensemaking processes that prioritized formal institutional structures as sensemaking resources. In

contrast, participants in the informal sector shared maintained co-opetition mindsets which revealed positive perceptions of co-opetition as a means for socialization.

Importantly, socialization was viewed as necessary for co-opetition actors to be legitimated as insiders; thus, enhancing their ability to establish independent businesses within the field. Simultaneously, socialization also acted as a resource for actor complacency in reinforcing-maintained co-opetition mindsets which prioritized institutionally grounded assumptions of co-opetitive behaviors. This understanding of non-economic co-opetition outcomes makes an interesting contribution because it facilitates understanding of how entrepreneurs can effectively cope with and secure the synergetic benefits of cooperating and competing simultaneously (Lundgren-Henriksson & Tidstrom, 2021).

It also brings to light the additional features of co-opetition sensemaking such as the sense-giving role of network central actors in helping other network actors to develop co-opetition mindsets. In this sense, understanding of how entrepreneurs construct co-opetition mindsets extends knowledge on the outcome of sensemaking in relation to how actors engage in practice. These findings are even more crucial within the context of entrepreneurship because entrepreneurs are '*born competitors*' (Pattinson et al., 2018) and as such, are more prone to developing co-opetition mindsets due to their strong inclination for strategic actions (Klimas, 2016) and high proclivity to risks (Galkina et al., 2017; Pattinson et al., 2018).

8.5.4 Theory Building through the Contextualized Sensemaking Framework

Several recommendations for qualitative research contributions to the field of International Business is theory building. Authors like Doz (2011) suggest that qualitative studies can provide rich, thick description of research phenomena through the merging of insights from various theories, as against the reliance on a single theoretical lens or juxtaposing two theories.

In this research, the synthesizing of sensemaking and institutional theory, as well as insights from post-colonial and sociological theories has resulted in the creation of an original theory called the

'*Contextualized Sensemaking'* theory. This theory which has developed from this research has been used to provide richer understanding and conceptualization of co-opetitive entrepreneurial network relationships within a post-colonial environment like Nigeria. The applicability of this theory is illustrated, and key elements and relationships are emphasized (Doz, 2011) in the following paragraphs.

Overall, the contextualized sensemaking framework is specifically useful for highlight the contextual dimensions of qualitative studies such as this. Specifically, several authors have found that contextual features can be difficult to unearth by a researcher who lacks familiarity and experience with the context (Cheng, 2007). Yet not all researchers would have lived experience with the context in which they are researching (Buckley & Lessard, 2005). This framework thus provides qualitative researchers with a tool for recognizing context and its significance to International Business

Additional, insights from the contextualized sensemaking framework can sensitize co-opetition researchers to important but previously neglected role of informal institutions; thus, facilitating the development of new and inspiring research agendas within co-opetition research. Admittedly, the role of formal institutions has been captured in co-opetition research however, the contextualized sensemaking framework provides deeper opportunities to further investigate the synchronized influences of both formal and informal institutions on the construction of co-opetition mindsets across various contexts.

8.6 Methodological Contributions.

Underlying philosophical assumptions about knowledge could either restrict or enhance the process of knowledge construction in any field (Pittaway, 2020). The underlying social constructionist philosophical assumptions guiding this study has made it possible for the introduction of a more reflexive approach to conducting research in International Business. Specifically, the social constructionist philosophy priorities a move towards more socially embedded and historically situated understanding of knowledge, reality, and human actions (Pittaway, Aissaoui, & Fox, 2018). This

presupposes a view of reality as plural, and multifaceted in nature and as such, accessing such multiple realities requires careful consideration and application of appropriate techniques that allow for flexibility and reflexivity of the research process (Burr, 2015). In the following sub-sections, discussions on these considerations are presented; reflecting ways that methodological choices in this study further advance the practicalities of a social constructionist research project:

8.6.1 Contribution to the Role of Language and Translation in Balancing *'Researcher-Researched'* Power Relationships and Inclusion in International Business Research

Stereotypical perceptions of the role of language and translation in research processes have tended to exclude unique types of participants from mainstream research (Chandler-Smith & Swart, 2014). While there is awareness of the globalized nature of academic research, the default has often been to present knowledge as homogenous, rather than acknowledging the heterogenous nature of knowledge (Xian, 2008) by drawing on socio-historical, cultural, and institutional differences.

This is even more important when acquiring knowledge from a socially stratified nation like Nigeria. As Westwood & Jack (2007) argue, while nations with a colonized history may have evolved into a temporal situation of absence of direct rule domination, such nations to an exceptionally substantial extent, still experience the effects of colonialism through colonially established formal structures of domination. For instance, most empirical data that inform knowledge in the field of international business, and specifically, co-opetition research, tend to be drawn from Westernized, and/or formal settings. Yet, as revealed in the findings of this study, the characteristics of formal and informal settings largely differ, especially in a postcolonial nation like Nigeria where informal actors are often marginalized and, in some cases, othered, due to differing social classifications.

To improve the credibility of knowledge in the field, participants who are *'othered'* within organizations and/or communities need to be given an opportunity to participate in research and lend their voice to the production of knowledge that concerns them (Davis, 2012; Bell & Sengupta, 2022).

In view of this, this thesis deployed language as an essential tool for heightening inclusive participation from participants within both formal and informal sectors of the fashion industry in Nigeria. Specifically, current trends in international business research have identified language as critical to understanding the qualitative research process (Welch & Piekkari, 2006). Despite the growing interest in language, as well as the fact that data is collected from a broad range of diverse international venues, there is still little discussion and clarity provided on language which from a social constructionist standpoint, is a crucial avenue for meaning production (Welch & Piekkari, 2006), reducing '*research-researched'* power imbalance, and heightening inclusion for participants.

Participants within the informal sector were provided with the freedom to speak in their native languages, (e.g., Yoruba and pidgin), which gave them much needed level of autonomy in the research process. Here, Xian's (2008) points attention to instances where restricting participants to one language (e.g., English language) limits the possibility of allowing participants reveal valuable cues about their underlying experiences. Ignoring these language differences could ultimately result in findings which are compromised (Xian, 2008).

