



**THE ROLE OF DIGITAL MARKETING IN THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE
FORMAL RETAIL SECTOR IN FLAGSTAFF**

By

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DECLARATION

I, Zizipho Noqazo, declare that this dissertation is my own work, except as indicated in the references and acknowledgements. It is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management Sciences in Public Relations Management at the Durban University of Technology (DUT), Durban. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination purposes at DUT or any other University. Furthermore, I authorise that this dissertation be made available for photocopying, inter-library loan and made available to interested students and organisations.

Signed

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Date

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DEDICATION

This Dissertation is dedicated to God almighty; truly with God all things are possible. I also dedicate my work to my family; my beloved grandparents Phaphama Patrick Noqazo, Nozolile Patience Noqazo, and Nomvuyo Medrina Soqashe. My parents Zandile Noqazo and Mveliso Gqada. Lastly, to my dear son Yasandisa Lulo Noqazo

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

ABSTRACT

Marketing is a fundamental part of any retail business as it is the means of promoting products and services to the target market (Grönholm 2012). Digital marketing has transformed retailers' marketing strategies significantly. Online marketing channels are undeniably one of the most advanced digital technologies to be used in marketing, which makes it essential for retailers to incorporate these strategies into their businesses. The internet and its rapid technological developments have provided retailers with numerous tools for online marketing, such as email marketing, social media, pay-per-click, search engine optimisation, pop-ups and so forth. While many rural South African businesses are starting to adopt these marketing tools in their businesses, the role of digital marketing in the sustainability of the formal retail sector in the rural areas of South Africa (SA) has not been explored fully.

The aim of this study was to explore the role of digital marketing in sustaining retail businesses in Flagstaff, while the primary objective of the research is to identify and describe the role of digital marketing in retail businesses in rural areas. According to Bala and Verma (2018), digital marketing is the greatest platform to transform a product into a brand and has the potential to increase sales tremendously, provided that businesses have knowledge and understanding of how to apply it properly. The study adopted a mixed research method in order to achieve the set objectives. This study followed the probability sampling method in recruiting participants. Random sampling was the probability sampling method employed to generate the sample for this study. Retailers operating in Flagstaff and members of the public (customers) were the two populations targeted for this research. The study used a structured self-administered questionnaire consisting of 20 items to collect quantitative data from retailers. Focus group discussions were also conducted with members of the public to gather qualitative data. The researcher adopted the census method, whereby all 52 stores in Flagstaff took part in the study. The sample for the focus group interviews comprised of thirty (30) participants that were allocated into six groups of 5 participants in each group. The study used version 27.0 of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyse quantitative data, and thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data.

According to the study's findings, retailers utilise a variety of digital marketing methods, including social media marketing, email marketing, and mobile marketing, to exchange information, contact with customers, send them sales pitches and other marketing materials, and interact with them online. Retailers claimed that digital marketing had introduced novel ways to conduct online business, such as online shopping. However, this activity is connected to a number of difficulties in rural areas, which has prevented many retailers from offering it as a substitute for traditional shopping. As a result, there is little use of online shopping in Flagstaff retail businesses. Consumer feedback indicates that retailers' use of SMS communication, Facebook, and emails to convey information about sales pitches and promotions has inspired and encouraged customers to make purchases from particular retailers. However, participants have stressed that they prefer hearing from retailers through traditional channels since they are simpler to access because they have trouble getting information on digital platforms.

The study recommends that rural retailers should integrate digital marketing into their marketing activities, which will increase awareness of the brand; reach a wider audience; aid in keeping up with trends and staying ahead of the competition; and maintain their presence on social media platforms. The study suggests that further research be conducted on the impact of specific online marketing tools in order to allow retailers to focus on online channels that align with their brand to generate profitable results for the business.

Key Terms:

Digital marketing; retailers; sustainability; internet; online media; social media; consumers, Flagstaff; South Africa.

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CHAPTER 1: ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the background to the study, the context of the study, the problem statement, research aim and objectives of the study, rationale for the study, scope of the study, delimitations and limitations, research methodology, and the latter part of this chapter covers the structure and flow of this study.

1.2 Background to the study

A number of businesses have benefited from opportunities attributed to digital marketing, some retailers operating in rural areas are unable to use digital marketing tools due to the lack of infrastructure, lack of expertise, lack of digital marketing knowledge and inadequate computer knowledge (Leeflang *et al.* (2014). The challenges attributed to the lack of the usage of digital marketing tools to sustain the retailing sector are more evident amongst rural areas, such as Flagstaff in Eastern Cape (Sinha and Sheth 2018).

Sustainability is a major concern amongst several retail outlets in rural communities as they often lack capital, marketing strategies and entrepreneurial skills. Kang and Park (2018) claim that a few years ago, methods of traditional media were considered as important modes of communication in marketing and advertising of businesses and building long-lasting brands, but in recent years digital media has grown significantly and is now an important part in marketing and advertising. The world is in the digital age and the need for change is inevitable, retail businesses need to adjust and adapt to these changes to stay relevant and relatable. The necessity for the use of digital marketing by businesses is supported by the above statements.

1.3 Context of the study

Digital marketing involves the application of digital technologies carried out on the internet for the purpose of marketing products and services to target customers. These

digital technologies are inclusive of online channels, such as social media networks, email, LinkedIn, YouTube, Blogs and Pinterest (Juska 2021). These digital marketing tools are often used to advertise with the intent of increasing profitability while retaining customers (Ryan 2014). This is done through the development of planned approaches to improve the knowledge of customers (their needs and interests), then deliver integrated communication and online services that match their individual needs (Thomas and Housden 2017).

Since the beginning of time, businesses have been trying to influence their prospective customers through a variety of tools. In modern times, the most prominent amongst these tools is digital marketing channels (Ryan 2014). With the emergence of new technologies such as digital networking and social media, there has been a major change in the business environment. Long gone are the days when businesses used time-consuming and expensive advertising methods. Digital marketing is now the new way of communicating online with the public. It is important for business owners to be able to use these online marketing tools for the growth and sustainability of their businesses. However, research suggests that rural communities are yet to maximally benefit from digital marketing (Lakshmi 2023: 170).

Due to changing market conditions and other resource constraints, many rural retailers find it difficult to remain in business (Cromartie 2017). Over the past 50 years, there have been substantial changes in the demographic, economic, and social landscape of rural regions, which has made it more difficult to launch and maintain businesses there (Deller, Kures, and Conroy 2019). For a very long time, the purpose of marketing in the retail industry has been crucial. A study by Wilson and Makau (2018: 64), reveal that before the evolution of the internet, rural retail businesses employed traditional marketing strategies such as broadcast and print media for the promotion of their product and services. Jacob, Saravanan, Vishwajit, Prabha, and Mathipurani (2019: 6) claim that rural retailers employ verbal advertising to persuade rural consumers to purchase a recently introduced product. In this modern era, the so-called traditional marketing is slowly being replaced digital marketing, hence the need for rural retailers to integrate online marketing strategies.

In recent years, digital marketing has advanced proficiently. This innovative form of advertising is essential to growing a business. Looking at the marketing stage when traditional advertising was initially used. Initially, door-to-door sales and the provision of necessary services were the

primary means of product distribution and word-of-mouth marketing. Traditional types of marketing, such as print ads, TV commercials, billboards, and direct mail, have been utilised for decades to connect and engage with consumers. But the proliferation of digital devices like computers, tablets, and smartphones, as well as the internet, has completely changed the way organisations communicate with their customers (Shahid 2023: 15). The marketing landscape has changed due to digital technologies, which has convinced businesses to reevaluate their strategies. Due to the ease with which they may develop and create solutions that are more intelligent and effective, many businesses are still moving from traditional to digital platforms (Simplilearn 2020).

Thus, this research will explore the use of digital marketing with regards to the sustainability of the retail sector within the rural setting of Flagstaff.

1.4 Statement of the problem

A major challenge amongst retailers in South Africa is “sustainability”. Sustainability is a major concern amongst several retail businesses as they often lack capital, marketing strategies and entrepreneurial skills (Umadia Sr and Kasztelnik 2020: 22). Many of these businesses struggle within the first few months while others fold up at a later stage. Digital marketing has however been used in several businesses to sustain and develop retail businesses (Lekhanya 2015). Digital marketing tools such as Emails, social media and Blogs have played a significant role in the sustainability and growth of retail businesses. While a number of businesses have benefited from opportunities attributed to digital marketing, some others are unable to due to the lack of infrastructure, lack of expertise, lack of digital marketing knowledge and being computer illiterate (Bollweg *et al.* 2020); (Kamutuezu, Winschiers-Theophilus and Peters 2021b: 45). Guzana and Msosa (2022: 5) state that customer orientation and value proposition, digital consumer behavior, digital green marketing, competitive advantage, supply chain, and capacity have been demonstrated to be the six limitations to digital marketing and sustainability. Other developing African countries also face challenges on how to handle digital marketing within the retail sector. According to Hasanat, Hoqueeb, Hassanc and Hamide (2020: 2675) in Malaysia it is frequently observed that retailers have not developed social media applications to assist customers in the digital marketing process because they have not properly

implemented interaction and communication paradigms. Customers have been unable to learn about the Malaysian retail business in this way, which has hindered the industry's expansion. In addition, there are difficulties such as low digital marketing budgets, no conversions from paid website optimisation, fierce competition, and rare social media posting. Digital marketing is still in the early stages in developing countries such as South Africa, especially in the Eastern Cape region. Among other disadvantages of digital marketing already mentioned are the frequent changes in online advertising and the need for skilled and creative employees when creating online content (Guzana and Msosa (2022)).

These challenges, attributed to the lack of the usage of digital marketing tools to sustain retail outlets, are more evident amongst rural areas such as Flagstaff in the Eastern Cape Province. The lack of knowledge and understanding of digital marketing by the retail sector in rural areas hinders the growth and sustainability of retail businesses (Kamutuezu, Winschiers-Theophilus and Peters 2021a). Umamageswari and Krishnaveni (2020: 357) indicate that numerous retailers have been developing innovative methods to advertise their products online. Thus, it illustrates how digital marketing is replacing traditional marketing. The problem in particular is that some retail operators in rural areas have inadequate knowledge of effective marketing strategies on how to successfully sustain retail businesses in these rural communities. Rural retailers such as Flagstaff face a challenge of sustaining their businesses, this is attributed to the low uptake of digital marketing in a rural setting.

1.5 Research aim and objectives.

The aim of this study is to explore the role of digital marketing in sustaining retail businesses in Flagstaff.

The study's objectives are:

- To identify and describe the role of digital marketing in retail businesses in rural areas;
- To examine the level of understanding and use of digital marketing by retail businesses and customers in the rural areas of Flagstaff;
- To determine the extent to which retail businesses in rural areas benefit from digital marketing in sustaining their businesses; and

- To assess the public's perceptions on the impact of the use of digital marketing in retail stores.

1.6 Hypothesis

The following hypothesis which served as the study's guideline will be investigated and analysed. The hypothesis was developed based on the objectives.

H: There is a low adoption of digital marketing by retail businesses and customers in rural areas of Flagstaff.

1.7 Research questions

- What is the role of digital marketing in rural retail business?
- To what extent is digital marketing being used by retail businesses in the rural areas of Flagstaff?
- How can retail businesses in rural areas benefit from digital marketing in sustaining their businesses?
- What are the perceptions of members of the public regarding the impact of digital marketing as used in retail stores?

1.8 Rationale of the study

Philip and Williams (2019) posit that the world is in the digital age and businesses need to find new and innovative ways to market themselves and be competitive. Having observed how businesses use digital marketing to promote themselves and maintain relationships with their customers, it is important that retail businesses familiarise themselves and adapt to these new changes. Olazo (2022) asserts that adopting digital practices requires new and fast tools for the use of marketing, but some businesses (SMEs) experience financial challenges and are therefore unable to adopt these practices. It is evident that retail businesses are struggling in that aspect, which has become a challenge in sustaining their businesses. Helm, Kim and Van Riper (2020: 27) indicate that the retail sector plays an important role in the market and in the lives of consumers. The role of retail businesses is to provide goods and services to customers and provide a remarkable customer experience in order to encourage customers to keep coming back. Therefore, there is a need for the use of digital marketing tools to sustain rural retail businesses for them to remain competitive and

provide for the needs of their consumers (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick 2019a: 14). The undertaken study was an effort to explore the role of digital marketing in sustaining the retail sector in Flagstaff. The study is predicted to increase the understanding of the use of digital marketing in retail to sustain rural retail businesses.

There are enormous benefits to the utilisation of digital marketing through marketing efforts/activities in retailing to both the retail marketers and the consumers (Kingsnorth 2022: 290). There are great opportunities in the retail sector in Flagstaff which need to be fully taken advantage of. Retailers must take advantage of the business opportunities presented by digital marketing in order to remain sustainable. The inspiration for this study was therefore founded upon the need to understand the role of digital marketing in sustaining the rural retail sector in Flagstaff.

1.9 Scope of the study

The scope of this study is restricted to retailers operating in rural Flagstaff, Eastern Cape, and how they engage in digital marketing activities. Additionally, the scope extends itself to consumers regarding their perceptions of the role and benefits of digital marketing channels in retail businesses.

1.10 Delimitations

This study is limited to the formal retail sector of the rural Flagstaff community in the Eastern Cape. Retail business operators or individuals in managerial positions and members of the public are targeted take part in this study.

1.11 Research methodology

This study followed a mixed method approach. Quantitative data was obtained from the retail stores using questionnaires and qualitative data was obtained from the general customers using focus group discussions. The study had two populations, one group was made up of retail store operators or store management teams in Flagstaff and the other population group was made up of the members of the public (customers). The researcher adopted the census method whereby all the stores in Flagstaff took part in the study. Fifty-two (52) questionnaires were distributed amongst store

managers or assistant managers and employees of different stores.

This study followed a non-probability sampling method in recruiting participants from the customers in Flagstaff. Focus group discussions were conducted with 30 customers as they were intercepted at shopping centres around Flagstaff. The respondents were put into groups of five. A total of 45 questionnaires were returned from retail stores, and the answers obtained from the focus groups were usable. A pre-test was conducted amongst a selection of five (5) retail operators who were requested to complete the questionnaire. The individuals who participated in the pre-test were not included in the actual study. The researcher used the latest version (27.0) of the SPSS statistical package to analyse data from the stores and used thematic analysis to analyse data from the focus group discussions.

1.12 Outline of the dissertation chapters

The dissertation is divided into five chapters, arranged from the introductory chapter to the concluding chapter. There is a chapter that deals with the theoretical framework of the study, and another dedicated to explaining the research methodology that was followed in this study, as well as a chapter dedicated to the presentation and analysis of the results. The following is an overview of each chapter:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter includes the introduction and background to this study. The problem statement, aim and objectives, rationale of the study, scope of the study, delimitations and limitations, and a brief research design are covered in this chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical frameworks

Chapter 2 focuses on the literature review and theoretical frameworks pertaining to the role of digital marketing in the sustainability of the retail sector in a rural area. This chapter also comprises the theoretical frameworks and theories related to the use of digital marketing and its role in sustaining rural retail businesses.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter describes the type of research methodology adopted by this study. It also

provides information on the methods of data collection and the techniques used to analyse the collected data.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

This chapter presents and analyses the results of this study using various statistical methods. Discussions of the results will then follow in this chapter.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

The final chapter presents a summary of the study, makes conclusions, and gives appropriate recommendations based on the findings. Areas which need further research on the use of digital marketing in sustaining the rural retail sector are also presented.

1.13 Conclusion

This chapter covered the background to the study and research problem. The aims, objectives and rationale of this study were all presented. The structure and flow of study chapters were outlined. The next chapter will discuss the literature review and concepts that demonstrate the importance of digital marketing.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The literature review chapter discusses what digital marketing involves; presents the role of digital marketing in the sustainability of the formal retail sector in Flagstaff; and discusses the use of online channels, namely E-mails, social media, blogs, and other internet/online marketing channels in rural retail businesses. This chapter discusses in detail the role of digital in the retail industry, the benefits of digital marketing, as well as the public's perceptions on the impact of the use of digital marketing in retail stores. According to Randolph (2018) literature review is a systematic process that academics, researchers, and practitioners use to identify, assess, and produce complete and documented knowledge.

2.2 Defining Retailing

Retailing is the selling of goods and services to consumers for their personal or household consumption (Moodley 2019: 15). Retailing, according to Singh *et al.* (2018) encompasses all operations involving the sale of goods or services to ultimate customers for personal, non-business purposes. The activity of selling goods and services to last-level consumers for their use is known as retailing. Hameli (2018) also asserted that retailing is concerned with getting products into the hands of clients who are willing to pay for the pleasure of eating, wearing, or experiencing certain product items in their final state. Since retailers play a critical part in the route that items follow after they leave a manufacturer, grower, or service provider to reach the individual who consumes, retailing is all about the distribution of commodities and services (Goga, Paelo and Nyamwena 2019).

Retailing is also a vital component of a marketing plan since it facilitates the targeting process and ensures that a product reaches specific consumer segments. Ferrell, Hartline and Hochstein (2021: 54) indicated that in a marketing plan, it is critical to match the environment in which a product is purchased to the product's features and attributes, as well as its price. Customers benefit from a variety of services provided by retailers, including being positioned in convenient locations, modifying product

ranges according to shopping tasks and selling items in quantities that correspond to personal consumption levels (Grewal, Motyka and Levy 2018). Managing this process to ensure that it operates successfully involves a number of managerial issues. As a result, retailing is a seemingly basic management process that is intriguingly complex in detail (Berman, Evans and Chatterjee 2018).

Retailing encompasses the sale of both tangible and intangible goods, such as loaves of bread and pairs of shoes, as well as the sale of services (Patil 2022). According to Guan, Mantrala and Bian (2019), the retailer is one of several conceivable organisations through which goods produced by manufacturers move on their route to their customer destination, according to traditional marketing theory. As members of a distribution channel, these companies have a variety of responsibilities. Channel members, or marketing intermediates as they are sometimes referred to, perform tasks that a manufacturer lacks the means to execute, such as exhibiting a product alongside related or alternative products in a convenient area for customers to shop.

2.3 The significance of the retail sector

The main role of a retail business is to provide goods and services to customers. All businesses must therefore create a particular retail mix, one that appeals to their specific target market and must ultimately meet the financial objectives of the business. Tlapana (2017: 16) articulates that a 'retail mix' refers to all fundamentals of a retail business combined together to ensure a remarkable customer experience, encouraging them to keep coming back. These key essentials comprise of customer service, store location, product price and quality, store design and layout as well as marketing and advertising.

Kelvin (2021) states that retailers operate in a constantly changing environment, whether it be the internal operations of the business or external factors. Due to external factors such as political, social, legal, and economic changes, the retail industry is evolving continuously. Henceforth, retailers must take these changes into consideration and form solid approaches to counteract these challenges. Buthelezi (2018) agrees that the role of a retailer is very diverse, it varies between customer

service, brand promotion, marketing, and advertising, purchasing goods, packaging and shipping, corporate social responsibility, and relationship marketing.

Moodley (2019: 15) asserts that the nature and role of a retail business appears to be more complex than it actually is, but once one has figured out the main and distinctive roles, it becomes much easier to comprehend and be able to operate efficiently. These roles were formulated so as to provide better customer service, create brand awareness, and enhance the growth of the business. It corroborates the aim of this study in exploring the role of digital marketing in sustaining retail businesses. Retail is an important sector in society, for it offers the means through which the public enjoys life and living, be it clothes, food, cars, or entertainment. Moodley (2019: 16) furthermore indicates that with the retail industry being the largest contributor to the South African economy, it is also a great source of employment, and adds significance to goods and services. The retail sector is rapidly evolving in terms of quality and diversity worldwide.

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) report by Statistics (2020) South Africa reported that the significance of the retail sector in SA is indicated by the positive impact it has on the economy due to the large number of sales that retail businesses generate, and the large number of people employed within the sector. Retail businesses employ over 22% of the country's workforce and is the third largest contributor to the gross domestic product (GDP). Retail business owners are amongst the richest people in SA and retail store managers and dealers' wages are well above average. Nevertheless, Lee and Barnes (2016) maintain that retailing is a complex and challenging industry as their sustainability depends upon other sectors. Therefore, the state of the economy has a great impact on retailers and consumers, i.e., a weak economy results in a decline in sales revenue.

Kumar, Anand and Song (2017) assert that retail businesses must always adjust their strategies in order to adapt to the changes of a constantly changing environment. The rate of inflation, increases in tax, volatility in stock markets and consumer price index are all crucial factors that directly affect retail sales and the economy. Thus, retailers must keep up to date with local, national, and international socioeconomic conditions so they can remain profitable, viable and sustainable.

2.4 The South African retail sector

Terblanché (2016) established that in the past, early retailing was about selling basic, essential goods in the marketplace, which then eventually developed into small stores run by sole owners. Today's retail sector has transformed enormously since digital technology and globalisation came into being, so much so that retail business entails more than just the buying and selling of products; a lot of other factors such as marketing and advertising are involved in the operation of the business. Nowadays, supermarkets, chain stores and pop-up stores are what make up retailing. These stores are engaged in numerous channels of retailing and are regulated by global organisations (Syaglova and Salamovska 2019:215). However, informal retailing is still a significant part of the retail sector in South Africa, generally formed by street vendors and flea markets. This type of retailing requires limited skills and does not have a lot of obstructions (Terblanche 2018).

de Bruyn and Freathy (2011) reported that during the apartheid era in South Africa, the racial segregation laws separated retailers and customers of different races. As a result, there were adequate retail stores in "white" regions and not enough in "black" areas. There was a division in retail shopping; white entrepreneurs dominated the developed shopping centres while black business owners operated in undersized shops with poor structures (Masojada 2019). However, since 1994 the new government restructured the retailing infrastructure. Masuku *et al.* (2021) contended that at first large retailers were pessimistic to invest in less developed areas because of the rate of crime at that time. But eventually more retail enterprises were established in form of shopping malls and shopping centres.

Retailing in South Africa is one of the most challenging and competitive sectors, competition from both local and global brands is incredibly intense. The South African retail environment is extensively diverse and fascinating (McCallaghan and Heyns 2021). South Africa is a large, dynamic, and complex country with millions of diverse consumers all over with different needs and expectations to which retailers need to cater. The retail sector is a combination of formal and informal retail businesses, which both play an important role in the market and in the lives of consumers. Masojada (2019) stated that a retail business that operates within the official legal framework of South Africa and is registered with South African Revenue Services (SARS) and pays

required taxes on every income the business generates is classified as a formal retail business, e.g., Shoprite, Spar, Mr Price, etc. Whereas informal retail is made of small, unregistered businesses which often operate in residential areas, such as street vendors, at-home businesses popularly referred to as tuck shops or spaza shops. Also, with the development of the internet and the use of digital technologies, online retailing was established. Goga, Paelo and Nyamwena (2019) indicate that online retailing, also known as E-commerce, refers to the sale of products or services conducted over the web. The continuous rapid growth in E-commerce has changed the nature of business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) commerce as it influences availability of products, shipping methods, consumer perception and product pricing. Online shopping makes it easy and convenient for consumers to purchase products and services as it eliminates the extra time and effort needed to visit a physical store and offers shopping 24/7 (Joubert and Erdis 2019).

The South African retail industry is listed as the 20th largest retail market in the world and the largest in the sub-Saharan region (Innovate 2016: 50). South Africa's retail development is strongly influenced by what is happening globally. The South African retail sector can be influenced by current global economic conditions. Therefore, it is important for retailers to understand global economic trends and the impact they have in retail development (Terblanché 2016). Traditional rural retail development in SA corresponds closely with how the rest of Africa operates, mostly the least urbanised areas. The South African retail sector according to Mwamba and Qutieshat (2021) stands out with the most advanced formal retail sector. The country's policies are relatively stable, and its infrastructure is well-developed. Local retailers carefully concentrate on how they position their brands against certain income groups. The South African retail sector is a model of how significantly an industry can be shaped by a political and consumers' context.

Table 2. 1 How South Africa’s biggest retailers compare in terms of revenue.

Name of retailer	Ranking in Deloitte Report	Countries of Operation	FY2018 Retail Revenue (Rm)	FY2019 Retail Revenue (Rm)	FY2019 Retail Revenue Growth
Steinhoff	72	30	200 534.6	195 511.06	-0.50%
Shoprite	107	15	140 233.8	144 522.6	0.43%
Spar Group	139	10	104 214.94	110 173.75	0.66%
Pick and Pay	179	7	86 278.4	89 240.6	0.36%
Woolworths	224	14	66 752.14	66 514.82	-0.02%

Source: (Geerlings 2021)

Table 2.1 above illustrates the top five general retailers, food, and drug retailers in South Africa. The data shown on the table is a comparison of SA’s biggest retailers in revenue rankings in the Deloitte report. Based on industry reports these key players were ranked in the global top 250 retailers in the Financial Year 2019 (FY19). The report further indicates that Steinhoff International Holdings N.V. was ranked at 72 in the retail sales rank, Shoprite Holdings Ltd. at 107, The SPAR Group Limited at 139, Pick n Pay Stores Limited at 179 and Woolworths Holdings Limited at 224 (Geerlings 2021). The South African retail sector is highly competitive like other global retail environments, especially in emerging market economies.

The estimated size of South Africa’s population is approx. 60.14 million (Statistics 2021). The statistics (2021) report indicates that Gauteng, KwaZulu Natal and the Western Cape hold the highest spending power in South African retail because they have higher concentration of the population; therefore, their retail sales are greater than in other provinces. In terms of business, trade and industry, the high rollers of SA reside in Johannesburg and Cape Town, and it is estimated that 50% of the country’s retail takes place in these cities (Montandon 2015b). Retailers have been venturing into different areas of business, exploring new possibilities so as to grow, but still complement their existing products and leverage of an existing consumer base through diversification. In most cases, retailers obtain information about their customers’ financial state and shopping behaviour by means of loyalty programmes and retail data of their customer base, thereby making it easier

for them to create an ideal product for consumers around those segments (Goga, Paelo and Nyamwena 2019).

2.5 Rural retail business characteristics

Within local and competitive markets, rural retail businesses are seen as necessary institutions. According to Alford and Page (2015: 657) a company's survival increases with its size, while its growth decreases as it gets older. Rural retail businesses, according to Montandon (2015a: 127) are vulnerable to failure due to a lack of resources to support management and marketing activities. Rural firms often rely on the owner's personal expertise and talents due to restricted access to information and the size of management. The rural retail business sector, according to experts, faces particular disadvantages and problems that have a substantial impact on its existence (Phambuka-Nsimbi, Makgosa, Themba and Lyanda 2015). One of the key features of a rural retailer, according to Ahmad *et al.* (2015) is the incapacity to adapt new technologies at a suitable speed.

According to Ahmad *et al.* (2015: 561) perceived compatibility, manager/owner skills and expertise, apparent relative advantage, external change managers, and organisation features all influence technology adoption. Rural retailers, according to Sedera *et al.* (2016: 368) lack the resources needed to compete with established enterprises in the same industry. Furthermore, most rural enterprises' business investment strategies, particularly in marketing, are hampered by a lack of enough funds. Kraus *et al.* (2017) found that rural retail shop owners seek to cut marketing costs to reduce their high operating costs. Retail enterprises in rural areas, according to Blanchard (2015: 541) understand their consumers' expectations and demands better than metropolitan businesses.

