DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DRIVE DURING COVID-19 CRISIS BY SMALL, MEDIUM AND MICRO ENTERPRISES IN RURAL KWAZULU–NATAL

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THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DRIVE DURING COVID-19 CRISIS BY SMALL, MEDIUM AND MICRO ENTERPRISES IN RURAL KWAZULU–NATAL

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DECLARATION

I, Godfrey Sabelo Mpungose, the undersigned, hereby declare this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Management Sciences (Business Administration) at the Durban University Technology. It has not been previously submitted for any degree or any examination at any other university.

05/06/2024

Godfrey Sabelo Mpungose Date

ABSTRACT

Globally, Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises are perceived as major economic growth contributors in solving problems pertaining to poverty alleviation, the high unemployment rate and inequalities. In countries such as China, the United States of America and the United Kingdom, these enterprises make a huge contribution to gross domestic product and have played a crucial role in poverty reduction and alleviating unemployment. In the context of South Africa, SMMEs are earmarked as strategic business mechanisms for job creation, innovation, competitiveness and economic growth. Rural SMMEs also play a remarkable role in promoting sustainable livelihoods in rural communities. However, in countries such as Brazil, France, the UK and Australia, investment in promoting SMME establishment has been operationalised, which has resulted in a greater impact on economic advancement, irrespective of projected environmental challenges. This signals SMMEs play a vital role in both developing and developed countries in contributing to their GDP.

The South Africa government has invested much in promoting the establishment of SMMEs, with the intention of creating 90 percent new jobs by 2030, in accordance with the National Development Plan. Despite, this good intention, some SMMEs are unable to survive for more than five years due to various threats that affect their existence, which is of major concern to policy makers, researchers, government officials and other stakeholders with a key interest in this sector.

Prior to the Covid-19 crisis, Rural SMMEs were faced with challenges such as lack of infrastructure and internet connectivity, which the outbreak of Covid-19 further exacerbated, with lockdown measures by government leading to some South African rural SMMEs closing down temporarily, numerous permanently, while others were declared technically insolvent. One of the factors that influence SMMEs worldwide, is their ability to use social media to create and maintain their business presence, communicate with customers and market and sell products/services. Nonetheless, rural SMMEs were found to lack social media strategies to support their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis, which implies not much was done regarding marketing, traditional or online, by rural SMMEs due to the high costs to sustain their business, resulting in a lack of operational cash flow due to the economic turmoil caused by the Covid-19 crisis.

The research study, therefore, investigated rural SMME growth and survival, focusing on critical factors affecting their use of social media as driver to ensure their continued existence during the Covid-19 crisis, enabling them to survive and grow in future crises. The motive behind the study focus on KZN is because nothing much has been done concerning the use of social media as a tool, in contributing to the survival and growth of rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis in developing countries, with special reference to South Africa in rural KwaZulu-Natal.

Further exploration in the use of social media as rural SMME growth and survival driver during the Covid-19 crisis is, therefore, needed to overhaul the existing knowledge contribution in SMME survival and growth, particularly in South Africa, with special reference to rural KwaZulu-Natal. This study will investigate the current research gap regarding a comprehensive understanding of critical factors influencing rural SMME survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis, thereby preparing them to deal with future crises. The second objective will thus be to design and propose a social media model as a driver for SMMEs in rural KwaZulu-Natal to learn from the Covid-19 crisis, contributing to their continued growth and survival.

Theoretical models were found to be insufficiently explored in previous studies. Therefore, this study intends to narrow the identified knowledge gaps through enhancing the state of South African SMMEs, with special reference SMMEs in rural KwaZulu-Natal, regarding their survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis.

The study was conducted in seven rural places within the KwaZulu-Natal Province, using a quantitative method, where a closed-ended questionnaire was used to collect primary data, from 374 rural SMMEs owners and managers. A non- probability, convenience sampling technique was employed, with inferential and descriptive statistical data analysis undertaken using the Statistical package for Social Sciences (v27. 0) software.

Rural SMMEs were found to have a lack of social media awareness, insufficient technology infrastructure, deficient internet connectivity, and a shortage of technical and managerial competencies to adopt and use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. This implies environmental factors had a huge negative influence on the use of social media by rural SMMEs; this resulted in a lack of innovation, which is instrumental in SMME survival and growth.

Further constraints were found to include social support and networking that led to business failure in social media adoption and use, thus, social media marketing strategies were absent, with management perception constraints leading to business failure in using social media for survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. Survival and growth strategies were perceived as strategic business mechanisms to improve rural SMME performance in terms of their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. The prime insights were provided in both practical and theoretical implications of the study.

These findings enabled the design and proposal for implementation of a seven-stage social media model, as a survival and growth driving tool for rural SMME during crises, such as the Covid-19 pandemic and in future pandemics within the KwaZulu-Natal Province.

It is recommended rural SMMEs should strengthen their innovativeness in order to embrace technology for social media adoption and use, in addition to investing in technology advancement, in order to adapt to rapid environmental changes. Moreover, government policy re-evaluation regarding rural SMME survival and growth mechanisms is recommended, in order that government regulations and policies promote rural SMME survival and growth in future pandemics in South Africa, with special reference to rural KZN.

Key words:

Social media, rural SMMEs, Critical Factors, Covid-19 crisis, Business Failure, Survival and Growth.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACCA	Association of Chartered Certified Accountants
AsgiSA	Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa
BER	Bureau for Economic Research
CCMA	Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration
COVID-19	Coronavirus pandemic
CRM	Customer Relations Management
DSBD	Department of Small Business Development
DEDTEA	Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs
DoI	Diffusion of Innovation Theory
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
GEM	Global Entrepreneurship Monitor
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IFC	International Finance Corporation
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IT	Information Technology
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
MFMA	Municipal Finance Management Act (56 of 2003)
NDP	National Development Plan

NSBA	National Small Business Act
NYDA	National Youth Development Agency
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PE	Performance expectancy
PEOU	Perceived Ease of Use
PPP	Public Private Partnerships
PR	Perceived Risk
PU	Perceived Usefulness
R&D	Research and Development
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SA	South Africa
SBI	Small Business Institute
SCRM	Social Customer Relations Management
SEDA	Small Enterprise Development Agency
SEFA	Small Enterprise Finance Agency
SETA	Sector Education Training Authority
SMME	Small, Medium and Micro Enterprise
SNS	Social Networking Site
StatsSA	Statistics South Africa
TAM	Technology Acceptance Model
TOE	Technology, Organization, Environment framework
TPB	Theory of Planned Behaviour
UK	United Kingdom
US/USA	United States of America

UTAUT	Unified Theory of Acceptance and use of Technology
WB	World Bank
WPLG	White Paper on Local Government

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CHAPTER 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the study was to design and propose a social media model as a driving tool for rural KwaZulu–Natal (KZN) Small, Medium and Micro Enterprise (SMME) survival and growth during a disaster, such as the Covid-19 crisis, due to SMMEs facing economic turmoil caused by the outbreak and spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. This resulted in a negative financial position for SMMEs, to the extent where some SMMEs opted to lay off their employees, while their revenues have dropped due to the reduction of sales since the governments of countries worldwide applied restrictions to close their economies. SMME survival and growth have suffered as a result, negatively influencing Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in countries globally and their economic advancement has gradually declined. The lockdowns and restrictions imposed by governments of countries worldwide due to the Covid-19 crisis not only negatively influenced economies, it also severely impacted business sustainability. This suggests some rural SMMEs are technically insolvent (Msimango-Galawe, Menzies and Erwin 2020; Telukdarie, Munsamy and Mohlala 2020).

Despite, the above-stated predicaments, SMMEs are regarded as the engine of economic development and act a catalyst to promote industrialisation in developing and developed countries and account over 90 percent of businesses. Thus, they make an immense contribution to the economic growth of countries, market growth and the entire standard of living, globally (Moise, Khoase and Ndayizigamiye 2020; Muriithi 2017; Turyakira 2018; Legoabe 2017; Afolayan and De la Harpe 2020).

In the context of South Africa (SA), SMMEs contribute approximately 34-38.8 percent of GDP for the country and thus, provide a chief contribution to job creation, estimated at 28-58 percent of the country's employment. It is also stated SMMEs in SA will contribute roughly 90 percent of new jobs and 60–80 percent of the country's GDP by 2030 (IFC 2018; Kalidas, Magwentshu and Rajagopaul 2020; SEDA 2019; SBI 2019; Wiid and Cant 2021).

Based on the above economic turmoil, restrictions and lockdowns imposed by governments of countries worldwide, versus the expectations from SMMEs globally, in terms of economic growth, Prince (2019) suggests social media platform use to connect businesses with potential customers during closed economies to market their products and services and promote their brands. Social media platforms are viewed as web-based technologies generated to distribute information to different customers for the businesses in a cost-effective manner, through decreasing staff time (Fraccastoro, Gabrielsson & Pullins 2021).

In this regard, social media can increase the degree of revenue enhancement, permitting organisations their productivity and performance. Social media platforms can assist SMME rescue in an economic recession, since Rambe, Matema and Madichie (2017) revealed 13 million South Africans use Facebook; 7,4 million are on Twitter; 8,26 million on YouTube; and 2,68 million are on Instagram. In addition, many users are accessing these platforms on mobile phones; thus, many people and customers are utilising social media platforms as a means of communication.

Van Scheers (2016) and Price (2019) emphasised, social media can be used as an important key driver for SMMEs, in the unprecedented circumstances these small enterprises are faced with, to promote their products and services locally and internationally in the 21st century to create job opportunities, reduce poverty and contribute to the country's economic growth. Despite the good intention of promoting SMME establishment in SA, the Covid-19 crisis has impacted negatively on SMME survival and growth (Nyawo 2020; Sugandini, Effendi, & Istanto 2020).

This leads to the decrease of cash reserves of rural SMMEs, due to the decrease of sales and some SMMEs being technically insolvent; caused by lockdowns and restrictions imposed by governments of countries globally. It can be concluded SMMEs experienced a shortage of revenue to run their day-to-day operations. This has been exacerbated by the outbreak and spread of the Covid-19 crisis globally (Nyawo 2020). Hence, this study seeks to examine the critical factors impacting social media use as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN.

The next section provides a brief background to the preliminary study, followed by the research objectives and general overview of the theoretical framework of the study. Chapters two and three provide an analysis of the literature review, based on the existing knowledge relevant to the research problem, guided by the research questions and objectives and describes the theories that underpin the study. Chapter four describes the research design, and chapters five and six discuss the findings and provide a conclusion and recommendations, lists limitations and future work.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The background to the problem of study will provide an overview of the research problem, which ultimately, emphasises the importance of the study and the initiatives, policies and legislation applicable to the use of social media for rural SMME survival and growth. The background to the study problem will also provide an overview of relevant expert views centred on this study. It is briefly discussed as follows**:**

1.2.1 Overview of study background

The investment has been made through identifying SMMEs in South Africa (SA) as the major component to establish the means of enhancing job creating opportunities and wealth distribution to previously disadvantaged persons. This requires SMME owners-managers to possess necessary competencies to withstand the barriers for survival and realise maintainable growth (Peters and Naicker 2013). Chimucheka and Mandipaka, (2015) as well as Chimucheka (2013) concur with the above notion, stating SMMEs are important in creating employment, promoting economic development, dealing with the poverty crisis, and lessening inequality levels. Irrespective of SMMEs being regarded as a critical part in the contribution to economic growth, the sector faces many challenges that hinder its survival, growth and development.

Timm (2011) suggested that small businesses have the opportunities of creating over 2.5 million jobs, which will thus approximately decrease about 500 000 dependents of government social grants by the year of 2020**.** In addition to the above, the world has experienced a high, noticeable failure rate of SMMEs, with SA's SMMEs not excluded in this case. This failure of SMMEs emanated from different factors and entrepreneurial culture. In other words, SMMEs in SA required interventions to deal with factors that hinder their business success and for survival and advancement purposes, to improve South African SMME performance (Telukdarie *et al.* 2020).

Notwithstanding this, the world was confronted with Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) crises, health and economic, which negatively influenced the global economy and global supply chains. Furthermore, this had a negative effect on SMME survival, growth, and sustainability (Telukdarie *et al*. 2020).

Based on the above, Nyawo (2020) highlights the Covid-19 crisis has put the burden of financial strain squarely on these small businesses that are unable to pay employee salaries, and unable to function, due to restrictions enforced by governments in many countries, where certain enterprises have shut down on a temporary basis. In addition, social media has gained popularity worldwide through development of the internet in the 21st century. This has resulted in the way entrepreneurs communicate with their target customers, and how companies promote their products or services (Culnan, McHugh and Zubillaga 2010; Ahmad, Ahmad, and Bakar 2017).

1.2.2 South African initiatives influencing SMME survival and growth

From the South African perspective, Nieuwenhuizen (2019) pointed out the South African Government had put rigorous efforts into stimulating SMME growth over many years, through initiatives such as the Small Business Act (1996), the Small Business Amendment Act (2003), the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (AsgiSA) (2006), and the National Development Plan (NDP) (2012), as well as with the establishment of a Small Business Ministry, including the Department of Small Business Development (DSBD) in 2014. The initiatives are briefly discussed as follows:

1.2.2.1 Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (AsgiSA)

The South African government introduced the initiatives for growth, employment and redistribution (GEAR) and the Reconstruction and development programme (RDP) with the intention to promote employment opportunities and address the challenges of poverty, as well as social and economic inequalities. However, despite the initiatives, these challenges continued necessitating another initiative, with AsgiSA introduced as a promoter to accelerated growth and development. AsgiSA intended to address the challenges for growth and development, which entail lack of skilled and committed staff in the public service; lack of human resources to implement policies; inadequate financial resources; and corruption and mismanagement of funds; as well as lack of people-driven development; lack of proper co-ordination between institutions; and barriers to entry, limits to competition and limited new investment opportunities (Hemson and Khosa 2004; 2008). In addition, the AsgiSA was developed with the purpose of promoting small businesses and to create investments.

By inference, this initiative would be a catalyst for economic advancement to create jobs and reduce the high rate of poverty within a country. Nevertheless, this requires sufficient allocation of resources and funds to SMMEs (Khamfula 2004; Zulu 2017; Hemson and Khosa 2004).

1.2.2.2 Establishment of a Business Ministry

In the post-2014 National Elections a new dispensation for SMMEs in SA was ushered in, with the introduction of Small Business Development (SBD) to steer economic growth, where the focus was on the rejuvenation of local economies. Manentjies (2015) reports one of the strategic SBD objectives aim to provide a comprehensive qualitative and quantitative framework for SMME development, recognising the unique roles performed by this diverse economic sector in the creation of employment, the contribution to economic growth and the provision of sustainable livelihoods. SBD also aims to provide support to small businesses to increase support through consolidated public agencies, enterprise coaching, mentorship, and incubation, as well as extensive support programmes (Zulu 2014; 2017).

1.2.2.3 Department of Small Business Development (DBSB) (2014)

SA faces a multitude of social and economic problems, with recent statistical releases by Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) showing pedestrian economic growth rates of approximately 1.4 percent, an unemployment rate of roughly 27.1 percent, according to the restricted definition, coupled with a growing population estimated to be almost 58 million people (StatsSA 2018a, b, c; 2019).

In an effort to alleviate some of the socio-economic ills, the South African government adopted the NDP 2030, an all-encompassing blueprint to ignite economic growth, reduce unemployment and bring countless South Africans above the poverty line. One central component of the NDP is the creation of SMMEs, to close the gap between the economic reality and envisaged plan (NDP 2016). The NDP recognises the role SMMEs can play in creating meaningful employment on the broader scale, thereby alleviating poverty.

In SA, SMMEs represent 40 per cent of all business and contributes 36 per cent to the economy. The NDP forecasts, by 2030, 90 percent of all new jobs in SA will be in SMMEs. Achieving full employment, decent work and sustainable livelihoods is the only way to improve living standards and ensure a dignified existence for all South Africans. This will be accomplished by expanding the economy to absorb labour and improving the ability of the country’s people and institutions to respond to opportunities and challenges. The NDP aims to reduce the unemployment rate to six percent by 2030. To achieve full employment, the country needs to create roughly 11 million jobs in the next 20 years. The economy is expected to grow by approximately 5,4 percent on average every year over this period to achieve this aim (NDP 2016).

For small business to increase their contribution to the local economy and create more jobs, an enabling environment is needed. However, the outbreak and spread of the Covid-19 crisis has caused economic recession globally, which impacted SMME survival and growth negatively, due to the financial distress SMMEs face. In addition, frequent power outages in SA and in some countries worldwide, is considered as the threatening factors to small businesses and can have a detrimental effect on not only their survival and growth in this sector but also on their economic advancement (Zeidy 2020; Nyawo 2020; Saunders and Schoeman 2018).

1.2.2.4 Enterprise development strategy

The Gauteng Enterprise Propeller (GEP) allowed many SMMEs the opportunity to tender for Gauteng Provincial Government (GPG) work, as part of the enterprise development strategy. This infers GEP intends to provide support to SMMEs. The strategy spells out the adjustment of procurement practices to improve the growth of small businesses. In addition, the preferential procurement policy also set intentions for small businesses (Bruwer & Smith 2018; Zwane 2009).

1.2.2.5 National Small Business Act (NSBA), 102 of 1996 and its 2019 amendment

The NSBA of 1996 was propagated as a replacement to the Small Business Act of 1981. It offers the guidance on the organs of state in order to promote small businesses, and for measures on related matters with a country. This Act provides for the establishment of the National Small Business Advisory Council (NSBAC) (Mahambehlala 2019, Zwane 2009). The 2019 amendment to the NSBA introduced further refinements, focusing on enhancing support mechanisms and addressing contemporary challenges faced by SMMEs, such as technological advancements and market access issues (Republic of South Africa, 2019).

1.2.2.6 National Small Business Amendment Act (NSBAA), 29 of 2004

The NSBA, Act 102 of 1996, retracted the Ntsika Enterprise Promotion Agency (NEPA) and made provision for establishment of the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA). The aim of the development agency is to integrate institutions appointed to deal with enterprises, such as the National Manufacturing Advisory Centre (NMAC), NEPA and any other relevant institutions.

Enterprises are classified by the NSBAA (Act 29 of 2004) according to sectors or sub-sectors, consistent with the standard industrial classification. The grouping is done in accordance with dimensions that include aspects of size or class, the equivalent of total full-time paid employees, total yearly throughput, and total gross asset value (excluding fixed property). Subject to enterprise size and classification, compliance with all prescribed requirements is expected of owners or members; requirements include business registration, tax clearance certificates, banking information and the services made available. SEDA was established with the purpose of providing different assistance to the advancement of small businesses and nurture their growth. In addition, this act did not provide a comprehensive support to the SMMEs (Mahambehlala 2019, Zwane 2009; Rangwetsi and van der Waldt 2021).

1.2.2.7 National Small Business Council (NSBC)

The NSBC in SA was established in 1995, with the main objective of representing and promoting the interest of small businesses in the country. The NSBC was also set up to advise the national, provincial, and local spheres of South African government on social and economic policy to promote small businesses. The chief business of the NSBC is, therefore, to promote the interests of small businesses in SA, as envisioned in the national strategy for the development and promotion of SMMEs (Mahambehlala 2019; Zwane 2009).

1.2.2.8 Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act (PPPFA), Act 36 of 2001

Support for the PPPFA is provided for in the Constitution, section 217(2), where provision is made for policies concerned with procurement, where the plight of previously disadvantaged individuals and groups are concerned.

This Act enabled propagation of the Preferential Procurement Regulations (PPR) (2017) by the National Treasury; these regulations apply to all state organs, controlling all processes for tendering as well as financial transactions. Therefore, public institutions should establish "whether the goods or services, or services for which a tender is to be invited, are in a designated sector for local production and content, whether pre-qualification criteria are applicable and whether compulsory subcontracting is applicable" (PPPFA section 217(2)).

The PPR Act (2017), furthermore, charts contributor details, in reference to the broad-based black economic empowerment (BBBEE), indicating their status level and number of points. There are two-point systems: (1) 80/20-point classification system, for procurement of goods and services for the value equivalent to or beyond R30 000 up to R50 million, and (2) 90/10-point classification system, for value beyond R50 million.

The regulations, furthermore, instruct the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), in consultation with National Treasury, to

> "designate a sector, sub-sector or industry or product in accordance with national development and industrial policies for local production and content, where only

> locally produced services or goods or locally manufactured goods meet the stipulated minimum threshold for local production and content,”

and specify a reasonable threshold for content and local manufacturing (PPR Act 2017).

Should enterprises wish to secure contracts with organs of state, they have to comply with the PPR (2017). Key guidelines for enterprises wanting to do business with government include basic aspects, such as their BBBEE status, time of submission, service provider location, gender and other documentation relevant to government interactions. In general, compliance assessment of enterprises is done by government institutions, for instance, municipalities, to establish the applicant’s financial viability and whether the enterprise is able to sustain themselves while contending in the market economy. Consistent with PPPFA stipulations, enterprises typically operate in compliance with good corporate governance and outcomes-based ideas. Moreover, the Act is noted to promote an environment that is both competitive and conducive for enterprises as business environment.

1.2.2.9 Broad Based Back Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) Act (Act 52 of 2003)

The BBBEE Act (Act 52 of 2003) was implemented through what was known as Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) (Cargill 2010) to contribute to the establishment of an equitable society by providing accessible financial services to black people (The Banking Association SA 2017). The BEE phase started from 1993 and lasted until 2003 (Cargill 2010; Chabane, Goldstein and Roberts 2006; Patel & Graham 2012).

Establishment of BBBEE outlined different strategies to uplift SMMEs, particularly for transformation, making funding provisions with various adjuncts (Irene 2017); meant to serve as the cornerstone of the South African Government’s efforts to educate and train the large sector of the population disadvantaged under apartheid rule (Standard Bank 2017). Small businesses needed to qualify and be compliant with BBBEE regulations and codes to qualify for support (Crampton 2016).

Based on the above, Ngibe and Lekhanya (2020: 58-59) highlighted small businesses will only qualify if, and only if, they meet the criteria set on the small enterprise scorecard. One criterion entails a turnover between R5 and R35 Million (Standard Bank 2017). The codes intended to strengthen modification of the economy through enabling supplier status and providing automatic BEE recognition levels designed to reduce the scorecard verification procedure (Mophethe 2015).

1.2.2.10 White Paper on Local Government (WPLG) 1998

This regulatory document, the WPLG (1998), comprehensively guides the municipal responsibilities and functions of all almost domains in, the municipality. Generally, the WPLG objective aims to develop and expand social and economic development in local government. This intention draws on the Constitution (section 153(a)), which obliges municipalities to "structure and manage its administration and budgeting and planning processes to give priority to the basic needs of the community and to promote socioeconomic development".

According to Hindson (2003: 145), an important part of developmental local government comprises policies and regulations designed for local economic development (LED), incorporating the view that support for local enterprises should be provided through public resource mobilisation and forming of Public Private Partnerships (PPPs). In addition, the stimulation and economic empowerment of local communities, particularly disadvantaged individuals/groups, requires these policies and regulations to be created.

Local enterprises must, therefore, gain access to and exploit available developmental opportunities. This kind of opportunity corresponds with functions of local government as well as its mandate, which includes providing basic infrastructure, water, electricity, and sanitation, as well as municipal roads. Through PPPs, some of these functions could be outsourced to local businesses.

Municipalities are, furthermore, urged by the WPLG (1998), to scrutinise the way they operate and the status of their community relations. These endeavours of engagement regarding operations and the community should always promote economic and social local community development. In agreement with this view, Koma (2012: 112) and Dean and Tustin (2003: 361) assert strategic municipal plans, such as the Local Growth and Development Strategy (LGDS), should be a basic part of community empowerment and local enterprise development.

In principle, municipalities are guided by mandates and direction from the WPLG (1998) on how to be more community-centred and oriented to development, in addition to ways of promoting and empowering local enterprises. Municipal council strategies, plans and by-laws should stimulate entrepreneurship and promote and advance business initiatives that could further the creation of jobs, assist to alleviate poverty and contribute to overall economic prosperity.

1.2.2.11 Municipal Systems Act of 2000 and Municipality Planning and Performance Regulations of Number 25 of 2000

Section 26(c) of the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 details the advancement of development, both social and economic, stipulating that municipal Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) have to contain LED plans, along with a budget allocated to implement these plans. Section 16(1), furthermore, encourages PPP and public participation, as it requires local government to create environs conducive for communities (including enterprises), where they are able to plan projects and programmes with the municipality, as well as coordinate, implement, monitor, and evaluate these events and occasions. Local government is mandated through Section 74(1), to develop financial policies such as collection of revenue, debt, and policies with regard to credit control, along with tariffs for service(s). Policies regarding tariffs should ensure municipal services are equitably provided to communities, with service fees corresponding to service use. These tariffs should, similarly, indicate the costs associated with rendering the service, including interest charges and costs of replacement.

For those enterprises engaged in LED projects and programmes, the tariffs must also advance financial sustainability by means of tariffs that are incomparable. In addition, environmental management is promoted by the Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 and this endorses effective, efficient and economical deployment of resources. Enterprises have comprehensive information through these policies and service tariffs that can guide them regarding their debt, credit and tariffs. Further to this, it is expected of enterprises to comply with the stipulated policies and regulations by the municipality; otherwise, they will be dealt with or services at their business sites terminated until full compliance is realised.

1.2.2.12 The Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA) 56 of 2003

The Local Government: MFMA (Act 56 of 2003) is aimed at promoting sound financial management practices and systems in local government. As such, the MFMA underpins National Treasury regulations and standards, such as the Generally Recognised Accounting Practice (GRAP) standard, promulgated in line with Chapter 11 of the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) (Act 1 of 1999).

According to the MFMA, Chapter 1, section 2(a-g), the sustainable and sound management of the financial dealings of a municipality and its entities are safeguarded by the establishment of values, principles, and other prerequisites. In this respect, the MFMA makes provision in section 2 for the following:

- safeguarding accountability, transparency, and necessary lines of responsibility in the municipality's financial dealings and its respective entities,
- "[…] management of municipal expenditures, liabilities, revenues, and assets in order to curb theft, financial mismanagement and fraud,
- "[…] planning, coordinating and budgeting processes with other tiers of government and pertinent stakeholders such as enterprises within the municipal jurisdiction, and
- "[…] compliance with the supply chain policy and regulations as stipulated by the National Treasury".

On entering into business with municipalities, it is expected enterprises will comply with the processes and requirements for tender or find themselves disqualified from participating in the process. In addition, municipalities are duty-bound to manage their affairs and processes of a financial nature, in a manner that is non-discriminatory, in order for enterprises to be provided a fair opportunity to take part in municipal affairs, by means of tendering processes that are transparent.

Good developmental local governance, through sound financial management, is promoted by the MFMA (2003), where activities, plans and strategies are outcomes-based. As determined in Chapter 12, section 121 (2) (a-c), municipalities are mandated to table annual reports with detailed records of all municipal undertakings during the financial year under review. Added to this, annual reports should emphasise municipal performance against the budget allocated for the financial year and uphold a culture of good financial governance and accountability to local communities. It is evident municipalities have dedicated legislative prescripts, which translate to all enterprises doing business with municipalities should fully comply with all the necessary policy requirements. Endeavours by enterprises to comply with these requirements should be demonstrated with evidence of good corporate governance and sound internal financial control systems.

1.2.2.13 Other South African government institutions promoting SMME survival and growth

The government of SA regard SMMEs as a sector capable to provide job opportunities in the next decade (Moise *et al.* 2020; Kraai 2021). Some SMMEs are faced with failure rates due to lack of support structures, low levels of research and development (R&D), lack of access to markets, and onerous labour laws, along with poor infrastructure, lack of access to finance, government bureaucracy, and lack of training and experience (Mhlope 2021; Ayandibu and Vezi-Magigaba 2021; Kanayo *et al.* 2021).

The mandate of the DTI is to promote the survival and growth of SMMEs, in collaboration with the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA), the SEDA, the National Empowerment Fund (NEF) and the Small Enterprise Finance Agency (SEFA) (Khoase *et al.* 2020). The DTI has employed a strategy to develop policies and strategies, with the intention of promoting survival and growth through initiatives such as the strategic B-BBEE. Arshad *et al.* (2020) added the NEF also supports small businesses through financial and non-financial provision for their survival and growth.

1.2.2.14 General conclusions on supporting structures for SMMEs survival and growth in SA

The support structures signal the commitment of the South African government in promoting the survival and growth of SMMEs with the intention of banking on the assistance of these small enterprises to reduce poverty and unemployment in the country (Lose 2019; Dvouletý *et al.* 2018; Nkwinika 2018; Hewitt and van Rensburg 2020). However, irrespective of these government initiatives, SMMEs continue to fail (Arshad *et al.* 2020; Kelly *et al.* 2021).

1.2.3 KZN perspective initiatives influencing SMME survival and growth

The South African government put in place the Radical Economic Transformation (RET) programme to support and promote the survival and growth of SMMEs. The KZN provincial government, under the Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs (DEDTEA) had a mandate to assist the SMMEs in KZN especial in rural places to benefit from RET. The DEDTEA established tangible interventions based on RET that would promote the survival and growth of rural SMMEs, since KZN is dominated by rural places (Nene 2021).

The intent of the programmes was to support and promote rural SMMEs in KZN and include operation Vula, Radical socio-economic Transformation, Revitalisation of Township, and Industrial Economic Hubs, as well as payment of service providers within 30 days upon receipt of invoices. The programmes intended to act as a catalyst to promote the survival and growth of rural SMMEs in KZN, with the purpose of improving KZN GDP. KZN is regarded as a second largest contributor to GDP in SA. This implies the DEDTEA is meant to foster a favourable environment for the economic advancement of previously disadvantaged people, with special reference to rural SMMEs (Nene 2021). Despite these initiatives, the KZN provincial government has recorded a high failure rate of rural SMMEs, specifically in where to the startup level of SMMEs is concerned in rural places.

This was exacerbated by the outbreak and spread of the Covid-19 virus, which caused an economic recession crisis globally and negatively impacted rural SMMEs in KZN (Msimango-Galawe *et al*. 2020). This was justified by Msimango-Galawe *et al*. (2020), whose study revealed the South African economy declined by 16.4 percent in the second quarter of 2020, in comparison to the first quarter of 2020. It was found 61 percent full-time jobs were lost and KZN SMMEs contributed 13.06 percent towards the job losses. Furthermore, 76.8 percent part-time jobs were found to be lost across nine provinces, with SMMEs in KZN contributing 14.58 percent towards the loss of part-time jobs. According to Bushe (2019), more than 70 percent SMMEs fail within 5–7 years from inception. Therefore, the low survival and growth rate of SMMEs in SA could be an indication of inadequate adoption of new innovations, such as use of social media technologies. It is against this background this study seeks to examine the critical factors influencing social media use by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis.

1.2.4 Linkage of social media use and the Covid-19 crisis and its influence on rural SMMEs

The Covid-19 crisis accelerated the adoption of digital technologies, including social media, as businesses sought ways to maintain operations under lockdowns and social distancing measures. For SMMEs in rural KZN, social media provided a critical lifeline. Businesses could keep customers informed regarding their operations, promote products, and even conduct sales through social media platforms. This digital shift would not be merely a temporary response but has the potential to transform how these businesses operate in the long-term (Dwivedi *et al.* 2020).

The rural SMMEs could have derive benefits such as increased visibility and reached customers through the use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis; cost effective marketing with limited budgets, social media offered an economical way for rural SMMEs to promote their products and services. The use of social media could enhance customer engagement in respond to inquiries, and provide customer support, as well as improving customer satisfaction and loyalty. In addition, the use of social media could promote business resilience, allowing rural SMMEs to continue operating through online sales and marketing activities, which could assist many rural SMMEs to survive the economic downturn caused by the Covid-19 crisis (Dwivedi et al. 2020).

1.2.5 General overview of the theories that underpin the research study

This research study was guided by the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) model, technology acceptance model (TAM), diffusion of innovation (DOI) theory, and Technology, organization, environment (TOE) theory, as well as survival-based theory and firm growth theory (Dearing and Cox 2018; Issa, Lucke and Bauernhansl 2017; Ngibe 2020; Sugandini *et al.* 2020; Gekombe, Tumsifu and Jani 2019; Davis 1989). These theories are portrayed (Figure 1.1) below:

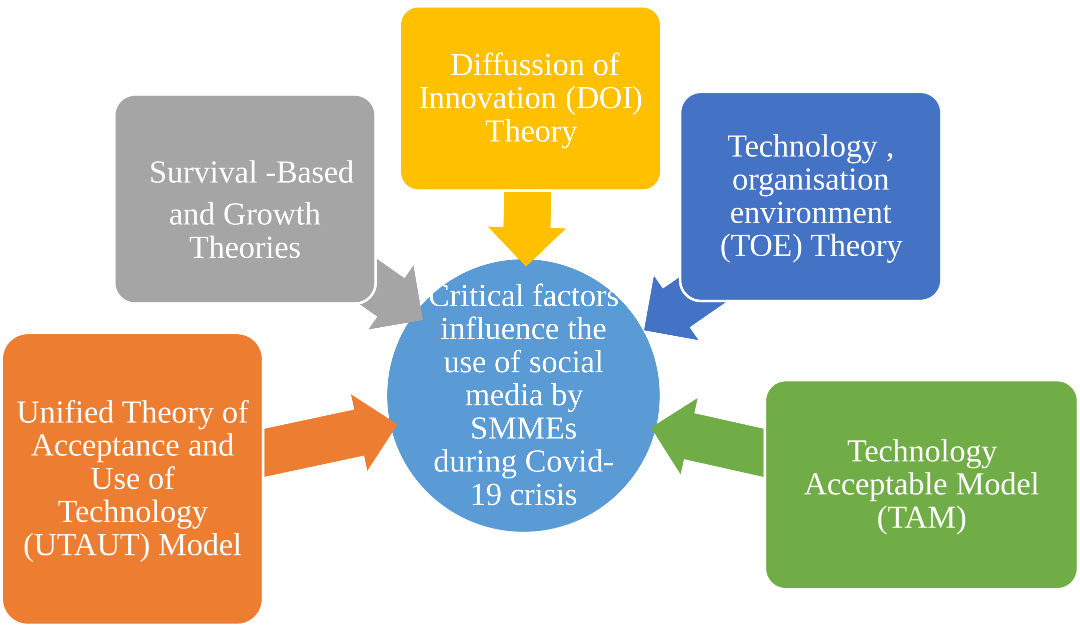


Figure 1.1: Theories adopted for this study

Source: Researcher (2022)

Figure 1.1 depicts the theories adopted for this study. The UTAUT model emphasizes the intention of organizations, such as SMMEs, towards using the system, for instance, social media platforms, whereby the model will focus on the relationship between acceptance and satisfaction and their influence on the intention for constant use of the system (Figure 1.2), for instance social media platforms, for SMME survival and growth in economic turmoil, such as created by the Covid-19 crisis (Momani 2020; Zeidy 2020).

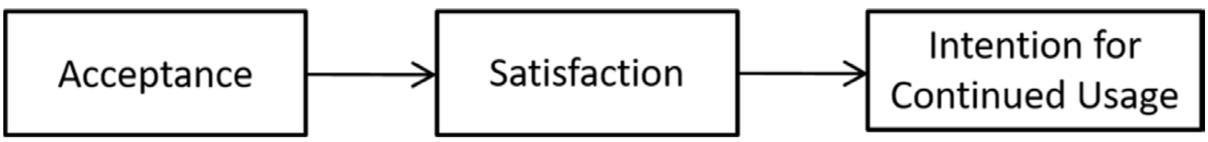


Figure 1.2: Relationship between acceptance and satisfaction and their influence on intention for use of system

Source: Adapted from Momani (2020)

DoI theory is a theory that intends to launch the proficiencies of innovation cultures, which add to the innovation competitive advantage efficacy that supports maintainable SMME growth in the new dynamic marketplace forces (Nimfa *et al*. 2021).

TOE theory is the framework that, on the one hand, provides insight how technology, organization and environmental contexts influence the adoption and use of new technology, such as social media platforms, at business level (Baker 2012; Alhaimer 2019). On the other hand, the Technology Acceptable Model (TAM) is a theory that provides in-depth insight on behavioural challenges regarding the adoption and use of technology at the business level (Dahnil *et al*. 2014; Alhaimer 2019).

Survival based theory view in strategic management emphasises the assumptions that to survive, organizations must deploy strategies focused on running very efficient operations that can respond rapidly to the changing competitive environment (Cochrane 2009; Khairuddin 2005). Firm growth theory is a theory established by Churchill and Lewis (1983) that comprises five phases, namely existence, survival, success, and take-off, as well as resource maturity. This theory highlights the growth and productivity of any business, large or small, are likely to follow an expected pattern represented by consecutive progressive phases (Perényi & Selvarajah 2008).

Based on the above, this study is built upon these theories, whereby they will assist to address the problem statement of the research study and attend to the research questions. These theories will also aid in addressing the primary research of the study, which is to investigate the critical factors impacting the social media use as a driving tool for rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in KZN. The theories in this study would be used to provide an in-depth understanding of study constructs, using some constructs from the theories to develop a new social media driver for rural SMME survival and growth are as follows.

DoI theory in this study would be used to understand the process of social media adoption among SMMEs in rural KZN whereby the key elements, such as the innovation-decision process (knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation) will be analysed to determine how rural SMMEs adopted and integrated social media into their operations during the Covid-19 crisis. TOE theory could highlight the importance of technological readiness, organizational support, and environmental factors in the adoption of social media and allow rural SMMEs better access to technology and supportive organizational structures, in order to be more successful in leveraging social media (Alhaimer 2019; Nimfa *et al*. 2021).

TAM theory would provide insights into the factors driving social media adoption. The model will help in analysing how the perceived benefits (for example, improved customer engagement, increased sales) and ease of use (such as user-friendly platforms) of social media influence its adoption among rural SMMEs. UTAUT theory will focus on performance expectancy and facilitating conditions. highlighting the critical role of perceived benefits and external support in social media adoption. This model would be used to explore how these factors influenced the adoption and effective use of social media by SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis.

Survival theory would underscore the necessity of adopting innovative strategies, such as social media, for business continuity during the crisis. Rural SMMEs that would adapt quickly to using social media would be more likely to survive the economic downturn caused by the Covid-19 crisis. Firm growth theory examines the factors that contribute to the growth and expansion of firms. This theory provides a framework for analysing how social media contributes to the growth and scalability of SMMEs (Cochrane 2009; Gekombe *et al.* 2019; Davis 1989; Perényi & Selvarajah 2008).

Furthermore, the study findings are used to develop and propose a social media model as a survival and growth driving tool for SMME in rural KZN, during emergencies such as the Covid-19 crisis, for example. The theories underpinning the study are discussed in-depth in Chapter 3.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND SUBSTANTIATION

The Covid-19 outbreak that started in 2019 in Wuhan, China, caused severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). The World Health Organisation (WHO) on 11 March 2020, declared it as a crisis, referring to it as a global pandemic (Cucinotta and Vanelli 2020; Akinnuwesi *et al*. 2021). The total number of confirmed cases of Covid-19 globally was estimated at 189 million and more than four million deaths were reported in 222 countries as of 15 July 2021 (Akinnuwesi *et al*. 2021). SA was not excluded in this case, with 2 253 240 confirmed Covid-19 cases and 65 972 cases of deaths (Department of Health 2020).

In KZN, there were approximately 373 285 confirmed Covid-19 cases and 317 deaths due to the pandemic (Akinnuwesi *et al*. 2021; Department of Health 2020). The study conducted by Akinnuwesi *et al*. (2021) and Bello (2020) in Nigeria, as one of the developing countries in Africa, revealed the country faces challenges in relation to infrastructure, electricity, literacy, and beliefs, as well as norms, internet connectivity and low per capita income. SA is not excluded in this case, since it is one of the developing countries, with rural provinces such as rural KZN. Moreover, Budree, Fietkiewicz and Lins (2019) and Prince (2019) pointed out SMMEs do not make use of social media in SA. This lack of social media in use in the country by SMMEs added to the challenges these enterprises are faced with. This implies a lack of in-depth understanding of social media in SA by SMMEs. Therefore, due to these challenges, exacerbated in by the outbreak and uncontrollable spread of the Covid-19 global crisis; these industries are likely to find it hard to cope with the unforeseen challenges of global economic recession.

This was evident in the study conducted by Zeidy (2020), which revealed SMMEs were subjected to threats posed by the Covid-19 crisis, resulting in many SMMEs shutting down, most experienced decreased turnover, while other SMMEs had not only lost their customers but were also subjected to reduced opportunities to meet new customers, with a drop in demand for products/ services and the subsequent lack of operational cash flow. These resulted in a negative impact on the financial position of rural SMMEs.

In addition, Msimango-Galawe *et al.* (2020) pointed out during the lockdown, due to the outbreak and spread of Covid-19 crisis, SMMEs were impacted negatively, reflected by the South African economy experiencing a decline between the first and second quarters of 2020. The drop equated to 16.4 percent quarter-on-quarter, which was not annualised. Furthermore, the findings of this study indicated 61 percent (4 720) full-time jobs were lost; full-time employees before the start of lockdown numbered 7 728 and 3 008 by the end of lockdown level 3. On the one hand, SMMEs from KZN contributed 13,06 percent towards full-time job losses. On the other hand, 2 615 (76.8 percent) part-time jobs were lost across the nine provinces, with KZN SMMEs contributing 14,58 percent towards the part-time job losses of the employees.

Studies conducted in relation to SMMEs depicted that rural SMMEs are faced with other challenges that prevent their growth and development. These challenges entail poor management, lack of financial support, lack of training and experience, and lack of marketing research skills, as well as poor marketing skills, lack to prepare marketing plans, and poor analysis of the market, along with the inability to understand and forecast future customer trends and needs, product demand and competition (Lekhanya 2010; Maloka 2013 ; Chimucheka and Mandipaka 2015; Maziriri and Chinomona 2016; Nyawo 2020).

According to van Scheers (2016), SA is regarded as having one of the highest SMME failure rates in the world, due to these factors. The investment in successful marketing will generate critical sales for sustainable SMMEs. However, not much has been done in relation to marketing by rural SMMEs, due to the high costs of sustaining a business.

Rambe *et al.* (2017) stated SMMEs have the potential to enhance economic and social advancement; nevertheless, the social media platforms to promote e-market places that improve their business practices remain neglected and under-explored in emerging economies such as SA and Zimbabwe. As Prince (2019) explained, there are rare entrepreneurs who utilise social media platforms with the intention to gain visibility, viability and sustainability to market their products and services. This supports, Lekhanya (2013:1) who asserted “emerging and developed economies are utilising social media for entertainment, socializing, and information gathering, instead of brand promotions and competitive differentiation”.

None of these studies, however, indicated the critical importance of social media use as driver for the survival and growth of SMMEs in rural KZN during disasters, such as the Covid-19 crisis. In view of the above, Oji, Iwu and Tengeh (2017), Budree *et al.* (2019) and Prince (2019) pointed out the lack of social media strategies to support SMME growth in SA, which is a major obstacle when it comes to dealing with the fallout of the Covid-19 crisis.

Akinnuwesi *et al.* (2021) and Bello (2020) highlighted developing countries are faced with challenges in relation to infrastructure, electricity, literacy, as well as beliefs and customs, internet connectivity and low per capita income. According to Msimango-Galawe *et al.* (2020), SMMEs from KZN are one of the highest contributors of full- and part-time job losses across nine provinces due to the spread of the Covid-19 crisis.

These impediments influenced SMMEs’ behavioural intention to adopt, accept and use social media during the pandemic. These SMME challenges would necessitate the use of social media during these crises in order to survive and grow in this turbulent environment. Not much research has been undertaken concerning social media use as a driver and tool in accomplishing rural SMME survival and growth during situations such as the Covid-19 crisis in developing countries, with special reference to SA, in rural KZN. Therefore, this study aimed at investigating the critical factors impacting social media use as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN, and to develop and propose a social media model as a driving tool for rural SMME survival and growth during disasters, such as the Covid-19 crisis.

This study was guided by the UTAUT model, DoI theory, TOE theory, TAM and firm growth theory, along with survival-based and firm growth theories, which ought to address the research questions as depicted (sub-section 1.4.3) below.

Before the Covid-19 crisis, research on the use of social media by rural SMMEs in KZN was scarce and primarily descriptive. Studies focused on the general adoption of social media tools without exploring their strategic use for business growth, marketing, and customer engagement. In this regard, the key gaps identified comprise limited understanding of strategic social media use to enhance business operations, inadequate analysis of barriers, which indicate insufficient analysis of the barriers to social media adoption including digital literacy , access to technology and challenges related to infrastructure.

Few studies compared rural SMME social media use with their urban counterparts, leading to a lack of contextual understanding. In addition, the literature before the Covid-19 crisis revealed varying levels of social media adoption among SMMEs, influenced by factors such as business size, sector, and owner-manager characteristics (Jagongo & Kinyua 2013). SMMEs were subjected to common barriers that included lack of awareness, skills, and resources (Oji *et al.* 2017).

The Covid-19 crisis necessitated a pivot in business strategies, highlighting the urgent need for research into the adaptive use of social media by SMMEs. However, several gaps remain, including impact analysis where there is a lack of quantitative analysis on how social media use impacted the financial performance and sustainability of rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis. Studies have adequately addressed the behavioural changes and how rural SMMEs have adapted their social media strategies in response, yet, there is a gap in understanding the extent to which SMMEs have adopted new technologies and digital marketing strategies during the crisis.

Moreover, literature during the Covid 19 crisis showed that SMMEs increasingly relied on social media for marketing and customer engagement during the crisis (Davidson &

Vaast 2020). However, handful of studies reflected that some SMMEs used social media to innovate and build resilience against the Covid-19 economic impacts (Pantano et *al.* 2020). The literature that has been reviewed indicated that most of the studies used theories such as TAM, which is often used to explain the adoption of new technologies, emphasising perceived usefulness and ease of use (Davis 1989). Lastly, the Resource Based Review (RBR), which focuses on how firms utilise internal resources such social media capabilities to gain competitive advantage (Barney 1991).

However, the current literature lacks a comprehensive model that integrates the strategic use of social media by rural SMMEs during crisis conditions, such as the Covid-19 crisis. This gap necessitates the development of a new social model that encompasses how rural SMMEs can leverage social media strategically for long-term benefits, understanding the adaptive mechanisms employed by rural SMMEs in response to the Covid-19 crisis and quantitative measurement of the social media impact on business performance and sustainability.

Therefore, this study intended to fill the knowledge gap through developing a social media use model as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth in rural KZN, in the time of crisis events, such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Consequently, this study sought to establish the critical factors affecting social media use by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis. Furthermore, this will also help rural SMMEs to derive recommendations on how to effectively attain survival and growth of their businesses during economic recessionary crises, resulting from the Covid-19 crisis.

1.4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1.4.1 Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to investigate the critical factors impacting the use of social media as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crises in rural KZN, and to develop and propose a social media model as a driving tool for rural SMME survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis. The study seeks to understand the extent to which social media has been adopted, the strategic applications of these platforms, and the resultant business outcomes.

1.4.2 Primary objective

The primary objective of this study is to quantitatively assess the impact of social media usage on the operational performance and resilience of SMMEs in rural KZN during the

Covid-19 crisis. This includes measuring the effects on business revenue, customer engagement, and overall sustainability.

1.4.3 Secondary objectives

The study intends to achieve the overall aim through addressing the following secondary objectives:

Sub-objective 1: To investigate the factors that influenced the use of social media as driver for SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN.

Sub-objective 2: To ascertain the extent to which SMMEs used social media as driver for survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN.

Sub-objective 3: To measure the perceptions of SMME owners and managers towards adopting and using social media for SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN.

Sub-objective 4: To establish the Covid-19 crisis impact on SMME survival and growth in rural KZN.

Sub-objective 5: To identify the social media marketing strategies that can be employed by SMMEs for survival and growth during emergencies, such as the Covid-19 crises, in rural KZN.

Sub-objective 6: To design a social media model as a driving tool that can be used by SMMEs to survive and grow during the Covid -19 crisis in rural KZN.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study therefore seeks to address the problem statement through answering critical questions as outlined below**:**

- What are the factors that influenced social media use as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN?
- To what extent did SMMEs make use of social media as a survival and growth driver during the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN?
- What are the perceptions of SMME owners and managers towards adopting and using social media for SMMEs survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN?
- What is the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on SMME survival and growth in rural KZN?
- What are social media marketing strategies SMMEs could have used for survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN?

- What social media model can be used as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth during disasters, such as the Covid-19 crisis, in rural KZN?

1.6 HYPOTHESES FOR THIS STUDY

The hypotheses are categorised as the null hypothesis (Ho) and alternative hypothesis (Ha). The main study hypotheses are as follows**:**

Ho1: There is no relationship between social media awareness and government support as factors that affect the use of social media for rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

Ha1: There is a relationship between social media awareness and government support as factors that affect the use of social media for rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

Ho2: There is no relationship between creating an awareness of their products and services and increased sales and the extent to which the use of social media can influence rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

Ha2: There is a relationship between creating an awareness of their products and services and increased sales and the extent to which the use of social media can influence rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

Ho3: There is no relationship between the level of trust in social media and its usefulness and the influence on the perception of rural SMME owners, managers, and entrepreneurs to use social media for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

Ha3: There is a relationship between the level of trust in social media and its usefulness and the influence on the perception of rural SMME owners, managers, and entrepreneurs to use social media for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

Ho4: There is no relationship between minimising product distribution costs and increasing revenue and the impact of Covid-19 on rural SMME use of social media for their survival and growth.

Ha4: There is a relationship between minimising product distribution costs and increasing revenue and the impact of Covid-19 on rural SMME use of social media for their survival and growth.

Ho5: There is no relationship between responding to customer needs and complaints and retaining customers and the influence on rural SMMEs to use social media as a marketing strategy for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

Ha5: There is a relationship between responding to customer needs and complaints and retaining customers and the influence on rural SMMEs to use social media as a marketing strategy for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

Ho6: There is no relationship between innovative practice and increasing product sales and the influence on rural SMMEs to use social media as a strategy for survival and growth during future pandemics.

Ha6: There is a relationship between innovative practice and increasing product sales and the influence on rural SMMEs to use social media as a strategy for survival and growth during future pandemics.

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The motive behind this study is to establish and understand the factors influencing social media use as a survival and growth driving tool for SMME during the Covid-19 crisis and to develop and propose a model for social media use as a driving tool for rural KZN SMME survival and growth during disasters, similar to the Covid-19 crisis, due to the financial constraints faced by SMMEs. This study intends to provide comprehensive insights into those crucial components primary to SMME managers and owners on these rural enterprises' survival and growth in the turbulent environment they are subject to, due to the spread of the Covid-19 crisis.

Numerous studies have been conducted on social media with regard to SMMEs (Price 2019; Lekhanya 2013; Rambe *et al.* 2017; Öztamur and Karakadılar 2014; Trainor *et al.* 2014; Oji *et al.* 2017; van Scheers 2016; Mazzarol 2015). However, not much has been done concerning the use of social media as a driver and tool in relation to accomplishing survival and growth of SMMEs, during the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN. This study further intends to determine the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on SMME survival and growth during the crisis in rural KZN. It is therefore envisaged this study will contribute to new knowledge, with regard to survival, and growth of SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis, particularly in rural KZN. Lekhanya and Mason (2014) agreed many research studies have been conducted concerning factors that impact entrepreneurship and small businesses. However, not much has been done on rural businesses in KZN. According to

Zeidy (2020), during the Covid-19 crisis, many SMMEs were subjected to financial constraints due to reduction of opportunity to meet new customers; a drop in demand for products/services, and lack of operational cash flow.

This study thus intends to develop and propose a social media model as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth in rural KZN, in times of crisis such as during Covid-19. The model intends to provide SMMEs and their owners and managers with a comprehensive understanding of the influence social media use has as a driver for business success; help them distribute their products and services in a cost-effective manner; as provide guidelines to deal with financial constraints to which they are subjected to because of the Covid-19 crisis; minimise costs of marketing strategies intended to help develop policies for financial support that will revive and grow their businesses.

The developed guidelines will assist SMMEs to inform policy decisions with regard to their survival, growth and sustainability in rural KZN, as well as to derive benefits such as cost reduction pressure, interaction with customers, creation and enhancement of relationships with customers, and brand awareness, as well as customer engagement, promotion of products and increased sales, along with acquisition of new customers, during catastrophes such as the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN, for their survival and growth.

The findings of this research will benefit rural SMMEs with an in-depth comprehension of social media use and the influential role it played in surviving and growing rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis. Thus, the overall the significance of this study revolved around the development and proposal of a social media model as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth during disasters, such as the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN, in order to provide comprehensive policy options for mitigation of the above threats posed by theCovid-19 crisis impact in rural KZN. This study is crucial to rural SMMEs of KZN to gain survival, growth, stability, and sustainability, as well as regain a healthy financial position for their businesses and contribute to the economy of KZN and the country during the economic recession that emanated from the Covid-19 crisis.

1.8 ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE THESIS

This research provides an original contribution by**:**

Highlighting the Digital Divide: The study underscores the digital divide between different sizes of enterprises in rural areas, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to support micro SMMEs in digital adoption.

Context -Specific Insights: By focusing on rural KZN the research adds context-specific insights that are often overlooked in broader studies. This regional focus provides valuable information for policy makers and local support organisations**.**

Quantitative Evidence: The use of quantitative methods offers robust evidence of the impact of social media on business resilience, contributing to the existing literature with empirical data.

Development of a Social Media Utilization Model for Rural SMMEs: One of the key original contributions of this thesis is the development of a Social Media Utilization Model tailored specifically for rural SMMEs. This model identifies the critical factors influencing social media adoption and usage, including technological readiness, perceived benefits, and external pressures. It also outlines best practices for effective social media engagement, addressing unique challenges faced by rural businesses. This model can serve as a practical guide for rural SMMEs aiming to enhance their digital presence and leverage social media for business continuity and growth.

Empirical Evidence of the Impact of Social Media on Business Resilience: This study provides empirical evidence of the positive impact of social media on business resilience during the Covid-19 crisis, particularly in a rural context. By quantifying the relationship between social media usage and business performance, the research demonstrates that higher levels of social media engagement are associated with increased sales growth, customer engagement, and market reach. This evidence fills a gap in the existing literature by providing concrete data on how social media can help rural SMMEs navigate and survive economic disruptions.

1.9 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.9.1 Research design

A research design provides a framework or blueprint for conducting the research study, through stating appropriate procedures applicable to gather information necessary to the identified research problem (Akhtar 2016; Abutabenjeh and Jaradat 2018). A quantitative method was used for this research study, through the use of a closed-ended 5-point Likert scale questionnaire. The method permitted the researcher to gather comprehensive data in a quantitative manner, with the aim of obtaining an in-depth understanding of critical factors affecting the use of social media by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis (Creswell 2014; Ainin *et al*. 2015). Data were gathered from SMME owners-managers in rural KZN.

1.9.2 Population

A population can be described as "an entire organisational unit with which the research problem is concerned" (De Vos *et al.* 2011: 223; Whitley Jr and Kite 2012 458). In this study the respondents are regarded as the population, to which the results of the study are generalised (Salkind 2014). The study population consisted of 414 070 SMMEs in KZN. This number is determined by StatsSA, as presented in the Quarterly Labour Force (QLF) Survey (StatsSA 2020).

1.9.3 Sampling method and size

A non-probability, convenience, purposive sampling method was used to select SMME owners and managers as the prime respondents to gather the required data through a structured questionnaire for the research study. The motive behind utilising these respondents emanated from the fact they would be in a position to provide comprehensive information pertaining to the study variables, which are organisational and technological context factors, as well as environmental factors, as detailed in chapter 2, and the conceptual framework for the study in chapter 3.The use of a convenience sampling method was also pivotal to this study, as participants were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate (Alrousan *et al.* 2020; Salamzadeh and Arbatani 2020; Matikiti, Mpinganjira and Roberts-Lombard 2018; Scholtz 2021).

According to the StatsSA QLF Survey (2020), there were 414 070 SMMEs in KZN. Ajay and Masuku (2014), Ajay and Micah (2014) and Remler and Van Ryzin (2015) propose, in terms of the population of SMMEs in KZN, in calculating the sample size, this formula was used;

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 pq}{d^2},$$

which gave rise to the sample size of 384 respondents.

1.9.4 Data collection instrument

A research instrument is defined by De Jonckheere *et al*. (2019) as a tool with which to gather data, to measure and analyse according to the research subject. Therefore, it is critical for a researcher to choose the research instrument most suitable for the study (Richey and Klein 2007: 106; Hall 2008: 146). In the case of this study, a structured questionnaire was used to collect data, which was a 5-point Likert scale in nature. The data were collected through a questionnaire, according to the research objectives, which were then used to test the hypotheses of the research study (Velentgas *et al.* 2013: 109).

