

Social Media as Digital Tool for Promoting Businesses in Underdeveloped Regions of Former Transkei Homelands Eastern Cape Province South Africa – A Survey Study

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Aim/Purpose	The study explores social media applications usage to promote businesses with emphasis on Small Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) in underdeveloped regions in today's information age era.
Background	<p>The application of ICT-driven digital platforms in Social Media in the present information economies by SMMEs, especially those operating in underdeveloped regions, opens up global markets to them without much hindrance.</p> <p>Noted in the literature, that SMMEs, especially those in developing countries are not utilizing ICTs to its full potential. And even though Internet access and ICTs devices are becoming more common in South Africa, literature of the application of Social Media to support SMMEs business activities in underdeveloped regions are limited.</p>
Methodology	Quantitative and purposive methods were used to collect data through a questionnaire.
Contribution	This research will add to the growing body of literature calling for the blending of ICT-driven digital social media platforms to promote small businesses operating in underdeveloped regions. Results from the SMMEs are presented and insights are provided for effective and efficient use of these social media platforms.
Findings	The major findings of the study are although in the area of access to ICTs and Internet connectivity, the results was encouraging as all respondents (100%) have one or more means to access ICTs and internet, but the results in terms of application of Social Media to promote their businesses to the rest of the world and consequently access global market opportunities created by ICTs is lacking.
Recommendations for Practitioners	This study confirms other research, that in order to achieve proper ICTs usage, the end-users will first have to realize what the ICTs will accomplish for them. Therefore, the study recommends that agencies tasked with helping SMMEs need to come up with educational programmes dealing with the benefits and integration of ICT-driven digital innovations and platforms for social media.

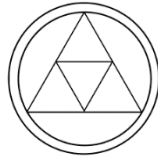
Recommendations for Researchers	There is the need to explore in-depth the factors for design, integration and success, such as cultural norms that inhibit technological integration in rural areas in developing nations.
Impact on Society	The research will assist stakeholders, policy makers and agencies tasked with assisting with the growth of SMMEs to identify the barriers likely to hinder transformation efforts and address them accordingly.
Keywords	ICTs, SMMEs, Social Media, Digital Innovation, Platforms, Underdevelopment, Survey.

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Human Elements		
<input type="checkbox"/> Personality Traits	<input type="checkbox"/> Development	<input type="checkbox"/> Mental Wellbeing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Behaviour	<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental	<input type="checkbox"/> Consciousness
<input type="checkbox"/> Cognition	<input type="checkbox"/> Social	<input type="checkbox"/> Physical Wellbeing

INTRODUCTION

The idea that SMMEs as a sector within economies contributes prominently to the economy growth of every country through jobs creation, promotion of entrepreneurship skills and innovation, generation of higher volumes of production. In export these SMMEs contribute significantly to gross domestic product and economic growth. This has given rise to the establishment of agencies by governments and non-governmental bodies across the globe to help SMMEs (Tassiopoulos, 2011; Vallabh, 2014). In fact, according to Nguyen & Waring (2013), the importance of SMMEs in every country's economy can be described to be that, "they are the building blocks towards industrialization and job creation".

In spite of the afore-mentioned contribution of SMMEs, according to Brink & Berndt (2010), more than 30% of SMMEs fail on the global stage during their first year of operation, and in South Africa as noted by Cameron & Miller (2008), SMMEs not surviving beyond the first year of operation is among the highest in the world. Thus, given the challenges facing SMMEs globally, there is a need for continual assistance to be given to SMMEs entrepreneurs not only to be innovative, efficient, adopt systems that will support them to reach their full business potential but also conduct greater research work to identify factors that could be hindering their survival as well as factors for success at the global stage.

With the dawn of the global information age era, which is driven by the application of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and its digital innovations and tools have ushered in a global wave of various forms of digital economies mechanisms, to a point where ways of doing business is changing faster than before. It is in light of the above-mentioned points that this study was carried out to determine the application of ICTs-driven Social Medias, by SMMEs entrepreneurs, supporting their businesses. This has been found to be a significant challenge facing SMMEs operating in an underdeveloped region.