As a result of the proximity of their consumers, retailers develop stronger entrepreneurial characteristics. Consequently, their enterprises can expand more easily. The failure of rural retail enterprises to connect their products and services with external demands, on the other hand, is the principal hindrance to their intended expansion.

Table 2. 2 characteristics of urban versus rural retailing environments in South Africa

Urban	Rural
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Big box retailers • Hyper centres • Organised flea markets • Convenience stores • Shopping malls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural retail taxi oriented • Town centres • Informal trade • Spaza shops • Planned shopping centres

Source: (Prinsloo 2016)

Rural retailing is distinguished from urban retailing by the information in the table above. One big box store inhabits a free-standing structure made exclusively for its own use, serving as a destination within the urban retail environment and giving a distinctive retail experience. These shops offer complementary products like those for home improvement, such as those from Builders Warehouse, Makro, CTM Tile, etc. Retail in cities also involves a single hyper store that offers groceries, hardware, appliances, apparel, furniture, and household products that typically makes up hyper centres, also known as value centres (Prinsloo 2016: 34). The remainder of the area is occupied by several smaller line shops. Hyper centres put a strong emphasis on high-quality goods at reasonable rates and are driven by convenience. Shopping malls make up a sizable portion of urban retail, and their function as a commercial setting is to offer businesses a more desirable location in terms of the area's appeal, demographic catchment, accessibility, parking options, and overall quality of the shopping environment (Essah 2018).

Town centres, planned shopping centres, rural retail taxi-oriented, informal commerce, spaza stores, and other elements make up the urban retail environment. Both urban and rural populations are catered for in town centres. Town centres are significant locations for shopping, particularly for residents in rural areas. The rural population dominates the town centre retail customer base (Prinsloo 2016: 35). Planned shopping centres, like the recently constructed Flagstaff Square, in Flagstaff, Eastern Cape are often referred to as shopping malls or plazas and include a variety of retail stores, food courts, banks, service stations, and other businesses.

According to a magazine article by Scape (2022) Flagstaff Square makes retailing simple, which increases customer pleasure. Their consumers are primarily drawn from the rural areas surrounding Flagstaff. A significant portion of rural shopping is taxi oriented. Its primary purpose is to supply a wide range of retail goods to workers, customers, and commuters who frequently use a specific taxi rank. From formal shopping malls to unofficial vendors, all of the retailers cater to commuters. Additionally, there are spaza stores, which are categorised as being in the informal trade sector. Their major purpose is to make extra money and provide rapid convenience services to the neighbourhood in less affluent townships and suburbs. In contrast to urban retailing, which is dominated by organised big box retailers, established shopping malls with multiple retail stores, and convenience stores on every corner, rural retailing is primarily composed of chains of clothing and food retail stores, restaurants, banks, and furniture shops (Das Nair and Dube 2015).

2.6 Retail sector within rural communities

Zondo (2016b) states that rural retail is a large market but very isolated. Rural retail is formed by developed and non-developed, formal, and informal markets. Digital media has reformed people's opinion, more particularly that of women and the younger generation. They generate the highest demand in retail, aspiring to high quality non-basic daily life products. Word of mouth is very important and has a lot of influence in rural areas. Retailers need to be open-minded, navigate and understand first the needs of their target market in order to effectively market themselves.

Rural retailers generally experience difficulties with the distribution of goods, language barriers, low levels of literacy and inadequate infrastructure. There are relatively low numbers of retail outlets within rural communities. All these factors contribute to the challenges and barriers to the use of digital marketing by rural businesses (Lekhanya 2016). Rural retailers have also identified problems such as high prices, high transportation costs, low profit, and low level of business education of owner-managers (although they are working hard to overcome this) also contributing to these challenges. Rural markets have loads of opportunities to offer businesses but there are still major challenges to work around. The main challenges are issues related to market research, high expenditure in market development, promotion, advertising and

marketing communication, physical distribution, channel management and small retailers lack of adequate facilities to store stock (Fernie and Sparks 2018: 302).

Hung (2016) established that the cost to provide goods and services to rural South Africa is expensive. The returns are not proportionate to what the market expects. Steps to ensure advertised products are available in the market have to be taken continuously when creating consumer awareness about goods and services. A customer's decision to purchase products is largely influenced by recommendation from other customers or retailers themselves; otherwise, many customers tend to buy whatever is available in-store (Ewerharda, Sisovskya and Johansson 2019: 8). The emphasis for the present seems to be on distribution, which is to ensure their brands are available even in informal markets.

Rural retailing businesses are physically isolated, as a result they are vulnerable to missing out on opportunities to obtain new customers, technical advancements, and industry growth. According to the research cognitive capabilities, experience, and managerial skills are key requirements for rural retail operators to succeed in their companies (Christie 2016: 54). According to Chazireni (2017: 22) retail operators/managers must seek support in skill development through formal training or collaborations in order to meet the requirements and expectations of their businesses, consumers, and the community as a whole.

The capacity of retail managers to develop effective plans for their firms is hampered by a lack of resources. According to Buthelezi (2018), in order for a retail firm to flourish in rural locations, it must execute measures to win community support and acceptance. When developing marketing and communication strategies, retailers frequently rely on an understanding of rural culture and society. In terms of long-term viability, community support and word-of-mouth in rural areas are viewed as critical factors in keeping retail enterprises afloat, and retailers must understand the dynamics and characteristics of their customers. In addition, Ailawadi and Farris (2017: 127) state that in order to ensure the long-term viability of retail enterprises, retailers must employ various digital marketing methods, have an online presence, and develop good interpersonal connections with customers.

2.7 Retail sector within Flagstaff

South African History Online (2011) documented that on the location of what is now Flagstaff, Zachariah Bowles and his business partner, Mr. Owen, opened a trade establishment in 1877. The town got the name Flagstaff from their custom of flying a white flag up every Sunday to let potential consumers know the store was closed on that day. Retailing has always been the main activity in Flagstaff and the retail sector's target market are people based in rural communities around the town. At first, Flagstaff's mail service operated out of a makeshift hut, a square structure with a thin thatched roof. Flagstaff is a rural area in the OR Tambo District Municipality in the Eastern Cape region of South Africa. It is where Ingquza Hill is seated (Property24 2021).

Property24 (2021) further state that according to the SARS-conducted Community Survey, Flagstaff has an estimated total population of 279 795 people and serves as the administrative centre for the local municipality. Flagstaff's population is remarkably high given that most of the population lives in rural areas which makes up the majority of the municipal area. 46% of Flagstaff's population comprises people of 15 year of age or younger. Despite the lack of work in the local area, 48 percent of the population is made up of people between the ages of 15 and 64, who can be deemed economically engaged. There is a large number of young people in Flagstaff which indicates that youth-specific service delivery and social upliftment should be a top priority for development.

Figure 2.1 illustration of the map of Flagstaff, Eastern Cape:



Source: Nonaneticon (2018)

Retailing forms the heart of the rural social landscape, it offers space for entertainment, commercial activities, and social interaction (Baghaee, Nosratabadi, Aram and Mosavi 2021: 3). As Flagstaff is mainly a rural area, all social and economic activities are literally tied to retailing. Flagstaff retailers' primary source of consumers are people from the surrounding rural communities. In 2021 Flagstaff embraced a new development within rural retailing, the Flagstaff Square. Flagstaff Square is designed to offer its community convenient and essential retail in a first-class setting (Property24 2021). Taking into account that Flagstaff is confronted with serious development challenges, retail is a valuable element in striving to revive the rural economic state. To date there is not much literature on businesses, growth, and sustainability in respect to the use of digital marketing tools and techniques (Dumitriu, Militaru, Deselnicu, Niculescu and Popescu 2019). One of the factors that seems to hinder growth in rural retail in areas such as Flagstaff, is the growth in population which increases informal settlements that spread into central town and back streets, occupying a great area where more retail stores can be built.

The community at large is also not well informed on the new digital technologies and how they can influence the way retailing is conducted, therefore they may pay less attention to it and rather stick to the old traditional media. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) illiteracy also comes with scepticism, as such digital innovations like online shopping are not popular within retail businesses in rural areas such as Flagstaff (Ndaba, Mwalemba and Course 2021). People living in rural areas tend to view technology as a complication rather than a solution and, according to especially the older generation, as an invention intended for the younger generations.

Schild (2014: 55) states that marketing is important in the early stages of a business because it defines the essence of marketing between the retailer and their market. Retail operators need to properly plan their marketing activities as they operate in an unstable environment. Schild (2014) maintains that retailers need to first understand the environment in which their business operates so they can execute marketing objectives effectively. Dlamini (2017: 78) posits that businesses exist in a constantly changing environment and even well-established retailers need to adapt to these changes. Literature indicates that small/ undeveloped retailers do not engage much in marketing (Nhuvira 2021). This is evident in rural Flagstaff as they hardly advertise their products, and the business' lack of marketing tools contributes to this. Many of

the retail businesses in this area have limited resources needed and also lack the necessary experience to introduce digital marketing in their business so they rather dedicate their time to common traditional marketing activities.

A major challenge among retailers in South Africa is “sustainability”. Sustainability is a major concern amongst several retail businesses as they often lack capital, marketing strategies and entrepreneurial skills (Schmidt *et al.* 2017: 23). Many of these businesses struggle within the first few months while others fold up. Digital marketing however has been used in several businesses in urban areas to sustain and develop them (Lekhanya 2015: 411). Digital marketing tools such as You Tube, Emails and Blogs have played a significant role in the sustainability and growth of retail businesses.

While a number of businesses have benefited from opportunities attributed to digital marketing, some others are unable to due to the lack of infrastructure, lack of expertise, lack of digital marketing knowledge and of being computer illiterate (Bollweg *et al.* 2020); (Kamutuezu, Winschiers-Theophilus and Peters 2021b: 45). These challenges attributed to the lack of the usage of digital marketing tools to sustain retail outlets are more evident among rural areas, such as Flagstaff. The lack of knowledge and understanding of digital marketing by the retail sector in rural areas hinders the growth and sustainability of businesses (Srivastava and Gupta 2022: 127).

2.8 Challenges within the retail sector

Fatunde (2022: 46) states that, there is no doubt that informal retailers experience more challenges and limitations in comparison with formal retailers and may not have the ability to take on these challenges by themselves. Retailers face challenges within the internal environment of the business. Zondo (2016a: 218) asserts that internally, the reasons why rural businesses are faced with many challenges is due to the lack of technical knowledge, isolation, limited networks, management skills and management behaviour. Other issues can be brought from areas of operation such as human resources, finance, marketing, production, and operations.

Challenges attributed with management skills refers to the lack of experience in the field of retail business, lack of training for managerial position, reluctance, or failure to make innovative changes, failure to manage growth, an inability to delegate authority

to employees, an inability to set objectives, negligence in performing management duties, having no optimistic attitude, etcetera (Zondo 2016a: 220). Human resource issues include the inability to attain and keep suitable employees, losing key members of staff, unethical issues, unsatisfactory productivity, labour related problems, shortage of employees and management's failure to adjust the organisational structure (Weber and Badenhorst-Weiss 2018).

Bushe (2019: 10) asserts that finances can be a major challenge for rural retail in terms of lack of consumer credit, the retailer's lack of capital, management's inability to do financial planning and a failure to implement adequate financial controls. In addition, a lack of inventory control, failure to accurately analyse information, poor credit management and challenges to obtain supplier credit are cited as reasons for financial challenges. A lot of marketing issues in retail are related to factors such as failure to identify target markets, ineffective marketing, poor market segmentation, poor marketing efforts and poor store location (Scheers 2018); (van Scheers and Makhitha 2016: 245). Where production and operations are concerned, there is a proven record of numerous issues, i.e., inadequacy in quality control systems, issues with resource suppliers, changes in product line and developing innovative products and services have been identified.

Fatoki (2018: 3) asserts that other challenges are caused by factors in the external environment, mainly the macro and market environment. With the macro environment, management does not have control over market factors and success frequently depends on their ability to instantly respond to market changes. These factors are inclusive of changes to the interest rate, inflation, and growth in economy, with technological developments, crime and global warming adding to the list of challenges. The market environment comprises of new competitors offering products at cheaper values, a decline in product/service demand, poor growth projections, major industry developments, market limitations and loss of customers (Czinkota *et al.* 2021).

2.9 Sustainability of retail sector

The issue of sustainability has grown rapidly of late, becoming a very relevant element in management for both businesses and government. It appears that sustainability in

business is linked with the triple bottom line model, this model incorporates three pillars, the social, environmental, and economic dimensions of sustainability and is designed to adapt sustainability to the business environment and how each pillar is depended on the other. However, sustainability in this study refers to the ability to build, operate, manage, and maintain rural retail businesses through social, economic, and technological developments and new innovations over time (Son and Niehm 2021). The involvement of different stakeholders in a retail business plays an important role in the administration and proliferation of retail sales. Simamane (2016: 103) argues that to be successful in sustainable retail, retailers must keep a sense of balance between demands in the market and shareholders' expectation. Retailers hold a prominent position in the market and for that reason they have come to be an essential aspect in promoting and bringing about change in the market process.

It is important for retailers to understand organisational development and sustainability, much can be learnt from successful enterprises. Mfeka (2017) states that remaining sustainable in the retail sector requires good management practices, especially regarding marketing and communication functions, the use of new age technology and consumers' perception because these factors can influence the rate of store development and shopping visits. Sustainability commands retailers to be creative and flexible when developing marketing strategies.

Digital marketing has transformed the ways in which people communicate and form decisions. The internet has penetrated the market at such a high rate, it led businesses to initiate new channels of communicating with customers. For instance, social media channels such as, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are now part of daily communication. Literature indicates that globally, in 500 companies, 87% have organisational Twitter accounts and 77% have business pages on Facebook. This is why it is wise for businesses to adopt social media in the integrated marketing and communication strategies to manage the public relations of the company (Kang and Park 2018: 1).

The internet is a driving force of the rising gap between markets and businesses and also a major challenge for marketing. Digital marketing has become a vital and necessary tool to deal with the challenges that exist in the marketing field. At the same time, since the beginning of the 21st century, sustainability is becoming a real

challenge for businesses, retailers in particular (Diez-Martin, Blanco-Gonzalez and Prado-Roman 2019: 9).

Ahmed *et al.* (2019: 2) argue that years ago, traditional media was a significant way of communication but in the past couple of years along came digital marketing which continues to thrive day by day and has developed into an important method in building brand sustainability through different marketing and communication channels. Retailers have been empowered to market and deliver their products and services to their customers through the new media. The fascinating part of these new digital technologies is that they can be used from smart phones and portable tablets, there is no need to travel around with computers; business owners can communicate and disseminate information from anywhere in the world regardless of time zones. Since the emergence of, and the rapid growth of digital marketing tools, traditional media communication channels such as magazines and newspapers are faced with real-time threats (Madondo 2018: 114).

This study is an effort to explore the role of digital marketing in sustaining the retail sector in Flagstaff. Retailers need to refocus their marketing strategies towards the various channels of digital marketing. It is also a wise way to obtain customer feedback on company's products and services, hence they can adjust their brand strategies to meet the needs of customers and form long-lasting sustainable brands.

2.10 Competition within the retail sector

According to Magoso (2020: 3) retail competition can be approached in different ways. Retailers compete for customers in terms of store location, quality and availability of products, low prices, services, and fresh produce. Location is no longer a huge factor in competition as it was before, instead services are a huge part of sustainable growth, especially when faced with extreme price competition. There is a growing amount of chaos in the market because of superstores, discount stores and warehouses which continue to rise (Mfeka 2017). The rise of these new outlets creates great competition with the general grocery businesses e.g., convenience stores and supermarkets, and drives them to reduce product prices. As a result of competition, retailers need to compromise and create variety in products and prices, which can be profitable and sustain customers. The price charged depends on the level of services provided; this

requires retailers to compare what the competitor is offering so they can meet the demands in the market (Tlapana 2017: 20). Customers are constantly looking for new shops, new style and still asking for more from the retailers they usually shop at.

Literature indicates that a number of strategies were established in the mid-90s to prevent invaders from modifying the retail market on both national and international level. One of these strategies included the proposal of opening grocery stores inside malls, near road borderlines and convenience stores at gas stations, consequently dominating the marketplace. A second proposal was to expand the merchandise assortment, for instance opening pharmacies within supermarkets. They also developed the advertising and price war strategies, which have proven to be less successful than others (Venkatesh 2017). In the past 12 years, the driving force behind most successful retailers has been practicing the everyday low prices tactic (Müller and Nagle 2017: 244); (Mason 2015). New techniques used to avoid and manage competition within retail continue to emerge every day, such as the 'secondary market expansion' concept. For example, a few years ago Spar group introduced this concept by creating 'Spar family store'. Simamane (2016) supposed that perhaps the most disturbing challenge to manufacturers is that retail has become more concentrated and integrated, apart from the constantly changing retail environment.

According to Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019b: 12) digital marketing plays a huge role in keeping up-to-date of new trends in the market. Following trends gives businesses a clear idea of what is in demand at a particular period. Using social media or the internet, retailers can gain knowledge of what consumers want by monitoring market trends and offer products according to these demands, thus remaining competitive in the retail sector. Social media shows that many of SA consumers are influenced by international fashion styles and online shopping has made it possible for them to shop worldwide (Ntobaki 2018: 45). As such many online boutiques are opening up, using popular shopping websites such as Wholesale7, Shein, and Zaful as suppliers, and they have gained many customers. For South African retailers it is important to observe what international brands are offering so they can design their products around those descriptions. All retailers are confronted with major trends in the competitive world of retailing, but through digital marketing providing all the tools to navigate the industry, any retailer can remain competitive (Conradie 2016: 52).

2.11 Evolution of the Internet

The evolution of digital technology triggered something life changing that has never been seen before in the history of technology, the 'Internet' (Rindfleisch, O'Hern and Sachdev 2017). The evolution of the internet took place over two decades ago (Weis 2010). In the beginning, the program in which the public internet was designed did not have the ability to manage massive quantities of data flowing via millions of networks (Abbate 2022). Currently the Internet community is creating ways to develop and examine new technological networks that are critical to the progress of the internet in the future. The Internet is a restricted network, which offers a space to develop innovative technologies which then migrate to the public internet (Internet-Society 2020: 3). Can and Alatas (2017: 2) found that the internet and the web had impressive inventions and breakthroughs that led to the application, growth, and rise in the use of social networks such as Facebook and Twitter and these networks became an essential part of people's lives.

Although many companies have integrated Facebook into their businesses to assist with their advertising campaigns and marketing activities, it is still unclear whether it will be a success or failure and whether or not it will become a renowned communication channel for companies in the future. Klingenberg and Antunes (2017) reported that the integration of the internet with telephone communications, via Wireless Application Protocol (WAP) has been found to be the latest developments in internet technology. By means of cell phones, the WAP allows for the access to the internet, however this access is independent of cell phone networks. Kovar (2016: 1); (Nyirenda-Jere and Biru 2015) discovered that people have more access to cell phones than they have to computers, hence the future of the internet is in the hands of cell phone technology. This will probably have a significant outcome in terms of developments and innovations, allowing for access of services and for the dissemination of content through digital technologies. Eddy (2011) predicted that by year 2021, probably every person will have access to the internet, because hand-held devices will gradually become cheaper but will remain sophisticated.

Approximately half of all adults access the internet through broadband Wi-Fi routers using laptops. The rate of utilization of cell phone devices and wireless PCs on the

internet has increased substantially in the past year. Chaffey (2020) reported that 81% of people search online to purchase a product or service using any kind of device, 90% visit an online store's site, 74% purchase products online using any device, 67% use shopping apps on mobile phone or tablets and 52% of purchases are made using cell phone devices. He further adds that Google is one search engine that continues to dominate; according to net market share it began the year 2020 with 70,38% of average net share. However, this shows a decline in numbers for in 2019 their net market share was 75, 46%; on the other hand, there has been a slight rise on Bing's net share.

Barwise and Watkins (2018) allege that network operators will be compelled to reduce data access charges resulting in a major shift of data to the internet. The internet will grow into a room of transaction of sales, with more people starting to use the internet to conduct activities online, such as online shopping and online banking. Chaffey and Smith (2017: 5) articulate that there is a migration from the marketplace into the electronic market space, across all borders, without a glitch; there is a constant growth of access to the internet through mobile phones. The internet has proven benefits which it offers to both customers and businesses, thus making it to be a huge part of the future of the marketing of all businesses. Nowadays, cell phones are more dominant than desktop computers and laptops and are the most common tool for accessing the internet. Digital television, cell phones and mobile applications all have internet access.

In 1969 the ARPANet was established by the Department of Defence in the United States in order to protect military communications in the event of nuclear war. Email programming was invented in 1971, enabling network communication. The ARPANet had its first international connection from Norway and the UK. Between 1981 and 2000 online subscribers in the UK started increasing and over 150 were connected (Rajaraman 2022: 1841). Tim Berners-Lee established the World Wide Web (WWW) in between these years and in precisely 1998 Google was created (Gohel 2014). The internet has grown in leaps and bounds since the collapse of dot.com just after the year 2000. Since then, there has been a massive transformation to the internet. As the internet is available 24/7, businesses are able to operate with other businesses worldwide, despite the difference in time zones. Just as businesses have changed, so have customer expectations. Customers no longer want to wait for delivery, they want

what they want and want it now. If they do not get the service they desire, they look for other businesses that will give them better service (Thomas and Housden 2017: 33). Therefore, the promises retailers make for online deliveries must be fulfilled. The number of incomplete shopping basket in stores is a testimony to the fact that customers do not like standing in long queues, so online shopping is the new and better alternative.

2.12 Introduction to digital marketing

We are living in the digital age; this is the most significant and emancipating period of technological transformation and development the world has ever seen. According to Lee and Cho (2020: 332), new digital technologies are changing the media space worldwide. Statistics have proven that social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have over 830 million different users on a daily basis. The term 'digital marketing' was first used in the early 1990s as the launch of both internet and the World Wide Web became an important aspect of daily lives of a lot of people all over the world (Kingsnorth 2022: 7).

Smith (2018) observed that digital marketing has had a number of adaptations and still differ between countries. Some countries refer to it as 'internet marketing' while others call it 'e-marketing'. Both these terms can be used in substitute for the other but 'digital marketing' is by far becoming the one people use most and this study also refers to it as digital marketing. Kannan (2017); Esqueda-Walle, Marmolejo Rodríguez and Villarreal Estrada (2020: 258) describe digital marketing as a term that sums up and comprises both words which refer to "any kind of marketing activity that requires interactive technology to be implemented". With the technology advances and the growing dependence by numerous customers on the internet and its interactivity between brands and consumers, digital marketing began to grow.

Ryan (2020) alleged that a lot of advances in marketing are integrated with the development of innovative digital technologies. Perhaps the internet is the most immense tool of communication and connectivity known in the history of technology innovations, thus making it an essential resource that marketers must use. The

practice of marketing through the internet incorporates all forms of marketing using the internet by any means. That is the core aspect of digital marketing.

Hofacker (2018: 4) defines digital marketing as the use of networks created from hardware and software in the process of marketing. According to Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019b: 9) digital marketing involves the application of internet and other digital technologies together with traditional communications to accomplish the purpose of marketing. It is also about directing different online media that are managed by an organization. It is mainly for the purpose of accomplishing marketing objectives by applying digital technologies.

Thomas and Housden (2017) indicate that digital marketing is applying digital technologies that form online channels such as Emails, the web and digital television in order to sustain activities of marketing used to gain customers and generate profit. Digital marketing channels allow for different and creative forms of advertising which creates the thrill in the message, story, image, placement, and refinement. It all adds up to a great combination that eventually brings about change in the world. Advertising is a form of marketing that is concerned with influencing and persuading people to make decisions that benefit the business. The power of advertising can accomplish incredible things and generate positive results provided that it is done well and properly (Ryan 2014: 2).

Kusumawati (2019: 3) describes digital marketing as a term used by one or more digital media to promote a brand, product, and/or a retailer. Digital media provide means for retailers to be able to recognise and address consumers prior to purchasing a product. In so doing, this enhances the relationship they have with their consumers. Pride and Ferrell (2016) believe that digital marketing tools give retailers the ability to facilitate a two-way communication with customers, creating a home-grown touch. There are numerous digital marketing tools used by retailers, some of these prominent tools are social media, e-mail marketing, e-marketing, mobile marketing, and Search Engine Optimisation (SEO). Digital marketing can be defined as the use of online channels used in marketing a brand.

Digital marketing is one type of marketing that is being broadly utilised in promoting products or services and to reach customers through the use of digital channels.

Digital marketing goes beyond internet marketing, it comprises of other channels that do not require the use of Internet, such as mobile marketing (SMS and MMS) and display advertising. The term digital marketing is a broad one, it refers to several marketing and advertising methods that are set out to reach existing and prospective customers by means of digital technologies. Digital marketing encompasses a wide variety of services, products and brand marketing campaigns mainly using the internet as a core advertising medium in addition to mobile and traditional TV, radio, and newspaper (Idrysheva *et al.* 2019: 4).

Digital marketing is an integration of email marketing, social media, online advertising, text messaging, affiliate marketing, search engine optimization, pay per click interaction with the public. Its effects are not difficult to measure. The planning of marketing and advertising campaigns is done in a short period of time. Literature reveals that digital marketing is relatively cheap and a fast way to promote products, services, and brands (Yogesh, Sharaha and Roopan 2019). The success of digital marketing strategies can be celebrated if/when a company reaches a specific amount of their local audience. Marketing campaigns can be easily improved, and new innovations can be implemented within any campaign (Yasmin, Tasneem and Fatema 2015: 72). Digital marketing successfully reaches a wide range of customers all around the world. It also creates a platform for two-way conversation in the social media space. With digital channels operating 24/7, this allows for endless online shopping with response and feedback occurring anytime.

In addition, Sathya (2017: 866) refers to digital marketing as a definitive term used for online marketing, internet marketing or web marketing. Digital marketing can be defined as a general term used to market a product or service using digital technologies, mainly on the internet, as well as mobile phones, display advertising, and any other digital medium.

According to the several definitions the study provided; it is evident that digital marketing is an exceptional and efficient approach to successful marketing of any business. It plays an important role in today's society and businesses at large. Its ability to connect retailers and consumers at a personal level through social media has brought enormous growth to retail. The great revolution of digital marketing has and will continue to create space for more advancement for eons.

2.13 Digital marketing channels

According to Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019a: 26) digital marketing tools are used to accomplish the objectives of brand recognition, awareness, and favourability and to encourage product purchase by inspiring online media users to visit a site to participate with the product or brand, and to eventually buy online or use traditional media channels, for example cell phones or to go in-store.