This sensitivity to language as an important methodological decision was further supported through the application of an appropriate translation strategy such as the foreignization strategy (Venuti, 1995). Here, the goal was to maintain the authenticity of participants' truth,' rather than searching for conceptual equivalence which may not always paint an accurate picture of reality, as revealed in the encounters and observations narrated in the previous paragraphs. Language and translation play vital roles in the articulation and dissemination of knowledge and incites future researchers to rethink the taken-for-granted perception of the English language as the dominant language which although useful as a 'shared language of knowledge,' underscores the multiplicity of languages and its impact on the research methodologies (Tietze, 2021).

Furthermore, narrations which are domesticated for the benefit of only one group of audience, results in a loss of cultural meanings and knowledge authenticity (Venuti, 1998; Xian, 2008) because there are specific meanings or '*unsayable silences*' which cannot be effectively captured in another language (Becker, 1991). As an example, Yoruba is a tonal language where words and phrases with similar spellings may have different meanings which can only be understood based on how pitch is used. In one of my encounters with a participant, the comment '*alejo nla ni mo gba*' was made. This comment could simply be translated to mean that the participant considers my visit and his interaction with me as a valuable opportunity for him. Conversely, the participant could also have been sarcastic to mean that I had considered myself important enough to gain his attention. The pitch of his voice when making these comments, accompanied by his gestures, expressions, and actions (e.g., signaling one of his workers to fetch me a stool to sit on), is how I understood that his comment was a compliment, rather than sarcasm.

Further supporting this argument, table 4.11 in this study outlines some differences in meaning which could very easily have been overlooked. For instance, the words 'competition' is known as '*idije*' (meaning contest) or '*figagbaga*' (signifying pride). Even more crucial here, is the fact that because of the descriptive nature of Yoruba language, speakers undergo a process of visualization to make sense of a particular event. In visualizing competition as *'idije,'* participants would draw cues from historical experience of contest such as between two communities, for instance. Here, competition is viewed as unavoidable for survival. Opposed to this, is the action that accompanies a visualization of the word *'figagbaga'* which is a description of a person raising their shoulders in a proud manner. When participants draw cues from this expression in their sensemaking of competition, competition is viewed a negative action and as such, competitive actions are frowned upon.

A definitive argument of social constructionism is that the ways in which we think, act, and communicate about our world shapes our views of it. Core socio-cultural ontological constructs such as language, discourse, knowledge, and culture have been identified as key to explaining the ways in

which people make sense of their world yet, most research adopting social constructionist epistemologies fail to clearly describe and explain how these socio-cultural constructs shape knowledge construction. Notable authors like Nkomo (1992) and Spivak (1994) have discussed extensively about the importance of language in research methodologies; noting how Western research methodologies tailor ontological, epistemological, ideological, and theoretical orientations to construct representations of the other which reduces them into a sameness that does not account for their differences (Westwood, 2006).

To truly genuinely recognize, acknowledge, and represent the complex, rather than sanitized version of participants' reality (Xian, 2008; Wilmot & Tietze, 2020), therefore, the consideration of language and translation provides a starting point for improving methodological designs in qualitative international business research. It provides an opportunity for qualitative IB researchers to adopt methodological choices that heighten inclusion for information-rich participants. It also provides an opportunity for researchers to account for power relationships between the researcher and the researched, and how this can be negotiated over time while establishing and maintaining rapport and trust (Brooks, Riele, & Maguire, 2015).

8.6.2 Contribution to Reflections on Researcher Positionality in International Business Research

A crucial yet overlooked aspect of qualitative research methodology is the issue of researcher positionality. New research contributions have started to acknowledge the importance of positionality as an important methodological decision in qualitative research. Authors such as Adu-Ampong & Adams (2020) through their insightful narration of experiences conducting research in Ghana argue that qualitative researchers need to address their own subjectivity within the field by exploring how the researcher's identity, positionality, and relationship with the research context shape the impact generated from a research endeavour (Adu-Ampong & Adams, 2020). This would require a reflection of the fluid, negotiable, and unpredictable nature of relationships that unravel over the course of research (Brooks, Riele, & Maguire, 2015), examining the connections and power dynamics between

the researcher and the researched (Adu-Ampong & Adams, 2020; Nyasahnu, 2021), and recognising the presence of researcher bias and how this can be managed (Dery, 2020).

This is particularly relevant for research conducted within an environment that is familiar to the researcher, and for which, the researcher may be considered an 'insider.' However, multiple and contrasting identities which the researcher may have acquired overtime may ultimately influence the data collection and interpretation processes. While qualitative research often discusses the impact of researcher positionality on research access and entry, there is little accounting of the dilemma of '*researching one's own*' (Daley, 2001). This, therefore, calls for a conscious appraisal of researcher's sense of self and conscious navigation of shifting identities within the field to generate rich data (Adu-Ampong & Adams, 2020).

In view of this, I drew on my field experience in Nigeria: an economic context that still bears the fingerprints of colonialism. I reflected on my interactions with working-class and middle-class fashion designers operating within the informal and formal sectors of the industry respectively. Prior to field entry, I had considered my familiarity with the research context enough for me to be accepted as an insider. Yet, incidences upon entry into the field forced me to acknowledge my *'outsider'* identity which I had gained through international exposure in England, and how this could complicate my *'insiderness.'* Clearly, as Locke (2015) summits, the issue of positionality in research is often triggered by tensions encountered by the researcher within the research context, which cause researchers to *'rethink, re-adjust, and recalibrate their methodological tools.'* Thus, reflecting on my multiple *'identity biography'* - as a working-class child, a middle-class adult, and a middle-class researcher aiming to provide authentic truths about both classes, has the potential to richly inform positionality and data collection and analysis processes (Brooks, Riele, & Maguire, 2015) in qualitative research.

In furthering the importance of researcher positionality, I also pay attention to the socio-historic background of myself as the researcher, and the researched. Specifically, Milner (2007) argues that

researchers need to become aware of how their sense of self, sense of others, and systems shape methodologies. This has been found to be particularly significant for research contexts where researchers continuously experience participants with different cultural, and language backgrounds (Locke, 2015). Considering the highly cultural, socially stratified, and colonial-historical background of Nigeria, I found myself constantly shifting positions to adjust to the research participants I interacted with at any given time. Research contexts such as this, provide fertile ground for exploring and unraveling the ongoing negotiation of positioning in research inquiries. Specifically, the dynamics of such research contexts suggest that researchers may encounter tensions in their interactions which ultimately cause the researcher to rethink, adjust and recalibrate their methodological tools (Locke, 2015).