Although the limitation of industrial resources and infrastructure in underdeveloped regions continues to remain a challenge, the rapid growth and infiltration of internet, ICTs and its digital devices in society, creates a digital platform for businesses in underdeveloped regions to participate in the global economy without any hindrances. ICT digital innovations and tools like Internet, Smartphone, etc., can be used to capture, store, share and exchange information across the globe through Social Media platforms like Face book, WhatsApp, and Twitter which help in overcoming the hurdles of physical barriers.

CONTEXT OF STUDY

The global economy shifts from the industrial age to the 21st century digital economies propelled by advances in ICTs has brought about a technological integration revolution in business activities, and in the management of various sectors such as education, health, agricultural, etc. playing important roles in a nation's economy. As a result, these changes continue to affect not only the manner in which individuals and business enterprises conduct business but it also keeps increasing the competitive level in the business sphere to a point where without the use or application of ICTs in any form achieving effectiveness, efficiency, higher productivity becomes a tall order.

Considering the challenges facing SMMEs globally and in particular South Africa as highlighted by Brink & Berndt (2010), and Cameron & Miller (2008), the study focused on the region of former Transkei Homelands, economically, one of the underdeveloped regions in South Africa.

South Africa a nation emerging out of the apartheid system is still battling with the dual economy (Berry & Clarke, 2002) created during the apartheid era, which brought about inequalities among the different races. The first economy which was urban areas formerly exclusive for “White-Europeans”, is developed, integrated to the global supply chain, and uses advanced technologies; while, the second economy, mostly the former Homelands reserved for blacks remain largely underdeveloped and communities in the second economy experience inequalities and limited opportunities (Ligthelm, 2006; Mbuyisa, 2017). The former Transkei Homeland region is characterized by high levels of unemployment, poverty and crime. SMMEs are therefore important to the economic development of the region because of the positive contributions it can make to job creation, poverty alleviation and growth.

As noted by Buhalis (2003), SMMEs especially those in developing countries are not utilizing ICTs in their business to its full potential. And even though Internet access and ICTs devices are becoming more common in South Africa (Goldstuck, 2012), research on the application of Social Media to support SMMEs business activities in underdeveloped regions are relatively scarce and limited.

Taking the above-mentioned into consideration, the problem for this study is formulated as assessing ICTs utilization among SMMEs by exploring the use of Social Media as ICTs-driven digital tool to promote the businesses of SMMEs operating in underdeveloped regions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Evidence from studies and researchers have established that the application of ICTs and its tools to daily business operation helps in achieving efficiency, cost-effective and expand the market reach for businesses in the information age global economies era. Bourgouin (2002) found that there is increase in the application of ICTs tools by rural tourism SMMEs operators in South Africa to enhance their daily business activities and that has brought some benefits to their businesses.

The study of Shiels et al. (2003) on selected SMMEs in Northern Ireland, established that the application of ICTs by SMMEs entrepreneurs to support their daily business operations are somewhere determined by the industry operation and the vision of the SMME. According to the works of Cecchini & Scott (2003) the use of smart cards and Internet-based of field loan officers of microfinance organizations to get the loans of SMMEs approved quickly increased the client base of these microfinance organizations significantly.

Frempong (2007) conducted a case study on 280 SMMEs in Ghana and highlighted that the application and type of ICTs by the participants are influenced by the operation of their businesses. The use of mobile phone was found to be dominant and its use enhancing business activities among East and Southern Africa SMMEs was revealed by the study of Adera et al (2014). ICTs utilization by SMMEs in Namibia by Chiware & Dick, (2008) also revealed that in Namibia the application of ICTs are not fully realized among SMMEs operators.

The problem of rural SMMEs entrepreneurs accessing bigger markets can be solved by the use of ICTs as a platform for business to consumers. For instance, the use of ICTs tools such as mobile phones according to Jensen, (2007) have enabled the Indian state of Kerala small scale fishermen at sea, to determine the availability of potential buyers, demand and agree on prices to sell which have assisted in accessing markets for their catch and also in saving them storage cost. According to Kemp, (2016), approximately one third of the world’s population is reported to be using social media. Kemp further depicts that social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter users will continue to grow, which suggest the use of these platforms by SMMEs entrepreneurs operating these businesses in underdeveloped regions to promote their businesses activities, will enable the entrepreneurs to sell their products and services to the global consumer.