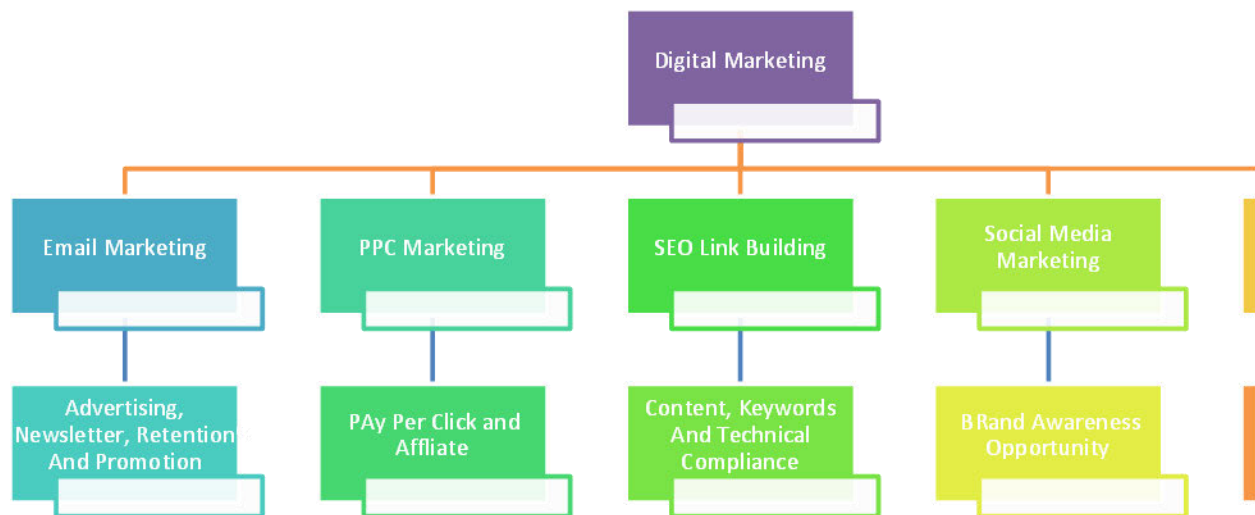
Digital marketing channels allow people to connect and communicate worldwide and have created a space where people can socialise. Social media has grown into a very predominant online channel of communication facilitated by computers and cell phones, and as of late, mobile networks developed upon the theoretical and innovative foundations of Web 2.0, which encourages the construction and trade of consumer-produced content (Kaplan 2015: 197). Sloan and Quan-Haase (2017: 487) explain that web 2.0 is generally interconnected to put together channels in which social media networks work. Social media can be classified as a digital marketing evolution regarding software and hardware which enables users to access meaningful content; facilitates communication, amongst other benefits.

Dahl, Eagle and Low (2015) maintain that with the change in the manner of activity from the computer to the internet, social media has diverged from traditional Communication Marketing Channel (CMC), internet accessibility has thus increased enormously, particularly with the rise of mobile applications. Moreover, there has been a shift in terms of cost and producing information from businesses to customers who are active participants in developing content and online presence; in addition, the power lies more in customers than on brands or products. Social media is all about generating content in means of blogs, videos and pictures and the sharing of experiences and views about a product or service (Ansari *et al.* 2019: 5). Businesses reciprocate this sharing of content by opening a platform for people to be able to interact with the business or brand thereby transmuting formal addresses into social discussions and forming great relations with clients. In addition, the likes, rates, comments, and recommendations that online users make on a brand facilitates growth and change in social relations and networks. Social media integrates numerous

channels of communicating online, for example blogs, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Akram and Kumar 2017: 347).

2.13.1 Digital marketing tools

Figure 2.2 Digital Marketing Tools



Source: Cameron (2014)

- Online advertising

Zhang, Song and Li (2020: 6) refer to online advertising as playing a significant role in digital marketing. It is also referred to as internet advertising where businesses can disseminate information about their products or services. Bala and Verma (2018: 327) assert that through advertising online, a company can provide customers with the content, promotions and ads that meet their expectations and that are of interest to them. Companies create their own websites where they showcase their products or services, giving customers and the general public free access to the information so they can learn about their business or brand offers. Research suggests that advertisers should put ads that are more significant and valuable on the web. With the means of online advertising, a company is able to control its financials and time management (Aslam and Karjaluoto 2017: 1655).

- Text Messaging

This type of marketing refers to information sent to recipients about a company's product or service in terms of a text using mobile phones. This information can be sent in form of an SMS or MMS. Text message marketing became progressively well known in mid 2000s in South Africa. Companies can send instant messages to customers of confirmation details on orders made online and tracking & shipping information (Nguyen, de Leeuw and Dullaert 2018: 265). Utilizing SMS for ad campaigns can get satisfactory outcomes rapidly. Through this procedure, organizations can send marketing communication to clients continuously, whenever and can be sure that the information will be received. Additionally, organizations can conduct surveys and acquire feedback from clients to build up and improve on their product and services in future (Yasmin, Tasneem and Fatema 2015).

- Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

SEO is defined as the way of influencing a website or webpage visibility on the results of a search engine. Usually when a webpage appears more often and top of the results list, it is more likely to get visitors than the websites that follow. SEO may be directed at various types of searches, inclusive of image search, location search, scholarly information search and news updates (Kadam 2019: 312).

Veglis and Giomelakis (2019: 1) describe SEO as an organised method applied to raise the ranking of a company and/or its product in the listings of the search results when certain keywords are typed in on a search engine. Search Engine Optimization aims is to improve the search ranking of a website in Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs) by expanding the content of a site to be more relevant to search phrases. Search engines update their systems frequently to punish sites with low quality that attempt to game their rankings, making SEO a fast-moving objective for advertisers.

Kittur and Mane (2019: 219) aver that SEO includes obtaining the most high-ranking site on the results of a search engine on organic or natural listings of the page when a mix of particular keywords have been keyed in. For instance, when one conducts a search on Google and Bing, the results page the first listing will be a sponsored ad or Pay Per Click (PPC) link, followed by the natural listings. Thus, the advertisement revenues on search engines are increased due to prioritising of sponsored ads. The natural positioning depends on the system utilised by a single search engine to

coordinate content from a web page relevant to the keywords entered on the search bar. There is no charge for these postings to be shown or when a link applicable to your site is clicked upon. In any event, a business can hire an SEO company to improve rankings of its web page to much higher positions (Chaffey and Smith 2017: 370).

- Email Marketing

Email marketing refers to copy of an advert containing a whole email or a segment of an email communication. This can appear as a spontaneous type of communication, where an option to opt-out of from upcoming email is given to the recipient, or the message is sent because the recipient opted in to receive emails from that company or brand. Companies use outbound marketing to communicate to their customers and prospects through automated emails, encouraging purchases or for promotional purposes (Budac 2016: 306).

Olson *et al.* (2021: 290) articulate that email is one of the best tools of digital marketing used by business to promote their product or services on the web. Advertising a business by means of email can assist in reaching with prospective consumers who find a business appealing to them. Even with the ever-increasing developments of digital technologies, email newsletters remain popular. Email is an extremely cheap communication tool compared to advertising or different types of media broadcasting and can make a good turnover on investments when used effectively. With the application of graphic designs, a company can make a mixture of appealing graphics, content and links to their product or services, thus bringing the full attention of customers to themselves (Yasmin, Tasneem and Fatema 2015: 72).

Email communication from a company motivates purchases from customers and potential customers. Email is used to send messages to a company's existing and prospective customers. Companies can send emails as part of a once-off campaign or can be triggered to be automatically sent on certain events such as welcome strategy (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick 2019a: 27). Email is one of the most effective tools of online marketing that companies use to promote their business on the internet. Marketing one's business via email can help keep contact with potential customers who show interest in the business. It also allows the business to keep customers informed of vital information such as promotional sales, helps strengthen the brand

and earns the confidence of customers. To gain positive response from customers, emails should be kept precise, exciting, and relevant and give customers the option to opt-out from the company ads at any time they desire (Zhang, Kumar and Cosguner 2017: 853).

- Pop-ups

Pop-up ads are regarded as a graphical user interface display section, they usually emerge on the user's window, containing an advertisement related to the user search. A click on the box of the ad leads directly to the site from which the ad was created, attracting more visitors on the company's page thereby creating brand awareness/visibility (Mbugua and Ndavi 2021: 11).

- Paid search/ Pay Per Click (PPC) marketing

Paid media marketing incorporates any kinds of advertisement that is paid for, be it search ads, banners, billboard posters, Pay Per Click ads, promoted posts or stories (Desai and Vidyapeeth 2019: 197). PPC is an ad that comes in the form of a text, carrying a link to a web page of a company when a particular phrase is typed in on a search engine. According to Sjöblom *et al.* (2019: 26), the number of ads appears right at the top of the natural listings of the search results, and they are generally labelled as sponsored links. Google reports on search ads show that they are putting more effort to improve relevance in paid media ads, especially for retail, by displaying product value on the ad. The Google advertising programme- Google Ad Words (@<http://adwords.google.com>) along with Microsoft search marketing can likely be compared to search engines such as, Yahoo and Bing, these are the most commendable search engine tools on which to advertise in order for a business to appear higher on search results (Vankov 2018: 193).

Szymanski and Lininski (2018: 98) explain PPC is a text ad paid for by a company that is displayed as a sponsored link on the page's results when a search user keys in a specific keyword. It is termed 'Pay Per Click' because a fee from the marketer is required every time an internet user taps on the link. In the event that a link is clicked on more than once, the search engine will detect this activity and there will be no charges from it as it is regarded as a 'click fraud'. PPCs have become available on social media as well, mostly used by brands and brand influencers to get more visitors on a company's website thus generating sales. PPC creates more engagement on a

company's products and services at a relatively low price, hence, it is one of the best ways of online advertising. Internet users, particularly on social media, claim that PPC is a convenient technique to get more information on a product and a great way to influence people to purchase a product (Das 2021: 105).

2.14 Social Media



Figure 2.3 Social media networks

Source: LogoDix (2018)

Social media is a communication tool that allows retail businesses to integrate online communication in their business strategies and is a great platform for effective advertising (Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi 2020: 6). Kozlenkova *et al.* (2017) state that online communication is an important aspect in retailing and significantly differs from traditional marketing. Retail businesses use social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube to promote their brand awareness, build stronger and long-lasting brand-consumer relationships and simultaneously reach a wider audience. Online communication is an important tool in assisting retailers to meet their online sales' objectives (Caruth 2016: 2). Social media decreases marketing costs, empowers consumers and offers retailers extensive communication benefits. Wang, Pauleen and Zhang (2016) claim that businesses with active social media accounts have become prominent within the retail industry. Social media as a marketing tool is used by retailers to effectively communicate with audiences in different demographics and to stay competitive in the industry by offering opportunities to deliver ground-breaking marketing methods and approaches (Icha 2015: 4). According to Ramanathan, Subramanian and Parrott (2017); Kotni (2021) implementing social media channels grants retailers a platform to be transparent, share internal organisation information as a way to create personal connections with their consumers, such as their activities and decisions that are not regularly published or accessed on other communication networks.

Social media marketing emerged as an integral aspect of many businesses' marketing strategies. The concept of social media use serves as an undeniably essential tool used to market to the general population and serve as a simplified approach to analyse consumer reactions (Wibawa *et al.* 2022: 22). Furthermore, social media improves the level of engagement with consumers, targets appropriate markets, and develops communication between small retail businesses and consumers. The literature uncovered an array of topics such as company engagement; marketing strategies; advantages of online marketing; benefits of using Facebook, Twitter, and other web-based social networking sites; and benefits of EWOM. Choi *et al.* (2020) asserted that the goal of online networking is to showcase products or services and use the Internet as a platform to increase brand awareness and revenue. Furthermore, the use of online networking strategies can help increase revenue, generate website traffic, and appeal to new audiences (Lee *et al.* 2018: 247).

Online and mobile word-of-mouth forums, such as social networking websites, blogs, company-sponsored discussion boards and chat rooms, consumer-to-consumer email, consumer product or service ratings websites, and internet discussion boards, are all examples of social media. In recent years, these social media have gradually grown in popularity.

A Statista report by Galal (2022) on the Average time per day spent by online users on social media in South Africa from 1st quarter of 2017 to the 3rd quarter of 2021 (in hours/minutes) states that, as of the third quarter of 2021, South Africans used social media for an average of three hours and 37 minutes each day. The amount of time spent on social media in South Africa has been rising annually since 2017, peaking at two hours and 47 minutes in that year. Retailers' marketing operations should be carried out on social media platforms so as to appeal to a mass audience that spends more time on the Internet than on traditional media.

- **Search Engine Optimization Growth**

An article by Petic (2023) reports that SEO was a radically different business a decade ago than it is now. Previously, there was little that Google could do to prevent keyword stuffing. Things changed when SEO became all about content, and businesses that published the greatest content were rewarded with high Google rankings. Google, as

the industry leader in search engine optimization, updates its algorithm on a regular basis. Local searches have also become a major SEO priority throughout the years. Local search was moulded and modified with Google's Pigeon update in 2014. In local SERPs, Google began rewarding well-optimized websites with a competitive advantage over their competitors. This also helped with location-specific searches and mobile browsing (Faruk, Rahman and Hasan 2021).

Google's algorithms began prioritizing HTTPS websites in 2014. HTTPS became a positive nexus with greater search ranks on Google's SERPs since encryption ensures data integrity and the user's sensitive information. Today, a safer website implies that users will trust you, and Google will give you a higher ranking, which will improve your SEO (DevriX 2020). There are a large number of customers, which is important in any digital marketing strategy for a business because they are the individuals you want to target and attract.

Petic (2023) further wrote that big data has emerged as one of the most important differentiators in today's digital marketing landscape. It is used in marketing to provide unique consumer experiences as well as user-generated content that attracts new customers. The number of businesses with a web and social presence has expanded in recent years, which means you'll need to remain on top of the latest trends and develop new digital marketing tactics on a regular basis.

2.15 The role of digital marketing in the retail industry

Juska (2022: 194) established that the role of digital marketing in the retail industry is to develop, maintain and improve brand perception. In retail marketing environments, digital marketing plays a significant role in designing mobile web notification, video viewing monitors, recognition software aisle and wall displays of promotional items. These items influence a customer's buying decision, which is important because brands are competitive on price and quality factors. Retailers control the content and distribution of messages within their store locations through digital applications.

In addition, Al-azzam and Al-Mizeed (2021: 456) assert that digital marketing plays a significant role in targeting a business' market more effectively based on demographics, geographical area and the public's behaviour. The role of digital

marketing is to help generate new traffic, leads, and to grow sales for retail businesses by reaching consumers that are interested in a business' product and services.

Through online marketing businesses can market themselves to prospective and high-value consumers online. With the highly competitive environment in the retail sector, digital marketing offers equal opportunities for retailers to have a higher competitive advantage. For instance, numerous retailers invest in SEO and PPC to help boost their site in search engine results. Both big and small retailers can use this marketing concept to attract and reach a greater audience. The role of digital marketing is to help retailers optimise their marketing budget and earn money from their marketing efforts (Storm 2019).

Furthermore, Krizanova *et al.* (2019: 2) assert that online marketing is more cost effective over traditional marketing and offers gratifying returns. Digital marketing allows retailers to concentrate on their target audience and reaches people anywhere in the world. Businesses can establish a particular target audience through a PPC campaign or content marketing and create a data base to market directly to those people. Retailers are able to understand the impact of their marketing campaigns by tracking and monitoring their effectiveness through insights, which reveal impressions made by the campaign, audience reach and content interactions (Reddy (2016).

2.16 Understanding the use of digital marketing tools in retail businesses

Advertising has always been about appealing to the customer. In the era of mass media, it was all about being creative, making humorous commercials and fascinating print advertisement. Nowadays, advertising is more about forming associations and significance to gain attention. In today's environment, advertisers are putting more effort to deliver their messages to the desired target publics in order to build on the communication performance (Bala and Verma 2018).

Social media, blogs, emails, and search engine optimization (SEO) are the most commonly used digital marketing tools. According to Bhandare (2021: 2387) email marketing is one of the most effective tools of digital marketing used to send messages to customers, messages that are usually about a sales pitch and promotions. Emails can

also be used when you don't have anything to advertise but as a tool to keep engaging with the consumer, making your business more reliable and your brand stronger.

According to Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019b: 30) social media is a significant tool of digital marketing that requires encouraging communication with customers on the company's website, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and similar media. Businesses can use these social media tools to send messages to customers or interested publics who have opted in on their online sites. It is important to take part in conversations with customers with relation to the company's products and services in order to learn more about what the customer wants and what they are interested in. This gives better a perception of the company.

A social media site gives users access to content and messages that gives notification when new products are launched or when there is a new development in the company. Sancheti *et al.* (2019) explain that blogs provide means for comment from readers. There are many companies and marketing businesses that use blogs as a tool for advertisement with some blogs being more interesting than others. In order for blogs to be successful they need to offer news that is of value and comment.

2.17 Use of digital marketing by rural retail businesses and customers

Rural retail businesses, according to Alford and Page (2015: 655) use the internet's value in marketing to gain lasting competitive advantages through process reshaping, management skills, and innovation expertise. According to research, rural retailers' use of web-based marketing is limited due to a lack of resources. Turner and Endres (2017: 37) back up this claim, stating that the failure of rural businesses in digital marketing is due to a lack of money. However, rural business owners consider marketing to be an important strategy for promoting their activities.

Rural retail managers and owners, according to Blankson, Cowan and Darley (2018: 29) use the internet as a marketing tool to grow and support their businesses. Rural retailers have different marketing strategies depending on where they do business. Blankson, Cowan and Darley (2018: 36) argue that rural retail businesses employ marketing to promote their competitive advantage. Owners, on the other hand, fail to realise the full potential of digital marketing due to a scarcity of resources (Alford and

Page 2015: 658); (Taiminen and Karjaluoto 2015). As a result, it should be highlighted that the internet is an important marketing tool for rural retail businesses, but its use is limited due to a lack of resources. According to He *et al.* (2017) the internet is a hub for selling retail products and services. Most businesses, according to Subramanian (2018: 95) rely on word-of-mouth promotion to recruit new clients. In order to promote marketing tactics, rural retailers must also analyse sales patterns and consumer profiles. To be successful, retail businesses owners need to use excellent marketing strategies along with client persuading techniques. Rural retail store owners can use digital marketing to create a strong customer base and enter niche markets with the help of the internet.

According to Durai and King (2019: 95) effective digital marketing has a substantial impact on corporate operations. As digital marketing technologies enable organizations to digitise, sell, and transport real assets more virtually, an online-driven business converts physical business activities into efficient digital processes. Digital marketing may be utilised to improve company process efficiencies, save warehouse logistics costs, and increase customer satisfaction in service sectors (Murray *et al.* 2016). Retailers can use digital marketing to improve their store layout by installing sensors that track consumer movements to identify high-traffic lanes and positioning goods on those aisles to increase sales (Leghari, Kamal and Rashid 2022: 49). Alternatively, retail companies collect information about their customers' behaviour via online advertising and use that knowledge to offer things that the client is more likely to buy (Dasgupta, Nagaraj and Nagamani 2016); (Gregory 2015).

Digital marketing has transformed consumers' buying habits as a result of rapid technical advancements. It has provided consumers with a number of benefits. Consumers can stay up to speed on company's information via digital marketing technologies. Many consumers may now access the internet from anywhere at any time, and companies are constantly updating information about their products and services. Consumers can interact with the company's varied operations through digital marketing. Consumers can go to the company's website to learn more about the products or services, make online purchases, and write reviews (Wong 2021).

According to Standberry (2022) consumers acquire clear information about items or services through digital marketing. There is a small probability that information

obtained from a salesperson in a retail business will be misinterpreted. The Internet, on the other hand, provides extensive product information on which clients can base their buying decisions. Because many organisations are attempting to advertise their products or services through digital marketing, it is becoming the largest benefit to the customer in terms of allowing customers to compare products or services from other suppliers in a cost-effective and time-efficient manner. Customers do not need to go to a variety of different retail shops to learn about the items or services. Because the internet is available 24 hours a day, there is no time limit on when a customer can buy a product online; customers can shop at any time.

Bala and Verma (2018: 336) articulate that digital marketing allows viewers to share the product or service's content with others. One can readily transfer and obtain information on the attributes of a product or service to others via digital media. The company offers evident pricing by displaying product or service costs via digital marketing channels, making prices highly plain and transparent for customers. Customers always benefit from being informed instantly by simply looking at any one form of digital marketing. Companies may change prices or offer special offers on their products or services on a regular basis, and customers always benefit from being informed instantly by simply looking at any one form of digital marketing. Customers that use traditional marketing, first see the advertisement before going to a local store to buy the products or services. Whereas using digital marketing, customers can acquire products or services immediately (SpeedyPaper 2019).

Digital marketing in the retail sector can be advantageous in many ways. Among its advantages include:

- **Competitive Advantage:** Utilizing digital marketing effectively can help retailers compete against much greater competition. A strong strategy can help them defeat competition even if you have fewer resources than they do. Even on a small budget, retailers can employ digital marketing in their businesses (Sujith 2022).
- **Improved conversations:** Digitally, it is much simpler to reach your prospects at the correct time and in the right method. The likelihood that a customer will make a purchase is also increased by direct engagement and interaction from the

retailer. Digital marketing promotes more leads, sales, and customer loyalty (Sujith 2022).

- **Improved Brand Metrics:** Brand metrics include the popularity of your brand among consumers as well as its image and awareness. The use of digital marketing enables businesses to stand out from the competition. With the use of appropriate digital marketing strategies, it is able to influence consumers' brand perception (Brisk-Logic 2021).

Digital Marketing can also benefit consumers in the numerous ways, such as the ones indicated below:

- **Convenience:** Customers can easily communicate with businesses through digital marketing. Customers may compare costs, check for availability of products in-store, and make rapid purchases via digital marketing (Souto 2022).
- **Personalised experience:** Through digital platforms, such as websites, mobile apps, social media, email marketing, and other channels, retail businesses are able to provide customers with personalised experiences. They can gather data about their customers through surveys, social media, and etc (Souto 2022).
- **Fewer hassles:** Customers do not have to deal with salespeople or leave themselves up to persuasion and emotional elements, in addition, they do not have to stand in queues at checkout (Yasmin, Tasneem and Fatema 2015: 74).
- **Keeps consumers aware of lates updates:** Customers are kept up to date on the internet via websites, emails, online advertisements, and social networking sites. Customers can use smart phones and tablets to access the internet while on the go. Manufacturers and retailers can provide real-time information to their customers via the internet (Yasmin, Tasneem and Fatema 2015: 74).

- **Diffusion of innovation theory**

The diffusion of innovation theory can be used to view a research problem through a theoretical lens. Firms have also used the notion to accept an innovation at various stages of technological growth (Kaminski 2011). Innovative ideas are shared through multiple routes amongst participants in a social system, which is known as the diffusion process. The five characteristics defined by Rogers refer to the degree to which a given innovation is perceived to have: (a) a relative advantage, the degree to which a user perceives benefits or improvements over existing technology as a result of adopting an innovation; (b) compatibility, the degree to which the innovation aligns with the end-users' values and habits; (c) complexity, the degree to which the innovation is perceived as difficult to implement; (d) observability, the amount to which members of the targeted social system notice the given change; and (e) trialability, the ability of an innovation to be put to the test without entire commitment and with low investment (Dibra 2015); (Ma, Lee and Goh 2014). Individuals use interpersonal interactions and mass media to understand knowledge about new technology, according to O'Sullivan and Carr (2018).

Knowledge of the diffusion of innovation theory also reveals how corporate executives use various tools and resources to innovate while maximizing profitability in specific settings. According to Bashir, Yousaf and Wani (2016) most technological advancements force retailers to become more aggressive in their tactics. External and internal influences, according to Zolait (2014) promote product innovation within the organization. To succeed with innovative techniques, business executives should make the most of all available resources. In addition, the adoption process begins when a user accepts an innovation and concludes when the user's desire has waned (Scott and McGuire 2017). Users assess a product or concept and choose whether proceeding is the best option. The diffusion of innovation hypothesis aids retail executives in implementing new ideas, expanding communication channels, and presenting strategies for successfully marketing new products (O'Sullivan and Carr 2018).

2.18 Challenges and barriers to the use of digital marketing by rural businesses

According to Bostanshirin (2014) rural businesses have a shortage of infrastructure, coordination, and formal organization. These insufficiencies relate to the company as a whole and all its functional areas, however experience indicates that, in practice, it seems that such companies are particularly weak when it comes to implementing marketing. Similarly, Lekhanya (2015:38) states that there is a lack of knowledge, and the perception business owners have about technology is the major obstacle to why they have not been able to adopt digital marketing. Independent retail businesses in Flagstaff lack the human resources and have no knowledge on how to make use of opportunities made available by the emerging digital environment to their own advantage.

Foroudi *et al.* (2017: 237) explain that retailers are confronted with several challenges in globalised markets. Still, the greatest problem is how to successfully manage all the incorporating functions of the business without causing conflicts within them. Research indicates that these business owners have difficulties in managing their businesses; these are inclusive of understanding financial responsibility, creating products which suit customers and recruiting employees with appropriate skill sets. However, the biggest challenge amongst all is taxes and business regulations. Therefore, they need to understand the regulation for the industry and its impact on their business as well as developing the skills necessary to deal with the challenges.

Philip and Williams (2019: 2) allege that barriers to the use of digital marketing in rural areas has been defined as 'digital divide'; the gap between individuals, households, businesses, and geographical areas at different socio-economic levels with regard to both opportunities to access information and communication technologies and to the use of internet for a wide variety of activities. Sustainability of the retail industry research interrogates barriers to participation in an increasingly digital society and identifying what prevents the adoption and use of new digital technologies. Barriers to the use and adoption of digital marketing tend to focus on the socio-economic attributes of individuals who are not digitally engaged, their demographic attributes, financial status, and education attainment.

2.19 Consumer's perception of digital marketing in rural areas

Advertising, reviews, public relations, social media, personal experiences, and other avenues all have an impact on customer perception (Stec 2021). Consumers view the use of digital marketing tools such as Social media, You Tube and blogs as a source of entertainment and information (Fourie 2015: 34). Literature shows that in the past television adverts were more popular and easily remembered than other advertising media. Perception, according to Agyekum *et al.* (2015) is the process by which people perceive or view an idea or an environment, and then process that concept based on their conclusions about various aspects. Perception is based on how people understand things based on their perception of an event or relationship. TRAFTON (2019) defines this as people's prior experiences, likes, dislikes, beliefs, and feelings.