1.10 DATA ANALYSIS

According to Flick (2017), quantitative data analysis uses descriptive and statistical inferential statistics to represent the data. In the case of this study, the data collected were analysed using the Statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) (version 27.0). This software assisted the researcher to perform descriptive and frequency analysis, as well as correlation, tabulation, t-test analysis and inferential statistics, including Cronbach's Alpha, Factor Analysis, Kaiser Maier Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's tests. The data are presented in tables, graphs, and pie charts.

1.11 PILOT TESTING

The pilot study is explained by Fraser *et al.* (2018) and Kumar (2011) as a feasibility study that is small and structured, to determine whether results can be obtained from the different aspects of the methods planned for a larger investigation that is more exact, or confirmatory and can generate the results. To determine the time and costs involved, a pilot study was conducted; this typically includes anticipating the potential problems that could be encountered during the actual research process (Tagliabue *et al*. 2020).

Prior to undertaking a descriptive study on social media use as a driver during the Covid-19 crisis by SMMEs in rural KZN, a pilot test was conducted to assess the usability of the survey questionnaire and data collection processes. The pilot study is thus a small-scale version of the main study, whereby a quantitative method was used in this pilot testing, in which 10 closed-ended questionnaires were distributed and completed by all 10 respondents. Upon receipt of the completed questionnaires from respondents of rural KZN, the data were clustered, grouped and coded accordingly on an Excel spreadsheet. to collect quantitative data from rural SMME owners and managers in KZN; the questionnaire was the primary measurement tool. Results are presented in the form of descriptive statistics using tables for the biographical data and factors influencing social media use by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis in KZN.

The findings of the pilot study revealed insufficient time was provided for respondents to complete the questionnaire; the questionnaire should be translated into isiZulu for respondents to have a clear understanding of certain statements of the questionnaire; and respondents would need assistance in questionnaire completion. The isiZulu translated questionnaire is depicted in Appendix A/ Isithasiselo A. It was recommended respondents be given sufficient time to complete the questionnaire during the main research study. It was further recommended respondents be assisted by the researcher during the process of questionnaire completion for the main study.

A covering letter, the questionnaire and the informed consent letter were translated into IsiZulu to make it easy for respondents to gain more understanding of certain questionnaire statements for this research during the main study. Improvements were thus made to the measurement instrument prior to commencing the main research study on the use of social media as a driver during the Covid-19 crisis by SMMEs in rural KZN.

In addition, respondents who participated in the pilot study were excluded from the main study. The pilot study was done to help the researcher determine whether the research area is worth pursuing at a larger scale (Kumar 2011). The pilot study was also used to determine reliability and validity of the research instrument. The data collected through a closed ended questionnaire were used to amend the questionnaire, as indicated above. The primary aim of conducting the pilot test was to establish any potential problems that may temper the quality and validity of results prior to the final questionnaire being distributed and completed by study respondents (Ngibe 2020). The pilot study highlighted the value of pilot testing in terms of improving the methodology and research instrument of this research study.

1.12 VALIDITY

Validity is defined as the degree to which a questionnaire measures what it is intended to measure (Bryman 2016: 159). Creswell *et al.* (2018, 2019) add validity in measurement addresses the degree to which the concept(s) under study are accurately represented by the specific items on the questionnaire, test, self-report form or other measuring device. To ensure the data collection instrument validity, content validity was carried out, where the researcher used seasoned experts in the area to provide their views on the validity of the tool. Validity was also ensured by piloting the questionnaire to the selected members of the target population. The pilot study made a point that challenges were attended to at the early stages, in order to curb any shortcomings in the main study, while it also permits the researcher to assess the research method suitability and its appropriateness, thus improving questionnaire validity (Sürücü & Maslakçı 2020.)

1.13 RELIABILITY

Reliability refers to consistency over time, that is, will a questionnaire yield the same results in the same situation, when administered twice over a short period, such as days or a week (Leedy and Ormrod 2010; Gerrish and Lathlean 2015: 415). The researcher ensured improvement of reliability for the instrument, where internal consistency was measured using Cronbach's coefficient alpha at 0.70. Internal consistency estimates reliability by grouping questions in a questionnaire that measure the same concept (Taber 2018: 1279; Nawi *et al*. 2020).

1.14 ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Anonymity is explained by Holland and Rees (2010), to refer to the identity of a respondent remaining unidentifiable at any time when anyone is reading the provided information. In addition, Holland and Rees (2010: 89) define confidentiality as the managing of private data in research for the protection of individuals; more specifically when they are sharing sensitive information. In this study, respondents were asked not to display their identities prior to the questionnaires being distributed, and assurance was provided that the knowledge collected would be treated with anonymity, which was done. Furthermore, the study respondents were assured of their anonymity, of confidentiality and that the data they provided would only be used for the purpose of this study. A covering letter was furnished to respondents, with detailed information regarding guidelines respondents needed to follow in relation to the research study.

1.15 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Miller, Mauthner and Jessop (2012: 14) define ethics as "moral deliberation, choice and accountability on the part of the researcher(s) throughout the research process." In accordance with this, ethical approval had to be obtained from the Durban University of Technology (DUT) Faculty Research Ethics Committee. Respondents were completely conversant regarding the research study and an informed consent form was obtained from the respondents (Klenke 2016: 148). The letter of information covered the following aspects: the study purpose; procedure outline; potential risks or discomforts to participants; as well as benefits; remuneration; and confidentiality of participants.

1.16 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

1.16.1 Delimitation of the field of study

The study was limited to critical internal and external factors that affect social media use by rural KZN SMMEs. This means the study outcome may not be generalised to other kinds of SMMEs, or to SMMEs in other countries. Nevertheless, the research study results can be used to enhance SMME survival growth during disasters such as the Covid-19 crisis in SA, as numerous of the variables show resemblances with other provinces.

1.16.2 Limitations of the study

In this study the quantitative approach was utilised, and the researcher experienced the challenges of completion of the questionnaire by some of the respondents were familiar with concepts related to rural SMMEs in KZN, even if there were well vest with English. Others respondents were given the questionnaires that were translated into IsiZulu. However, some of them did not clearly understand the business concepts, which were translated into IsiZulu. This necessitated the researcher to explain in depth the purpose survey to the target population in order for them to be able to complete the questionnaires. This process assisted considerably in creating an atmosphere conducive for the respondent participation in the study. This caused delays in completion of the questionnaires, with the collection of data extended to three months (March, April and May 2023) instead of two months, as per the original set timeframe.

1.17 DEFINITIONS OF KEY STUDY CONCEPTS

For this study, key concept definitions are used for improved understanding of the research study, as well as its evaluation and analysis.

1.17.1 Small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs)

The abbreviation SMME stands for Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises. This encompasses business enterprises, small businesses, corporations, companies or entrepreneurial ventures in SA, where the total annual turnover is less than or equivalent to R220 million and 250 people, at most, are employed (NSEA 2019). Moreover, SMMEs are acknowledged as an engine of economic advancement, through creating employment and reducing poverty, with special reference to developing countries with low income, used as a catalyst to stimulate growth in the economy and address the unbearable poverty they are faced with (Nani and Chiromo 2019). Therefore, in this study, there is interchangeable use of the concepts SMMEs and small businesses.

1.17.2 SMME Survival

SMMEs are referred to as one of the organisations established to contribute to the GDP of a particular country in order to reduce unemployment, create job opportunities and make a contribution in the country’s socio-economic upliftment. SMME survival, where this study is concerned, can be referred to as organisational survival and in the perspective of this study, is defined as the continuous ability of SMMEs to create wealth through innovativeness, increase market shares and remain profitable, despite all odds created by the Covid-19 crisis (Ugwuzor 2017).

SMME survival in the perspective of this study, refers to the continuous ability of SMMEs to create wealth through its innovativeness, increase its market share and remain profitable despite all odds that are created by the Covid-19 crises. The recent economic recession caused by Covid-19 globally crisis deepened the threat to survival of rural SMMEs. The recent economic recession caused by the Covid-19 crisis globally, deepened the threat to survival of SMMEs. Numerous SMMEs completely shut down, while others applied interventions and adopted strategies to slow down or reduce operations **(**Ugwuzor 2017; Zeidy 2020; Ndweni *et al*. 2019).

1.17.3 Definition of SMME growth

The concept growth can refer to the growth in sales, number of employees in the organisation including the increase in financial, structural, organisational, and strategic (Brush, Ceru and Blackburn 2009; Nieman and Struwig, 2019; Wickham, 2016). In context of this study, the SMMEs growth refers to the situation whereby rural SMMEs can increase in sales, employment, financial, structural, organisational and strategic. proportions.

1.17.4 Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

The GDP of an economy is a measure of total production, which refers to the monetary value of all final goods and services produced within a particular country in a definite time (Vuba 2019). In the year 2030, according to the NDP, it is estimated SMMEs would contribute between 60-80 percent to GDP increase and create many of the 11 million new jobs in SA. However, it was found the unemployment rate was at 27.1 percent in quarter 4 of 2018 (Vuba 2019).

1.17.5 Rural Area

“Rural” refers generally to areas of open country and small settlements, but the definition of “rural areas” in both policy-oriented and scholarly literature are terms often taken for granted or left undefined, in a process of definition that is often fraught with difficulties (IFAD, 2010). Rural areas are characterized by low population density, limited infrastructure, and a primary reliance on agriculture and natural resources. In the context of KwaZulu-Natal, rural areas often face challenges such as inadequate access to technology, education, and financial services (Lekhanya and Mason 2014).

1.17.6 Rural SMMEs

SMMEs in rural areas are defined based on their size, scope of operations, and location. These enterprises typically have fewer employees, limited capital, and operate in local markets. They are crucial for rural development, as they provide employment and stimulate economic activities (Lekhanya and Mason 2014).

1.18 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

This research study is made up of six chapters, briefly stated as follows**:**

Chapter one: Introduction and research study overview

In this chapter, the study introduction and background were presented, along with its purpose, the research questions, objectives, as well as the statement of the research problem, hypotheses and the study significance and scope. The chapter also summarised the research design. In addition, this chapter briefly discussed the scope of the study and definitions of key concepts for this study.

Chapter two: Literature review on factors influencing SMME social media use during the Covid–19 crisis

A discussion of the critical factors that affect social media use by rural SMMEs during events such as the Covid-19 crisis, is presented in this chapter Furthermore, it discusses the different types of survival and growth strategies employed by SMMEs in international and African countries and SA for survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

Chapter three: Literature review on theoretical and conceptual frameworks for the study

This chapter discusses relevant theories and support that provide an in-depth understanding of the factors influencing social media use by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis. These theories entail the UTAUT model, DoI theory, TAM, and TOE, as well as firm growth theory and survival-based theory. The chapter also outlines the characteristics research model derived from the literature review of the study.

Chapter four: Research Methodology

The methodology that will be used in the study is explained in this chapter, with the sample and method of obtaining data reliability and validity of the research discussed. This chapter details the methodology that will be instrumental to address the aims and research objectives in order to design and propose a social media model as a driving tool for SMMEs survival and growth during situations such as the Covid-19 crisis, in rural KZN. The study adopted a quantitative research design. The chapter also discusses the ethical considerations of the research.

Chapter five: Results, Discussion and Interpretation of Findings

This chapter will illustrate and discuss the findings collected through a structured questionnaire, regarding the research aims, questions and objectives of the study. It also elucidates the results and analysis as well as the statistical analysis of the data obtained by means of closed ended questionnaires. It will show the process of how the collected data will be managed and interpreted.

Chapter six: Conclusions and recommendations

In this chapter, the conclusions and recommendations of the research study will be discussed. This chapter also compares the empirical findings and the literature reviewed for this research, with the comparison based on the objectives of the research and relevant survey questions/ statements that will be conducted. The findings will also be tested in relation to the generated hypotheses, in addition to being further assessed in conjunction with the secondary data and tested in relation to the generated hypotheses.

Feasible conclusions and recommendations will be offered in this section, regarding overall social media use as a driving tool for rural KZN SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. The recommendations are also intended to be of assistance to policy makers, government officials and rural SMMEs in KZN. This chapter will indicate the strength of the findings and further propose and discuss an integrated model as the guidelines, which can assist the rural SMMEs to cope with the Covid-19 crisis in KZN to sustain their survival and growth in order to contribute to the GDP of KZN and SA in general as well as the conceptual framework that will be derived from the literature review.

The above overview of chapters of the research study is depicted as follows:

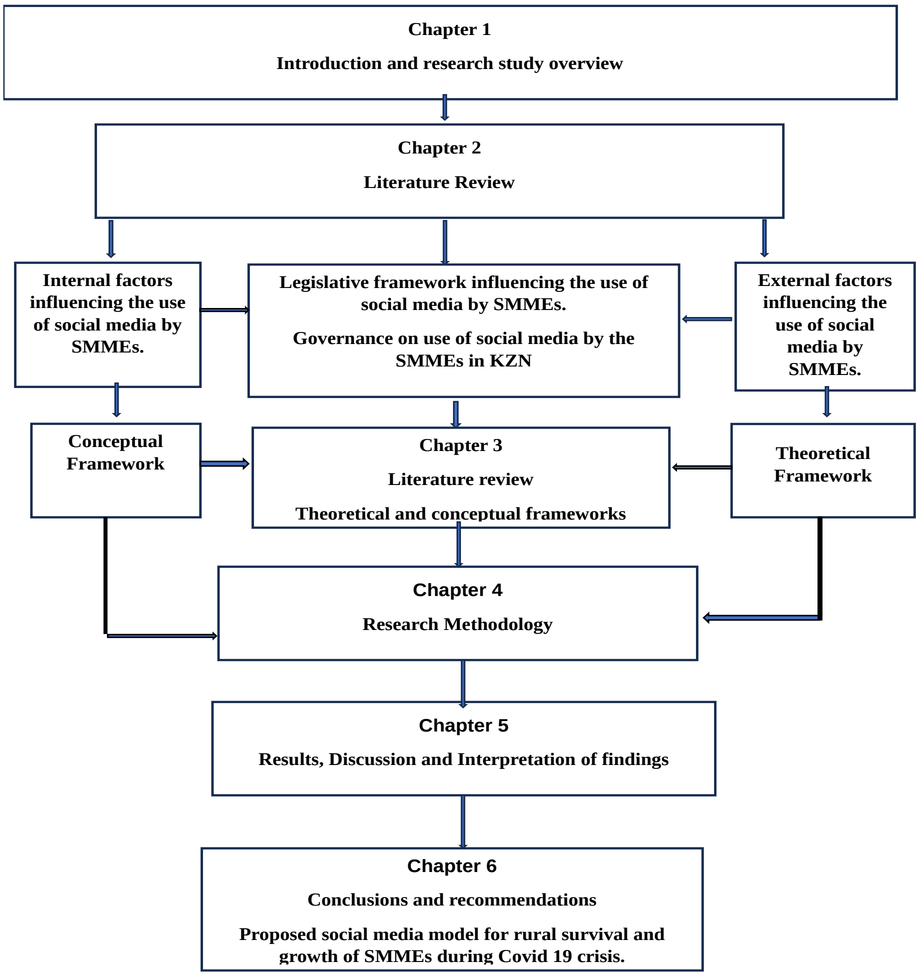


Figure 1.3: Chapters outline

Source: *Own research (2023)*

1.19 CHAPTER SUMMARY

A general study background mapped the customary research layout. The research problem was discussed, which deals with insufficient SMME survival and growth in social media use by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis. This emanates from the critical factors affecting social media use by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis. Furthermore, the primary and secondary study objectives were outlined, where the primary objective of the research aims at assessing the influence critical factors have in impacting social media use as a driver for rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in KZN.

To determine which critical factors influenced social media use as a driving tool for rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in KZN, six sets of hypotheses were generated. The theoretical background of the study was also briefly discussed, along with the influence of the critical internal and external factors impacting social media use by rural SMMEs, as a driving tool for survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in KZN. The theoretical and empirical aspects of the study were outlined in the research methodology. In addition, the chapter analysed and clarified definite significant concepts used to enable better comprehension, assessment, and analysis of the research study. The theories adopted for this study were also briefly outlined in this chapter, along with the chapter layout of the thesis. In the next chapters 2 and 3, the literature review on the factors influencing social media use by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis in KZN and theoretical and conceptual frameworks for the study will be discussed.

CHAPTER 2: FACTORS INFLUENCING SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY RURAL SMMEs DURING THE COVID–19 CRISIS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Social media is represented by web-based technologies that enable distribution of information to different customers for businesses in a cost-effective manner through decreased staff time. In turn, social media can enhance revenue, permitting organisations to share the skills and to helping their customers to improve their organisations productivity and performance. Furthermore, as the most effective marketing platform, social media is expected to create opportunities for businesses to connect with potential customers (Prince 2019).

Rambe *et al.* (2017) revealed 13 million South Africans are using Facebook; 7,4 million are on Twitter; 8,26 million on YouTube and 2,68 million are on Instagram. Many users are also accessing these platforms on mobile phones. Moreover, social media is referred to as an innovation process that increases communication to a higher level (Aldahdouh *et al*. 2020). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010: 61) pointed out social media is regarded as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content”.

Chugh and Ruhi (2018) refer to social media as “an online service allowing users to construct a public or private profile to connect and interact with their social connections”. Thus, it is known as internet–based applications comprised of wikis, bookmarking services, discussion forums, and blogging services. Obar and Wildman (2015) concurred social media is a computer-based communicating medium providing support to information and knowledge advancement and distribution, in addition to further forms of expression by means of social networking sites (SNSs). These sites comprise, among others, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn, as well as innumerable blogging platforms (Al-Adwan & Kokash 2019; Tajpour, Salamzadeh and Hosseini 2019; Wong *et al*. 2020). Additionally, in the 21st century, known as the era of new technologies, social media is regarded as the prime element allowing organisations, including rural SMMEs, to be competitive, have market access and to have closer relationships with their customers.

Social media is thus the chief influencer in customer buying decisions, where they can conduct their research on services and products they intend to buy (Elena 2016; Kaplan, 2015). Furthermore, according to van Scheers (2016) and Price (2019), social media is viewed as an important key driver for SMMEs to promote their products and services locally and internationally in the 21st century, in order to create job opportunities, reduce poverty and inject growth into the country's economy. Rural SMMEs are not excluded in this case.

Social media is considered a marketing communication technique. which businesses use to liaise with their customers in order to receive feedback and sustain customer satisfaction. This means social media offers SMMEs a platform to market their products and services and will provide small enterprises an opportunity to create brand awareness at reasonable costs to their customers and increase sales (Tlapana and Dike 2020).

Social media use has gained popularity in the world in such a manner that worldwide, 2.95 billion people in 2019 were active in social media, with this number set to escalate to 3.43 billion by the year 2023. This infers rural SMMEs are expected to ensure social media becomes part of their business strategy to reach more people for sales. Digital and social media also permit businesses to reach their marketing goals at a moderately low cost. To date, globally, the registered business total is more than 50 million on Facebook pages, and more than 88 percent utilise Twitter for marketing purposes. Furthermore, social media platforms are used for public service awareness and promotions for politics-related issues (Statista 2020; Ajina 2019; Grover *et al.* 2019; Hossain *et al*. 2018; Kapoor and Dwivedi 2015; Shareef *et al*. 2016; Lister 2017; Grover *et al.* 2022).

SMMEs could utilise these opportunities to advertise their products and services, and to survive, grow and sustain themselves during economic and health crises, such as the Covid-19 crisis. Nevertheless, Caballero-Morales (2021), Fernandes (2020) and Hamilton (2020) highlighted that SMMEs experienced a temporary catastrophe, due to a lack of market understanding and inadequate monetary resources during the worldwide Covid-19 crisis. This crisis compelled SMMEs to embark on technological innovations to survive and grow in spite of the crisis.

The adoption of technological innovations is restricted due to the lack of expertise in marketing, fiscal and human resources (Subriadi and Kusuma Wardhani 2022). In the context of the SMME business environment, social media is regarded as the paramount technological tool to absorb pressure, which emanated from economic crises in terms of advertising goods and services to customers worldwide (Wardati and Er 2019; Hassan, Nadzim and Shiratuddin 2015; Bocconcelli, Cioppi and Pagano 2017). Based on the above discussion, it appears a knowledge gap exists with regard to social media use by rural SMMEs during the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, this study investigated the critical factors impacting social media use as a driver for rural SMME survival and growth in KZN during the Covid-19 crisis.

2.2 SMME CLASSIFICATIONS AND DEFINITION

SMME classifications and definitions are briefly discussed below**:**

2.2.1 Classifications of SMMEs

There are no set standards for what constitutes SMMEs worldwide, but they are categorised into survivalist, informal and formal groups. SMME definitions are subject to the business environment in which they operate (Caballero-Morales 2021; Fernandes 2020). In a South African context, SMMEs are grouped in accordance with sectors and business environments in which they participate, making it difficult to globalise challenges to which they are subject. The environment SMMEs face will create complex challenges for them to accept social media platforms for their survival and growth. This requires SMMEs to be defined and grouped according to the policies of those countries in which they are located (Hamilton 2020; Bvuma and Marnewick 2020).

In this sub-section, SMMEs are defined and categorised according to South African and international perspectives. As stated by Mutezo (2005) and the National Credit Regulator (NCR) (2011), the abbreviation “SMME” refers to small, medium and micro enterprises and “SME” refers to small and medium enterprises. SMMEs and SMEs are used as synonyms for small, medium and micro enterprises in SA. The terms “small businesses” and “SMMEs” are also used interchangeably by the DTI (Omar, Arokiasamy and Ismail 2009; Herr and Nettekoven 2017).

The abbreviation SMME, is used as an acronym worldwide as well as in SA. From an international perspective, the term “SME” largely refers to small and medium-sized enterprises when the World Bank (WB), the European Union (EU), the United Nations (UN) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) conduct their studies, (Nwankwo and Gbadamosi 2011; Justina and Pula 2015). Whereas, the term “small and medium businesses (SMBs)” is mostly used in the United States of America (USA), when conducting research. Das (2017) stated India uses the concept micro and small enterprises (MSEs). In Africa the abbreviation “MSME” is normally used for micro, small and medium enterprises. However, in SA, the abbreviation SMMEs is generally used for small, micro and medium enterprises (NCR 2011; Mutezo 2005). This study adopted the abbreviation SMME as depicted in the South African National SBA 102 of 1996 and, because this study was conducted in the context of SA.

2.2.1.1 South African perspective

The South African National Small Business (NSB) Act (102 of 1996), and the NSB Amendment Acts of 2003 and 2004 define small businesses as enterprises in any economic sector, categorised as micro, very small, small, as well as medium enterprises. This business enterprise is supposed to be governed by one or more persons in accordance with set criteria. In accordance with the NSB Act of SA, Act 26 of 2003, SMMEs are defined (Table 2.1) below:

Table 2.1: SMMEs definition according to NSB Act 102 for South Africa

Type of Enterprise	Number of Employees and description	Annual Turnover in Rand	Gross Assets without Fixed Property
Medium	Comprises up to 200 employees, subject to industry, managed by owner but have division of labour with structured arranged in decentralised management manner with immovable premises coupled with prescribed set standards.	Less than R4 million up to R50 million subject to the industry	Less than R2m to R18 million, depending on industry
Small	Fewer than 50 employees, formal and registered, managed by owner with immovable premises plus a more multifaceted business structure of management.	Less than R2m to R25 million, subject to the industry	Less than R2m to R4.5 million, subject to the industry
Very Small	Fewer than 10 to 20 employees, subject to the industry, integral part of the formal economy and use technology.	Less than R200 000 to R500 000, subject to the industry,	Less than R150 000 to R500 000, depending on industry
Micro	Between one to five employees, informal businesses with no licence, possess formal business premises, governed by labour	Less than R150 000	Less than R100 000

	legislation, and potential to become official small business.		

Source: NSBA No.102 of 1996 and DTI (2008)

According to the NSB Amendment Act of 2019, Table 2.1 is amended, whereby this Amendment Act provides a new quantitative definition of SMMEs in SA. According to the Government Gazette, the classification is based on the number of employees, annual turnover and gross asset value as follows:

Table 2.2: SMMEs definition according to National Small Business Amendment Act of 2019

Type of Enterprise	**Description**
Medium	• Number of employees: 51 to 250 • Annual turnover: Between R50 million and R220 million • Gross Asset Value (Excluding fixed property): Between R18 million and R60 million
Small	• Number of employees :10 to 50 • Annual turnover: Between R15 million and R50 million • Gross Asset Value (Excluding fixed property): Between R5 million and R18 million
Micro	• Number of employees: Few than 10 • Annual turnover: Less than R15 million • Gross Asset Value (Excluding fixed property): Less than R5million

According to Tustin *et al*. (2005), Fortuin (2004), DTI (2008), Olusegun *et al.* (2018) and Bvuma and Marnewick (2020), in terms of the NSB Act 20 of 1996 and the NSBA Act 26 of 2003, survivalist enterprises as part of the categories for SMMEs as depicted (Table 2.1**)** above. Survivalist enterprises are briefly described as follows:

Survivalist enterprises

These business enterprises are subject to poverty and are striving for survival., however, people are unable to find jobs or access the sector of their choice to conduct the activities of these enterprises. The enterprises possess limited capital investment and business activities, with fundamentally no specific training skills in the precise field. The income made from their businesses remains less than the bottom income standard, with restricted opportunities to advance their businesses sustainably (Olusegun *et al*. 2018; Bvuma and

Marnewick 2020). In the context of this study, the survivalist, micro, very small, small and medium enterprises are categorised as SMMEs.

This classification is referred to in this study as small businesses. The terms SMMEs and small businesses are thus used interchangeably in this study. In summary, the National Small Enterprise Act 102 of 1996 categorises SMMEs broadly as follows:

Table 2.3: SMMEs categories according to The National Small Enterprise Act 102 of 1996

Enterprise size	Annual turnover (SA Rand)	Number of Employees
Medium	Up to R26 million	Up to 200 employees
Small	Up to R13 million	Up to 50 employees
Very Small	Up to R3million	Up to 20 employees
Micro	Up to R0,2 million	Up to 5 employees

Source: National Small Enterprise Act 102 of 1996

Based on Table 2.2 above, the National Small Enterprises Act, 2004 (Act No. 29 of 2004) further extended the definition of SMMEs. Accordingly, SMMEs are classified into five categories, namely the standard industrial sector and sub-sector classification, size of class, equivalent of paid employees, and turnover and asset value (fixed property not included). The categories of SMMEs are (Table 2.3a, b) as follows**:**

Table 2.4(a): SMME categories according to the NSBA Act 29 of 2004

Sector or subsector in accordance with the standard Industrial Classification	Size of class	The total fulltime equivalent of paid employees	Total turnover	Total gross asset value (fixed property excluded)
Agriculture	Medium	100	R5m	R5m
	Small	50	R3m	R3m
	Very Small	10	R0.50m	R0.50m
	Micro	5	R0.20m	R0.10m
Mining and Quarrying	Medium	200	R39m	R23m
	Small	50	R10m	R6m
	Very Small	20	R4m	R2m
	Micro	5	R0.20m	R0.10m
Electricity, Gas and Water	Medium	200	R51m	R19m
	Small	50	R13m	R5m
	Very Small	20	R5.10m	R1.90m

	Micro	5	R0.20m	R0.10m
Construction	Medium	200	R26m	R5m
	Small	50	R6m	R1m
	Very Small	20	R3m	R0.50m
	Micro	5	R0.20m	R0.10m
Finance and Business Services	Medium	200	R26m	R5m
	Small	50	R13m	R3m
	Very Small	20	R3m	R0.50m
	Micro	5	R0.20m	R0.10m

Table 2.4(b): SMME categories according to NSBA Act 29 of 2004

Sector or subsector in accordance with the standard Industrial Classification	**Size of class**	**The total fulltime equivalent of paid employees**	**Total turnover**	**Total gross asset value (fixed property excluded)**
Retail and Motor Trade and Repair Services	Medium	200	R39m	R6m
	Small	50	R19m	R3m
	Very Small	20	R4m	R0.60
	Micro	5	R0.20m	R0.10m
Wholesale Trade, Commercial Agents and Allied Services	Medium	200	R64m	R10m
	Small	50	R32m	R5m
	Very Small	20	R6m	R0.60m
	Micro	5	R0.20m	R0.10m
Catering, Accommodation and other Trade	Medium	200	R13m	R3m
	Small	50	R6m	R1m
	Very Small	20	R5.10m	R1.90m
	Micro	5	R0.20m	R0.10m
Transport, Storage, and communication Medium	Medium	200	R13m	R3m
	Small	50	R6m	R1m
	Very Small	20	R5.10m	R1.90m
	Micro	5	R0.20m	R0.10m
Transport, Storage and communication	Medium	200	R26m	R6m
	Small	50	R13m	R3m
	Very Small	20	R3m	R0.60m
	Micro	5	R0.20m	R0.10m
Community, Social and Personal Services	Medium	200	R13m	R6m
	Small	50	R6m	R3m
	Very Small	20	R1m	R0.60m
	Micro	5	R0.20m	R0.10m

According to Table 2.4(a, b) above, SMMEs in SA are classified in terms of the nature of business they provide to their customers. The nature of the business is depicted (Table 2.4) as follows:

Table 2.5: Business nature of SMMEs in SA

Nature of Business	% of SMMEs
Sell the product in the same form as they got it	48.8%
Buy something to sell, but add value before reselling	10.7%
Grow something and sell	5.2%
Make something and sell	5.1%
Sell by-products of animals	3.7%
Rear livestock / poultry and sell	3.1%
Sell something that was collected from nature	1.5%
Sell something obtained for free	0.6%
Render a skilled service for example mechanic, plumber, hairdresser	13.2%
Render other services for example car wash, garden services, transport (taxi services) catering	5.1%
Render a professional service for example doctor, lawyer, accountant	1.3%
Render building/construction services	1.0%
Render tourism-related services for example accommodation / hotel / Band / guest house, tour operators	0.6%
Retailers	78.7%
Service Providers	21.3%

Source: FinScope SA, Small Business Survey (FinMark Trust 2010)

2.2.1.2 International perspective

Researchers found no set standards that constitute SMMEs worldwide, however, this depends on the policies of that country with regard to defining and grouping SMMEs (Caballero-Morales 2021; Fernandes 2020; Hamilton 2020; Bvuma and Marnewick 2020). According to Devi *et al*. (2020), a country such as Indonesia, defined and grouped its SMMEs (Table 2.6) as follows:

Table 2.6: SMME categories according to international perspective

Enterprise size	net worth in RP (converted to rands)	Annual sales

Small	Having a net worth of more than R62 143,25 up to a maximum of R621 120,81 excluding land and buildings for business premises.	Having annual sales of more than R372 547,66 up to a maximum of R3103 135,00.
Medium	Having a net worth of more than R621 120,81 up to a maximum of R12 432 460,00 excluding land and buildings for business premises.	Having annual sales of more than R3103 135,00 up to a maximum of R914 427 500,00.
Micro	Having a net worth of at most R62 155,58 excluding land and building for business premises.	Having annual sales of at most R372 967,80.

Source: Devi et al. (2020)

2.3 SMMEs FROM AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The SMMEs are contributing to economic growth of the development countries with an intention of creating job opportunities and reduce high rate of inequality in the economy (WB 2018; Masuku and Selepe 2017). Countries such as Australia, Belgium, Canada and Chile have a contribution of 51 percent to GDP. In the Australian economy, SMMEs account for more than 90 percent of the country's businesses (Australian Government 2016), whereby SMMEs are categorised into 42.2 percent large, 22.4 percent medium and 22.4 percent small enterprises (Australian Government 2016). On the other hand, America comprises more than 22 million small businesses (Focus Economy 2018) and is regarded as a country with a stable economy since it invested in its SMMEs as engine of country's economic growth (Nemaenzhe 2010).

Countries such as Japan, Britain, Denmark and Sweden also recognised SMMEs as an engine for economic growth. Japan has invested in technology and its economy is stable, having relied on SMMEs to boost the country's economy during the 2009 economic recession. Denmark recognised SMMEs as critical business enterprises that reduce unemployment rate. Sweden heavily invested on SMMEs to drastically improve its GDP. Whilst Britain used the SMMEs as the key driver of national growth (Nemaenzhe 2010). Naude (2011) argues some countries that have experienced economic growth through investing in SMMEs was because these countries have accepted new technology innovation such as social media technologies for entrepreneurship growth in their countries.

2.4 SMMEs IN AFRICA

Africa is a developing continent, and most African countries are faced with economic, social and political instability, which lead to poverty, inequalities, a high rate of unemployment, illiteracy and population migration (Hausman 2005; Lukhele and Soumonni 2020). In this regard, SMMEs are identified and used as a vehicle to address the disparities of the past, to support and improve the economic growth of African countries (Njoroge and Gathungu 2013). This implies SMMEs in Africa play a crucial role in alleviation of poverty and promotion of economic participation to those previously disadvantaged, with an intention of creating wealth. This was evident from the report of the WB (2018), which revealed in countries such as Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi and Chad, SMMEs contribute approximately 16 percent of GDP through their SMMEs, which are informal in nature (WB 2017).

SMMEs and co-operatives are instrumental in the Kenyan economy and contribute immensely to economic growth, whereby the government invested mostly in very small businesses and medium enterprises, whilst the Tanzanian government has implemented several reforms to enhance SMME survival and growth in the country (Nemaenzhe 2010). The government of Botswana has invested in promoting and supporting the growth of SMMEs through putting the Small Business Act in place (Mannathoko 2011). Additionally, SMMEs have contributed significantly in the creation of job opportunities in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), recorded by the WB (2018), where it was highlighted in countries such as Kenya, Zambia, Ivory Coast, and SA as well as Cameroon; SMMEs contributed 38 percent, 37 percent, 33 percent, 21 percent and 19 percent of new jobs created, respectively.

This was supported by some studies that pointed out seven of 10 (70 percent) new jobs are created by small businesses among developing countries (WB 2015; Page and Soderbom 2015). The study conducted by Adeosun (2022), with regard to the contribution of small businesses to Nigerian economic growth, revealed small businesses are contributing to economic growth, with a positive influence in reducing the unemployment rate. This suggests a positive correlation with the statistics released regarding Nigeria, which highlighted as of December 2017, small businesses created approximately 3-million jobs in Nigeria (National Bureau of Statistics 2019).

This infers SMMEs are contributing to economic development and reduction of unemployment in African countries, although in certain instances, SMMEs fall short of the expectations with regard to the expected contribution to the economic advancement of the African continent. This is attributed to the lack of new technology use innovation, such as social media technologies (Bushe 2019; Budree *et al*. 2019; Prince 2019).

2.5 SMMEs IN SA

SEDA (2019) published various quarterly reports regarding the number of SMMEs in SA. The SEDA report, in partnership with the Bureau for Economic Research (BER), used data from the QLF Surveys and the Quarterly Financial Statistics (QFSs) set up by StatsSA. The approach employed is that used by the DTI (2008) to establish the number of SMMEs. Table 2.7 shows the number of SMMEs in SA:

Table 2.7: Number of SMMEs in SA

Key indicator	**Number /percentage**
Number of SMMEs	2,550,540
Number of formal SMMEs	736,198
Number of informal SMMEs	1,754,443
Number of jobs provided	10,839,819
Percentage operating in trade and accommodation	41.3%
Percentage operating in community services	12.7%
Percentage operating in construction	13.9%
Percentage operating in financial and business services	13.3%
Percentage black owned formal SMMEs	74.5%
Percentage contribution of SMMEs to turnover of all enterprises (including large enterprises)	38.2

Source: SEDA (2019)

Table 2.7 reveals the majority (1 754 443) SMMEs in SA function in the informal sector, which amounts to 68.8 percent of all SMMEs, excluding agriculture and private households. Thus, more than two out of three SMMEs are informal, while the majority of SMME owners are black and operate in the trade and accommodation sector (SEDA 2019).

2.6 CONTRIBUTION OF SMMEs IN SA

2.6.1 Overview

Small businesses play a critical role in the economic growth of countries. It was found SMMEs form 97 percent of all businesses in SA and generate 57 percent of GDP (Chimucheka 2013). In the context of SA, the government has identified SMMEs as the businesses that add value in reducing the unemployment rate and creating job opportunities (Leboea 2017). SMMEs have a positive impact on poverty alleviation (Chimucheka 2017), with their contribution categorised into economic growth, employment and poverty alleviation (Chimucheka 2017; Matsukunyane 2013; SEDA 2019), discussed below.

2.6.2 Contribution of SMMEs to economic growth, employment and poverty alleviation

The South African government has adopted the NDP 2030 to ensure the realisation of economic advancement and reduce the rate of unemployment, according to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2017) and has been consistent in ensuring SMMEs are sustained on a continuous basis. In this regard, the South African government has put support structures in place such as Khula Enterprise Finance (Ltd), the SEDA, and SEFA (Bruwer 2016). The chief motive for ensuring the sustainability of SMMEs, is these entities provide socio-economic value and contribute to the national economy (Bruwer 2020). In the context of SA, SMMEs constitute appropriately 97 percent of all functional business entities (Brendon 2016; Viljoen and Struweg 2016). They are responsible for creating employment opportunities for 60 percent of the national labour force, contributing an estimated 45 percent to the national GDP (Chimucheka 2013; Amoros and Moska 2016; Bhorat *et al*. 2018). On this basis, SMMEs are regarded as crucial drivers of economic growth, strategic innovation, and job creation catalysts in SA (Bruwer *et al*. 2018).

The contribution of SMMEs to the economy advancement differs from country to country. However, its positive impact is pivotal to growth of the country. In the context of SA, SMMEs have a major contributing effect to GDP, amounting to between 34 and 39 percent (IFC 2018; Kalidas *et al*. 2020; SEDA 2019; Wiid and Cant 2021). In addition, SMMEs help the governments of their countries improve the livelihoods of the people, such that SMMEs contribute approximately 70 percent jobs and generate between 50 and 60 percent added value. These small enterprises generate employment, economic empowerment and social well-being and are expected to contribute approximately 40 percent to the GDP and

60 percent of total employment in developing economies (Small Business Institute (SBI) 2018; Fatoki 2021).

Consequently, governments of countries worldwide are prioritising SMMEs as a major priority for their growth of the economy. SA, in this regard, has projected that SMMEs would be in a position by 2030 to create 600 million jobs. Irrespective of this stated projection, SMMEs in SA account for 98.5 percent of all firms but only contribute 28 percent of all jobs, due to high SMME failure rates resulting in jobs lost in SA. The high SMME failure rate thus portrays a negative picture of job creation in the country. Hence, this raised some doubts and questions whether SMMEs would ever contribute meaningfully to job creation, the reduction of poverty and income inequality and economic growth in various developing countries (OECD 2017; WB 2018; Agyei 2018). Moreover, SMMEs play a huge role in the general global economy in both developed and developing countries. Similarly, SMMEs in SA compare favourably with their global counterparts regarding their contributions to GDP, employment and percentage of businesses in the country (Akpan n.d.).

Manzoor, Wei and Sahito (2021) emphasise SMMEs in rural areas are necessary for providing jobs to poor rural employees. Thus, this is regarded as a vital instrument for rural development and reduction of poverty in rural places. According to SEDA (2019), SMMEs employed approximately 8.9 million people in SA. It is estimated 2.44 million jobs were for SMME owners, whilst 6.4 million were for SMME employees. This implies SMMEs are major contributors of economic advancement in rural places such as KZN. Nevertheless, sustaining their survival and growth in the long-term remains a great challenge for SMMEs (Bhorat *et al*. 2018).

Social media use during the Covid-19 crisis was critical to ensure rural SMMEs could market their products and services and continue to contribute to livelihoods of people, particularly in rural places. However, Nene (2021) argues in SA, with special reference to KZN, unemployment is very high. This has a negative impact on socio-economic development in rural KZN and the country as a whole. The contributions of SMMEs to GDP and employment in different countries before the Covid-19 crisis are depicted (Table 2.8) below.

Table 2.8: SMME contributions to GDP and Employment in different countries before the Covid-19 crisis

Economy	SMME share of no of enterprises %	% Value contribution to GDP	SMMEs % of total employment
United Kingdom	99.00%	51.10%	48.95%
Canada	70.90%	27.00%	90.43%
Belgium	94.40%	61.80%	69.04%
Japan	70.40%	38.30%	6.42%
Singapore	99.33%	49.40%	67.74%
Mozambique	71.10%	28.50%	42.91%
South Africa	98.00%	49.40%	63.76%
Spain	99.00%	64.80%	74.85%
Netherlands	99.00%	64.70%	66.95%
Malta	99.00%	71.50%	80.03%

Source: DSBD (2020)

Table 2.8 above shows SMMEs play a key role in the global economy, in terms of creating more than 50 percent of job opportunities, which corroborates figures by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2018). In the context of SA, the contribution of SMMEs is approximately half of the country's GDP and 64 percent of the country's employment. According to Akpan (n.d.), SMMEs in SA experienced stable growth from Quarter 1, 2017 to Quarter 2, 2018. In addition, SMMEs experienced a huge decline of 2.02 percent, -10 percent, and -5.22 percent, respectively. This sharp decline was ascribed to the negative impact of the outbreak and spread of Covid-19.

In SA, moreover, the Covid-19 crisis caused a decline in employment from the fourth quarter of 2019 and the first quarter of 2020. The findings revealed a major decline in the first quarter of 2020 by 14 percent in the SMME sector (Akpan n.d.). This significant decline of growth within SMMEs was attributed to the Covid-19 crisis and its negative impact. Chimucheka (2017) added the South African government has acknowledged SMMEs as a critical factor in poverty alleviation that assists with poverty eradication through providing employment to large population of the country, irrespective of the challenges they are facing.

Considering the above, it could be deduced the SMME sector could contribute to the process of survival, growth and sustainability in order to cope with the Covid-19 crisis aftermath. This can be realised through SMME adopting social media use in marketing products and services to improve sales and provide revenue enhancement. Such SMME growth can occur in different forms, such as revenue growth, asset growth and value creation. However, the true value of intangible assets such as brands, knowledge, and patents should also be recognised. Based on the above, the findings by Kietzmann *et al.* (2011), De, Pandey and Pal (2020) and Akpan (n.d) indicated SMME survival, growth and sustainability are extremely important. The motive behind SMME survival, growth and sustainability is because they have the potential of promoting job creation and economic growth (Kruger 2004; OECD 2017; NDP 2016).

Irrespective of the government promoting the establishing of SMMEs through available supporting structures (Chapter 1, sub-section 1.2.1), because SMMEs have been identified as businesses that contribute to the stimulation of the South African economy and growth, through creating employment and reducing the poverty rate. SMMEs are faced with external and internal factors that have a positive and negative influence on SMME survival and growth (Sibiya 2018; Ngwenya and Zondo 2021; Amoros and Moska 2016; Bhorat *et al*. 2018).

2.7 CONTRIBUTION OF SMMEs IN KZN

The province of KZN comprises 10 district municipalities that are mainly rural (Provincial Treasury 2017) and one metropolitan municipality known as eThekwini metropolitan municipality, which is the engine of economic growth in the province, with more than 60 percent contributed to the economic output of the province (COGTA 2018; Zhou and Gumbo 2021). According to the International Finance Corporation (IFC) (2019), the majority SMMEs are located in rural areas, as depicted by roughly 41 percent of small businesses in KZN being situated in rural places, which is confirmed by Zhou and Gumbo (2021). KZN makes a positive contribution to the GDP of the country; ranked as the second largest contributor to the national economy, with 15.7 percent contributed to national GDP (Sitharam and Hoque 2016).

Despite the major contribution of KZN to national GDP, the province is faced with high rates of poverty, unemployment, crime and illiteracy. Generally, business management skills, or lack thereof, are recognised as a central factor that led the failure of small businesses in rural KZN. SMMEs receive funding, however, they still fail, indicating SMME owners-managers lack financial skills (Lekhanya 2016).

2.8 IMPACT OF SMMEs ON LIVELIHOODS OF RURAL COMMUNITIES

The term "livelihoods" refers to the availability of suitable stocks and enough cash and food flows to meet the basic needs of a family (Chambers and Conway 1991). According to Chambers and Conway (1991), there are many ways to sustain a living. These could be affected by gender, since it is a social construct; thus, one could be specialised or apprenticed as livelihood strategy. Education can also affect the pool of livelihood strategies from which to choose. Fundamentally, livelihoods are essential for poverty alleviation, and a poor person's life cannot be transformed at all, when they have no means of earning a substantial income (Firisani 2022). As stated by Bvuma and Marnewick (2020), people rely on human capital for livelihoods in today's world The South African government is, therefore, promoting SMMEs as a key strategy for job creation, economic growth for poverty alleviation and reduction in inequalities. Many African countries have also adopted strategies that promote SMME development as a major way to reduce poverty, particularly among urban dwellers (Eshetu *et al*. 2013: 21).

2.9 OVERVIEW ON SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY RURAL SMMEs DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS IN SA

Organisations are subject to challenges, which necessitate employing digital and social media marketing strategies to maintain and increase market share and promote their products and services. SMMEs should create an appropriate brand awareness to be effective, efficient, and economically sustainable in times of economic uncertainty, disruption and recession, as with the Covid-19 crisis. SMMEs are thus duty-bound to integrate the use of social media with their overall business strategy (Kietzmann *et al*. 2011; Shareef *et al*. 2018; Li, Larimo and Leonidou 2020; Khodieva and Khodieva 2020).

Organisations have been found to derive benefits through ensuring social media strategies are integrated with their overall business strategy. The benefits for rural SMMEs using social media involve connecting with customers, improving awareness of their brands, influencing customer attitudes, receiving customer feedback, and helping to improve current services and products, while also increasing sales (Ezeife 2017; Dwivedi *et al*. 2021).

In the 21st century, organisations are supposed to embark on strategic change management, which means moving from traditional channels of communication to the use of digital and social media marketing strategies (Sugandini *et al.* 2020). Despite such good intentions for promoting the establishment of SMMEs in SA, the Covid-19 crisis negatively affected SMME survival and growth (Nyawo 2020). To overcome these disadvantages, Trawnih *et al.* (2021) suggested social media could be the prime platform for ensuring rural SMMEs survived and grew during the crisis.

Tlapana and Dike (2020) and O’ Donnell (2011) highlighted social media has a huge impact on creating customer perceptions and purchasing decisions. This will necessitate SMMEs investing more resources in learning about social media marketing strategies to increase their survival, growth and sustainability in turbulent environments, such as an economic recession and the Covid-19 crisis (Sugandini *et al*. 2020). The use of social media marketing strategies by rural SMMEs will also assist these small enterprises in retaining clients and recruiting new customers. SMMEs must, therefore, avail themselves of social media to market their goods and services in the 21st century to survive, grow and be economically sustainable in an unsettled environment (Tlapana and Dike 2020). This process would enable these small enterprises to retain and increase their market share. By inference, the organisations must face the reality of developing a social media strategy and plans to be in touch with their customers during economic uncertainty and disruption (Kietzmann *et al*. 2011; Algharabat *et al*. 2018. 2019; Kapoor *et al*. 2018; Kaur *et al*. 2018).

However, not many studies have been conducted on social media use during the Covid-19 crisis by rural SMMEs, however, some authors such as Tlapana and Dike (2020), Khodieva and Khodieva (2020), Sugandini *et al*. (2020) and Alhamami *et al.* (2023) focussed on this aspect, but they did not focus on rural places. This suggests a knowledge gap in this regard, with this study, therefore, attempting to narrow and address this knowledge gap in the context of SMME survival and growth. It investigated critical factors influencing the use of social media by rural SMMEs in KZN during the Covid-19 crisis. The findings were used to develop and suggest a social media model as driver for rural SMME survival and growth in KZN.

2.10 CRITICAL FACTORS AFFECTING SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY RURAL SMMEs DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

2.10.1 Introduction

Despite, the government’s good intentions for promoting the establishment of SMMEs in SA, the Covid-19 crisis negatively affected SMME survival and growth (Nyawo 2020;

Sugandini *et al.* 2020). Trawnih *et al*. (2021) further suggest social media is regarded as the prime platform that ensured SMMEs survive and grow during the Covid-19 crisis.

Tlapana and Dike (2020) and O' Donnell (2011) emphasised social media has a huge impact on creating customer perceptions and purchasing decisions. This necessitates SMMEs invest more to learn about social media marketing strategies for increased survival, growth and sustainability in turbulent environments, such as the economic recession and the Covid-19 crisis (Sugandini *et al.* 2020). This will also assist SMMEs in retaining their customers and recruiting new customers. They must, thus, avail themselves of social media to market their goods and services in the 21st century to survive, grow and to be effectively, efficiently and economically sustainable in an unsettled environment (Tlapana and Dike 2020). Additionally, Lekhanya (2010) and Mason and Lekhanya (2014) revealed the challenges of SMMEs are pertinent in rural KZN and are confronted with internal and external factors that negatively affect their success. Despite these challenges, SMMEs are regarded as the engine for economic advancement in developing economies, in terms of creating employment opportunities and income distribution challenges. Rural areas in SA, with special reference to KZN, are not excluded in this case (Ngcobo and Sukdeo 2015; Lekhanya 2015).

According to the literature reviewed, not much has been done concerning the use of social media as a tool to improve SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in developing countries such as SA, and rural KZN in particular. Therefore, there is a need to address the knowledge gap identified in this regard by conducting this study. Against this background, the study sought to investigate the critical factors affecting social media use as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN. Furthermore, this study developed a social media model as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth during disasters such as the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN. In the context of this study, the vital factors in the decision-making process play a crucial role in ascertaining the success or failure of a decision.

2.10.2 Social media use by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis

The concept "crisis" is described as an event that is unexpected and abrupt, which threatens to disrupt day-to-day operations of business enterprises, including rural SMMEs, which can negatively influence financial resources of businesses. Thus, this would give rise to reputational risk for business enterprises (Trawnih *et al*. 2021; Coombs 2007), with rural SMMEs not an exception in this case. As a consequence of the crisis, a necessity has arisen for businesses to develop survival and growth strategies to withstand such events emanating from for example, the economic recession caused by the Covid-19 crisis (Reeves *et al*. 2020). Based on the above discussion, social media use has been regarded as instrumental for the survival and growth of SMMEs (Akpan, Soopramanien and Kwak 2020; Sugandini *et al*. 2020).

The current crises negatively affecting rural SMMEs is due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which has required businesses to (re)design their business survival and growth strategies (Reeves *et al*. 2020). Kunene (2020) and Baadjie *et al*. (2023) stated SMMEs have a tendency to be more at risk during a crisis, as a result of resource constraints, and being positioned unfavourably in the market, which means they must, therefore, weigh up various ways to communicate, in order to uphold their standing among their customers (Coombs 2007; Trawnih *et al*. 2021; Enwereji 2022). This is confirmed as, during the recent Covid-19 crisis, SMMEs had to make use of digital technologies, including social media, as a survival tool to reach existing customers and attract new customers (Itliong 2022).

There is, however, a lack of acceptable studies conducted to promote social media platform adoption and use as a survival mechanism during the Covid-19 crisis, with special reference to emerging economies (Trawnih *et al*. 2021; Sugandini *et al*. 2020). This is supported by Lekhanya (2013), who pointed out South African rural SMMEs in KZN are still lagging in using social technologies for promoting their products and services and interacting with potential customers. Hence, there is a gap that needs to be addressed regarding the use of social media as survival mechanism in rural SMMEs. This study thus investigated the critical factors influencing SMME social media use in rural KZN during the Covid-19 crisis.

The UTAUT model, the DoI theory, the TAM and the TOE models are used to provide in-depth understanding and descriptions of internal and external contexts of social media use during the recent Covid-19 crisis (Hillmer 2009; Baker 2012; Venkatesh and Morris 2003; Papadopoulos, Baltas and Balta 2020). In addition, Papadopoulos *et al.* (2020) found the Covid-19 crisis provided business opportunities for developing countries to investigate new strategies that would ensure business continuity during a crisis, such as Covid-19. Thus, SMMEs must embark on survival and growth strategies during such crises (Trawnih *et al*. 2021). In this regard, the study used survival-based and firm growth theories to provide insights and explanations on the survival and growth of SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis.

2.10.3 Critical factors affecting rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis

These critical factors are categorised as internal and external and known to be critical when either an appropriate or an incorrect implementation of a particular factor leads to an advantageous or disadvantageous position. The critical factors are also known as the success factors of any organisation (Vartiak 2016). In the case of this study, these factors refer to the internal and external factors that play a pivotal role in determining success or failure in social media use for rural SMME survival and growth. These rural small enterprises are faced with internal and external factors that negatively influence their survival and growth in turbulent environments.

This was exacerbated by the outbreak and spread of the Covid-19 crisis, which resulted in measures imposed by governments across the globe restricting movement, referred to as "lockdown", including SA. This caused major disruptions to developed and developing countries' economies (Nyawo 2020; Trawnih *et al*. 2021). The critical factors in the context of this study are referred to as the environmental factors affecting social media use by SMMEs in rural KZN during the Covid-19 crisis.

Environmental factors include economic, political, legal, and social factors, as well as labour markets and laws, public policy, credit access, and entry to financial markets, in addition to market infrastructure, developments in technology, and networks (Benedict 2019, Liao, Welsch and Stoica 2003 Welter 2001). Ngibe (2020: 65) emphasised internal and external environmental factors must be coherent in a manner that permits organisations to form a strategy yielding economic advantage and ample earnings, facilitating performance improvement. An overview of critical factors, known as environmental factors, is briefly outlined as follows:

2.10.3.1 Overview of critical factors affecting social media use by rural SMMEs during Covid-19 crisis

Critical internal and external environmental factors affected the business of rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis. These factors determined the level of social media use by rural SMMEs for their survival and growth. The factors highlighted are, for example, institutional environmental factors that may negatively impact rural SMME survival and growth. A study conducted by Herrington and Kew (2018) focused on assessment of the

SA entrepreneurial environment by certain leading business experts. This revealed the main institutional barriers to entrepreneurial activity in SA are entrepreneurship education, R&D transfer, the financial environment, and support, in addition to government policies and the regulatory environment, along with government support for entrepreneurship programmes.

Part of a country's institutional environment consists of rules, social norms and cognitive structures, with these guiding, constraining, or liberating economic activity locally. The framework for market transactions is also set by defining alternative courses of action SMMEs can pursue, prescribing risks and rewards for varying activities, and specifically stating the conditions under which small businesses hold legitimacy (Spencer and Gómez 2004). It was proclaimed by Manolova, Eunni and Gyoshev (2008) that the institutional environment of a society encompasses the fundamental ground rules, whether they are political, social, or legal, where these rules determine the production and distribution basis. In order that organisations may be provided with support and legitimacy, they have to adapt to the rules. As explained, institutions comprise regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive systems (Scott 2001).

Institutions that are effective and efficient include regulative systems, which consist of legislation, regulations and policies by government that advance specific behaviours while restricting others. The responsibilities of SMME owners can be specified by laws and regulations that assign property rights, as well as reduce the startup risks when starting a new business. Institutional voids are created where a country's formal institutional environment is ineffective and inefficient. In turn, these voids create an unstable and unpredictable business environment, for example, corruption and crime that negatively impact SMMEs (Estrin, Korossteleva and Mickiewicz 2013; Mthimkhulu and Aziakpono, 2015; Yukhanaev *et al*. 2015).

Institutional environment factors are, therefore, coercive factors (Kloviene 2012). These may impact on social media use by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis, which generally include accounting standards, financial legislation and socio-economic-political institution pressures. In addition, coercive factors emanate from external stakeholders such as government authorities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which compels organisations to implement different environmental regulations and standards. These standards are mandatory for the organisations (Roxas and Coetzer 2012; Kloviene 2012). The coercive factors can profile the environmental protection and legislative mandates of the organisations (Berrone *et al*. 2013); these factors principally deal with critical internal behaviours (Roxas and Coetzer 2012). In developing countries, coercive factors may originate from international buyers such as the EU, foreign investors, professional associations and transnational institutions (Berrone *et al*. 2013).

Coercive factors were found to affect organisations' environmental performance (DiMaggio *et al*. 1983; Latan *et al.* 2018). Mandatory regulations are imposed by government authorities and every organisation (including SMMEs) is bound to follow these regulations, subject to imposition of serious sanctions and punishments for failure to act (Deephouse 1996). For example, SMMEs were faced with coercive pressures due to lockdown restrictions imposed by the South African government during the Covid-19 crisis (Disaster Management Act 2002).