This sensitivity to researcher positionality thus contributes to growing concerns about the central role of the research process on the research outcome (Bell & Sengupta, 2022). Specifically, qualitative research methodologies need to begin to acknowledge the empowering role of research which can be attained through a consideration of researcher relations with the researched. This requires a rethink of global north-centric methodologies which limit the agency of the knowledge producers and create space for pluralism that captures the exploratory, reflective nature of qualitative research (Bell & Sengupta, 2022).

Reflections on research positionality also contributes to a rethink of how ethical issues can be negotiated in practice. (Brooks, Riele, & Maguire, 2015). They highlight axiological questions of value creation in the research process and ethical accountability, as opposed to the widely held view that research is value-free.

Although ethical practice has often been viewed as adherence to a 'static set of principles' (Hughes, 2005) which are accomplished through the signing of consent forms, the fluid nature of research

relationships and the politics of the research process could also unravel unexpected ethical tensions which need to be accounted for.

By paying attention to researcher positionality, this thesis also makes a contribution to the debate on social constructionism and also encourages qualitative researchers in International Business to engage in a critical reflection of their positionalities and biases, and how these could impact the achievement of credible (Adu-Ampong & Adams, 2020) and authentic (Xian, 2008) representation of the lived experiences of the researched whose voices should be visible and heard within research accounts (Westwood, 2006; Milner, 2007; Wilmot & Tietze, 2020).

8.6.6. Contribution to Contextual Debates in International Business Research

In International Business qualitative methodologies, context has been identified as an important source of contribution due to its capacity to enrich and modify theories (Hoorani, Plakoyianaaki, & Gibbert, 2023). Accordingly, context in international business is described as multi-faceted due varying national, spatial, temporal, and cultural boundaries which play crucial roles in understanding organizational behaviours, structures, results, and reactions at specific points in time (Hoorani, Plakoyianaaki, & Gibbert, 2023). As such, new research in international business is beginning to emphasize the importance of context to international business theorizing (Welch et al., 2022; Reuber & Fisher, 2022; Hoorani et el., 2023).

A key feature of methodological contributions in this study, therefore, is its reflection of contextual knowledge drawn from the formal and informal institutional contexts in Nigeria, through which epistemological questions of what it means to 'know' (Bell & Sengupta, 2022), are explored. For example, the colonial history of Nigeria is heavily discussed in Chapter 5 of this study, and insights from these as well as participants experiences, and narrations heavily inform how context shapes the sensemaking of co-opetition within entrepreneurial networks. The process nature of this research thus provides contextual richness by embedding contexts in the explanations of how entrepreneurs in

network relationships construct maintained or temporal co-opetition mindsets which inform how they act within such network interactions, as well as the outcome of their actions.

One could say that these strategies contribute to decolonizing methodologies that deconstruct the monolithic nature of Western perspectives, (Poulis, Poulis, & Plakoyiannaki, 2013), and place emphasis on the research process as essential to the outcome of research. The little attention given to context in international business research can be attributed to a general lack of awareness and/or oversight (Nguyen & Tull, 2022). Nonetheless, the crucial role and explanatory power of context in international business research cannot be overlooked and as such, methodologies which consider contextual richness such as this are needed to encourage a rethink on how context is theorized, operationalized, and conceptualized (Welch et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2022). It also increases creative freedom for researchers towards widening epistemological and ontological perspectives in international business research (Piekkari & Welch, 2012; Cunliffe, 2018; Reuben & Fischer, 2022; Nguyen & Tull, 2022).

8.7 Contribution to Policy

The implications of a social constructionist philosophy are that the more phenomena are viewed as constructed, the more opportunity there is to deconstruct and reconstruct (Elder-Vass, 2012). In relation to policy deconstruction and reconstruction therefore, the temporality of co-opetition within the formal sector could lead to underutilization of the benefits of cooperating with competitors. To avoid this pitfall and enhance a more long-term co-opetition mindset, entrepreneurial network central actors and regulatory authorities could jointly develop and implement structural conditions for co-opetitive network interactions such as introducing ad hoc incentives, creating open forums for discussions, and implementing mutual trust-building activities. This could potentially lead to long-term co-opetition within the formal entrepreneurial network since synergy eventually becomes embodied in the perceived unanimity of network actors.

Thus, the development of mutual trust is vital for the development of long-term co-opetitive relations within the formal sector. Economic incentives and advantages provided by the formal regulatory authorities would not suffice if actors were not mutually committed to the process (Kylanen & Mariani, 2012). This further highlights the role of external factors such as regulatory authorities who could intensify their engagements with both formal and informal fashion-based networks to support them with enhancing their proclivity towards synergistic actions like network co-opetition. Finally, policy makers could create access for participants within the informal sector which could result in a stronger brand image of the fashion industry within international markets. This could be achieved through introduction of policies that shorten the gaps between the formal and informal sector and promotes co-opetition between both sectors. The result of this could manifest as opportunities for resource and capacity sharing, stronger competitiveness of the overall fashion industry, reduction of barriers to entry, and creation of further employment opportunities.

8.8 Contribution to Practice

Regardless of regulatory incentives, entrepreneurs need deeper orientation to co-opetition. This is because long term co-opetition has been found to be beneficial for firms (Mariani, 2007; Kylanen & Rusko, 2011; Kylanen & Mariani, 2012; Darbi & Knott, 2022). Through an examination of co-opetition mindset construction, this thesis contributes to practical understanding of how co-opetitive actors find a common ground for achieving the mutual benefits of co-opetition (Gernsheimer et al., 2021). In other words, the extent to which competitors are inherently driven to share capacity and resources determine the kinds of mindsets which they hold.

Specifically, it has been revealed how 'too little' co-opetition resulting from temporal co-opetition mindsets may be insufficient for firms to achieve their co-opetitive objectives due to sharing limited volumes of resources and capabilities (Dahl, 2016). Here, normative primers (e.g., industry changes and customer preferences), cultural-cognitive editors (e.g., entrepreneurial independence), and regulatory triggers (e.g., economic incentives) provide the feedstock for sensemaking processes. In

constructing temporal co-opetition mindsets however, the issue of trust becomes pertinent as a key factor. Specifically, the inherent contradictions between cooperation and competition affects the development of trust within the formal sector, yet trust is essential for long-term co-opetition to occur.