The general public comprises consumers who have different perceptions about a retailer based on feelings, impression, and the knowledge they have about the retailer's product or service (Dictionary.com 2014). Consumers want to be in charge of their purchasing decisions, have given their explicit consent to be contacted, and only receive relevant, timely personalized advertising (Kallier 2016). Based on parameters such as message content, authorization, service providers, and frequency of messages, consumers accepted the use of digital marketing technologies. Young and educated people are believed to have an extremely tight (intimate) relationship with their phones, which motivates marketers to communicate with them at any time (Schutte and Chauke 2022: 877). Simultaneously, Kallier (2016: 49); Abrudan and Neaga (2018: 66); learnt that the younger generation of consumers have more trust in advertisements than the older generation. According to Venter (2017) young and educated people are open to, and skilled with technology, and can adapt to it rapidly; as a result, retailers should try to communicate with them via their mobile phones. Because the elderly market finds online advertisements more irritating than the youth market, the youth market has a positive attitude toward online advertising because they believe it is more personalized than other forms of advertising, and they therefore consider mobile advertising when making purchasing decisions. Donga (2017: 78) investigated consumer acceptance of mobile marketing through mobile phones among university students in South Africa. The study discovered that mobile

advertising is still evolving, and that young customers are aware of it. The key result was that characteristics such as privacy, trust, relevance, dangers, location, and shopping style influenced mobile advertising acceptance. Furthermore, how rural consumers view online advertising is influenced by celebrities' and social media influencers' behaviour, actions, and decisions.

Retailers care a lot about how the public perceives digital marketing. Kotler and Keller (2016) noted that it is important for retailers to have marketing communication in order to manage consumers' perceptions and influence existing beliefs and attitudes formed towards the retailer. The bulk of studies in South Africa are conducted in the provinces of Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, and the Western Cape, with majority of them taking place in metropolitan regions. For instances the studies of Goga, Paelo and Nyamwena (2019), Lekhanye (2017), Moodley (2019) Buthelezi (2018), Chazireni (2017), Dlamini (2017), and many others that this study has made reference to. These studies looked at the retail sector, sustainability, consumer perception, digital marketing, rural retail business, and other aspects related to this study. As a result, there is a scarcity of comparable research in other provinces, particularly in rural areas. People in rural areas may confront specific socioeconomic constraints and lifestyles, such as a lack of infrastructure to facilitate online shopping/delivery (Nebaimoro 2017: 3) which may influence their attitudes toward digital marketing.

Using the ABC model of attitudes, consumer's perception towards digital marketing can be explained easily and retailers can measure success of their advertising campaigns.

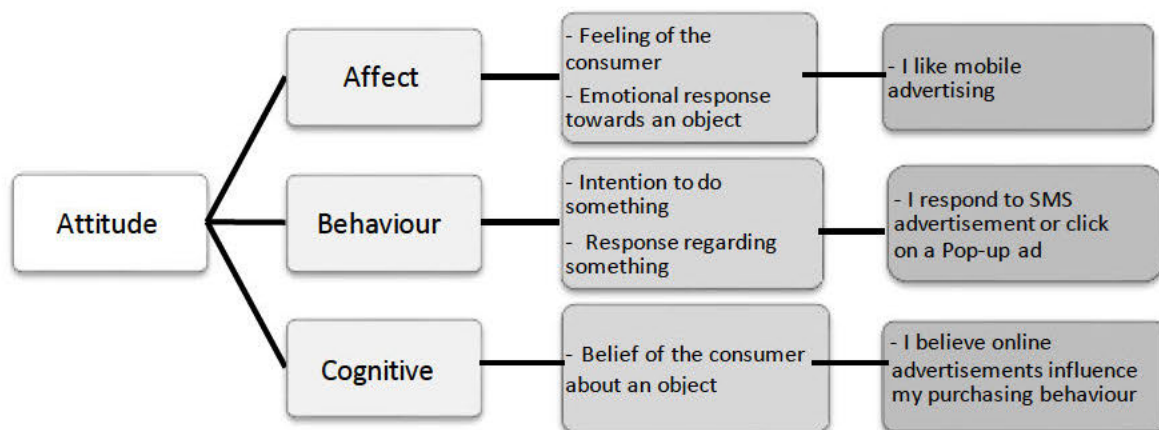
- **The ABC model of attitudes**

The ABC model of attitudes was used by (Der Waldt *et al.* 2009), (Le and Nguyen 2014), and (McLeod 2014) to analyse attitudes regarding digital marketing. Attitudes are divided into three categories in this model: affect, behaviour, and cognition. When constructing focus group questions to understand the rural participants' views on digital marketing, the ABC model of attitudes was used.

Consumers' attitudes regarding mobile advertising are influenced by their perceptions of advertising (Le and Nguyen 2014). The ABC model of attitudes can be used to examine consumer perceptions and attitudes about products and services (Figure

2.5). These three components combine to create a human experience.

Figure 2.4: The ABC model of attitudes



Source: Zickermann (2014: 62)

2.20 Application of digital marketing to sustain the rural retail sector

Chaudhary and Shukla (2022: 73) due to intense competition, retail operators must stay abreast of all the changes occurring in the retail sector globally. This can be a substantial challenge for any business. As a result of resource constraints, rural businesses in the same industry frequently find themselves unable to adopt the same retail marketing strategy in the face of competition from retailers in urban areas. Retail businesses face obstacles without the right technologies, which limits their online marketing prospects. The success of a firm is frequently determined by its talents (Ragab 2016: 73). According to Alford and Page (2015: 655) organizations employ digital marketing to gain long-term competitive advantages. Minimal marketing strategies, according to Alford and Page (2015), are based on technological restrictions, action research, financial constraints, and a lack of digital marketing knowledge. Retail business leaders, according to Ragab (2016: 2) face significant IT adoption failure rates due to a lack of knowledge, culture, and resources. Chong *et al.* (2017) investigated the marketing issues that businesses face around the world, as well as the ongoing changes in customer satisfaction.

Effect, endorsement, acknowledgment, affiliation, and brand consistent quality are

some of the other problems that business leaders face (Chong *et al.* 2017). Digital marketing techniques, by adjusting procedures and intensifying plans, coincidentally improve branding opportunities. Leaders should design web-based social media efforts to generate cash and promote branding for increased consumer involvement, according to (Boughzala 2016). Furthermore, digital marketing advertising allows retailers to improve their brand image and increase product awareness. The use of social media is a technology-based strategy for establishing client interactions. Consumers and businesses now have ubiquitous access to data because to advancements in mobile and wireless technologies (Pantano and Priporas 2016).

The concept of internet advertising gives businesses a technological and information platform to employ as a competitive marketing weapon (Hassan, Nadzim and Shiratuddin 2015: 264). As a result, developing an online presence on sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter can boost selling opportunities and maximize social capital for retail firms. Businesses may develop social interactions and prospects for growth across a variety of demographics by using social media as an advertising platform (Msonga and Swallehe 2022: 29). When rural retail business owners fail to adapt to technological development, they remain at a significant disadvantage compared to most of their urban counterparts (Philip and Williams 2019: 308).

Modern-day retailers can benefit from digital marketing. Retailers, on the other hand, must first establish proper digital marketing methods before reaping these rewards. Here are a few of the most effective digital actions for retail businesses to promote their product and services (Khorev 2021):

- **Website design and development:** Having a powerful website that is tailored to the target demographic enhances customer experience and satisfaction for both new and existing customers.
- **Search engine marketing:** Customers may easily locate the retail business they're seeking for by ranking high in search engines for relevant keywords.
- **Material marketing:** To attract new customers and keep existing ones, shops should focus on generating good written and visual content.
- **Email marketing:** Retailers should send emails to potential and current consumers

with product offers and important messages that they will find useful.

- **Social media marketing:** Retailers should determine which channels their customers use the most and leverage those platforms to acquire and retain customers.

Retailers who decide to maximise their business plans with effective digital marketing techniques will have a lot of options. They should, however, consider seeking assistance from specialists in the sector if they want to succeed and thrive in this competitive industry. A skilled digital marketing agency not only assists in connecting with potential consumers and driving sales, but also promotes global brand exposure (Pandya 2017). It is a good idea for retail stores to use the services of a marketing agency to reap the benefits and progress in the right direction.

- **The institutional theory**

According to Chandler and Hwang (2015) the institutional theory is used to explain how businesses react to external forces in a manner that encourages homogeneity over populations. As compared to urban businesses, rural businesses are confronted with difficult and distinctive external challenges, such as a lack of technology, industry competitors, remoteness of the store location and a stagnant local economy which require strategies to overcome (Dobson 2018). Researchers can use institutional theory to put into context and comprehend how rural social behaviour affects local business success and how managers strategize in a rural setting. Institutional theory is relevant to this subject because it explains how rural enterprises respond to external pressure, develop a plan, and achieve long-term viability (Rigg and O'Mahony 2013). This theory further examines how institutional and technical environments set the rules and pressure businesses to conform to be competitive within the market in order to achieve long-term sustainability. relate

2.21 Benefits of digital marketing to the sustaining of rural retail businesses

Veleva and Tsvetanova (2020: 6) articulate that the most important advantage for using digital marketing is the ability to manage costs, the speed with which information can be transmitted, and the ability to update information or promotional material. The cost effective, refined quality and everlasting product manuals, information and other promotional materials disseminated on the internet are essential and results in

improved cost effectiveness and the effectiveness of these materials. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019b: 14) identified three terms to explain how digital marketing benefits the organisation: identifying, anticipating, and satisfying. Growing sales through online shopping, because it is faster and can be used by people all over the world with access to the company's online site. Using digital marketing brings the company closer to customers through two-way communication, on online platforms and learning more about the customers by monitoring conversations. It saves costs; there is less need for print material, information is disseminated using emails and reaches customers faster. Hogg (2017) states that with the decrease in the cost of digital technologies, the benefits of online communication multiply as they offer flexibility and interactivity between customers and the organization. Moreover, digital marketing depends on strategies that function well through the internet and mobile devices for businesses with great plans but minimum budgets. It has countless benefits such as being cost-effective, providing real-time results, forming more interactive relationships and it is easy to measure results (Lekhanya 2015: 13).

Social media tools have made it possible for the ease of communication and availability of information. Dos Santos and Duffett (2021) mention that social media tools provide a business with a several advantages viz. constant customer interaction, interacting with a greater audience than what channels of traditional media affords, positive word-of mouth communication and the ability to market products and services to a vast audience. Furthermore, social media channels enable customers to share information about products/services respectively in an online setting (Nations 2021).

Despite the large number of advantages and opportunities that the use of social media can provide a business, not all businesses are overly excited and eager to make use of this strategy. Social media allows users to speak their minds, and to provide honest opinions and experiences, sometimes in anonymous form (Ntobaki 2018: 45). Marketing managers have little advice for effectively using social media as a marketing tool, as a shortage of educational literature and other helpful sources exists. Thus, the process of interactive social media marketing is yet to be the most favourable form of marketing among businesses, and not all include it in their integrated marketing communication strategy. Based on the above information, it is evident that social media has provided businesses with a new tool to interact and communicate with customers (Nations 2021).

2.22 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed literature on how the retail sector applies digital marketing tools to sustain their businesses. The retail sector was discussed thoroughly. The different types of social media and their role and influence in retail was discussed and outlined. The challenges and barriers to the use of digital marketing by rural businesses were brought to light. Furthermore, this chapter discussed the public perception of the impact of the use of digital marketing in retail stores. The following chapter presents the research methodology that was adopted for this study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the role of digital marketing on the sustainability of the formal retail sector in Flagstaff. This chapter outlines the research methodology employed for this study. Wisker (2018: 90) describes research methodology as a record of the research approach/design adopted in a study, outlines the population/target population, sampling method, the measuring instrument used, pretesting, data collection and analysis, delimitations/ the scope of the study, limitations, validity and reliability/trustworthiness, anonymity and confidentiality and ethical considerations of research. This study followed a mixed method approach. Quantitative data was obtained from the stores using a questionnaire and qualitative data was obtained from the general customers using focus group discussions.

3.2 Research design

Creswell and Clark (2017: 53) assert that in research studies, the process of research design encompasses the collection, evaluations, interpretation, and documentation of data. Research design entails all relevant topics involved in initiating and conducting a research study, starting from identifying a problem, to documenting it and lastly publishing the results (Punch and Oancea 2014). Cooper, Schindler and Sun (2006: 192) correspond to this definition and add that research design comprises the planning of gathering information, evaluating, and examining it. The research design regulates or limits biases. Additionally, Maggetti, Gilardi and Radaelli (2013: 10) maintain that research design is an effective plan in directing or guiding the researcher in choosing the correct method to follow when carrying out a study and it brings lucidity to the interpretation of the study.

Kothari (2004: 31) defines research design as a means for structuring the manner in which data will be collected and evaluated and intends to align the research aim to appropriateness whilst corresponding to budget measures. Research design organises the procedures that need to be followed in the execution of a research study

with the aim of obtaining the necessary data and achieving the objectives set out for the study (Malhotra, Birks and Wills 2010: 10). Research design can be exploratory, explanatory, or descriptive in nature, alleged Kent (2007: 16). Exploratory research can be conducted by collecting data through conducting interviews and academic literature where there is very little information known about a topic and the researcher intends to explore the topic further (Zikmund *et al.* 2013: 52). Explanatory research focuses on the study of a situation to explain the relationship between variables, and can be conducted through case studies, statistical surveys, observation, historical and attitude surveys. Lastly, descriptive research aims to achieve more accurate descriptions of situations, persons and events and can be conducted through interviews and sampling questionnaire surveys (Saunders and Lewis 2017). When formulating research design, it is mandatory to take precautions so as to avoid anything that may interfere with the accuracy of the entire research study and for your research findings to materialize in the most reliable manner or form.

Furthermore, Yin (2003: 20) defines research design as a process that adheres to a logical sequence of research phases that sums up the experimental data to the initial research questions and objective of the study and eventually up to the final stages. The fundamental nature of research design is that it demonstrates all steps of the events that took place in the course of research and how they occurred. Woodside and Wilson (2003: 498) stipulate that research findings must present answers to the primary questions for which the study was conducted.

The study is descriptive in nature, as it seeks to describe the role of digital marketing on the sustainability of rural businesses from the retail sectors point of view in South Africa. This approach allows the researcher to explore different characteristics simultaneously, such as age, race, gender, etc. In addition, it provides data regarding population changes.

3.3 Research Approach

Research approach is the master plan of a study that enhances control over the factors that can possibly undermine the validity of the results (Burns and Bush 2006). O'leary (2004: 121) outlines two main types of research approaches. These are mainly quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Quantitative research is labelled as

an objective positivist search for remarkable truths that depends on hypothesis, variables, and statistics whereas qualitative research does not support positivist ‘rules’ and functions at acknowledging different realities through a study with a small number of in-depth cases (Morgan 2013: 45).

The study followed a mixed method approach. The mixed method research design combines quantitative and qualitative research approaches in a single study. Mixed research method is a procedure that integrates qualitative and quantitative research approaches in a particular curriculum of review or survey that is applied when gathering and examining data in the conduct of a study (Cresswell 2012). Paul and Leedy (2010) claim that the benefits attributed to this approach are that the researcher can use the strengths of one where the other method presents weaknesses.

Dörnyei (2007) corroborates the aforementioned delineations when he refers to mixed research method as a design that incorporates both qualitative and quantitative aspects in a research study. This approach enables the researcher to explore trends and developments when carrying out quantitative research which can further be explored broadly in qualitative research (O’leary 2004).

Table 3.1 different approaches to research, their characteristics, advantages, and disadvantages.

	Quantitative research	Mixed research	Qualitative research
1. Scientific method	Confirmatory or “top-down”. The researcher tests hypotheses and theory with data	Confirmatory or exploratory	Exploratory or “bottom-up”. The researcher generates or constructs knowledge, hypotheses, and grounded theory from data collected during fieldwork.
2. Ontology (i.e., nature of reality/truth)	objective, material, structural, agreed upon	Pluralism; appreciation of objective, subjective, and intersubjective reality and their interrelations	Subjective, mental, personal, and constructed
3. Epistemology (i.e., theory of knowledge)	Scientific realism; search for truth; justification by empirical confirmation of hypotheses; universal scientific standard	Dialectical pragmatism, pragmatic justification (what works for whom in specific contexts); mixture of universal (e.g., always be ethical) and community-specific needs-based standards	Relativism; individual and group justification; varying standards
4. View of human thought and behavior	Regular and predictable	Dynamic, complex, and partially predictable.	Situational, social, contextual, personal, and

		Multiple influences include environmental/nature, biology/nature, freewill/agency, and chance/fortuity	unpredictable
5. Most common research objectives	Quantitative/numerical description, casual explanation, and prediction	Multiple objectives: provide complex and fuller explanation and understanding, understand multiple perspectives	Qualitative/ subjective description, empathetic understanding, and exploration
6. Interest	Identify general scientific laws; inform national policy	Connect theory and practice; understand multiple causation, nomothetic (i.e., general) causation and idiographic (i.e., particular individual) causation; connect national and local interests and policy	Understand and appreciate particular groups and individuals; inform local policy
7. Focus	Narrow-angle lens, testing specific hypotheses	Multilens focus	Wide-angle and "deep-angle" lens, examining the breadth and depth of phenomena to learn more about them
8. Nature of observation	Study behavior under controlled conditions; isolate the casual effect of single variables.	Study multiple contexts, perspective, or conditions; study multiple factors as they operate together.	Study groups and individuals in natural settings; attempt to understand insiders' views, meanings, and perspectives.
9. Form of data collected	Collect quantitative data based on precise measurement using structured and validated data collection instruments	Collect multi kinds of data.	Collect qualitative data such as in-depth interviews, participant observation, field notes, and open-ended questions. The researcher is the primary data-collection instrument.
10. Nature of data	Variables	Mixture of variables, words, categories, and images	Words, images, categories
11. Data analysis	Identify statistical relationship among variables	Quantitative and qualitative analysis used separately and in combination	Use descriptive data; search for patterns, themes, and holistic features; and appreciate difference/variation.

Source: Jonson and Christensen (2008)

After studying and comparing quantitative, qualitative, and mixed research methods and taking into considerations their advantages and disadvantages as listed in the above table, combining qualitative and quantitative research techniques will enable the researcher to provide the more comprehensive knowledge required to inform theory and practice. The information in the table shows that mixed research methods are effective for achieving different objectives because they produce results that are

more nuanced, and easy to comprehend. It also understands and addresses the multiple perspectives of the objectives of the study. The mixed method emphasizes numerous study lenses and is interested in bridging theory and practice. This approach has a pragmatic and dialectical stance. Hence, mixed method is a suitable approach to this study as it covers all the bases that qualitative and quantitative cannot cover alone.

3.4 Target population

Target population refers to the entire group of individuals for which researchers are interested in generalising the conclusions (Rahman 2020). Swanepoel, Swanepoel, van Graan, Allison, Weiderman and Santana (2006) describe a target population as a total group of people selected by the researcher from whom to obtain to complete a research study. In addition, Zikmund and Babin (2015: 415) state that the chosen population must be distinct so that it can produce good and reliable results. This study had two populations, one group was made up of retailers operating in Flagstaff and the other population group was made up of the members of the public (customers). The researcher aimed at covering the south African retail sector in a rural setting where the adoption of digital marketing was still at an infant stage, Flagstaff matches that description and is well suited to the research objectives. The researcher previously participated as a Field Worker in Flagstaff conducting population census for Statistics South Africa. Having been exposed to the community, the researcher gained knowledge of Flagstaff's demographic, economic and social status, hence this area was selected for the study.

According to SARS (2019) the estimated total population of Flagstaff is 279 795, which grows at a rate of approximately 1.2% p.a. Approximately 55% of the population are females and 45% are males. There is an estimated number of 52 retail stores registered in Flagstaff. There is no list of stores available, the researcher did a physical count of the stores. This study focused mainly on clothing and grocery retail operations. The retailers selected include chain stores such as Jet, Exact, and independent stores like Checksave.

3.5 Sampling method

According to Dhivyadeepa (2015: 7) sampling is a research process involving special methods for selecting a group of individuals from a population for the execution of the research study and it is an important component of research. He further states that sampling is important as it significantly impacts on the quality of results/findings. Hair, Page and Brunsveld (2019) define sampling as a method used by researchers to determine the sample for the study. There are various methods of sampling that a study can employ, namely probability and non-probability sampling.

Nishishiba, Jones and Kraner (2013: 79) assert that probability sampling is the process in which the selection of respondents is directed by the probability principle. The Probability Principle ensures that each element of the target population has an equal and measurable chance of being part of the sample. Cooper, Schindler and Sun (2006) listed some examples of probability sampling, namely simple random sampling, systematic, stratified, cluster and multiphase sampling.

On the contrary, non-probability sampling techniques depend on the subjective judgement of the researcher when selecting units from the population to be included in the sample. Examples of this sampling method are convenience sampling, judgmental sampling, quota sampling and snowball sampling (Zikmund *et al.* 2013: 395). Given that the population of retailers (52 stores) is feasible to investigate, the researcher adopted the census method whereby the management of all 52 stores will take part in the study, a questionnaire will be distributed to every store manager or assistant manager in those stores.

This study followed the probability sampling method in recruiting participants from the customers in Flagstaff in conducting focus groups. The aspect of probability sampling method chosen is random sampling. Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler (2014) articulate that random sampling is the process of choosing a subset of individuals from a broader population so that each person in the population has an equal and independent probability of being included in the sample. Simple random sampling was used to select participants with no specific pattern or criteria. This was done to ensure that the section was unbiased.

For this study, no sampling was done with stores, as the researcher employed a census method.

3.6 Sample size

Sample size refers to the number of participants a study will include. It can be quite challenging to define the sample size and a number of quantitative and qualitative premeditations need to be taken into consideration. The cost of every bit of data collected is influenced by the sample size; the bigger the sample size, the higher the costs (Malhotra, Birks and Wills 2010). Kent (2020) explains sample size as the number of respondents which form the foundation for a research study and are used and recorded into an information format.

Catherine (2002) mentions that it is always advisable that if a study employs a quantitative research approach, the size of the sample selected must be greater to achieve accurate results. Even so, researchers must take into consideration financial limitations and possible timeframes when designing a sample size. Sekaran and Bougie (2016) observed that from 30 to 500 respondents is what is regarded/ considered an appropriate sample size. For this research all 52 retail stores were taken into consideration to obtain quantitative data, whereas the sample for the focus group interviews consisted of thirty (30) respondents to participate in the study.

3.7 Measuring instruments

Jonson and Christensen (2008) define measuring instrument as procedures taken to determine the level, ability, and scale/size of something. These are measures used by researchers to distinguish dissimilarities in opinions and understandings amongst individuals of the selected sample size (Bryman and Bell 2011). A measuring instrument simply evaluates differences. The research instruments that can be employed for data collection are questionnaires, interviews, observations, standardised tests, and documentations (Saunders and Lewis 2017).

For the purpose of this research, a questionnaire was employed for collecting quantitative data from retail stores and focus groups were conducted to collect qualitative data from customers. The use of questionnaires in surveys such as this one is supported by (Zikmund and Babin 2015).

3.7.1 Design of the questionnaire

Taduvana (2017: 38) defines a questionnaire as a set of questions constructed and distributed to respondents to obtain appropriate data for the purpose of accomplishing the study's objectives. Brace (2013) states that in the process of collecting data, the questionnaire is an accurate method of gathering relevant information in research. Questions can be categorised into three types of questions, namely close ended (structured) questions, open-ended (unstructured) questions and semi-structured questions. This study used a structured questionnaire to collect data. Closed and open-ended questions were used as they provide participants with a number of possible answers that they can choose to respond to (Colton and Covert 2007).

When constructing a questionnaire Maree and Pietersen (2007) assert that researchers should take into consideration the nature of the data that the questions will generate and the methods that will be used when analysing the data. Struwig and Stead (2013) emphasise that when constructing a questionnaire, serious consideration must be given to how the questionnaire appears, specifically the phrasing of questions, the classification of questions and the types of responses. Most questionnaires generally include an introduction to the study respondent demographics/background questions, practical questions, it should also address minor concerns before questionnaire is administered and the procedure utilized in selecting participants (Blair *et al.* 2014). The study objectives and the literature were the immediate sources of the questions posed. This was done to make sure the research objectives were addressed in the questions and to guarantee the validity of the study's findings.

3.7.2 Advantages of a questionnaire

Kumar (2011:) articulates that collecting data using questionnaires saves costs and time and is a relatively convenient method to gather data compared to interviews. Questionnaires allow for anonymity as the researcher and participant do not interact personally; in the event that they are required to interact, if the conditions under which the research is conducted permits a participant's information to be withheld, then their identity will not be disclosed. This is an effective instrument of collecting data where a questionnaire may consist of sensitive questions. Furthermore, Blair, Czaja and Blair

(2013: 57) concur that the advantages in collecting data through questionnaires is less time consuming and minimum costs are incurred in the process.

3.7.3 Disadvantages of a questionnaire

According to Kothari (2004: 100) when questionnaires are not completed properly, the probability of revisiting the participant is low and the reason that some unanswered questions cannot be identified. The great disadvantage in using a questionnaire is that once the questionnaires have been disseminated, there is inflexibility caused by the challenge to alter the method and the possibility of ambiguous responses or no responses at all to some questions. Also, this method makes it difficult to properly determine participants that demonstrate accuracy when responding to questions.

3.7.4 Characteristics of a good questionnaire

A good questionnaire should be printed in order, with a visible and fine font, should contain no grammatical or spelling errors and should be user friendly (Maree and Pietersen 2007). The instructions on a questionnaire must be easy to comprehend; the paper on which it is printed must be of good quality and must include brief supporting statements for those respondents that may take long completing the questions. Payne and Payne (2004: 186) agree that questions should be phrased and structured in a manner that respondents will be able to understand and respond to. In addition, Wagner, Kawulich and Garner (2012: 109) state that a good questionnaire should consist of both open-ended and closed-ended question, thus the responses will not be restricted to the options the researcher has presented. The questionnaire for this study demonstrates these elements discussed above. This was ensured through the pre-testing process, where participants pointed out incomprehensible and unclear sections, which gave the researcher the opportunity to correct those errors.

3.8 Focus groups

Focus groups are one of the main techniques of qualitative research and are defined as a selection of a small group of people with common characteristics to participate in a discussion for market research purposes and are monitored by the researcher. This

technique allows participants to interact and share their insights and experiences on a product or service for the researcher to gather detailed information from a consumers' point of view (Pollfish 2021). The researcher used the method of focus groups to reduce uncertainty in research.

3.8.1 Advantages and disadvantages of focus groups

This research method offers several advantages that aid the researcher in understanding the research problem better and will also help in reaching satisfactory conclusions. However, researchers ought to consider some shortcomings when choosing this research method. The advantages and disadvantages of focus groups are tabulated below:

Table 3.2 Advantages and disadvantages of focus groups

Advantages of Focus Groups	Disadvantages of Focus Groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When individuals participate in a discussion, they provide essential information that takes away any ambiguity within the subject matter. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The opinions of a small group that is equivalent to the target population are valuable but may not be clarifying for a larger population.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enables researchers to analyse perceptions, beliefs, and feelings of their participants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruiting people to participate in focus groups discussions takes a significant amount of time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus groups enable researchers to observe and study their participants' behaviors, e.g., facial expressions, body language etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some participants can influence the discussion, even deviate it into an irrelevant direction.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus group sessions take less than 90 minutes. Thus, they produce results quickly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It also takes time to navigate different demographic characteristics.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not every question has to be planned in advance; researchers can simply generate new question during the discussions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As in any discussion, certain participants will be dominant, while others are less conversational.
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Source: Pollfish (2021)

Focus group discussions were conducted with customers, where they were intercepted at shopping facilities around Flagstaff. Six focus group discussions consisting of 5 participants in each group were conducted. The focus groups did not run concurrently and were not completed on the same day. Selecting customers around shopping facilities was a way to ensure that participants were actual customers at Flagstaff stores. The guidelines used while conducting focus groups and responses from customers indicated that participants had knowledge of what digital marketing was used in stores. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants before commencing with the discussions and respondents consented verbally to taking part in the study. The researcher recorded the conversation and deleted the files after data analysis was completed. Ethical clearance was obtained prior to the commencement of the research. Focus groups are appropriate for this research because they are the most accurate way to find out more detailed information on perceptions, insights, attitudes, experiences, and views of the public (Nyumba, Wilson, Derrick and Mukherjee 2018).