Normative factors emanated from suppliers, customers, associations such as the organisations' trade unions, the media and other social entities. Trade unions and other associations are usually considered the basic entities that create normative pressures (DiMaggio *et al*. 1983; Latan *et al*. 2018). In developing countries, normative force is considered a driving factor influencing norms and a sense of responsibility, because normative factors affect socially compliant behaviours and actions. These pressures ensure customers and suppliers in the external environment and organisations operate in a socially compliant manner, thus encouraging the adoption and use of social media platforms (Roxas and Coetzer 2012).

Environmental factors were thus critical in determining social media adoption and use by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis for their survival and growth. Therefore, rural SMME entrepreneurs must consider the environmental factors that can affect their perceptions and actions regarding the growth of rural SMMEs (Benedict 2019: 44-45).

In the context of South Africa, in relation to SMMEs, the restrictions through imposed lockdowns were mandatory, since it was in line with the Disaster Management Act of 2002, in terms of Section 27(5) (c). The economy of SA was closed, which had a huge negative impact on the financial positions of SMMEs and on the GDP of the country. It was stated categorically that anyone who deviated from the Disaster Management Act, 2002, in terms of Section 27(5) (c) would be in transgression of this Act, which would be a criminal offense. Thus, these restrictions and lockdowns were imposed by governments of countries globally, with SMMEs from rural places not excluded in this case. This meant rural SMMEs had to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis to continue to survive and grow in this predicament period.

The mandate had an impact on rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis (Disaster Management Act 2002). Irrespective of the economic constraints resulting from the Covid-19 crisis and restrictions imposed by the governments of countries worldwide through closing their economies, rural SMMEs had an opportunity to make use of social media as a driving tool for their survival and growth (Nyawo 2020; Zeidy 2020; Sugandini *et al*. 2020; Trawnih *et al*. 2021; Tlapana and Dike 2020; O' Donnell 2011). The institutional environmental factors, with special reference to the legislative framework impacting social media use by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis and notwithstanding internal and external factors, including challenges faced by SMMEs, these small enterprises play a primary role in advancement of countries' economies.

The critical factors affecting social media use by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis are illustrated (Table 2.9**)** below.

Table 2.9: Critical factors affecting rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis

Internal factors affecting the use of social media by rural SMMEs	**External factors affecting the use of social media by rural SMMEs**
Lack of internet connectivity	Lack of infrastructure
Lack of technology infrastructure	Lack of cyber security
Managerial competencies	Lack of patent security
Lack of financial skills	Lack of broadband internet
Lack of business technical skills	Government regulations
Lack of social media awareness	Lack of social support
Lack of availability of resources	Impact of Covid-19 crisis
Rural SMME owner-manager perceptions	Economic factors
Rural SMME owner-manager support	Political factors
Influence of small size on use of social media	Customer pressure
Rural SMME owner-manager influence on social media use	Social media cost
	Strong competition

	Larger market scope
	Lack of investment in technology
	Social media marketing strategies

Source: Own research (2022)

Table 2.9 portrays the critical factors affecting SMME social media use during the Covid-19 crisis, which are discussed according to the research questions and objectives in this chapter and the next.

SMMEs are established for a particular purpose, and thus add value to the economies of their countries (Ngibe and Lekhanya 2020; Lekhanya 2015; Fatoki and Garwe 2010). However, SMMEs are subjected to internal and external factors, known as the business environment, in which SMMEs are operating. The internal and external factors play a crucial role in determining the survival and growth of SMMEs (Delmar and Wiklund 2008; Beck and Demirguc-Kurt 2006). The survival and growth of SMMEs is negatively or positively influenced by turbulences in the business environment (WB 2006; Zhang, van Doorn & Leeflang 2014; Sitharam & Hoque 2016). The critical internal and external factors are discussed as follows:

2.10.4 Internal factors affecting social media use by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis

The internal factors in the context of this study are portrayed (Figure 2.1) below**.**

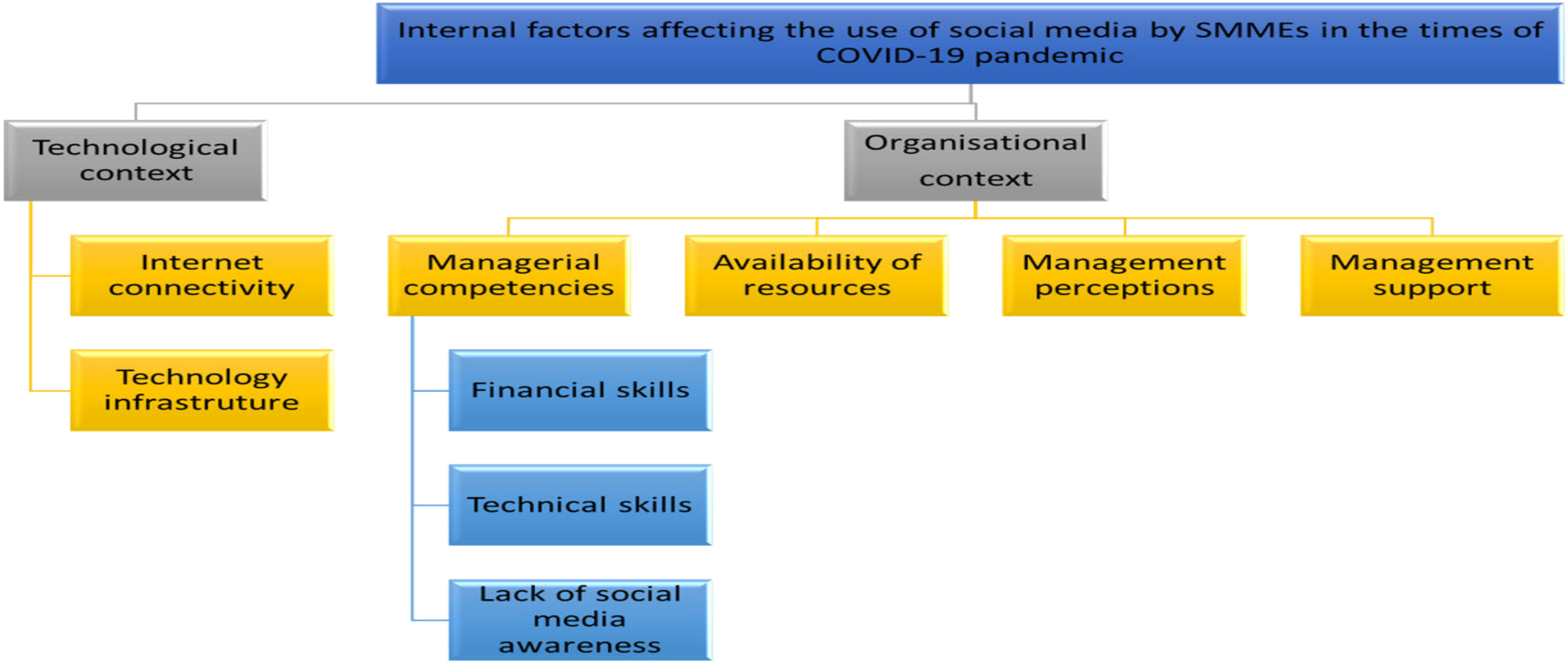


Figure 2.1: Internal factors affecting social media use by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis

Source: *Researcher (2022)*

As illustrated (Figure 2.1), internal factors are regarded as the organisation's capabilities and characteristics in which it has control of these factors (Abed 2020). In addition to Abed (2020), Wang *et al*. (2016) emphasised organisations must ensure inner organisational processes are best suited to drive the adoption of new technology. Alsharji, Ahmad and Abu Bakar (2018) indicated inner organisational attributes include organisational capabilities, management systems and organisational size. Zhu and Kraemer (2005) supported this notion, stating the organisational context is known as expressive measures such as scope, size and availability of the resources within the organisation. The internal factors are categorised into organisational and technological contexts. The internal factors that positively or negatively influenced social media use by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis are discussed as follows**:**

2.10.4.1 Lack of internet or broadband connectivity

Internet connectivity is regarded as an integral part of socio-economic advancement and enhances productivity and the overall GDP of economies of countries worldwide. In addition, internet connectivity can connect remote populations to markets and create platforms for innovation (Dalberg 2013; Madon 2000). According to Guerriero (2015), internet connectivity can contribute to SMME growth that comprises firm profit and firm efficiency, which are briefly discussed as follows:

SMMEs are in a position of making profits through internet connectivity, because they can use it to reduce costs and increase revenue through improved communication. Internet connectivity benefits SMME survival and growth through permitting these enterprises to market their products and services locally and internationally, since it removes distance between SMMEs and customers (Dalberg 2013). It lowers communication and transaction costs and improves the availability and exchange of information, by reducing information asymmetries and enabling sellers and buyers to access markets at a cheaper cost. By using the internet to access the worldwide web, SMMEs can expand commercial connections with their customers (Clarke and Wallsten 2006; WB 2009, Madon 2000).

In addition, the internet is a cheaper platform for SMMEs to advertise and market their products. The use of social networking by customers has, therefore, increased drastically, where customers are sharing their experiences with other online users. This is supported by approximately 80 million active social network users in Africa today, corresponding to a social penetration of around seven percent of the total population (Chukwu and Uzoma 2014; We Are Social 2014). The study conducted by Audience Scapes (2010) with more than 8 000 adults from Ghana, Tanzania and Zambia in 2009 and 2010 revealed 19.8 percent respondents use the Internet to visit a social networking website at least once a day, and a further 15.2 percent at least once a week.

This implies SMMEs can use social media through access to internet connectivity, to increase the probability of liaising with existing customers and attract new customers during crises such as the Covid-19 crisis to promote their products. This can increase sales and enhance the revenue of rural SMMEs for their survival and growth during disasters similar to the Covid-19 crisis.

Moreover, in SA, there are roughly 10 million Facebook users, where Facebook penetration is approximately 19 percent, with users spending almost three hours on average per day on social media channels (We Are Social 2014); internet users who also utilise social networks are more likely to be active online. For example, South African online social media users are more than twice as likely to go online daily (75 percent) than other internet users (35 percent) (Balancing Act 2014). Therefore, internet connectivity will allow SMMEs to use direct online sales for products and services.

E-commerce has grown exponentially in SA but is constrained by the lack of support services such as delivery systems and online payment platforms, which creates resistance to electronic payments. These benefits are noticed in the financial markets, consulting, travel and tourism sectors (Worldwide Worx 2012). Based on a study We Are social (2014) conducted, it can be deduced there are opportunities for rural SMMEs to survive and grow if they could invest in social media, because they could access existing customers and attract new customers to market their products and services to during closed economies.

The McKinsey Global Institute (2013) projected by the year 2025, e-commerce would account for 10 percent of total retail sales in Africa's main economies (corresponding to $75 billion in annual online sales). In conclusion, internet connectivity within SMMEs contributes to business creation through enabling innovation, quicker diffusion of ideas and knowledge, and greater networking, as well as access to new markets. Irrespective of the immense contribution of SMMEs to overall national growth through access to internet connectivity, the continent of Africa is experiencing a low rate of establishing new SMMEs.

In this regard, Nigeria initiated a scheme called 'Get Nigerian Businesses Online'. This assisted small businesses to gain an online presence to achieve the target of getting more than 25 000 businesses onto the web since 2011, driving marketing and awareness, and consequently, business growth in the Nigerian SMMEs sector (Dalberg 2013). SA is not excluded in these initiatives, since it launched the scheme known as 'Woza Online' in January 2012, for SMMEs to build their own websites at no cost. As a result of this initiative, 11 200 SMMEs that created a website in the first two months after its introduction (Worldwide Worx 2012).

Dalberg's 2013 study, conducted in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and Senegal with more than 1 300 businesses across Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and Senegal, revealed more than 80 percent SMME owners perceived their businesses as beneficiaries due to internet use. Moreover, 70 percent SMMEs believed this process would result in employment of new employees. This is line with the Worldwide Worx (2012) study in SA with 2 000 SMME owners and decision makers, which revealed possessing a website has a positive correlation with profitability and survival. Of the business enterprises with websites, 30 percent agreed their business would not survive without an online presence and 79 percent reported they had experienced growth, of which 30 percent indicated they experienced advanced growth.

Overall, the businesses enterprises declared this would not be possible without access to the internet. This means it is important for rural SMMEs to invest in social media for their survival and growth during situations such as the Covid-19 crisis. The above discussion has revealed the majority SMMEs owners (between 39 and 42 percent) suggested the internet is the prime tool for communicating with customers in order to advertise their products and services. It also plays a significant role in ensuring SMMEs realise sustainability, business growth and maintain competitive advantage in the marketplace (World Wide Worx 2012).

Rural SMMEs were not excluded from using the internet as their primary tool to communicate with their customers with the intention of advertising their products and services during the Covid-19 crisis. Thus, rural SMMEs could utilise this business opportunity to adopt social media to attract new customers and improve their client base to sustain their survival and growth in times of crisis. In addition, a study conducted by Audience Scapes (2010) highlighted a bearing between internet use and SMME growth. In conclusion, the McKinsey Global Institute (2013:6-8) projected that by 2025 "Internet-related productivity and efficiency gains (including cost savings, consolidated supply chains and digitised payment collections) in the African retail sector will be between $16 billion and $23 billion".

Based on the above discussions, where governments of countries worldwide closed their economies, rural SMMEs with internet connectivity during the Covid-19 crisis were able to communicate with their customers by adopting and using social media, with the purpose of marketing their products and services and thus maintain their profitability. Therefore, internet connectivity can play a critical role in social media adoption and use for SMME survival and growth during a crisis such as Covid-19 crisis. Audience Scapes (2010) found 26.6 percent individuals sampled in Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia perceived the internet is easy to use; 40.7 percent believe it is difficult to find places where they can access the internet, and 45.3 percent said internet access is expensive.

In particular, the price of the internet is critical for policies aimed at increasing internet connectivity in developing countries. Nonetheless, the internet remains too highly priced in a variety of developing countries (Broadband Commission 2014), while the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) stated fixed-broadband prices seem to be negatively correlated with the level of economic development of these countries, which makes it difficult for them to access internet connectivity (ITU 2014).

Lekhanya (2014) emphasised the high cost of infrastructure installation, the exorbitant technology price, the shortage of skilled workers and the lack of management vision to adopt internet technology hindered rural SMMEs from adopting social media in SA. Studies conducted by certain researchers have revealed the use of digital tools such as social media assisted organisations to maintain economic activity during the Covid-19 crisis (Bloom, Fletcher and Yeh 2021; Fairlie and Fossen 2021; Doerr *et al.* 2021). However, small businesses are without access to fast internet and are unable to make use of digital tools due to the lack of financial resources and lack of digital skills (Farole and Winkler 2015; Paunov and Rollo 2016; Marsh *et al.* 2017). Cariolle and Léon (2022: 8-9) argued lack of internet connection is a barrier to the use of digital tools and may also mirror a lack of information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure, which hinders rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media during the Covid-19 crisis for survival and growth.

Rural SA is confronted with the challenge of poor broadband connectivity. This was confirmed by a study in 2017, which showed 20 percent of the population had access to the internet, whilst many people face cultural, economic and social barriers to communicating through social media technologies (Pather and Rey-Moreno 2018: 3-4). This infers rural SMMEs have the challenge of access to internet, which may have created a barrier in social media use due to lack of internet connectivity during the Covid-19 crisis. The inadequate connectivity in rural SA is also cited in the NDP, South Africa Connect, and the 2015 National ICT Advisory Review Panel Report. The National Integrated ICT Policy White Paper (p. 66) emphasised the network rolled out is skewed towards urban areas, as compared to rural areas (Pather and Rey-Moreno 2018: 3-4).

Small businesses remain hindered by their lack of internet connectivity, despite great technological advancements globally. Without this technology, rural SMMEs may have found it difficult to survive during the Covid-19 crisis (Gqoboka, Anakpo and Mishi 2022: 1395-1396). Rural SMMEs would have been unable to communicate with their customers with the purpose of marketing their products and services. Consequently, the non-availability and/ or partial internet connectivity can be an obstacle to rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media for survival and growth during disasters such as the Covid-19 crisis (Sugandini *et al*. 2020; Gqoboka *et al*. 2022).

Lekhanya (2014) emphasised the high cost of infrastructure installation, exorbitant technology prices, shortage of highly skilled workers and lack of management vision to adopt internet technology are hindrances to rural SMME adopting new modern technologies such as social media in SA. This implies rural SMMEs were subject to internet affordability by rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

2.10.4.2 Lack of technology infrastructure

Infrastructure is regarded as one of the important critical factors for economic advancement, because it assists organisations to achieve their intended objective with regard to survival and growth. This is due to the technology providing the opportunity to small businesses to reach their existing and prospective customers and using it to connect with global supply chains (Obokoh and Goldman 2016: 3). The use of technology such as social media is cost effective as it can track customers and improve internal day-to-day business operations of small businesses (Adenikinju 2005; Kessides 1993).

According to Venter *et al.* (2015), there are various forms of technologies that include online technologies, computers, and mobile technology. Mavimbela and Dube (2016) highlighted SMMEs are faced with a slow pace to adopt and use technology such as social media; ascribed to poor infrastructure, lack of skills, and exorbitant cost of technology.

This suggests rural SMMEs will find it difficult to survive and grow during crises, due to the slow pace of embracing technology emanating from the lack of access and inability to use it (Venter *et al*. 2015; Mavimbela and Dube 2016; Tendai, Nicole and Tafadzwa 2018).

The use of technology enhances SMME productivity and customer service, which means the use of technology in the form of social media by SMMEs would improve productivity and growth. It is crucial for SMMEs to embrace the adoption of technology to use social media to improve performance (survival and growth) during disasters such as the Covid-19 crisis, in terms of financial performance (Sitharam and Hoque 2016; Asomaning and Abdulai 2015; Tendai *et al.* 2018; Dubihlela and Sandada 2014). Some rural SMMEs in developing countries are not aware of the visible benefits of ICT and e-business. Visible benefits include work routine simplification through ICT, increase in productivity, promotion effectiveness and efficiency of communication, and customer service improvement (Okundaye, Fan and Dywer 2019). The inability of rural SMMEs to appreciate the effects on their performance has severe consequences for the adoption and use of ICT in developing countries such as Nigeria and SA. Similarly, those SMMEs aware of the visible benefits of ICT are hindered by barriers to its use, with rural SMMEs not excluded in this case.

According to Asunka (2016), many rural SMMEs are willing and knowledgeable regarding the benefits of ICT to business performance; however, several barriers hinder their adopting and implementing ICT solutions, including social media. The barriers are categorised as internal and external. The internal barriers include organizational behaviour, the behaviour of the owner/manager, and cost of adopting ICT, while external barriers comprise political, cultural, legal, and social, as well as infrastructural barriers (Tarute and Gatautis 2014). These barriers have mitigated the adoption and implementation of ICT by numerous SMMEs, ultimately hindering them from performing, particularly during the Covid-19 crisis.

These barriers had a negative influence on SMME ability to adopt and use social media so as to penetrate to market their products and services (Asunka 2016; Lekhanya 2016; Gqoboka *et al.* 2022). The opportunity to adopt and use social media for survival and growth, as well as to contribute to employment and the GDP of the country was thus missed by SMMEs, due to internal and external barriers rural SMMEs face (Lekhanya 2016). The contributions of SMMEs can be further improved using ICTs meant to transform business performance, since they will have access to large amounts of information. Through access and use of ICTs, SMMEs will increase the probability of creating more job opportunities and increased public revenue (Mutobvu 2020).

ICT will, therefore, increase the chances of rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media with the intention to participate in the knowledge economy by facilitating connectivity. This will help them create and deliver products and services on a global scale and provide access to new markets and new sources of competitive advantage to boost income growth. A study conducted by Lekhanya (2016), with 127 questionnaires used to collect data from rural small businesses owners/managers in the Southern region of KZN, found poor infrastructure negatively impacts rural small businesses, which affected these enterprises' survival and growth in this area. In conclusion, Lekhanya (2014: 2719) emphasised the lack of technology in rural small businesses in KZN has been a problematic factor for them to adopt ICT as compared to larger businesses.

Rural small businesses in KZN are thus lagging, when compared to larger businesses, in terms of adopting new technology such as social media, which may have made it difficult for rural SMMEs to survive and grow during the Covid-19 crisis (Lekhanya 2014: 2719; Enwereji 2022). Rural SMMEs are in financial distress due to the Covid-19 crisis that can, in turn, be detrimental for rural SMMEs to adopt and use technology, for example, new social media technologies during emergencies, with the Covid-19 crisis and natural disasters as examples, due to unavailability of resources for the adoption and use of social media during the pandemic (Gqoboka *et al.* 2022; Enwereji 2022).

Based on the above, the access to market by rural SMMEs to market their products and services during the Covid-19 crisis in developing countries, particularly in rural places, would have been difficult without technological infrastructure and increased digital literacies. Additionally, rural SMMEs with a fundamental knowledge of social media face hindrances in economically benefitting from the technology (Solomon, Allen and Wangombe 2023: 18-20). Therefore, rural SMMEs in KZN may be subject to lack of technology infrastructure, which may make it difficult for rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media for survival and growth during crises similar to Covid-19 (Lekhanya 2014: 2719; Lekhanya 2016). However, it was found social media use is a critical tool for marketing purposes, as it can increase the rural SMME survival and growth rate during crises (Patma *et al*. 2021; Kakumbi and Phiri 2022).

2.10.4.3 Managerial competencies

Researchers have a different view of managerial competencies, for example, Veliu, Manxhari and Jashari (2017) perceived managerial competencies as the acquired knowledge, skills and behaviour that promote effectiveness and efficiency of managers in executing their duties and responsibilities (Veliu *et al.* 2017). However, Ogunsola (2017) refers to managerial competencies as the intellectual resources posed by the owner-manager in assuming the task in an organization. Brits and Veldsman (2014) argue managerial competencies are regarded as a set of skills, abilities and knowledge required to accomplish a definite job. Rambe and Makhalemele (2015) added managerial competencies are the prime factors that promote the survival of a business. Zahra, Zandi and Bahmani (2014) stated the lack of managerial competencies will lead to business failure. In the same vein, Herrington, Kew and Kew (2014) highlighted SMMEs in SA fail due to a lack of managerial competences.

According to Fatoki (2014), managerial competencies are chief resources for the survival and growth of SMMEs; this indicates rural SMMEs need to identify the competencies that will enable them to use social media during crises. Many researchers recommend SMME owners are to embrace the digital age, since not doing so can lead to the failure of SMMEs to survive and grow during disasters such as the Covid-19 crisis. SMMEs, including those in rural places, will hinder their survival and growth should they be unable to align their business with a technology strategy, such as the use of social media during an economic, environmental or health crisis such as Covid-19 crisis (ACCA 2012; Arham, Boucher and Muenjohn 2013; Li *et al*. 2016).

Lekhanya (2018) concurred with the above researchers, pointing out management skills, business practices and working in collaboration positively impact SMME growth. Consequently, it is recommended rural SMME owners possess management skills and competencies that permit them to successfully manage their businesses, with rural areas such as KZN not excluded in this case.

Rural SMME owners would have been best advised to cooperate and practice social media use during the Covid-19 crisis to increase market penetration, competitiveness, and increased awareness of their business and to extend customer relationships (Matikiti *et al*. 2018; Choudhury & Harrigan 2014). In conclusion, SMME owner/manager support possesses an ability to motivate the implementation of social media for SMME survival and growth (Alrousan *et al*. 2020; Grover and Goslar 1993; Low *et al*. 2011; Matikiti *et al*. 2018; Salamzadeh and Arbatani 2020).

Research conducted by Nene (2021: 4) was based on assessing managerial competencies of small enterprises in Okhahlamba Local Municipality, which is one of the rural places in KZN. The main study objective was to determine whether SMME owners-managers possess adequate skills to successfully manage their businesses, with 120 questionnaires distributed to rural SMME owners-managers and 116 questionnaires were collected from the respondents. It was found those rural SMME owners-managers with formal qualifications after matric seem to be doing well in their business, in comparison to those who do not have formal qualifications. It was further revealed SMME owners-managers are fully aware of the managerial competencies they should possess, however, many lack the required managerial competencies (Nene 2021: 4-6). Even the literature reviewed by Nene (2021: 20-21) revealed rural SMMEs are subjected to business failure due to the lack of managerial competencies, with these competencies regarded as key crucial internal factors that contribute to business failure or success. Lekhanya (2015), in this regard, argues approximately 80 percent of South African rural SMMEs lack managerial competencies, which has led to business failure.

Some researchers pointed out rural SMME owners or managers who are reluctant to embrace the digital age will experience business failure, which may impact negatively on rural SMMEs to survive and grow during crises similar to the Covid-19 crisis. SMMEs in rural places will experience interruptions in their survival and growth when they are unable to align their business with a technology strategy, such as using social media technologies to market their services and products to existing and prospective customers (ACCA 2012; Arham *et al*. 2013; Li *et al.* 2016; Bodziany *et al.* 2021).

Management competencies are thus critical to influence rural SMME owners-managers to adopt and use social media marketing by providing vision and cognitive support to the business (Li *et al*. 2016). The lack of managerial competencies by rural SMMEs were thus a hindrance in influencing social media use during the Covid-19 crisis. Rural SMMEs were vulnerable due to their poor managerial skills and inadequate sales market during the Covid-19 crisis (Yaghoubi Farani *et al.* 2022). Management competence, consequently plays a crucial role in business success or failure (Yahya and Elsayed 2012: 132) and it is significant for SMME owners-managers to recognise when the business is subjected to turbulences in the environment they are operating in, regarding the competencies suitable for these changes emanating from the Covid-19 crisis (Taipale-Erävala 2015: 20; Yaghoubi Farani *et al.* 2022). This infers SMMEs, particularly those in rural places, need to identify the competencies that will assist them to survive and grow during situations such as the Covid-19 crisis (Bodziany *et al*. 2021).

The managerial competencies of rural SMME owners-managers to manage business played a critical role in SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. However, managerial competency gaps among SMMEs owners-managers during the pandemic remain high, which has led to business failure (Malinao and Ebi 2022). In the same vein, Lekhanya (2015) pointed out rural SMME owners-managers are generally confronted with a lack of managerial skills and would prefer to use the traditional way of advertising their products and services, rather than using new technology such as social media that might demand rural SMMEs owners-managers undergo more managerial training and skills (Amoah and Jibril 2020).

2.10.4.4 Lack of financial skills

According to Agyei (2018) and Fatoki (2021), many SMME owners need financial management skills to be successful. This implies the success or failure of their enterprises is highly dependent on the availability of resources, including owner-manager financial skills. Such financial skills refer to the situation where owners are able to use their financial knowledge to make financial decisions to realise the survival and growth of their businesses. However, it is apparent there are insufficient financial skills amongst rural SMME owners and managers, which resulted in poor financial decisions (Agyei 2018; Fatoki 2021). The lack of financial skills amongst SMME owners and managers contributed negatively to the ability of rural SMMEs to create employment and stimulate economic advancement. Such inability to access finance from formal financial institutions, due to poor financial skills can lead to default risk for financial institutions. This will create bad financial records for rural SMMEs with these institutions; therefore, rural SMMEs will be unable to access finance from formal financial institutions.

Constrained access to external finance by SMME is due to the lack of the financial skills SMME owners and managers exhibit in properly managing their finances, to where they create good financial records that will assist with good credit records, which will stimulate the probabilities to access external formal financial institutions (Agyei 2018; Nunoo and Andoh 2012; Huston 2012; Fatoki 2014. Fatoki 2021; Bongomin *et al*. 2017; Hussain, Salia and Karim 2018; Adomako, Danso and Damoah 2015).

This may have negatively impacted rural SMMEs to have sufficient budget to adopt and use social media as part of their marketing strategy to market their businesses during Covid-19 crisis. Consequently, the crisis caused by the lack of financial skills among rural SMME owners and managers can hinder their access to sustainable financial capital; this means these small enterprises could not cope with social media implementation to continue with their day-to-day operations when the economies of countries were closed due to lockdowns. Hence, the financial skills of SMME owners and managers had a huge impact on the adoption and use of social media for survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

Agyapong and Attram (2019) concurred with the above researchers, suggesting good financial skills of owners and managers are critical indicators of rural SMME success, which may act as a catalyst to create more chances of access to finance. Thus, good financial skills can be the means for SMMEs to generate competitive advantage in order to influence their selection, use and management of financial assets and enhance the effectiveness, efficiency and economy of their financing decisions and strategy. Worthy financing and investment decisions by fiscally skilled owners and managers have a bearing on the liquidity, solvency and profitability of SMMEs. Alternatively, it can be deduced poor financial skills of managers and owners would have prevented SMMEs from having capital to finance social media adoption and use during the Covid-19 crisis.

Highly financially skilled SMME owners and managers will give their business enterprises access to knowledge and information regarding how to obtain finance which can, in turn, lead to competitive advantage and superior performance. Lack of financial literacy by rural SMME owners-managers can lead to bad financial decisions with negative consequences to an SMME's operations, financial structure and mandate (Agyapong and Attram 2019; Barney 1991; Eniola and Ektebang 2014; Abdulsaleh and Worthington 2013).

2.10.4.5 Lack of business technical skills

According to the NDP, small businesses in the services sector are adversely affected by skills shortages such as business IT capabilities, mostly in services such as accounting and sales. In 2008, the DTI also acknowledged the shortage of skills and limited number of entrepreneurs to create employment growth (SEDA 2019; StatsSA Quarter 2: 2015). Therefore, SMMEs need appropriate digital capabilities for digital transformation and orientation as the basic business skills to adopt and use social media during crises.

One the one hand, digital capability refers to the ability of businesses to create new products and processes and to respond to market evolution (Pham *et al*. 2021; Khin *et al*. 2020) and is characterised by technology affordances. This includes the efforts of businesses in development and maintenance procedures that exploit human capital and knowledge assets to interact with a specific set of digital technologies (Pham *et al*. 2021; Khin *et al*. 2020). Digital orientation, on the other hand, is a business strategy that pays special attention to changes emanating from digital technologies such as social media platforms. Digital orientation entails the business being more attentive on the digital business market. Kindermann *et al*. (2020), Bullini (2016), and Checchinato *et al*. (2021) conclude digital orientation defines digital technology scope as the set of digital technologies that allow the organisation to realise strategic goals. Digital orientation has to do with acquiring new skills, competencies and knowledge needed to facilitate digital transformation.

Rural SMMEs must, therefore, acquire new skills in order to adopt and use social media during disasters such as the Covid-19 crisis. In this case, it can be presumed rural SMMEs must be digitally oriented businesses, in the context of innovation, in order to attain a broader vision and commitment with regard to using new technologies such as social media platforms to develop innovative product growth during crises.

Ardito *et al.* (2021) stated digital orientation fosters digital transformation and provides a competitive advantage. This follows from digital technology capabilities and orientation referred to as the technical skills rural SMME owners’ need to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis for their survival and growth. According to Lekhanya (2018), these technical skills are critical in aiding SMMEs to work towards growth and explore new opportunities in developing economies, with special reference to SA, Nigeria, Kenya, and Malaysia.

Lekhanya (2018) further revealed technical skills for rural SMMEs are problematic, even in developed countries such as the UK, where it was found approximately 36 percent smaller companies experienced skilled staff shortages, which had a bearing on their growth. It was, furthermore, discovered SMMEs showed different percentages in the most critical skills, such as lack of sales skills (16 percent), a shortage of IT skills (12 percent), and financial management skills amounted to 10 percent. Thus, rural SMMEs are short of digital technology capabilities and orientation that can assist their social media adoption and use to increase market penetration and customer relationships, and increase sales that can increase revenue during economic disruptions caused by the Covid-19 crisis.

The lack of financial management (10 percent), in the context of SMME survival and growth, has a bearing on technology affordances, which can prevent rural SMMEs from having their own capital for social media platform adoption and use for advertising their products and services to existing and new customers to enhance their revenues during closed economies.

SMMEs, therefore, require technical skills that enable these enterprise owners-managers to deal with the particulars of the adoption process that is technology-related, considered fundamental for coping with innovation practices. According to Maduku, Mpinganjira and Duh (2016), there is a lack of technologically related skills that will require SMMEs to secure the services of IT advisors at a huge cost, due to their lack of innovation and learning capabilities. Ghobakhloo *et al*. (2012) revealed a shortage of IT experts within SMMEs, which will negatively impact of social media technology adoption and use. This means IT-related technical skills availability within SMMEs will make SMMEs receptive to adoption and use of new technology, to interact with prospective and existing customers, which would improve learning capabilities that would augment the adoption of social media marketing.

A lack of technology skills would exacerbate the lack of digital orientation, referred to as strategic business orientation, which specifically focuses on the changes emanating from digital technologies, such as social media platforms. In conclusion, digital technology capabilities and orientation is one of the technical skills for rural SMMEs survival and growth. These are regarded as critical factors for adoption and use of social media during Covid-19 crises to market products and services for survival and growth of rural SMMEs.

A study conducted by Lekhanya (2018) revealed technical skills for SMMEs are also problematic even in developed countries, where it was found 36 percent of smaller companies in the UK experienced a shortage of skilled staff. This means SMMEs lack digital technology capabilities and orientation that can assist them with social media adoption and use to increase market penetration and customer relationships, in order to increase sales that can give rise to increased SMME revenue in times of economic disruptions caused by the Covid-19 crisis.

2.10.4.6 Lack of social media awareness

Social media is defined, according to Alshehri (2019), as a service that is web-based , which allows individuals to generate public profiles, communicating with users when connections are shared with others, while able to view the links made by other users in a system. The author further describes consciousness as the subjective condition of a person's existence to realise something, both within or outside oneself (Alshehri 2019). Awareness of social media is a prerequisite for its further use, where such awareness is in reference to knowing and understanding more regarding something that happens in the world or around someone. Insufficient awareness is, therefore, one of the problems where the use of social media is contradicted (Oyekan and Kamiyo 2008). Social media awareness is stated by Hew (2011) as the primary determining factor of informal scientific communication. This is echoed by Alencar (2016), who from the results of his research, significantly contributed to understanding the meaningful relationship between social media awareness and its adoption for informal scientific communication. Bugshan (2019) asserts awareness of social media has become a means of information diffusion and improvement, which follows on from Praveena and Thomas (2014) and Shen (2015), who concurred such awareness is an essential factor that influences the intention to continue to adopt web technology. These principals also apply to rural SMMEs; this means a lack of social awareness may be one of the problems contradicting the use of social media by rural SMMEs. This would distract rural SMMEs from adopting and using social media during disasters such as the Covid-19 crisis, with Shen (2015) and Efendi *et al*. (2020) having suggested social awareness is a critical factor motivating the business to adopt and use technology such as social media.

Lekhanya (2013) concurred with the above researchers, highlighting South African rural KZN SMMEs' tardiness towards social media adoption and use to improve their businesses, through interacting with existing and potential customers. Rural SMMEs in KZN, therefore, lack social media awareness for marketing their products and services to their customers and would have found it difficult to adopt and use social media during the Covid-19 crisis for the purposes of survival and growth.

A study conducted by Sugandini *et al.* (2020) where the TOE model was used regarding the adoption of social media by SMMEs, revealed SMMEs that were affected by the Covid-19 crisis possess heightened awareness of social media and purposely adopted and used social media to connect with existing and potential customers for marketing their products and services in order to survive and grow during the pandemic. Thus, overall, it was critical for SMMEs to create an awareness of social media, and to adopt and use social media during the Covid-19 crisis for their survival and growth (Kakumbi and Phiri 2022).

Oyekan and Kamiyo (2008) emphasised a lack of social awareness is regarded as one of the problems that contradict social media use by rural SMMEs. These rural SMMEs may have found it difficult to use social media to communicate with their customers during the Covid-19 crisis, as Hew (2011) highlighted social media awareness is the primary determinant of informal scientific communication. Lekhanya (2013) further revealed the slow uptake pace by South African rural KZN SMMEs in adopting and using social media, to improve their businesses through interacting with existing and potential customers.

2.10.4.7 Availability of resources to adopt and use social media by rural SMMEs

Availability of financial resources signifies the existence of financial support, in which businesses can decide to adopt and use social media technologies for marketing their products and services (Kim & Garrison 2009 Sugandini *et al*. 2020; Potluri & Vajjhala 2018). The only critical factor businesses consider when they embark on the adoption of innovation, is the availability of financial resources, which is alleged as the fundamental aspect of the process of adoption and use of social media technologies for their survival and growth in times of crisis (Maduku *et al*. 2016; To & Ngai 2006; Itliong 2020).

This situation was also labelled as "business slack", which exemplifies the need for numerous resources owned by business enterprises such as financial, technical, and human resources. Essentially, the critical resource factor that plays a crucial role in social media technology adoption and use relates to finances (Karjaluoto and Huhtamäki 2010; Itliong 2020). A study by Ismail (2013) concurred, stating the accumulation of adequate capital by businesses is regarded as a fundamental step in the adoption and use of social media technologies by the business enterprises. Overall, the availability of financial resources within SMMEs is a fundamental step that would assist their social media adoption and use for their survival and growth (Sugandini *et al*. 2020; Papadopoulos *et al*. 2020; Itliong 2020; Chang *et al.* 2020). SMMEs faced a problem of financial resources to adopt and use social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

Financial resources are key resources that will dictate whether rural SMMEs will use social media as cited by Maduku *et al*. (2016), To and Ngai (2006) and Itliong (2020). Therefore, the only critical factor businesses considered when they intend to embark on the adoption of new innovation, such as use of social media technologies, is whether there are financial resources available, which is alleged as the fundamental aspect of the adoption process n and use of social media technologies by SMMEs for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 and subsequent economic crises (Maduku *et al*. 2016; To & Ngai 2006; Itliong 2020).

Rural SMMEs are faced with the challenge of financial constraint, which perpetually affects their social media adoption and use as a new innovation technology to market their products and services for survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis in developing countries. Eniola and Ektebang (2015) added rural SMMEs generally faced financial restraints that restrict their current advertising tools such as social media, because the product and service promotion is based on social media adoption and use by means of their financial position during the Covid-19 crisis. Rural SMMEs have more low-income customers, which contributes to the lack of affordability to adopt and fully use social media for survival and growth during events such as the Covid-19 crisis.

2.10.4.8 Rural SMME owners' and managers' perceptions on social media use

SMME manager and owner perceptions refer to their attitudes towards adopting and accepting social media platforms during the Covid-19 crisis to ensure their survival and growth in the subsequent economic recession. As pointed out, SMMEs play a significant role in employment creation and are regarded as one of the chief drivers of economic growth (Mosweunyane, Rambe and Dzansi 2019). SMME owners and managers are reluctant to use these technological advances, since they believe advanced technologies can be harmful to business productivity. There is thus an uncertainty that social media has a probability of reputation risk for the business, because social media may impact negatively on business productivity in the workplace (Mazzarol 2015).

Considering the above, it is imperative rural SMMEs embrace digital technologies, even when faced with potential threats to compete in international markets. According to Larkina, Ovcharenko and Tagaev (2018), SMMEs have the perception the costs of utilising social media are high (this includes those in rural areas). Studies conducted by Praveena and Thomas (2014), Shen (2015) and Matikiti *et al.* (2018) revealed the knowledge of technology and acceptability of information technology (IT) are subject to manager perceptions.

This means competence, social media orientation, business culture and organisational characteristics were critical for rural SMMEs to adopt and accept the use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. When rural SMME managers/owners have a negative perception of adopting social media in economic constraints such as the Covid-19 crisis, they will decrease the chances of marketing their goods and services during restrictions imposed by governments of countries worldwide. In return, this can reduce rural SMME survival and growth during economic turmoil (Nyawo 2020; Zeidy 2020; Janssen and Van der Voort 2020; Kottika *et al*. 2020). The findings further suggest managers have an impact on the use and acceptance of new media technologies. Pavlou and Fygenson (2006: 115-143) added one major challenge is to "invest in the use of right technology for the organisations to reduce manager's perceptions of control, self-confidence and effort", with rural SMMEs not excluded in this case.

Van Akkeren and Cavaye (1999) argue SMME owners are primarily concerned with returns on investment, which leads them to be more concerned with regard to short- to medium-term viability of an investment rather than its long-term benefits. Therefore, substantial investments are often not realised when there are no short-term benefits to be derived. Al-Qirim (2006: 5) argues "the loss of control of the business heightens the fear and anxiety of small business owners". Rural SMME owners may not be enthusiastic regarding the adoption of a technology that will result in loss of control of their business.

The decision to adopt a technology is related to the perceived usefulness (PU) of such a technology. Kirby and Turner (1993) argued this perception is often related to the knowledge SMME owners have concerning the use of such technology. The knowledge will then inform the owner of the potential benefits of the technology in relation to the business. Such knowledge, combined with the perceived benefits, will determine whether the owner accepts and supports the implementation of the technology.

Corbitt *et al.* (1997) advocate e-commerce is more of a management than a technical issue. Many researchers have further found, without the support of managers, technology cannot be successfully implemented (Gagnon and Toulouse 1996; Lambert 1996; Cooper and Zmud 1990; Kwon and Zmud 1987; Manross and Rice 1986; Mabulele, 2020). SMME owners-managers are the key responsible agents for ensuring strategic and operational rules that govern their business activities and e-commerce initiatives are in place. In the context of SMMEs, owner support of a technology, coupled with their perception of the potential benefits of e-commerce, acts as a catalyst towards its adoption, strategically and operationally. Strategically, e-commerce focuses on marketing, promotional and product/service strategies, while operationally, e-commerce focuses on infrastructure, back-end support, logistics and customer services (Razi, Tarn, & Siddiqui 2004). Oji *et al*.

(2017) added the misperception of social media use by small businesses is one of the barriers to adoption and use of social media.

Rural SMME owners or managers have the option to adopt a new innovation such as social media for their survival and growth (van Scheers 2016; Price 2019; Wong *et al.* 2020; Tlapana and Dike 2020). Purnamasari *et al.* (2020) and Davis (1989) state TAM theory would provide in-depth insight of the perceptions of social media adoption and use, as discussed in Chapter 3 of this study under section 3.3.3. The model was thus applicable to rural SMMEs in the case of the Covid-19 crisis.

2.10.4.9 Rural SMME owners and managers support the use of social media

SMME owners/ managers must influence their business to adopt new technology because they possess the power and authority to influence the behaviour of individuals at all levels of the organisations. In particular, SMME management has a critical responsibility to motivate their business to adopt social marketing through providing vision and cognitive support to the business and for SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. According to Gutierrez, Boukrami and Lumsden (2015) and Zailani *et al*. (2019), SMME manager support creates a conducive environment for rural SMMEs to survive and grow and provides a diversity of resources to motivate the social media adoption and use process.

Studies confirmed the all-encompassing purpose of new technology adoption and use within the business solely depends on managers/owners (Maduku *et al*. 2016; Maroufkhani *et al*. 2020). Consequently, should SMMEs intend to adopt and use social media marketing a part of their marketing strategy and create a conducive atmosphere, managers/owners, through their decision, are able to positively influence social media adoption and use for the survival and growth of rural SMMEs (Zailani *et al.* 2014; Kakumbi and Phiri 2022).

Some research concurred with the above notion, pointing out the positive impact managers have on the implementation of IT-related technologies (Alatawi, Dwivedi and Williams 2013; Maduku *et al.* 2016; Matikiti *et al*. 2018; Ramayah *et al*. 2016). In conclusion, rural SMME owners have the ability to motivate the implementation of social media for their survival and growth during economic disruptions such as the Covid-19 crisis (Grover and Goslar 1993; Alrousan *et al.* 2020; Salamzadeh and Arbatani 2020; Matikiti *et al.* 2018; Low *et al*. 2011).

2.10.5 External factors affecting rural SMME social media use during the Covid-19 crisis

External factors emanate from outside the environment of the SMMEs. These organisational, social, and technical factors affect the awareness of the ease and usefulness of technology such as social media (Mpofu *et al*. 2013; Esmaeilpour *et al*. 2016). In the context of this study, this implies external business factors would have affected the awareness of the ease and usefulness of social media for SMME survival during the Covid-19 crisis. The external factors in accordance with the literature that has been reviewed are depicted (Figure 2.2) below:

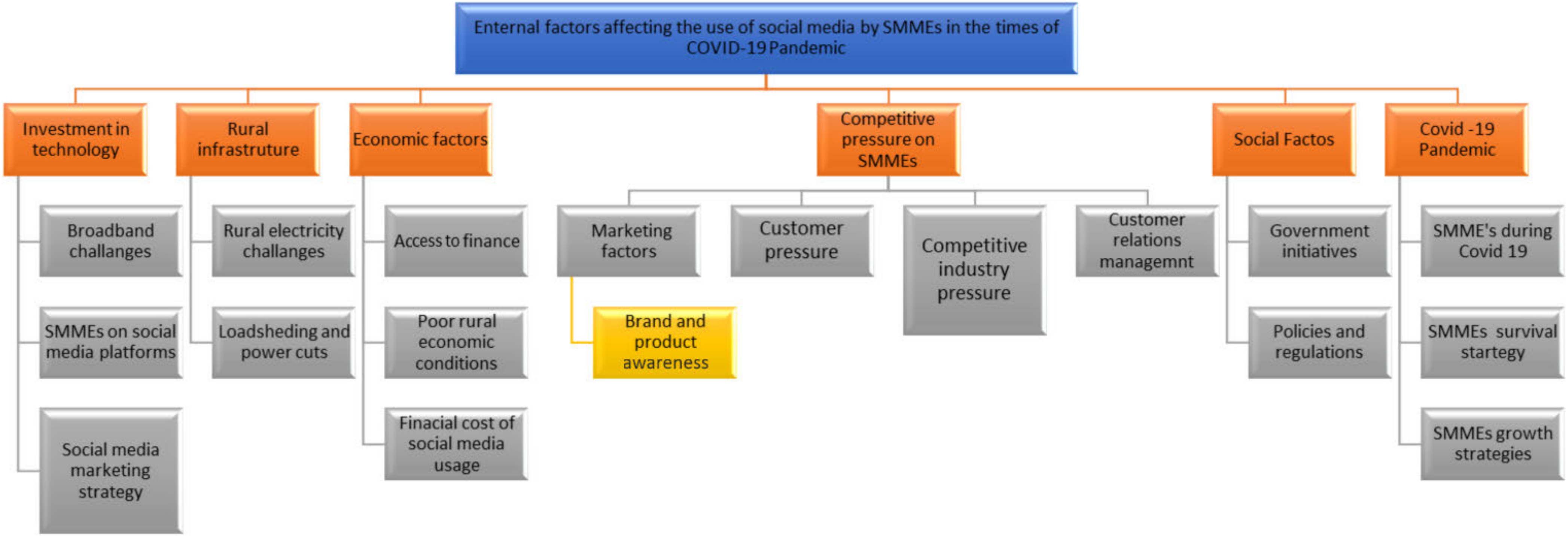


Figure 2.2: External factors affecting SMME social media use during the Covid-19 crisis

Source: Own Research (2022)

2.10.5.1 Investment in technology for social media adoption and use by rural SMMEs

Fatoki (2014: 925) suggests poor provision of budget and adequate analysis of investment to fund day-to-day activities of rural SMMEs have a direct bearing on technology implementation by numerous SMMEs. Such a lack of sufficient funds within rural SMMEs may have a negative effect on technology influences, including repair costs, software applications and data frameworks (Giovanni and Mario 2013). According to Leboea (2017), the presence of technology in small businesses will empower them to take advantage of existing opportunities, such as the improvement of turnover, since technology is understood to provide significant empowerment to organisations in that regard.

In addition, SMME owners and managers are critically important, because they have a major impact on the growth of their businesses; their level of technology knowledge is the prime contributor towards the survival and growth of rural SMMEs (Pu *et al.* 2021: 8-9; Strydom and Nieuwenhuizen 2015). Hence, rural SMME owners and managers need to have in-depth technology knowledge, including of social media platforms, through which they can influence the allocation of the budget for technological advancements to attract more customers.

The use of technology enhances SMME survival and growth and contributes to effective customer service (Dewa *et al*. 2014). This suggests the use of technology is vital if SMMEs are to improve the chances of their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis (Reijonen 2008; Dubihlela and Sandada 2014). High failure rates of SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis can be attributed to lack of access and inability to use technology to adopt and use social media in order to survive and growth (Sitharam and Hoque 2016; Asomaning and Abdulai 2015; Enwereji 2022). This may also suggest SMME owners that have access to technology and are able to use it, are more likely to be successful than those without access who are unable to use technology for their business success (Jeong, Pae and Zhou 2006; Rhee, Park and Lee 2010; Strydom and Nieuwenhuizen 2015).

Should rural SMMEs not be adaptive to changes caused by the technological environment created by escalation of the Covid-19 crisis, this implies those SMMEs are unable to survive the turbulences caused by the pandemic (Erasmus, Strydom and Rudansky-Kloppers 2013; Sugandini *et al.* 2020). Thus, rural SMMEs may not survive competition in the business world, which means technology is important for a business to improve its performance for survival and growth during crises such as Covid-19.

Rural SMME owners-managers, therefore, need to possess transformational managerial qualities in order to adopt new technological advancements such as social media that will encourage their prospects of survival and growth during crises (Staniewski 2016; Rahayu and Day 2015; Mabulele 2020). Ramdani, Chevers and Williams (2013: 739) suggest the key variable for determining new technology adoption, such as social media platforms by SMMEs, revolved around the cost of technology implementation.

Insufficient budget will, therefore, prevent rural SMMEs from using new technology platforms such as social media, due to implementations perceived as too expensive. This emanated from many rural SMMEs in numerous African countries experiencing problems when obtaining financial assistance from institutions to finance the technological advancements for rural SMME survival and growth. For some small enterprises, it is impossible to adopt new technological platforms such as social media, since they are unable to secure funding to implement new technology (Fatoki 2014, Matlay and Westhead 2013).

Those SMME owners-managers who have access to technology and are able to adopt social media survive and grow, when compared to those SMMEs that do not use social media (Rhee *et al*. 2010; Strydom and Nieuwenhuizen 2015). It follows rural SMMEs that are not adaptive to changes brought by technology, do not have control of their business environment (Erasmus *et al*. 2013). As a result, these rural SMMEs may not be able to survive and grow in turbulent times, such as that caused by the Covid-19 crisis, because they would not have been able to adopt and use social media during the pandemic (Chimucheka, Nicole and Tafadzwa 2018; Trawnih *et al*. 2021).

In the 21st century, organisations cannot survive without the use of technology. In this digital age, organisations are using social media networks to promote their goods and services (Deloitte 2013; Li *et al*. 2016). Nevertheless, consumers can also use these platforms to influence each other's preferences by means of comments on social media (Kotulaa, Kaczmarek-Ciesielskaa, & Mazurek 2021; Arham *et al*. 2013). SMMEs during the digital age are in the position of acquiring excellent opportunities to advance in marketing their products and services, add value to existing products and services, reduce costs, and develop new export markets, as well as add value to existing activities (Deloitte 2013; Li *et al*. 2016). The new advancement of the business environment through digital technologies creates opportunities for new entrants (new SMMEs) through disrupting the existing order; this can open opportunities for new product markets, with SMMEs playing a pivotal enabling role (Rogerson 2000).

There is no lack of entrepreneurs in Africa; however, few survive because they are unable to market their products and services properly. Moreover, developing African countries' rural SMMEs are subject to challenges with regard to embracing new technologies, due to their inadequate access to finance, low skill levels, ineffective managerial competencies, and slow adoption of digital technology (Nene, 2021; Kotulaa *et al.* 2021). Therefore, those SMMEs that do not integrate their business strategy with social media will miss the opportunity of ensuring their businesses survive and grow in crises such as the economic recession and Covid-19. Rural SMME owners must influence the business to adopt new technology due to the power and authority they possess, so as to change business environment behaviour.

SMME managers-owners, additionally, have a critical responsibility in adopting and using social marketing through providing vision and cognitive support to the business (Li *et al*. 2016; Donga, Ngirande and Chinyakata 2021). However, should management be reluctant to embrace the digital age, this could lead to the failure of rural SMMEs to survive and grow during emergencies such as the Covid-19 crisis. The digital age is regarded as a virtual marketplace compelling rural SMMEs to develop new business models and renew existing business models and value chains (Deloitte 2013; O'Regan and Ghobadian 2005; Avolio, Kahai and Dodge 2001; ACCA 2012; Arham *et al*. 2013; Li *et al*. 2016; Hattingh *et al.* 2020).

2.10.5.2 Broadband challenges faced by rural SMMEs towards adopting and using social media

According to Sun and Wang (2005, cited by Lekhanya 2014: 2718), a small business "in remote or rural areas experiences additional difficulties", including their inability to gain "access to broadband Internet and a shortage of trained personnel, as well as facilities built for the use of emerging technologies" (Ramayah *et al.* 2016: 150). Moreover, a study by Belson (2020) in the context of rural America, revealed the challenges many rural areas in the USA still face. This is due to the lack of broadband, with approximately 39 percent of the American rural population or 23 million people, lack access to broadband internet service, due to broadband being too expensive to bring to rural communities with low population densities, when compared to urban areas.

This emphasises the difficulty rural SMMEs faced in using social media as a driving tool during the pandemic, because broadband remains too expensive. SMMEs in KZN were not excluded in this case, in accordance with evidence stated on the rural USA population. It is suggested rural SMMEs in KZN had found it difficult to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis as a technique for survival and growth, due to the high cost of broadband.

2.10.5.3 Rural infrastructure affecting social media use by rural SMMEs

This sub-section will focus on rural infrastructure, including poor ICT infrastructure, rural electricity challenges and the influence of loadshedding and power cuts on social media use. Infrastructure is referred to as physical resources, which includes buildings, equipment, roads, and water, as well as communication facilities and electric systems, necessary for rural SMMEs' day-to-day survival and growth (Obokoh and Goldman 2016). In addition, poor planning, shortage of funds and lack of maintenance exist due to the weak infrastructure in many countries within the SSA region (Mugo, Kahuthia and Kinyua 2019; Rao and Srinivasu 2013).

Infrastructure represents all fundamental physical facilities on which other factors such as economic, social, and political activities significantly rely (Jacobs 2019b; Obokoh and Goldman 2016). This implies infrastructure is regarded as products and services created by the government, which do not yield goods and services directly, but offer inputs for all other economic, social and political activities. These SSA countries are subject to inadequate infrastructure, which is a prime barrier for their adoption and use of social media.

Poor infrastructures (good roads, manufacturing plants, railways, and port along with power facilities, as well as telecommunications networks, educational institutions, and hospitals, in addition to justice and community facilities) will, therefore, delay the movement of goods and human resources. This results in interruptions in economic advances in these countries (Khan, Biswas, and Ahmed 2009; Cissokho and Seck 2013; Jacobs 2019b; Obokoh and Goldman 2016; Mugo *et al*. 2019; Rao and Srinivasu 2013; Nkechi *et al*. 2012).

Moreover, poor infrastructure negatively impacts adoption and use of social media for the survival and growth of rural SMMEs, due to an inadequate supply of electricity. In support of this, it was reported there was a lack of electricity due to load-shedding in Senegal, which destructively affected economic growth, with special reference to the manufacturing and industrial sectors. SA is not excluded in this case, since the country is subjected to load-shedding on a frequent basis. Therefore, load-shedding and poor electricity supply are also regarded as a problem rural SMMEs are faced with in social media adoption, which negatively impacted their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis (Cissokho and Seck 2013; Fatoki and Garwe 2010).

In this regard, SMMEs must invest in power generating plants and provide their own equipment, since the shortage of electricity supply through load shedding compromises their competitiveness. Consequently, loadshedding in SA is one of the major impediments for survival and growth of SMMEs (Obokoh and Goldman 2016; Schwab 2017).

The study conducted by Obokoh and Goldman (2016) in Nigeria on the performance of SMMEs revealed a positive correlation between the status quo of infrastructure and the operational costs of SMMEs. This infers when infrastructure deteriorates, the operational costs of SMMEs would increase which, in return, may place SMMEs in financial distress**.** The Covid-19 pandemic caused uncertainties in the business environment that were detrimental to the adoption of technology, such as new social media technologies. According to Itliong (2020), it was revealed the Covid-19 crisis caused SMMEs to adopt social media as a survival tool to market their products and services.

Despite this, it was discovered SMMEs were subjected to a lack of infrastructure, which hindered them from adopting technology such as social media during the Covid-19 crisis (Scupola 2003; Itliong 2020). According to the BER (2016), one of the major challenges faced by small businesses is the lack of quality infrastructure, as this hinders their ability to develop and, ultimately, contributes to slow growth for many small businesses, which in most cases, leads to abandoning the business venture (BER 2016). Challenges around the willingness of organisations to adopt digitalisation include; the necessary skills to deal with digitalisation; the need to utilise digital technology; and the necessary infrastructure to cater for digital technology. An inconsistent understanding of what digital transformation entails, along with employee resistance, can inhibit digital adoption in SMMEs. Furthermore, costs and lack of knowledge are regarded as major challenges for SMMEs to embark on digital adoption of social media for their survival and growth (Vimal *et al*. 2023).