To improve trusting relationships and encourage long-term co-opetition within the formal sector, therefore, network coordinators could apply relationship management techniques to help network members bolster trusting behavior. Network coordinators as central actors could also enhance cooperative interactions to reinforce trust and diminish vulnerabilities of actors in such relationships. Trainings and workshops could also be provided to adjust the perceptions of network members to their co-opetitive reality as this can enable them to adopt a more maintained or long-term co-opetition mindset.

Within the informal sector, it is also revealed how 'too much' co-opetition could result in conflict, an imbalance of power, opportunistic actions, and result in reduced competitive benefits within the informal sector (Tidstrom, 2014). To mitigate these risks, network coordinators could capitalize on their sense-giving role and guide sensemaking of network co-opetition by deliberately presenting cooperative and competitive interactions in favorable ways, for instance, emphasizing benefits which actors could derive from cooperating and competing simultaneously. This way, actors could become more conscious of their co-opetitive reality which could accelerate the construction of positive co-opetition mindsets.

Further practical implications of this study highlight the importance of entrepreneur coping with uncertainty. Entrepreneurs need to continuously update their future visions of co-opetition as a new normal. Additionally, the mindsets constructed by entrepreneurs can also shape the expectations of others which in turn, influences how they perceive co-opetition and engage in it. These further stresses the significance of sensemaking whereby an actor attempts to influence the sense making and meaning construction of others towards a preferred understanding of any organizational reality (Gioia &

Chittipeddi, 1991). Combinedly, the intertwined processes of sensemaking and sense giving reveals how reality is socially constructed (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014) which is another key area for entrepreneurs to explore. For instance, through joint interactions with regulatory agencies to share their perceptions and views of future co-opetitive relations.

8.9 Limitations and Future Studies

The result of this study contributes to defining the complex process of co-opetition sensemaking within entrepreneurial networks in Nigeria's fashion industry. None the less, there are still areas needing further research. First, this study is designed as case-specific by focusing on a single industry context. While findings have transferrable potentials, there is a need for future studies to explore entrepreneurial co-opetition sensemaking in diverse industries and empirical contexts. This is particularly important, considering research findings that co-opetition factors are industry and context-specific (Klimas, Czakon, & Frederich, 2022). In line with this, future studies could also provide cross country comparisons (Mollering, 2006) since comparative studies could provide richer insights on how institutions shape economic relationships like co-opetition.

Second, data in this study selected only participants within the formal and informal sectors who cooperated with competitors within these networks. In other words, there is no analysis of entrepreneurs within networks who did not engage in co-opetitive interactions, or who dropped out of such collaborative relations. This provides an avenue for future research to explore how and why entrepreneurs may change their co-opetition mindsets. Additionally, the perceptions drawn from participants only relate to a specific period. Given that sensemaking is an ongoing iterative process (Weick, 1995), the perceptions of co-opetitive actors may change as they interact overtime (Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016a). Future research could therefore adopt a longitudinal approach to generate insights on the impact of time and change on co-opetition sensemaking (Lundgren-Henrisksson & Kock, 2016a; Pattinson et al., 2018).

Third, this study recognises the benefits of network co-opetition which may be otherwise unattainable for individual entrepreneurs. Yet, co-opetition also poses potential challenges which may expose entrepreneurial networked firms to risks and additional competitive challenges. Future research could therefore examine how entrepreneurs manage the tensions arising from the conflicting logics of cooperation and competition in diverse co-opetitive relationships. This could include an exploration of the role of emotions and coping strategies unfolding overtime, and its subsequent implications on the construction of co-opetition mindsets.

Fourth, this study unearths various informal institutional influences on co-opetition sensemaking. The elements of informal institutions could further be unpacked and explored independently to gain a fine-grained understanding of how they shape sensemaking processes. For example, institutional trust is identified as a normative institutional influence which is a key feature of co-opetition (Lascauc, 2020). In expanding this, future research could examine various dimensions of trusts and trusting behaviours of co-opetitors.

Finally, the findings of this case study could also be strengthened through application of a range of methodological approaches. For instance, the abductive process used in this study could be complemented with other mixed methodologies, grounded by critical realist approaches. While the use of multi data collection methods (interviews, documentation, observations) combinedly provide rich insights to the social construction of co-opetition, potential advancement of this case study could deploy discursive analysis to capture the interpretive nature of co-opetition, for instance, how it is discursively constructed and shaped through daily social interactions on an individual and network level.

8.10 Concluding Remarks

This thesis contributes to the literature on co-opetition sensemaking by showing how institutions shape sensemaking processes of co-opetition. Specifically, actors make sense of co-opetition by accessing broader societal institutional frames when meso-level (firm-level) frames are not plausible. The

consequences of divergent frames may include varied perceptions of the regulatory, normative, and cultural-cognitive institutional environment from which plausibility and legitimacy are derived. The role of institutions and the broader institutional environment in sensemaking processes have been neglected in co-opetition research and as such, the contextualized sensemaking framework provides deeper theoretical understanding of the multi-level and dynamic nature of co-opetition. In addition, this thesis contributes to the empirical literature on sensemaking in networks (Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016b) by addressing the interplay of co-opetition drivers, processes, and outcomes. This thesis also highlights the complex nature of co-opetition network relationships due to the simultaneity of cooperation and competition, and resultant sensemaking and sense- giving of these interactions.

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10. Appendices

10.1 Participant Information Sheet

Principal Researcher: Caroline Nanain Kom

Director of Studies: Dr Diana Sharpe

Supervisor: Dr Martin Owens

<u>RESEARCH TOPIC:</u>

Making Sense of Co-Opetition in a Post-Colonial Entrepreneurial Landscape: Nigeria's Fashion Industry.