3.9 Pretesting

Pretesting is a method used to examine the research instrument before using it in the actual data collection (Perneger *et al.* 2015). Sharma and Bansal (2020) describe pretesting as a process that takes up a small number of respondents to evaluate the performance and understanding of a questionnaire before it is distributed to the target audience. Furthermore, it gives the researcher an opportunity to make corrections on any issues that were encountered during the pre-test. In addition, pretesting is an essential procedure in research in designing a satisfactory questionnaire that encourages participants to respond positively and accurately which expedites the data capturing process (Paneerselvam 2004: 102).

A pre-test was conducted amongst a selective of five (5) retail operators to complete the process. The retailers who participated in the pretesting process were not included

when actual data was collected. The purpose of the pre-test was to determine if the population sample would comprehend the designed answer choices and questions as intended by the researcher and is capable of responding accurately to the questionnaire. This gave the researcher an opportunity to eliminate or amend any inaccurate, ambiguous, and incomprehensible questions. The findings of the pre-test revealed a few grammatical errors which were corrected. The findings also revealed that retailers required explanation on some of the questions, this prepared the researcher for the actual data collection.

3.10 Data collection

According to Olsen (2011) data collection is the process of gathering and evaluating information on variables of interest in an organized way to answer research questions, test hypothesis and evaluate results. Burns and Bush (2006) identified 2 forms of data collection, namely the primary and secondary data. Primary data refers to data collected by the researcher specifically for an ongoing study, whereas secondary data discusses information that was previously gathered by a person for other purposes different from the researcher's current study. Primary data can be collected in various ways, whether by means of surveys, interviews (personal or telephonically) and electronically i.e., using google forms (Mujis 2004: 41).

Self-administrated questionnaires were issued to 52 participants (retail managers/ retail business operators) in Flagstaff to collect primary data for this study. This required that the researcher visit the stores to distribute questionnaires and observe until the questionnaires were completed. Prior to visiting the stores, appointments were made with the respective retail business operators or individuals in managerial positions of those stores. One questionnaire was distributed individually to stores whilst the researcher supervised that process and collected the completed copies of the questionnaires.

Focus groups were conducted with members of the public or general customers at public gatherings around shopping facilities in Flagstaff. Participants were informed of the purpose of the discussion and volunteers took part in the study. A group constituted of 5 individuals to allow better control of the group. A total of 30 participants took part in the discussions.

3.11 Validity and reliability/ trustworthiness

3.11.1 Validity

Sekaran and Bougie (2016) discuss validity as the extent of how comprehensive a specific concept is evaluated with the research instrument. In addition, Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2009) explain that validity is the extent to which the outcomes of research correctly represent what is happening in the situation.

To ensure validity of data, questionnaires were translated into IsiXhosa so that respondents may have a better understanding of questions. This is corroborated by Pitchforth and Van Teijlingen (2005: 1) assertions, that cross-cultural research often requires interpretation or translation to enhance communication between a researcher and a participant. A pilot study was conducted with five participants (Store Managers) in order to ensure validity of the questions in the questionnaire.

In addition, Bernard and Bernard (2013) and Wilson (2014: 109) cite four different forms of validity, namely:

- Construct validity- this form indicates the validity of the theoretical construct of questions and examines whether the instrument measures the constructs it is designed to. It should further validate its fundamental concept and why and how it works the way it does and what it measures. To ensure construct validity the researcher developed a measuring instrument based on relevant existing literature. The questionnaire designed includes relevant questions that measure the uses of digital marketing.
- Internal validity- ensures that the outcomes of research correspond with reality. To ensure internal validity for this study, the researcher used triangulation by confirming findings using other sources of data such as books, journal articles, and observation of the use of digital marketing by rural businesses.
- Criterion validity- criterion accurately indicates a construct using a basic principle. The validity of an instrument is measured by assessing scores with another measure that a researcher believes to be of the same construct.

- Content validity- when all probable aspects of a research study are included, a measure is then regarded to have content validity. It also discusses the accuracy of the measuring instrument in being able to cover aspects in the construction of a questionnaire.

3.11.2 Reliability

Sarantakos (2005) on the other hand defines reliability as the degree to which a measurement yields sound results when assessments are made in a repetitive manner. It deals with the accuracy, consistency or repeatability of a measure or instrument. Sarantakos (2017) provides the 3 types of reliability below:

- Stability reliability- also referred to as Test-retest, is related to reliability over time on the same group of people. It establishes the ability of the instrument to yield reliable results even when it operates at different time zones. To measure stability, the researcher developed a questionnaire to measure the intellectual capacity of a group of participants and conducted the same test on the same group of participants at two different times. The results were far too different. To improve stability, the researcher reconstructed the questionnaire, and the questions were formulated in a way that response will not be influenced by the respondents' frame of mind or attentiveness.
- Representative reliability- it assesses the reliability of the measure when employed using different populations from the primary target population for the study.
- Equivalence reliability- this form is used to determine the consistency and reliability of the results across all measures.

3.12 Data analysis

Data analysis is defined as a way of bringing order, structure and meaning to a mass of collected data (De Vos *et al.* 2011). Luigi *et al.* (2012) describes data analysis as the addition of value to raw collected data. According to Kothari (2004) data analysis approach is mainly concerned with examining hypotheses for drawing interpretation

and to estimate yet unknown values of constraints of the population in cases of survey data.

For the purposes of this research, the researcher used version 27.0 of Statistical Package for Social Scientist (SPSS) to analyse quantitative data from the stores. Thematic analysis- a method used in analysing qualitative data was used to analyse data from focus group discussions made up of customers. This is a good approach when the researcher wants to examine people's opinions, views, experience, knowledge and understanding on a matter (Caulfield 2020). As such, this study sought to assess the public's perceptions on the impact of the use digital marketing in retail stores. Themes and sub-themes were identified from the proceedings of the discussions.

3.13 Delimitations

Delimitations refer to the boundaries of the research study set by the researcher (Theofanidis and Fountouki 2018). This study was limited to only the retail sector of the rural Flagstaff community in Eastern Cape. Retail business operators or individuals in managerial positions, and customers took part in this study.

3.14 Limitations

Mills and Gay (2019) refer to limitations as characteristics of a research project that cannot be controlled by the researcher and have a negative impact on the results of the study. Some focus group participants had less knowledge about digital marketing; therefore, they had problems in answering questions to their full ability. Other respondents, both customers and retail store staff were not fluent in English, nor did they fully understand the language. The researcher had to translate questionnaires to isiXhosa where necessary. In addition to these limitations, though the study refers to the rural component of Flagstaff, the area is not entirely rural. The smaller part of the area is urban, and the results may not be purely based on rural characteristics of South Africa as elements of the urban settings may have infiltrated into the study. As a result, the findings may not be generalised to represent other rural areas which have their unique characteristics.

3.15 Anonymity and confidentiality

Shamoo and Resnik (2009) state that anonymity means that the research does not collect information that identifies the respondent or that the research cannot associate the identity of the participants with research responses. Whereas confidentiality refers to the principle of privacy, it is an assurance given to a person that what they have discussed will not be repeated to another without their consent. In order to ensure anonymity in this study, the identity of the participants completing the questionnaires and taking part in interviews were not disclosed; nevertheless, pseudonyms were used where necessary.

3.16 Ethical considerations

According to Shamoo and Resnik (2009) ethical consideration refers to an accumulation of ethics and principles that address questions of what is good and bad in human affairs. The respect and dignity of respondents for the research was properly maintained throughout. The research abided by ethical standards set by the Durban University of Technology through the IREC committee (Approved-Ethics Level 2). Permission to collect data was obtained from the management of the respective retail outlets. Participants were issued with a letter of information and consent to indicate that they have agreed to take part in the study.

3.17 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research methodology employed for this study. The process of research is described in depth, including tools that were used to gather and analyse data. The research design followed in this study is descriptive in nature and it followed a mixed method approach. Quantitative data was obtained from the stores using a questionnaire as the instrument and qualitative data obtained from the general customers using focus group discussions as the research instrument as well. This study had two populations, one group was made up of retailers operating in Flagstaff and the other population group was made up of the members of the public (customers). The researcher adopted the census method whereby all the stores participated in the study, a questionnaire was distributed to every store manager or assistant manager in

those stores.

To ensure the validity of questions in the questionnaire, a pre-test was conducted amongst a selection of five (5) retail operators to complete a questionnaire. The researcher used version 27.0 of Statistical Package for Social Scientist (SPSS) to analyse quantitative data and thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data. Furthermore, the researcher clearly identified limitations and the study was delimited to Flagstaff. Anonymity was ensured by concealing the identity of the participants who completed the questionnaires and those that participated in the focus group discussions; and ethical considerations were maintained throughout. The next chapter (Chapter 4) focuses on data presentation and analysis.

CHAPTER 4: STATEMENT OF FINDINGS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE DATA

4.1 Introduction

The research methodology employed in this study was presented in the previous chapter. This chapter presents the results and discusses the findings from the data obtained from the retail stores through questionnaires, and from members of the public through focus group discussions. The chapter commences by a presentation of quantitative data collected from 52 retail stores in Flagstaff using a questionnaire as the instrument. That data was analysed using SPSS version 27.0. The results will present the descriptive statistics in the form of graphs, cross tabulations, and other figures. Inferential techniques include the use of correlations and chi square test values, which are interpreted using the p-values. The second part of the chapter shows a presentation and discussion of qualitative data collected using focus groups as the instrument. Thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data. Lastly, overall conclusions from both qualitative and quantitative findings will be drawn, thus giving a more complete picture of how the research questions were addressed.

4.2 Quantitative data analysis

This section shows the analysis of quantitative data. In total, 52 questionnaires were dispatched to retail operators in Flagstaff and 45 were returned, which gave an 87% response rate. Six (6) questionnaires were rejected because the retail operator did not consent to taking part in the study. The research instrument consisted of 20 items, with a level of measurement at a nominal or an ordinal level. The questionnaire was divided into 4 sections which measured various themes as illustrated below:

Section 1 – Biographical data

Section 2 – Impact of digital marketing

Section 3 – Use of digital marketing

Section 4 – Benefits of digital marketing

4.2.1 Reliability Statistics

The two most important aspects of precision are reliability and validity. Reliability is computed by taking several measurements on the same subjects. A reliability coefficient of 0.60 or higher is considered as “acceptable” for a newly developed construct. The table below reflects the Cronbach’s alpha score for all the items that constituted the questionnaire.

Table 4. 1: Cronbach’s alpha coefficient

Sections		Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
2	Digital marketing impact on the business	4	0.737
3	Use of digital marketing by retail businesses in the rural areas of Flagstaff	4	0.739
4	Extent to which retail businesses in rural areas benefit from digital marketing in sustaining their businesses	4	0.642
Overall		12	0.886

The reliability scores for all sections (0.886) exceeded the recommended Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.60. This indicates a degree of acceptable, consistent scoring for these sections of the research instrument.

4.2.2 Factor Analysis

According to Moonsamy and Singh (2014) factor analysis is a statistical technique whose main goal is data reduction. A typical use of factor analysis is in survey research, where a researcher wishes to represent a number of questions with a small number of hypothetical factors. For example, as part of a national survey on political opinions, participants may answer three separate questions regarding environmental policy, reflecting issues at the local, state, and national level. Each question, by itself, would be an inadequate measure of attitude towards environmental policy, but *together* they may provide a better measure of the attitude. Factor analysis can be used to establish whether the three measures do, in fact, measure the same thing (Gay, Mills and Airasian 2012). If so, they can then be combined to create a new variable, a factor score variable that contains a score for each respondent on the factor. Factor techniques are applicable to a variety of situations. A researcher may want to know if the skills required to be a decathlete are as varied as the ten events,

or if a small number of core skills are needed to be successful in a decathlon. One need not believe that factors actually exist in order to perform a factor analysis, but in practice the factors are usually interpreted, given names, and spoken of as real things.

The matrix table/s is preceded by a summarised table that reflects the results of KMO and Bartlett's Test. The **KMO and Bartlett's Test** table below shows two tests that indicate the suitability of data for structure detection. The **Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy** is a statistic that indicates the proportion of variance in the variables that might be caused by underlying factors. High values (close to 1.0) generally indicate that a factor analysis may be useful with the data. If the value is less than 0.50, the results of the factor analysis probably won't be very useful.

Bartlett's test of sphericity tests the hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix, which would indicate that the variables are unrelated and therefore unsuitable for structure detection. Small values (less than 0.05) of the significance level indicate that a factor analysis may be useful with the data. Factor analysis is done only for the Likert scale items. Certain components may be divided into finer components. This is explained below in the rotated component matrix.

Table 4. 2: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Sections		Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity		
			Approx. Chi-Square	df	Sig.
2	Digital marketing impact on the business	0.732	38.295	6	0.000
3	Use of digital marketing by retail businesses in the rural areas of Flagstaff	0.728	39.542	6	0.000
4	Extent to which retail businesses in rural areas benefit from digital marketing in sustaining their businesses	0.627	25.420	6	0.000

All of the conditions are satisfied for factor analysis.

That is, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy value should be greater than 0.500 and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity sig. value should be less than 0.05.

Table 4. 3: Rotated Component Matrix

SECTION 2	Component
	1
2.1 Digital marketing plays an important role in developing, maintaining, and improving the brand's perception.	0.736
2.2 Digital marketing plays a significant role in designing mobile web notification, creating websites for online shopping, wall displays of promotional items in store.	0.701
2.3 Digital marketing influences customer's buying decision.	0.753
2.4 Digital marketing aids in targeting a business' market more effectively based on demographics, geographical area, and the public's behaviour.	0.822
SECTION 3	Component
	1
3.1 Digital marketing tools are used to send messages to customers, messages that are usually about a sales pitch and promotions.	0.852
3.2 Digital marketing tools are used to keep engaging with the customers, making the business more reliable and your brand stronger.	0.770
3.3 Online communication from the company motivates purchase from customers and potential customers.	0.784
3.4 Digital is used to keep up with the main trends in the retail industry.	0.567
SECTION 4	Component
	1
4.1 Digital marketing is cost effective and fast in reaching the target market.	0.639
4.2 Digital marketing grows sales through online shopping.	0.840
4.3 Digital marketing attracts new customers and retains existing ones	0.704
4.4 Digital marketing has been of advantage in the business in order to stay ahead of competitors.	0.582

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 1 components extracted.

With reference to table 4.3 above, the principal component analysis was used as the extraction method, and the rotation method was Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. This is an orthogonal rotation method that minimizes the number of variables that have high loadings on each factor. It simplifies the interpretation of the factors. Factor analysis/loading show inter-correlations between variables.

Items of sections that loaded similarly imply measurement along a similar factor. An examination of the content of items loading at or above 0.5 (and using the higher or highest loading in instances where items cross-loaded at greater than this value) effectively measured along the various components. The statements that constituted each section loaded perfectly along a single component. This implies that the statements that constituted these sections perfectly measured what it set out to measure.

4.2.3 Biographical data

This section summarises the biographical characteristics of the respondents. The research primarily focused on a number of biographic variables, which are discussed below.

Figure 4.1: Number of years in business

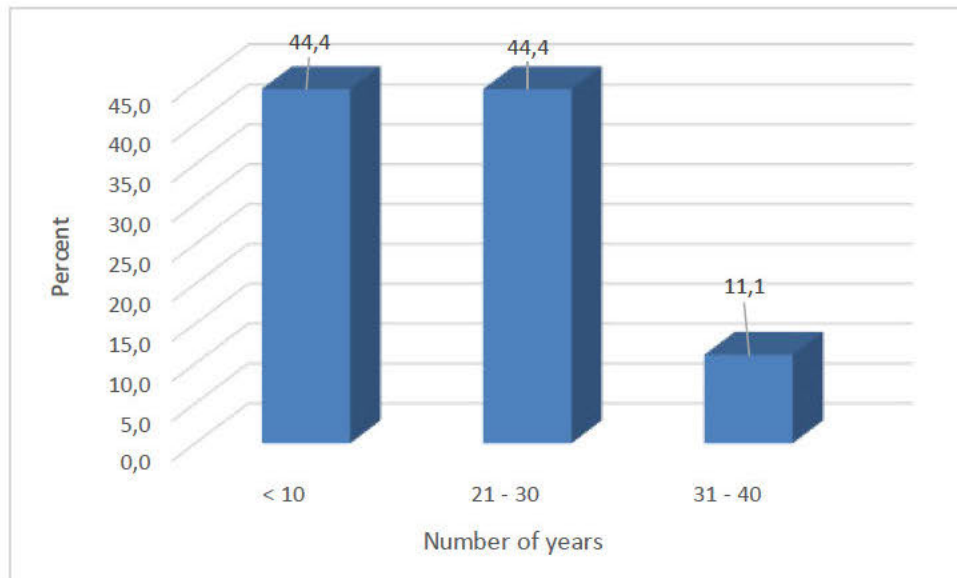
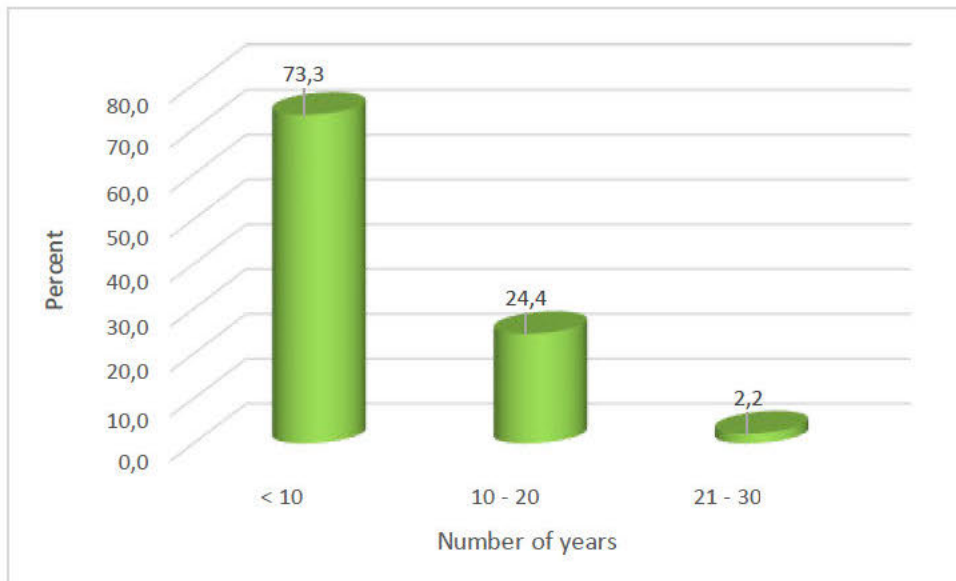


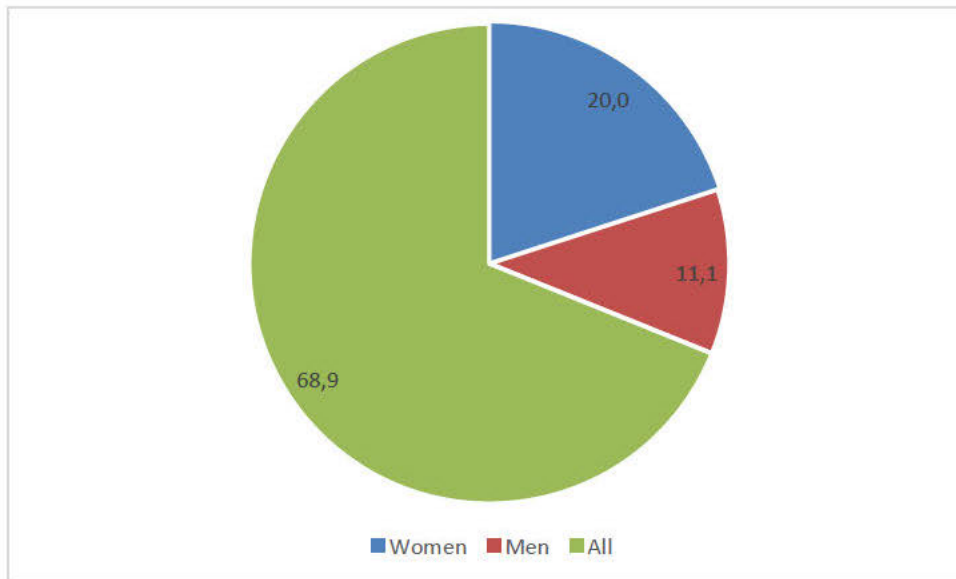
Figure 4.1 above indicates the time the business has been in existence. There are similar numbers of businesses that had been in existence for less than 10 years and businesses that had existed for 21 and 30 years. Approximately a tenth of the businesses had been in existence between 31 to 40 years ($p = 0.007$). All of the businesses are in the formal sector. As depicted in Figure 4.1, 44.4% of the respondents indicated that organisations have been in retail business for less than 10 years in Flagstaff and a matching 44.4% shows that there are retailers who have been in existence for 21 to 30 years in this same area. These figures only show the period of existence of the retail business in Flagstaff that took part in the survey, notwithstanding that some businesses were in operation in other areas before operating in Flagstaff. The figure also shows that a smaller number (11.1%) of retailers have been operating for more than 3 decades in Flagstaff. This level of experience in the industry suggests that rich responses about the sustainability of the retail sector as proposed in the aim of the study will be obtained.

Figure 4.2: Number of years employed in the retail industry



The figure (4.2) above indicates the length of service of the respondents in those businesses. Approximately three quarters of the respondents (73.3%) have been employed in the retail sector for less than 10 years ($p < 0.001$). As illustrated in figure 4.2 above, 24.4% of the respondents have been working in Flagstaff retail businesses for 10 to 20 years, while 2.2% of the respondents have been in employment for 21 to 30 years. As a result, these figures show that the respondents are well experienced in the retail sector and can provide informed responses that can enrich the findings of the study.

Figure 4.3: Target market



More than two-thirds of the respondents (68.9%) target their products across all categories of customers ($p < 0.001$) in terms of gender. A fifth targets women (20.0%), with 11.1% targeting only men customers. This highlights that an extensive number of the retailers' target market include both men and women and some few retailers offer product and services that are mainly for women only (20%). The lowest being men (11.1%), this reveals that there is a small number of clothing retailers in Flagstaff that only cater for men. The study focused mainly on clothing and grocery retail operations. Those who target a specific gender are mainly running clothing retailing businesses.

The sections that follow analyses the scoring patterns of the respondents per variable per section as reflected in the questionnaire and as aligned with achieving specific objectives of the study. Where applicable, levels of disagreement (negative statements) were collapsed to show a single category of "Disagree". A similar procedure was followed for the levels of agreement (positive statements). This is allowed due to the acceptable reliability levels. The results are first presented using summarised percentages for the variables that constitute each section. Results are then further analysed according to the importance of the statements.

4.2.4 Section analysis

4.2.4.1 The role of digital marketing

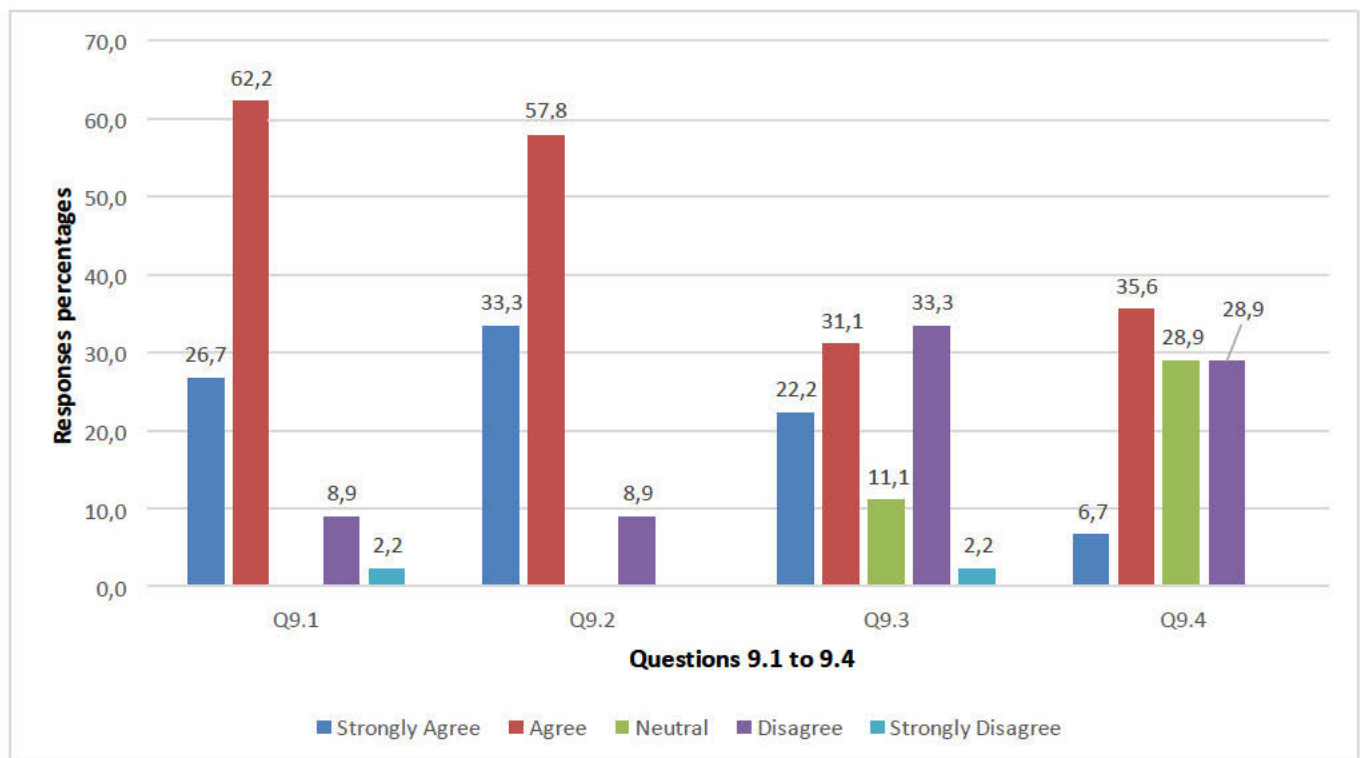
This section deals with use of digital marketing and its role on the sustainability of the formal retail sector in Flagstaff. The table (4.3) below summarises the scoring patterns of the impact of digital marketing on retail businesses.