In 2018, Fosu did a survey study of SMMEs entrepreneurs in Buffalo City Metropolitan, South Africa ICTs utilization by checking access, e-skills to enhance their business activities. The findings of the study indicated that although the participating SMMEs entrepreneurs had to access to modern ICT-devices but the technological skills to utilize ICT-devices to enhance their business activities was lacking among the participants. The focus of the current study is on Social Media platform usage by rural SMMEs entrepreneurs' as an opportunity to showcase their businesses to the global market.

This study set out to determine whether SMMEs owners operating their businesses in underdeveloped regions are taking advantage of and applying commonly and easily accessible Social Media platforms like WhatsApp, Face book, and Twitter to support and promote their businesses to the rest of the world in order to harness the opportunities ICTs presents, in the information age global economies arena.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES & HYPOTHESIS

Objectives

The main objective of this study is to assess ICTs utilization as among SMMEs entrepreneurs operating their businesses in underdeveloped regions. In studying everyday use or application of ICTs, Okon (2015), and Maepa (2000), have asserted that it is critical for one to understand the information needs of the population or the communities been studied because of the fact that once a person identified his or her information needs, then the person is also in a better position to determine where (the source) as well as means or media to use to seek that particular information, which may have impact on the type and usage of certain ICTs. Therefore, in order to achieve the primary objective, the study sought to:

1. Specify the *business information needs* of the selected SMMEs entrepreneurs,
2. Specify *sources* of obtaining business information,
3. Specify the *type of ICTs they have access* to in supporting their business activities,
4. How they use the ICTs digital devices they own to support their business activities daily,
5. Specify access to Internet and its connectivity in the area where they operate their businesses, and
6. Determine ICTs application (in terms of commonly known Social Media) in support of respondents' businesses.

Hypothesis

Considering the above, the study makes the following hypothesis: While Social Media digital platforms open up the global market for SMMEs,

...application of common social media digital platforms to access the global markets is lacking among SMMEs entrepreneurs in underdeveloped regions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The quantitative method and the purposive approach were used to survey forty-three (43) SMMEs entrepreneurs operating clothing, furniture, builders, small scale manufacturer (like toilet rolls, bread, etc), panel beaters, and groceries within the former Transkei Homelands. Butterworth, Idutywa, Mthatha, Komga and Tsomo were the towns surveyed.



Figure 1: Topographic picture of one of the study areas depicting how it is underdeveloped.

According to Welman & Kruger (2001), Polkinghorne (2005) and Bless et al., (2007) the use of purposive approach makes the researcher to consider and approach participants who may be seen as a key source of obtaining quality data out of the entire population with a survey questionnaire (closed and open-ended questions).

Bless et al., (2007) further explained the benefit of using a questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions to be that it can be analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The approach of selecting participants was that the researchers first visited the selected towns, identified the SMMEs entrepreneurs who were willing to take part in the study and then arranged a suitable time to meet them individually to administer and assist them to answer the questionnaire.

Using these approaches gave respondents the opportunity to explain questions that seemed difficult, directly to the researcher. This approach helped to overcome misunderstanding and misinterpretation of words or questions on the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze closed-ended questions and common theme analysis was used for open-ended questions.

To achieve the set objectives of the study, the following questions were used on the questionnaire:

1. What is the demographic information of participants?
2. What type of information do you need as an entrepreneur for your business?
3. Where do you normally seek the indicated information needs from?
4. Indicate the type of ICT-devices you have/own

5. What is your means of accessing internet?
6. How is internet connectivity in the area where your business is located?
7. From list of Social Media platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter) provided, which ones do you have accounts on for your business?
8. How often do you post messages, pictures and videos about your business on your business Social Media platforms?

ANALYSIS OF DATA & DISCUSSION

The need for opportunities and especially business information by SMMEs entrepreneurs will continue to increase digital innovation advances in the information age global economies arena. These entrepreneurs (1) will need real time information on available global opportunities, (2) make daily business decisions on cost-effective, and efficient ways to optimize returns, and (3) know how to reach and attract potential customers in global markets places.