Dear Participant,

I am a PhD student at Sheffield Hallam University. I would like to invite you to take part in a study about entrepreneurial network relationships in the fashion industry. This study forms part of my doctoral programme which is concerned with the theory and practice of how fashion firms engage in-co-opetitive network relationships in Nigeria. This information sheet provides some detail about what my study is about, what your contribution might be and what I intend to do with the findings:

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to contribute to my PhD thesis about entrepreneurial network relationships in the fashion industry. This study is designed to explore and explain institutional factors which promote or constrain the sensemaking of entrepreneurial network co-opetitive relationships.

My Motivations

My passion for the Nigerian fashion industry springs from my experiences as a fashion and design student in Nigeria several years ago. During this time, I witnessed the vibrant growth of the fashion industry which is fast becoming a driving force for the commercialization of Nigerian culture and creativity globally. At a time where the *"Buy Nigerian- Wear Nigerian"* initiative is being projected by the government to diversify the economy, the Nigerian fashion industry is beginning to change the perception and consumption trends of fashion and become a valuable source of economic growth. However, the industry still faces challenges. In addition, there is a lack of adequate and verifiable data on the economic potentials on the Nigerian fashion industry. Based on these findings, my research has the potential to increase government awareness and interest, increase global attention and uplift the profile, profitability, and sustainability for Nigerian fashion designers.

Who is taking part?

The views of fashion-based entrepreneurs as well as policy stakeholders within the fashion industry will be helpful to understand how entrepreneurial network relationships are developed and used in creating entrepreneurial opportunities. My aim is that this information will contribute to the development and implementation of policy and practice.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you do agree to participate you could still decline to answer questions you don't want to. You are also free to withdraw up until 2 weeks after the study without giving a reason and there will be no adverse consequences if

you do so. Any concerns and/or complaint about any aspect of the way you have been dealt with during this study will be addressed.

What would I have to do?

You are invited to take part in an interview. The interview would last up to one hour and involve questions and conversation about the Nigerian fashion industry, your challenges as a fashion firm and your participation in entrepreneurial network relationships. You don't need to prepare anything in advance although thinking broadly about your experiences and examples of collaborations with other fashion firms would be helpful. The interview would be conducted in a location and time of your choice. Ideally this would be in a place where you are comfortable and can speak freely. The interview would be audio taped and transcribed word for word. It would then be pseudonymised, that is, some details would be changed to protect your identity. The recording and the original transcript would not be made public. The pseudonymised transcript would become part of my project data set, which, would eventually be made available on an open access research repository at the end of my research.

Confidentiality

All information collected during the research will be treated as confidential and any identifying aspects, such as names, locations, and any other identifying markers, will be pseudonymised to ensure confidentiality. This means any identifying features may be changed (though not the quality and nature of what you are saying). Neither the recording nor the original transcript would ever be made public. The pseudonymised transcript would become part of a project data set, which, following the end of the project, would be made available on an open access repository (such as SHURA).

What are the possible risks of taking part?

Following ethical good practice codes, the aim is to provide a comfortable and safe environment for interviewees. There are no known risks of taking part. As a guarantee of my commitment to protect your confidentiality, all the information you give will be pseudonymised so that anyone who reads reports from this research will not know who has

contributed to it, unless you explicitly agree that your name can be mentioned in publications arising from the research. You will be sent a transcript of the interview before the analysis to allow you ensure that you have not been misrepresented. The data collected during the discussion will mainly be used, alongside a range of other sources, to develop the researcher's project as well as contributing to academic journal articles, chapters, or conference presentations. In all circumstances, any direct quotations or examples used could not be attributed to you or your firm as identifying information will be removed.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Participants may benefit in several different ways. For example, participants would be offered a chance to contribute meaningful insights and experiences to academic and management practice of fashion. You would also be offered an opportunity to reflect on your practices and make suggestions which could inform further developments in the field of entrepreneurship and overall business.

To confirm your participation, please read and sign the attached consent form and return to me via email. Once I have received it, I will contact you so we can arrange a suitable time to conduct the interview. If you require further information, kindly contact me or my supervisors using the details below.

Thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Nanain Kom (Researcher)

PhD Student,

Sheffield Hallam University.

Supervisor 1 (DOS)	Supervisor 2
Dr Diana Sharpe	Martin Owens
Senior Lecturer in International Business	Senior Lecturer
Sheffield Hallam University	Sheffield Hallam University

Participant Consent Form

Principal Researcher: Caroline Kom

Director of Studies: Dr Diana Sharpe

Supervisor: Dr Martin Owens

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research study. As the title above reflects, this study aims to understand how fashion-based organizations in Nigeria cooperate and compete simultaneously in inter-organizational relationships.

Please take a moment to read the information below and acknowledge your consent by ticking the response that apply.

	YES	NO
I have read the Information Sheet for this study and have had details of the study explained to me		
My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I may ask further questions at any point		
I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study within the time outlined in the Information Sheet, without giving a reason for my withdrawal or to decline to answer any particular questions in the study without any consequences		
I agree to provide information to the researcher under the conditions of confidentiality set out in the Information Sheet		
I wish to participate in the study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet		
I consent to the information collected for the purposes of this research study, once anonymised, to be used for any other research purposes.		

Participant's Name: ………………….…………………………………….

Participant Signature: …………………… **Date:** ……………………………………

Email Address ……………………………………………………………….

Phone No: ……………………………………………………………………….

Researcher's Name: CAROLINE Nanain KOM

Researcher's Signature: …………………… **Date:**

You can withdraw up until 2 weeks after the study without giving a reason and there will be no adverse consequences if you do so. Any concerns and/or complaint about any aspect of the way you have been dealt with during this study will be addressed.

10.3 Interview Guide: Fashion Designers

10.3 Interview Guide
Principal Researcher: Caroline Nanain Kom

Director of Studies: Dr. Diana Sharpe

Supervisor: Dr. Martin Owens

Details	Description
Name of participant	
Position of participant	
Network Association	
Tie spent in Association	
Interview Time	
Interview Date	
Location of Business	
Location of interview	
Recording Number	

Additional Information	

Interview Guide for Data Collection (Formal and Informal Network

Introduction:

Could you please tell me about your background and how you started your business?

Theme 1: Network Interaction

Could you please tell me a detailed story of how your network relationship developed?

Tel me about your role in this association

What motivated you to join this association?

How would you describe the interaction among members in your association?

Can you remember and describe some of what you feel are the most critical events in your interaction with other network members?