Table 4.4: The role of digital marketing in retail businesses

Questions		Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Chi Square p-value
		Co unt	Ro w N %	Co unt	Ro w N %	Co unt	Ro w N %	Co unt	Ro w N %	Co unt	Ro w N %	
9.1	Digital marketing plays an important role in developing, maintaining, and improving the brand's perception.	12	26.7%	28	62.2%	0	0.0%	4	8.9%	1	2.2%	< 0.001
9.2	Digital marketing plays a significant role in designing mobile web notification, creating websites for online shopping, wall displays of promotional items in store.	15	33.3%	26	57.8%	0	0.0%	4	8.9%	0	0.0%	< 0.001
9.3	Digital marketing influences customer's buying decision.	10	22.2%	14	31.1%	5	11.1%	15	33.3%	1	2.2%	0.003
9.4	Digital marketing aids in targeting a business' market more effectively based on demographics, geographical area, and the public's behaviour.	3	6.7%	16	35.6%	13	28.9%	13	28.9%	0	0.0%	0.035

The information in this table is graphically illustrated in the following figure (4.4) and explained thereafter.

Figure 4.4: Role of digital marketing



The following patterns are observed in Figure 4.4:

- All statements show (significantly) higher levels of agreement whilst other levels of agreement are lower (but still greater than levels of disagreement)
- There are no statements with higher levels of disagreement
- One statement has a large neutral response (Q9.4)
- The significance of the differences is tested and shown in the table (4.3) above.

Q9.1 and Q9.2 have similar and high levels of agreement (agree and strongly agree). As can be seen from Figure 4.4, Q9.1 shows that 62.2% and 26.7% of the total sample agreed and strongly agreed that digital marketing plays an important role in developing, maintaining, and improving the brand's perception. This means digital marketing has an important role to play in terms of influencing the perception towards a brand. The role ranges from developing the right perceptions towards a brand to maintaining and improving that perception. Brand perception has a huge impact on the sustainability of the organisation. As such, digital marketing can be used to sustain

retail operations in this area by influencing favourable perceptions of corporate brands of organisations.

On Q9.2, 57.8% agreed and 33.3% strongly agreed that digital marketing plays a significant role in designing mobile web notification, creating websites for online shopping and wall displays of promotional items in-store. This shows that digital marketing also supports online shopping, can generate web notifications that keep customers informed or aware of important developments in the organisation like price discounts or promotion campaigns. Q9.3 and Q9.4 have marginally higher levels of agreement and disagreements, with Q9.4 having a high neutral response at 28.9%. However, this indecision did not exceed any level of agreement/ disagreement. In Q9.3, 33.3% disagreed with the statement “digital marketing influences customer’s buying decision” exceeding the level of agreement (31.1) with this statement.

This level of scoring on the aforementioned statements emphasises the significant role digital marketing has in improving a brand’s perception. This is consistent with Assal (2022) assertion that digital marketing helps to progress a business through the online medium such as the web, consequently reaching many consumers in a second. Numerous small and big retailers are using the web to share information, communicate, and complete transactions to underwrite themselves globally. The internet is a pervasive platform for information, enabling internal and external customers to save costs for businesses and consumers. Also, Rangaswamy *et al.* (2020: 56) indicate that digital marketing offers significant opportunities to retail businesses through improved brand awareness and increased sales. The level of agreement is significantly higher than the other options ($p < 0.001$). Juska (2018: 194) states that the role of digital marketing in retail industry is to develop, maintain and improve brand perception. Retailers in Flagstaff have indicated how they use digital marketing tools for advertising and marketing communication in their businesses. Additionally, Rangaswamy *et al.* (2020: 56) stipulate that digital marketing offers significant opportunities to businesses through lower costs, improved brand awareness and increased sales.

To determine whether the scoring patterns per statement were significantly different per option, a chi square goodness-of-fit test was done. The null hypothesis claims that similar numbers of respondents scored across each option for each statement (one

statement at a time). The alternate states that there is a significant difference between the levels of agreement and disagreement. The results are shown in **table 4.4**. The highlighted sig. values (p-values) are less than 0.05 (the level of significance), it implies that the distributions were not similar. That is, the differences between the way respondents scored (agree, neutral, disagree) were significant.

4.2.4.2 The use of digital marketing in retail businesses

This section deals with use of digital marketing in retail businesses. One of the objectives of the study was to examine the level of understanding and use of digital marketing by retail businesses and customers in the rural areas of Flagstaff. Table 4.5 summarises the scoring patterns of the respondents (stores) use of digital marketing in retail businesses.

Table 4.5: The use of digital marketing by retail businesses

QUESTIONS	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Chi Square p-value
	Cou nt	Ro w N %	Cou nt	Ro w N %	Cou nt	Ro w N %	Cou nt	Ro w N %	Cou nt	Ro w N %	
Q10.1 Digital marketing tools are used to send messages to customers, messages that are usually about a sales pitch and promotions.	17	37.8%	22	48.9%	0	0.0%	6	13.3%	0	0.0%	0.011
Q10.2 Digital marketing tools are used to keep engaging with the customers, making the business more reliable and your brand stronger.	9	20.0%	25	55.6%	2	4.4%	9	20.0%	0	0.0%	< 0.001
Q10.3 Online communication from the company motivates purchase from customers and potential customers.	10	22.2%	23	51.1%	5	11.1%	6	13.3%	1	2.2%	< 0.001
Q10.4 Digital is used to keep up with the main trends in the retail industry.	16	35.6%	28	62.2%	0	0.0%	1	2.2%	0	0.0%	< 0.001

The information in Table 4.5 is graphically depicted in the following figure and explained thereafter.

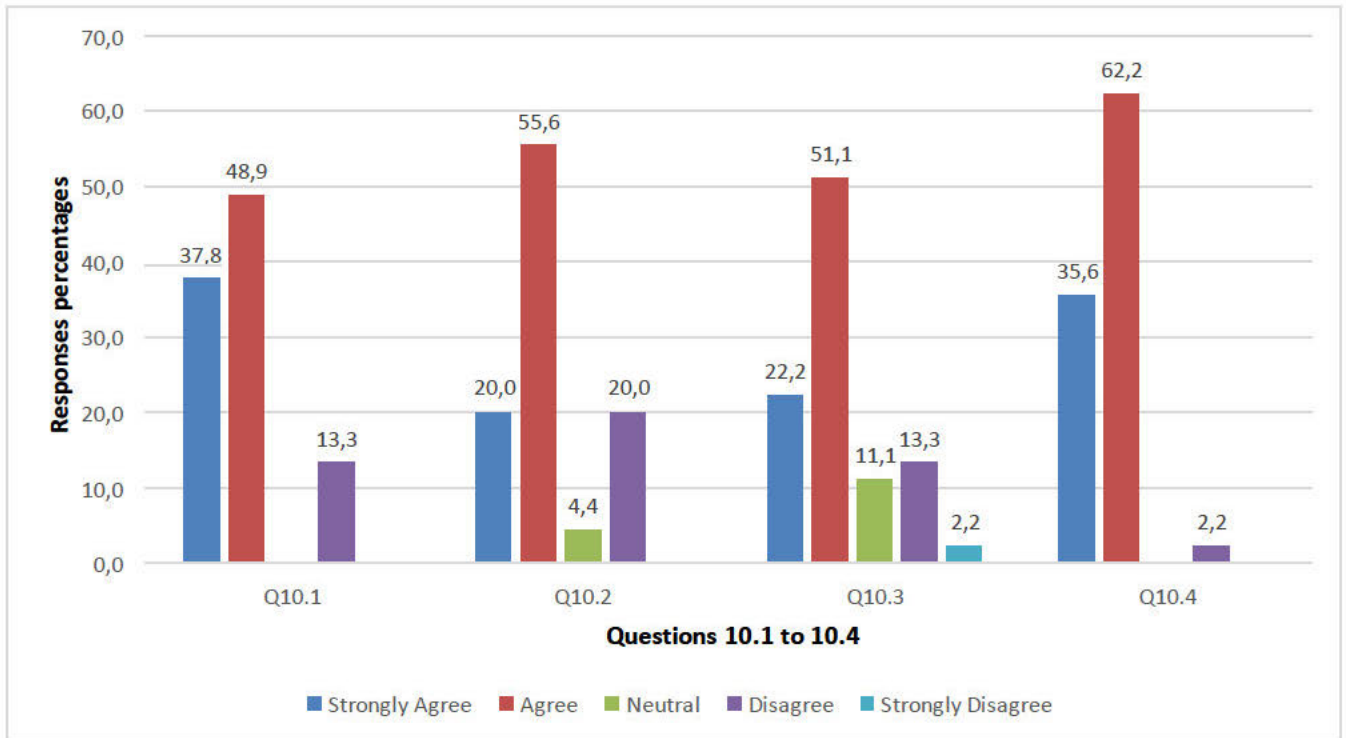


Figure 4.5: Use of digital marketing

As can be seen from figure 4.5 above, the level of agreement is significantly higher for all statements (Agree + Strongly Agree). On Q10.1 48.9% and 37.8% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that they use digital marketing tools to send sales pitch and promotional messages to consumers, Q10.2 shows that 55.6% agreed and 20.0% strongly agreed that they use digital marketing tools to engage with online customers. Q10.3 shows that 51.1% and 22.2% agreed and strongly agreed that customers and potential customers are motivated to make purchases when companies communicate with them online. Lastly, the highest agreement value is 62.2% to the statement “digital marketing is used to keep up with the main trends in the retail industry.” This is consistent with Reddy (2017), who states that digital marketing plays can be used as a tool to keep up to date of new trends in the market and remain competitive in the industry.

This indicates the importance of using of digital marketing in retail businesses and is consistent to a study done by Deloitte (2021) which found that more than 60% of customers interact through multiple channels and irrespective of time, place, and device or medium, they however expect consistency. As a result, retail businesses

must constantly evolve their support models to accommodate this ever-changing landscape.

4.2.4.3 Benefits of digital marketing in sustaining retail businesses

This section deals with the benefits of digital marketing in sustaining retail businesses. One of the objectives of the study was to determine the extent to which retail businesses in rural areas benefit from digital marketing in sustaining their businesses. Table 4.6 summarise the scoring pattern of the benefits of digital marketing in sustaining retail businesses.

Table 4.6: Benefits of digital marketing in sustaining retail businesses

QUESTIONS		Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Chi Square p-value
		Co unt	Row N %	Co unt	Row N %	Co unt	Row N %	Co unt	Row N %	Co unt	Row N %	
Q11.1	Digital marketing is cost effective and fast in reaching the target market.	24	53.3 %	19	42.2 %	2	4.4 %	0	0.0 %	0	0.0 %	< 0.001
Q11.2	Digital marketing grows sales through online shopping.	11	24.4 %	17	37.8 %	10	22.2 %	5	11.1 %	2	4.4 %	0.005
Q11.3	Digital marketing attracts new customers and retains existing ones	10	22.2 %	25	55.6 %	6	13.3 %	4	8.9 %	0	0.0 %	< 0.001
Q11.4	Digital marketing has been of advantage in the business in order to stay ahead of competitors.	7	15.6 %	30	66.7 %	3	6.7 %	5	11.1 %	0	0.0 %	< 0.001

The same information is graphically presented in Figure 4.6 to make the analysis and comparison easier.

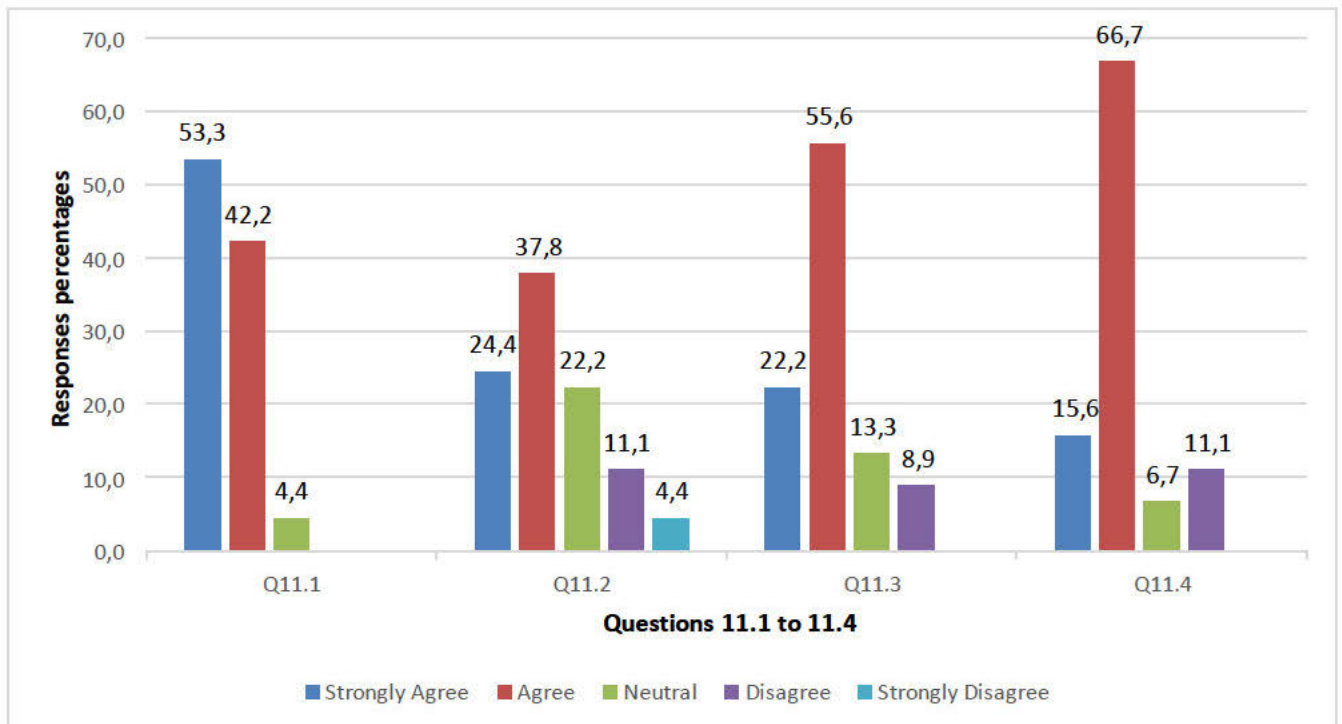


Figure 4.6: Benefits of digital marketing

The level of agreement is significantly higher for all statements here as well. The highest level of agreement is 66.7% of the statement “digital marketing has been of advantage in the business in order to stay ahead of competitors.” This is followed by 55.6% of retailers who agreed that digital marketing attracts new customers and retains existing ones. The graph also reveals that 53.3% strongly agreed that digital marketing is cost effective and fast in reaching the target market. The findings reveal that one of the main benefits of digital marketing in the retail industry is cost effectiveness and its ability to reach the target market rapidly, and to stay ahead of competitors.

Deiss and Henneberry (2020) claim that in the present day, more retail businesses are focusing on channels where the target demographic can be discovered and using digital marketing tactics to build brand awareness, which makes it simpler to find a niche. The new strategy to draw customers and increase awareness is to be open and honest about the brand's objectives, offerings, values, and production process online. The relationship between marketing and sales is clear in the retail industry. The retail industry is experiencing intense rivalry as more and more international web stores pop up every day. Retailers must employ digital marketing strategies to provide the best value to customers in order to increase their competitive edge. Wong (2021) claims

that by combining traditional and retail businesses they are considerably more likely to find, attract, convert, and retain their audience if they use digital platforms in their marketing strategy. Digital marketing strategies are typically more affordable and can provide a larger return on investment than traditional marketing strategies.

4.2.4.4 The effect of digital marketing on retailers' sales revenue

This section deals with the effects of digital marketing retail businesses' sales revenue. Table 4.7 summarises the scoring pattern of **the effect of digital marketing on retailers' sales revenue**.

Table 4.7 Effect of digital marketing on sales revenue

How has the emergence of digital marketing affected sales revenue in your business?						p-value
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Valid	Increased	41	91,1	91,1	91,1	< 0.001
	Decreased	4	8,9	8,9	100,0	
	Total	45	100,0	100,0		

Table 4.7 above depicts that 91.1% retailers indicated that the emergence of digital marketing has increased sales revenue in their businesses, while 8.9% alleged that they noticed a decline in sales. Responses in this category show that digital marketing has increasingly affected the sales revenue. This is because it has helped retailers to effectively target specific audiences to market their products and services, which leads to more sales for their business, thus increased returns. This is consistent with Kannan (2017) assertion that digital marketing aids businesses to gain increased revenues in sales. Sales increase through improved brand perception and the ability to reach numerous prospective customers with promotional messages. Given this ability of digital marketing to impact positively on sales, profitability of the organisation is enhanced, and the organisation can remain in business or can even grow and expand in its operations. Therefore, digital marketing plays a meaningful role in sustaining retail businesses even in the rural settings such as Flagstaff where the empirical findings were collected.

4.2.4.5 The impact of the change/transformation from traditional to digital media on retail businesses

This section deals with the impact of the change/transformation from mainly traditional media use to digital media by retail businesses. Table 4.8 summarise the scoring patterns.

Table 4.8 Impact of the change/transformation from traditional to digital media

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	p-value
Valid	Positively	40	88,9	88,9	88,9	< 0.001
	Negatively	5	11,1	11,1	100,0	
	Total	45	100,0	100,0		

Response in this category was mainly affirmative (88.9%) and supports the fact that digital transformation has positively impacted business and has led to the following organisational benefits: Increased revenue; decreased operating costs; improved customer satisfaction. Wang, Pauleen and Zhang (2016) state that because of the transformation to digital media marketing, experts no longer need to guess at where consumer interest may lie when consumer interest is being tracked on social media. Retailers can be able to search and see what customers around the world are interested in and improve their products and services to gratify those needs and are able to attract new customers who ultimately make a purchase, growing sales on a daily basis. Transformation to digital marketing use presented several benefits to retail operations and retailers expressed good impression of the impact of this transformation.

4.2.4.6 Retail stores that offer online shopping

This section seeks to identify how many retail stores offer online shopping in Flagstaff. The table below summarises the scoring pattern.

Table 4.9 Number of stores that offer online shopping

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	p-value
Valid	Yes	16	35,6	35,6	100,0	0,053
	No	29	64,4	64,4	64,4	
	Total	45	100,0	100,0		

The data presented on the above table shows that 35.6% of retail stores offer online shopping while 64.4% of the respondents maintained that their stores do not offer online shopping because of several common challenges/difficulties associated with new digital technologies. This is relevant to Goga, Paelo and Nyamwena (2019: 35) assertions that online retailing in South Africa has not developed to the extent it has in developed countries because of factors such as delivery costs, postal services, and trust in online payment systems. This low uptake of online shopping in this area may be due to the fact that consumers in rural areas, mostly the elderly, are not digitally well informed, therefore they do not know how to complete orders online; other issues include the inability to deliver products to remote villages/locations, mobile data costs and the fact that the target market is sceptical of shopping online. However, 35.6% of rural retail businesses offering online shopping, this is a significant improvement. This may however be a result of the fact that Flagstaff is not entirely rural, there is a smaller percentage which is predominantly urban. As a result, the results are not purely representative of rural settings of South Africa as elements of urban characteristics managed to infiltrate in the study.

4.2.4.7 The extent to which digital marketing is used for advertising in retail stores

This section aims to determine the extent to which digital marketing is used for advertising in Flagstaff retail stores. Table 4.10 summarises the scoring pattern.

Table 4.10 Use of digital marketing for advertising

To what extent is digital marketing used for advertising in your retail store?						
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	p-values
Valid	1-20%	12	26,7	26,7	26,7	0,005
	21-40%	17	37,8	37,8	64,4	
	41-60%	8	17,8	17,8	82,2	
	61-80%	6	13,3	13,3	95,6	
	81-100%	2	4,4	4,4	100,0	
	Total	45	100,0	100,0		

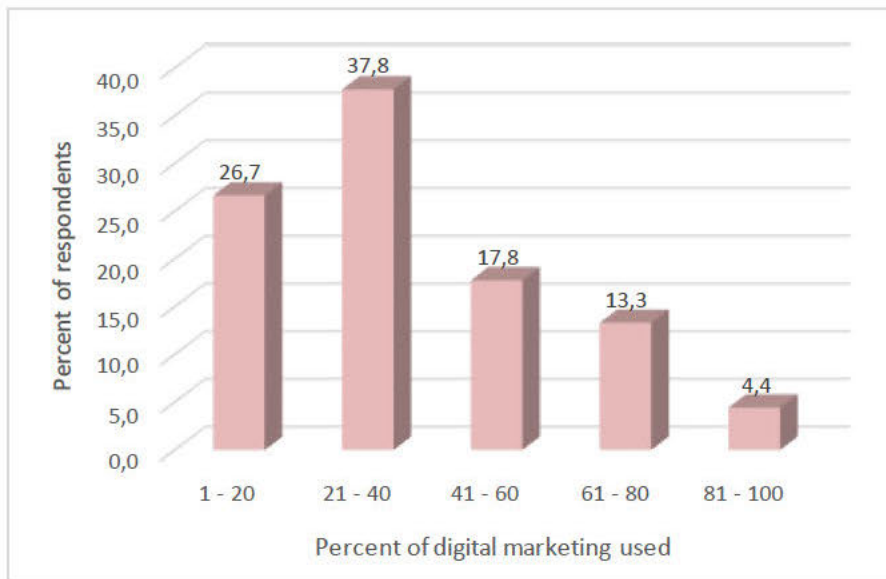


Figure 4.7 Amount of digital marketing used

The highest responses in this category were 37.8% of respondents who revealed that the amount of digital marketing used for advertising in their store is 21% to 40%, followed by 26.7% who stated that they only include 1% to 20% digital marketing when advertising. The lowest, being 4.4% of respondents, indicated that from 81% to 100% of digital marketing is applied in their advertising. Response in this category illustrates that digital marketing is not being used to a great extent for advertising in Flagstaff retail stores. This means that many retail businesses in rural Flagstaff use traditional advertising methods more than online advertising in order to reach their customers. Evidence shows that there is a digital divide in this area influenced by digital illiteracy, limited internet access, lack of digital marketing knowledge, geographical restrictions and so on. This is in line with Philip and Williams (2019: 2) claim that barriers to the use of digital marketing in rural areas is referred to as a 'digital divide' influenced by opportunities to access and use the internet. Internet connectivity and availability of power supply to support devices can be one of the issues leading to restricted use of digital marketing. About a third of organisations however still make an effort to advertise on online platforms in order to sustain their organisations.

4.2.4.8 Effective digital marketing tools in retail businesses

This section seeks to identify which digital marketing tools are most effective in retail businesses. The table below presents the scoring pattern.

Table 4.11: Effective digital marketing tools

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	p-value
Valid	Emails	21	46,7	46,7	46,7	< 0.001
	Blogs	1	2,2	2,2	48,9	
	Social media	23	51,1	51,1	100,0	
	Total	45	100,0	100,0		

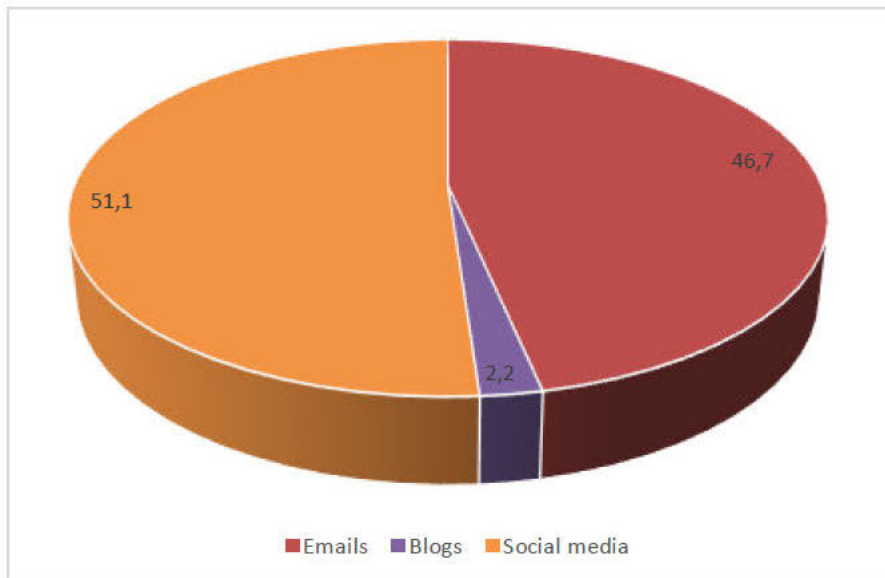


Figure 4.8: Different digital marketing tools

Figure 4.8 reveals that there are high scores for Social media (51.1%) and Emails (46.7%) being the effective digital marketing tools. However, the majority of responses in this category acknowledged social media as the most effective digital marketing tool. This response can be viewed in line with the suggestion of Smart Insights (2019) that the most effective strategy is social media marketing. Correspondingly, Packer (2011) supports these suggestions, maintaining that social media is very diverse since it has different platforms and creates space for retailers and consumers to interact. Retailers can reach a wide range of audiences through these platforms, therefore becoming highly effective. However, the study found that digital marketing is not widely

used in this area as it is adopted by about a third of retailers. This effectiveness is not synonymous with the level of adoption of the platform.

4.2.5 Hypothesis testing

The traditional approach to reporting a result requires a statement of statistical significance. A **p-value** is generated from a **test statistic**. A significant result is indicated with " $p < 0.05$ ". These values are highlighted with a *. A Chi square test of independence was performed to determine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between the variables (rows vs columns).

The null hypothesis states that there is no association between the two. The alternate hypothesis indicates that there is an association.

The table in Appendix B summarises the results of the chi square tests results.

4.2.5.1 Chi Square Tests

The chi-square test results reveal that there are number of significant relationships between the research statements. From the table in Appendix B, the p-value between "Digital marketing plays an important role in developing, maintaining and improving the brand's perception" and "How has the emergence of digital marketing affected sales revenue in your business?" is 0.003. This means that there is a significant relationship between the variables highlighted in yellow. That is, the emergence of digital marketing has had an impact on brand perception.

A significant relationship is evident between "Digital marketing plays an important role in developing, maintaining and improving the brand's perception" and the following statements: "What is the percentage of your total communication budget do you spend on digital marketing?" p-value 0,005 and "How important are online platforms for shopping in your company?" p-value 0.001. This means that the amount of communication budget allocated to digital marketing has an impact on digital marketing's ability to accomplish its role towards brand perception and having online platforms plays an important role on building an improved brand perception.

From the table in appendix B, a significant relationship exists between “Digital marketing plays a significant role in designing mobile web notification, creating websites for online shopping, wall displays of promotional item in store” and the following statements: “To what extent is digital marketing used for advertising in your retail store?”, p-value 0.017, and “How does the growth of your business now in the digital era, compare to when you were only using traditional advertising methods?”, p-value 0.001. These results portray that the use of digital marketing in retail businesses plays a role in designing mobile web notification, creating websites and wall displays of promotional item in store and the growth of businesses are progressive due to new channels of advertising, marketing and communication brought by digital marketing.