Globally, ICTs and its devices have been seen as an efficient tool to facilitate knowledge sharing, information exchange and the fastest way to reach the rest of the world. Hence, the application of ICTs to facilitate daily business operations is vital to the survival of businesses in the information age global economies era.

The findings of the current study are presented in the following tables below, according to common themes in line with the previously elaborated objectives:

Demographic background of respondents

Researchers like Venkatesh et al., 2003; Musa et al., 2005, and many others have revealed that variables such as age and gender are factors to be considered in technology adoption and use. The age and gender of respondents were explored and presented in table 1 demographic background.

Table 1. Demographic background (N=43).

Age	Frequency	Percentage
20 – 29	8	18.60
30 – 39	10	23.26
40 – 49	17	39.53
50 and above	8	18.60
Gender of respondents		
Male	28	65.12
Female	15	34.88
Township		
Butterworth	10	23.26
Idutywa	9	20.93
Mthatha	11	25.58
Komga	3	6.98
Tsomo	10	23.26

Table 1 gives the percentages of the age grouping. The high percentage of respondents were the group 40 – 49 (39.53%) followed by 30 – 39 (23.26%). The culture norm of most households having males as the head and breadwinners in these regions could probably be linked to the results in Table 1 showing more males (65.12 %) than females (18.60%). According to the cultural practices of the selected regions, males are regarded as stronger, wiser spices and consequently are expected to provide for their families as well as run the family business.

Business information needs and sources of obtaining the information by respondents

As pointed out by Heeks (1999), that the assessment of application of ICTs by SMMEs operators needs to capture the information needs and sources of obtaining such information within that sphere. Table 2 reveals the SMMEs entrepreneurs' information needs and corresponding sources. These were explored in the open-ended questions component of the questionnaire and the results are presented in common themes with frequencies and percentages below:

Table 2. Business information needs and sources (N=43).

Common theme	Frequency	Percentage
Business information needs		
Business registration and management	16	37.21
Financial assistance	23	53.49
Seeking advice	43	100
Looking for contracts	10	23.26
Marketing	35	81.40
Raw material supply	28	65.12
Tax	40	93.02
Sources of obtaining information needs		
Follow business owners	42	97.67
Search it from internet	2	4.65
From business advisers	4	9.30

The findings are in line with the assertion from Duncombe (2004), which highlights that most non-exporting SMMEs information needs reflects a struggling to survive. Comparing these findings with the findings of the studies of Zhao (1990) and Kinnell et al. (1994) on assessing information needs by Chinese SMMEs, their results highlighted among others commercial information on foreign markets, patents, product specifications, etc., as well.

The findings of the two authors (Zhao, 1990 and Kinnell et al., 1994) clearly indicate the eagerness and the vision of SMMEs entrepreneurs in developed countries to reach the global market. The finding about the sources of business information in Table 2 confirms the study findings of Okon (2015), which noted that people tend to seek information from their peers rather than from the experts who may have reliable information. This pattern of respondents seeking business information may affect the application of certain ICTs like web blog, internet, etc., to support their business activities.

Types of ICTs devices & support to business

Participants responded to questions on types of ICT devices they own and how they are used to support daily business activities. The results are reported in Table 3 below.

Table3. Types of ICTs respondents have and how they use them (N=43).

Type of ICT device	Frequency	Percentage	How devices are used to support daily business activities (Grouped according to common themes)
Mobile phone	43	100	1) Communicating with suppliers and customers 2) For browsing internet
Tablets	4	9.30	For storing information and browsing internet
Desktops	25	58.14	1) Issuing out receipts, invoices, quotations 2) For storing information and browsing internet 3) Use it to project the videos of the CCTV cameras
Laptops	11	25.58	For storing information and browsing internet

The results in Table 3 shows that the commonly owned ICT devices by respondents are mobile phones (100%) followed by desktops (58%), laptops (25.58%) and Tablets (9.30%), further confirming the findings of Kemp (2016), which reported that the global commonly owned ICT devices to be: laptops and desktops (56%), mobile phones (39%), Tablets (5%), other ICT devices (0.1%).

Access & ratings

The study also checked means of access and connectivity of internet in the areas of respondents. Table 4 gives the findings below.

Table 4. Means of internet access and rating of internet connectivity by respondents (N=43).