As the costs of digital adoption decrease and the tools for standardisation of digitalisation grow, SMMEs will be motivated to adopt social media use (Soluk and Kammerlander 2021; Van Dijk and Hacker 2003; Wishart and Roper 2021; Stankovska *et al*. 2016). Rural SMMEs will thus be motivated to adopt and use social media as tools of digitalisation., since they are supposed to consider the financial costs of implementation of digital technologies. Therefore, SMMEs should have a digital and communication strategy to encourage digital adoption by SMMEs. Moreover, management perceptions should be motivational factors for the adoption of digital technology, in addition to economic and cost benefit analysis (Annosi *et al*. 2019; Adamkolo *et al*. 2018; Wishart and Roper, 2021). This will lead to low sales demands of SMME products and services, leading to a raid decline in revenues that will negatively impact rural SMMEs as they would incur the added costs of social media use in economic crises.

Doherty *et al*. (2016) and Philip and Williams (2019) stated the absence of high-speed internet access is regarded as a challenge to digital adoption in rural SMMEs, with poor digital connectivity also ascribed to other socio-demographic barriers to adoption. This means poor connectivity leads to poor advancement of digital skills in rural SMMEs, which hinders these enterprises from adopting and using social media for survival, growth, sustainability and internationalisation (Bowen and Morris 2019).

Rural SMMEs need electricity in their day-to-day operations (Energy Commission 2014), with electricity making an immense contribution to product marketing, as it enhances consumer satisfaction by making goods available to consumers when needed. In contrast to the above, an insufficient supply of electricity to the public and business enterprises has a catastrophic effect on economic development and the social welfare of the people (Nyanzu and Adarkwah 2016). This has a negative impact on the business enterprises, because power outrages affect the productiveness of rural SMMEs. As a result, business losses were impacted in such a manner, the GDP growth rate declined from 8.8 to 7.1 percent in 2013, where this fall is attributed to negative growth in the manufacturing sub- and service-sectors, fuelled by an inadequate supply of electricity, including to rural areas in SA.

This occurrence will have a long run negative impact on the economies of countries (Energy Commission 2014; Nyanzu and Adarkwah 2016). The constant supply of electricity is a principal factor for the day-to-day operations of SMMEs for survival and growth. In addition, a 2013 WB enterprise survey identified electricity shortages as the second major obstacle to enterprise development. Thus, 49.8 percent businesses in Ghana consider an insecure electricity supply as a major constraint (Mthimkhulu and Aziakpono 2016). Moreover, research in the Moshi municipality of Tanzania by Mchopa, Kazungu, Moshi (2014) revealed power rationing resulted in a decline in SMMEs productivity. In addition, because of power rationing, a decline in productivity was reported to be related to the loss of income within SMMEs. On the one hand, Braimah and Amponsah (2012), through a qualitative survey in the Kumasi metropolis in Ghana revealed frequent blackouts increased SMME production costs and affected their ability to meet contract deadlines. Cissokho and Seck (2013), on the other hand, found power outage duration had a significant impact on productivity, as measured by the technical efficiency of SMMEs.

Load shedding is stated to potentially cause SMMEs to undergo liquidation, with SMMEs more vulnerable compared to large organisations. This is because SMMEs lack adequate human and capital resources, as well as financial support, and the majority are unable to afford back-up facilities to guarantee a power supply. Minister Zulu, from the DSBD, made an alarming statement that 70-80 percent SMMEs could never celebrate one year of business. As a sector, SMMEs are seen as a main driver for economic growth, job creation and poverty alleviation, thus, this failure rate should not be over-looked. The emphasis is on the consumption of electricity being positively correlated with productivity and economic growth (Scott *et al*. 2014; Assan and Masibi 2015; Cissokho and Seck 2013; Mashimbye 2018; Ado and Josiah 2015: 240).

Eskom first started implementing load shedding in 2008, due to limited electricity supply to cater for the demands of SA (Amusa *et al*. 2009; Rankin and Rosseau 2008; Carlsson and Martinson 2016; Kusakana 2019; Winkler *et al.* 2020). This process of load shedding was due to practices of corruption, mismanagement, power station design flaws, and capital expenditure shifts as a result of "State Capture", along with a lack of skills, insufficient emergency diesel, lack of maintenance of the electricity supply infrastructure, as well as boiler leaks and the use of poor-quality coal (Ateba *et al*. 2019). The situation worsened between of the years 2008 and 2019, where the shedding of up to 4 000 MW electricity supply was instituted for a four-hour-rotational-period (Kohler 2014; Businesstech 2019). An unbearable stage was reached in December 2019, where the country was placed in stage 6, with 6 000 MW of electricity supply shed on a six-hour-rotational-basis (Du Vegane 2020); this happened while business enterprises heavily relied on the supply of electricity.

The Republic of South Africa (RSA) continued to experience continuous incidents of temporary power shutdowns in 2019–2020. Due to its inability to supply the national demand with electricity, Eskom constantly applied load shedding for several hours a day in most of the country. Load shedding is stated as an intervention of last resort when power demand exceeds supply, moreover, times and areas affected by load shedding are communicated by Eskom to the public at short notice (Makgopa & Mpetsheni 2022). This implies South African enterprises are faced with a loadshedding electricity crisis that poses a threat to business survival and growth (Rankumise 2017).

The load shedding situation in SA adversely affected SMMEs in the country (Bruwer and Van Den Berg 2017). In concurring with the above, research conducted by Ateba *et al*. (2019) found loadshedding had a negative effect on the national economy on a daily basis, amounting to 65.7 billion. This implies SMMEs, including rural SMMEs, were drastically affected, which impacted their survival and growth. Subsequently, a study by Mbomvu *et al.* (2021) revealed SMMEs could not execute their daily businesses as expected, losing their potential income and cash inflows, which adversely affected their growth. SMMEs are, by implication, in financial distress due to load shedding and will find it difficult to fund the expenditure to adopt and use social media, due to financial constraints they face; this would have nullified the chances of rural SMMEs adopting and using social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

2.10.5.4 Economic factors influencing rural SMME social media use

Economic factors revolve around interest rates, exchange rates, inflation, and disposable income of consumers and businesses, positively or negatively influencing SMME survival and growth (Smit *et al.* 2013). In circumstances where interest rates are lower SMMEs will, on the one hand, be motivated to invest, as this will improve their businesses. On the other hand, the higher the interest rates, the lower the propensity to invest, which would increase the failure rate of SMMEs because of a decline in their working capital (Bertelsmann Stiftung BTI 2016).

Based on the above, the financial and fiscal system that exists in a country determined by economic factors and the status quo of the economy of that country will influence the day-to-day operations of SMMEs. In the case where a country is experiencing economic growth, SMMEs are likely to achieve growth, however, achieving growth could prove a challenge in an economic recession. These economic factors can be in the form of interest rates, foreign exchange rates, employee wages and salaries, along with employment promotion policies, inflation, taxes, and government spending, as well as business phases (Pulaj and Kume 2013; De Beer 2015; Williams and Needham 2016; Booysen 2017).

The challenges SMMEs face include the unemployment rate at 27.2 percent and interest rates amounting to 10.25 percent, access to financing for SMMEs, tax compliance and regulations, as well as an insufficient supply of infrastructure (Herrington *et al*. 2014, 2011 2015; Schwab 2017). The results would place rural SMMEs in financial distress. SMMEs, including those in rural places, would not be in good standing for financing social media adoption and use for attracting more customers to ensure their survival and growth. This has been worsened by the Covid-19 crisis that negatively impacted small businesses, which were affected more than large business worldwide, with many SMMEs declared technically insolvent (Digitally Driven 2020, 2021).

SMMEs, therefore, experienced an economic recession during the Covid-19 crisis and were subjected to financial constraints, which had a negative effect on SMMEs to adopt social media during the Covid-19 crisis. Based on the above, there would have been difficulties for rural SMMEs to use social media, due to the financial constraints and customer pressure they faced due to the economic recession caused by the Covid-19 crisis.

According to Kloviene (2012), factors that may have influenced social media use by SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis mainly centred around economic constraints, competition and technological advancement. Yamakawa, Peng and Deeds (2008) and Korsakienė *et al*. (2015) pointed out the business intention in such a context is to replicate each other's strategic decisions under competitive pressure. In addition, technological advancement is an enabler for enterprises to expand through innovations such as social media platforms. Nevertheless, business enterprises with a low appetite to invest in technology decrease their competitive advantage, in terms of reaching more customers and attracting new customers to increase the probability of increasing sales and revenues (Yamakawa *et al.* 2008; Korsakienė *et al*. 2015; Manolova *et al.* 2008; Kloviene 2012; Fauzi and Sheng 2020). Consequently, rural SMMEs reluctant to invest will lag in using social technologies for promoting products and services, including interacting with potential customers. This suggests SMME social media use in SA is very low, including rural SMMEs in KZN (Lekhanya 2013).

In the context of SMMEs, this suggests rural SMMEs must consider investing in technology advancement such as social media platforms, to create competitive advantage through innovations and reach more customers and attract new customers. Even should SMMEs be exposed to economic constraints such as the Covid-19 crisis, rural SMMEs can use social media to market their goods and services, irrespective of restrictions imposed by governments of countries worldwide. In return, this can promote small enterprise survival and growth during economic turmoil such as that leading from the Covid-19 crisis (Nyawo 2020; Zeidy 2020; Sugandini *et al*. 2020).

2.10.5.5 Financial cost of rural SMME social media use during the Covid-19 crisis

Joyce (2018) found advanced countries experience increases in revenue through online content and adverts in banks. Marketing strategies are also used by banks to increase their operations and create awareness. In addition, social media use plays a key role in cash flow variability of businesses, and is correlated with financial performance (Unachukwu 2004; Merino, Srinivasan, and Srivastava 2007; Okari 2017, Umukoro *et al*. 2020). Umukoro *et al*. (2020) studied social media costs among listed banks in Africa, including Ghana, Nigeria, SA, and Botswana, as well as Tanzania and Kenya. The findings of their study are tabulated (Table 2.10) below:

Table 2.10: Findings of social media cost for survival and growth of banks in Africa

Country	Findings
Ghana	A one percent increase in social media cost caused an increase of 13 percent in operating cash flow; 2.4 percent in financing cash flow and 28 percent in investing cash flow.
Nigeria	A one percent increase in social media cost would result in: a decrease in operating cash flow (-37 percent); -0.05 percent decrease in financial cash flow; nine percent increase in investing cash flow for every one percent increase in social media cost.
South Africa	A one percent increase in social media cost would result in: a five percent increase in operating cash; a 1.4 percent increase in financial cash flow. The coefficient results revealed a -15 percent increase in investing cash flow for every one percent increase in social media cost.
Botswana	A one percent increase in social media cost resulted in: a three percent increase in operating cash flow; a 0.6 percent increase in financial cash flow; a .06 percent increase in investing cash flow for every one percent increase in social media cost.
Tanzania	A one percent increase in social media cost resulted in: a -4 percent decrease in operating cash flow; a 0.8 percent increase in financial cash flow. A one percent increase in social media cost resulted in a -4 percent increase in investing cash flow
Kenya	A one percent increase in social media cost would result in: a three percent decrease in operating cash flow; a -0.556 percent decrease in financial cash flow; a one percent increase in investing cash flow for every one percent increase in social media cost

Source: *Umukoro et al. (2020)*

Table 2.10 reveals businesses must invest in social media to ensure their enterprises are able to survival and grow and experience increased sales for sustainability. In the context of the Covid-19 crisis, those in crises make use of social media platforms to market their products and services. Studies conducted revealed some SMMEs were partially closed, their revenues decreased and some of their employees were laid off. Furthermore, SMMEs in rural areas are subject to poor connectivity due to the lack of ICT infrastructure (Akpan *et al*. 2020). These small businesses are also limited in acquiring new technologies, due to inadequate information and budget and are, as a result, unable to afford social media costs.

Rural communities are aware of the importance of business technology; however, they opt for simple technologies as opposed to advanced technologies under ordinary conditions. SMMEs in rural areas will thus find it difficult to face unusual crises such as Covid-19. In conclusion, rural SMMEs cannot afford to pay social media costs due to being subjected to critical factors. Consequently, the Covid-19 crisis and resulting economic crisis caused negative financial positions for SMMEs (Laudon & Laudon, 2019; Abdul Rashid 2016; Akpan *et al*. 2020). Some researchers highlighted the negative impact of the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN places was exacerbated by poor infrastructure for connectivity to the internet and the lack of access to ICT due to illiteracy, lack of computer skills, and lower household incomes (Lekhanya 2013; Laudon & Laudon 2019; Abdul Rashid 2016; Akpan *et al*. 2020).

In contrast, studies conducted on SMMEs suggested the use of social media should be part of conducting business in the current, technological and ever-changing marketplace (Beier and Wagner 2016, Rahman *et al.* 2020). The Digital Market Outlook (2020) revealed an increase in annual spending of 7.6 percent on social media by businesses would result in a social media market volume of US $132 245 million by 2024. This resulted in SMMEs viewing social media as a pivotal technique of business operations. It was found SMMEs are supposed to consider innovation practices for marketing their goods and services to gain competitive advantage. However, they are currently reluctant to accept new technologies such as social media due to financial constraints (Trainor *et al*. 2014; Dahnil *et al*. 2014; McCann *et al*. 2015; Beier *et al*. 2016, Rahman *et al.* 2020).

Durkin *et al*. (2014) emphasised SMMEs could utilise social media tools to create a competitive advantage, since they are reasonably cost effective. Moreover, rural SMMEs are subject to risks from a lack of resources and a huge cost to fast-track technology adoption. They are unable to adopt new technology due to the lack of finance, in comparison to larger organisations. This shortage of finance has also led to failure of SMMEs to implement Web 3.0 technology, particularly in developing countries (Potluri and Vajjhala 2018; Sugandini *et al*. 2020). Therefore, rural SMMEs would not have been in a position to fund social media costs in economic crises such as the Covid-19 crisis.

Cost also plays a critical role in social media technology acceptance and use by rural SMMEs in global crises (Alam and Noor 2009; Rahman *et al*. 2020; Chatterjee and Kar 2020; Ramayah *et al*. 2016). Nevertheless, there were certain instances where cost did not meaningfully influence IT adoption, with special reference to the case of Malaysia (Tan *et al.* 2009). Overall, adoption of new social media technologies in these businesses would draw a considerable start-up cost for SMME survival and growth (Ghobakhloo *et al*. 2012; Rahman *et al*. 2020). Some SMMEs would prefer social media instead of other IT-related adoption because of its low cost, little or barely any barriers to involvement, and ease of use (Derham, Cragg, & Morrish 2011).

This infers numerous businesses, should it be cost effective, will opt to use social media, since it will act as an enabler for businesses to interact with prospective and existing customers (Ainin *et al*. 2015a). By its nature, social networking is a cost-effective innovation that permits SMMEs to interact with customers.

A study conducted by Fatoki (2021) on access to finance and performance of small firms in SA, revealed the moderating effect of financial literacy through a positivistic research paradigm and a quantitative research approach A survey was conducted in the Central Business Districts (CBDs) of Johannesburg (Gauteng Province) and Polokwane (Limpopo Province) in SA. The study findings showed a significant positive relationship between access to debt finance and performance of SMMEs. In addition, the findings indicated financial literacy moderates the relationship between access to finance and performance of SMMEs (Fatoki 2021).

Good financial skills of rural SMME owners and managers are, therefore, fundamental to the success of SMMEs, in order to impact job creation and economic growth of countries globally. This will assist in reducing poverty and other economic ills of countries, with special reference to developing countries. In the context of this study, good financial skills of rural SMME owners and managers would place rural SMMEs in a position to access funds from banks, with which to adopt and use social media for their survival and growth during the economic recession crisis caused by the Covid-19 crisis. Overall, however, poor business financial skills can constrain rural SMME ability to adopt and use social media and to survive and grow during these crises.

Mazanai and Fatoki (2012) highlighted the chief challenge of access to finances as a delay in the survival and growth of start-up SMMEs. For example, SMMEs are subject to a complex process of accessing finance imposed by financial institutions' credit processes, which have become more careful due to the pressure of the financial crisis. This has made it tough for SMMEs to comprehend the processes of securing loans from financial institutions (Haron *et al*. 2013). Prior to this crisis, access to finance was also a cause for concern to SMMEs in various developing countries to secure their survival and growth. Financial institutions were reluctant to fund SMMEs with sufficient capital in developing countries such as SA (Dalberg 2011). Rural SMMEs thus did not have adequate funds to finance the adoption and use of social media during the global Covid-19 crisis.

Pretorius and Shaw (2004) stated the majority SMMEs depend heavily on their own capital, which is insufficient for these businesses to survive and grow. Therefore, access to finance from financial institutions is extremely important to counteract the negative impact of cash flow problems for SMMEs to adopt social media to survive and grow during a crisis, such as that caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Whittaker (2008) pointed out SMMEs are restricted, in terms of legislation supporting access to credit, which creates major problems, since SMMEs are excluded from credit practices.

Banks are reluctant to take the risk of financing SMMEs. Commercial banks consider financing SMMEs as a high risk, because these small enterprises are regarded as very indebted and lack the capacity to meet prompt debt repayments (Aleksandr *et al*. 2016). Consequently, it becomes problematic for SMMEs to obtain a commercial loan (Amadasun and Mutezo 2022). Overall, it may be deduced many SMMEs suffer a shortage of working capital due to a lack of access to finance from commercial banks, resulting in their being financially unstable (Amadasun and Mutezo 2022; Aleksandr *et al.* 2016; Haron *et al.* 2013). Therefore, businesses would be unable to finance social media cost or interact with prospective and existing customers in order to increase their revenues. This emanated from SMMEs having insufficient funds to cater for social media cost (Umukoro *et al.* 2020).

Agyei (2018) and Fatoki (2021) found many rural SMME owners need financial management skills for their businesses to be successful. This means the success or failure of their enterprises is highly dependent on the availability of resources, including financial skills. Hence, this may negatively impact rural SMMEs, as they may not have sufficient budget to adopt and use social media as part of their marketing strategy to market their businesses during a crisis.

SMMEs, including rural small enterprises, will adopt social media as valuable marketing tool if, and only if, the costs for adopting and using social media are reasonable and considerate. Consequently, rural SMMEs will find difficulties in adopting social media as a driving tool for their survival and growth during emergencies such as the Covid-19 crisis. This emanates from the lack of resources and huge cost of technology SMMEs are subjected to, including rural SMMEs in KZN (Sugandini *et al*. 2020; Lekhanya 2013).

2.10.5.6 Influence of poor rural economic conditions on SMME social media use

This sub-section focuses on rural entrepreneurship, commonly referred to as rural SMMEs. These rural SMMEs are influenced by the physical and economic environments, where the physical environment focuses on the location of rural SMMEs. In the rural areas, the market size is smaller, with poor accessibility to customers, suppliers, and institutions (Stathopoulou *et al*. 2004; Keeble & Tylor 1995). According to Immedashavilli, Ivchenko and Kekua (2013), Sexene (2012), Smallbone (2009) and the OECD (2020), rural SMMEs are faced with challenges such as low product demand, as well as little used services in the local market. As a result, rural SMME sales will decline drastically, which will negatively impact economies of scale. In addition, small businesses in rural areas are unable to compete with urban SMMEs, due to their low levels of skilled labour and education, lack of IT, and lack of technical knowledge skills, as well as lack of finance.

This means rural SMMEs must introduce new marketing strategies and use modern advertisements such as social media, in a way that rural people can easily understand (Kekua 2013; Sexene 2012; Smallbone 2009; OECD 2017).

However, rural SMMEs are run by people with low education levels and as a result, social media platforms have limited effect. Consequently, rural SMMEs depend on third parties, which exploit them in the process of marketing their products and services. The transport and communications infrastructures are added challenges for rural SMMEs, because these small enterprises operate in remote areas. The distance between rural and urban areas for transporting rural SMME products may also present barriers for them to market their products. In addition, poor infrastructure may present further challenges to rural SMMEs in terms of adopting and using social media to attract new business and customers to ensure their survival and growth (Kekua 2013; Sexene 2012; and Smallbone 2009; OECD 2020).

The small size of local markets challenges rural as opposed to urban SMMEs, due to the low population densities in these areas. This means rural SMMEs are compelled to focus on special niche markets (Kekua 2013; Sexene 2012). Likewise, a study by Belson (2020) in the context of rural America, revealed challenges facing rural SMMEs emanated from the businesses still believing in traditional marketing strategies, such as word-of-mouth, as their advertising technique and using paper leaflets for marketing their products and services.

In the context of the Covid-19 crisis, rural SMMEs were expected to use social technologies to more efficiently market their products and services in a cost-effective manner. However, they were confronted with poor economic conditions as stated above and found it difficult to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis, worsened by poor infrastructure, which rural SMMEs are faced with, including those in KZN (Trawnih *et al.* 2021; Lekhanya 2013; Nyawo 2020; Smallbone 2009; OECD 2020). Based on the above, it can be deduced poor economic conditions in rural places would have made it difficult for rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media during the Covid-19 crisis to assist with their survival and growth.

2.10.5.7 Competitive pressure affecting rural SMME adoption and use

The competitive pressure in an industry is governed by the threat of new entrants, the bargaining power of suppliers and buyers, along with the threat of substitute products, as well as competition in the industry. Such competitive pressure is also experienced within the SMME sector (Sahi *et al*. 2019). Consequently, in order to craft an operational strategy to achieve competitive advantage in the sector, the business must be able to minimise the impact of the above-mentioned five forces. The intensity of industrial competition is also faced by the SMME industry, as revealed by Sahi *et al*. (2019).

Chen *et al.* (2015) indicated a competitive environment exists outside the company, and it must be observed and analysed continuously, because it always changes, depending on the number of existing players, as well as government regulations and technological changes. Ahani, Rahim and Nilashi (2017) highlighted the huge effect competitive pressure had on the decision by SMMEs to adopt social media, and those competitors make use of social media to advance their competitive advantage and boost customer satisfaction and the financial position of SMMEs. Lin (2014) added there is a positive correlation between competitive pressure and the decision to adopt social media. This results in a high probability of uncertainty within the business environment, which will necessitate a high demand for IT adoption and social media.

The competitive rivalry in an industry also tends to alter its landscape, with technology a game-changer, often resulting in the restructuring of an industry. The Covid-19 crisis forced businesses to implement technology, since they are achieving a competitive edge by investing in technology to (Porter and Millar 1985; McKinsey and Company 2020). The competitive pressure on rural SMMEs is based on the inaccessibility of SMMEs to markets. This implies rural SMMEs are experiencing a high intensity of competitive pressure, in such a manner it can be a constraining factor for rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media during situations such as the Covid-19 crisis. This will negatively impact rural SMME survival and growth (McKinsey and Company 2020; Lin 2014).

According to Kloviene (2012), mimetic factors that may influence social media use by SMMEs in times of crisis, generally emanate from copying others' best practices. Mimetic forces arise when business enterprises engage in competition, seeking superior performance (DiMaggio *et al*. 1983; Latan *et al*. 2018). Additionally, competitive pressure has a crucial role to play in the course of adopting and using technology. This pressure would emanate from the effort by same industry external competitors (Oliveira *et al.* 2014). Businesses have been observed to adopt technological changes to respond when they perceive strong competition within the industry (El-Gohary 2012; Haller and Siedschlag 2011). The basis of such pressure is founded on the threat of losing marketplace competitive advantage; to compete and survive market demands imposed on business enterprises (Maduku *et al*. 2016; Zainuddin *et al*. 2017). In the context of globalisation, businesses such as SMMEs are vulnerable to numerous competitors worldwide.

Rural SMMEs are able to gain a strategic benefit by adopting technology to survive and grow in a global crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Consequently, it is critical for rural SMMEs to embrace technological changes such as social media technologies (Gangwar, Date, & Ramaswamy 2015; Sugandini *et al*. 2020; Zeidy 2020). This is evident in the case of Malaysia, where social media marketing has been adopted by SMMEs in their competitive marketing strategies, making it imperative for a business to adopt such changes to survive and grow.

It may be concluded competitive pressure in the marketplace impacts technology adoption and use (Rahayu and Day 2015). In the same vein, numerous studies have determined the substantial influence competitive pressure has on SMMEs to adopt social media to increase sales for their survival and growth during a crisis (Low *et al*. 2016; Maduku *et al*. 2016; Oliveira *et al*. 2014; Trawnih *et al.* 2021). This means it is important that businesses respond to competitor actions and behaviours. In developing countries, better environmental management in foreign and multinational businesses are encouraged by mimetic forces. These factors are deemed the best tools to ensure greater performance, as companies are able to respond to international demands by employing advanced technology. Governments and stakeholders can be influenced by strong mimetic pressures to ensure businesses adopt advanced environmental management and technologies to generate higher performance. In addition, businesses responding to mimetic pressures can obtain economic benefits by being more competitive (DiMaggio *et al*. 1983; Latan *et al*. 2018).

The adoption of social media platforms as part of IT would allow businesses to respond to mimetic pressures and bring competitive advantage. However, businesses worldwide were faced with the Covid-19 crisis; for example, a survey conducted by the NBER in the USA involving more than 5 800 small businesses, revealed 43 percent small business were threatened with closure in December 2020. These small businesses were, therefore, faced with financial constraints that led to their insolvency (Bartika *et al*. 2020).

The financial constraints and unprecedented Covid-19 crisis thus caused an economic recession for SMMEs, including rural SMMEs, which delayed social media adoption and use by SMMEs for their survival and growth. Competitive pressure affecting the adoption of social media by SMMEs had a heavy bearing on the marketing of products and services, branding and product awareness, as well as customer relationship management (CRM) by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis (Hoekstra and Leefang 2020; Dollens *et al.* 2020; Cheng *et al*. 2019; Cui and Wu 2016).

2.10.5.8 Influence of customer pressure on rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis

Studies conducted with regard to technological use, reflect customer pressure is a critical, influential, environmental factor (Rahayu and Day 2015). Research on SMME technology adoption has illustrated a positive correlation between the intention to adopt and use technology and customer pressure from (Ghobakhloo and Tang 2015; Maduku *et al*. 2016; Matikiti *et al*. 2018).

Comparing large enterprises and SMMEs it was discovered these small enterprises are more vulnerable to customer pressure to meet expectations (Maduku *et al*. 2016; Premkumar and Roberts 1999). Furthermore, in a study related to IT adoption, Wanyoike *et al*. (2012) examined the role environmental factors play in e-commerce adoption of Kenyan SMMEs, concluding perceived customer pressure gives rise to e-commerce adoption. In the same vein, similar results were derived from a study by Maduku *et al*. (2016), with regard to online marketing adoption in SMMEs. Further to this, concerning social media implementation by SMMEs, it was demonstrated successfully that a business would have to adopt social media when influenced by imposed customer pressure (El-Gohary 2012). Overall, it may be deduced customer pressure, therefore, had a strong positive correlating pressure on rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media to survive and grow during the Covid-19 crisis.

2.10.5.9 The influence of competitive industry pressure on rural SMMEs

Competition is regarded as the pressure a business enterprise faces within an industry (Thong and Yap 1995). Furthermore, an industry where a business enterprise experiences competition has a substantial influence on the use of technology (Levenburg *et al*. 2006). Enterprises such as rural SMMEs are compelled by competitiveness to adapt to new technology, in order to maintain their competitive position. To succeed, SMMEs in a global industry must, additionally, take more part in social media marketing strategies to acquire an advantage that is comparative (Zhu *et al.* 2003). It has also been stated, when a firm decides to adopt a change, it can possibly gain a competitive edge among its competition that can, subsequently, change industry competitors (Porter and Millar 1985).

As Zhu *et al*. (2003) specified, competition within the industry can encourage firms such as SMMEs to sustain their competitive edge by adopting new technologies, notwithstanding crises such as Covid-19. Therefore, in this study's context, the crisis created by the Covid-19 crisis could have motivated rural SMMEs to adapt to the turbulences through adopting and using social media (Rahman *et al*. 2022; Sugandini *et al*. 2020).

2.10.5.10 Marketing factors influencing rural SMME social media use

Kotler *et al.* (2015: 29) proposed business enterprises can achieve their goals through knowing the needs of target markets and thus meeting customer expectations better than their competitors. Therefore, when the business enterprise is not customer orientated, their products and services will not be either. Maxwell (2021) extended the perspective of the marketing concept by categorising it into three elements, namely marketing as a philosophy or culture, as a strategy and as techniques or methods. However, Schiffman and Wisenblit (2014) defined a business enterprise product's success as heavily dependent on the way consumers perceive and process marketing stimuli devised to promote the firm product. This could include rural SMMEs.

Nonetheless, the Covid-19 crisis had significant consequences for business enterprises, as well as in the purchasing of products, more specifically for consumer behaviour; this means the pandemic influenced practically all businesses. This necessitated business enterprises continuing to meet fundamental consumer needs and maintain employment levels. One of the existing techniques to achieve this, is marketing (Hoekstra and Leefang 2020).

The Covid-19 crisis affected consumer behaviour, which compelled businesses to apply marketing tools to reduce the severity of the impact. The use of marketing during the Covid-19 crisis indicated how marketing could be applied during economic recessions. Recently, Ding *et al*. (2020) showed the core purpose of consumer behaviour is to help preserve and create customers who are pleased with a specific product or service, as they will continually purchase the same product. Marketing is done in a way that customers can constantly make purchases of comparable products (Muniyappa and Gubbi 2020). Thus, to pursue and maintain more customers during the Covid-19 crisis, more SMMEs focussed on consumer behaviour.

Based on the above discussions, Zainuddin, Adam and Fuzi (2021) added, in an economy that has embraced digitalisation, mass media plays a critical part in the development, remodelling and leadership of public opinion. Consequently, mass media positions across channels have grown, and SMMEs need to use them carefully during situations similar to the Covid-19 crisis, since only this channel is deemed acceptable as an approach to finding customers. According to Oji *et al.* (2017), many studies revealed social media can be used as a marketing strategy, for example, in a unique American study, Brown (2010) found 51 percent respondents used Facebook, while 67percent used Twitter to buy what was posted on the company social media account. According to Jagongo and Kinyua (2013), 81 percent small business owners/managers agreed social media connected more people, because it was cheaper and more user friendly in comparison to outdated ways of advertising. Some respondents in this group (23 percent) admitted they used social media for CRM; 22 percent utilised the platform to sell their products, 21 percent used this platform to gain access to market trends, and 15 percent used it to acquire customer data (Oji *et al.* 2017).

It can, therefore, be deduced SMMEs could adopt and use social media during the Covid-19 crisis to connect with more customers to sell their products and increase their revenues. Thus, consumer behaviour is critical in marketing products to customers and using social media during crises.

2.10.5.11 Brand awareness influences social media use by rural SMMEs

Social media is ideal for SMMEs to draw the attention of customers, create product and brand awareness, and some SMMEs in the UK use social media websites as a business tool (Carter 2011; van Scheers 2016; Johansson and Corvers 2012). Homburg, Klarmann and Schmitt (2010) state most small businesses have financial and time constraints when it comes to portraying their brands to customers prior to their competitors.

These constraints have created obstacles for small businesses to acquire prospective and new customers and to keep their brand relevant in the market, because their competitors are making their brands more visible. Furthermore, posting businesses products and services is not sufficient to advertise the brand and to attract more customers. Gustafsson and Li (2021) further assert the Covid-19 crisis brought huge challenges and crises to brands that not only affected consumer behaviour but also brand loyalty and equity. Dollens *et al.* (2020) further pointed out, during the Covid-19 crisis, consumers disregarded aspects such as brand loyalty and "premium" goods and instead, considered what is necessary. Consumers might thus change their prioritisation and decision-making with regard to consumption (Ward 2020; Sheth 2020); these changes could, in turn, impact businesses' brand loyalty and brand equity. At the same time, businesses needed to secure their brand loyalty and brand equity to overcome the challenges of the Covid-19 crisis, such as products being out of stock and consumers having a lower consumption ability (Dollens *et al*. 2020).

Considering the above, Gustafsson and Li (2021) revealed the Covid-19 crisis immediately affected consumer behaviours such as pent-up demands and embracing digital technology. Therefore, brands faced the challenges of adapting to the current environment to satisfy existing consumers and secure brand loyalty. In this context, most business enterprises, including rural SMMEs, started developing brand equity online, along with online services and digital advertising. Thevenot (2007) mentioned small businesses can make a swift turnaround using social media, because this can assist them to increase awareness and remain relevant with their customers, globally. The use of marketable social media can improve the marketable position of small businesses in a drastic manner in competing with their competitors (Homburg *et al*. 2010).

Some studies found SMMEs worldwide were forced to lay off employees, while others temporarily closed, including rural SMMEs, due to the negative financial position caused by the Covid-19 crisis (Barrero *et al*. 2020:17; Msimango-Galawe *et al.* 2020). Therefore, the negative financial and time constraints of rural SMMEs would make it difficult to adopt and use social media platforms to showcase products and secure brand loyalty and equity online from their customers. This would have yielded a negative impact on rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis (Gustafsson and Li 2021; Homburg *et al.* 2010).

2.10.5.12 Influence of customer relationship management (CRM) on SMME social media use

Social CRM (SCRM) entails merging customer-facing activities, as well as the accompanying processes, systems, and technologies, with innovative and developing social media applications, enabling engagement with customers in collaborative conversations and customer relationship enhancement (Cheng and Shui 2019; Trainor *et al.* 2014). According to Cheng *et* *al.* (2019) and Cui and Wu (2016), the utilisation of social media to influence CRM is regarded as crucial for customer involvement in the new product or service development process.

Considering the above, CRM has become a strategic approach to business, underlined by relationship marketing theory (RMT). CRM can be defined as the "process of acquiring, retaining, and partnering with selective customers to create superior value for the company and the customer" (Parvatiyar & Sheth 2001: 6). CRM's technology-driven transformation is referred to as social customer relationship management or SCRM or CRM 2.0, thus renaming CRM (Hidayanti, Herman, & Farida 2018; Sigala, Christou, & Gretzel 2012; Parvatiyar & Sheth 2001: 6). In crises such as Covid-19, this technology is essential in developing relationships with customers, because it is crucial to attaining accurate information regarding people in a timely manner (Desmond and Zhaohao 2021; Saha *et al.* 2021). Therefore, firms including SMMEs can employ new technologies such as social media to create knowledge, as well as to facilitate the value co-creation process (Ramkissoon and Unseal 2018; Saarijarvi *et al*. 2013). This infers firms such as SMMEs need to consider social engagement, mainly through media video platforms (YouTube), microblogging sites (Twitter); blogs and wikis; and SNSs such as LinkedIn, MySpace and Facebook (Tuten 2020; Wang and Kim 2017). Such social engagement intends to secure brand loyalty through social media technology adoption and use for rural SMMEs to improve their non-financial and financial performance.

The use of social media provides a more effective discussion platform for businesses to liaise directly with customers, in order that they may provide feedback regarding new product or service development. In support, Google, Microsoft, T Mobile, and Amazon, as well as IBM, have evolved social media to attract users to obtain information and to also focus on innovation which, in turn, produces greater performance (Cheng 2019). It follows that rural SMMEs should have invested in social media use to attract customers during the Covid-19 crisis. However, studies conducted by some researchers showed rural SMMEs are faced with economic recession due to the Covid-19 crisis, having been declared technically insolvent during the economic disruptions caused by the pandemic (Bartika *et al.* 2020). Hence, it would have been difficult for these enterprises to adopt social media during Covid-19 as driving tool for crises, making it unlikely rural SMMEs followed the trend to create opportunities for them to survive and grow during the Covid-19 crisis.

2.10.5.13 Social factors affecting social media use by rural SMMEs

Social factors were used interchangeably with socio-cultural factors in the context of this study; these factors impact on the individuals' personality, attitudes and lifestyle, including business enterprises, with special reference to behaviour and social surroundings. In addition, these factors play a critical role when business enterprises are supposed to craft and implement marketing strategies for their businesses (Henry 2010; Gachuhi 2016). It is highlighted SMMEs lack comprehensive understanding with regard to the social environment impact in their day-to-day operations of the business for survival of rural SMMEs, when it comes to embarking on innovation (OECD 2017; Henry 2010; Gachuhi 2016; Luebke 2017; Indris and Primiana 2015; Ngibe 2020).

Social factors are thus pivotal for rural SMME survival, which requires careful consideration and to put strategies in place to compete in the marketplace. SMMEs should, therefore, have a comprehensive understanding of the influence of social factors to realise their growth (Rujirawanich, Addison and Smallman 2011; Genis-Gruber and Öğüt 2014; Shalley and Gilson 2004; Ngibe 2020). Culture is referred to as a collection of beliefs, ethics, laws, and customs, as well as norms that allow persons to belong to a specific society, and through interaction, culture is passed from generation to generation (Spencer-Oatey 2012; Waters and Lo 2012). However, studies revealed the culture of users influences technology adoption (Malik *et al.* 2019; Chukwuere, Mavetera and Mnkandla 2017; Joshua, Nehemiah and Ernest 2015; Lekhanya 2013). It may, therefore, be deduced rural SMMEs must capitalise on the influence of businesses culture when they plan to adopt new technologies such as social media for their businesses, in order to retain existing customers and attract potential customers during crisis, for their survival.

Considering the above, Kaitlin (2010) added the sites for social media intend to launch innovative means of social collaboration and developing friendships. It is further stated social media platforms should be developed with the notion they support the culture, values, and beliefs of users (Lekhanya 2013; Ractham and Srisamran 2018). Subsequently, Kim, Sohn and Choi (2011) conducted a study in the USA and Korea, where it was found culture influences people when adopting social media technologies. This necessitates that these technologies must be established to cater for the differences of cultural users.

Social media is thus constantly growing, and requires to be used in a manner that it forges a synergy with business culture (Andzulis, Panagopoulos, and Rapp 2012; Pimmer, Lee, and

Mwaikambo 2018). It can, therefore, be construed that the use of social media by rural SMMES is influenced by culture, which implies culture is a critical factor in social media use. Hence, culture influenced SMME use of social media in the course of the Covid-19 crisis, for SMME survival and growth.

2.10.5.14 Influence of Government initiatives worldwide on SMME social media use

The Covid-19 crisis impacted countries worldwide, since it caused economic recession due the imposed lockdowns and measures implemented to close economies. During the Covid-19 crisis, governments of countries and policymakers worldwide were faced with severe uncertainty. These issues posed by the Covid-19 crisis differed from country to country, influencing government policies in many ways, which included crisis management efforts and reaction strategy (Allain-Dupré *et al.* 2020). Every period appears to undergo terrible disturbances of routine, however, the impacts of the Covid-19 epidemic crisis on business and corporate investment were unbearable to SMMEs and some businesses collapsed, while others fought to survive (Wagdi and Rabie 2021); thus, governments throughout the world responded with support initiatives.

By inference, the Covid-19 crisis concerned all countries that had to put measures in place to reduce the impact on their economies globally. The US instituted measures to revive SMMEs, where they were provided with the Paycheck Protection Programme, which amounted to $650 billion during the commencement phases of the pandemic (Bhutta *et al.* 2020). This programme was managed by the Small Business Administration (SBA), providing loans to small businesses by utilising banks, credit unions, and other financial institutions, with the intention of ensuring survival of SMMEs and retaining employees (Fairlie and Fossen 2021).

The UK government employed a programme known as the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), referred as “the Furlough” scheme, for remunerating employees during the pandemic and the resulting economic recession. This scheme (CJRS) provided 80 percent employee salaries to the maximum of £2 500 per month, catering for more than 8.7 million jobs, costed to the sum of approximately £60 billion (Yue and Cowling 2021).

In addition, 4.6 million self-employed were catered for by the UK government using the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme, which provided grants of 70 percent of average monthly trading profits, calculated from tax returns for 2018 and 2019. The scheme intended to look after self-employed workers who earned less than £50 000 in profit for the relevant period (Yue and Cowling 2021). This implies there were business opportunities for small businesses to embark on online shopping by using social media to cater for customer pressure to order to provide products to them, since customers were subjected to closed economies emanating from the Covid-19 crisis. In conclusion, it may be assumed this scheme created a need for small businesses to invest in social media use to meet the needs of customers created by customer pressure during Covid-19 crisis.

The German Government, during the pandemic, put measures in place by introducing a scheme to protect those businesses and start-ups affected by the Covid-19 crisis. This entailed taxation support, state-supported short-time work compensation schemes, improved measures at guaranteed banks, loans and special programmes provided by KfW (Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau) (PWC 2020). Lastly, the government ensured an emergency aid that provided once-off lump sum payments to the self-employed, subject to extensive revenue deterioration (Block *et al*. 2020). It may be deduced the German government prevented financial distress from affecting business enterprises. including SMMEs, in such a manner that there were funds available for businesses to finance social media use the during the Covid-19 crisis, for business survival and growth.

China introduced its measures as early as February 2020, when the Chinese central bank unblocked extensions or renewals of loans to business enterprises and announced a reduction in the banks' mandatory reserve ratio. In addition, the government offered a package to support the digitalisation of SMMEs due to economic crisis. This follows from the Chinese government that encouraged SMMEs to invest in new technology such as social media to connect with existing and potential customers to improve their sales for SMMEs survival during the Covid-19 crisis. Policy measures to assist SMMEs at regional level included deferred tax payment, reducing rent costs, waiving administrative fees, and subsidising R&D costs for SMMEs, as well as social insurance subsidies, subsidies for training and purchasing teleworking services, and additional funding to spur SMME loans, which were put in place to reduce the negative impact of the Covid-19 crisis on SMME survival (KPMG 2020). This means SMMEs were encouraged to invest in social media use during the Covid-19 crisis.

According to a 2020 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) report, there are 54 national governments that made emergency policy decisions and actions to respond to the Covid-19 crisis (GEM 2020). Unprecedented amounts of state aid were channelled, uplifting economies around the globe. Irrespective of governments of countries putting fiscal, monetary, and administrative measures in place to counteract the negative impact of the Covid-19 crisis on

SMME survival, SMME owners are confronted with the spread of Covid-19 crisis; however, SMMEs continued to experience a decline of their financial performance. This resulted in an economic recession that negatively impacted on the routine SMME operations (Belitski *et al*. 2021; Graeber *et al.* 2021). There is thus a high probability that SMMEs were unable to adopt using social media platforms, since they require the budget to adopt social media to liaise with their customers with the intention to improve sales during the Covid-19 crisis for their business survival and growth.

SA was not excluded in this regard. The South African government passed the Covid-19 regulations which compelled the country to institute contingency measures to provide support to small businesses (Zeidy 2020). During the time of the Covid-19 crisis, the government introduced policy measures to mitigate the economic impact of Covid-19 on business enterprises, to prevent SMMEs from being liquidated; through providing certain tax relief, social security payments, reduction of debt payments and rent and utility payments (SBP 2020). It can be deduced SMMEs may have had cash reserves that were used to invest in social media adoption, to enable communications with existing and potential customers to increase their sales, for survival during the Covid-19 crisis.

The DSBD in SA gave directives through the government gazette during the pandemic, to assist SMMEs to comply with the Covid-19 regulations, where they informed SMMEs to comply with Covid-19 regulations at the workplace (Zeidy 2020; Disaster Management Regulations 2020). SMMEs were provided with masks during the Covid-19 crisis, and were duty bound to obey the Covid-19 regulations. Had they not complied, these small enterprises faced legal consequences, since the Covid-19 crisis was uncontrollable worldwide, with SMMEs financially distressed (SBP 2020), which created a financial inability to adopt and use social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

2.10.5.15 Impact of Covid-19 crisis on SMME social media use

The Covid-19 crisis presented an unparalleled challenge in many ways. First, it threatened millions of people’s lives all over the world. It took toll of almost four million people worldwide, as of the end of June 2021 (Worldometers 2021). At the same time, social distancing guidelines affected the service sector, in particular an area where physical proximity often matters and a sector that depends more on micro and small businesses than the manufacturing sector (Belitski *et al*. 2022). Moreover, the Covid-19 crisis drove businesses into economic recession and financial distress. Correspondingly, it negatively impacted countries' economies significantly, which depended heavily on the structural facets of economies and existing socio-economic conditions (Mazzanti et al. 2020). In addition, the Covid-19 crisis substantially worsened economic, business and investment environments, including rural SMMEs, which were forced to temporary close and become insolvent (Gray 2020; Karacsony 2020; Kornelius, Dewi Buntuang and Biden 2020). Based on this discussion, Mbatha (2022) explored the benefits in using SNS to enhance work productivity within small businesses in the tourism sector. Results revealed social media transformed the way small businesses operate on a daily basis, with special reference to communication and marketing strategies.

However, researchers such as Karacsony (2020) and Kornelius *et al.* (2020) reported many small businesses were negatively impacted by the Covid-19 crisis and were regarded as technically insolvent due to the economic distress caused by Covid-19. This included rural SMMEs that were subjected to financial constraints. This meant rural SMMEs could use social media during the Covid-19 crisis to improve productivity, as cited by Mbatha (2022), provided they had the working capital to adopt social media during the crisis.

Gray (2020) pointed out small businesses were faced with economic turmoil due to the uncontrollable crises, resulting in a lack of finance for rural SMMEs and some temporarily closed. Hence, it was difficult for some SMMEs to adopt social media to penetrate the marketplace to advertise their products and services to customers during Covid-19. The crisis, therefore, directly affected self-employed individuals more than other employed individuals and SMMEs more than large businesses in Europe, the USA, and other parts of the world (Kritikos *et al*. 2020; Digitally Driven 2020, 2021). In this regard, Gavril *et al*. (2020) emphasised European countries were subjected to the vulnerabilities of the Covid-19 crisis, and recommended there must be appropriate policies to eradicate its negative impacts on businesses. It was considerably difficult for countries' governments to create and efficiently implement adequate policies, with rural SMMEs also affected.

De *et al.* (2020) further highlighted the Covid-19 crises compelled businesses to use digital technologies such as social media, due to physical distancing and global lockdowns. The global lockdowns caused an increase in patterns of behaviour in conducting business. Thus, governments made significant efforts to mitigate the systematic risk posed by the coronavirus. This forced governments of countries worldwide to increase security procedures, and numerous nations came to a complete halt (Dzigbede *et al*. 2020; Caduff 2020; Benavides and Nukpezah

2020; Uddin *et al*. 2021), which created opportunities for SMMEs to adopt social media during the Covid-19 crisis for their survival and growth. This depended heavily on the financial position of SMMEs, whether they could afford to cater for social media cost, relative to its use during the Covid-19 crisis (Umukoro *et al*. 2020).

This placed information systems and networks at the centre of businesses to sustain themselves during Covid-19 crises (De *et al.* Pal 2020). This infers the Covid-19 crises necessitated businesses responding to economic disruptions, uncertainty, and recession through designing robust corporate strategies for them to survive in the ever-changing environment. This further required businesses to invest in IT infrastructure (Khodieva and Khodieva 2020). As stated by Kietzmann *et al.* (2011) and De *et al*. (2020), for the purposes of reputation, increasing sales, as well as improving survival of rural SMMEs, businesses invested in social media during the Covid-19 crisis. This means rural SMME survival, growth and sustainability were at risk, and they had to devise techniques to cope with the turbulent environment the Covid-19 crisis caused.

The NYDA (DBSB 2020) conducted a study on the Covid-19 crisis impact in 2020, which suggests the Covid-19 crisis affected 88 percent SMMEs of 1 000 businesses. The findings portrayed that 22 percent SMMEs were faced with a decline in cash inflows, 26 percent did not manage to generate income, and 16 percent did not generate sales. Therefore, SMME survival was constrained. The Covid-19 crisis also forced consumers to embark on online shopping and it was discovered that approximately 37 percent consumers increased this activity. It may be deduced SMMEs invested in social media use in the course of the Covid-19 crisis. SMMEs, particularly rural SMMEs, were faced with an economic recession caused by the Covid-19 crisis, which impacted negatively on SMMEs cash inflows. As a result, they could neither afford to buy personal protective equipment (PPE) due to the lack of financial resources, nor to invest in social media adoption and use during Covid-19.

The situation was made worse by the corrupt activities around PPE tendering, whereby more than 600 companies were investigated by the Special Investigating Unit (SIU) for tenders awarded valued in excess of R5-billion. This was alleged as wasteful expenditure (Mbunge 2020: 1810). Mbandlwa and Netswera (2020: 1782) added SA, as a country in the process of alleged corrupt procurement, is in debt, since the country borrowed from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the New Development Bank (BRICS Bank). It was further stated as of December 2020, the South African government debt was estimated to have escalated to 80 percent of GDP, at almost R4,5 trillion (Mbandlwa and Netswera 2020: 1782). This may lead to the belief SA does not have sufficient money to support SMMEs with finance, in such a manner where they can adopt and use social media during crises such as Covid-19, for their survival and growth. Therefore, overall, the influence of the Covid-19 crisis had a negative effect on social media use by SMMEs, including rural SMMEs, regarding their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis (Mbandlwa and Netswera 2020; DSBD 2020).

In the context of SA, the Disaster Management Act 57 of 2002 imposed on SMMEs was intended to ensure compliance with the regulations and the infringement on this Act was a criminal offence. Perpetrators were liable to a fine or to imprisonment not exceeding six months or both as per Section 60 (2) of the Act (Disaster Management Regulations 2020; DSBD 2020). Business entities including SMMEs found contravening Covid-19 regulations incurred correction notices, compliance orders and even prohibition orders that increased compliance costs for SMMEs.

This meant SMMEs needed more funds to cater for such costs, with rural SMMEs in KZN not excluded in this case (DSBD 2020). It may be deduced more money was directed towards compliance costs, as opposed to social media use and adoption by rural SMMEs to attract customers and improve sales during the Covid-19 crisis, for their survival and growth.

Inspectors of the Department of Employment and Labour reported the compliance rate of business entities including SMMEs amounted to only 47 percent in the public sector and 57 percent in the private sector (DSBD 2020). Thus, this indicates the Covid-19 crisis was a burden on SMMEs with regard to compliance. It can be concluded the Covid-19 crisis strained SMME financial positions, since non-compliance with the Covid-19 regulations would compel them to pay penalties (Disaster Management Regulations 2020; DSBD 2020). This means SMMEs would not be able to invest in social media, due to financial distress posed by non-compliance with Covid-19 regulations.

Rural SMMEs would thus be unable to adopt social media during Covid-19, which would be detrimental to their survival and growth due to the closed down economy during the crises (Nyawo 2020; Telukdarie *et al*. 2020; Msimango-Galawe *et al*. 2020). Kietzmann *et al.* (2011) further suggested social media, currently, has a significant impact on business reputation, sales, growth, and survival; however, SMME owners ignored the use of social media in the time the Covid-19 crisis was running its course. This emanated from the fact that "they do not understand what it is, the various forms it can take, and how to engage with it and learn"

(Trawnih *et al*. 2021). Considering the above discussions, some researchers have studied the Covid-19 crisis in relation to SMME survival. The findings of their studies are tabulated below.

Table 2.11: Influence of Covid-19 crisis on SMMEs to use social media for survival and growth

Author(s)	**Findings**
Atayah *et al*. (2021)	The Covid-19 crisis had a negative and significant effect on the company's financial performance. The increased rate of Covid-19 decreased business capacity; difficulties supplying raw materials; lack of purchasing power of customers; and the decline of SMME financial performance. It further increased the level of digital marketing adoption, such as social media platforms.
Mohanty and Mishra (2021)	It was found the Covid-19 crisis had a negative and significant effect on financial performance as measured by cash inflows.
Al-Awadhi *et al.* 2020; Shen *et al*. 2020; Zaid *et al.* 2020).	The Covid-19 crises had a negative and significant effect on financial performance. It meant, with the increasing and prolonged occurrence of the Covid-19 crisis, it can reduce the financial performance experienced by the culinary sector MSMEs in Indonesia.
El Chaarani *et al.* (2021)	It was found during the Covid-19 crisis, the adoption of marketing innovations had a positive impact on business performance.
Minai *et al*. 2021; Jiang and Wen 2021; Kimuli *et al.* 2021).	The Covid-19 crisis impacted strategic digital entrepreneurship in a positive and significant way, which includes digital marketing, and motivated a faster digital technology adoption pace. Covid-19, in conclusion, positively and significantly impacted digital marketing adoption and use by SMMEs in Bali's culinary sector.
Salam *et al*. (2021).	The findings revealed a need for SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis as one of the marketing strategies to attract potential and retain existing customers for their survival during Covid-19.

Source: Compiled by the Researcher (2022)

Table 2.11 depicts the Covid-19 crisis negatively influenced the financial performance of small businesses, which decreased their cash reserves. The crisis also created opportunities for small businesses to adopt social media platforms to enhance their performance. This infers social media could be adopted and used by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis for their survival, provided they had the working capital to finance social media adoption during the crisis.

2.10.5.16 Political factors impacting social media use by rural SMMEs

Political factors have a great impact on the quality of the business environment and contribute immensely to the behaviour of SMME owners and managers. These factors include tax policy, environmental law, tariffs, and political stability or instability, including corruption rates of countries (Grosanu and Bota-Aram 2015; Kadosca and Franscovics 2011). Shahabadi, Sarigol, and Tanhaei (2016) identified the political economy as an important factor influencing the business environment. The study results indicated the countries that have been more successful in improving political economy indices have a better business environment.

In another study in Nigeria, political activities such as the lack of financial support, lack of management experience, corruption, and lack of necessary infrastructures, as well as lack of education, inappropriate organising and accounting, inadequate profits, and low demand for products or services, are considered as important barriers to small businesses (Zonouzi, Hoseyni, Khoramshahi 2021: 50-51). Krasniqi (2007) considered the tax burden, unfair competition, and inappropriate financing as obstacles to the growth of small businesses in Kosovo.

The political environment can change because of the policies of the prevailing government at every level and cause businesses to suffer losses that will have a negative or positive impact on their financial position. Thus, on the one hand, a positive financial position of SMMEs would have encouraged them to adopt social media use during the Covid-19 crisis. On the other hand, the negative financial position of SMMEs will discourage them from adopting social media. It is, therefore, very important for businesses to plan for variability in the policies and regulations governing a stable business environment (Hamiza *et al*. 2020).

2.11 LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK INFLUENCING THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY RURAL SMMEs

2.11.1 Overview of legislation influencing social media use by rural SMMEs in SA

A study conducted by the BER (2016) highlighted no growth of SMMEs over a period of eight years, from 2008 to 2015, irrespective of the good intentions of the South African government. These small enterprises were intended to create job opportunities, and reduce employment and the high rate of poverty in SA. Considering the above, Nieuwenhuizen (2019), Nyamwanza *et al*. (2016) and Herrington and Kew (2018) emphasised this stagnation of SMMEs emanated from legislation and regulations imposed by governments of developing countries, which constrained SMME growth and survival. The studies conducted by Herrington and Kew (2017) and Cant and Wiid (2013) concurred with the above notion.

Herrington *et al*. (2018) estimated constraining effects as 80 percent, while Cant and Wiid (2013) estimated these at 60 percent. Cant and Wiid (2013) and the Small Business Project

(2013) revealed SMMEs were subjected to a hostile environment for the advancement of their businesses. This is attributed to the failure of the country's government to curtail legislation as major impediment for SMME survival and growth of their businesses, which caused a major decrease in SMME employment. In addition, it nullified the South African government's purpose to support the very few SMMEs that were established, while those existing enterprises did not experience growth. Muriithi (2017) further states a constraining factor that prevented SMMEs from survival was the government's bureaucratic structure. This means government policy is able to influence entrepreneurial activity.

As stated by South-African business owners, the most common regulatory obstacles to business survival were: tax requirement compliance, labour laws, government policies that are compulsory, for instance, the BBBEE initiative, and support programmes by the government (Herrington *et al.* 2011; Schwab 2011). The inefficient government bureaucracy has caused SA to be rated 48 of 138 countries in the Global Entrepreneurial Report. This is a major detrimental factor for doing business in SA (Schwab 2017), while restrictive labour regulations are other contributory factors (Schwab 2017).

Despite the above, Nieuwenhuizen (2019) highlights SMMEs are critical contributors to employment, GDP, and prosperity of a particular country. In the TOE framework, government support through legislation is an environmental factor that influences technology adoption. Government regulations are also able to motivate or prevent technological innovation adoption by businesses, which includes social media. When special government regulations are issued that require businesses to enforce strict control and have testing tools available for industrial safety, adoption tends to be hampered in applying these government regulations (Seethamraju 2015).