Significant relationships also exist between “digital marketing influences customer’s buying decisions” and the following statements: “To what extent is digital marketing used for advertising in your retail store?” p-value 0.028 and “How important are online platforms for shopping in your company?” p-value 0.004. These p-values indicate that advertising through digital marketing channels can influence customers’ perception and ultimately encourage purchasing. Moreover, online shopping services offer convenience, and some customers prefer to shop online, retailers can attain more customers to make purchases from anywhere in the world.

Lastly, significant relationships were revealed between digital marketing tools are used to send messages to customers, messages that are usually about a sale pitch and promotion and the following statements: “How has the change/transformation from traditional to digital media impacted on your business?”, “What is your business’ main purpose for using digital marketing?” and “How does the growth of your business now in the digital era, compare to when you were using only traditional advertising methods?” (p = 0.006, p = 0.006, p= 0.046, respectively). These results indicate that the transformation from traditional to digital media has positively influenced the growth of businesses, and simultaneously presented tools of online marketing that can be used to effectively disseminate information and communicate with customers.

4.2.6 Correlations

Correlation is defined as finding an arrangement or connection between variables in a way that their scores move together in a recognisable arrangement. The scores for both variables can either rise or drop together, or one variable may tend to rise while the other variable drops (Adams and Lawrence 2015: 225). Bivariate correlation was also performed on the (ordinal) data. The results are found in the appendix (Appendix C). The most commonly used bivariate correlation technique is Spearman's correlation. Spearman's correlation measures the degree of relationship between two related variables.

The results indicate the following patterns. Positive values indicate a directly proportional relationship between the variables and a negative value indicates an inverse relationship. All significant relationships are indicated by an asterisk (* or **). Therefore, only those measures indicating significant relationships (highlighted by an asterisk) will be discussed, as shown by the Spearman's correlation calculation.

The correlation value between "Digital marketing plays an important role in developing, maintaining and improving the brand's perception" and "Online communication from the company motivates purchase from customers and potential customers" is **0.508**. This is a directly related proportionality. Respondents indicate that the better the online branding, the more likely sales would increase, and vice versa.

There is a directly proportional relationship between "Digital marketing tools are used to keep engaging with customers, making the business more reliable and your brand stronger" and the statements: "Digital marketing plays an important role in developing, maintaining and improving the brand's perception" ($r = 0.466$, $p = 0.001$), "Digital marketing plays a significant role in designing mobile web notification, creating websites for online shopping, wall displays of promotional items in-store" ($r = 0.474$, $p = 0.001$), "Digital marketing influences customer's buying decision" ($r = 0.352$, $p = 0.018$), "Digital marketing aids in targeting a business' market more effectively based on demographics, geographical area and the public's behaviour" ($r = 0.513$, $p = 0.000$) and "Digital marketing tools are used to send messages to customers, messages that are usually about a sales pitch and promotions" ($r = 0.584$, $p = 0.000$). All of these

preceding correlation values between the statement, “Digital marketing tools are used to keep engaging with customers, making the business more reliable and your brand stronger” and five of the given statements all support the existence of directly proportional relationships. Retailers indicate that the use of digital marketing tools is important in targeting specific audiences, communicating, and engaging with customers in order to build an improved brand perception, create brand awareness, and encourage online purchases from customers. One of the study’s objectives was to examine the level of understanding and use of digital marketing by retail businesses and customers in the rural areas of Flagstaff. These results reveal that digital marketing plays a significant role between retailer and consumers in terms of marketing communication and engagement.

The correlation value between “Digital marketing influences customers’ buying decision” and “Digital marketing plays an important role in developing, maintaining and improving the brand’s perception” is 0.425. This is a directly related proportionality. Respondents indicate that the better consumers’ perception is on a brand, the more likely they are to purchase their products.

Another direct proportional relationship is evident amid “Digital marketing grows sales through online shopping” and the following statements: “Digital marketing plays an important role in developing, maintaining and improving the brand’s perception” ($r = 0.523$, $p = 0.000$), “Digital marketing plays a significant role in designing mobile web notification, creating websites for online shopping, wall displays of promotional items in-store” ($r = 0.505$, $p = 0.000$), “Digital marketing influences customer’s buying decision” ($r = 0.496$, $p = 0.001$), “Digital marketing aids in targeting a business’ market more effectively based on demographics, geographical area and the public’s behaviour” ($r = 0.390$, $p = 0.008$), “Digital marketing tools are used to send messages to customers, messages that are usually about a sales pitch and promotions” ($r = 0.561$, $p = 0.000$), and “Online communication from the company motivates purchases from customers and potential customers” ($r = 0.618$, $p = 0.000$).

These results express the importance of using online platforms for the benefit of retail businesses. Moreover, the importance of online shopping services, improved brand perception, understanding of target audience and consumer interaction was also

highlighted. These results, therefore, address the objective of the study to determine the extent to which retail businesses in rural areas benefit from digital marketing in sustaining their businesses.

4.3 Qualitative data analysis

This section presents and discusses the findings from the focus group discussions conducted with members of the public (customers) for the study. The data was analysed using thematic analysis. The sample for the focus group discussions consisted of thirty (30) respondents. Eighteen (18) were females and twelve (12) were males. The respondents were put into five (5) groups of six (6) participants each and each group discussed a list of variables that were identified as related to the role of digital marketing on the sustainability of the formal retail sector. The focus groups did not run concurrently and were not completed on the same day.

Roller (2019) avers that this method of qualitative data analysis encompasses the interpretation of a data set (such as transcripts from in-depth interviews or focus groups) and classifying patterns in meaning across the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006: 79) thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. Thematic analysis was widely used in the field of psychology. The researcher asked the participants spontaneous questions built around the following questions:

1. What is your understanding of digital marketing?
2. Do you consider social media, YouTube, and blogs as a source of information?
3. Was digital marketing ever used by retail businesses in Flagstaff to influence your buying behaviour?
4. Were you ever exposed to a digital marketing campaign here in Flagstaff?
5. What was your reaction after exposure to digital marketing?
6. Do you think stores here are benefiting from digital marketing to sustain their businesses?
7. Do you find online shopping convenient, or do you prefer shopping in-store?
8. Does digital marketing work in this rural setting?
9. Do you prefer digital communication to traditional communication?
10. What impact does digital marketing have when used by stores in Flagstaff?

11. What are the challenges that hinder you from using the online channels?

4.3.1 Emerging themes from the study

The results and data analysis making up the qualitative phase of this chapter is guided by the research objectives, which are as follows:

- To identify and describe the role of digital marketing in retail businesses in rural areas.
- To examine the level of understanding and use of digital marketing by retail businesses and customers in the rural areas of Flagstaff.
- To determine the extent to which retail businesses in rural areas benefit from digital marketing in sustaining their businesses.
- To assess the public's perceptions on the impact of the use of digital marketing in retail stores.

All participants shared truthful information about their perception and understanding of digital marketing during the discussions. The participants were able to interact and share their insights and experiences on digital marketing, so the researcher was able to gather detailed information from a consumers' point of view. The emerging themes and sub-themes from the study are discussed below.

A quick view of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase guide in completing thematic analysis is provided in the figure below.



Figure 4.9: Braun and Clarke's (2006) Six-Phase Guide to Thematic Analysis

Figure 4.9 above depicts Braun and Clarke (2006) provided a six-phase guide used in the study as a foundation in conducting thematic analysis. The steps are briefly explained below:

1. Phase one: The first step is to familiarise oneself with the data by reading and rereading it while making first notes. The researcher spent a lot of time with the data to ensure this stage of analysis was completed. The focus group discussions were recorded, and the researcher listened to the recordings at least twice to start looking for patterns and meaning while taking notes (Braun and Clarke 2006).
2. Phase two: Generating initial codes, which entailed the methodical coding of noteworthy elements of the data across the full data set and compiling information pertinent to each code (Braun and Clarke 2006). This stage was concentrated on data reduction and the creation of first codes (Attride-Stirling 2001); (Braun and Clarke 2006). The information was organised into digestible and comprehensible textual units, such as sentences, quotes, and single words (Attride-Stirling 2001: 391). The formation of themes was the main focus of this stage; it is the initial and most fundamental level of analysis utilized as an organizational tool (Braun and Clarke 2006).
3. Phase three: Searching for themes, concentrates on grouping codes into potential themes and compiling all pertinent information for each potential subject (Braun and Clarke 2006). The researcher analysed and organized the codes in this stage to find themes (Braun and Clarke 2006). Theme development and code placement were done in this stage.
4. Phase four: Themes were reviewed in step four, and a thematic "map" of the analysis was created by determining whether the themes related to the coded extracts and the complete data set (Braun and Clarke 2006). Using a two-level analysis of the codes, this phase was devoted to improving the draft themes that were discovered in phase three. The first stage required going through each theme's codes to see if a consistent pattern had emerged (Braun and Clarke 2006). The researcher would continue to the second level of analysis if a cohesive pattern was found; otherwise, a decision had to be taken if the codes and information for a given theme or the theme itself presented a problem. In order to finish the second

level analysis, the researcher made sure the themes matched the data and then examined the complete set of data. This afforded the researcher the opportunity to ascertain whether any information had been overlooked that might require additional coding (Braun and Clarke 2006).

5. Phase five: The focus of phase five involved giving each theme a distinct name and definition (Braun and Clarke 2006). This phase was concerned with the ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells. This objective of this stage was to be able to precisely describe the themes of the study and what they are not (Braun and Clarke 2006). To accomplish this, the researcher concentrated on outlining each theme, determining its core, and figuring out which component of the data and research questions each theme corresponds to (Braun and Clarke 2006).
6. Phase six: Writing the report. This is the final stage and the last chance for analysis. choosing compelling instances for the extracts, concluding the analysis of those extracts, connecting the analysis to the research questions and literature, and writing an academic report on the analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). This is the last phase that concentrated on analysing the data and writing a narrative about the data that goes beyond data description and makes an argument in relation to the research questions; while it also provides a brief, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story the data tells - within and across themes (Braun and Clarke 2006).

4.3.1.1 Theme 1: Level of understanding and use of digital marketing

The findings show that most of consumers in Flagstaff do have limited understanding of digital marketing and do not fully use the platforms. The difficulties attributed to the basic use of the internet in rural areas and some of the people not seeing the necessity of using digital technologies is evident in poor, older, and uneducated individuals.

Participants claimed that digital marketing is associated with the new age education best known by the younger generation. This is consistent with the assertion by Lekhanye (2015) that consumers in remote rural areas lack an awareness of digital marketing. Few consumers are aware of digital marketing and know how to use online

networks. These are predominantly in the ages of 18-30, which concurs with Phanthong and Settanaranon (2011) claim that the younger generation have more knowledge and understanding of using the internet and they can easily adopt technological innovations and developments, such as the use of online networks. Consistently, Saemundsson (2012) discovered that younger consumers have more faith in online marketing than older customers.

Theme 1a: Use of digital marketing by retailers

Retailers' use of digital marketing and their ability to influence consumers buying behaviour was the focus in this section. This theme answered the research objective that sought to examine the use of digital marketing by retail businesses and customers in the rural areas of Flagstaff. The research uncovered how consumers purchasing decisions were influenced through the use of digital marketing by retailers in Flagstaff. Some participants shared that they have received SMS communication about in-store promotional deals from some retailers in Flagstaff which propelled them to visit the retailer, this is referred to as mobile marketing. Consumers pointed out that:

Retailers such as Shoprite, Spar, and Boxer use Facebook to post catalogues on their timeline and when one visits their pages, they will be able to see this information and can also subscribe, and then catalogues will be sent to them directly via emails.

This activity alerts customers of products available in-store and of items that are on promotion, thus encouraging and motivating consumers to visit stores to make purchases. Using Blankson, Cowan and Darley's (2018) terms, rural retailers use digital marketing tools as a technique to support, promote, and grow their businesses. Other consumers also revealed that their buying behaviours were influenced by a few retailers in Flagstaff, for example Mr Price, Clicks, PEP, and TFG stores. A few consumers mentioned that when shopping in-store, they have willingly given retailers their email addresses at paying stations when asked if they would like their receipts sent to their emails and have received receipts. They stated that:

Thereafter we'd receive emails from those retailers with promotional information and/or newsletters, and new stock alert which influenced us to visit the retailer again.

Some participants mentioned that when retailers had run out-of-stock on items they had seen online or in-store before, they would opt to shop online, have their orders delivered in-store and pick up their orders in-store. Participants also shared that sometimes during online shopping they would experience difficulties along the process and would seek assistance from their younger siblings or their children in completing the transaction because they are more digitally savvy. Retailers in Flagstaff, according to the findings of the study, indicate that they have used online communication channels to send messages about a sales pitch and promotions, thus motivating purchases from customers and potential customers. By means of their online shopping and reliable in-store service deliveries, it is evident that they have stayed abreast of retail industry trends.

4.3.1.2 Theme 2: Rural retail businesses benefit from digital marketing

Findings from the research reveal that some rural consumers believe Flagstaff retail businesses have used digital marketing and have benefited from it, by means of customer attraction and retention, reach of a wider range of customers, and target market segmentation. This coincides with findings from retail stores in the quantitative data component, in which retailers indicated the benefits of using digital marketing, such as, cost effectiveness, attraction of customers, and being able to meet ever-changing market demands in retail. This is consistent with Parkin (2016); Malthouse *et al.* (2013: 278) assertions that digital marketing is the best tool for turning a product into a brand and has the ability to significantly boost sales, given that businesses are aware of how to use it.

Theme 2a: Exposure to digital marketing

Response in this category indicates that few consumers in Flagstaff have been exposed to digital marketing through Facebook where retailers post catalogues about a promotion in store and new stock alert, they have also been sent marketing communication via mobile phones and email. With their limited knowledge and understanding of the use and benefits of digital marketing, few Flagstaff consumers have adopted the application of digital marketing, especially the younger generation of consumers. This resonates with Shava and Chinyamurindi (2018) assertions that

despite the digital gap, the majority of young people in SA have access to social media and other online channels.

Theme 2b: Reaction after exposure

A further probe to participants who were exposed to digital marketing revealed that, after seeing posts of catalogues from retailers on Facebook and receiving marketing communication via mobile phones and email, it enables them to compare product prices between different retailers and realise which retail stores offers products at affordable rates, thus making it easier to choose which retailers to visit and make purchases from. This is similar to Moeti, Mokwena and Malebana (2021) statement that consumers can utilise online shopping sites to compare prices, choose products, and additional services provide by various retailers. However, the extent of this benefit of digital marketing is limited in Flagstaff due to the low adoption of the platform.

Theme 2c: preference between online and in-store shopping

The majority of participants underline that they have no intended method of shopping preference, but their choice of the method is influenced by factors such as the availability of products and services, and their prices. This corresponds with results from retail stores, where retailers expressed they have no preference between the two methods because it gives customers an alternative. However, they pointed out that the majority of their stores offer shopping in-store rather than online due to the elderly's lack of digital literacy, which makes it difficult for them to place online orders, consequently there is a low use of online shopping in Flagstaff.

4.3.1.3 Theme 3: Public's perception on the impact of digital marketing

The themes under public perception answered the research objective that sought to evaluate the public's perceptions on the impact of the use digital marketing in Flagstaff retail stores. The two sub-themes that emerged from the analysis of data, and that underpin the research objective were: the effectiveness of digital marketing in rural areas, consumer preference between digital and traditional communication.

Theme 3a: Effectiveness of digital marketing in rural areas

Research shows that the adoption of digital marketing in this area is not equivalent to its effectiveness. Flagstaff has relatively poor rural areas, with an underdeveloped network, that is what impedes the effectiveness of digital marketing in a rural setting. According to a study by Guzana and Msosa (2022), the effect of digital marketing across South African retail businesses is undisputable but systems for rural digital marketing have many drawbacks. The proliferation of digital marketing among the rural population is still being hampered by the digital divide and the technological intellectual gap. Therefore, the problem of how to penetrate and substitute traditional marketing with the ideal digital marketing platforms remains uncertain for rural retailers.

Theme 3b: Preference between digital and traditional communication

Response in this category was aimed at understanding consumers' preference between digital and traditional communication. Participants expressed that they prefer traditional communication methods because it is not easy to access information digitally, as some people do not even have TVs. However, people can access information through catalogues, and other forms of print information they can obtain from retail stores in Flagstaff, which means traditional media is still significant to rural populations. Retail businesses' ability to communicate effectively with its customers is crucial to the success of the business. Businesses must know the preferred methods of communication for their current and potential customers (Linoff and Berry 2011).

4.3.1.4 Theme 4: Challenges and barriers in using digital marketing

The next group of themes fall under challenges and barriers in using digital marketing, which answered the research question that sought to explore the challenges and barriers to using digital marketing in rural areas. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) literacy and digital divide, and network coverage, affordability, and language barrier were the themes that emerged to answer this question.

Theme 4a: Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Literacy and Digital divide

The elderly, poor, and uneducated people living in rural areas highlight that they lack access to computers, mobile devices, or mobile phones that are connected to the internet because there are no public centres within the neighbourhood; as a result, they must travel great distances to town in order to use internet cafes. These participants expressed that they lack access and financial resources to equip themselves with digital marketing knowledge, therefore are unable to use online platforms. Respondents shared that:

Flagstaff is a rural area, based on this, online services are not popular. Some people who reside in Flagstaff do not have smart digital devices which limits them as well.

This point clearly showed that some people in rural areas have never used digital devices in their lives and there are no internet cafes within rural communities, so people without smart phones or laptops have to travel in order to access the internet. This affirms the literature provided by Henry (2019), who avers that there are extremely few people who have access to the internet because of the differences between first-and-third world countries and the digital gap between urban and rural areas. Communities, geographical regions, businesses, and individuals do not all have the same access to information and communication technologies or the same opportunities to utilise the internet to enhance their daily lives. Participants expressed that:

Compared to individuals who live in urban regions, people in rural areas have trouble acquiring information. Many depend on the radio and TV and have little or no access to ICTs.

This can be a result of the digital divide's contributing factor, a lack of infrastructure in rural areas. Ngcaba (2012) argues that information is a driving force behind advances in knowledge, but it can only be useful and meaningful if it can be accessed. The lack of information technology in rural areas prevents residents from learning and acquiring the digital skills necessary to employ digital marketing. People with lower levels of education are computer illiterate in rural areas, and this illiteracy prevents them from using ICT tools like the internet and electronic communication, as well as shopping

online and carrying out online transactions. Without access to the internet and computer or smartphones, people are not able to use digital technologies and participate in online activities.

Theme 4b: Network coverage, affordability, and language barrier

The research found that a number of challenges and barriers attributed to using digital marketing in rural areas include the high cost of mobile data, low network coverage, and difficulty in understanding online content language. Some participants claim that they experience poor network connections in some parts of Flagstaff which affect internet connectivity, thus preventing the use of digital marketing. They complain about high prices in mobile data which are continuously rising, becoming more and more unaffordable. Participants also feel like the language of the internet is not easy to comprehend, one must be a regular online user or be educated to be able to navigate through online. Participants shared that:

There are people who have smart phones which can provide them with access to digital platforms, however the internet connection is still a challenge, there is no coverage for LTE and mobile data is expensive, it is better when you buy 'social media data bundles' which exclude internet access so those are the ones we often use.

Response from both retailers and consumers indicate that challenges of the digital divide impede the use of digital marketing to a full extent, as such some stores do not offer online shopping. The study observed that consumers in rural areas either do not have internet access or experience poor mobile network coverage to complete online transactions, hence the low adoption rate for digital marketing tools. Results also show that, due to these limitations many retail businesses are still using traditional methods to communicate with consumers as this method affords rural customer access to information without complications. Consumers as well express that they prefer using methods of traditional communication as it is easy for them to access, instead of digital.

It can be deduced from the findings that challenges faced by rural consumers simultaneously limit the effect of digital marketing tools adopted by retailers.

4.4 Conclusions

This chapter showed the presentation, analysis, and discussion of the findings from this study. SPSS version 27.0 was used to analyse quantitative data. The data was presented in the form of cross tabulations and graphs. Thematic content analysis was used to analyse qualitative data. This chapter offers insights on inferred research findings and responses of the participants. With the support of active literature, this chapter provided statements that answer and clarify the research questions reviewed in Chapter one, and the objectives of this study. The findings of the study underline the role of digital marketing on the sustainability of the formal retail sector in Flagstaff. However, though the platform proves to be effective, there is low adoption or consumption of the platform by members of the public to some challenges revealed by the study. The study also conducted analysis like factor analysis, chi-square tests of independence, Pearson's correlation, and t-tests on gathered data which showed substantial relationships between demographic variables like age, gender, target market and different statements of the research.

Conclusions and recommendation of this research will be presented in the chapter that follows.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter analysed and discussed the finding obtained from this study. This concluding chapter aims to summarise key findings and offer recommendations based on the empirical evidence. Additionally, it offers incisive suggestions on how digital marketing can be employed effectively in sustaining the retail sector. Despite the fact that this study was limited to Flagstaff, EC, given the common features of the market from which all other retailers attract their consumers, the findings can generally be of significance to the use of digital marketing in the retail sector throughout South Africa. The chapter starts with a summary of the theoretical and empirical investigations, then moves on to the analysis on the attainment of the main research objectives for this study. It will highlight some of the main problems this study uncovered. The chapter will then conclude by making recommendations based on the study and offer suggestions on areas for further research.

5.2 Summary of the theoretical orientation

Chapter two discussed the environment of the retail sector within Flagstaff, the role of digital marketing on the sustainability of the formal retail sector, the use of different online channels, the public's perceptions on the impact of the use of digital marketing in retail stores and so forth. According to literature, digital marketing is a significant tool in marketing and advertising within the retail sector; as it aids in reaching a wider audience by integrating online marketing tools and social to traditional marketing channels, increases sales and saves costs. The use of digital marketing can influence customers' buying decision thus increasing the brand's Return on Investment (ROI) over time. Literature indicated that digital marketing has made it easier for retailers to keep up with trends in the industry, thus creating successful competitive and marketing strategies. Chapter two established that retail companies use social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube to increase brand awareness, forge long-term relationships with customers, and concurrently reach a larger audience.

Hence, companies with active social media presences are increasingly common in the retail sector.

Literature articulated that digital marketing tools are used to keep engaging with the customers, making the business more reliable and the brand stronger. The literature review found that one of the most important benefits of using digital marketing is the ability to transmit information rapidly at a low rate, which shows that day-by-day print media is gradually being replaced by online media and businesses can operate successfully and sustain themselves over and over if they capitalise on online marketing.

The literature established that online media provides customers with a platform to share their experience and general opinions which allows brands to use that information to develop their business and offer consumers value-added products and services. Chapter two delineated three main factors that influence consumer perception on a product or service: is (a) experiences, (b) expectations and (c) what others have said about them (reviews). The study revealed that most consumers are influenced by experiences and reviews when making a buying decision. Consumers' beliefs and opinions can be shaped and reshaped by different factors such as the brand's reputation, store image and quality of products and services offered.

Chapter two also identified challenges and barriers to the use digital marketing in rural areas, which include educational literature, lack of knowledge and the perceived intrusiveness of digital marketing by retailers. These barriers and challenges to the use of digital marketing in rural areas were referred to as the digital divide.

5.3 Summary of the empirical study

Presented here is the summary of both the quantitative and qualitative data analyses.

5.3.1 Quantitative data

The summary from the quantitative data obtained through questionnaires as the research instrument revealed that digital marketing plays a significant role in the marketing, and advertising of retail businesses in Flagstaff. Response from retailers also revealed that digital marketing is a great approach to achieving a positive brand

perception, as perception of the brand has a huge impact on the sustainability of businesses in the retail industry. Research found that retailers use different digital marketing tools, such as social media marketing, email marketing, and mobile marketing to share information, communicate, send sales pitch and promotional messages to consumers, and engaging with customers online. These activities proved to be helpful methods to attract and retain customers and have an influence on a consumer's buying behaviour. Retailers indicated that digital marketing has presented unconventional systems to complete online transactions, such as online shopping, this activity however is associated with several challenges in rural areas which has prevented many retailers from offering it as an alternative way shopping, hence there is low application of online shopping within Flagstaff retail businesses. Regardless of this, retailers expressed countless benefits attributed to the use digital marketing, such as cost effectiveness, being able to maintain their competitive advantage, increases in sales revenue, and the ability to rapidly reach target market.

5.3.2 Qualitative data

Themes identified upon the analysis of the data gathered from consumers through focus group discussions and in line with achieving the research objectives were used to present qualitative data. Through Braun and Clarke's six-phase guide to thematic analysis, initial codes were generated, and ultimately four preliminary themes were identified. The findings suggest that there is a limitation in the use of digital marketing amongst poor, older, and uneducated people, however these limitations are not popular amongst the youth as they are deemed digitally savvy. According to responses from consumers, it is evident that the use of SMS communication, Facebook, and Emails by retailers to disseminate information about promotions and sales pitches has motivated and encouraged customers to purchases from selected retailers. However, participants have underlined that due to difficulties in accessing information on digital platforms, they prefer receiving communication from retailers through traditional channels as they are easier to access.

The findings highlight that customers have no premeditated preference method of shopping, but because the majority of retailers in Flagstaff offer in-store shopping, it is

normally their first choice. Nonetheless, participants also revealed that they sometimes opt for online shopping when retailers have run out of stock in-store and the desired products are available online. The study has also revealed that due to the digital divide and the gap in technological intelligence in rural areas, there is inadequacy in the spread of digital marketing amongst rural populations. The findings reveal that high costs in mobile data, low network coverage, and language barrier online are some of the main challenges that impede the use of digital marketing by people in rural areas. Rural consumers encounter difficulties that concurrently limit the effectiveness of the digital marketing strategies employed by retail businesses.

5.4 Realisation of research objectives

In order to address the research problem, four research objectives were outlined. Here follows their description:

5.4.1 Objective one

The first objective was to identify and describe the role of digital marketing in retail businesses in rural areas. The empirical findings reveal that some retailers in Flagstaff use tools of digital marketing, such as, email, social media, and mobile marketing to advertise, market, promote their products and services to customers, and communicate through online platforms. Through the use of digital marketing, retailers have been able to maintain a good competitive advantage in the retail sector. Some customers can place online orders, get updates from stores, and become aware of certain offerings through digital marketing. However, this is currently done on a small scale due to the many challenges faced by customers. As a result, the first objective was achieved.

5.4.2 Objective two

The second objective was to examine the level of understanding and use of digital marketing by retail businesses and customers in the rural areas of Flagstaff. Findings of the empirical studies found that retailers use digital marketing to keep up with the main trends in the retail industry, so as to constantly evolve and be able to offer products and services aligned with market demands. Retailers have enough

understanding of what digital marketing is and they are using it to promote and to sustain their businesses by targeting the right customers and attracting them to buy their offerings. On the other hand, customers have limited understanding of digital marketing, and their use of the platform is still very low. Despite the low consumption of digital marketing by rural based customers, retailers are using the platform to a good extent. As a result, the second objective was achieved.