Means of internet access	Frequency	Percentage
Through only my mobile phone	38	88.37
Have internet connection and data cards for business	5	11.63
Rating of internet connectivity around business location		
Excellent	12	27.91
Good	29	67.44
Poor	2	4.65

The findings reveal that all respondents have access to internet and the connectivity within their areas is good.

Support to businesses

Researchers and most marketing professionals across the globe point to videos as advertisement tool with best return on investment (Bowman, 2017; Gerber et al., 2014). SMMEs entrepreneurs operating their businesses in rural and underdeveloped regions can create pages for their businesses on various Social Media platforms and make videos, take pictures about their businesses using their mobile phones and post the videos, pictures across the various business Social Media pages with less cost, as ways of advertising their services and products.

This way of ICTs application to support their businesses can open the global market for them without much hindrance. Considering the above-mentioned cost saving way of SMMEs entrepreneurs, especially those whose businesses are based in rural and underdeveloped regions can apply ICTs and its digital devices to access the global market places without much hindrances.

The researchers assessed whether respondents have business pages on commonly known Social Media platforms (WhatsApp, Face book and Twitter). Table 5 reveals the findings below:

Table 5. ICTs application in terms of Social Media to support respondents' businesses (N=43).

Business Social Media accounts	Yes (%)	No (%)
Face book	9.30	90.70
WhatsApp	6.98	93.02
Twitter	4.65	95.35
All of the above	11.63	88.37

The results reveal high percentages of not having business page accounts (Face book 90.70%, WhatsApp 93.02%, Twitter 95.35% and 88.37% of all of the mentioned Social Media). The utilization of such platforms can open up the global market places for them, yet they do not capitalize on the digital innovation platform opportunities.

Posting of messages, pictures, videos on the business social media page accounts (N=43)

The frequency of posting messages, pictures and videos about their businesses on the various social media business account pages for their businesses, research question 9 was explored (closed question on the questionnaire) and the findings are presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Posting messages, pictures and videos.

Frequency	Yes (%)	No (%)
Once	8.70	91.30
Once in months	5.45	94.55
Daily	6.12	93.88

The findings from Table 6 reveal low percentages of posting of messages, pictures and videos by respondents on the various pages to market their businesses. The findings from Tables 5 and 6 highlights what Buhalis (2003) noted, and that SMMEs especially those in developing countries are not utilizing ICTs in their business to its full potential.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The study set out to investigate the application of ICTs in terms of commonly known Social Media platforms among SMMEs entrepreneurs in an underdeveloped region in the information age global economies era using selected townships in the former Transkei as a survey. The major findings of the study are:

1. In the area of access to ICTs and internet connectivity the results were encouraging as all respondents (100%) do have one or more means to ICTs and internet.
2. The results from Table 5 indicate only 9.30% of respondents do have Face book accounts for their business, WhatsApp (6.98%), Twitter (4.65%), All of the above (11.63%).
3. But looking at the high percentages of participants not having business page accounts on the commonly known Social Media platforms, highlights the findings of Buhalis (2003), that SMMEs especially those in underdeveloped regions are not utilizing ICTs to fully support their businesses.
4. Although majority of respondents do have means of access to these commonly known Social Medias and internet, clearly one is not far from the truth to conclude that the respondents are not applying and taking advantage of the necessary ICTs social media platforms available to them. Hence, the position of the study cannot be rejected.

Hargittai & DiMaggio (2001) have highlighted that for effective ICTs usage to be achieved by users, the user will first have to realize the need and the benefit to be derived from the usage. Therefore, the study recommends that agencies tasked with helping SMMEs need to run educational programmes targeting SMMEs entrepreneurs, in the selected regions. These educational programmes should address the need for integration and the benefits of ICTs to businesses in the global digital economies revolution in order to achieve the growth of SMMEs in rural areas to overcome access to global market challenges that SMMEs in underdeveloped regions face. In the context of this study, checking of e-skills of the SMMEs entrepreneurs to operate ICTs programs on their ICTs device is an area to explore further.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings are mainly descriptive of the situation regarding the ICTs-driven digital innovations and application among the selected SMMEs entrepreneurs in the former Transkei Homelands region, and generalization can only be reached for the study if appropriate inferential statistical tests are conducted.

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