Rangwetsi and van der Waldt (2021) suggest legislation assists SMMEs with their formation, survival, and growth. Legislation promotes the empowerment and support for small businesses to enter competitive viable markets, along with funding, training, and technical support, as well as advisory services. Nonetheless, should government regulations be able to provide support financially, through resources and tax breaks, businesses will be encouraged to adopt technological innovations such as social media (Tornatzky and Fleischer 1990). Through this regulation these businesses are motivated to use green IT (Chen and Chang 2014). However, there are unfavourable factors that affect SMMEs negatively, including compliance costs, with a multitude of regulations that restrain the financial ability of SMMEs to invest in social media as entry to new technologies. Thus, there is a high probability compliance and the regulatory environment will influence SMME financial performance for their survival. The legislative framework influencing SMME financial performance for investing in social media for their survival are discussed as follows**:**

2.11.2 Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) 75 of 1997 (as amended by Act 7 of 2018)

The BCEA was promulgated to give effect to, and regulate fair labour practices, as enshrined in the Constitution (RSA 1997). The BCEA specifies the basic employment conditions including working hours, remuneration, leave, and legal proceedings to be followed should disputes arise between employees and employers. This Act can be regarded as fundamental to SMME measures for fair staff remuneration. It is stipulated in Section 31(1) (a-d) and 32(1) (b) of the Act that employers, such as SMMEs, should maintain records of personal employee details; including occupations, hours worked, renumeration (salary / wage) according to the time of work, for example, per day, week, fortnight, or month, and indicate the basis of the employment, either contractual or on a permanent basis.

Confidentiality is promoted in Section 90(1-3) of the Act, clarifying information disclosure related to affairs of a fiscal or business nature, which has to be treated confidentially. According to small businesses, this impacts positively on the productivity of their employees. SMME owners cited this Act as necessary for them to hire skilled employees, due to the minimum wage set by the Employment Conditions Commission (Dean and Tustin 2003; Zwane 2009, Noble 2006).

Small businesses believed the BCEA has a huge effect on extra labour costs for the enterprise. This perception emanated from the requirements set by the BCEA that yield an increase in annual leave, family responsibility leave and the overtime rate. The cost of overtime has been drastically increased to time-and-a-half, and SMME owners who want employees to work night shift are forced to remunerate them at a premium, in addition, employees must be able to obtain transport. Furthermore, the regulations imposed on working time increased the cost to businesses. SMME owner/managers indicated the minimum wage levels set by the Employment Conditions Commission and the four months paid maternity leave, discourage them from employing young women (Dean and Tustin 2003; Zwane 2009, Noble 2006). The cost of SMMEs to comply with the BCEA has increased drastically, which will have an influence on financing social media use during global crises. Thus, there will be insufficient funds for SMMEs to cater for social media costs, in order to penetrate the market and reach their customers.

Based on the above, it can be concluded hiring skilled workers and paid women will require additional costs, should SMMEs need to find temporary substitutes for four months to replace women while on maternity leave. This could place SMMEs under financial distress.; therefore, these processes can be regarded as critical factors that could have negatively affected social media adoption during Covid-19, since this process requires financial provision. Hence, in this turbulent environment, SMMEs are faced with challenges that discourage their survival.

Additionally, Section 29 of the BCEA stipulates the employer must provide employees with information concerning the workplace. Furthermore, employees must be given their job descriptions and key performance areas expected at the workplace. The employee must, therefore, be remunerated accordingly, as part of the employment contract between the employer and employee.

However, this section is silent with regard to mandatory rules in terms of the employment contract. A verbal agreement is thus sufficient, valid, and enforceable, when the employer and employee agree on terms and conditions of the work expected to be executed and the remuneration an employee will receive after execution of the work (Thomas and Luvhengo 2020). As a result, small businesses do not bother with employment contracts. Instead, SMME owners enter a verbal contract with the employees, which acts as a written contract. Regarding verbal contracts, employees will execute their job descriptions and key performance areas and, in return, will be paid accordingly. This implies both parties indirectly complied with section 29 of the BCEA (Thomas and Luvhengo 2020).

Motsamai (2021) recommended SMME owners and employees should not enter into verbal employment contracts, because it cannot be easily proved, since no evidence-based information exists that indicates both parties entered into an employment contract. It is proposed the auditors should be part of the process to assist SMME owners with legal matters related to the employment contract.

2.11.3 Employment Equity Act (EEA) number 55 of 1998 (as amended 2019)

This was intended to curb unfair discrimination by employers in terms of race, gender, or the health status of employees. Employers such as SMMEs, with more than 50 employees, were supposed to develop and implement an employment plan to promote equitable representation of previously disadvantaged persons in all categories of occupations.

Considering the above, SMME owners pointed out there are additional costs incurred when SMME owners embark on the process of taking a manager to task. Further, it is costly to assess the progress of employment equity plan implementation, as well as finding appropriate previously disadvantaged individuals when employing and laying off old employees to bring about the changes required by the Act (Dean and Tustin 2003; Zwane 2009; Noble 2006).

Additional costs incurred by SMMEs on the actual implementation of an employment equity plan may direct most of their funds to this process. These funds could rather be focused on ensuring the survival of SMMEs through financing social media use to increase sales during crises, such as Covid-19. Thus, the incurred costs for employment equity may have resulted in inadequate funds being available for social media use during the course of the Covid-19 crisis.

Noble (2006) states EEA provisions would impose compliance costs on businesses, which they are unable to fulfil. The core concern is the definition of “designated employer”, which included enterprises without the capacity to truthfully meet EEA legislative requirements and would, therefore, be unable to make a frank contribution to affirmative action. The imposed compliance costs on SMMEs may have given rise to insufficient funds to adopt social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

2.11.4 Labour Relations Act (LRA) 66 of 1995 (as amended 2018)

The LRA (RSA 1995) was promulgated to give effect to the Constitutional obligations of labour relations, which provide for the rights of both workers and employers. In SA, the LRA provides for the right not to be dismissed unfairly, unfair labour practices, the right to bargain collectively, and the right to freedom of association, along with other labour-related rights (RSA 1995). The amended LRA (RSA 2018) explains organisational rights provide guidelines for collective bargaining, including council agreements to non-parties, set out procedures for disputes resolution, mechanisms for managing industrial action, and mechanisms to establish workplace forums. Problem areas identified in the LRA entailed bargaining councils, dismissal of employees, and the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) proceedings (Thomas and Luvhengo 2020). These general problems are briefly outlined as follow:

2.11.4.1 Bargaining councils

The LRA (RSA 2018) has a clear objective to make provision for small enterprises in the collective bargaining framework of SA. The main purpose of collective bargaining is to regulate the terms and conditions of employment at the workplace (Thomas and Luvhengo 2020).

Collective bargaining power is essential for individual workers to make their voices heard by bargaining collectively. However, bargaining councils are viewed by small businesses as “unreliable” institutions, forcing “big business” conditions of service on them, while not considering their interests in wage negotiations. Small businesses further assert the extension of agreements to non-parties is taken contrary to the notion of voluntarism. In addition, small businesses view it is impossible to be well-represented on bargaining councils, because they lack technical skills to effectively participate in such bodies (Thomas and Luvhengo 2020).

In addition, the process of bargaining is time-consuming (Noble 2006). Thomas and Luvhengo (2020) highlighted trade unions find it problematic to represent SMME employees in the best manner, since, when they demand more benefits on behalf of employees, the labour cost increases, which results in production cost. This occurs when the trade unions are taking part in the collective bargaining process and when protecting the rights of SMME employees (Thomas and Luvhengo 2020).

Thomas and Luvhengo (2020) also stressed the SMMEs sector is regarded as essential for the purpose of strike action. Thus, they should be limited, and the right to strike should be a last resort in the sector. Nevertheless, it must be noted when labour cost increases, production cost increases, which negatively impacts the working capital of SMMEs to finance social media use during emergencies such as the Covid-19 crisis.

2.11.4.2 Dismissal of staff

According to Noble (2006), small businesses do not have capacity to deal with disproportionately complex legal and procedural requirements that must be considered when dealing with the dismissal of staff; SMME owners deem the procedures as cumbersome and time consuming. Regarding the right against unfair dismissal, in terms of section 186 of the LRA, it is stated every employee has the right to fair labour practices (RSA 1995, 2018). Nevertheless, this section does not differentiate between employees of large enterprises and those of small enterprises. As a result, owners of small enterprises find the procedure regarding dismissals to be an administrative burden. Subsequently, legislators deemed it necessary to cure this defect by including Schedule 8 in the LRA, which allows small enterprises to follow a simple disciplinary procedure before dismissals can take place, where this process will incur minimal costs to small businesses (Thomas and Luvhengo 2020). This means when disciplinary procedure costs increase, this will lead to increased production costs, which will negatively impact SMME working capital to finance the use of social media during crises such as the economic recession and Covid-19.

2.11.4.3 CCMA proceedings

SMME owners are of the view CCMA proceedings are intimidating, since they perceived themselves to be people who lack the technical skills to represent themselves at the CCMA when there are hearings. SMMEs view CCMA procedures for dispute resolution as forcing an uneven burden on small businesses. Additionally, it seems the commissioners do consider the size of an enterprise in the process of issuing rewards. This factor may have negatively impact small businesses, with regard to the affordability to meet requirements of rewards (Theron and Godfrey 2000: 56; Noble 2006).

The lack of technical skills required at CCMA proceedings and the disproportionate burden placed on small businesses can thus become barriers for SMMEs to grow, since they will need to secure the services of an attorney to represent them at the CCMA, due to their own lack of skills. Hence, securing the services of an attorney will increase production costs, which will negatively impact SMME working capital to finance social media use.

2.11.4.4 General conclusions regarding the legislative framework influence on SMME social media use

Most legislative frameworks are intended to provide protection to small businesses within a country. Some business relations are developed to promote employment equity and discourage remuneration discrimination in the workplace, while also designed to prevent the injustices of the past being repeated. These laws are, additionally, intended to protect the government of a particular country, employees, and the private sector, in relation to the production of goods and services and unfair treatment experienced by either party (Thomas and Luvhengo 2020). Through these laws, small businesses can secure loans, business sites and participation in tenders for government goods and services. However, the commercial banks have made it difficult for SMMEs to secure loans. Existing laws can also give rise to unintended consequences for businesses, because they lack transparency. In addition, authorities are not accountable for their actions, where failure to sustain SMMEs often leads to reverse discrimination and crime and corruption, which is not justifiable from an economic point of view (Thomas and Luvhengo 2020). This means SMMEs had to incur additional costs on the above processes to adopt social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

Businesses typically think of tax rates and regulations as difficult. In addition, SA is now ranked 51st of 190 countries, losing 19 places from 2013 when it ranked in 32nd place. On average, businesses are still required to make seven payments per annum, spend 203 hours in a year filing, preparing, and paying taxes, where total taxes amount to 28.8 percent of their profit (WB 2017). More SMME funds are thus directed to tax rates and regulations. Hence, this has incurred additional costs for SMMEs, which negatively impacted the working capital of SMMEs to finance the use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

2.11.4.5 Conclusion

Based on the above, it was clear SMMEs were established with good intentions; to create job opportunities and improve employment of South Africans, as well as countries worldwide. Research has clearly shown how SMMEs contribute to the economic growth (GDP) of countries worldwide. The establishment of SMMEs is also aimed at improving the livelihoods of the people in that country, and SA is included in this case (Bvuma and Marnewick 2020; ILO 2018).

In support of SMME survival, governments worldwide have developed and implemented legislation to promote the survival and growth of these small enterprises. However, in the process of implementing legislation and regulations, SMMEs have experienced limitations and hindrances that create burdens, due to their lack of technical and capacity skills. In complying with such legislation, SMMEs incurred additional costs that may have impacted negatively on their working capital to finance social media use during Covid-19. In summary, SMMEs, particularly those situated rurally, may have had inadequate funds to adopt social media during the Covid-19 crisis for their survival and growth.

This implies the imposed legislation and regulations by the government of SA and other countries globally resulted in constraints for SMME growth. In particular, rural SMMEs suffered most in the process of compliance with legislation and regulations, because of poor technical skills. As a result, the non-compliance with legislation led to added labour and production costs, which reduced the ability of SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis to adopt social media technologies. This was further exacerbated by the uncontrollable Covid-19 crisis, which produced technical insolvency in other rural SMMEs, due to the decline of their cash reserves (Sugandini *et al*. 2020; Thomas and Luvhengo 2020).

In conclusion, laws and regulations may be the main stumbling blocks due to the compliance and administrative burdens imposed by Acts and regulations, which impeded rural SMMEs from having sufficient funds during the Covid-19 crisis to adopt social media technologies. This had special reference to rural KZN SMME growth and development (Sugandini *et al*. 2020, Thomas and Luvhengo 2020).

2.12 INFLUENCE OF GOVERNANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY RURAL SMMEs

2.12.1 Overview on the governance of social media by rural SMMEs

Several authors state businesses can use the Capability Maturity Model to describe the state of a business, with regard to ethics and social media. Furthermore, the concept of maturity is utilised to map logical ways to improve a business's services, predominantly through the software business. SMMEs may adopt the Capability Maturity Model (Crawford 2006; Hillson 2003; Farah 2011, 2013), which is depicted by Figure 2.4 below.

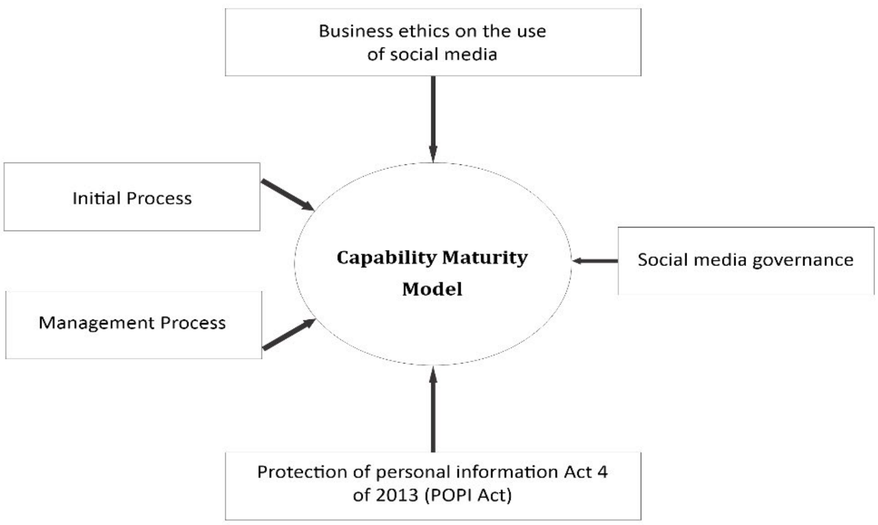


Figure 2.3: Capability Maturity Model

Source: *Researcher's analysis (2023) adapted from Crawford (2006) and Farah (2011)*

Figure 2.3 illustrated the maturity capability model that is briefly discussed as follows:

2.12.2 Initial process

This is the phase where the organisation acknowledges the link between business ethics and the use of social media processes. In this situation, there are no processes or standards, and no one is yet accountable for business ethics, with respect to social media. However, management is fully aware of the need for management in relation to business ethics and social media processes. In this case, SMMEs are not excluded (Crawford 2006; Hillson 2003; Farah, 2011, 2013).

Based on this, SMMEs would need to integrate their use of social media with business ethics to an accepted level as a tool to communicate with customers. Thus, management will need to understand business ethics and social media and be aware of the need for management processes. This will potentially promote social media adoption by organisations, including SMMEs during disruptions, such as the Covid-19 crisis. Hence, integration of social media and SMME business ethics could have promoted SMME social media adoption during the course of the Covid-19 crisis, to increase their opportunities for survival, since they would have been able to reach their customers (Farah 2011; Sugandini *et al*. 2020).

2.12.3 Management process

The process of business ethics and social media projects are appraised in terms of their importance to the business functions of organization, based upon metrics from cost and baseline estimates. In addition, business ethics and social media project information is integrated with other corporate systems to optimise business decisions. SMMEs are now fully established, culturally based on a business ethics and social media management-based culture (Crawford 2002; Sidenko 2006).

While operations and management are responsible to evaluate the processes, lessons learned should be used to improve the activities of business ethics and social media management. In conclusion, SMMEs are supposed to realise a maturity model for business ethics and social media. This may be accomplished through adapting the Capability Maturity Model to reflect the realities of business ethics and social media (Crawford 2006; Hillson 2003; Farah 2011, 2013).

SMMEs are advised to follow the different stages summarised above to adhere to and comply with ethical and behavioural norms in social media use, in order to advance their survival and growth (Sugandini *et al.* 2020; Sidenko 2006). Therefore, when these small enterprises managed to customise the business ethics and social media management-based culture for SMMEs, it would be easy for these businesses to adopt and use social media during disasters such as the Covid-19 crisis, for their survival and growth (Nyawo 2020; Sugandini *et al*. 2020; Farah 2011).

2.12.4 Social Media Governance

Governance as an umbrella term, refers to the logic of action and the causal relations between structures, interests, and interactions (Kooiman 2007). Corporate governance means the overall framework for the guidance and control of a company in a relationship with multiple stakeholders (Tricker 2009; Hopt 1998). Van Kersbergen and van Waarden (2004) further underlined the importance of corporate governance, stating the “relations between actors pose specific risks and uncertainties” and there is a need for different mechanisms. In the context of this study, it refers to the appropriate relations through communications between SMMEs and their stakeholders by means of social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

With regard to social media practice, the concept of governance and regulatory frameworks must be taken into cognisance. Social media guidelines, also known as blogging policies or social network guidelines, provide advice on how social media communications should be dealt with by all members of an organisation and how it can enable all to become communicators in participative online environments (Bell 2010; Turner 2010; Wright and Hinson 2009). Based on the above, organisations must ensure there are policies and frameworks that will guide employees and employers to understand the procedures and principles they need to follow with customers. When SMME owners and employees are well conversant with governance and regulatory frameworks; it will be easy to adopt social media during crises similar to the Covid-19 crisis.

2.12.5 Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013 (POPI Act)

The POPI Act is intended to give effect to the constitutional right to privacy. This Act has created a burden to SMMEs, since it has incurred high costs for compliance. Furthermore, it has been argued the POPI Act must cater for SMMEs through permitting them to be automatically exempted from compliance. Thus, it should not be the decision of the Information Regulator, in terms of section 37 of the Act, to exempt these enterprises, but due to the nature of business entities such as SMMEs, it is argued they should be awarded automatic exemption. This has emanated from the notion that compliance with the POPI Act increases the cost of compliance for SMMEs (RSA 1996; POPI Act 4 2013; Motsamai 2021). In addition, this means businesses must carefully deal with any information obtained from prospective customers, since these persons may become customers in future. SMMEs must thus ensure information collected through social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are managed in accordance with the POPI Act in a responsible manner.

Information must, therefore, be collected in a responsible and lawful manner, and any information obtained due to any form of hacking should not constitute “lawful” processing under the POPI Act. Hence, the POPI Act regulates social media platform use by SMMEs, by protecting the data security of prospective SMME customers from being misused for other purposes, including any form hacking.

2.13 INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES ON RURAL SMMEs DURING COVID-19 CRISIS

2.13.1 Overview of social media marketing strategies

Social media marketing strategies were critical to rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis (González-Padilla and Tortolero-Blanco 2020; Sulthana, Evangelin and Vasantha 2021: 6376). Social media can be classified in different ways, depending on their content and user interaction. One classification proposed by Papachristou (2013) was according to their genres, which include content creation and publishing (blogs, v-blogs, podcasts), content sharing (YouTube, Flickr), social network sites (SNS) (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, My Space, Google Plus+3), collaborative productions (Wikipedia), virtual worlds (Second Life) and add-ons. Social media has thus built the foundations for a participatory economy, where participants gain value as a result of community action. The term social media has been applied to varied technologies—wikis, blogs, microblogs, SNS, virtual worlds, and video-sharing sites, to name a few. Social media also fosters connectivity among individuals (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010).

Based on the above, SA has the highest rate of users engaging in mobile technology and mobile social media on the African continent (Beger and Sinha 2012). According to Shezi (2016), there is an increased number of households connecting to the Internet, from 48.7 percent in 2014 to 53.3 percent in 2015 in SA. Besides this, people access the Internet mainly at their workplaces, households, and schools (Mzekandaba 2016; Jami Pour *et al.* 2019; Panjaburee and Srisawasdi 2018). Shezi (2016) further states more than 13 million people make use of social media platforms in SA; approximately 10 million users access social media platforms solely using mobile devices. In addition, Cosenza (2022) established worldwide social media use, as depicted (Figure 2.4) below.

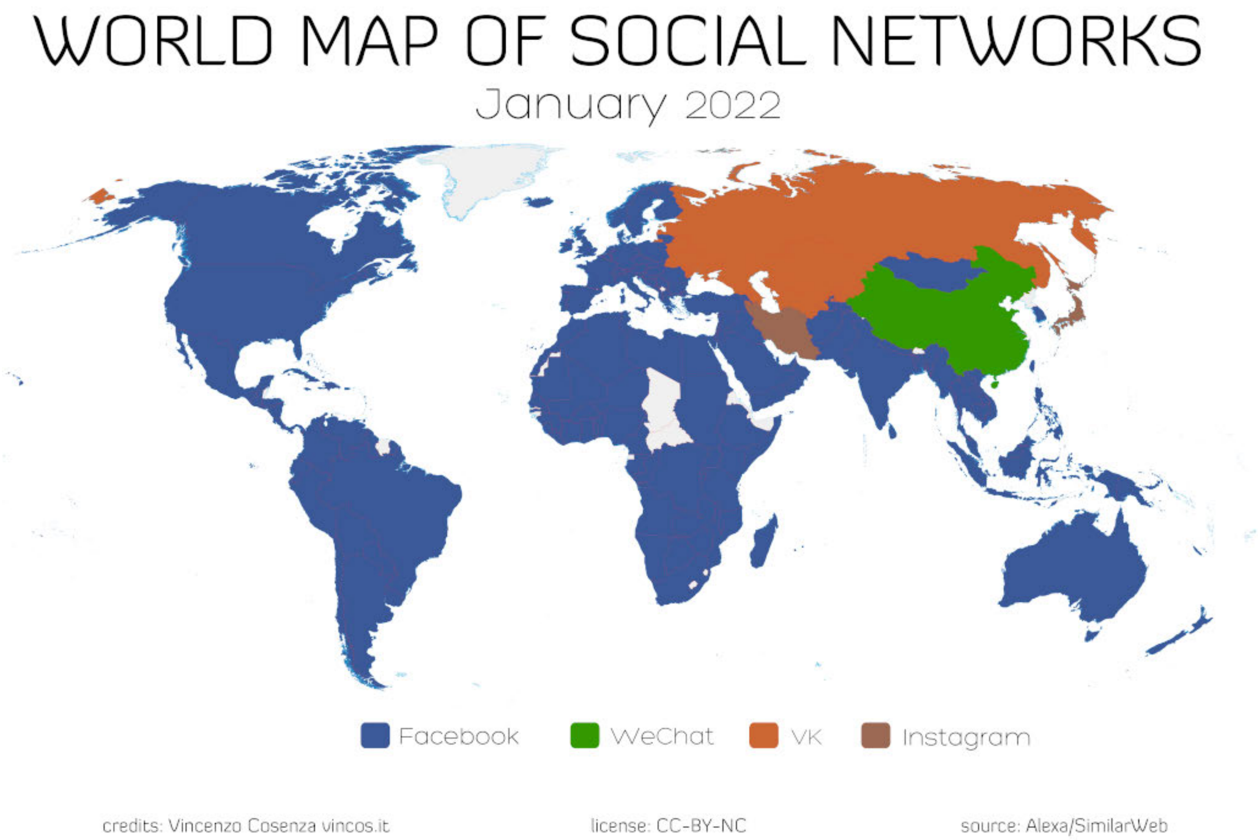


Figure 2.4: World Map of Social Networks

Source: *Cosenza (2022)*

Figure 2.4 shows Facebook has established its leadership position, where it has 2,9 billion active monthly users and is the leading social network in 156 out of 167 countries (93 percent). WeChat, the super app, reigns in China with 1,26 billion active monthly users. VK is the leader in Russian territories, with approximately 100 million active users (Cosenza 2022).

Social media, which stresses the importance of digital business strategy, is thus fundamentally changing the way organisations, including rural SMMEs, communicate, collaborate, consume, and create. These media have revolutionised the ways in which organizations relate to the marketplace and society, creating a new world of possibilities and challenges in all aspects of the enterprise, from marketing and operations, to finance and human resource management (Aral *et al*. 2013). Mbatha (2022) further emphasised social media platform such as Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn are used by organisations to interact with their customers. Rural SMMEs are not excluded in this case, and Karimi and Naghibi (2015) pointed out this can add value as follows**:**

2.13.1.1 Advertising

Social media platforms can reach existing and attract new customers to market their products and services. Social media also plays a crucial role in enabling small businesses to conduct research on their customers and the kind of services they wish to receive (Mbatha 2022). Hence, social media promotes survival and growth, which SMMEs can use during crises to reach their customers and marketing of their services and products. As a result, rural SMMEs are able to increase sales during pandemics, and survival and growth, through social media use, can be sustained.

2.13.1.2 Social review sites

Social review sites can assist customers and community members to display their views and allow their organisations, including rural SMMEs, to interact with community members to solve their challenges to prevent brand damage (O'Connor 2008; Mbatha 2022). SMMEs can, therefore, use social media to communicate with their customers to obtain their views and resolve challenges to maintain relationships and protect their brands for the sake of SMME survival and growth.

2.13.1.3 Video hosting sites

YouTube has created a huge impact on businesses, such that they can interact with their customers and know their tastes, preferences, as well as the products customers are interested to receive from their organisations. Rural SMMEs are not excluded in this case (Djafarova and Kramer 2020; Alobaid 2020).

2.13.1.4 Community blogs

Community blogs allow customers to state their views, while businesses can also share their vision with customers (Attu & Terras 2017; Dame 2016; Mbatha 2022). This implies rural SMMEs can share their vision with existing customers during crises; through this process, there will be good CRM, which can promote the survival and growth of SMMEs.

2.13.1.5 Discussion sites

These are the form of social media platforms that can be used by rural SMMEs to commence discussions with their customers concerning products and services they would like to receive (Cho and Wash 2021; Latack *et al*. 2020). This infers SMMEs can use social media platforms during disasters such as the Covid-19 crisis to communicate with their customers, who will be able to inform SMMEs regarding the products and services they would like to receive.

Therefore, rural SMMEs will be able to sustain relations with their customers and keep them during crises.

2.13.1.6 Sharing economy networks

This type of social media platform is generally used in the tourism sector, where networks such as Rover and AirBnB, assist individuals to share information with each other, provided they have the same interests (Kirchner & Schüßler 2019). This type of social media platform can assist organisations to share information to their customers about the available services and products. Thus, it these platforms can assist rural SMMEs to communicate with their customers in order to increase revenues to survive and grow during emergencies such as the Covid-19 crisis. Rural SMMEs can, therefore, derive benefits from the wide use of social media as illustrated (Figure 2.5) above, to attract new customers and keep existing customers for the survival and growth of the enterprise.

2.13.2 Social media marketing strategies

Social media has brought innovative practices, enabling marketing activities in the marketplace of the products and services of the businesses (Eid *et al*. 2019; Khayer *et al*. 2020). Furthermore, these strategies have shown the benefits in being cost-effective, as well as an information sharing platform that is effective, and efficient for the businesses. It has also, over the years, shown itself as a valuable marketing tool for advertising the business enterprises' products and services (Eid *et al*. 2019; Wamba *et al*. 2019).

Social media marketing appears to serve as a really good basis from which to locate customers, create an engaging environment, and simultaneously generating promoters for various brands. It is clear that social media marketing is on the increase, with evident importance, with social advertising investment across the globe predicted to rise by 2021, in the order of US 153 563 million (Statista 2020. This moves towards integrating social media with marketing activities saw US marketers applauding the move, since nearly 90 percent state their business exposure has increased as a result of the shift toward social media (Skills Lab 2019).

In 2016 more than $14.8 billion was spent in the US alone, on social media marketing, which undoubtedly makes the US the largest social media advertising market in the world (Statista 2020). At the start of the 21st century, social media use has turned into the most widely used business strategy, particularly for SMMEs (Chatterjee and Kar 2020; Duff and Segijn 2019; Eid *et al*. 2019).

2.13.3 Classification criteria of social media marketing strategies

Business enterprises interested in improving communication channels with their customers should embark on developing customer engagement (Li *et al.* 2020). Furthermore, such customer engagement will motivate the business enterprise to develop effective social media marketing strategies, in order to engage with their customers and market the business, its products and services for growth (Harmeling *et al*. 2017; Venkatesan 2017). Thus, the business will benefit from customer engagement in the form of tangibles, referred to as higher revenues, market share and profits, as well as intangibles, such as feedback from customers regarding improved business products and services (Pansari and Kumar 2017; Li *et al.* 2020).

2.13.4 Categories of social media marketing strategies

According to Li (2020), there are four categories of SMME social media marketing strategies. This adds to Choi and Thoeni (2016), Felix, Rauschnabel and Hinsch (2017) and Rydén, Ringberg and Wilke (2015), who explained business enterprises, including SMMEs, utilise four types of social media marketing objectives, with four mental models to guide social media marketing strategies. The four mental models entail business-to-customers (to promote and sell), business-with-customer (to connect and collaborate), business-from-customers (to listen and learn) and business-for-customer (to empower and engage).

2.13.4.1 Social Commerce Strategy

Regarded as a tool used by business enterprises, this strategy is employed to acquire customer information, allowing the enterprise to contact customers in a more efficient manner (Guesalaga 2016; Jayson, Block and Chen 2018). Therefore, a social commerce strategy promotes social media use as a tool for selling, promotion and advertising platforms, which positively influence customers to purchase products that, in turn, improves the financial position of the business enterprise (Li *et al.* 2020). Nonetheless, it may be believed SMMEs are not excluded in this case, which implies SMMEs with this strategy would have been able to promote and sell their products during the Covid-19 crisis.

Therefore, SMMEs need to have selling capabilities and use different selling channels to synergise the effects of social media (Kumar *et al*. 2016). In addition, Akpan *et al*. (2020) stated those social media strategies assist SMMEs to gain a competitive advantage to increase their sales through virtual customer engagement, even in partial lockdowns. Subriadi *et al.* (2022) concurred with Akpan *et al*. (2020) pointing out a social commerce strategy helped small businesses to survive during the Covid-19 crisis through use of the action research cycle.

2.13.4.2 Social Content Strategy

This strategy creates social content in different formats in order to attract and retain customers, solely based on customer needs, in comparison to promoting products and services (Järvinen and Taiminen 2016). Content marketing is thus regarded as a customer-centric strategy, which is useful, relevant, compelling and timely. This strategy is a two-way communication, in which business enterprises deliver valuable content and customers react positively to this content. The strategy purpose is to improve customer engagement with the intention of increasing product sales (Malthouse *et al*. 2013). Therefore, business enterprises create brand awareness through social media use to communicate their branding. Social content strategy is used by businesses, including rural SMMEs, to attract customer attention, provide them with favourable news and focus on the strengths of the business products and services (Vries *et al*. 2012; Swani *et al*. 2017).

2.13.4.3 Social Monitoring Strategy

Social monitoring is a strategy businesses use to observe and analyse the behaviours of customers in social media. It allows businesses to attend online to the needs and complaints of its customers (Van Noort and Willemsen 2012; Lamberton and Stephen 2016). This means feedback will come from customers who portray their behaviour on social media. In return, the business enterprise will note what the customers said regarding their products and services. The business enterprise is expected to listen, learn and react to its customers (Moe and Schweidel 2017; Carlson *et al*. 2018). The chief objective of a social monitoring strategy is to improve customer satisfaction and promote good relationships. Thus, through this strategy, it can create a belief the business uses social media to listen and respond to customer needs and complaints (Timoshenko and Hauser 2019). Rural SMMEs are not excluded in this case. This strategy is a two-way communication between customers and the business enterprise and requires the business to possess the capabilities to attend to customers' online needs and complaints (Kim *et al*. 2016; Li *et al.* 2020).

2.13.4.4 Social CRM (SCRM) Strategy

This strategy is based on the business possessing the highest degree of maturity in strategy, since it is supported by a technology platform (Li *et al.* 2020). SCRM comprises the social media dimension (customer engagement) and the CRM dimension (customer retention), which positively affect competitive advantage, performance, and growth of the business (Malthouse *et al*. 2013). SCRM is a collaborative interaction involving firm-customer, inter-organizational, and inter-customer intentions, where social media becomes the chief CRM enabler (Trainor *et* *al*. 2014). This requires the business to possess SCRM and learning capabilities connected with relationship management and innovation, in order to build an effective SCRM strategy. Therefore, it can be deduced rural SMMEs can use social media in their operations to promote customer engagement and customer retention for survival and growth (Choudhury and Harrigan 2014; Moe and Schweidel 2017).

2.14 STRATEGIES FOR RURAL SMMEs SURVIVAL DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

Survival strategies for SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis are discussed briefly as follows**:**

2.14.1 Overview of strategies for SMMEs survival

Businesses worldwide are expected to embark on environmental analysis to develop growth strategies that will lead to their survival, which requires business strategy. Such a strategy assists business enterprises to enhance their competitive advantage and establish their performance within their sector. Thus, growth is a necessity for businesses to survive in developing industries, and they must continuously improve through embracing a change and advancement process (Wheelen and Hunger 2012; Wickham 2016, Durmaz and İlhan 2015). Therefore, small businesses have to embark on innovation in order to reach survival during emergencies such as the Covid-19 crisis.

The idea of innovation refers to new social media technologies use for management practices, which enable businesses to achieve a desired improvement in their operations on a daily basis. Small businesses have the duty to ensure business processes, in terms of organisational context, are the right fit to fast-track innovative technology adoption, such as social media technologies, in the SMME survival context, in the course of the Covid-19 crisis. Innovations are regarded as internal and external in nature, with a strong bearing on the technologically critical factors influencing the use of social media for SMME survival during crises (Adam and Alarifi 2021; Miner 1997; Child 1972). SMME survival is regarded as a performance indicator that these small enterprises can adapt to the turbulent business environment they are subject to, as well as being an objective measure of SMME success.

In times such as the Covid-19 crisis, rural SMMEs are threatened with financial distress, which can weaken their survival, sales and revenues, due to the external turbulent environment (Sugandini *et al*. 2020; Adam and Alarifi 2021; Hillier and Ibrahimo 1993; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). It may be deduced the financial distress could have led to rural SMME inability to finance their social media use during the Covid-19 crisis. Other researchers suggest innovation practices are critical factors behind the survival and continuity of enterprises such as SMMEs. These innovation practices support the improvement of business survival, growth, and sustainability for future business success. SMMEs can achieve a competitive advantage, referred to as the foundation of its survival. Nevertheless, survival also results from SMMEs adapting to the threats and risks imposed by the economic and Covid-19 crises (O'Reilly III and Tushman 2011, 2012; Mason and Harrison 2015; Gaynor 2002; Ortiz-Villajos 2014; Helmers and Rogers 2010; Zeidy 2020).

Survival, however, also results from achieving success in the encountered crisis imposed by the external environment (Dhochak and Sharma 2015). Therefore, this suggests SMMEs could employ innovation practices such as using social media platforms as driving tools during events such as the Covid-19 crisis, which could bring about positive results for these business enterprises. According to the literature reviewed, a knowledge gap was identified regarding rural SMME social media use in KZN. This indicates a knowledge gap that needed to be addressed in this study, with special reference to rural SMMEs in KZN (Lekhanya and Mason 2014; Budree *et al.* 2019; Prince 2019). Considering the above, this study investigated the critical factors influencing the use of social media as a driving tool for SMME survival during the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN, with the aim to develop a proposed social media model as driving tool for SMME survival in times of a pandemic or similar crisis in rural KZN.

2.14.2 Rural SMME survival strategies during the Covid-19 crisis

Gerald, Obianuju, and Chukwunonso (2020) strongly suggested different business enterprises must ensure their survival strategies are able to counteract impending emergencies that can hinder the potential survival of businesses during disasters such as the Covid-19 pandemic. These crises necessitate SMMEs to forge innovation cultures that will ensure resource sustainability and service continuity, due to the businesses having suffered due to insufficient liquidity and being unable to quickly adapt to changes resulting from crises. SMMEs in this case, are finding it difficult to survive in the ever-changing business environment caused by the Covid-19 crisis (Masago *et al*. 2021).

Rotimi and Edewor (2018) highlighted those businesses must make a profit, survive and grow, to ensure continuity against all turbulences presented by the business environment. It is critical to ensure they realise their going concern, continue to operate indefinitely and avoid expected liquidation or have to significantly reduce the scale of operations in the foreseeable future (Awe 2006; Rotimi and Edewor 2018). Business survival refers to the capability of business enterprises such as SMMEs, to continuously operate within a turbulent environment, irrespective of global crises; thus, business survival must be regarded as a primary objective for any business (Onwuka *et al.* 2017; Obasan 2014; Rotimi and Edewor 2018).

This suggests businesses enterprises need to have the capacity to structure and restructure themselves so they have a comprehensive understanding of the influence of critical factors such as culture, technology, uncertainty, and changes, as well as competitive market, leadership style, profitability, and productivity, in addition to sales turnover, for their survival and growth (Odumbakun *et al.* 2017; Oginni and Adesanya 2013; Rahman *et al*. 2022). Hence, business survival is a prerequisite for any SMME, despite all the odds, for instance the global Covid-19 crisis (Rotimi and Edewor 2018; Rahman *et al*. 2022). This section will explore survival strategies SMMEs should consider, discussed as follows:

2.14.2.1 Business agility by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis

The concept of agility originated from a study, sponsored by the US government in the early 1990s, which the National Institute of Aerospace undertook. Agility can be best described by the circumstances where business enterprises such as rural SMMEs, are prepared to achieve a flexibility , accompanied by overall efficiency in learning, in addition to the capability to continue to adjust their positioning so they may gain optimally, despite economic turmoil such as economic recession, caused by crises such as the Covid-19 crises (Seyadi and Elali 2021: 32; OECD 2020; Masago *et al.* 2021).

Agility is further dependent on the capability to quickly and effectively react to changing markets, with customer-designed products and services as driving force (Kumar and Motwani 1995). Therefore, enterprises must have the ability to manage unexpected changes, survive unprecedented business environment threats, and benefit from changes by turning them into opportunities (Zhang and Sharifi 2000; Narasimhan, Swink and Kim 2006). In the context of this study, and based on the above definition of agility, SMMEs must be able to respond swiftly to turbulent business environments to meet the external demands of customers. In addition, they must be able to learn and transform the strengths of their business, to where business opportunities are best used to survive during crises (Seyadi and Elali 2021; Masago *et al*. 2021).

Mason (2010) found a link in both active and ambiguous conditions, between overall internal performance and enablers of operational agility. Furthermore, the author also established a relation between operational agility and market-related overall performance when similar circumstances are present, which was significant,. By implication, the drivers of agility are those situational factors that motivate a business to relook at its existing strategy, understand the requirement for it to be agile, and deem agility as an approach that is preferred to attain sustainability, profitability and success in the business. SMMEs would, therefore, be in a position to survive a crisis such as Covid-19, providing they embark on business agility. However, Masago *et al*. (2021) investigated SMMEs in Kenya and found out many small businesses had been caught off guard by the Covid-19 crisis. Consequently, many employees were laid off from working for SMMEs, with these enterprise reducing staff wages, seeking new raw material sources due to a declining demand for their products.

Bartika *et al*. (2020) examined roughly 5 800 SMMEs, establishing that many had become fragile financially, had to let employees go, shut their businesses, or find new strategies for operating. As stated by the OECD (2020), both the supply and demand side of SMMEs were affected by the Covid-19 induced crisis. These firms experienced a reduction on the supply side with labour supply, with workers staying at home as a result of movement restrictions or had to care for their dependents. In addition, there was disruption of supply chains that caused unavailability of goods and parts that are intermediate. Further to this, on the demand side, the reduced demand for their products impacted the ability of rural and other KZN SMMEs to function, which resulted in liquidity shortages (OECD 2020).

The negative effects of the Covid-19 crisis obliged businesses to identify critical factors that would assist with attaining flexibility in day-to day operations (Seyadi and Elali 2021; OECD 2020). Some researchers discovered innovation practices, total quality management (TQM), new social media technologies, and new human resource management practices all influence operational performance, which can improve the survival and competitive advantage of SMMEs. Therefore, rural SMMEs would be in a position of moving towards the phase of realising capability and business agility during crises such as Covid-19 (Maisiko 2014; Hashim 2015; Seyadi and Elali 2021; Rahman *et al*. 2022).

Business agility in SMMEs requires setting survival business strategies in such a manner that responsiveness is aligned to the vision and mission statements of their businesses (Moore and Manring 2009; Rahman *et al.* 2022). In addition, Doz (2022) suggested business agility can be enhanced by strategic business sensitivity, resource fluidity and collective management commitment (management unity), which are briefly discussed as follows**:**

(i) Strategic business sensitivity

Business (strategic) sensitivity means enterprises are able to gain in-depth insight of turbulences they are faced with in times such as the Covid-19 crisis. They need to have had the strategic foresight to adopt social media technologies and use these to survive during the course of the Covid-19 crisis (Doz 2020; Doz and Kosonen 2010; Bikfalvi and Marque 2017). This means business sensitivity is fundamental to mitigate risks by making sure strategies regarding agility are effective and sustainable.

Betta *et al*. (2018) concurred with the above researchers, asserting SMMEs should put survival strategies in place to address customer pressure with immediate effect; this will also allow these enterprises to adjust to the economic turmoil caused by the Covid-19 crisis (Trawnih *et al*. 2021). Therefore, the agility approach towards survival during the Covid-19 crisis required SMMEs to establish relationships with potential and existing customers to ensure trust and customer loyalty (Rahman *et al*. 2022).

The relationship with customers could be realised through the use of social media to communicate with customers. As a result, SMMEs would be able to use social media to market their products with the intention of increasing their revenues during crises (Nyawo 2020). In addition, regarding crises such as Covid -19 crisis, SMMEs must customise their strategic direction to become agile in their day-to-day operations. Strategic business agility could provide the fundamental mechanisms for rural SMMEs to survive in turbulent business environments caused by crises similar to that resulting from Covid-19 crisis (Rahman *et al*. 2022; Seyadi and Elali 2021).

(ii) Resource fluidity

Resource fluidity allows business enterprises to properly allocate their resources, in order to adjust and adapt to turbulences. This can be realised through using available resources to adopt social media to attract customers, which would result in business sustainability and competitiveness. The reallocation of available resources would further assist SMMEs to earn new business opportunities to survive during turbulent times, such as the Covid-19 crisis (Morton *et al*. 2018; Acquier and Damasso 2013; Doz 2020).

(iii) Collective management commitment (Management unity)

Management unity, in the context of this study, is considered to comprise those situations where SMME owners are decisive in taking decisions without hindrance of business politics (Doz and Kosonen 2010). Owners, in this regard, must be able to share values with the business and create internal, cultural and business ethics, allowing for more flexibility towards re-engineering business models. SMME owners must be able to embrace new business models that would improve survival of their business (Lewis *et al*. 2012).

By inference, employees would earn mutual respect and be inspired to become more creative and innovative in seeking new business models. Management success in business is heavily dependent on agile development and the ability to deal with market uncertainties to seize external opportunities to penetrate the market during crises similar to that created by Covid-19 (Doz and Kosonen 2010; Rahman *et al*. 2022; Seyadi and Elali 2021). In conclusion, Bock *et al*. (2012) emphasised the critical aspects of strategic business agility would be useless without strategic business agility, resource fluidity and management unity. The business enterprises must thus institute resource allocation processes that are effective and dynamic, in order to benefit in full from effective resource use, and efficient and economical use of social media during health and economic crises, such as Covid-19.

2.14.2.2 Firms' operational marketing efficiency

Efficiency depends on resource allocation across alternative uses and is achieved when marginal productivity per unit price is equal across all resources that contribute to the firms' outputs (Rahman *et al.* 2022). Businesses such as rural SMMEs spend many financial and non-financial resources on activities related to marketing, promotion and distribution, in order to increase their revenue in economic recessions such as the Covid-19 crisis (Rahman *et al*. 2022; Moore 2002; Keh *et al*. 2006). Rahman *et al*. (2022) and Naidoo (2010) added businesses must put actionable marketing plans in place in order to apply their dynamic capability to attract prospective and retain existing customers in times of global crises**.**

Rural SMMEs must, therefore, use their resources efficiently in times of global crises, such as Covid-19 crisis (Rahman *et al.* 2022; Sheth 2020; Borders and Lester 2020). This suggests the Covid-19 crisis and economic recession were an eye opener to help SMMEs understand the need to integrate their marketing activities with new technology innovations such as social media (Yi 2020; Prohorovs 2020). In other words, rural SMME owners are expected to respond to market demands and customer pressure by adopting and using social media in sales operations. This means marketing operational efficiency is one of the survival strategies SMMEs may use in crisis situations (Rahman *et al*. 2022; White *et al*. 2020; Ashworth 2012).

2.14.2.3 Firms’ innovation capability optimisation

Innovation capability means business enterprises are able to continuously design new or modified products and services, including introducing new techniques in response to turbulent business environments (Rahman *et al*. 2022; Cefis and Marsili 2012).Nevertheless, the innovation capability of SMMEs depends on their resources, size and business environment; in this regard, they require dynamic capability to respond to global crises, customer pressure and market demands (Guijarro *et al.* 2013; Jeng and Pak 2016; Eggers 2020). In addition, SMMEs must constantly use innovation practices such as social media technologies as a preventative measure (Gajda 2017; Rahman *et al.* 2022).

This is known as innovation capability by rural SMMEs, which was needed to survive during the Covid-19 crisis. The optimisation of innovation capability has to do with innovative thinking by businesses to, for instance, adopt social media technologies that will create an innovative culture (Rhee and Stephens 2020). Thus, this will assist business enterprises to provide a survival strategy that will enhance businesses competitiveness, thereby enabling them to survive in global crises, such as Covid-19. Overall, rural SMMEs had to embark on innovation capability optimisation through adopting and using social media, to survive during the Covid-19 crisis (Rahman *et al*. 2022; Heinonen and Strandvik 2020; Cankurtaran and Beverland 2020).

2.14.2.4 Firms rethink the customer experience

The concept of customer experience elucidates their emotional role in making their experiences memorable towards business enterprises’ products and services (Kotler *et al*. 1996; Hanna and Wozniak 2001; Rahman *et al*. 2022). In the context of the Covid-19 crisis, rural SMMEs were confronted with the challenge to find solutions that would address their needs, such as how to motivate customers to access their products and services (Rahman *et al*. 2022; Beraha and Đuričin 2020).

Such small businesses must develop innovative-based cultures with a dynamic capability to adopt digital technologies. These would include social media, and location-based mobile applications, in order to provide an interactive business environment between themselves and consumers, enabling them to market their products and services to increase revenues for survival during situations such as Covid-19 and the resulting economic crisis (Parise, Guinan and Kafka 2016; Homburg *et al*. 2017; Bolton *et al*. 2018; Zhou and Li 2010, Rahman *et al*. 2022). In conclusion, rural SMMEs in these crises must respond to customer pressure and customer purchase experiences through adopting and using social media as one of the survival strategies, in order to interact with customers with regard to their products and services, for their survival and growth.

2.14.3 Competitive capabilities as a rural SMME survival strategy during the Covid-19 crisis

Competitive capabilities denote a company's adeptness at outperforming its competitors with significant distinction, and satisfying customer needs through the offer of high-quality products and services, as well as value, while competitive advantage is retained (Gerald *et al.* 2020). Capabilities are thus an indicator of strategic agility effectiveness of a firm and focus on a its ability to make use of resources that are available in a way where competitive advantage is generated (AMBE 2010). Consequently, competitive capabilities create a supply chain of indicators that show strategic agility benefits; these abilities must be easy to act on, thus enabling swift correctional actions to be implemented promptly for performance to be enhanced.

Zhang and Sharifi (2000) maintain the competitive abilities of a firm that make use of strategic agility are comprised of flexibility, speed, accountability, and competence. Strategic agility is therefore reliant on information systems that are enhanced and advanced production technologies, with its main aim to ensure innovation occurs speedily and customers have more input in the operations of the organization. The competitive capabilities of a firm involved in strategic acceleration should thus have its basis in innovative learning and customer satisfaction. This generally implies the competitive capabilities of a firm are based on meeting customer expectations, in comparison to its industry rivals, by means of new innovations such as social media technologies, for its survival during crises such as Covid-19.

Hong, Tran and Park (2010) explain, in the current global market environment, small businesses compete based on their network capabilities, which includes customers and suppliers. However, the dynamic business environment nature and constantly changing needs and preferences of the customer necessitate sufficient information flow through supply chains. Information communication technologies (ICT), which include electronic data change and the Internet, have assisted significantly in improving supply chain communication and effectiveness of coordination. Nevertheless, only those firms that leverage these technologies will benefit fully and become competitive.

Managers in all types of organizations, according to Gunasekaran and Ngai (2004), are under pressure to control the running cost of their businesses and find ways to differentiate their products and services from their competitors. Many discrete activities can lead to competitive advantage, from designing a product, to its production, marketing, and delivery to the market. The contribution of these activities to the relative cost position of the firm creates a basis for differentiation. As example, Toni and Tonchia (2001) found competitive capabilities of a firm include factors related to flexibility, costs, time, and productivity, along with quality. The authors found these capabilities ensure viability of a firm in the long-term, while also contributing to leadership status being achieved. Rosenzweig and Roth (2007) determined competitive capabilities can be apportioned into cost leadership, quality, products, and flexibility of process es, along with reliability of delivery.

Correspondingly, Chen and Paulraj (2004) noted supply chain competitive capabilities include not only reliability of delivery, but also swift order confirmation of customer orders, in addition to customer satisfaction, quick handling of customer complaints, as well as volume flexibility, and conformance of products to specifications. Nader and Heidari (2016) also confirmed SMMEs today are operating in a turbulent environment. Developments, such as economic globalisation and changing technology, have helped empower consumers and made it more difficult for firms to compete with rivals. Selling products in overseas markets has, moreover, created several challenges that have to be overcome. Therefore, it is essential to identify and build a competitive advantage for SMMEs in global markets, with social media technologies utilised for marketing products and services to existing and prospective customers during disruptive disasters similar to the Covid-19 crisis. In aligning these elements to organisational capability is thus vital in achieving competitive advantage. Firms should, n this regard, strive to increase their strengths through competitive capability development, such as using social media, during events such as the Covid-19 crisis (Hutton and Eldridge 2019; Rahman *et al*. 2022).

2.14.4 Use of social media as a tool for Business Continuity Management (BCM) for rural SMME survival

Businesses are faced with uncertainties and risks that can interrupt their day-to-day operations; which indicates a necessity for effective BCM and organisational resilience. Ultimately, organisational risk management entails identification, evaluation, and managing risks associated with an organisation’s operations (Skipper and Kwon 2007; Lowe 2010). However, business enterprises, including SMMEs, can be disrupted; such disruptions can be either minor or major. This was evident with the sudden spread of Covid-19 in early 2020, which disseminated rapidly, infecting various industries and sectors in more than 213 countries. Until the end of 2020, the cumulative number of confirmed cases worldwide reached 91.5 million, and the cumulative death toll reached 1.96 million. It seriously affected the lives and health of people around the world and changed the daily routine of the public and society. SMMEs were not excluded in this case, such that some were declared technically insolvent, while others closed and some employees lost their jobs (Msimango-Galawe *et al.* 2020).

This was evident in countries worldwide, for instance, in China, there was a reduction in business income of nearly 67.69 percent among SMMEs; while 21.61 percent could not repay loans and other debts in time, placing greater pressure on operating funds. A further 86.22 percent SMMEs could not survive on funds in their accounts for more than three months, while 33.73 percent SMMEs did not have enough funds to survive for one month (Ma, Liu, Gao 2021).

Muriithi (2021) highlighted the global loss on manufacturing exports for China, the EU and the USA, arising from the Covid-19 crisis, which was expected to reach $126 billion (ITC 2020). Ma *et al*. (2021) drew attention to the Covid-19 crisis having worsened rising unemployment globally, leaving the labour market in turmoil. This increased the business bankruptcy rate in developed countries to 2.4 percent in 2020, compared to 1.4 percent in 2019. All industries in the world were caught in a state of long-term lockdown and faced a deadlock of shutdown with no time limit. Therefore, the pandemic was both a public health emergency and a crisis of global finance and economies, with challenges faced worldwide of addressing public health challenges and restoring the economy. This had a huge negative impact on rural SMME survival (Ma *et al.* 2021; Msimango-Galawe *et al.* 2020).

Based on the above discussions, had these economic disruptions that caused the Covid-19 crisis worldwide not been well managed, SMMEs may have shortened their lifespan. SMMEs operate in a globally dynamic and complex business environment (Fadun 2017; Msimango-Galawe *et al.* 2020); this implies these small enterprises must ensure business continuity during and post crises such as the Covid-19 crisis. Business continuity efforts have existed historically, referring to efforts to ensure continuity of service or product delivery in the face of disruptions. Business Continuity Management (BCM) is typically perceived as part of business risk management and focuses on disruptions of business-critical functions through rapid events, according to Smith (2012), although disagreements on the theoretical anchoring and core terminologies (for example, crisis) remain and blur in its use (Al-Dahash *et al*. 2016). BCM also typically includes crisis and emergency management components (Smith 2012).

BCM thus incorporates disaster recovery, crisis management, business recovery, and emergency management, incident management, contingency planning, as well as product recall (ILO 2012). Historic disruptions and the current impacts of the Covid-19 crisis have driven businesses to seek tools such as social media technologies, to maintain their operations and ensure their resilience (Schmid *et al*. 2021). The use of social media as a tool for the BCM of rural SMMEs should not be ignored, since it encourages the need for these enterprises to be proactive, ensuring less impact from severe disasters and quick recovery. This dictates a necessity for BCM to be an integral part of strategic planning, as this will facilitate an all-inclusive approach to a firm's decision-making process. It ensures all levels of business are working collaboratively in goal setting; and facilitates clearer understanding of business objectives and roles (Fadun 2017).

BCM, inclusive of social media use, helps in recovery from the Covid-19 crisis and develops resiliency in case of future disruptions. It enables both preventive and corrective methods and techniques for organisational risk management through business continuity and recovery planning.

Management of business continuity provides a competitive advantage by identifying business exposure to threats and disruptions and strategically provides plans for effective prevention and recovery for the business (Komgova and Fejfar 2013; Elliot *et al*. 2010). This means it minimises loss of customers, reduces loss of profits, prevents increased costs, and identifies business opportunities such as the use of social media, to penetrate the market for SMMEs, despite disruptions posed by crises. (Jorrigala 2017; Olufemi and Abiodun 2021; Rahman *et al*. 2022). Therefore, the use of social media as a tool for rural SMME BCM is a critical survival strategy, since it helped identify business opportunities during the Covid-19 crisis.

2.15 Growth strategies for rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis

The growth strategies rural SMMEs could employ during the Covid-19 and similar crises, are briefly discussed as follows**:**

2.15.1 Overview of rural SMME growth strategies during the Covid-19 crisis

Growth is categorised into quantitative and qualitative development in business. Quantitative growth refers to an expansion in existing output, sales revenue, asset growth, and product range, as well as extent of resources (number of employees, capital sum and more), and investments; however, qualitative growth is concerned with developing the quality of business elements. It is difficult to explain qualitative growth with quantitative terms, however, since a business with qualitative growth also shows signs of quantitative growth, we can say the latter is the outcome of the former (Ülgen and Mirze 2004). Growth is a way to tell what a business wants to do, in accordance with its goals and objectives, according to Kotler (1984), and covers technical and administrative developments to reach its goals. This means there is an increase in size, property, technology, and human business elements (Öncer 2012, Durmaz and İlhan 2015).

2.15.2 Extent of rural SMME social media use during the Covid-19 crisis

Goi (2014) and Jordan (2018) pointed out business enterprises adopted and used social media platforms to communicate with existing and potential customers, with the intention of creating relationships to forge loyalty in future. Kakumbi and Phiri (2022) confirmed the adoption of social media among rural SMMEs is low, whereas it can have a huge impact on their growth. For example, studies conducted by Rodriguez, Ajjan, and Peterson (2014) and Moghavvemi (2015) revealed Facebook improved sales and customer relationships, which create customer loyalty.

The most popular social media platforms are Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, with extensive customer use, to share similar interests with other customers, as well as positive or negative business service experiences and products (Valos *et al*. 2016; Schulze *et al*. 2014; Kumar *et al*. 2016).