What do you think about collaborating with members in your association?

Do other members share your thinking, or do they think differently about collaborating in your association?

How would you describe the attitude of other members to collaboration in your network?

Have you experienced any issues in your network that you can remember?

Theme 2: Perceptions of Cooperation and Competition

What does collaboration mean to you?

Tell me the background to your association's collaboration.

How do members collaborate in your association?

What does competition mean to you?

How have you experienced competition so far in your business?

How have you experienced competition when collaborating with members in your association

What do you think other members think about competition?

How do you think other members experience competition?

Has any member taken advantage of you?

Have you taken advantage of other members?

Theme 3: Network Coordination

How has collaboration been talked about and encouraged in your association?

Do you interact differently with members in your association from members who are not part of your association?

How do members in your association interact with other designers who are not part of your association?

Does your association determine how you interact with members and non-members?

What is the scope of the collaboration in your association?

Who sets the rules and guidelines for collaboration in your network?

Have you (others) ever experienced disputes in your association?

What is normally the cause of disputes in your association?

How is dispute resolved in your association?

Are you happy with the way dispute is resolved?

What role did the law courts play in resolving these disputes?

What role did your association play in resolving these disputes?

Theme 4: Perceptions of Formal Institutions

What do you think about the government 's role in promoting small business like yourself?

Do you know of any government support (loan, grants), that is available to small businesses?

Have you been able to access any government support all through?

Does being a member of an association make it easier for you to access government support?

How effective are the law courts in Nigeria?

Does the government influence the ways in which you interact in your network? How?

Does the government provide any support for fashion designers who join associations?

Have you ever had a reason to use the law courts? Why/why not

What you think about using contracts in your business interactions?

Do you currently have any contract in place for your collaborations?

Theme 5: Perceptions of informal Institutions

What types of agreements do you normally have with memebrs in your collaborations?

Is it possible to collaborate without using contracts?

In the absence of contracts, how do you ensure you are not taken advantage of by other association members?

Are there any specific things you look out for when identifying a potential partner?

Do you think your association plays an important role in your collaborations? What roles do they play/What do you think about this?

What is your perception about family? Do you consider family important in your business?

Does your religion influence the way you collaborate in your association?

What happens to a member if they fail to meet up to the expectations of the collaboration?

What impact does this have on members, including yourself?

How does the association sanction defaulting members?

Can you recall any difficulty experienced when relating with other memebrs from a different religion or ethnic background?

Between the government and your association, which provides more business information and opportunities for you?

Theme 6: Perceptions of Present and Future of Network co-opetition

What are your expectations of collaboration as a member of an association?

How do you see future collaborations in your association?

How do you think others feel about collaboration in the future?

How do you see competition in future?

If you were given a second chance, would you continue to be a member of your association?

Is there anything you would like to change in the way collaboration is structured in your organisation?

Conclusion:

Is there anything else you would like to add?

10.4 Interview Guide: Institutional Regulators

Principal Researcher: Caroline Nanain Kom

Director of Studies: Dr Diana Sharpe

Supervisor: Dr Martin Owens

Details	Description
Name of participant	
Position of participant	
Network Association	
Tie spent in Association	
Interview Time	
Interview Date	
Location of Business	
Location of interview	
Recording Number	
Additional Information	

Interview Guide for Data Collection Institutional Regulators

Introduction:

- Could you please tell me about your background and role?

- How would you describe your role as a government/association agent?

- Why did you choose this career?

- What is your educational background?

- How does your organisation interact with fashion designers?

- Who decides this mode of interaction?

- Do you organize meetings with specific fashion designers or the association as a whole?

- What existing activities, organizations, or partners are you familiar with that work well on issues related to the fashion industry?

- What issues do you think fashion designers face at the moment?

- How does your organisation help to resolve these issues?

- Are there specific funding set aside for the fashion industry?

- How is funding distributed and prioritised?

- For you. What has been the most challenging or rewarding experience interacting with fashion designers?

- Do you have any policies, incentives, or expectations for fashion designers to be part of an association?

- How would you describe the interaction among members in the associations?

- How would you describe collaboration in the associations?

- Does your organization interact in any way with the associations?

- What does collaboration mean to you?

- What are your thoughts about collaboration in networks?

- Do other institutional organizations share your thinking, or do they think differently?

- Are your thoughts based on personal perceptions or based on any stated policies?

- How would you describe the attitude of fashion designers to collaboration?

- What does competition mean to you?

- What do you think other institutions think about competition?

- Is there anything else you would like to add?

10.5 Table 1 Samples of Data Extracts and Initial Codes

Data Extracts from Formal network	Data Extracts from Informal Network	Basic Codes
[…] Sometimes we have order we might not be able to meet up, I ask some members to help with the production of certain designs and they do the same for me too. In this business, we have people who do what I do but specialize in certain designs like embroidery or beadworks, so it's when I need their skill, I give them these jobs so that we can all meet up with the standard […] […] everybody has to move digital. All round digitals. You have to start thinking automation. It's no longer a choice, it's no longer about when you're ready. So, places like this would really open your eye to what's new in the industry. A lot of designers here are not small fries. These are bog boys in the industry. Many of us here showcase abroad. If you go abroad, nobody is doing cut and sew anymore. So, you can imagine a place like this where you meet all kinds of certified professionals in the industry. That also rubs off on you as a designer because when customers come, they know that they are meeting credible designers. And you can't get to this level all alone. That's why I keep saying to designers, make use of these fashion show. Grab the opportunity. Don't be afraid that people would steal your designs or what not. That's thinking small. we can't do everything on our own […] […] I would say, working with like minds, big brands like FD4 could give me the push that I need. I mean, we all belong to the same association but FD4 is a big name in this industry. So, when we work together, it's just to pull our individual strengths and create more market […] […] I collaborate a lot. I'm not a greedy person. I'm happy to share the revenue and resources as long as we give quality work […] […] well, people know me as FD7. I have a brand that is big and popular. So do other members. So, the more we work together, we expose our individual brands to the world. This means more people will see and hear of us. Also, it means we have more collections to showcase	[…] in my store I don't have all the machines that I need to complete some type of designs. So, what I do is, after the design stage, the cutting, and then it's time for coupling, I send my apprentice to take them to our members store who has those type of machines that I need. So, we work a lot together in this association […] […] collaborating as a network is not just to promote ourselves, but to also influence government policies and support for the fashion industry. When you go as a single person, nobody will listen to you but when we come as a force, that way we can be heard loud and clear.' […] it has never crossed my mind that my fellow network member can steal my ideas. She brought me into this business. She made me join this network, showed me the way, opened up about everything. So, someone that decided to open up like that, why would you even think such a person would steal your business ideas? Which business idea? The one that she brought me into and showed me the way? How to do packaging, how to do exhibitions […]	Knowledge sharing Interaction Knowledge and business advice Communication Personal relationships Commonality of cooperation Willingness to cooperate. Proximity Trust