5.4.3 Objective three

The third objective was to determine the extent to which retail businesses in rural areas benefit from digital marketing in sustaining their businesses. Empirical findings revealed that the retail businesses benefit from the use of digital marketing through customer attraction, increase in sales and profitability, the ability to compete with other retailers and to send updates about products and services. Digital marketing affords retailers easy access to customers through social media and email. The application of digital marketing strategies proves more affordable, can reach target markets rapidly, and yields generous returns on investment. To get a competitive advantage, retailers must use digital marketing techniques to offer the best value to customers. Using digital platforms as part of their marketing plan, findings indicate that retail businesses that combine traditional and digital are far more likely to find, attract, convert, and retain their customers. As a result, the third objective was achieved.

5.4.4 Objective four

The last objective was to assess the public's opinion on the impact of the use of digital marketing in retail stores. Empirical findings of the study suggest that some consumers do not recognise the impact of the use of digital marketing, this is evident in poor, older, and uneducated individuals. However, the study also found that the younger generation of consumers has more trust on the use of digital marketing. The study also reveals that consumers prefer traditional communication channels because it is difficult to acquire information digitally, which proves that there is still relevance in using traditional media in rural areas. Findings further show that the impact of digital marketing is impaired by the digital divide and the intellectual divide in technology,

hence Flagstaff's adoption of digital marketing is not proportional to its efficacy. Thus, this objective was achieved.

5.5 Recommendations deduced from this study

The study produces numerous inferences from both literature and empirical findings on the role of digital marketing sustaining retail businesses in the rural areas. This study explored the role of digital marketing on sustaining retail businesses in Flagstaff. Subsequent to the results of this study, it is recommended that retailers should transform their advertising and marketing strategies and increase their use of digital marketing tools to sustain themselves in the competitive and ever evolving retail industry. Rural areas are thought of as brand-new unexplored possibilities. Retail businesses in rural areas have obstacles applying digital marketing to a wider extent, because of this they have not been able to fully benefit from digital marketing opportunities. This also has to do with how difficult it is to reach rural customers because of where they are located. Thus, the use of digital marketing should be incorporated into traditional marketing and advertising techniques in rural areas, so as to reach consumers regardless of their geographical location.

Social media can support businesses' local consumer connections and foster better consumer-business communication. To promote their brands to broad audiences, rural retailers need to strengthen their online presence by setting up social media accounts on sites such as Facebook. This is the most well-liked social media network and has a lot of growth potential for businesses. In order to inform customers about their products and services, rural businesses should keep using traditional approaches, i.e., print and broadcast media, and complement that with digital marketing tools such as mobile marketing, social media, or email marketing. They can successfully conduct digital marketing in rural areas by combining the aforementioned ideas. Also, customers in rural areas frequently have less knowledge of what is offered by the retail sector, retailers can give support in this area to customers by teaching them how to use digital platforms. Some customers can see a digital display but fail to understand what is shown there. Hence, more digital support should be given to customers in those areas. Rural retailers now have the chance to be the first to reach out and introduce themselves utilising a variety of digital marketing techniques, they should put more

effort on establishing online relationships, and constantly engage with their customers.

Retailers in rural areas must improve their level of interaction with customers through harnessing the benefits offered by digital platforms such as social media since some customers in these areas confirmed the use of these platforms. Retail is a worldwide industry thus it must be completely embraced. According to the findings, retail business owners should increase their use of digital marketing and be more creative online in order to meet the expectations of customers who prefer online media. To keep up with the trends of the retail industry around the world, digital marketing strategies should be implemented.

The creation of ecommerce applications for use on smart phones, which offer a collection of shopping information and that enables people to shop online, is one of the global trends in retailing. These apps have a great deal of potential to enhance marketing communication, boost conversation rates, give convenience, and deliver a more tailored buying experience. Therefore, in order to effectively meet consumer expectations, innovation in the development of these applications is required.

This study recommends that the curriculum offered in schools must have a digital component to create more awareness of skills that can help rural population to operate in the digitalised environment. Some community members lack computer literacy, thus in order for them to benefit from digital marketing, they must be taught how to use computers and related technology. The establishment of extreme centers for digital skills training that are tailored to the unique needs of rural retailers and customers who are at the very bottom of the digital divide is also recommended. Although there are challenges and barriers that attribute to the lack of the usage of digital marketing, retailers can subsidise the establishment of free Wi-Fi zones in rural areas to support the communities and to solve the network problems. To improve the uptake of digital marketing and reach to customers, retailers can develop zero-rated platforms where customers can access information without requiring data. Furthermore, this study recommends a set up digital displays in stores, taxi ranks and rural communities where community members usually gather.

5.6 Areas of further research

- This research explored the role of digital marketing in sustaining retail businesses in Flagstaff and established a number of opportunities for further research. It is recommended that the impact of specific digital marketing tools be investigated. This will enable businesses to identify which digital marketing channels their target audience frequently use and prefer so they can narrow down to the ones that are effective for their businesses. This will therefore allow them to focus their marketing approaches on those specific channels.
- The research studied different types (clothing, grocery, etc.) of retailers, future studies can mainly focus on one type of retailer.
- Apart from the retail sector, further research can be undertaken to reveal the role of digital marketing in other sectors such as tourism, the arts and entertainment or the banking sector.
- Further research should be directed towards the influence of digital marketing on consumers' perception of brands in rural areas should also be investigated. This will allow brands to compare different public opinions and beliefs and understand what influences consumers' purchasing decisions.
- In order to stay current with market advancements, continual research is needed in the same area as that addressed by this study. Considering that completely new digital marketing technologies can be invented and because people's interests and preferences might change, the landscape for digital marketing can be uncertain.
- Future studies can be directed at the comparison of the use of traditional approaches and digital marketing in the rural retail sector.

5.7 Conclusion

The empirical findings of this study have shown the important role of digital marketing in sustaining retail businesses in the rural areas of Flagstaff. It is the duty of retailers and retail managers to adopt digital marketing as an element of their marketing and advertising strategy. Retailers are using digital marketing to appeal to customers, and customers are using the platform to gain more information from retailers in order to inform their purchase decisions. The use of digital marketing is still limited in these areas as retailers have not fully considered this is an alternative, but it is another option available to them to reach other customers. Understanding digital marketing is still limited amongst both retailers and customers. However, to some extent, certain retailers have benefited from this platform and customers have also benefited.

The perceptions of the members of the public are not negative but are characterised by a lack of full understanding of the platforms. The study recommended the continued use of digital marketing by retailers in order to keep abreast of developments in the retail environment and to also support and sustain businesses. As a result, both traditional approaches and digital marketing should be used, and they should complement one another in order to fully benefit both businesses and retailers.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE

Permission to use my response for academic research

This information is necessary to show that a real person completed the questionnaire. Any information that is made available will be private and confidential and used with discretion; no names will be linked to responses.

I hereby give permission that my responses may be used for research purpose Yes No

SECTION A -Demographic data

1. How long have you been in business in Flagstaff?

Less than 10 years	10-20 years	21-30 years	31-40 years	41-50 years	More than 50 years

2. How long have you been working for the company?

Less than 10 years	10-20 years	21-30 years	31-40 years	41-50 years	More than 50 years

3. Who is your target market?

Women	Men	All

SECTION B

Please complete this section with regard to the role of digital marketing in retail businesses in rural areas.

Please tick the appropriate answers.

Note: SA- Strongly Agree, A- Agree, N- Neutral, D- Disagree and SD- Strongly Disagree

4. Describe the role of digital marketing in retail businesses in rural areas

	SA	A	N	D	SD
4.1 Digital marketing plays an important role in developing, maintaining, and improving the brand's perception.					
4.2 Digital marketing plays a significant role in designing mobile web notification, creating websites for online shopping, wall displays of promotional items in store.					
4.3 Digital marketing influences customer's buying decision.					

4.4 Digital marketing aids in targeting a business' market more effectively based on demographics, geographical area, and the public's behaviour.					
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--	--	--	--	--

5. Examine the use of digital marketing by retail businesses in the rural areas of Flagstaff.

	SA	A	N	D	SD
5.1 Digital marketing tools are used to send messages to customers, messages that are usually about a sales pitch and promotions.					
5.2 Digital marketing tools are used to keep engaging with the customers, making the business more reliable and your brand stronger.					
5.3 Online communication from the company motivates purchase from customers and potential customers.					
5.4 Digital is used to keep up with the main trends in the retail industry.					

6. Determine the extent to which retail businesses in rural areas benefit from digital marketing in sustaining their businesses.

	SA	A	N	D	SD
6.1 Digital marketing is cost effective and fast in reaching the target market.					
6.2 Digital marketing grows sales through online shopping.					
6.3 Digital marketing attracts new customers and retains existing ones					
6.4 Digital marketing has been of advantage in the business in order to stay ahead of competitors.					

SECTION C

7. How has the emergence of digital marketing affected sales revenue in your business?

- Increased
 Decreased

Please indicate estimated percentage

--

8. How has the change/transformation from traditional to digital media impacted on your business?

- Positively
 Negatively

Briefly explain how

--

9. Does your store offer online shopping?

- Yes
- No

Whichever, what is the challenge you come across with?

10. To what extent is digital marketing used for advertising in your retail store?

- 1-20%
- 21-40%
- 41-60%
- 61-80%
- 81-100%

11. Which digital marketing tools do you find most effective for your business?

- Emails
- Blogs
- Social media
- Pinterest

Other (please specify)

APPENDIX B: CHI SQUARE TESTS

	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
Age group	5.2	2	0.074
Race	30.422	1	< 0.001
Gender	0.556	1	0.456
Name of your company	0	8	1.000
How long have you been in business in Flagstaff?	10	2	0.007
How long have you been working for the company?	35.733	2	< 0.001
Who is your target market?	26.133	2	< 0.001
Digital marketing plays an important role in developing, maintaining and improving the brand's perception.	39	3	< 0.001
Digital marketing plays a significant role in designing mobile web notification, creating websites for online shopping, wall displays of promotional items in store.	16.133	2	< 0.001
Digital marketing influences customer's buying decision.	15.778	4	0.003
Digital marketing aids in targeting a business' market more effectively based on demographics, geographical area and the public's behaviour.	8.6	3	0.035
Digital marketing tools are used to send messages to customers, messages that are usually about a sales pitch and promotions.	8.933	2	0.011
Digital marketing tools are used to keep engaging with the customers, making the business more reliable and your brand stronger.	25.311	3	< 0.001
Online communication from the company motivates purchase from customers and potential customers.	31.778	4	< 0.001
Digital is used to keep up with the main trends in the retail industry.	24.4	2	< 0.001
Digital marketing is cost effective and fast in reaching the target market.	17.733	2	< 0.001
Digital marketing grows sales through online shopping.	14.889	4	0.005
Digital marketing attracts new customers and retains existing ones	24.067	3	< 0.001
Digital marketing has been of advantage in the business in order to stay ahead of competitors.	42.378	3	< 0.001
How has the emergence of digital marketing affected sales revenue in your business?	30.422	1	< 0.001
How has the change/transformation from traditional to digital media impacted on your business?	27.222	1	< 0.001
Does your store offer online shopping?	3.756	1	0.053
To what extent is digital marketing used for advertising in your retail store?	14.667	4	0.005
Which digital marketing tools do you find most effective for your business?	19.733	2	< 0.001
What is the percentage of your total communication budget do you spend on digital marketing?	20.444	4	< 0.001
How important are online platforms for shopping in your company?	1.6	2	0.449
What do you think are the effects of using digital marketing as an advertising tool?	8.133	2	0.017
What is your business' main purpose for using digital marketing?	6.933	2	0.031
How does the growth of your business now in the digital era, compare to when you were using only traditional advertising methods?	20.933	2	< 0.001
Please indicate where digital marketing played a significant role in keeping the business sustainable	16.133	2	< 0.001
Please indicate which social media tools are most effective to you in keeping up with the main trends in the retail industry	3.8	3	0.284
The high penetration rate of the Internet has led people to initiate new types of social media interactions. Which of the following does your business participate in?	8.778	3	0.032
Relationship marketing and organisational communication are recognised as an innovative way to build relationships with customers for sustainable growth. Which of these communication tools are aligned with your business?	0.022	1	0.881

APPENDIX C: CORRELATIONS

			Correlations											
			Digital marketing plays an important role in developing, maintaining and improving the brand's perception.	Digital marketing plays a significant role in designing mobile web notification, creating websites for online shopping, wall displays of promotional items in store.	Digital marketing influences customer's buying decision.	Digital marketing aids in targeting a business' market more effectively based on demographics, geographical area and the public's behaviour.	Digital marketing tools are used to send messages to customers, messages that are usually about a sales pitch and promotions.	Digital marketing tools are used to keep engaging with the customers, making the business more reliable and your brand stronger.	Online communication from the company motivates purchase from customers and potential customers.	Digital is used to keep up with the main trends in the retail industry.	Digital marketing is cost effective and fast in reaching the target market.	Digital marketing grows sales through online shopping.	Digital marketing attracts new customers and retains existing ones	Digital marketing has been of advantage in the business in order to stay ahead of competitors.
Spearman's rho	Digital marketing plays an important role in developing, maintaining and improving the brand's perception.	Correlation Coefficient	1.000											
		Sig. (2-tailed)												
		N	45											
	Digital marketing plays a significant role in designing mobile web notification, creating websites for online shopping, wall displays of promotional items in store.	Correlation Coefficient	.320*	1.000										
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.032											
		N	45	45										
	Digital marketing influences customer's buying decision.	Correlation Coefficient	.425**	.461**	1.000									
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.004	0.001										
		N	45	45	45									
	Digital marketing aids in targeting a business' market more effectively based on demographics, geographical area and the public's behaviour.	Correlation Coefficient	.552**	.468**	.488**	1.000								
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.001	0.001									
		N	45	45	45	45								
Digital marketing tools are used to send messages to customers, messages that are usually about a sales pitch and promotions.	Correlation Coefficient	.386**	.303*	.568**	0.279	1.000								
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.009	0.043	0.000	0.063									
	N	45	45	45	45	45								
Digital marketing tools are used to keep engaging with the customers, making the	Correlation Coefficient	.466**	.474**	.352*	.513**	.584**	1.000							
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	0.001	0.018	0.000	0.000								

business more reliable and your brand stronger.	N	45	45	45	45	45	45						
Online communication from the company motivates purchase from customers and potential customers.	Correlation Coefficient	.508**	.531**	.577**	.451**	.470**	.344*	1.000					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.002	0.001	0.021						
	N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45					
Digital is used to keep up with the main trends in the retail industry.	Correlation Coefficient	0.185	0.270	.397**	0.232	.511**	.309*	0.275	1.000				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.225	0.073	0.007	0.125	0.000	0.039	0.067					
	N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45				
Digital marketing is cost effective and fast in reaching the target market.	Correlation Coefficient	.305*	0.203	0.253	0.121	0.281	.412**	0.206	.516**	1.000			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.042	0.182	0.093	0.429	0.061	0.005	0.175	0.000				
	N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45			
Digital marketing grows sales through online shopping.	Correlation Coefficient	.523**	.505**	.496**	.390**	.561**	.494**	.618**	.391**	.374*	1.000		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.008	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.008	0.011			
	N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45		
Digital marketing attracts new customers and retains existing ones	Correlation Coefficient	.437**	.546**	.417**	.400**	.339*	.408**	.369*	.504**	.336*	.514**	1.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.003	0.000	0.004	0.006	0.023	0.005	0.013	0.000	0.024	0.000		
	N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	
Digital marketing has been of advantage in the business in order to stay ahead of competitors.	Correlation Coefficient	.447**	0.206	.309*	.301*	.383**	.316*	.437**	0.048	0.083	.405**	0.113	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002	0.174	0.039	0.044	0.009	0.035	0.003	0.755	0.588	0.006	0.461	
	N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

APPENDIX D: LETTER OF INFORMATION



Title of the Research Study: The role of digital marketing on the sustainability of retail sector in Flagstaff

Principal Investigator/s/researcher: Miss Zizipho Noqazo, Master of Management Sciences: Public Relations Management

Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s: Dr. E. Madondo, PhD Management Sciences: Marketing

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study: This study intends to explore the role of digital marketing in sustaining retail businesses in Flagstaff.

Outline of the Procedures: A questionnaire will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Respondents are requested to answer questionnaires completely and in order for the researcher to be able to analyse and interpret all data accurately.

Risks or Discomforts to the Participant: The study poses no danger to participants' health and well-being.

Benefits: The study has potential to benefit the respondents and the entire retail sector of Flagstaff by making recommendations for application of digital technologies and to put digital marketing into practice. There will be no financial rewards to respondents. For the researcher, the study has possibilities of publishing journal article(s).

Reason/s why the Participant May Be Withdrawn from the Study: Respondents will take part on study on their own free will and may withdraw at any time they wish.

Remuneration: There will be no remuneration received by respondents for participating in the study.

Costs of the Study: Respondents are not expected make any form of monetary contribution towards the study.

Confidentiality: The identity of respondents will not be revealed in the research report or publication.

Research-related Injury: No injuries should be expected from this study.

Persons to Contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries:

Please contact the researcher, Miss Z. Noqazo at 083 620 8683, or the supervisor, Dr. E. Madondo on 063 350 8280 or the Institutional Research Ethics administrator on 031 373 2900. Complaints can be reported to the DVC: TIP, Prof F. Otieno on 031 373 2382 or dvctip@dut.ac.za

APPENDIX E: CONSENT



Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:

- I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, Zizipho Noqazo, about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study - Research Ethics Clearance Number: _____,
- I have also received, read and understood the above written information (Participant Letter of Information) regarding the study.
- I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a study report.
- In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerised system by the researcher.
- I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.
- I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.
- I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research which may relate to my participation will be made available to me.

_____	_____	_____	

Full Name of Participant Thumbprint	Date	Time	Signature / Right

I, _____(name of researcher) herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

_____	_____	_____
Full Name of Researcher	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____

Full Name of Witness (If applicable)

Date

Signature

Full Name of Legal Guardian (If applicable) Date

Signature

Please note the following:

Research details must be provided in a clear, simple and culturally appropriate manner and prospective participants should be helped to arrive at an informed decision by use of appropriate language (grade 10 level - use Flesch Reading Ease Scores on Microsoft Word), selecting of a non-threatening environment for interaction and the availability of peer counseling (Department of Health, 2004)

If the potential participant is unable to read/illiterate, then a right thumb print is required and an impartial witness, who is literate and knows the participant e.g. parent, sibling, friend, pastor, etc. should verify in writing, duly signed that informed verbal consent was obtained (Department of Health, 2004).

If anyone makes a mistake completing this document e.g. wrong date or spelling mistake a new document has to be completed. The incomplete original document has to be kept in the participant file and not thrown away and copies thereof must be issued to the participant.

References:

Department of Health: 2004. *Ethics in Health Research: Principles, Structures and Processes* <http://www.doh.gov.za/docs/factsheets/guidelines/ethnics/>

Department of Health. 2006. *South African Good Clinical Practice Guidelines*. 2nd Ed. Available at: http://www.nhrec.org.za/?page_id=14

APPENDIX F: EDITING LETTER

EDITOR'S LETTER

Researchers Beyond-Borders (PTY)
Umhlanga, Durban
South Africa
15 December 2022

To whom it may concern

Editing of Masters Dissertation: Zizipho Noqazo (Student number -21509098)

Title of dissertation: The role of Digital marketing on the sustainability of the formal retail sector in Flagstaff.

This letter serves as confirmation that the aforementioned dissertation has been language edited.
Any queries may be directed to the author of this letter.



Regards

Maleni Pillay
Researchers Beyond-Borders
consult@researchersbeyondborders.com
www.researchersbeyondborders.com

APPENDIX G: GATE KEEPERS LETTERS

Jet Mart, 5943
Main Street
Flagstaff
4810
22 October2019

Letter of Agreement to Complete Research

Dear Sir/madam

I am the manager, Mphumzi at Jet Mart. I write this letter to confirm that I have agreed that Zizipho Noqazo can carry out her study at our store and I have been given a letter of information to know more about what the research involves.

Sincerely
The Manager- 062 562 0817



Mr Price 620
Flagstaff
4810
26 October2019

LETTER OF CONFIRMATION TO PERFORM RESEARCH

Dear Sir/madam

I, Anele Cele hereby confirm that Zizopho Noqazo can complete her research at Mr Price. The letter of information provided was clearly explained and I have understood what her study will requires. It would be our pleasure to help your achieve your aim.

Regards,

Anele Cele

MR PRICE
FLAGSTUFF CENTRE
620

Shoprite
Main Street
Flagstaff
4810
22 October 2019

Confirmation Letter to Complete Research

Sir/madam

I Roloeft Marats, the manager at Shoprite would like to give Zizipho Noqa,zo the opportunity to complete her research at our store. I have read and understood the letter of invitation she provided. This letter serves as a confirmation of agreement upon her request to do research at Shoprite.

Regards,

Marats- Store Manager

..

Letter of Confirmation to Complete Research

Sir/madam

I Jongikhaya, the manager at Boxer Superestores after carefully reading the letter of information provided by the Durban University of Technology student, Zizipho Noqazo. She can go ahead and carry out with her research at our store.

Thank you,
Mr Jongikhaya- Manager

Markham
ERF 331
Plaza
Lusikisiki
4820
21 October 2019

LETTER OF CONFIRMATION TO PERFORM RESEARCH

Dear Sir/madam

I Ntefeleng the manager at Markham after being approached and informed by Zizipho Noqazo about the nature of her research and was provided with a letter of information, have decided to allow her to do research within Markham. With this letter I confirm that she can continue with her study in our store. It would be our pleasure to help you achieve your objectives.

Regards,
Miss Ntefeleng- 039 253 1305

MARKHAM
LUSIKISIKI 1022019

APPENDIX H: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



MANAGEMENT SCIENCES: FACULTY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (FREC)

27 November 2019

Student Name: **Miss Z Noqazo**

Student No: 21509098

Dear Miss Z Noqazo

MASTER OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCES: PUBLIC RELATIONS

TITLE: The role of digital marketing on the sustainability of the retail sector in Flagstaff.

Please be advised that the FREC Committee has reviewed your proposal and the following decision was made: **Approved – Ethics Level 2**

Date of FRC Approval: 27 November 2019

Approval has been granted for a period of two years from the above FRC date, after which you are required to apply for safety monitoring and annual recertification. Please use the form located at the Faculty. This form must be submitted to the FREC at least 3 months before the ethics approval for the study expires.

Any adverse events [serious or minor] which occur in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration must be reported to the FREC according to the FREC SOP's. Please note that ANY amendments in the approved proposal require the approval of the FREC as outlined in the FREC SOP's.

Yours sincerely

Prof JP Govender

Chairperson: Faculty Research Ethics Committee

APPENDIX I: FRC PROPOSAL APPROVAL



21 January 2020

Student number: 21509098

Dear Ms Z Noqazo

MASTER OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCES: PUBLIC RELATIONS

This serves to confirm the approval of your research proposal by the Faculty Research Committee, at its meeting on 27th November 2019, as follows:

1. Research proposal and provisional dissertation title:

The role of digital marketing on the sustainability of the retail sector in Flagstaff.

Supervisor: Dr E Madondo

Co-supervisor: n/a

Please note that any proposed changes in the thesis/dissertation title require the approval of your supervisor/s, the Faculty Research Committee, as well as ratification thereof by the Higher Degrees Committee.

2. Research budget to the amount of R10 000.00

Please note that this funding is not a scholarship or bursary and is therefore not paid directly to you, but is controlled by the Faculty. Any proposed changes to the use of this funding allocation requires the approval of your supervisor and the Dean. Please note that funding will be reimbursed to you after the provision of receipts.

The Institutional Research Committee has stipulated that:

- (a) This University retains the ownership of any Intellectual Property (patent, design, etc.) registered in respect of the results of your Masters/Doctors Degree in Technology studies as a result of the award and the provisions of the above Act;
- (b) Should you find any of the terms above not acceptable then you are given the option to decline the Research budget award to your project in writing.

May we remind you that in terms of Rule G25(2)(b), if you fail to obtain the Masters/Doctors degree within the maximum time period allowed after first registering for the qualification, Senate may refuse to renew your registration or may impose any conditions it deems fit. You may apply to the Faculty Research Committee for an extension.

Please note that you are required to convert your registration from the informal to the formal course and re-register each year.

Please note that the following must be adhered to:

Registration:

1. Ensure formal registration has taken place (*the onus is on the student and the supervisor to ensure registration takes places at the beginning of each year whilst the student is currently engaged with his/her Masters or PhD qualification*)
2. Ensure that application for Conferment of Status has been made in the event of your undergraduate qualification being different to this application. *Your attention is drawn to the fact that Conferment of Status is required for registration.*
3. Ensure that your supervisor has submitted your proposal to the Faculty Research Officer (FRO) for IREC clearance (institutional research ethics committee). This is in the case of Ethics level 2 IREC and level 3 IREC (in the case of a study dealing with vulnerable populations). See guideline attached. *It is the researcher's responsibility to check the Ethics requirements and submit to the relevant bodies irrespective of the reviewer's recommendation.*

Dissertation submission for examination:

1. Ensure that you submit the intention to submit form **(PG 5)**, signed by the HOD and Supervisor
2. Ensure that the signed checklist is submitted with the **PG 5**
3. Once your dissertation is submitted to the supervisor for examination purposes, communication from here on will only be with you supervisor and not with the faculty.
4. Your supervisor **MUST** nominate the examiners three months prior to submission of the dissertation/thesis for examination.
5. On submission for examination, please note that three ring bound signed copies must be submitted to your supervisor along with the completed and signed **PG 7** form, **FMS Checklist** and **Turn it in report**.
6. Feedback will be provided to your supervisor regarding the examination result after the result is ratified by the Higher Degrees Committee (HDC).
7. In the event of a resubmission the reports will be submitted to the supervisor who will communicate with you for revision. Once revision has taken place your supervisor will submit to the FRO for resubmission to the examiners.
8. In the case where there is a discrepancy in examiners results, an Arbiter will be nominated via the HOD and supervisor and tabled at FRC and ratified at HDC. On completion of this process, the Arbiters report will be tabled at FRC and ratified at HDC.
9. Results of the Arbitration process will be communicated to your supervisor

Graduation requirements:

1. Ensure that you submit a completed signed PG10 form
2. one hard bound dissertation/thesis with a pdf version on CD
3. response to post graduate examination form
4. completion of study form (IREC form)

Should you experience any problems relating to your research, your supervisor must be informed of the matter as soon as possible. If the difficulties persist, you should then approach your Head of Department and thereafter the Faculty Research Coordinator.

Please refer to the 2019 General Rule Book and the Postgraduate Students' Guide 2019 concerning the rules relating to postgraduate studies, which include *inter alia* acceptable minimum and maximum timeframes, submission of thesis/dissertations, etc. Please do not hesitate to contact this office for any assistance. We wish you success in your studies.

Kind regards,

Prof JP Govender

Obo FRC Chairperson: Professor VP Rawjee

Faculty of Management Sciences

THE ROLE OF DIGITAL
MARKETING IN THE
SUSTAINABILITY OF THE
FORMAL RETAIL SECTOR IN
FLAGSTAFF

by Zizipho NOQAZO

Submission date: 13-May-2023 08:18PM (UTC+0200)

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