Ghanem and Hamid (2020) added social media platforms, including Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp and LinkedIn, are most popular with SMMEs, and have become the main business enablers for these small enterprises to increase their revenue for survival and growth. Aronica, Bonfanti and Piacentino (2021) revealed SMMEs are more likely to use social media for strategic targets, such as marketing and receiving customer feedback with regard to their services and products. Consequently, knowing how to use social media for advertising is a critically vital business strategy for rural SMMEs to influence sales. The different types of social media platforms that can be used by rural SMMEs for their survival are briefly discussed as follows:

2.15.2.1 Facebook

A study by Moghavvemi (2015) revealed Facebook use has a strong positive impact on SMME financial as well as non-financial performance; in that it enables increased sales transactions, volume, and enquiries, as well as number of customers. It also reduces the cost of advertising, enhances customer relations and information accessibility, allowing customers direct access to information they previously did not have. Furthermore, via use of social media (Facebook), business enterprises including rural SMMEs are also able to obtain information regarding customer tastes or wants and competitor activities and tactics, along with brand sentiments.

Similarly, Kimani (2014) revealed Facebook and Twitter provided a perfect way to share information among different social classes, product awareness, and more active communication. Khan and Karodia (2013), in a related study in SA, established 51 percent SMMEs agreed Facebook was an effective channel for marketing, while 70 percent agreed the platform was useful for public relations. A further 62 percent said it was useful for marketing, with 43 percent that agreed it was useful for customer relations. These factors highlight the role played by social media in SMME growth strategies.

Tlapana and Dike (2020) emphasised Facebook has 16 million users in SA and is a valuable marketing tool to communicate with potential and existing customers. Based on the above discussions, that the authors state SMMEs can use Facebook to reach targeted customers and improve their brand awareness. Therefore, Facebook can be used by rural SMMEs as a marketing tool to communicate with existing and attract new customers, in order to increase sales during crises, in addition to improving brand awareness and create customer loyalty.

One reason for the high number of active Facebook users is that anyone who is at least 13 years of age is allowed to register as a user (Robertson and Kee 2017). Facebook was launched in 2004 and holds the most promise for retailers, in offering various ways to reach and attract new shoppers (Chugh & Ruhi 2018). As of 2011, this SNS was reported to have 750 million active users, however, as at the second quarter of 2015, Facebook had 1.45 billion active users (Galati *et al.* 2017). Ranked as the most used social network worldwide, traffic to the network is on the rise daily (Bellucci and Manetti 2017). Facebook allows users to create a page that serves as an extension of their online shop that can be used to connect with customers, distribute content, promote product offers, services, as well as brands, and attract online shoppers. Facebook can also be used to advertise products and provide online shoppers a link to a blog post about the business or industry (Assimakopoulos *et al.* 2017).

2.15.2.2 Twitter

Tlapana and Dike (2020) explain Twitter conveys business messages to different customers with 269.6 million users worldwide. In this regard, SMMEs should use such platforms to reach out to customers in order to promote their business and receive instant feedback regarding products or services during crises. In addition, Grewal and Levy (2013) report some businesses are without fundamental knowledge with regard to the potential benefits from using social media, such as twitter, and how to best use it to connect with customers. Such SMMEs miss business opportunities to market their products and services to their prospective and existing customers during crises such as Covid-19.

Twitter permits businesses to interact with customers directly at low cost, yielding effective results when used constantly and correctly. Social media is one of the most effective promotional tools used by businesses to advertise their products and services to their targeted customers. Tlapana and Dike (2020 added social media marketing tools can be utilised as promotional tools. However, lack of technical skills and knowledge by rural SMMEs hindered them from using social media platforms to communicate with prospective and existing customers to increase their sales during the Covid-19 crisis. Dickey and Lewis (2010) concluded SMMEs seem to struggle with using social media due to the lack of necessary resources. Twitter allows businesses to identify their brands' worldwide to their targeted customers (Tlapana and Dike 2020).

2.15.2.3 Instagram

Instagram is a SNS that allows users to filter photos, videos, and post these on various sites. It provides SMMEs the opportunity to follow social trends and information on consumer tastes and preferences (Tlapana and Dike 2020). According to Baker *et al.* (2011), social media strategies are influenced by information on competitor feedback. However, social media marketing requires consistency, and it consumes time. Hence, it is crucial rural SMMEs use social media marketing efforts and strategy in an effective manner in order to survive during a crisis.

2.15.2.4 WhatsApp

In SA, for example, although numerous social apps (for example, Facebook, Twitter, and Mixit) have been introduced, very few have been as widely received as WhatsApp, which today is used by 15 million subscribers; compared to Facebook with 9 million and Mixit with 7 million subscribers (TruTower.com 2014). According to a compilation of Google search statistics originating from SA for 2011, WhatsApp.com at that time was observed to be the most ‘googled’ and downloaded site in that country (The Star 2011). The fact that WhatsApp was introduced into the market in 2009 and reached half a billion active users in less than five years, represents a remarkable accomplishment by any measure. This rapid diffusion suggests SMMEs may make use of this business opportunity to connect with perspective and existing customers to market their products and services during disasters such as the global Covid-19 crisis.

Enterprises can also use the WhatsApp marketing tool to promote their business, interact with users by sending and receiving text and media files, and use the rich interface by requesting early access to the platform (Stone and Logan 2018). This can be done by contacting companies that provide the API integration with WhatsApp and offering their technical support to enterprises in managing the platform (Khatun and Al-Dhlan 2017). Furthermore, WhatsApp has introduced the WhatsApp Business app for small, medium and large-scale enterprises of all industries. This enables enterprises to stay in touch with customers and expand their market base, by effectively using the app and promoting the business, irrespective of where users reside (Dar *et al.* 2017).

2.15.2.5 YouTube

YouTube is the second largest search engine, following Google, as well as the third most frequented website and largest of the video content-sharing and -creation websites in the world. YouTube is free in terms of membership, uploading, and/or viewing content, which means this digital ICT platform attracts a huge audience (Chu *et al*. 2013; Göbel *et al.* 2017; Gupta *et al*. 2018). With 1.5 billion monthly users; two-thirds of whom are aged; over 400 hours of video are uploaded every minute; 1 billion hours of video content are viewed daily, while more than 50 percent uploaded YouTube files are viewed via mobile devices (Chu *et al.* 2013; Dehghani *et al*. 2016; Göbel *et al.* 2017; Gupta *et al.* 2018).

Rural SMMEs can, therefore, capitalise on the popularity of YouTube, which their customers can use to view the products on offer. SMMEs can thus use YouTube to market their products and services, since it is accessible to 1.5 billion monthly users (Göbel *et al*. 2017; Gupta *et al*. 2018). YouTube is thus a valuable marketing tool rural SMMEs could use to market their products and services to improve their sales during crises such as the Covid-19 crises.

YouTube provides organisations and brands with an interactive ICT platform to share new and existing video content with consumers. A personalised brand YouTube channel assists businesses in creating the brand’s online presence and provides a platform to view all the brand’s video content at leisure. Analytics help to observe what video content is the most effective (Kaplan *et al*. 2012; Hamari *et al.* 2016; Minocha 2009; Carroll *et al*. 2010; Duffett *et al*. 2018). This would promote the brands of SMMEs to customers; in return, these would encourage customer loyalty during crises such as that caused by Covid-19.

2.15.3 Integrating vision and mission statements with social media as a tool for SMME growth

Visions and missions are critical components of strategic planning for organisations to adapt to their environment. Businesses operate in an ever-changing political environment, as well as economic and social circumstances, in addition to technological advancements and economic demands (Pearce and Robinson 2000: 3). This means businesses are supposed to adapt their strategic development continuously to withstand the various opportunities and threats they face. Therefore, businesses require effective strategic management to ensure survival for financial improvement (Robbins and Coulter 2003: 199). A vision and mission are thus key elements that can assist businesses with strategic direction in an ever-changing environment. The vision directs the business in a chosen direction that can generate employee loyalty, high-level productivity, and motivation. A vision focuses on a business' strategy and is the foundation for repeated organisational success, ensuring market potential and positioning the business within the marketplace (Shrivastava 1994: 1; Tedlow 2001: 72; Chun and Davies 2001: 323).

Subsequently, businesses must possess a commonly shared vision that, ultimately, results in a mission with reliable business information for customers, employees, and stakeholders and aligns with day-to-day business operating practices (Waddock and Smith 2000: 82). "Mission" refers to a description of all the activities executed by businesses to sustain their competitive position in the prime market (Pearce and Robinson 2000: 30). Strategic vision, therefore, depicts a firm's aspirations for is future, that is, where a firm is headed, whereas a strategic mission pronounces its purpose and its present business. This is referred to as "who we are, what we do, and why we are here" (Pearce and Robinson 2000: 30). SMMEs' strategic vision and mission will communicate owners' aspirations to stakeholders and customers, as well as assisting to steer their energies in a common direction, even during turbulent environments such as the Covid-19 crisis (Pierre Classen, Garbutt and Njenga 2021).

SMMEs, through a well-crafted and actionable strategic mission, can identify products and services, the buyers need that it pursues and the market it caters for during crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic (Thompson *et al.*2017: 19-25; Pierre Classen *et al.* 2021). Mosoma (2014: 99), Ngibe (2020: 73) and Zhang, Garrett and Liang (2015: 157) highlighted mission statements always need to be adjusted to turbulent environmental factors, in order to meet market needs that can yield the desired performance of a firm. Consequently, the vision positions the businesses in its future marketplace. Rural SMMEs will, therefore, benefit from having well-constructed mission and vision statements, which are actionable. This will enable these statements to be constantly modified by their owners, in keeping with the ever-changing business environment, to ensure their business continues to provide tangible value for employees and customers.

In conclusion, the mission and vision statements of businesses can assist with technological advancement adoption, such as social media platforms, which can position businesses to penetrate the market to attract new customers and sustain existing customers. Therefore, well-crafted mission and vision statements that are actionable can be regarded as critical factors to assist rural SMME owners to integrate social media as part of a strategic priority to improve their sales and to interact with customers during a disaster such as the Covid-19 crisis. Rural SMMEs, through high, practically implementable mission and vision statements, can adopt social media that can promote their growth during any crisis. Overall, these small enterprises must embark on the process of integrating their vision and mission statements with social media as a tool for SMME growth.

2.15.4 Social media strategy as SMME growth strategy

The integration of social media channels with marketing activity helps to improve online marketing channels, nevertheless, before starting, there are a number of aspects that must be considered. For instance, establishing a presence in social media requires patience and attention to detail, as well as hours of planning. Success will not happen overnight, but dexterity is the main focus, as well as orientation and commitment. In order to be effective, SMMEs will need to do research and work step-by-step as a team, mainly to develop a strategy for the use of social communication tools (Safko and Brake 2009). The authors stress the importance of building a marketing strategy on social media, considering all available channels. An example of this is the smart phone, which must be part of a strategy on social media as users/customers spend much time reading content through mobile phones, and the user experience through desktop and mobile phone should thus be considered, in order to avoid future mistakes (Safko and Brake 2009).

2.16 USE AND BENEFITTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY RURAL SMMEs

SMEs generally lack social networking consistency, nevertheless, with social media, one must post consistently to reach a wider range of consumers. Social media allows a business to increase brand awareness, with social media platforms helping to connect with customers and create a real human connection with the world; these platforms are a very cost-effective way of promoting businesses. Tlapana and Dike (2020) also suggested social media methods have been great tools in marketing strategies.

Social media has, furthermore, become an increasingly predominant tool for building reputable brands in the modern business landscape (Ahmad *et al*. 2017). Eze *et al*. (2020) note social media positively transforms the growth and survival of SMMEs, because it has become a vital advertising tool in the ever-dynamic and -changing business environment. The authors add that social media aids in the promotion of merchandise by means of Web-based facilities and assists SMMEs to promote their products on the internet, consequently enabling advertisers to connect with potential customers. Furthermore, Eze *et al.* (2020) explain SMMEs that implement social media marketing technology need to develop strategies that will not only create awareness but also promote dialogue and win the trust of the target customers. However, in many developing countries, including the UAE, social media adoption has failed to prove such relationships, because of the uncertainty of its use by SMMEs (Ahmad *et al*. 2017; Eze *et al*. 2019). Therefore, examining the roles of social media adoption helps explain why their impact on SMME performance is vital for promoting the further development of SMMEs in rural KZN. Such understanding can lead to better decision-making regarding social media adoption by SMEs, as well as helping SMMEs navigate the social media landscape for optimal performance.

2.17 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the crucial role of social media, such as assisting rural SMMEs to market their products and services during the Covid-19 crisis to increase sales. It also focused on the pivotal role of SMMEs in SA, revealing the significant contribution SMMEs have made not only to the creation of jobs, but also to the economy and the GDP of the country, further explaining the influence of SMMEs on rural community livelihoods. However, it was established even though there have been attempts by the South African government to assist SMMEs to grow and develop throughout the years, these efforts have not borne any positive results, since failure remains a reality for SMMEs with many unable to reach maturity stage.

The chapter further highlighted the internal and external environmental factors that affected social media use by SMMEs in the course of the Covid-19 crisis.

Legislative framework that influences SMME survival, as well as their use of social media were also discussed, along with Covid-19 regulations impeding the growth and success of SMMEs, were critically highlighted. In addition, the Covid-19 crisis made matters worse for SMMEs, since lockdown disruptions caused them to be technically insolvent, and some rural SMMEs were temporarily closed, therefore, the chapter discussed strategies for SMME survival and growth. The following chapter is an extension of the literature review of chapter 2 and will discuss the theoretical and conceptual frameworks for the study.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS FOR THE STUDY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented a detailed view of SMME contributions to the economy through job creation and GDP of SA and the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on rural SMME survival and growth. It also focussed on the crucial role of social media in assisting rural SMMEs during Covid-19 crisis, as well as factors affecting social media use during the pandemic, along with a discussion on survival and growth strategies.

This chapter will provide a discussion on the study's theoretical and conceptual frameworks, commencing with the process of analysing the theoretical framework, which assesses the UTAUT model, DoI theory, TOE framework and TAM theory, as well as survival-based and firm growth theories. In conclusion, conceptual framework follows, which intends to provide guidance on the research study flow, thus, providing clarity on how social media influenced rural SMMEs in rural KZN during the Covid-19 crisis.

3.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework is considered the lens that provides the study guidance (Adom, Huseein, & Adu-Agyeim 2018). This section depicts numerous theories and modes that describe the critical factors influencing social media use as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth in the times of the Covid-19 crisis. As explained by Christou (2023) theory is a necessity to interpret the reality and can be utilised to frame and understand the phenomena. Torraco (2016) suggests theory is regarded as a notion, or a set of philosophies that intend to define something. This implies the study's theoretical framework will offer guidance and resonate with the research process, which entails the problem statement, literature review, methodology, and presentation, as well as discussion, and interpretation of findings, along with conclusions drawn (Grant and Osanloo 2014; Adom *et al*. 2018).

This section draws on the existing UTAUT model, DoI theory, the TOE framework, TAM theory, as well as survival-based and firm growth theories, in addressing the research questions and realising the achievement of the study objectives.

3.3 SEARCH FOR A THEORY SUITABLE TO THIS STUDY

There are five widely-used models to investigate the adoption and the use of social media related technologies, these models include: the TAM; the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB); DoI theory; the UTAUT; and the TOE Framework (Parveen 2012; Oliveira & Martins 2011; Nguyen *et al*. 2022).

Parveen (2012) and Oliveria *et al.* (2011) state there are different major theories that can explain social media use during the Covid-19 crisis, which impact SMME survival and growth in rural KZN Alkhateri *et al*. 2022). These theories are aligned to key theoretical frameworks, namely the UTAUT model**,** DoI theory, TOE theory, the TAM, along with survival-based and firm growth theories (Dube, Van Eck & Zuva 2020).

A theoretical framework has been developed by the researcher, which is assumed will advance the explanation of the use of social media for survival and growth of rural SMMEs at the time of the Covid-19 crisis. The theories and models examined in this study focus on different aspects and each theory or model emphasises a specific area. Since small businesses are regarded as critical enterprises with a major influence on nations' economies, their survival and growth are extremely important, because they contribute to the creation of job opportunities and wealth in those countries (Msomi & Olarewaju 2021). Nonetheless, SMMEs must adopt information systems to gain competitive advantages and be sustainable in the marketplace. SMMEs are thus advised to utilise information systems effectively, in order to survive and grow, derive advantages from technology, and become productive in their day-to-day operations (Qureshi & York 2008; Mursalin 2012).

The literature further reveals the importance of SMMEs exhibiting the right behaviour and attitude to adopt technology. Hence, the UTAUT and TAM are seen to be theories more suitable for this study, as they emphasise the importance of technology acceptance behaviour (Marikyan & Papagiannidis 2023; Qureshi & York 2008). Furthermore, behavioural intention is considered a key driver for people to adopt and use the technology such as social media platforms. Hence, it can be deduced UTAUT and TAM are deemed most applicable to SMMEs, since these theories deal with intentional behaviour, such as needed by SMME owners to accept and adopt social media platforms for survival and growth (Mursalin 2012). Social media is, in addition, realised as part of IT and its adoption is categorised into individual and organisational levels (Matikiti *et al.* 2018).

The UTAUT model is a theory that promotes individual adoption of social media platforms, because it deals with the behaviour factor, in terms of adopting and use of social media (Hawavitharana, Nanayakkara, Perera & Perera 2021).

Davis (1989) postulated the TAM theory, in order to create comprehensive understanding with regard to user acceptance, geared to the successful design and execution of information systems. According to Davis (1989), user acceptance of new technology is influenced by three critical factors, including attitude towards technology use, PU, and perceived ease of use (PEOU). However, the chief determinant factor of the actual usage of a new technology platform is heavily influenced by PU and PEOU of social media platforms (Kumar *et al*. 2020; Wu *et al.*2023).

Emphasis is thus placed by Gupta, Manrai and Goel (2019) on the UTAUT model as foundation theory for SMME owners to comprehend IT acceptance. However, it does not take into cognisance all-inclusive phases that promote the adoption of technology, as catered for by DoI theory. The cultural aspects for adoption of technology are excluded in the UTAUT and TAM models, however, they are recognised in the DoI theory. This implies the weakness of the UTAUT model is complemented and supplemented by DoI theory. The main difference is the inability of the UTAUT model to measure innovativeness, whereas DoI theory can measure it (Taiwo and Downe 2013; Rosen 2005).

It is stated business culture is, moreover, critical for SMMEs to consider regarding social media platform adoption and, hence, both the UTAUT model and DoI theory will be a employed as a sound combination for SMME acceptance and use of social media platforms for their survival and growth in an economic recession, such as the Covid-19 crisis (Mosweunyane *et al.* 2019). Therefore, the DoI theory, and UTAUT model are instrumental in facilitating social media platforms adoption and use for SMME survival and growth in the economic recession caused by the Covid-19 crisis.

It is, furthermore, highlighted by survival-based theory that management's survival-based view emphasises the assumption that businesses should adopt strategies focused on running efficient operations to survive in a competitive environment (Egwakhe *et al*. 2020; Muazu *et al*.2019). These scholars concluded a business that succeeds is one most suited and capable of adapting to the environment. This proposes rural SMMEs during the Covid -19 crisis would adapt and survive in this environment, provided they adopt efficient strategies, such as to accept and use social media platforms to market their products, services, and brands. This will create loyalty and retain clients and customers during lockdowns and restrictions imposed by governments of countries globally. This theory is, therefore, deemed suitable for the study, because SMMEs, with special reference to rural SMMEs in KZN, needed to devise survival strategies to endure during the Covid-19 crisis.

Based on the above, Gupta, Guha, Krishnaswami (2013) highlighted enterprise growth heavily depends on internal and external resources, which are crucial to assist enterprises to realise their competitive advantage. Firm or enterprise growth is facilitated by favourable conditions, with this growth categorised into five stages and crises of growth, namely: creativity, direction, delegation, and coordination, as well as collaboration (Masurel and Van Montfort 2006; Gupta *et al.* 2013). By inference, these critical phases are considered in social media adoption and use by SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis.

TOE theory clarifies the critical elements of the business environment that promote innovation in the business for its survival and growth. These important components include the organisation, technology, and the environment, which play a critical role in technology adoption and usage decision-making (Baker 2012 Chau, Hepu and Tay 2020; Chatterjee *et al*. 2020.; Justino *et al*. 2022). This theory, therefore, contemplates which variables in the business environment would perform a role in the use of social media for SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

Based on the above, this study suggests theories such as the UTAUT model**,** DoI, TOE, TAM and survival-based and firm growth theories, for the development of a theoretical framework to extend the study on the use of social media as driver for SMME survival and growth, have different roles to improve and sustain SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. It is assumed these theories will answer the research questions and fulfil the study objectives. An overview of these theories is briefly presented below**:**

3.3.1 Unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) model

According to Venkatesh *et al*. (2003), in terms of the UTAUT model, there are critical factors with the potential to influence the use of social media, which comprise performance and effort expectancy, along with social influence and facilitating conditions. Additionally, Bakar and Zaini (2022) proposed other critical factors that influence the use of social media, which entail the attitude and belief (behaviour), propensity to share information, viral marketing expectancy and fear of the Covid-19 crisis.

Studies conducted suggest there are approximately 28.9 million South Africans who make use of the internet, which equates to 53.3 percent of the entire population. As the Covid-19 crisis occurred, entrepreneurs suffered problems such as employee layoffs, a critical financial point, employee health issues; and decreased sales and turnover, as well as customer demand (Bakar and Zaini 2022). However, with potential customer availability on the internet, it is expected this would be the time for entrepreneurs to take serious action in using social media as their marketing tool (KPMG 2016; Smit *et al*. 2013; Louw 2010; Kumar & Ayedee 2021). Critical factors influencing the use of social media by SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis were adapted from the UTAUT model and depicted in Figure 3.1:

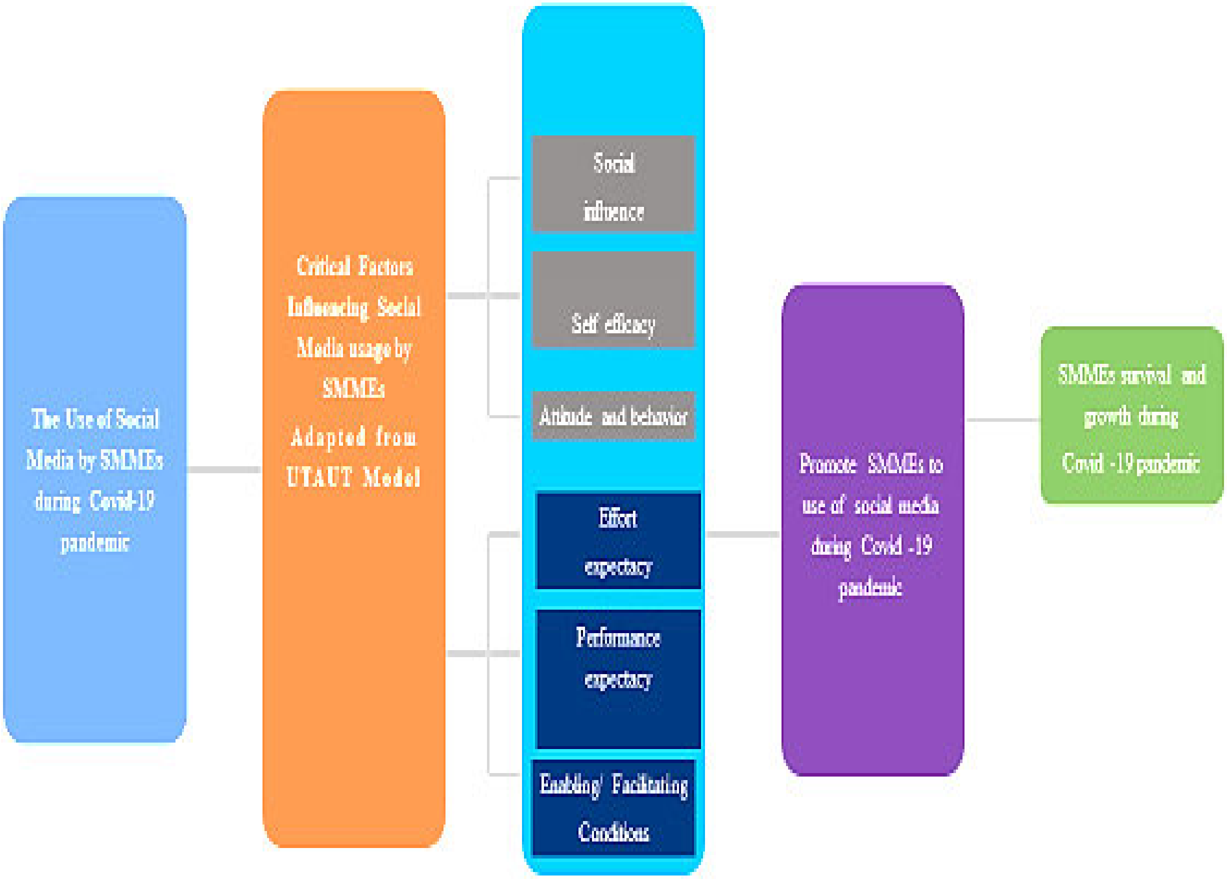


Figure 3.1: Critical factors influencing the use of Social Media by SMME

Source: *Adapted from UTAUT Model (Venkatesh et al. 2003)*

The graphic illustration above (Figure 3.1) was adapted from the UTAUT model by Venkatesh *et al.* (2003) and comprises four critical factors that may have influenced the use of social media by SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis**.** These factors comprise performance expectancy (PE), social influence, effort expectancy and facilitating conditions. Furthermore, UTAUT embraces four intermediate, individual, variated variables, namely gender, age, experience, and voluntariness of use, which predict the relationship between primary factors and behavioural intention and use behaviour (Venkatesh *et al*. 2003). The adapted critical factor illustration (Figure 3.1) extended to Bakar and Zaini (2022) and is associated with SMME social media use during the Covid-19 crisis; discussed as follows**:**

3.3.1.1 Social influence

Social influence refers to the degree to which an individual holds a strong belief of the need to use a new technology, or social media technologies, based on responses of other individuals, and is a direct determining factor of behavioural intent. This encompasses the degree to which an individual perceives it is important that others believe he or she should use the new system. In the context of this study, social influence is the degree to which SMMEs contemplate customers' belief that the use of the social media during Covid-19 crisis would benefit customers, while the use of social media would, in turn, have enabled the SMMEs to survive and grow during the Covid-19 crisis. Thus, social influence emphasises others' belief the user should adopt the new system or social media technologies Venkatesh *et al*. 2003) in response to use social media by SMMEs during Covid-19 crisis (Pentina Koh, & Le 2012; Swart *et al*. 2022; Dyussembayeza *et al*. 2023).

Kelman (1958) explained the process of social influence is the guideline whereby customers choose a definite [online] service, based on the recommendations of others who frequently use the service and derived the benefits of its use (Aronson, Timothy & Akert 2010; Chiu *et al.*2013). Customers prefer certain technologies, based on individual preferences, as well as opinions and recommendations suggested by users (Wokke & Rodenrijs 2018; Bagozzi *et al*. 2002a; Cheung *et al*. 2009; Dholakia, Bagozzi & Pearo 2004; Abbas Naqvi *et al.* 2020). Social groups generally have the greater influence when it comes to stimulus, with customers requiring positive attitudes and actions to accept and use technology platforms such as social media (Aronson *et al.* 2010; Chiu *et al.* 2013). Considering the above, Kelman (1958, 2017) asserted social influence processes are, in general, categorised into three phases, which are identification, internalisation and compliance (Doo 2023).

Identification

Identification entails the perception an individual possesses, based on the influence of the social community and explains how individual behaviour is affected by the social community (Cheung *et al*. 2011; Kelman 1958, 2017). It is, furthermore, an enabler that motivates customers to accept and use specific technology, such as social media, since they are willing to sustain a significant relationship with society (Bagozzi *et al*. 2002b; Cheung *et al*. 2011). According to a study conducted by Cheung et *al*. (2011) it was revealed identification is a critical factor that creates cohesiveness in a group, conserving its values and customs. This infers those customers will prefer technologies to maintain a strong network with their social group (Kelman 1958, 2017). In addition, Huang (2019) and Yushi *et al*. (2018) highlighted social media users who already associated themselves with a specific group custom, can portray positive purposes towards social media use (Huang 2019; Yushi *et al*. 2018). Studies have thus established a significant relationship exists between the process of identification and the maintainable intention to use social media.

Based on the above discussions, identification is shown to be a critical factor for the SMME social media adoption and use during Covid-19 crisis, because SMME customers would be able to associate themselves with the social group norms. As a result, it would be highly probable they would accept and use social media, if they are able to embrace the factor of social influence identification. In other words, when customers identify themselves with the users of social media; this will, in turn, benefit SMMEs in marketing their products, services, and brands, since they will utilise social media to market their products, providing customers access to view and buy their products. In turn, identification could have benefitted SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis, using social media (Huang 2019; Yushi *et al*. 2018; Kelman 2017; Kakumbi & Phiri 2022).

Internalisation

Kelman (1958, 2017) stated internalisation refers to the influence consumers perceive when they witness the views of others, in terms of what is in agreement with their own, which can be affected by consumer's social behaviour. In a virtual communication environment, internalisation may occur when consumers realise other users of the social media platforms have the same beliefs, interests, and goals, creating a need to be a part of that community (Davis, Bagozzi and Warshaw 1989). Venkatesh and Davis (2000) depicted when internalisation was combined with social influence, it significantly affected the sustainable intention to use a particular social media platform. The internalisation of information and opinions from outside sources can increase a user's confidence in the usefulness and entertainment value of the social media platforms (Yushi *et al*. 2018). Studies conducted by researchers such as Cheung *et al*. (2011), Li (2011) and Yushi *et al*. (2018), argued internalisation affirmatively affected a person's intention to continue using a definite social media platform.

Identification

Studies conducted reveal that identification and internalisation are shown to be the foremost factors in determining consumer attitudes to sustain their use of online platforms, such as social media (Cheung *et al*. 2011; Cheung & Lee 2010; Malhotra & Galletta 1999). Thus, it can be concluded this factor (internalisation process) is critical for SMMEs, since customers will observe other users of the social media, in which they share the same beliefs, interests, and goals, and would, therefore, also wanted to be a part of adopting and using the social media platforms during the period of Covid-19. This implies SMME customers will be likely to use social media technologies, as they observe other peer social groups using social media platforms. SMMEs would thus be able to market their products and services, since their customers will have access to market. As a result, rural SMMEs may be able to attract potential new customers and retain old customers. It can be concluded SMMEs will have a high probability of surviving and growing in an economic recession, such as that resulting from the Covid 19 crisis (Cheung *et al*. 2011; Li 2011; Yushi *et al*. 2018).

Compliance

Cheung *et al*. (2011) and Huang (2019) point out, in the situation where the new technology is a market innovation, whereby potential users depend on secondary information from their peer group prior to deciding to use that technology (conformity with group dynamics), is achieved through a customer's agreement about group behaviour and values (Aronson *et al.* 2010; Cheung & Lee, 2010). Research has shown compliance can be expected in the virtual environment (Egebark *et al*. 2011; Vasalou, Joinson & Courvoisier 2010).

Many studies have proved the normative impact associated with compliance is highly correlated with sustainable consumer intentions to use social media platforms (Al-Debei *et al.* 2014; Ku *et al*. 2013b; Sledgianowski *et al*. 2009). In parallel with the preceding discussion, it was assumed compliance favourably influenced a consumer's sustainable intention to use social media. Kelman (1958) considered compliance as reflecting partiality towards a certain action, while Aronson *et al*. (2010) asserted compliance was the means of providing a favourable response to requests made by others. This means compliance would have been considered as critical for rural SMMEs to adopt social media for use during the Covid-19 crisis, in order to survive and grow during this time.

3.3.1.2 Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as the ability to achieve a definite task to attain personal goals, which is critical in envisaging human behaviour, with special reference to personal choice, efforts, and perseverance (Newman *et al.* 2019). By implication, self-efficacy has to do with the belief of individual ability to perform a task at hand, making it crucial for SMMEs to survive in crises such as the economic recession caused by the Covid-19 crisis in a successful manner. Cumberland, Meek and Germain (2015) revealed a high rate of self-efficacy will give rise to increased entrepreneurial orientation and SMME growth. The researchers contend the self-efficacy of SMMEs can promote the businesses of SMMEs in challenging environments, as SMME owners would exhibit commitment and vigour to work hard without any concession on their goals and objectives (Cumberland *et al.*2015).

A study conducted by Hocevar *et al*. (2014) revealed self-efficacy, in relation to social media, has a strong positive correlation between self-efficacy over social media and reliability of online information. In addition, Mohd *et al.* (2014) suggested the influence of self-efficacy on the intention of entrepreneurs to use something new in their business was also investigated. The authors found individuals who are honest and have a high level of self-efficacy have the potential to be innovative and take risks. Therefore, self-efficacy during the Covid-19 crisis would have propelled rural SMME owners to cope in the consequent economic recession, to sustain their survival and growth post Covid-19 (Sari, Sari & Rinaldo 2022).

3.3.1.3 Attitude and behaviour intention to use social media

Attitude refers to an assessment of the influence of a particular behaviour that can result in either an unfavourable or favourable belief. An unfavourable assessment will yield to impediment, which negatively impacts the behaviour that will be performed, while favourable assessment will promote the behaviour that needs to be performed (Ajzen 2005; Bandura 1978; Samosir *et al*. 2021). This is also referred to as behaviour intention, which is defined as the indication of individual readiness to perform a given behaviour (Abdullahi *et al*.2021). Fulantelli and Allegra (2003) highlighted SMME manager perceptions in relation to ICT acceptance need to be improved; this can be achieved by working collaboratively with other parties for the use of broadband internet (Geng *et al.* 2023).

Performance expectation was, moreover, found to have the strongest effect on behaviour intention to use new technology (Venkatesh & Zhang 2010; Van Dijk, Peters & Ebbers 2008). Based on the above, discussion it can be concluded attitude and behaviour intention of SMMEs are pivotal in accepting and use of social media in the times of the Covid-19 crisis. This implies SMMEs with a positive attitude and behaviour intention were likely to influence their businesses to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis to market their products and services in order to increase their revenues for survival and growth in this crisis (Peng *et al*.2022; Effendi *et al*.2020).

3.3.1.4 Effort Expectancy

Effort Expectancy refers to the degree that reflects the ease with which technology can be used, which will have a positive effect on the intended use. It is regarded as easy use of a system and extended to level easy use of technology, such as social media platforms (Venkatesh *et al.* 2003; Venkatesh, Thong & Xin 2012). Should SMME customers have a positive effect on using social media during the Covid-19 crisis, the SMMEs are likely to market their brands on social media. As a result, SMME customers are likely to access the market and buy the products of SMMEs while restricted from interacting with their customers face-to-face. SMME sales are likely to increase as a result, which can create an opportunity for rural SMMEs to survive and grow in the economic recession caused by the Covid-19 crisis.

3.3.1.5 Performance Expectancy (PE)

PE is regarded as the extent to which the individual believes the technology will help them improve their performance. It also refers to the degree to which an individual believes using the system will assist to attain gains in job performance (Venkatesh *et al.* 2012). In smaller firm owners, PE has been found the most powerful determinant of digital adoption, characterised as a factor related to resource constraints, when compared to their larger counterparts. A study conducted in relation to the factors that influence the use of social media in Egypt revealed PE has huge impact on behavioural intent (Khong *et al*. 2013; Adamkolo *et al.* 2018). Furthermore, a study in South Korea and Malaysia arrived at a common finding, where both countries view PE as the ability to influence the intention of the community to use internet marketing. Nonetheless, PE is a strong predictor of usage and behavioural intention (Jeng & Tzeng 2012; Moghavvemi & Akma Mohd Salleh 2014; Adamkolo *et al*. 2018; Venkatesh *et al*. 2003).

Scholars define PE as the degree to which SMME owners perceive using technology, such as social media platforms, is beneficial in their day-to-day operations and supports them to attain benefit in their enterprise (Venkatesh *et al*. 2003; Amoah *et al*.2023).

Overall, PE is a critical factor with regard to SMME intention to adopt and use social media in their day-to-day operations during the Covid-19 crisis for their survival and growth.

3.3.1.6 Enabling / facilitating conditions.

The facilitating conditions are the extent to which an individual believes existing business enterprises, including SMMEs, and their technical infrastructures can support the use of a system or social media technology. It entails the degree to which an individual believes organizational and technical infrastructure exists to support use of the system (Venkatesh *et al*. 2003). Facilitating conditions are, furthermore, seen as the level where entrepreneurs are confident their business has the infrastructure and tools needed for increasing their sales.

It was discovered facilitating conditions will not affect behavioural intent but will have an impact on the use of technology (Venkatesh *et al.* 2003). The findings regarding facilitating conditions also revealed users did not need any help in using Facebook but agreed they needed the proper equipment to use Facebook, which concurs with findings showing facilitating conditions as significantly related to social media use in Egypt (Salim 2012).

In conclusion, Abdat (2020) investigated using the UTAUT model to predict adoption of social media among Indonesian SMMEs, with the findings revealing that PE, social influence, and facilitating conditions had a positive and significant effect on behavioural intention to use social media. In the context of this study, the aim is to investigate the critical factors that influenced use of social media by rural KZN SMME during the Covid-19 crisis, with the critical factors adapted from the UTAUT model considered. This is to ascertain whether these factors have a negative or positive influence on the promotion of social media use during the course of the Covid-19 crisis. The study findings will be used to develop and propose a social media model as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth in rural KZN, during disasters such as the Covid-19 crisis.

3.3.1.7 The influence of UTAUT five intermediate individual variation variables on using social media during Covid -19 crisis

Gender

Scholars suggested gender type has an influence on the subjective norm, attitude, and perceived behavioural control (Venkatesh, Morris, and Ackerman 2000; Venkatesh *et al*. 2003). These studies found moderating for attitude is better done by men, while women are better in moderating the subjective norm and perceived behaviour control, particularly women in their early stage of experience. Men would, by implication, have a better attitude in terms of using social media, as compared to others, in the Covid-19 crisis. Nevertheless, women are likely to moderate their subjective norm and perceived behaviour control better, when compared to other social media platform users during the Covid-19 crisis, where rural SMME survival and growth is concerned, with special reference to older women (Ameen *et al*. 2022; Rahayu, Masduki, & llyanawati 2023).

Age

It is suggested age impacts the subjective norm, attitude, and perceived behavioural control (Baker, Al-Gahtani, and Hubona 2007; Lu, Yu, and Liu 2006; Venkatesh et al. 2000, 2003; Venkatesh and Morris 2000). In the context of the mandatory usage setting, attitude is better moderated by younger workers, while perceived behavioural control is better moderated by older workers. Furthermore, subjective norm is better moderated by older workers, particularly older women (Venkatesh and Morris 2000). On the one hand, social media use during the Covid-19 crisis would have been affected by younger SMME owners/managers, who are more likely to have a positive attitude to use social media platforms, while the behavioural intention for older users to use social media platforms will also likely be better. On the other hand, older women would better moderate the subjective norm, when compared to others, in terms of using social media during the Covid-19 crisis. Thus, age was a critical factor in social media platform use by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis, for their survival and growth.

Experience

According to Fischbein and Ajzen (1975), the relationship between behavioural intention and behaviour is strong in its nature for experienced users, because of their prior experiences. These users employ their knowledge developed from prior experiences to control their usage intentions (Taylor and Todd 1995; Alotaibi and Wald 2013; Venkatesh *et al*. 2003; Marikyan *et al.* 2023). Nevertheless, for inexperienced users, perceived behavioural control has a direct influence on actual behaviour. Accordingly, the relation of the behavioural intention with the actual behaviour is stronger for experienced users, more than inexperienced users (Hussein, Rosita, and Ayuni 2019; Kripanont 2007). It may be deduced rural SMME owners with previous experience on the use of social media are likely to have used social media during the Covid-19 crisis, for their continued survival and growth in this crisis.

Voluntariness

Agarwal and Prasad (1997) noted voluntariness has a significant impact on clarifying current usage, but does not have the same impact on the intention to continue using the technology. As with subjective norms in the UTAUT model, the voluntariness of use only moderates the social influence and its relationship with the intention of behaviour to use social media by rural SMMEs for survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis (Ramayah 2010).

Level of Education

Education is associated with self-confidence and competencies that can assist SMME owners to deal with business challenges. The SMME owners and managers with higher education and extensive experience have higher chances to be successful in business ventures and may lead the business to survival and growth (Forbes 2005). Therefore, SMME owners and managers must invest in formal education, since it is regarded as a key success factor for business growth (Carter *et al*. 2003). Bates (1990) confirmed small business owners with higher education levels are likely to succeed in businesses and in business growth (Kangasharju and Pekkala 2002). In the same vein, Pena (2002) revealed small business owners with higher levels of education in Spain contributed immensely to the business growth of small businesses. Saah (2022) suggested small business owners and managers should improve their education levels in order to contribute to the success, survival and growth of small businesses. Therefore, SMME owners and managers with higher levels of education could have assisted their business to use social media to survive and grow during the Covid-19 crisis.

3.3.2 Technology acceptance model (TAM) theory

TAM was developed by Davis (1989), with this theory indicating the connecting associations between structure patterns, PU, and PEOU, as well as attitude on use and actual usage behaviour. In the case where users are subjected to new technology, the judgment on how and when to use it is influenced by several factors. These factors entail PU; the level at which an intended user considers using a particular new technology would improve their job performance, and PEOU; and the probability a person is convinced using a specific system would be free from effort.

Research on social media use revealed social media is adopted and used when the users find PU and PEOU in a new technology platform (Sheng & Zolfagharian 2014; Pavlou 2003; Pentina *et al*. 2012; Lee *et al*. 2006). Thus, the PU and PEOU have a positive impact on attitude, concerning SMME intention to use social media for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

According to TAM, the intention to use technology will determine whether a person will use the technology (behaviour). This theory is significant in this study, because the study derives three constructs from TAM: PU and PEOU of social media, as well as attitude towards using new technology (Pentina *et al*. 2012; Lee *et al*. 2006). Ahamat, Ali and Hamid (2017) emphasised, in reference to social media use, the construct of perceived trust should be added to describe acceptance of social media. Prior research further suggested perceived enjoyability and perceived risk in the context of TAM influence usage behaviour, which directly affect social media adoption and use by small businesses (Che Nawi *et al*. 2019; Davis, *et al.* 1992; Mishra and Tyagi 2015).

This means, where this study is concerned, the perceived enjoyment and perceived risk would be investigated to determine whether they influenced the use of social media by rural SMMEs in the course of the Covid-19 crisis. Therefore, perceived enjoyment and perceived risk would be added as constructs of TAM theory.

Consequently, TAM theory consists of six constructs that are PU, PEOU of social media, attitude towards using new technology, perceived trust, perceived risk and perceived enjoyment by SMMEs, with regard to social media use by SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis, in the scenario of social media acceptance. (Alalwan *et al*.2018). TAM, therefore, indicates PU, PEOU of social media, attitude regarding the use of a new technology platform, and perceived trust, as well as perceived enjoyment to use social media by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis, which is depicted as follows:

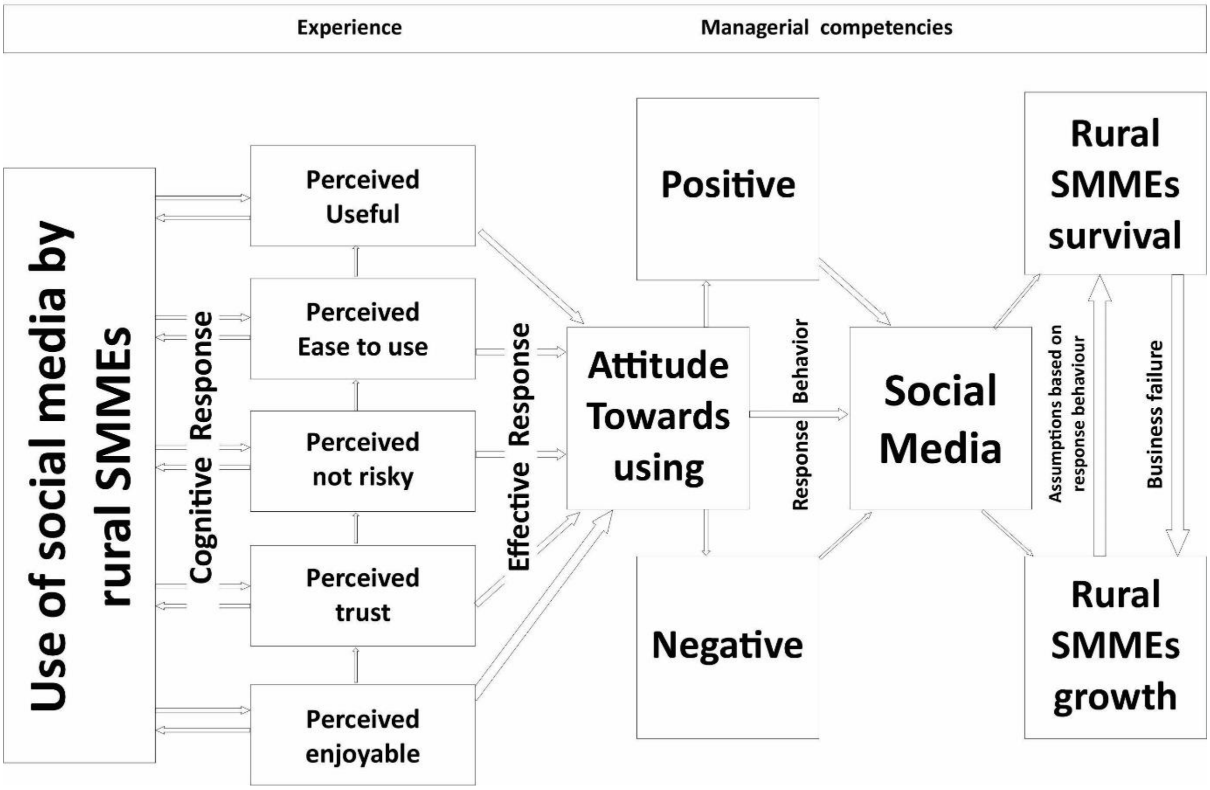


Figure 3.2: TAM theory influenced rural SMME social media use during the Covid-19 crisis

Source: Researcher (2022)

Figure 3.2 depicts the variables that influenced social media use by SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis; as discussed below:

3.3.2.1 Perceived social media Usefulness (PU) by SMMEs during the COVID-19 crisis

Nurqamarani *et al*. (2021) viewed the perceived usefulness of the concept in such a way, customers portrayed their belief that technology is useful in the survival and growth of the business enterprise. Rural SMMEs are not excluded in this case, where PU emphasises user belief in the use of new technology, such as social media, to boost their performance (Davis 1985; Purnamasari *et al*. 2020; King *et al*. 2006). This implies there is a probability to measure perceived usefulness on the basis that new technology is able to, through for instance social media platforms, improve business enterprise survival and growth (Purnamasari *et al*. 2020). Therefore, the PU of social media by rural KZN SMME owners was critical for them to adopt and use social media for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

3.3.2.2 Perceived of Ease of Use (PEOU) of social media by SMMEs during the **Covid-19 crisis**

PEOU is known as the degree in which an individual believes that through using a specific system would lead to a free of effort (Davis 1989; 1986). This means the user would find it very easy to use a new technology such as social media to improve his/her own job performance. Nevertheless, in reference to this study, acceptance of a social media platform is heavily dependent on ease of use.

Nunkoo, Juwaheer and Rambhunjun (2013) emphasised PEOU is the degree to which a person believes use of a technology is free from effort, however, Nasser and Prabhakar (2017: 55–62), and Nasser *et al*. (2017) added it depicts the situation whereby the user of new technology portrayed trust in the use of technology, which is free of cognitive effort. This infers users of new technology will not only derive the benefits of learning, the new technology, such as social media, would also be easier and more acceptable to use (Najib and Fahma 2020). Therefore, PEOU of social media by SMMEs in the times of Covid-19 crisis would have encouraged the SMMEs to adopt and use social media to attract existing and prospective customers, in order to increase their revenues during the Covid-19 crisis, to ensure their survival and growth.

3.3.2.3 Attitude towards using social media by SMMEs during the Covid -19 crisis.

In the context of this study, attitude refers to the positive or negative attitude of the new technology user towards the use of social media. Several studies emphasised attitude to use IT is a key factor in the analysis of technology usage behaviour (Davis 1989; Davis *et al*. 1989; Kuo & Yen 2009; Liao *et al*. 2007; Lu *et al*. 2009), in addition to users that partake in the use of social media platforms. The sharing of information on social media platforms also changes participant attitudes (Soderlund & Rosegren 2007). Lee *et al*. (2008) revealed remarks from other users influence participant attitudes either positively or negatively. However, a positive attitude is consequently crucial for adoption and use of social media to take place effectively. This required owners-mangers of SMMEs to have the right attitude to use social media in their businesses, as a survival and growth tool during the Covid-19 crisis, for their survival and growth in the subsequent economic recession (Ahamat *et al.* 2017; Al-Adwan *et al.* 2020).

3.3.2.4 Perceived trust on using social media by SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis

Trust is as a concept regarded as an act of preparedness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party, based on the anticipation the other will perform a specific action important to the trustor, despite the capability to control that other party (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman 1995; Che Nawi *et al*. 2019). This means trust is critical in social interaction and factors affecting new technology adoption, where it affects the consideration of using the social media platform (Hallikainen 2015).

Perceived trust is expected to affect the adoption of social media as a business platform. Building trust is a process that takes time and once trust is built, an individual's behavioural intention is affected, and it leads to specific decision-making (Akinwunmi, Olajubu, and Aderounmu 2015) In this study, perceived trust is defined as the degree of trust an individual has in social media as a reliable business platform, with perceived trust expected to affect the adoption of social media positively (Che Nawi *et al*. 2019). A recent study by Akinwunmi *et al.* (2015) found trust is important in technology adoption; this study involved the adoption of cloud technology. In studying the adoption of mobile commerce among early adopters of mobile services in SA, Joubert and van Belle (2013) found trust has a strong positive effect on adoption.

Ahamat *et al*. (2021) investigated factors influencing social media adoption in small businesses, with a questionnaire used to collect data from management, experts, entrepreneurs, and employees. The study findings revealed a significantly strong positive relationship between perceived trust and social media adoption and use. This infers perceived trust in SMME using social media was of utmost importance to build trust for these enterprises to adopt and use social media during the Covid-19 crisis, in order to penetrate the market to improve sales for survival and growth in this crisis.

3.3.2.5 Perceived risk (PR) to use social media by SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis

PR is defined as the process that influences customer confidence to consider the actions of their purchase decision (Im, Kim, & Han 2008). Hassan *et al.* (2006) elucidate that PR is referred to as a loss when an action's consequences are not favourable and an individual perceives the consequences will be unfavourable. Risk is regarded as a situation where the possibilities of outcomes from a decision are unknown; because of this, risk is regarded as an important factor in new social media technology adoption and usage. Empirical evidence suggests PR has a negative effect on adaptation intention (Featherman & Pavlou 2003), adoption of online banking services (Farzianpour *et al.* 2014), PU and PEOU in the online shopping channel (Li & Huang 2009). This suggests when the PR is high, it hinders the adoption of technology, and the lower the PR, the more likely it is a new technology will be adopted. Individuals will always have a certain level of PR towards technological adoption, and they are aware of the risks involved. A recent study looking into factors that influence consumer attitude towards SNS-based marketing, found PR affects attitude negatively. Based on the above empirical evidence, it can be stated PR affects the adoption of technology (Mishra & Tyagi 2015; Che Nawi *et al*. 2019).

In summation, TAM theory on the adoption and use of social media, is expected to drive benefits such as increased sales, improvement of productivity, enhancement of profitability, and reduction of costs, as well as enhancement of service quality, strengthening competitiveness position among competitors, and unsuccessful application, are expected to give rise to a negative impact on SMMEs with limited resources (Nurqamarani *et al*. 2021). The above cited constructs portrayed the behavioural intention and actual usage of social media by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis.

Behavioural intention is regarded as user willingness to use the new technology, which is a good predictor benchmark of actual use that denotes the repeated use of technology over time (Bamberg *et al*. 2003; Zhong 2021; Venkatesh *et al*. 2000). This implies, in the context of this study, SMME owners-managers had to be willing to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis to ensure their businesses survive and grow during this crisis.

3.3.2.6 Perceived enjoyable to use social media by SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis.

Enjoyment is perceived by several scholars as one of the critical factors that influence technology adoption and use, because when the user has a sense of joy in the process of using technology, there is a higher chance the individuals will adopt and use technology (Davis *et al.* 1992; Che Nawi 2019). By implication, the enjoyment of using technology influences the usage attitude (Davis 1989), which was confirmed by Cha and Koo (2015) and Sigala *et al*. (2012), who revealed, in the study for travel information search, enjoyment was shown to have a positive influence in the use of social media and communication technology.

Kim *et al.* (2016) added users of social media suggested that enjoyment of usage of social media was a contributory factor for usage of social media in a private club. These indications by the above researchers propose enjoyment can influence the use of new technology. Hence, it can be deduced that social media could have impacted social media use by rural SMMEs, for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

3.3.3 Diffusion of innovation (DoI) theory

DoI theory was developed in 1962 by Rogers and focused on the conditions in which a new idea to improve performance is likely to be adopted by the business enterprise or peer group of the same culture. DoI has generally been used to study new technology adoption and use in organisational contexts, which includes SMMEs (Rogers 1995; Kaminski 2011; Tan, Eze and Chong 2012). Rogers (1995) industrialised the DoI model, which comprises the adoption rate and phases to undergo prior to embarking on the innovation process. Diffusion is where the process of innovation is communicated by means of certain channels, over time, among the social system members (Rogers 1995).

In addition, Rogers (1962) highlighted DoI consists of an organisation's internal and external characteristics, which influence the decision to adopt and use a new technology in an organisation, including SMMEs. According to Rogers (2003), DoI comprises five perceived characteristics of innovation, which are: relative advantage; compatibility; complexity; and trialability; as well as observability. Moreover, Dearing (2010) asserted diffusion is regarded as the general communication of innovation, which is accepted by means of internal channels among peer group members (Rogers 2003). In support, Rogers (1995) and Kiwanuka (2015) highlight the process of innovation diffusion contains five phases, including the constructs depicted in Figure 3.3 below.

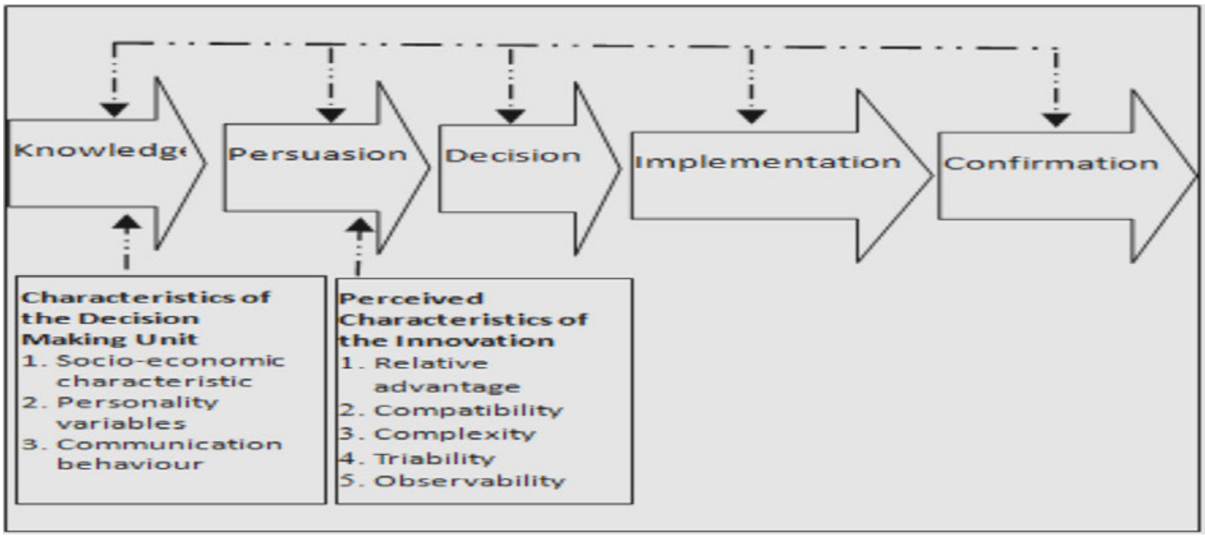


Figure 3.3: Innovation decision process adapted to SMMEs survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis

Source: *Kiwanuka (2015) and Rogers (1995)*

Figure 3.3 indicates the process of innovation diffusion possesses five stages the SMMEs could follow in pursuit of adopting and use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis, to survive and grow during the pandemic. According to Rogers (2003), the innovation-decision process is an information-seeking and information-processing activity, where an individual is motivated to reduce uncertainty regarding the advantages and disadvantages of an innovation, which are briefly discussed as follows**:**

The Knowledge Stage

This is the step whereby organisations, including SMMEs, must acquire more information with regard to innovation, in terms of the benefits they would derive when the innovation is adopted and utilised within the business enterprises (Awareness-knowledge). In addition, the organisations should be in a position of knowing how to correctly make use of innovation, which will increase the probability of adopting an innovation, while an individual should have a sufficient level of innovation knowledge before the process of innovation adoption (How-to-knowledge). Lastly, the organisations must be familiar with the principles of how and why the innovation functions in the context of their organisations (Principles-knowledge) (Rogers 2003; Sahin 2006).