which increases our brand reputation and trust that customers have for us as individual designers […]		
[…] I like to do my work myself because I don't like mistakes. I'm a creative person so I don't leave my work for others to do. Even my own tailors, I don't leave them to do my cutting or any part of my designs. My work is bespoke, so I like to stand pout. That's why I don't really see the point of collaborations all the time. It kills your creativity as a designer. And for me I like to give my customers value for what they are paying for. I don't have small customers in this business […] […] I've heard so many things about the former president. I know her very well. We contested for presidency together and she won. But after, you know, she became very autocratic. She fired (…) she was not working with anyone. She had her own personal secretary, her own this, her own xyz, and then she would choose people that she knows will be singing her praises. Those are the ones she works with; they are the ones who get information on what is happening in the industry (sighs). So, because of this autocratic attitude of hers, people don't really come to the meetings anymore. Everyone is doing their thing privately. Nobody is getting shows anymore. Anybody you see at these shows, they are Funmi's people. […] I hear the former president was using the association for her own personal things. To work into people, to work into government and all that. Once the attention is divided, then there is nothing happening in the association. Nothing is happening. Do you understand? You want to sit big and mighty as the president of the association, yet what happens to the association? No, what have we got to be proud of as the main association of fashion in Nigeria? You understand? It's not just about your personal interest. It's hard, its hard […] […] I'm committed to my work, but I'm also committed to community. But they don't appreciate you as a designer. Even if you're the type that would die there. Instead, they would only recognise the ones they see as the socialites. It's very discouraging, you know […]	[…] I remember one time; we got a deal from the local government to make some design samples of wallets. About 6,700 pieces. So, they chose me and one man like that because he too, he is good with wallet designs. And when I made the design, it was approved. When we eventually started to make the wallets, he started telling me that my design was rubbish. He said my design was not up to standard. I could see what he was trying to do. So, I got angry and left the job but when we took the matter to the association, they said I have to do it with him. […] what could I do? I had to continue but I made up my mind to never work with him again. He is very manipulative. He has a way of talking you down and elevating himself, making it look like he is also elevating you, but he is talking you down indirectly. He just uses people.	Past Experience Distrust Tensions and conflict
As a true designer, there should be signature. There should be something that runs through your work. Yes, you work with others to grow your	[…] association is good, but it's just normal to have some challenges sometimes, there is no association that does not have their own challenges. So, no matter how much we quarrel, we will settle it. But it's just that the	Social belonging Occupational egbe syndrome

work, but one has to see the difference that signifies your own work. And that's where competition comes in […] […] I remember back then; someone told me you have to be found 'eligible' to join the association. And I laughed. Eligible? What does that even mean? You that has been there for years and have nothing to show for it, what makes you more eligible than me? […]	problem there, is some members will still keep strong mind for you. They will say *ti apo ara won na so yren, nkan tan so yen apo ara won, nkan ti mo maa se wa ninu mi*[30] […] it's not really a new thing, cooperation. It is part of our bloodline. That is who we are. Among us Yorubas, that is the way we see life. Everything we do, from our home, everything is about community. So, when I even start this fashion business, I know that definitely, I have to join association because that is the only way I can succeed in this business […] […] we always believe one thing in union, that, **ka fi owó sowópò**…that is, to work together, to put our hands together. So, because we are both in association, we are working together with one understanding […] […] let me add my **2 kobo** by saying that **every collaboration is like a marriage**. You jump in with a leap of faith, not knowing if you will still be there to **celebrate your 100-year anniversary together**, **or if you will divorce after just 2 years**. Like the `Yoruba people say, a tree cannot make a forest. One hand cannot wash itself clean. If you want to grow big and expand, you need associations like this where you can collaborate with your peers in the industry […] […] Once a soldier, always a soldier. Apprentice is still the product of his boss, even though they are now his competition, and we are working together. Yoruba proverb will say **"ila oni ga ju onire"**[31] The farmer will bend it… he will have to bend it. No matter how tall the okro grows, you have to bend it down…to your own level and cut it. The okro does not have power to say I will not bend to my oga level oh […] […] coming to association, it is just like going to church or going to mosque. You know, in every gathering, you can gain one or two things.	Conflicting logics of cooperation and competition Opportunistic behaviour of members Group action Cultural and experiential homogeneity Recommendation based on network membership. Conflict resolution Trust in informal institutions Apprenticeship systems Psychological colonialism Power and control Religion (and love) Islam (Hustas) Culture Family and kinship ties Social class and power distinctions Social disparities

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[30] whatever they (the association members) decide to do does not concern me. My true intentions are hidden inside my stomach.

[31] *(Proverb) Ila oni ga ju onire – literal meaning is 'an okro tree cannot grow taller than the farmer.' Speaker provides a metaphorical agricultural imagery from farming communities which is normally used to teach a child/student/subordinate that no matter how knowledgeable or financially capable they become, they must still submit to the authority of their parents/teachers/superior.*