SMMEs are not excluded at this stage, as SMME owners should be aware of the benefits in accepting and use of new technology in the form of social media, and know how to correctly use it and the principles involved in its use. This will increase the chances for SMMEs to adopt and use social media during disasters such as the Covid-19 crisis, to ensure they survive and grow during the resulting economic recession crisis.

The Persuasion Stage

This is the stage at which the individuals within organisations such as SMMEs, are aware of innovation, how to use it correctly and the principles of using innovations that would lead to either a positive or negative attitude towards accepting and using innovations. By implication, the individual with the possession of knowledge will, at this stage, be persuaded through social reinforcement from others (colleagues, peers, and so on) that will affect the individual's opinions and beliefs regarding the innovation. This is also applicable to rural SMMEs, whereby they would undergo the process of the persuasion stage, in order to decide to accept and use social media in the times of the Covid-19 crisis, for their survival and growth (Sahin 2006; Rogers 2003; Sugandini *et al*. 2020).

The Decision Stage

This is a phase where the individuals, based on the acquired knowledge of innovations, will reject or accept the innovation. Organisations such as SMMEs may adopt innovations more quickly, which is referred to as an innovation with a partial trial basis. Where the majority within the organisations would first try to experience the process of adoption decision and speed up this decision process, it is known as the vicarious trial. Others may, at this stage, reject the adoption of innovation, whereas those who first accepted the innovation may later reject it, which is called a discontinuance decision (Rogers 2003; Sahin 2006). Therefore, rural SMMEs should have also undergone this stage during the Covid-19 crisis, in order to decide whether to accept or reject adopting social media use for survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

The Implementation Stage

This is where organisations such as the SMMEs would have implemented social media during the Covid-19 crisis. However, uncertainty regarding the results of implementing the innovation can crop up at this stage, requiring the SMMEs to employ technical assistance that will help them overcome this problem.

The innovation can also be altered by the user (such as SMMEs owners) at this stage in the adoption and implementation process, when a new idea is discovered. This is referred to as reinvention (Rogers 2003; Sahin 2006). This infers the SMMEs would implement social media at this stage, or alter the implementation, should the new idea arise, in order to adapt to uncertainties, when experienced, with assistance of the technical advisor, on innovations such as social media platforms, to market their products and goods, so their customers may have access to the products and goods. In turn, customers can buy the goods from the SMMEs and attract new customers, which could have created a high probability for rural SMMEs to survive and grow during the Covid-19 crisis.

The Confirmation Stage

In this stage, the individual within the business enterprise seeks support for his/her decision. When a person experienced conflicting messages concerning innovation, his/her decision may be reversed. However, most individuals tend to ignore the conflict messages and this will, therefore, result in confirmation of innovation adoption. According to Rogers (2003), this requires continuous support of innovation adoption and the appropriate attitude, because when not motivated, they may experience discontinuance during this stage. The process of discontinuance may also happen through the SMMEs rejecting the innovation to accept improved innovation to replace the old one (replacement discontinuance).

SMMEs may, nonetheless, at a later stage completely reject the innovation due to non-satisfaction with its performance or should it not meet their needs (disenchantment discontinuance). By inference, this does not afford a supposed relative advantage, which is the first quality of innovation and influences the rate of adoption (Rogers 2003; Sahin 2006). It may be deduced the confirmation stage of the adoption and use of social media by SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis depended on SMME owners being satisfied that social media would meet their needs.

In addition, Figure 3.3 is also made up of the constructs as stated by Rogers (2003, 2005), described as follows**:**

Complexity is defined as a system implemented by firms that is difficult to learn and requires exertion by employees. Moore and Benbasat (1991) propose complexity is similar to PEOU in TAM. Thus, unnecessary complexity of an innovation is a critical factor for acceptance of innovation adoption (Rogers 2003; Sahin 2006; Zailani *et al*. 2015). Complexity research in the use of technology and its implementation suggests complexity of technology implementation adversely impacts its adoption and use by SMMEs. Moreover, it was revealed when social media technologies are easy to use, it is highly probable SMMEs would adopt and use social media (Oliveira *et al*. 2014; Sugandini *et al*. 2020; Berman *et al*. 2012; Zailani *et al*. 2015). In contrast with this notion, Alshamaila (2013) stated business enterprises, including SMMEs, would find it difficult to adopt and use new technology such as social media when it is perceived awkward to use. This implies a significant association between perceived complexity and the intention to adopt an innovation (Alshamaila 2013; Low *et al*. 2016; Maroufkhani *et al*. 2020).

Perceived complexity was, consequently, discovered to create countless difficulties in the process of adopting new technologies (Gutierrez *et al*. 2015; Maduku *et al*. 2016; Oliveira *et al*. 2014; Ramdani *et al.* 2013). Moreover, it was found technology complexity had a negative effect on social media technology adoption and use in business enterprises. Therefore, SMMEs with in-depth knowledge in technology use would have been motivated to implement new technology, in the form of social media, to survive and grow during the Covid-19 crisis (Gallivan 2001; Chong and Olesen 2017; Religia *et al.* 2021; Yaseen *et al*. 2017; Sugandini *et al*. 2020).

Observability refers to a situation where the business enterprise obtains concrete evidence, after using the innovation, which means the system is demonstrated through evident results and is the chief motivational factor in technology adoption and diffusion (Parisot 1997). There must thus be evidence the adopted technology had an impact in the industry. Based on this notion, some studies found observability impacted SMME owners'/managers' decisions to adopt and use new technologies. In the context of this study, it is implied that if SMME owners had the necessary experience, social media adoption and use yielded positive results, with SMME owners more likely to adopt and use social media to penetrate the market, market their products and services, and improve revenues for survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis (Azam and Quaddus 2009; Hussin and Noor 2005; Al-Gahtani 2003; Seyal and Rahman 2003; Sugandini *et al*. 2020).

Compatibility refers to the situation whereby the business enterprises managers believe that it is easier to adopt and use new technology due to its compatibility with current processes and systems (Jere & Ngidi 2020). This implies innovation should be meaningful and clear to the prospective user. In addition, a lack of compatibility in IT with individual needs may negatively affect individual IT use (McKenzie 2001; Sherry 1997; Rogers 2003; Sahin 2006). In other words, SMMEs had to find it meaningful to adopt social media during the Covid-19 crisis, in order to use it to market their products and services to existing and prospective customers. It may be deduced when innovation is clear and meaningful to SMMEs, there would be a high probability for SMMEs to adopt and use social media. It was thus likely for SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis and able to survive and grow in the subsequent economic recession.

The beliefs, experiences, and needs of intended technology users are supposed to be considered compatible with the technology desired for implementation. SMME owners must, therefore, consider the intended innovation as practice, in a manner aligned with the business systems, with its adoption having a greater probability to be successful. As a result, SMMEs will perceive social media implementation and use as an integrated part of the business values and standards; this would have encouraged SMMEs to adopt and use social media during the Covid-19 crisis (Rogers 2003 Wang *et al*. 2016).

Triability is defined as providing a potential user with the opportunity to experiment with the innovation. Additionally, the more the innovation must be practically tried, the more it will be adopted and accepted. When an innovation needs to be changed or modified to meet new needs of the organisation, it must be done. In addition, triability in the early stages generally becomes more significant when compared to the late adoption stages. Hence, the more the innovation practically tried, the more it will positively influence the decisions to adopt and use new technology by businesses enterprises (Azam and Quaddus 2009; Boumediene and Kawalek 2008; Rogers 2003; Sahin 2006).

SMMEs are not excluded in this case, as early adopters would have derived benefits from innovations, in terms of using social media during the Covid-19 crisis, as opposed to late adopters. Early social media adopters during the Covid-19 crisis were, thus, more likely to realise the process of SMME survival and growth during this turmoil of economic recession, as compared to those who adopted social media platforms later. Nonetheless, social media is still in its infancy and is known for its novelty in the rural SMMEs setting in KZN, as stated by Lekhanya and Mason (2014), triability may, therefore, act as a significant catalyst of the decision by SMMEs to adopt social media during the Covid-19 crisis, in order to realise their survival and growth in this crisis.

Relative advantage is analogous to PU in the TAM put forward by Davis (1989). It is revealed cost and social status are the critical factors of innovations of relative advantage, which will increase the rate of adoption by organisations, including SMMEs. In addition, relative advantage is considered as what an individual perceives as the benefits of innovation, as opposed to current technologies. Ahmad *et al.* (2017) found the decision to adopt and use social media technology has a bearing on the situation where the business perceived technology will bring benefits to business enterprises, such as rural SMMEs, where SMME managers/owners are the decision-makers in their businesses.

This implies they would likely influence change to adapt to new technology, when this adaptation is seen to yield functioning benefits in the business (Ramayah *et al.* 2016). Should the SMMEs perceive adoption of new technology will bring no benefits to the business, they are more likely not to adopt the new technology (Li *et al*. 2008). Several studies have investigated the impact of relative advantage and have demonstrated its positive effects on adoption (Ramayah *et al*. 2016; Zailani *et al*. 2015, 2019).

The more SMMEs, therefore, acknowledge the benefit of relative advantage in terms of innovation, the more these enterprises will adopt the innovation; in terms of adopting new technology that supports social media use, in order to communicate with their customers, thus increasing sales for their survival and growth in the COVID-19 crisis (Alismaili *et al.* 2020; Sugandini *et al*. 2020; Rogers 2003). For example, the innovators, early adopters, and early majority are more status-motivated in adopting innovations. However, the late majority and laggards perceive status as less significant. These adopters of innovation are categorised to form a bell, depicted in Figure 3.4 below.

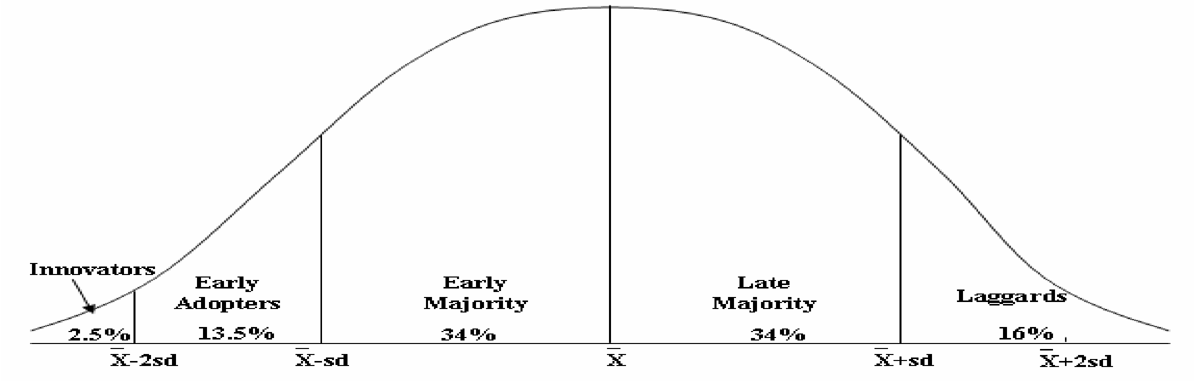


Figure 3.4: Types of innovation adopters adapted to SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis

Source: *Rogers (2003)*

Figure 3.4 depicts that partial innovation adoption and those who rejected innovation are not part of the depiction. Individuals who accepted the innovations are shown to form part of this bell over time. This implies those SMMEs that adopted and accepted social media during the Covid-19 crisis to allow customers access to buy their products and goods are likely to survive and grow at different rates, as stipulated (Figure 3.4) above.

Based on the above constructs, including complexity, observability, compatibility, and triability, as well as relative advantage, it can be deduced these constructs will continuously influence new technology adoption, in order for organisations such as SMMEs to use new technologies (social media platforms) in the economic recession caused by the Covid-19 crisis; to survive and grow through reaching their customers, thereby selling their products for revenue increase purposes.

Moreover, Zeidy (2020) revealed SMMEs are subjected to threats posed by the Covid-19 crisis, which resulted in drastic changes to SMME operations, due to the financial constraints they face. This indicates SMMEs should find new ways to facilitate reengineering their businesses to cope with these challenges. Thus, SMME survival and growth will be highly dependent on new innovations to sustain their businesses. In addition, Rogers (1995) explained innovation is 'an idea, practice or object' perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption.

The presence of a social system is critical when dealing with the Covid-19 crisis, particularly regarding the use of social media drive for SMME survival and growth and to develop and propose a social media model as a driving tool for rural KZN SMME survival and growth in times of crisis, such as Covid-19. Knol and Stroeken (2001), in support of the above, explained diffusion is concerned with reducing doubt in social system members through the communication process. Where SMMEs are concerned, this is referred to as the means of interpersonal channels, where learning is extremely important in considering the use of innovations such as social media for rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

DoI theory, therefore, caters for the use of social media drive as a tool by SMMEs, which would have contributed to their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. According to DoI theory, IT is the key component that allows the innovation. This can, in turn, encourage technology use, in the form of social media drive, thus enabling SMMEs to survive and grow in this crisis (Ngibe 2020; Issa, Lucke and Bauernhansl 2017).

3.3.4 Survival and growth-based theories

The survival-based and growth theories are briefly discussed as follows**:**

3.3.4.1 Survival-based theory

The survival-based theory was first utilised in the fraternity of economics by researchers such as Schumpeter (1934), Alchian (1950), Harrod (1939) and Marshall (1949). These scholars introduced the notion of evolutionary rational and natural selection into the theory of economics. The application of British philosopher and scientist, Herbert Spencer's concept of social evolution or "survival of the fittest" argument (survival-based theory) (Broom *et al*. 2002; Miesing & Preble, 1985), was published in 1864, originally based on biology, where themes such as function, adaptation and variation were examined, with regard to 'the most appropriate to its environment'. Many ideas proposed by Spencer remain, influencing work by prominent contemporary thinkers such as Pinker and Wilson on the power of evolution to shape culture, along with modern liberalism (Falk 2020: para 18). Today, however, this theory is generally found in economics, where researchers use this idea to analyse how organisations prosper and compete in industries, and to elucidate fluctuations in economy (Mohammad *et al*. 2010).

Survival based theory is considered one of the strategic management theories; it centres on the concept that a business enterprise needs to continuously adapt to its competitive environment in order to survive (Raduan & Abdullah 2009). In addition, Harris (2006) argued the organisation had to distinguish itself from its competitors to survive, since survival of the same two identical organisations that serve identical determination and customers is worthless and would result in the demise of one of those organisations.

The survival-based view in strategic management emphasises the assumption that, in order to survive, organisations have to deploy strategies focused on running very efficient operations that can provide rapid response to competitive environment changes (Cochrane 2009; Khairuddin 2005). Therefore, the survivor is the one fittest and best able to adapt to the turbulent environment. However, some advocates of this view argued picking a precise, fixed strategy would not be ideal. As an alternative, they suggest it is better to test numerous strategies at once and allow the process of natural choice to determine the strategy that best acclimatises to the surroundings (Agwu 2018).

This view put survival-based theory into the typology of emergent theories of strategic management. In addition, application of this theory is most suited in the field of corporate turnaround, in situations where organisations face challenges such as financial difficulties, failing products, and losing significant employees. These are the real symptoms of an organisation that is not operating efficiently (Abdullah *et al*. 2010; Orga *et al*. 2020).

The process of turning an organisation around usually consists of characteristics such as underperforming sales, under-capacity in terms of factory output, and an overstaffed human resource department. These characteristics of inefficient organisation could justify why turnaround strategies are employed, such as employee layoffs, repositioning products, and strengthening under-capacity assets by selling these off (Abdullah *et al.* 2010; Orga *et al*. 2020).

Essentially, the primary objective of implementing turnaround strategies is to ensure the organisation is operating efficiently and thus able to better adapt to the turbulent environment, in order improve its profitability and achieve the crucial goal of surviving the competitive market in which it operates. As survival-based theory argues, when an organisation is not adapting to the turbulent environment and becomes efficient in it, it simply will not survive. Therefore, the one that successfully embarks on turnaround strategies is the one that would operate efficiently and adapt successfully to its surrounding (Abdullah *et al.* 2010; Orga *et al*. 2020).

According to survival-based theory, business enterprises such as SMMEs need to survive in a turbulent environment, which means understanding the environment is an integral part of success. This requires SMMEs to appreciate a suitable strategy to adopt for survival. SMME owners-managers must, furthermore, safeguard innovation both internally and externally to ensure its sustainability amidst all forms of uncertainties. It is crucial for a business to study and understand the competitive nature of its environment, in order to survive by means of its ability to adopt a survival strategy for its sustainability. The business environment is branded by continuous new thinking of doing business to sustain survival, which infers the business enterprise must be innovative in thinking to ensure its survival in the ever-changing environment (Adebisi & Bakare 2019).

Based on the above discussions, the survival-based theory is considered most suited for this study, since SMMEs were faced with the outbreak and spread of Covid-19 and governments of countries worldwide imposed regulations and restrictions to close their economies. This resulted in a negative financial position for SMMEs, where some shut down their businesses and laid off their employees. On the basis of these challenges faced by SMMEs, Abdullah *et al*. (2010) and Orga *et al.* (2020) suggested survival-based theory can be used to address problems of this nature. In summary, this theory could have been used to address the problems faced by rural SMMEs through promoting their use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis for their survival and growth (Nyawo 2020; Zeidy 2020; Sugandini *et al*. 2020; Trawnih *et al*. 2021; Tlapana *et al*. 2020; O'Donnell 2011).

SMME owners/managers must, moreover, ensure the business embraces an innovation to realise its sustainability in an ever-changing environment, which necessitates understanding by the small business of its environment to survive, as well as develop a survival strategy. This implies the business enterprise must be innovative and develop new technology, such as social media, to cope in the turbulent environment caused by the Covid-19 crisis (Ameen *et al*. 2022).

3.3.4.2 Firm Growth Theory

This theory by Churchill and Lewis emphasises the growth and productivity of any business, large or small, are likely to follow an expected pattern, represented by consecutive, progressive phases (Perényi 2010; Perényi & Selvarajah 2008). According to Churchill and Lewis (1983), small businesses vary in size and capacity to grow, with small businesses going through five growth stages and they could become stuck in any of these stages.

The growth model is made up of five stages: existence, survival, success, and take-off, as well as resource maturity. In the existence stage, the most important factor is to get customers and, as a result, the formal system does not yet exist or is only available to a limited extent. In addition, the business structure at this point is flat, requiring managers/owners to adopt a management style, characterised by direct oversight of workers (Gupta *et al*. 2013).

As the organization progresses to the survival stage, it starts to use the formal system and its structure introduces more levels where, for instance, managers/owners start to assign specific roles to employees. At the success stage, the owners/managers can decide either to retain the business in its current state of performance and operation or introduce an expansion plan. The move to expand the business will entirely depend on the motivation of all employees, more business opportunities, increased availability of resources and, business opportunities, along with recognition, as well as owner's/manager's self-motivation.

During the success stage, the organization employs the use of important systems such as finance, marketing and operations. In the take-off stage, the management/owner is tasked with critical issues such as determining the growth rate, performance and financing the desired growth. The owners/managers delegate more work for the organization to perform more effectively (Gupta *et al*. 2013

The final resource maturity stage focuses on proper management of the business. The owners/managers are mostly concerned with proper management of finances, maintaining their relationship with other businesses and responding to changes in customer needs and entrepreneurial practices. At this point, the organization is using well-established systems. Since the firm growth theory by Churchill and Lewis explains the growth and expansion process, the theory is, therefore, rightfully linked to growth of rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis, as it provides a framework of how rural SMMEs grow from inception to maturity (Perényi & Selvarajah 2008).

3.3.5 Technology organisation environment (TOE) theory

TOE theory is referred as the theory that focuses on the business level, which intends to provide explanations on different elements of business that entail the technological, organisational, and environment contexts. Thus, TOE theory provides an in-depth understanding of internal and external business facets that influence the adoption and usage of new technology such as social media (Classen, Garbutt and Njenga 2021; Matikiti *et al*. 2018; Baker 2012).

TOE is a generally accepted model for studying IT adoption in organisations, including SMMEs. Originally developed by Tornatzky, Fleischer and Chakrabarti (1990), TOE is a theoretical framework that aims to envisage the adoption of different types of IT innovation, which was further explored by several other studies (Oliveira and Martins 2010; Srivastava and

Teo 2010; Pan and Jang 2008; Kuan and Chau 2001). TOE is regarded as a valuable framework to conduct a suitability analysis for a specific new technology, from which the business can derive financial and non-functional benefits for their survival and growth (Oliveira and Martins 2011) Hartanto and Soelaiman 2021).

New technology adoption, such as social media, takes place provided the new innovation is viewed as a new valuable marketing strategy, which means social media is regarded as a crucial aspect of a marketing strategy (Becker & Lee 2019). The TOE framework was found to be a predominant model in investigating numerous information system issues, including social media technologies. Empirical findings of studies pertaining to utilisation of the TOE model in the setting of SMMEs, established this model is a suitable framework to understand technology-based adoption, such as social media (Ahmad *et al*. 2017; Cao *et al*. 2018; Qalati *et al*. 2021). It may, therefore, be deduced TOE could have assisted SMMEs to gain a comprehensive understanding of the use and benefits of social media in the Covid-19 crisis, in order to penetrate the market to advertise their products and services to customers, with the intention to increase sales for business sustainability.

3.3.6 Linking theories of the study

This subsection will discuss the comprehensive application of the UTAUT model, DoI theory, TOE, and TAM theory, in addition to survival-based and firm growth theories. It is, therefore, imperative to connect them and expound the tenets on which the theories are based.

According to Puriwat and Tripopsakul (2021), social media is regarded as an integral part of IT. The research studies conducted, with regard to social media adoption, are categorised into two stages, namely, individual and organisational levels. In the case of the UTAUT model, it is referred to at individual level. The UTAUT model pays special attention to technology-based applications and systems.

The UTAUT model is developed to address behavioural intention of the individuals focusing on three determinations, which are performance expectancy, effort expectancy, and social influence. In addition to the effect of two direct determinants on usage behaviour, are the intention of use and facilitating conditions. Therefore, this theory focusses on the behavioural intention and usage behaviour of the individuals on the use of new technology platform such as social media adoption and use (Puriwat and Tripopsakul 2021). Curtis *et al*. (2010) conducted the study where the UTAUT model was used for social media adoption through investigative 409 U.S. non-profit organisations; the model was used for the first time to test social media in public relations. The study revealed social media was regarded as a beneficial tool to communicate among public relations experts in the non-profit sector. The findings by Curtis *et al.* (2010) concluded the business enterprises that have public relations department are experiencing the increasing of the adoption and usage of social media. Furthermore, the employees and managers have developed confidence to use social media for improving the survival and growth of the small businesses (Belas *et al*.2021).

SMME social media use will, therefore, depend on user acceptance to promote SMME survival and growth, which will be further discussed below. However, even though the UTAUT model has been extensively used, doubts exist regarding its proficiency to elucidate acceptance of technology for individuals.

The original UTAUT model has thus been extended through suggestions of different researchers, which pointed out external variables should be included to improve the capability of this model to predict the acceptance of IT. Suggested variables to complement the original UTAUT model involve self-efficacy and trust (Martins *et al*. 2014; Maillet *et al*. 2015; Cimperman *et al*. 2016; Kabra *et al*. 2017; Khalilzadeh *et al*. 2017).

This suggests, on the basis of the above weaknesses, the UTAUT model could not address all the challenges to SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. UTAUT focusses more on users, as opposed to organisations such as SMMEs, whereas DoI pays special attention to organisational contexts, which is more complex than those at individual level. This infers DoI complements the UTAUT weakness, which include the communication phases through the processes of new technology, for instance social media, to be adopted by business enterprises such as SMMEs (Kiwanuka 2015) as depicted in Figure 3.5 below.

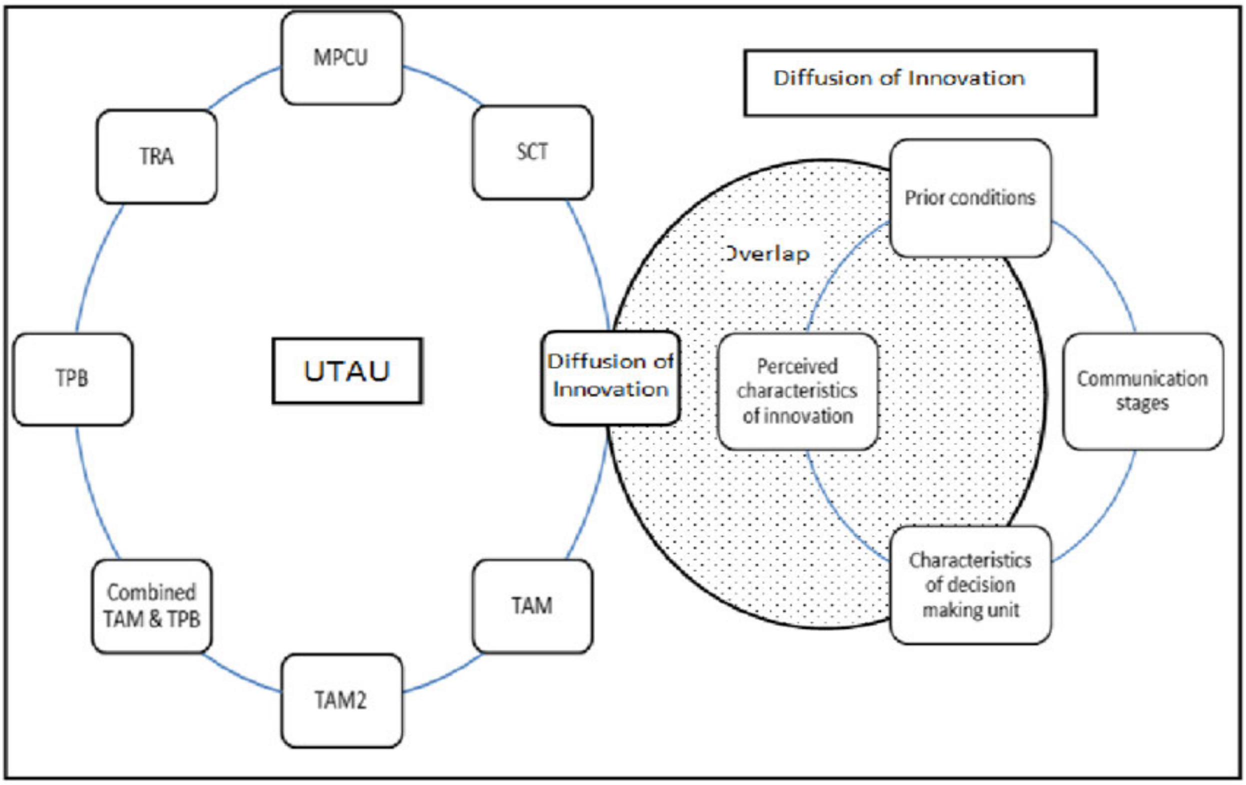


Figure 3.5: UTAUT and Diffusion of Innovation Theory adapted to complement and supplement each other for SMMEs survival and growth.

Source: Kiwanuka (2015)

Figure 3.5 illustrates UTAUT has failed to address the innovations catered for by DoI at organisational level. These innovations may assist SMMEs to adapt to the turbulent environment by adopting and using innovations such as social media in crisis such as that caused by COVID-19, in order to survive and grow during pandemic crises such as financial strain. This emanated from SMMEs having been unable to function during the Covid-19 crisis, which impacted negatively on their survival and growth (Telukdarie *et al*. 2020; Nyawo 2020).

The above figure depicts the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and TPB (1985). On the one hand, TRA, which is grounded on psychology, proposes a user's behaviour is inclined by behavioural Intention, predisposed by attitudes and subjective norms. On the other hand, TPB believes include perceived behavioural control in TRA that will provide a more accurate representation of actual behavioural status (Ajzen 1991).

Consequently, Figure 3.5 highlighted TAM theory combines the chief characteristics of TRA and TPB, which signify PU and PEOU are the two most important variables that can affect SMME owners' attitudes and behaviour towards adopting and using social media technologies during the Covid-19 crisis, to ensure their survival and growth in this economic turmoil.

Venkatesh *et al*. (2003), furthermore, presented the UTAUT as a technique that integrates TRA, TPB, and TAM. Thus, TAM and UTAUT are both critical theoretical models for gauging the degree of technology acceptance, according to Akman *et al*. (2017). Chhonker *et al.* (2018) conducted a literature study and indicated TAM and UTAUT are the most mature technology acceptance theories. Additionally, the TAM has been used by many researchers in different fields to evaluate behavioural factors that influence technology adoption at the level of both the individual and the organization (Awa *et al*. 2015; Razak and Latip 2016; Ahamat *et al.* 2017; Al-Adwan *et al.* 2020).

3.3.7 User acceptance process of innovations for promoting SMME social media use

As stated by Akman *et al.* (2017) and Chhonker *et al*. (2018), among the technology acceptance theories, the most mature are cited as TAM and UTAUT. The user acceptance process of innovations for promoting SMME social media use is depicted in Figure 3.6 below.

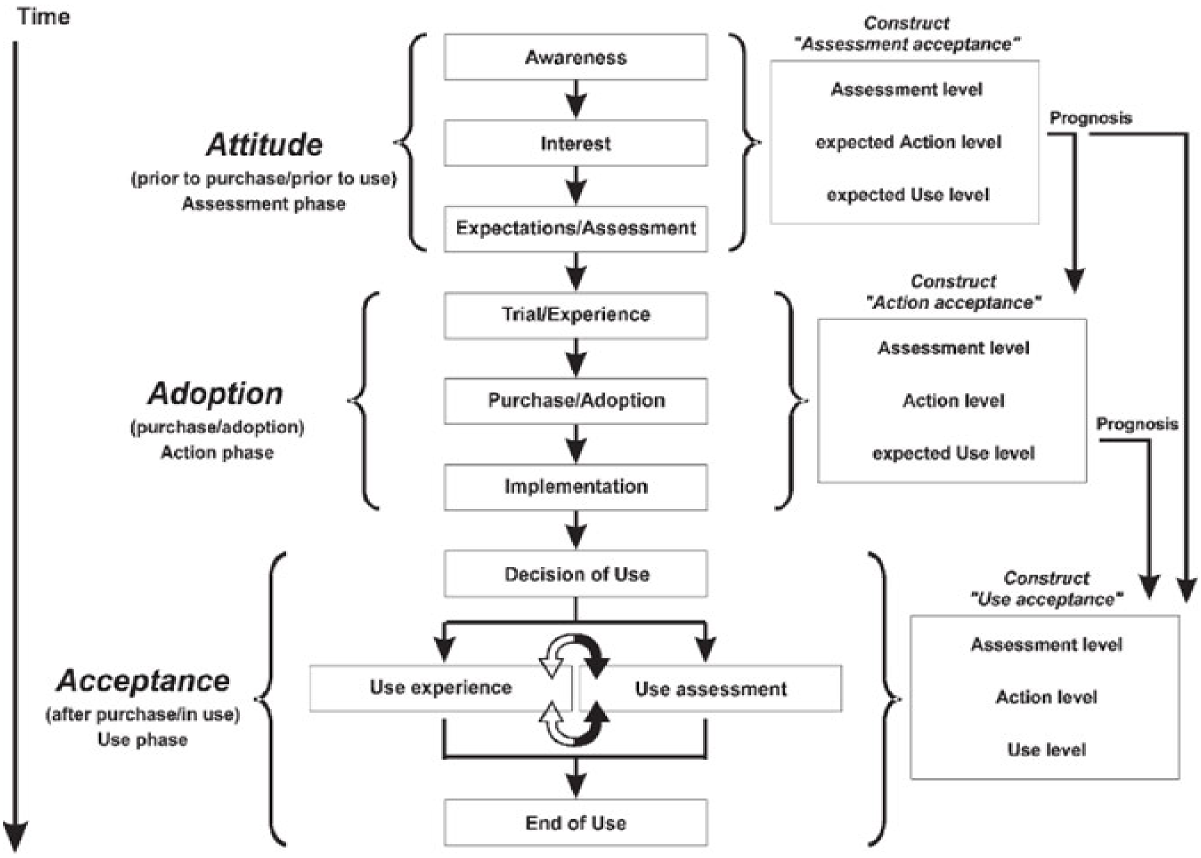


Figure 3.6: User acceptance process for SMME social media use

Source: Kiwanuka (2015)

Figure 3.6 indicates the attitude phase is regarded as assessment and has to do with the raising of awareness and interest and thus, formulating expectations for the need of the usage for technology within the organisations. The SMMEs are not excluded in this case, since confronted with the outbreak and spread of Covid 19 crisis, that negatively impacted SMMEs' financial positions relative to their survival and growth. This required the SMMEs to have to embrace an attitude of creating an awareness of need of the usage of social media platforms since they are subject to lockdowns, and they are restricted to see their customers face to face to market their products and services.

Secondly, Figure 3.6 comprises, the second phase called adoption, which requires the SMMEs to act in attempting to buy or adoption new technology and implement the social media platforms for SMME survival and growth in turbulent environment caused by the Covid-19 crisis and economic recession emanated from lockdowns and restrictions imposed to SMMEs by governments globally.

Lastly, Figure 3.6 proposes phase three that is acceptance. In this phase, the SMMEs must decide to use the new technology that is social media platforms to communicate with the customers and other stakeholders to showcase their brands and market their products and services during lockdowns and restrictions imposed their governments during Covid 19 crisis.

This implies the SMMEs need to accept and adopt social media platforms, which are regarded as IT platforms. To survive and grow requires the SMMEs to embrace a positive attitude in order to adopt and accept social media platforms. This can address the problems SMMEs are subjected to, such as the outbreak and spread of Covid-19 and the consequent global crisis. This resulted in the loss of jobs by some employees, loss of profit for SMMEs and some of these enterprises are technically insolvent. Considering the above, Kollmann (2004) and Kiwanuka (2015) propose that acceptance process of innovations comprised attitude, adoption and acceptance stages as depicted in Figure 3.6 above.

3.3.8 UTAUT and DoI theories on the use of social media for SMMEs survival and growth

Considering the UTAUT and DoI theories are regarded as management tools to enhance the SMMEs survival and growth. However, the DoI theory states that there must be the capabilities of innovation cultures that promote effectiveness of innovation competitive advantages that support the SMMEs survival and growth in a new market**.** Nonetheless, even though that the UTAUT model has been extensively used, but there are doubts, which exist over its proficiency to elucidate acceptance of technology for the individuals. In addition, UTAUT theory focuses on the behavioural intention and usage behaviour of the individuals on the use of new technology platform such as the adoption of social media (Puriwat and Tripopsakul 2021; Martins *et al*. 2014; Maillet *et al*. 2015; Cimperman *et al*. 2016).

3.3.9 Survival-based and firm growth theories integrate other theories for use of social media

The survival-based theory put more emphasises on the organisations who are subjected to financial difficulties, failing products, losing significant employees and these are the real symptoms of the organisations that are not operating efficiently. This theory proposed these organisations including SMMEs are supposed to embark on the turnaround strategies to address these deficiencies of the organisations because they have a negative impact on organisational survival and growth. In addition, this theory cited that the business needs to embark on the continuously process in adapt to its competitive environment to survive (Raduan & Abdullah 2009).

According to the analysis of UTAUT model, diffusion of innovation theory and TAM are preparing and laying the fundamental principles for the organisations including SMMEs to survive and growth in increasing their sales and revenues. In support of the above, survival-based theory cited that thus, the organisation that really successfully embark on turnaround strategies is the one that would operate efficiently and adapting successfully to its surrounding (Abdullah *et al.* 2010; Orga *et al*. 2020). However, the survival-based theory intends to embrace these theories in terms of the actual and practical methods of implementation of turnaround strategies if the organisations including SMMEs are experiencing the economic turmoil.

Thus, survival-based theory emphasised the proposition that organisations need to always acclimatise to its competitive environment to survive. This theory is one foundation of strategic management of the organisation. The strategic management is the process and approach of specifying an organization's objectives, developing policies and plans to achieve and attain these objectives and allocating resources to implement the policies and plans (Raduan & Abdullah 2009; Otungu *et al.* 2011). However, the firm growth theory pointed out that the owners/managers are mostly concerned with proper management of finances, maintaining their relationship with other businesses and responding to changes in the customers' needs and entrepreneurial practices (Churchill and Lewis 1983; Perényi & Selvarajah 2008; Perényi *et al.* 2010).

Based on the above discussions, it led us to believe that the UTAUT, DoI, TAM, survival based and firm growth theories in the context of this study are subjected to environment uncertainty in order to influence adoption and use of social media by SMMEs in Covid-19 crisis for their survival and growth. According Scupola (2003) environment uncertainty is referred as business environment that can damage the opportunities to adopt and use technology such as social media technologies. The Covid-19 crisis have made things worse and necessitated the SMMEs to adopt and use social media marketing valuable tool as means survival and growth in these pandemic crises (Itliong 2020; Sugandini *et al*. 2020). Hence, the TOE model is the best suited to deal more effectively business confronted with uncertainty of business environment since it caters for the technological context, organisational context and environment context (Trawnih *et al.* 2021; Qalati *et al.* 2021) as portrayed below.

3.3.10 Conclusion on the most suitable theories for this study

In light of the above discussion, it can be presumed that these theories are relevant and applicable to this study because the SMMEs owners, managers, employees, customers, government of countries globally, banks and other relevant stakeholders have to collaborate in dealing with the issues of Covid-19 crisis and economic recession and unemployment caused by the Covid-19 crisis, taking into cognisance human behaviour, changes, practices and SMME structures. This implies the above stakeholders must ensure SMMEs in SA are revived and grow as expected, with the intention of improving the GDP of the country.

According to the theories, the UTAUT theory fails to measure individual traits such as innovativeness and it neglected cultural facets, whereas the DoI theory catered for innovativeness and cultural aspects. This implies DoI theory supplements and complements the weaknesses of the UTAUT theory (Kiwanuka 2015). Nevertheless, although the TAM is known for identifying individual behavioural factors, criticism includes it not being plausible for the work environment (Ajibade 2018). Correspondingly, criticism of the TAM is because it does not consider compliance aspects, and it emphasises individual technology perceptions (Ajibade 2016). In this type of setting, technology adoption turns into the need for compliance, as opposed to it being a behavioural matter.

Notwithstanding the widespread use of DoI, criticism is that it considers the technological characteristics of the innovation being studied in the main and does not incorporate other adoption factors which may be key, whether internal or external. Further to this, DoI does not consider organisational and environmental factors’ impact (Amin and Hussin 2014; Tehrani and Shirazi, 2014. In addition, both the survival based and firm growth theories would be highly dependent on the business environment where the SMMEs are operating in order to them to put the turnaround strategies to deal with the Covid -19 crisis for SMMEs survival and growth (Adebisi & Bakare 2019; Rahman *et al*. 2022).

Given the above background that the technological context, organisational context and environmental context in which TAUT, DoI, TAM, survival based and firm growth theories did not manage to cater for all of them (Amin and Hussin 2014; Tehrani and Shirazi 2014) However, it was suggested by Oliveira and Martins (2011) that adding the environmental feature in the TOE model would improve the chances the framework will be more pertinent and suitable. The TOE model is used extensively to study a wide range of technology adoption and use in comparison to other theories as cited above and they are embraced by this model (Baker 2012).

Furthermore, the environmental context is considered the operating environment for firms, signifying its competitors, government agencies, as well as the industry in which it operates. In the context of this study, the TOE framework is used in reference to both human and non-human determinants in a framework, which offers more advantages as compared to old models such as TAM and UTAUT (Awa *et al*. 2017). Numerous researchers have linked new the TOE dimensions of the business with technology adoption such as social media. The motive behind this, is that TOE provides a comprehensive in-depth profile of key drivers that influence the adoption and use of social media for rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis (Abed 2020).

The TOE framework has, therefore, emerged as a framework that is well-established, tough and able to analyse varying factors that influence of different ICT types in the setting of SMME, with the factors classified as internal (technological and organisational) and external (environmental) (Abeysinghe and Alsobhi 2013). There is a wide range of studies on the use of the TOE model in technology adoption and use for business survival and growth, as depicted in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1: TOE model used in studies conducted for adoption and use of technology for business survival and growth

No.	Authors	Context	IT innovation	Technology-Organisation -Environment			Findings
				Technology	**Organisation**	**Environment**	
1.	Qalati, S.A., Li, W., Vela, E.G, Bux, A., Barbosa, B., Herzallah, A.M (2021)	Pakistan.	Social Media	Relative advantage Interactivity and Visibility	Top management support	Institutional pressure	Relative advantage is found relevant in the decision by SMMEs to adopt social media The interactivity of SM adoption is deemed a vital factor. The results suggest SM provides an interactive platform allowing SMMEs to communicate with customers and business partners in a two-way format that encourages its adoption. Visibility is also found significant for SMMEs, due to limited resources.
2.	Tajudeen, F.P., Jaafar, N.I. and Ainin, S. 2017	Malaysia	Social media	Relative advantage, compatibility, cost, structural	Top management support Entrepreneurial orientation	Institutional pressures	**Relative advantage** is positively associated with organizational usage of social media. This can be interpreted

				assurance, interactivity			as the expected benefits from social media usage will impact the organization to use social media. **Compatibility** of social media was identified as a significant factor that is positively associated with social media usage in organizations
3.	Trawnih et al., 2021	Jordan	Social media	Relative advantage, compatibility, complexity,	Employee expertise, perception cost, top management support	Government support, environment uncertainty, competitive pressure	The findings of this research revealed that social media implementation during Covid-19 crisis is directly affected through three factors of environment context Results revealed **top management support** in understanding social media adoption benefits via investing

							and allocating a budget that is appropriate will aid small business to successfully adopt social media. Therefore, challenges can be overcome through social media implementation and increasing the competitive advantage, the customer base and sales
4.	Parveen, 2012	Malaysia	Social media	Compatibility, Relative advantage	Entrepreneurial orientation, Top management support	Institutional pressures	TOE framework was identified as the suitable model for adoption and use of social media.

Source: Own research (2023)

As illustrated in Table 3.1 above, the TOE framework is portrayed in Figure 3.7 below, with the TOE framework described as an organisational-level theory incorporating technology, organisation, and environmental contexts, as stated by Baker (2012). Figure 3.7 indicates the influence of TOE theory on factors affecting social media use by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis, as follows**:**

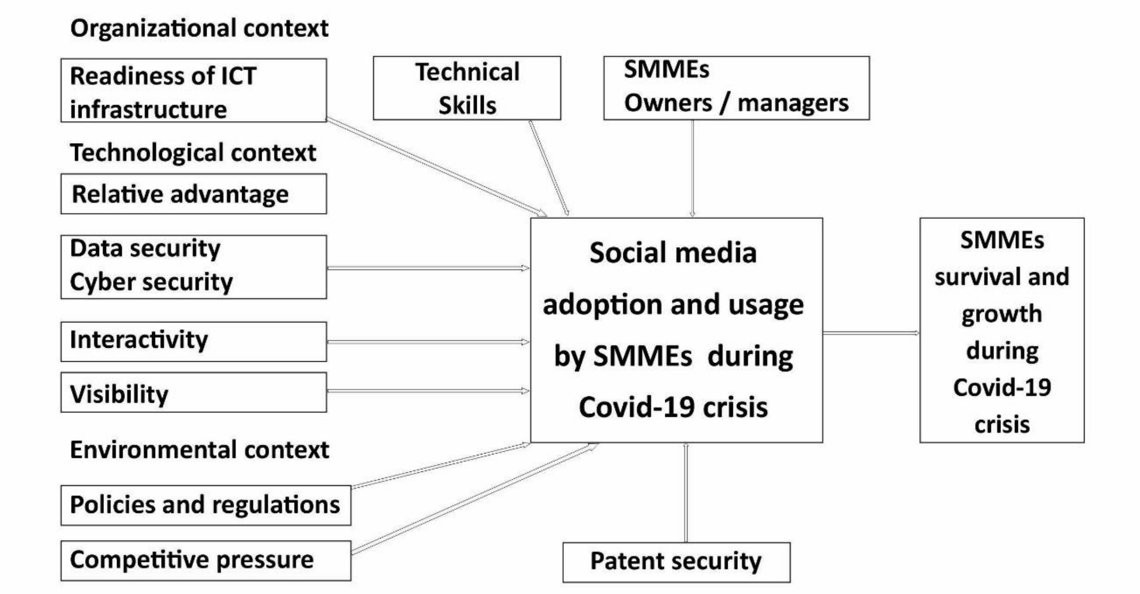


Figure 3.7: TOE framework affecting the use of social media by rural SMME during the COVID-19 crisis.

Source: Adapted from Justino et al. (2022), Qalati et al. (2010), Rogers (2003) and Trawnih et al. (2021)

Figure 3.7 shows TOE theory comprises three main organisational level contexts, namely organisational, technological and environmental. In this section details are presented on the factors that correspond to each context. It is worth noting some factors are discussed, intensely, which reflects their extensive examination of IT adoption and use for their survival and growth by the business enterprise, which are briefly discussed as follows:

3.3.10.1 Organisational context

Organisation characteristics known as one of the set of determinants in the TOE framework found in many studies that influenced new technology adoption, such as social media technologies. In the SMME context, with regard to the business' characteristics, it was revealed they positively impact the adoption and use of new technologies. Four widely examined organisational factors include enterprise size; readiness of infrastructure; SMMEs owners'/managers innovativeness; and technical skills (Justino *et al*. 2022; Qalati *et al.* 2021; Rogers 2003; Trawnih *et al*. 2021). They are briefly discussed as follows**:**

Enterprise size is considered a core organisation characteristics, commonly researched in the adoption and use of new technologies in the business enterprise and is viewed as a good acting catalyst that influences the adoption of new technologies such as social media by business enterprises, including SMMEs. Hence, different scholars in their studies found that there was a strong correlation between size and the probability for a business to adopt and use a new technology such as social media (Pan and Jang 2008; Zhu, Kraemer and Xu 2003; Premkumar and Roberts 1999). The researchers argued that large business enterprises have more opportunities as compared to SMMEs to adopt and use new technologies since they have adequate financial resources to invest infrastructure technology. In addition, large enterprises have appropriate IT proficiency to test with new technologies (Haller and Siedschlag 2011; Premkumar and Roberts 1999; Damanpour 1992).

However, other researchers have contrasting views with regard to business size influence on size in the context of its significance of adoption and use of new technology by SMMEs. According to their studies, it was found that the SMMEs possess the simple structure, which make it easy for them to adapt to turbulences posed their business environment including adopting and using social media technologies as opposed to large enterprises due to bureaucracy structure levels with regard to the decision-making process (Perényi & Selvarajah 2008).

Thus, Rahayu and Day (2015) in their research study found that there is a relationship between business size and e-commerce adoption among SMMEs emanating on the fact that they have simple structure and new technologies are more affordable. Hence, it may be deduced that the business size may positively contribute on the SMMEs to adopt and use social media due to the fact that they have simple and more flexible structure to adapt on business environment turmoil such as the Covid-19 crisis in order to survive and growth through building clientele to increase their revenues through using social media in this crisis.

However, the SMMEs have insufficient financial and organisational resources to invest to infrastructure technology and they lack technical skills related to IT expertise, which would make it difficult for SMMEs to adopt and use social media in covid-19 crisis to survive and grow in this crisis.

SMME owners'/managers' innovativeness is another factor affecting the SMMEs in relation to adopt and use social media and it reflects the degree of acceptance depicted by

SMMEs new innovative ideas in adopting new technology like social media technology. In the context of SMMEs, the SMMEs owners/managers are the prime decision-makers with regard to adopt and use new technology for growth and sustenance of the business (Ismaili *et al*. 2020; Wilson, Khazaei and Hirsch 2015; Dahnil *et al.* 2014; Govindaraju & Chandra 2012 ; Afolayan *et al.*2020).

This implies the level of new technology acceptance has a strong bearing on the positive or negative attitude of SMMEs towards adoption and usage of social media as new innovations. This notion is supported by the literature reviewed, which revealed that the SMMEs are more likely to adopt and use IT when the SMMEs owners/managers are more innovative to new ideas and have positive attitude towards adoption and usage of new technology innovations (Christodoulides *et al.* 2015; Ghobakhloo, Arias-Aranda and Benitez-Amado 2011; AlQirim 2007; Hussin and Noor 2005; Thong 1999; Thong and Yap 1995). In the case of this study, it is therefore expected that SMMEs owners'/managers innovativeness plays a crucial role in terms of SMMEs decision to adopt and use social media in order to penetrate the market and market their products and services to increase sales during Covid-19 crisis for survival and growth.

ICT infrastructure and resources readiness

ICT is a vital resource which all organisations should have and utilise effectively. However, SMMEs do not have enough budget to purchase the required ICT resources (Von Solms 2015). On the other hand, large organisations have a dedicated team of people handling ICT-related issues such as information security incidents and attacks, hardware and network issues (Fani *et al.* 2017). However, many SMMEs do not have adequate financial support to afford such IT departments (Von Solms 2015). Moreover, lack of knowledge of how to utilise ICT effectively can prevent SMMEs from integrating ICT into their daily business operations (Soni *et al*. 2015).

3.3.10.2 Technological context

The technology context best pronounces prevailing technologies in the business and different types of technologies accessible to market the products and services of the business in the market in order for business enterprise to use them to increase their brands and revenues. They are many researches that have researched on the adoption and usage of IT through using TOE model. The TOE model depicts the effect of technology characteristics is widely recognised and crucial to process of acceptance regarding new technology. According to Rogers (2010), there are five attributes of technology, which are relative advantage; complexity; compatibility; trialability; and observability that need to be considered by business when they intend to either adopt a particular new technology or reject it. The above stated attributes epitomize the fundamental pillars of Roger (1995). The very same core pillars were used by Rogers (2002) and Ramdani and Kawalek (2007) in diffusion of innovation theory to investigate the factors impacting of new technology innovations.

In addition, Justino *et al.* (2022) and Qalati *et al*. (2021) in the technological context in their study it was revealed that the data security, cyber security, patent security, interactivity and visibility are integral part of critical factors that need to considered in social media adoption and usage by SMMEs. In the context of this study the attributes used by Rogers (2010), Roger (1995), Ramdani and Kawalek (2007), Justino *et al*. (2022) and Qalati *et al*. (2021) will be considered in the TOE technology context. Based on the above, Figure 3.8 thus provides the core factors in the TOE technology context, which are appropriate for this study.

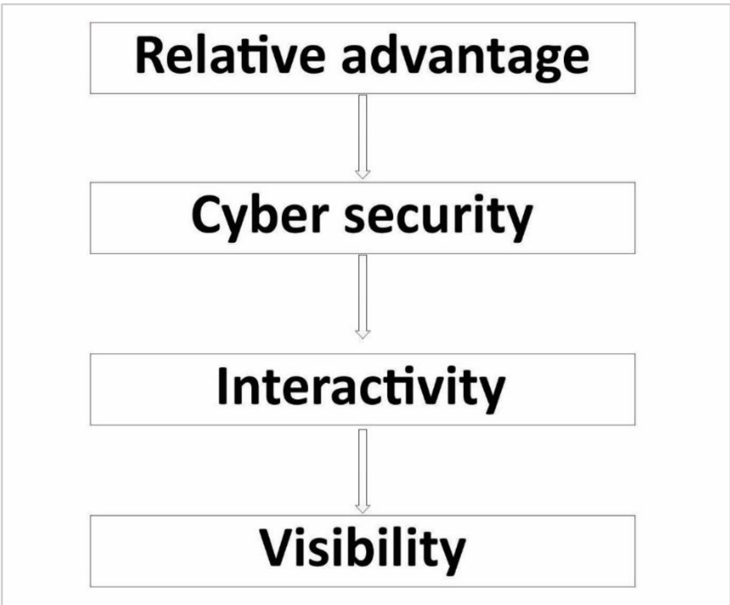


Figure 3.8: Core factors in the context of TOE theory

Figure 3.8 depicts the variables that influenced the use of social media by SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis, which are discussed below:

Relative advantage, compatibility, triability, observability and complexity are the core factors that have been identified by Rogers (2010), which exemplified the principal pillars of Roger (1995). These attributes were used by Rogers (2002) and Ramdani and Kawalek (2007) in their studies for the DoI theory. **Relative advantage, compatibility,**

triability, observability and complexity suggested SMMEs are more likely to adopt and use social media when SMME owners and managers had an opportunity to test the social media and it met the needs of the business, was perceived useful, demonstrated desired results and was perceived consistent with the existing needs and past experiences of the SMMEs (Rogers 1995, 2003, 2005, 2010; Ramdani and Kawalek 2007).

These attributes of TOE are similar for the attributes Ramdani and Kawalek (2007) used to investigate their influence in DoI theory, as reflected above. Hence, this infers these above-stated attributes are perceived by SMME owners/ managers as core attributes that made a positive contribution in adopting and using social media, then SMMEs would adopt and use social media had the experience that social media to penetrate the market in order for them to liaise with their customers and attract prospective customers to market products and services to increase their revenues for survival and growth in the times of Covid-19 crisis (Azam and Quaddus 2009; Hussin and Noor 2005; Sugandini *et al*. 2020).

Interactivity and Visibility are the technological characteristics used by *Qalati et al*. (2021) in their research study with regard to the effects of technological, organizational, and environmental, with regard to the factors influencing social media adoption. Interactivity is the process whereby two or individuals can communicate to each other using technology. In the context of SMMEs with regard to innovative technology, the social media is regarded as an innovative technology, which provide the platform for SMMEs to liaise with existing and prospective customers to promote their products and services for the purpose of increase revenues and their brands for business survival and growth (Kizgin *et al.* 2020; Qalati *et al*. 2021). On the other hand, visibility is referred as the degree in which there is general attraction that is recognised. The SMMEs are subjected to limited resources, which dictate their use and leveraging of social media for marketing activities that will, in turn, afford SMMEs more visibility, in contrast to large business enterprises (Braojos-Gomez *et al.* 2015; Qalati *et al*. 2021). The study conducted by Olanrewaju *et al*. (2020) that mainly focused on the relative advantage, compatibility, and cost-effectiveness acted as catalysts for adoption and usage of the new technology by businesses (Olanrewaju *et al*. 2020).

However, Cesaroni and Consoli (2015) in their study argued that the adoption and its usage of social media can offer businesses with high degree of cost effectiveness interactivity, and visibility. Thus, interactivity and visibility would act as the predecessors in the adoption and its usage of social media by SMMEs in the times of Covid-19 crisis for them to attract new customers and liaise with existing customers with the purpose of increase their sales in this crisis.

Cyber security refers to the information security that mainly focused on the protection of confidentiality, integrity and availability of digital information assets against internet threats (Solms & Solms 2018). It also focusses on protecting information resources and protects other assets, including people (Von Solms & Van Niekerk 2013). Cyber security is the protection of cyberspace, digital data, ICT technologies and users of cyberspace (Von Solms & Van Niekerk 2013). Challenges faced by SMMEs are vulnerable to cyber-attacks and lack cyber security measures (PwC 2020). SMMEs are increasingly targeted by cyber criminals (Bedi 2013; Hubbard 2019; Morgan, Colebourne, & Thomas 2006; Symantec 2019). SMMEs should protect themselves against cyber-attacks because that may result in their becoming a growing cyber risk to themselves, their clients, other organisations (in collaboration with) and the country as a whole (Von Solms 2015).

Legal developments in SA, such as the POPI Act may, furthermore, pressurise rural SMMEs to establish or upgrade their cyber security instruments, because the POPI Act requires organisations protect client, customer and other individuals' information. The Act applies to public and private entities, and according to condition 7 relating to security, SMMEs would entail implementing security controls in cyberspace (POPI Act 2013). This Act requires SMMEs to be responsible for protecting data for integrity and confidentiality. Therefore, SMMEs must identify reasonable internal and external cyber security risks, and identify, implement and evaluate measures to encounter the identified risks. SMMEs must establish cyber security standards, practices and procedures to be followed within their organisation.