353

	And you can even get connection. You don't have to wait for them to force you or impose a law before you join. Naturally, you are supposed to do it willingly, without force. Even ordinary tomato sellers, they have their own association, and it is by force. So, it has to be the same for us here too. Nobody forces you to go to church or mosque, you just know that you have to go. So, it should be same for association.	
[…] these fashion shows the government is organising are really good. I mean, it's a good deal for customers because, you can't just find my collections or other association memebrs collections just anywhere. We are about the best brains you can find in this industry. Under normal circumstances, for customers to reach us, they have to book appointments, come in for consultation, pay, order, so being able to get all top designers under one umbrella, it is a luxury for customers […] […] we mostly use contracts to structure our agreements. That makes everyone involved feel safe [...]		Market information Safety Access to customers
[…] Copyright law in Nigeria…no one respects the other person. Because the law doesn't protect anyone. The value system in this industry is really bad and that's because the law doesn't protect us […] […] I don't have connection, and I am not ready to jump the roof or do any extra thing just for that. I mean, like sexually or breaking the bank. You know, like oiling somebody's hands. Just because you want these favours. But because of my religion, I can't do things like that. My religion does not permit it. and I love God […]	[…] I have tried grants, a couple of grants, and I never won it. And some of my other friends have tried it and some got it. Even, there was a time I tried to connect with…a staff from CBN promised to help me get access to loan…or would I say, **somebody who knows somebody**. Ehen, so, only for the person to turn back, a married man, and say ehn, don't worry ehn, I will help you, but you must **give something for something**. SO, all that experience didn't encourage me at all. The requirements were too much for me, so I just get funding from friends basically […]	Corruption Bureaucracy
	[…] I just rely on funding from the network. We have our own ***ajo*³²** where we save monthly so that is what sustains us […] […] there are some customers that are tough and there are some apprentices too that are tough. So, when you bring the issue to the association, they can easily help out. The council of elders will solve it for you […]	Cost sharing Knowledge sharing Trust Non-collateral finance Reputation

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³² *Informal banking system*

	[…] to be honest, all hands are not equal in this industry. Because errr, you know, those ones, those big designers, they are the ones getting favours from the government. They have the connection. They are rich. Most of them come from rich families. Maybe their family is in politics, or they school abroad, things like that. So, they easily have that authority or power to move things, to make things happen. But we on this side, we don't have that kind of benefit […] […]	
	[…] the president does not make all the rules per say. But, I mean, you have to respect the fact that he is more like our patron in the association. Even in the whole fashion business. And everybody respects him. SO, he is more like our ***oga.***[33] […] we just like those Western designs, so we try to copy them sometimes. We want to be like them […] […] some people make it hard to work with them because they take advantage of you. But we still have to work together because that is the rule of the association […] […]err, maybe some members refuse to attend the meeting. When you're a member and you're told that meeting is 10am, you supposed to be there. So, if I as chairman and everybody comes out at 10am and till 11am you're still not there, we will send the olopa[34] out to go and raid. That is the only thing we do. So, our olopa would seize their machine and that makes them very angry. But that's the normal thing for us to do. Then at the end of the day, we will find them […] […] hmmmnnn, my dear, you know how we are in this side now. Without a degree, people would not respect you. So, you know sometimes when I bid for grants and all that, they will ask, what qualifications do you hold? And it can be embarrassing. People relate with you based on what you have.	Marginalization Power imbalance Force Inferiority

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[33] *Boss*
[34] Informal law enforcement officers

10.6 Key Patterns and Codes Emerging from Data

Organizing Themes	1st Order Themes	2nd Order Themes	Basic Codes
Temporal Co-Opetition Mindset	**Shared 'immediate' Benefit.** **Shared 'long-term Benefit.** **Private 'immediate' benefit:** **Private 'long-term' benefit:**	**Positive Perceptions of Entrepreneurial network co-opetition**	Desire to join network. Interaction Knowledge and business advice Communication Personal relationships Commonality of cooperation Willingness to cooperate. Proximity Footfall generation, Opportunities for cost reduction, share capacity for retail purposes, Co-creation of customer experience in destination/co-located sites, destination marketing, joint marketing activities to promote each other, co-location, Shared staff (e.g., salesperson, models, photographers, etc)
		Negative perceptions of entrepreneurial network co-opetition	Reproduction of elite status, social exclusion, increase in social position, partner reputation, partner heterogeneity, symmetric economic, social, cultural capitals, elite lifestyle. Opportunities for cost reduction, opportunism, undesired knowledge transfer, Keeping an eye on other FD activities. goal of entrepreneurial independence, increase market power, Uncertainty of implications for entrepreneurial/brand identity. Ambiguity of combined cooperation and competition Past Experience

		Uncertain perceptions of entrepreneurial network co-opetition	Distrust Tensions and conflict
			Social belonging Occupational egbe syndrome Conflicting logics of cooperation and competition Opportunistic behaviour of members Group action Cultural and experiential homogeneity
Maintained Co-Opetition Mindset	**Industry Marginalization:** **Negative social construction of 'competition':** **Taken-for-grantedness:**	**Taken for Granted Perceptions of entrepreneurial network co-opetition**	Recommendation based on network membership. Conflict resolution Trust in informal institutions Apprenticeship systems Psychological colonialism Power and control Religion (and love) Islam (Hustas) Culture Family and kinship ties Social class and power distinctions hierarchy, inequality, yearn for social legitimacy. language barrier
Regulatory Triggers	**Institutional (economic) Incentives** **Institutional Voids** **Institutional Inequality:**	**Positive perceptions of formal institutions** **Negative perceptions of formal institutions**	Market information reduce external competition from imported fast fashion, Increase legitimacy in domestic market. Safeguard African fashion heritage. Challenge stereotypes of westernization among fashion consumers, Bureaucracy Economic advantage, lack of government interest and support, influence government policies, Corruption in government processes Educational levels,

			asymmetric access to formal institutional support schemes.
			Formal versus informal coordination mechanisms Bureaucracy Economic advantage, lack of government interest and support, influence government policies, Corruption in government processes Educational levels,
Normative Primers	**Digitization of fashion industry and global competition** **Changing customer preference** **Family/kinship** **Religion**	**Positive Perceptions of Informal Institutions**	Cost sharing Knowledge sharing Trust Non-collateral finance Reputation
Cultural-Cognitive Editors	**Knowledge exchange in social networks** **Internalized domination** **Power disparities:**	**Negative perceptions of Informal Institutions**	Colonial history loyalty, service, reciprocity sense of shared identity
		Taken-for-granted perceptions of informal institutions	Maintenance of marginalization share knowledge and information, culture of collectivism, Institutional and network trust Sense of satisfaction and personal fulfilment master-slave syndrome unquestioned regularities of shared experiences, lack of other viable options, Opportunism, asymmetric partner positions and power, fear of Ostracism