Patent security is regarded as a system to protect the intellectual asset of the business enterprises such as SMMEs (Dou *et al.* 2012). In addition, (Duo *et al*. 2012) emphasised the business enterprises should enhance awareness and their own unique technology innovation because currently the business enterprises are fully aware of the critically importance of patent security in their businesses. However, most of the SMMEs are faced with the lack of human and financial resources in practices and the SMMEs should not give up of developing their own patents (Dou *et al*. 2012; Hughes *et al*.2010). Hughes *et al. (*2010) further highlighted that small businesses are not in the position of investing in patents as compared to larger businesses because of the lack of affordability of resources on the side of small businesses.

3.3.10.3 Environmental context

Rogers (2002) maintains the notion of the business environment being considered as among the vital factors that can either encourage or hinder the technology adoption process. Here, it is considered that the environmental context relates to external factors, whose support is required for business survival and growth.

Many environmental factors have been identified as influencing the decision by an organisation to adopt new technologies, which include competitive pressure; type of industry; market scope; and pressure from customers, as well as policies and regulations (the influence of Government social media policy and regulation on use of social media for SMMEs survival and growth), in addition to government support, environmental uncertainty. Further factors comprise competitive pressure, industry pressure, customer pressure and customer centricity, along with industry type, market scope and market orientation, as well as stakeholder engagements. The variables of TOE are discussed as follows:

The TOE framework is consistent with the DoI theory, but the TOE framework includes a new component: the environment context. Thus, it explains the intra-firm innovation adoption much better. Hence, the TOE framework is considered a more complete model to study IT adoption at firm level (Oliveira *et al*. 2011).

In the scenario of Covid-19 crisis, the rural SMMEs are supposed to develop the survival and growth-based strategies to cope with crisis. The survival and growth strategy for rural SMMEs to survive and growth must entail the adoption and use of social media since the economies of countries globally were subjected to lockdown due to Covid-19 crisis (Abdullah *et al*. 2010; Orga *et al*. 2020; Trawnih *et al.* 2021; Hartanto and Soelaiman 2021; Ahamat *et al.* 2017; Sugandini *et al*. 2020).However, the survive and growth of rural SMMEs will heavily be dependent on technological context, organisational context, and environmental context which the rural SMMEs are operating to them (Qalati *et al.* 2021).

In addition, through the above literature review, rural SMMEs are operating in a turbulent environment, worsened by the outbreak and spread of Covid-19 in SA, which impacted rural SMME survival and growth. Furthermore, the study intends to investigate the critical factors impacting the use of social media drive as a tool for SMME survival and growth in rural KZN during the Covid-19 crisis. This means rural SMMEs should analyse the implications of social media use. In summation, this study is built upon the theories discussed above, suitable for the investigation of factors impacting the use of social media as driving tool for SMME survival and growth in rural KZN during the Covid-19 crisis, and thereafter, to develop and propose a social media model as a driving tool for SMMEs survival and growth in rural KZN during crises such as the Covid-19 crisis (Zeidy 2020; Nyawo 2021; Puriwat and Tripopsakul 2021; Martins *et al*. 2014; Maillet *et al*. 2015; Cimperman *et al.* 2016).

3.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.4.1 Introduction

The conceptual framework of the study is based on the variables of the research study, which are used to explain the relationship that exist between the main variables of the study. The conceptual framework can be in a form of narrative or depicted graphical indicating key variables with intention of presuming relationship between them (Dickson *et al*. 2018). This section focuses on the conceptual framework for the use of social media during Covid-19 crisis by SMMEs, in terms of their survival and growth in the economic recession caused by the Covid-19 crisis.

Thus, this study was dealing with how the social media drive influence the SMMEs survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN. This study, therefore, uses the UTAUT model, DoI theory, TAM theory, and survival-based and firm growth theories, to reinforce the conceptual framework to enlighten the variables used in this study.

The dependent variables examined entail social media and rural SMMEs and the independent variables are environmental, technological and organisational factors. These dependent and independent variables, which were discussed in literature review (Chapter two and chapter three) of this study.

3.4.2 Conceptual framework on the use of social media by rural SMMEs for survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis

The conceptual framework of the study is briefly discussed as follows**:**

3.4.2.1 Overview of the conceptual framework

SMMEs in SA were faced with the crisis caused by the outbreak and spread of Covid-19, where governments of countries globally responded to the number of deaths and cases of affected people, by imposing restrictions and lockdown measures to prevent the uncontrollable spread of this crisis. Countries worldwide closed their economies as per government order, with businesses, including SMMEs experiencing a decline in cash reserves. Thus, SMMEs experienced negative financial positions, with some declared technically insolvent (Sugandini *et al.* 2020).

Van Scheers (2016) and Price (2019), nonetheless, pointed out social media can be used as an important key driver for SMMEs in the unprecedented circumstances they face, to promote their products and services locally and internationally in the 21st century, to create job opportunities, reduce poverty and inject their country's economic growth. Despite the good intention of promoting the establishment of SMMEs in SA, the Covid-19 crisis has affected SMME survival and growth negatively (Nyawo 2020; Sugandini *et al.* 2020).

In contrast to the above, Oji, Gervase and Haydam (2017), Budree *et al* (2019) and Prince (2019) revealed a lack of social media strategies to support the growth of SMMEs in SA, which was a major obstacle in dealing with the Covid-19 crisis. None of these studies, however, provide the critical factors on the use of social media drive as a tool for the survival and growth of SMMEs in rural KZN during the Covid-19 crisis and none developed a social media model as a driving tool for rural KZN SMME survival and growth in times of crisis, such as Covid-19.

It is quite apparent, therefore, that further exploration of the use of social media drive by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis is needed to overhaul the knowledge contribution to SMME survival and growth, particularly in SA, with special reference to rural KZN. The motivation for this study to focus on KZN was because little has been found in the literature concerning the use of social media as a tool in relation to accomplishing rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in developing countries, with special reference to SA, in rural KZN. This research is intended to contribute in some way to close this gap.

The UTAUT model, DoI theory, TAM, and firm growth strategy, as well as survival-based theory were employed collaboratively in this study, to explore the linkage of theories, to ensure the study is built upon them.

The UTAUT model is shown as one of the most powerful technology acceptance theories, developed to examine user ability to accept technology and their intention to adopt new technologies (Momani 2020). Rogers (1995) and Kaminski (2011) state DoI theory was developed in 1962 by Rogers and focused on the conditions in which a new idea to improve performance is likely to be adopted by the business enterprises or peer group of the same culture. Davis (1989) stated the PU, PEOU, attitude toward using and actual usage behaviour are critical factors which influence the adoption and use of social media by SMMEs as cited in TAM theory.

Jere and Ngidi (2020) highlighted the TOE theory, which was proposed by Tornatzky, Fleischer and Chakrabarti (1990) to comprise technology, organization, and environment. TOE is used by business enterprises to understand the variables that influence the adoption and use of new technology innovation, such as social media by business enterprise such as rural SMMEs. Many researchers used TOE theory in their studies as a lens to study adoption and use of new technology such as social media platforms (Awa, Ojiabo & Emecheta 2016; Baker 2012; Oliveira & Martins 2011; Jere and Ngidi 2020). This infers social media was regarded as a critical facet of a marketing strategy for SMMEs during the Covid 19 crisis, with rural SMMEs not excluded in this case.

Moreover, as discussed, survival-based or 'survival of the fittest' theory (Broom *et al*. 2002; Miesing & Preble 1985) proposes an organization's survival requires constantly adapting to changes in its environment. Understanding this environment is, therefore, an integral part of success, as is the need to appreciate the most suitable strategy to adopt for survival and enhanced competitive capacity (Abdullah 2010).

Lastly, Perényi and Selvarajah (2008) explains firm growth theory proposes that in all probability, business growth and productivity, regardless of the organisation's size, follow an expected pattern, through phases that are consecutive and progressive.

Thus, from the literature reviewed, critical factors were identified that influenced rural SMME social media use during the Covid-19 crisis (Chapter 2). In addition, the theoretical and conceptual frameworks for the study (Chapter 3) set out the theories used to provide useful and in-depth understanding and descriptions regarding the internal and external contexts of social media use during the Covid-19 crisis. Thus, the literature reviews of chapter 2 and chapter 3 of this study enabled development of the study's conceptual framework, portrayed in Figure 3.7, which depicts the independent and dependent variables as follows:

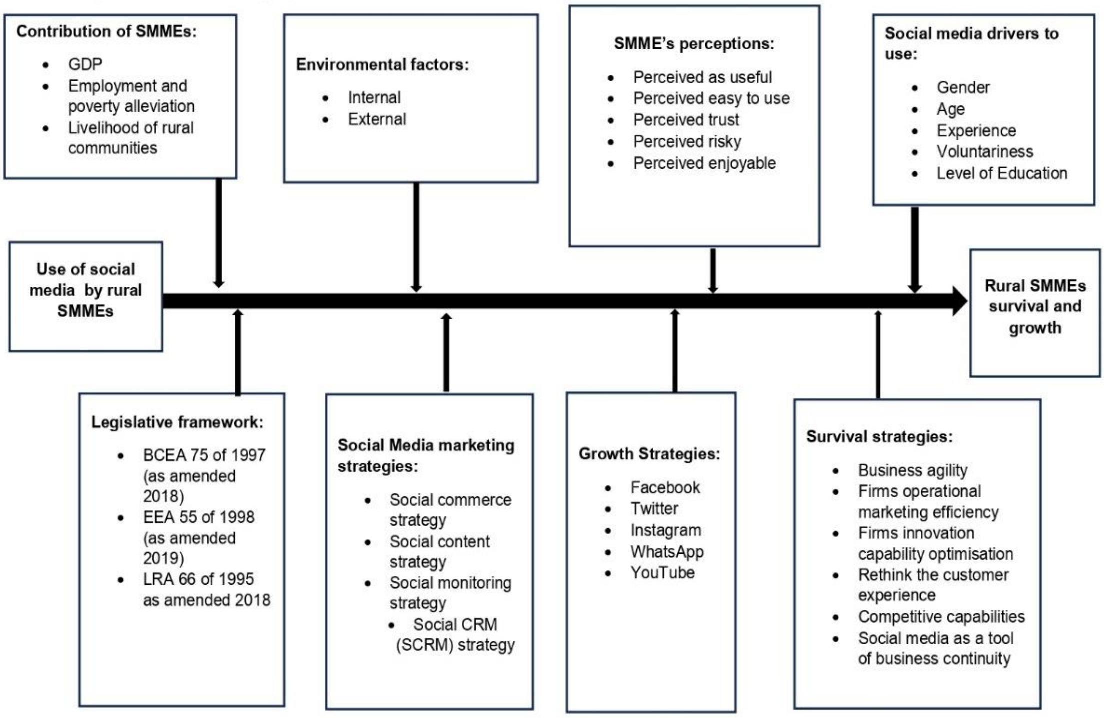


Figure 3.9: Characteristics of proposed research model

Source: Own research (2023)

The key concepts discussed in the literature review are brought together by the conceptual framework, displaying the dependent variable, which is explained by the independent variables, made up of the critical factors discussed in chapters 2 and 3 in the literature review. The effects of these critical factors highlight the association between rural SMMEs and social media that influenced rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

3.4.3 Measurement of rural SMME survival and growth

Measures refer to the independent variables used to evaluate the dependent variable. The subsections that follow depict measures in the framework that relate to SMME survival and growth.

3.4.3.1 Measurement of rural SMMEs survival

Table 3.1 shows the indicators used in completed empirical studies to measure survival in the businesses of organisations.

Table 3.2: Survival indicators and measures

Indicator	**Author(s)**
Positive mind-set of managers in the midst of economic turmoil or crises/recession	(Bamiatzi & Kirchmaier 2014; Orga, Patricia and Adaeze 2020).

Low cost price without affecting financial performance of the organisation	(Bamiatzi & Kirchmaier 2014; Orga *et al.*2020).
Keep existing customer base up to date about new products or services through social media platforms	(Bamiatzi & Kirchmaier 2014; Orga *et al.* 2020).
Reduce wages, salaries, personnel and budget for training and development **(structural re-adjustment)**	Ugwuzor (2017)
Freeze recruitment process and redefine the role and responsibilities of managerial staff **(structural re-adjustment)**	Ugwuzor (2017)
Show empathy and involve employees in survival process (**empathy and employee involvement**)	Ugwuzor (2017)
Encourage the survivors to come out with innovative ideas **innovative organisational citizenship behaviour**)	Ugwuzor (2017)

Source: Own Research (2022)

3.4.3.2 Measurement of rural SMME growth

Table 3.2 shows the indicators that completed empirical studies have used to measure growth in the businesses of organisations.

Table 3.3: Growth indicators and measures

Indicator	**Author(s)**
Increase in financial, structural, organisational and strategic growth and financial position.	(Brush *et al.* 2009; Nieman and Struwig 2019; Wickham 2016, McLaughlin 2012; Owoseni 2018).
Increase in number of employees	(Lebrasseur, Blanco and Dodge 2006; Širec and Močnik 2010; Machirori and Fatoki 2013; Neneh and Van Zyl 2014; Mthimkhulu and Aziakpono 2016)
Growth in sales	(Širec and Močnik 2010; Ambroise *et al.* 2013; Neneh and Van Zyl 2014).
Growth in asset	(Širec and Močnik 2010; Neneh and Van Zyl 2014).

Source: Own Research (2022)

3.4.4 Critical factors in rural SMME social media use during the Covid 19 crisis

The critical factors within the business environment context are categorised into internal and external factors; where these factors will determine the success and failure of the organisations in their day-to-day operations (Vartiak 2016). In this study, the critical factors are grouped into internal and external factors and their influence examined on the use of social media as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth in rural KZN during the Covid-19 crisis.

The internal and external critical factors are defined as follows**:**

The internal factors for the SMME business environment are those factors organisations such as SMMEs have control over; for instance, SMMEs control corporate strategies, operational systems and human resources (Vartiak 2016). Furthermore**,** external factors that impact the rural SMME business environment are those organisations such as SMMEs do not have control over; for example, SMMEs have no control over market, cultural, and economic forces (Vartiak 2016).

In addition, SMMEs were severely affected by the Covid-19 crisis, with some SMMEs shutting down, while employees were retrenched, as SMMEs were faced with negative financial positions. The Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) is defined as a communicable respiratory disease, caused by a new strain of coronavirus that causes illness in humans. This disease has resulted in a worldwide economic recession after governments of countries applied restrictions through closing their economies, which impacted business negatively, affecting the financial position of the SMME-sector and other industries. This also had a negative effect on rural SMME survival and growth (Zeidy 2020; Msimango-Galawe *et al.* 2020; WHO 2020).

3.4.5 Social media

Brake and Safko (2009) describe social media as the use by online users of various types of virtual media to share information and knowledge with online communities. There are different types of social media platforms, for instance, SNS (such as Facebook), microblogging (for instance, Twitter) and media-sharing sites (including YouTube) (Culnan *et al.* 2010; Jagongo and Kinyua 2013). In addition, social media is regarded as a chief platform for promoting organisational survival and growth in the context of SMMEs. It provides benefits such as cost reduction, customer relations management (CRM) and increased profits of organisations, as well as offering flexibility in day-to-day business operations (Trawnih *et al*. 2021).

3.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the study were depicted. It commenced with the theoretical framework that reinforces the study, using the UTAUT model, DoI theory, TAM theory and survival-based theory, to set out the perspectives the researcher will use in answering the research questions and in evaluating the critical factors that impacted social media use as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. In addition, this chapter assessed the conceptual framework of the study, involving SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis, in terms of how social media could contribute to SMME survival and growth in rural KZN during the Covid-19 crisis. The conceptual framework was graphically displayed through tables and figures, which depict social media as an enabler for promoting SMME survival and growth in rural KZN, thereby facilitating the answer to the main research question: What are the factors influencing social media use as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth in rural KZN during the Covid-19 crisis?

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapters discussed and analysed literature on critical factors affecting the use of social media by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis, along with the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, which provided in-depth analysis of theories, in relation to the critical factors for social media use by rural SMMEs in this study. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a discussion and an overview of the approaches and techniques used to conduct the research study.

Research is a process of seeking knowledge from the known to the unknown, in a scientific investigation, to derive a comprehensive understanding of social and physical phenomena in a designated area, with a precise topic (Kabir 2016; Kumar 2011). Research comprises the specific, schematically characteristics involving problem identification, review information, data collection, and analysis, as well as drawing conclusions, and to identify the main research question. These specific characteristics are schematically depicted in Figure 4.1 below:

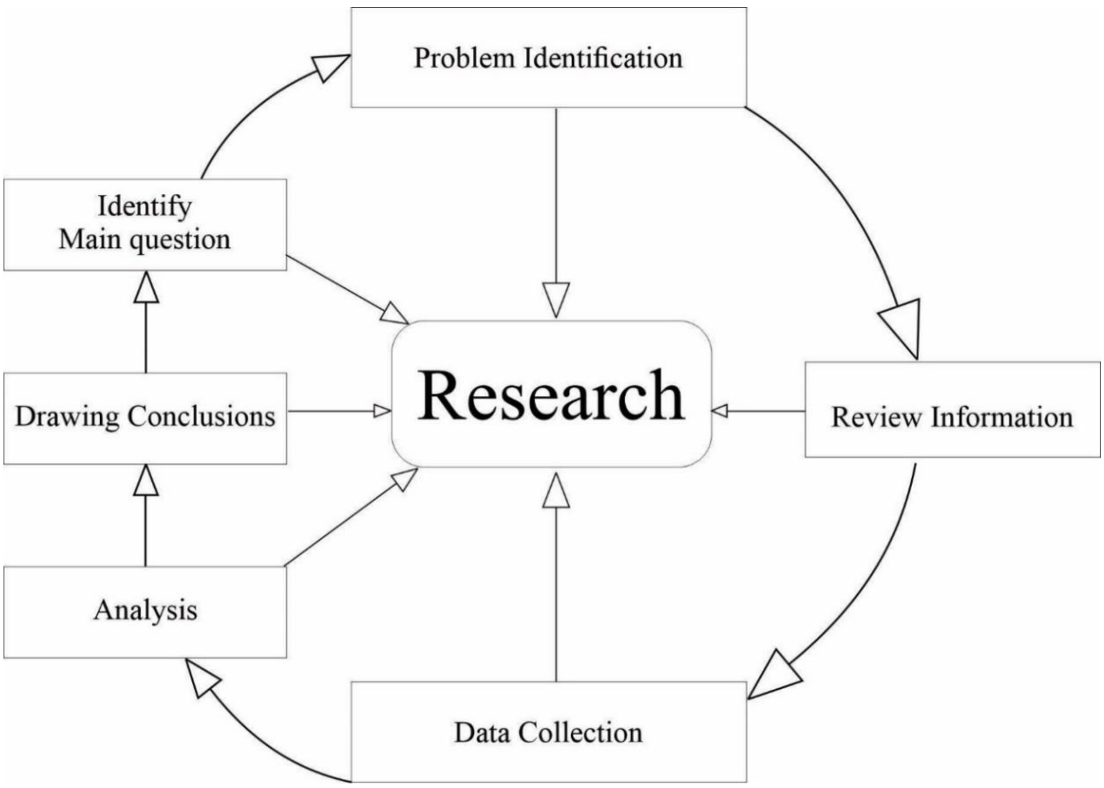


Figure 4.1: Specific schematically characteristics of research

Source: Adapted from Kabir (2016) and Kumar (2011)

As shown in Figure 4.1, the purpose of research is categorised into four types, namely, exploration, description, causal explanation and prediction. Therefore, it can be deduced research pursues predictions of events and descriptions, along with their correlations and theories. Nevertheless, methodology is known as the research tactic or strategy that illustrates the methods outlining how the research project should be conducted (Howell 2013; Patel and Patel 2019). Based on the definitions of both research and methodology, it is therefore concluded research methodology is regarded as a tactic, which is systematically organised to solve the identified problem statement in a scientific manner in the research study (Patel and Patel 2019).

The main purpose of research methodology is to attend to specific research questions and find appropriate answers to address the identified research problem statement (Kumar 2014; Williams 2007; Kabir 2016). Thus, this chapter will offer an in-depth discussion of the research design, research method, population, and data collection instruments, as well as the different types of data analysis employed in this study, validity and reliability, and ethical considerations.

4.2 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

The beliefs and assumptions regarding the nature of reality, knowledge, and the relationship between the researcher and the research subject, is referred to as the research philosophy (Sileyew 2019). There are three main research philosophies, namely positivism, interpretivism, and phenomenology.

4.2.1 Interpretivism

The subjective nature of human experiences is acknowledged in interpretivist philosophy, which focuses on understanding the meaning and context behind these experiences (Snyder 2019). Qualitative methods are employed to explore participant perspectives and interpretations.

4.2.2 Positivism

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019), it is assumed in positivist philosophy that there is an objective reality that can be studied through scientific methods. Positivism emphasises quantitative data use and aims to uncover universally applied general laws and patterns.

4.2.3 Phenomenological philosophy

Phenomenological philosophy aims to understand the essence of human experiences and how individuals make sense of their lived experiences (Mujumdar 2022). It delves into the subjective meanings and interpretations attributed to events and phenomena.

4.2.4 Justification for choosing positivism in this study.

The assumption in positivist philosophy is the existence of an objective reality that can be studied through the use of scientific methods (Saunders *et al*. 2019). Positivism highlights the use of quantitative data, aimed at uncovering universally applicable general laws and patterns. Positivists perceive knowledge can be found using the scientific method, which provides possible explanations for the cause of happenings in the world through experimentation, observation, control, and measurement, as well as reliability and validity, in the research processes. This implies a quantitative approach (Park, Konge & Artino 2020).

In the case of this study, positivism was applicable in this study, since it is quantitative in nature and knowledge was found through scientific methods in this study. Positivism was used in this study, because it promoted a hypothetico-deductive method that allowed this study to verify a priori hypotheses, stated quantitatively, where functional relationships were derived between causal and explanatory factors (independent variables - critical factors) and outcomes (dependent variables - social media) (Ryan 2018; Park *et al.* 2020). The rationale for choosing positivism in this study is depicted in Figure 4.2 below.

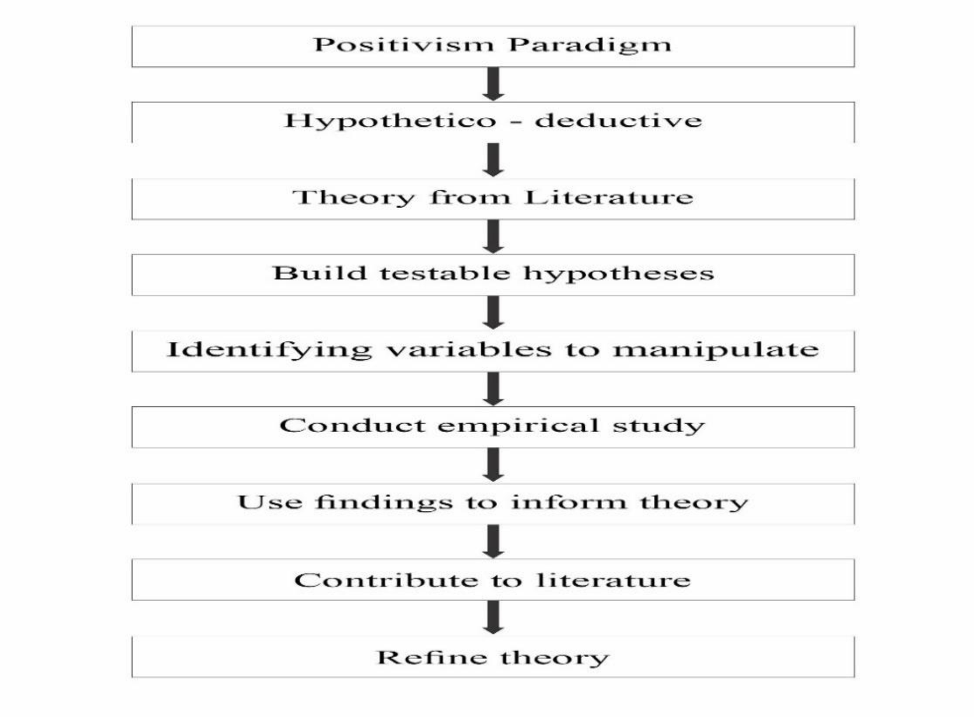


Figure 4.2: Rationale in choosing positivism for this study.

Source: Researcher analysis (2023) adapted from Park et al. (2020)

Figure 4.2 illustrates the rationale for choosing positivism in this study, which involved the process where the study generated explanatory casual relationships that eventually led to prediction and control of the phenomenon in question, namely rural SMME social media use for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

4.3 RESEARCH APPROACHES

Saunders *et al*. (2019) and Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) state research approaches are categorised into two, namely inductive and deductive approaches. A deductive approach tests the theories and hypotheses under consideration, whereas an inductive approach contributes to new theories and generalisations (Saunders *et al.* 2012). Hence, this study is descriptive and quantitative in nature as explained above. To derive the benefits illustrated in Figure 4.2 above., this study is descriptive, quantitative and cross-sectional in nature, which implies adopting a deductive approach.

4.4 RESEARCH STRATEGY

The specific methods and techniques used in data collection for a research study is referred to as the research strategy (Vears and Gillam 2022). Whereas in the interpretivist and phenomenological philosophies, research strategies cater for qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups (Saunders *et al.* 2019), in the positivist philosophy, the research strategy is generally focused on surveys and experiments to collect quantitative data. For this study, a quantitative method was used to collect data from rural SMMEs through a structured questionnaire that was distributed to a large sample of respondents, allowing for statistical analysis of relationships between variables (Saunders *et al.* 2019).

4.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

Salkind (2014) and Kumar (2011:74) pointed out a research design indicates how research is to be conducted to address the research questions. In addition, Creswell (2014: 12) asserted a research design offers guidelines in which the research study will gather the information to find solutions to the research problem and research questions. Research design is referred as the structure that holds the research study together with the intention of addressing the research questions in an effective, efficient and proper manner to achieve the objectives (Saunders *et al.* 2012; Trochim *et al*. 2015: 219). Bryman and Bell (2011 and Creswell (2014: 43) state there are three main research designs, which are quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods research designs, with different epistemological grounding and different strategies adopted in research (Kumar 2014: 22).

4.5.1 Qualitative research design

Qualitative research design depends on non-numeric data, such as interviews and experiments, enabling a comprehensive exploration of the research questions. Furthermore, qualitative methods, such as interviews, will assist the researcher to gain in-depth insights into stakeholder experiences and perceptions, as Snyder (2019) confirmed in his study regarding the adoption and impact of value chain systems in the transport sector.

4.5.2 Quantitative research design

Quantitative research design focuses on testing theories through investigating the relationship among variables, which can be measured and analysed through statistical procedures; this implies the design is descriptive in nature (Creswell 2009; Creswell 2014). Booth (2020: 1-22) asserted a quantitative research approach involves the collection and analysis of numerical data to quantify relationships and patterns between variables. It is used to test hypotheses and establish cause-and-effect relationships through surveys, experiments, and statistical analysis.

4.5.3 Mixed methods research design

Mixed methods, according to Bryman (2008) and Bryman and Bell (2011), is a relatively new research approach that has become very popular among modern researchers. “It combines quantitative and qualitative methods or crosses the two strategies, integrating the two forms of data and using discrete designs that may involve philosophical assumptions and logical structures" (Creswell 2014: 199). In the context of this research study, the research design adopted was due to its ability to address the research questions and provide appropriate answers. In addition, it has the potential to convert the identified research problems into applicable data for analysis, which could address the research in a suitable manner without leaving any gaps (Jongbo 2014: 88; Asenahabi 2019). The research questions are critical in any research design, because they are a fundamental component that connects the other components of the research study (Maxwell 2013; Trochim *et al.* 2015: 219).

4.5.4 Rationale for choosing quantitative research design.

The empirical study composition is quantitative by nature. Strong emphasis is placed by quantitative research on using formalised, standard questions and predetermined response options in a questionnaire or survey, when administered to large numbers of respondents (Hair, Bush and Ortinau 2000). As a quantitative study, a questionnaire, numerical measurements and statistical analyses of measurements were used to examine the social phenomenon being investigated (Hair *et al.* 2000; Lancaster 2005).

The empirical research was thus conducted through a self-administered or fieldworker-assisted questionnaire to SMME entrepreneurs in KZN; therefore, in the case of this study, a quantitative research design was adopted, as relationships were examined among variables, which are social media, SMME survival and growth and the Covid-19 crisis. These variables were intended to be measured using a questionnaire and analysed statistically to investigate the critical factors influencing the use of social media as a driver for SMME survival and growth in rural KZN during the Covid-19 crisis. This implies the study was extremely structured, deductive and quantitative, since it paid attention to scientific ideologies, and assessed the relationships between variables, in a structured way. This allowed the researcher to confirm or reject the formulated hypotheses, where it tested the theory through a structured questionnaire (Saunders *et al*. 2009: 113; Saunders *et al*. 2012).

Williams (2021) concurred with the above researchers, emphasising the quantitative method is a key method with the ability to form hypotheses and cater for deductive reasoning in a study to test and accept or reject the hypotheses. This method was also considered most suitable to explore the large sample size of 374 rural SMMEs in KZN, which was deemed necessary to establish findings that are valid; it would have been difficult to interview such a large number of rural SMME owners and managers within a short space of time.

The quantitative method allowed this study to test relationships between the study variables and provided statistical tests, which prove study hypotheses. However, using a research method such as a qualitative method would not have been suitable for this study, because of its inability to test relationships between the study variables. In addition, using a quantitative method was feasible for the sample size of the study, while it was also cost effective and not time consuming. Based on the nature of the quantitative method that has a rationale and objective, which is scientific in nature (McLeod 2017), this method was identified as best suitable for the study, because it assisted and guided in addressing the research questions and proved suitable to achieve the study objectives.

4.6 POPULATION OF THE STUDY

Sekaran and Bougie (2009: 267), Arlene (2005: 82) and Babbie (2017: 202) define a population in terms of elements, geographical boundaries, and time. Most studies cannot include all elements of the population of interest; therefore, a sampling frame needs to be identified, which means the target population is a set of units to be studied. This study intends to investigate the critical factors influencing the use of social media as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth in rural KZN during the Covid-19 crisis, and to develop and propose a social media model as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth during similar situations. According to Msimango-Galawe *et al.* (2020), SMMEs from KZN are one of the highest contributors of full- and part-time job losses across nine provinces, due to the outbreak and spread of the Covid-19 pandemic.

This SMME problem in KZN would have necessitated the use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis, in order for them to survive and grow in the turbulent environment that emanated from the Covid-19 crisis. Nevertheless, not much research has been undertaken concerning the use of social media as a driving tool, in relation to accomplishing survival and growth of SMME during Covid-19 in developing countries, with special reference to rural KZN in SA. The study, therefore, seeks to fill the knowledge gap through developing and proposing a social media model as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth in rural KZN.

The Provincial Treasury (2017) pointed out the province of KZN is the second largest province in SA in terms of population and economic outputs. The province is second after Gauteng, with the eThekwini Municipality as one of the major metropolitan municipalities. It is considered the economic hub of the KZN Province with a contribution greater than 60 percent to the province’s economic output (COGTA 2018). Other district municipalities that are predominantly rural are Amajuba, Harry Gwala, iLembe, and King

Cetshwayo, as well as uGu, uMgungundlovu, uMkhanyakude, and uMzinyathi, in addition to uThukela and Zululand (KZN PPC 2012; Zhou and Gumbo 2021). The province contributes 16.5 percent to the National Gross Value Added (GVA) and for 17 years, from 1995, the KZN province contributed more than 16 percent to national GDP (Zhou and Gumbo 2021). The municipalities in KZN are depicted in Figure 4.2 below:

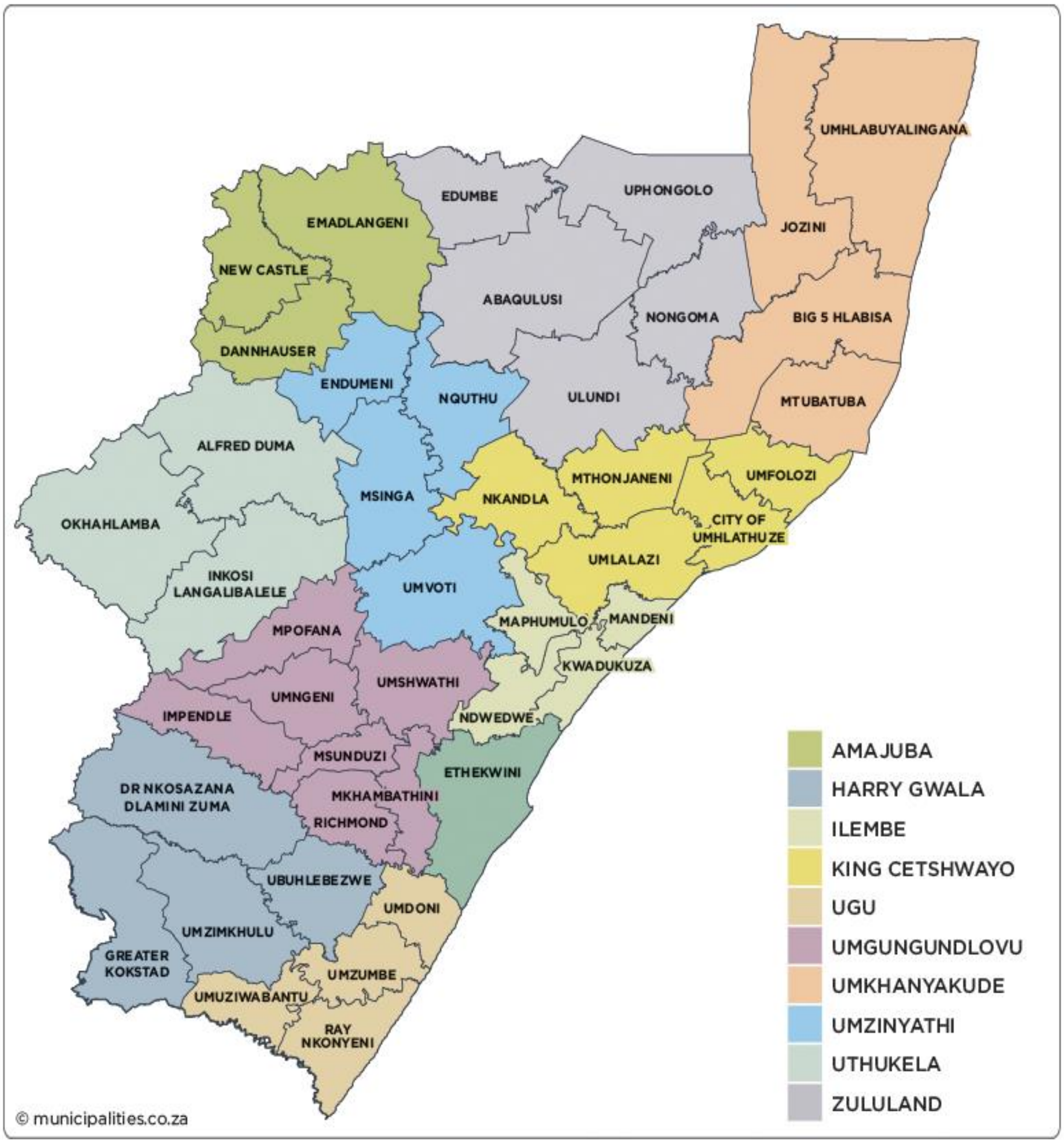


Figure 4.3: KwaZulu-Natal Province municipalities

Source: South African Municipalities (2018)

The target and study population comprised all SMMEs in four municipalities of the KZN Province, with special reference to SMMEs in rural KZN , located at the **Amajuba District Municipality** (which comprises Newcastle Local Municipality, Amajuba Local Municipality and Dannhauser Local Municipality); **Zululand District Municipality** (comprises Ulundi Local Municipality, AbaQulusi Local Municipality, eDumbe Local Municipality, Nongoma Local Municipality, uPhongolo Local Municipality); **King Cetshwayo District Municipality** (which comprises uMlalazi Local Municipality, Umfolozi Local Municipality, Mthonjaneni Local Municipality, City of uMhlathuze Local Municipality) and **uMzinyathi District Municipality** (which comprises Nquthu Local Municipality , Endumeni Local Municipality, uMsinga Local Municipality, uMvoti Local Municipality).

These four districts of KZN Province were chosen because some of the districts are regarded as rural district municipalities, with rural SMMEs therefore operational in these KZN areas. These municipalities differ in terms of the size; number of registered SMMEs; number of employees; years of existence of the firms; along with income and ownership.

4.6.1 Description of the population

According to the StatsSA Quarterly Labour Force Survey (2020), there are 166 331 SMMEs in the KZN Metro and 247 740 SMMEs in the KZN non-Metros, which amount to 414 070 SMMEs in KZN.

4.7 SAMPLE SIZE

A sample size is the actual number of participants that will take part in the research, with participants selected from the target population (Skovdal & Cornish 2015). The sample size affects the quality of data generalisation. When the sample size is small, it negatively affects the data obtained, as it may not be representative. This implies the larger the sample size, the better researchers can generalise findings to the population (Creswell *et al.* 2007; Saunders *et al.* 2009). According to the StatsSA, Quarterly Labour Force Survey (2020), there are 414 070 SMMEs in the province of KZN. Ajay and Micah (2014) and Remler and Van Ryzin (2015) state the sample size can be calculated by the following formula**:**

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 pq}{d^2}$$

whereby, when the proportion of the population (total number SMMEs in the KZN province 414 070) is unknown, the researcher may use $p = 0.5$ which assumes maximum heterogeneity (i.e. a 50/50 split) and $q = 1-p$. The degree of precision (d) is the margin of error that is acceptable. Setting $d = 0.02$, for example would give a margin of error of plus or minus two percent, in which an approximate 95 percent confidence level is preferred (Saunders *et al*. 2009). Hence, to determine the exact sample size, the above formula is used. The sample size for this study would thus be n = 0.9604/0025 = 384 1600, that is, the sample size is equal to 384 KZN SMMEs.

4.8 SAMPLING STRATEGIES

Vears and Gillam (2022) explain sampling is the method of selecting a subset of the target population for the study. Saunders *et al.* (2012) state sampling techniques comprise probability or representative sampling and non-probability or judgemental sampling (Stochemer 2019: 57). Probability sampling is a scientific technique that ensures each target population member has an equal opportunity to be chosen for the sample (Sileyew 2019; Alvi 2016). On the one hand, techniques such as simple random, systematic, stratified, and cluster sampling are included. Non-probability sampling, on the other hand, consists of the discretion by the researcher in selecting participants and includes convenience, quota, snowball, and purposive, as well as maximum variation sampling (Snyder 2019).

Wagner, Kawulich and Garner (2012) highlighted it can be challenging to make use of probability sampling, whereas non-probability sampling is best suited to quantitative research, while it is also convenient for survey strategy. Against this background, the study adopted non-probability convenience sampling and quota sampling. Convenience sampling was found easy to use in this study, because the researcher used it to find any respondent in any available point in time that were willing to participate in the study, through completing a closed ended questionnaire (Wagner *et al*. 2012). This sampling technique catered for the large number of SMME owners and managers in rural KZN.

4.9 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

According to Creswell (2019), a research instrument is regarded as a tool used for collecting, measuring, and analysing data regarding the study objectives, where a questionnaire is commonly used, comprised of a series of questions designed to gather information from respondents. Data collection instruments most suited to the research study should be used (Saunders *et al.* 2019; Creswell 2019). A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire with closed-ended questions was utilised to collect the data from the targeted population. In addition, Tustin, Martins and Van Wyk (2005) and Matthews and Ross (2010) state a questionnaire is regarded as a structured sequence of questions, formulated to gather facts and opinions and provides the means for recoding the data.

A review of literature was used to develop the questionnaire, aligned to the research objectives of the study. A quantitative research method was selected as the most suited technique to test the identified variables for the study. Participants were asked the same questions and had a set of answers they could choose from in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire is regarded as the heart of research study, since it addresses the fundamentals of the study, such as dealing with the study aim and the research objectives, with the intention to provide answers to the research questions (Price, Jhangiani and Chiang 2015; Kabir 2016). The questionnaire is used to collect primary data, in terms of the requirements of research study, through mail, over the telephone, in person or by a self-administered questionnaire (Neelankavil 2015; Ajayi 2017: 2).

The questionnaire was thus utilised in correlation with the research method adopted in this study and because of its inherent capability to cater for large sample sizes that can yield responses generally easy to tabularise, while it is also easy to analyse the data (Patten 2017; Quad 2016).

4.9.1 Questionnaire design and construction

A questionnaire is viewed by researchers as a self-completion survey instrument, with the purpose of collecting data on social phenomena within the parameters of the research of the population of interest (Brace 2018; Neuman 2014). In addition, Quelhas *et al*. (2011) emphasised designing a questionnaire is not easy and straightforward but a challenging task. However, questionnaire design is rooted in the research objectives and aim of the study, with the use of reviewed literature, aimed to provide answers to the research questions and address the identified problem statement for the research study (Boparai, Singh and Kathuria 2018: 210).

Construction of a questionnaire not aligned with the research aim, research objectives and questions of the study, may result in bias, incorrect interpretation of results and the study could lose its value or intended outcome. This infers the researcher should design a questionnaire that is clear, valid and reliable, and based on the study aim and research objectives (Jenn 2006; Mathers, Fox and Hunn 2009). The construction process of the research questionnaire is complicated, which requires the researcher to consider variables aligned with the study hypotheses. Hence, the onus is on the researcher to ensure the questionnaire is constructed in a manner that is clear and easily understood by research study participants (Kazi and Khalid 2012; Jain, Dubey and Jain 2016). Considering the above, the questionnaire of this study was drafted in accordance with the research aim, objectives and study hypotheses, through closed-ended questions and a 5-point Likert scale response range (Nemoto and Beglar 2014; Joshi *et al.* 2015).

The 5-point Likert scale questionnaire, therefore, collected the quantitative data in accordance with the research objectives with the purpose to address the study hypotheses. Saunders *et al.* (2012: 436) and Remler and Van Ryzin (2015) suggested a 5-point Likert–type scale has an ordinal level of measurement and possesses a ranking order. The ranking order in this study is categorised using five response categories, from (for example),1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3= neutral, 4=agree to 5=strongly agree. This study adopted this level of measurement and ranking order.

The questionnaire construction should follow sequential phases and requires intensive planning and development to ensure it is simply and easily understood by the target population of the study. In this case, the target population comprised rural SMME owners and managers in KZN. The questionnaire construction phases followed in designing the closed-ended questionnaire are illustrated in Figure 4.4 below.

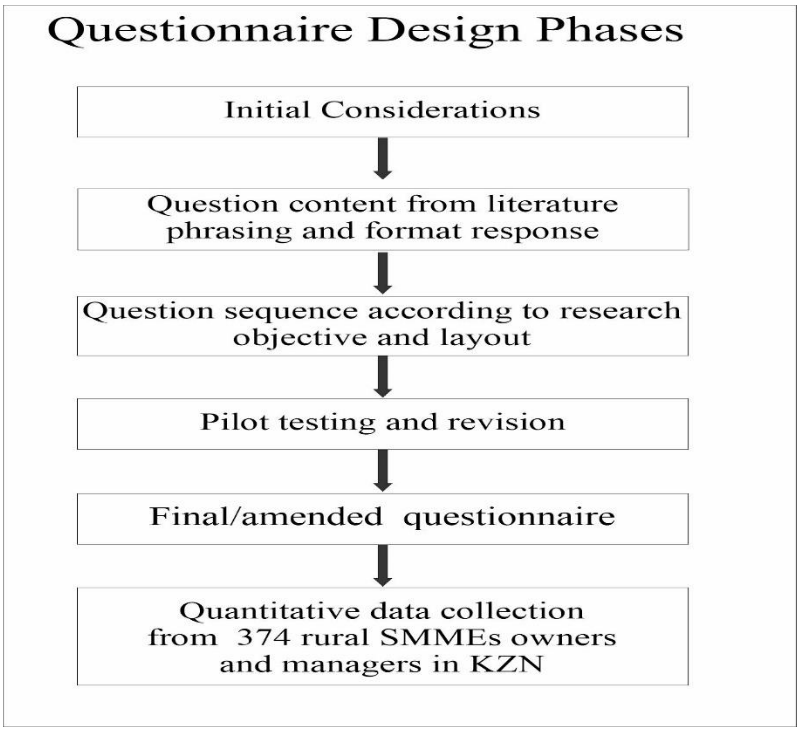


Figure 4.4: Questionnaire construction phases for questionnaire of the study

Researcher own analysis (2023) adapted from Roopa and Rani (2012)

The formulation of the questionnaire was achieved through a review of the literature to investigate the critical factors, shown to affect the use of social media and its ability to influence rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. Both internal and external environmental factors were considered and dealt with in this research study. A closed-ended questionnaire was used as research instrument, with questions in line with the literature review, study aim and objectives. The role of the questionnaire in this study is depicted in Figure 4.5 below.

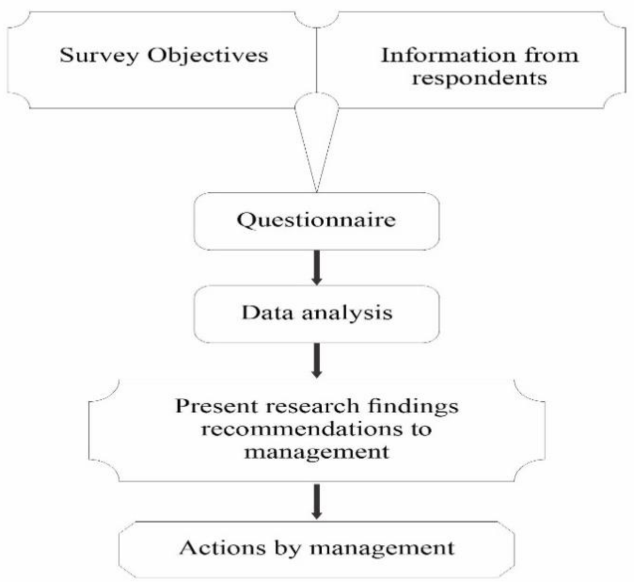


Figure 4.5: Role of the designed questionnaire in this study

Source: Tustin et al. (2005: 385)

The questionnaire was classified into two categories, namely sections A and B.

Section A shows the demographical information of respondents. This section was designed to understand the type of population surveyed and to assist the researcher to draw statistical inferences to understand and answer the hypotheses and study objectives. For example, the section assisted and guided the researcher to establish whether the years of existence in business was understood by respondents to influence rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

Section B focussed on gaining a comprehensive understanding regarding the variables of the research study. This section was derived from the research aim, research objectives, research questions and literature review for the purpose of supporting the research study. The main aim of this section was to investigate the critical factors influencing the use of social media drive by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis for their survival and growth. Additionally, this section permitted the researcher to determine the challenges faced by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis and find strategies to counteract the challenges rural SMMEs in KZN faced. This section offered respondents a range of responses to choose from, based on a 5-point Likert-scale, from strongly disagree, disagree, and neutral, to agree and strongly agree. A sample of the questionnaire is outlined below.

4.9.2 Sample of designed questionnaire

I hereby kindly request that you complete the questionnaire that is directed to the rural SMMEs owners and managers. The questionnaire is divided into Sections A and B

SECTION A: Biographical information

Please place a cross (X) in the appropriate box to reflect your answer on the questionnaire, which is divided into two sections (Sections A and B):

1. Please indicate your position in a business

SMMEs Owner	1
SMMEs Manager	2
If other, please specify: ______________________	3

2. Please indicate the number of years the business has been in existence

0 - 4 years	1
5 - 8 years	2
9 - 12 years	3
13 - 16 years	4
More than 16 years, please specify: ____________________	5

3. Please indicate your gender?

Male	1
Female	2

4. Please indicate your age group

18 -24	1
25-31	2
32-38	3
39-48	4

49 and more Please specify: ________________________	5

Section B: **The critical factors influencing the use of social media by rural SMMEs for survival and growth during Covid -19 crisis.**

The statements in the questionnaire comprise five category ratings to indicate the extent in which you agree or disagree to these statements. Please indicate your response for each question by putting **X** over the most appropriate answer.

Rating Scale

1= Strongly disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4= Agree 5= Strongly agree

13.The factors influencing the use of social media for rural SMMEs survival and growth during Covid - 19 crises

No	Statement	Rating Scale				
		1	2	3	4	5
13.1	Lack of technical skills affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis					
13.2	Lack of social media awareness affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis.					
13.3	Lack of managerial competencies affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis.					

14.The extent in which the rural SMMEs use social media drive for survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis

No	Statement	Rating Scale				
		1	2	3	4	5
14.1	Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to increase dominance in the market during Covid-19 crisis.					

14.2	Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to market their products during Covid-19 crisis.					

15.The perception of rural SMMEs owners and managers on the use of social media during Covid-19 crisis

No	Statement	Rating Scale				
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
15.1	Rural SMMEs perceived social media to be useful during Covid-19 crisis.					
15.2	Rural SMMEs perceived social media to be easy to use during Covid-19 crisis.					

16. The impact of Covid-19 crisis on rural SMMEs use of social media for their survival and growth

No	**Statement**	**Rating Scale**				
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
16.1	Covid-19 crisis influence rural SMMEs to use social media to minimise cost of distribution of products.					
16.2	Covid-19 crisis influence rural SMMEs to use social media to improve demand for their products and services.					

17. The social media marketing strategies for rural SMMEs survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis

No	Statement	**Rating Scale**				
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
17.1	Rural SMMEs used social media to sell products to customers during Covid-19 crisis					
17.2	Rural SMMEs used social media to create branding during Covid-19 crisis					

18. The use of social media as a strategy for rural SMMEs survival and growth during future pandemics

No	Statement	**Rating Scale**				
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
18.1	Rural SMMEs can use social media to overcome customer pressure during a pandemic					

18.2	Rural SMMEs can use social media to meet market demand during a pandemic					

4.10 DISSEMINATION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE / QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTION METHOD

This research study was quantitative and deductive in nature and the survey strategy was chosen to collect a large volume of data in a cost-effective manner, allowing for a rapid turnaround in data collection. The questionnaire, in this study, will be disseminated in person (Saunders *et al*. 2009; Saunders *et al.* 2012; Creswell 2009) to the selected rural SMME owners and managers.

Considering the above, one of the critical factors in collection of quantitative data is to follow the correct procedures and thus avoid administrative errors, which could mislead data administration. The correct method for data collection in this study was to administer the questionnaires by hand, distributing these to rural SMME owners and managers, which allowed clarifying any challenges experienced in completing the questionnaire (Dornyei and Taguchi 2010). This process was considered effective and efficient, since some rural targeted participants struggled to understand English due to their level of education. Even with the questionnaire translated into IsiZulu, some rural SMME owners did not understand the business concepts translated into IsiZulu. This required the researcher to clarify certain issues in order for them to complete the questionnaire. This process was effective and efficient, but also time-consuming. As a result, the entire process of questionnaire completion took three months, instead of two, as per the initial timeframe set.

The followed process was in line with that recommended by Boynton (2004: 1372) and Verma *et al*. (2021), who pointed out the most suitable approach for a researcher to embark on person-to-person distribution to targeted participants in order to obtain appropriate results and responses. In the case where questions are raised concerning any questions, the researcher is thus able to provide assistance immediately. This was the case in this study, with all questions raised by participants personally addressed by the researcher. This method was very demanding of the researcher in terms of financial cost due to the extent of travelling needed. However, this method was very effective and efficient on the side of targeted participants and they voluntarily agreed to participate in the research study. In turn, this method motivated the rural SMME owners and managers to complete the questionnaire, because all issues raised were attended to immediately by the researcher.

4.11 ADMINISTRATION OF CLOSED-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE

A covering letter accompanied the questionnaire to explain the need for the data, providing participants with information regarding the survey. The covering letter explained the research project clearly and intended to motivate participant interest in taking part in the research study. It contained requirements such as a description of the project; it stated why the participants should participate in the research study (Tustin *et al*. 2005: 187; Saunders *et al*. 2012).

4.12 PILOT TESTING OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Remler and Van Ryzin (2015) highlight that the survey questions are expected to meet the criteria of content, as well as cognitive and usability standards. The researcher utilised review and subject matter experts to assess whether the questions met content, cognitive and usability standards and review the questions to evaluate whether the content was suitable to measure what it was supposed to measure (Remler and Van Ryzin 2015).

Considering the above, a pilot study was conducted in this research study. De Vos *et al.* (2005) stated a pilot study is a mini study prior to the main research project, to ascertain whether the methodology sampling and analysis are suitable for the study. Furthermore, the pilot study generally guides the researcher in refining the research questions, ensuring they are in line with the study aim and objectives, with the purpose of promoting methodological correctness. This could assist the researcher to estimate the time and required resources to execute and complete the study (Ismail, Kinchin and Edwards 2018; Malmqvist *et al.* 2019). Therefore, the pilot study could assist and guide the researcher to remove any ambiguous questions in the questionnaire (Colton and Covert 2007; Denscombe 2014; Crossman 2019).

A total of 10 SMME owners / managers were given the structured questionnaire as a pilot study to test the feasibility of the study. Their feedback was used to amend the questionnaire, to improve and refine the questions. The general comment received from the pilot study participants was for the questionnaire to be translated into IsiZulu, because this study would be conducted in rural KZN. As a result of this common comment, the questionnaire was converted into IsiZulu, in order to cater for those participants who were not well-versed in English. Pilot study participants did not take part in the main study (Grove, Gray and Burns 2015). but were part of the 384 identified SMMEs. Hence, it can be concluded the sample size of the main study comprised 374 rural SMME owners and managers in KZN.

4.13 QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

4.13.1 Overview of quantitative data analysis

Quantitative data analysis is a process whereby data are managed in a methodical manner, through collecting and assessing measurable and confirmable data. It contains a statistical mechanism of analysing quantitative data (Creswell 2007; 2014). The main role of the researcher in this study was to quantify the hypothetic situation under study. It is usually carried out by scholars well skilled in using the statistical techniques of quantitative analysis with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software (Rahman & Muktadir 2021). In using statistical analysis, the researcher could derive the benefits of illustrating observations, and methodologically categorise and summarise the collected data (Rahman & Muktadir 2021).

This process is referred to as descriptive statistics. In addition, it enhances the chances for a researcher to comprehend and conclude a sample of a narrow group, studied in an identified manner. In this study, this process provided the researcher the opportunity to form conclusions by means of deductive reasoning.

In summation, this study adopted a quantitative research design and was descriptive in nature, with a structured questionnaire used to collect data from SMME owners and managers in rural KZN, whereby the data were collected in a large quantity. The study then used a deductive approach to test the theory and hypotheses. Therefore, the processes, techniques and findings and conclusions of this study were quantified as inferential statistics.

4.13.2 Statistical techniques for quantitative data analysis

The statistical techniques used in this research study included descriptive statistics, test of reliability, correlation analysis, and inferential statistics, as well as the Chi-square test and factor analysis. These techniques are described in this chapter, and the results examined in Chapter 5.

4.13.2.1 Frequency analysis

Frequency analysis was used in this research study to identify the associated number of times each respondent acknowledged a specific statement and to assess coding of data, in order to be interpreted in a pictorial / graphical manner (Cherry 2021; Ho 2013; Fallon 2016). In this case, frequency analysis provided a clear view of the number of cases that fall within the parameters of different response categories, set in the questionnaire of this research study, which also provided guidance for showing the complete results of the research study (Brown, Suter and Churchill 2018; Shreffler and Huecker 2022). This means categorisation of the data in frequency analysis assisted the process of quantifying for statistical analysis in this study (Ali 2021).

4.13.2.2 Descriptive analysis

This type of analysis provides an in-depth explanation of the nature of the phenomenon under investigation. Descriptive analysis summarises large information of the organisations by comparing variables with inferential statistics tests. Reporting the best suitable descriptive statistics is thus critical, since this process lessens the chances of presenting ambiguous results in the research study (Kaur, Stoltzfus and Yellapu 2018; Krishnaswami and Satyaprasad 2010: 161).

In this research study, descriptive statistics were utilised for two key purposes. First, they were used to provide a summary of the data set. Second, they were used to assist the study to provide a numerical description of different variables of interest (Mishra *et al.* 2019: 72; McNabb 2008: 153).

4.13.2.3 Test for reliability

In research, the term reliability refers to a study's consistency or measuring test (Dudovskiy 2018). When research findings can be replicated consistently, they are reliable, with a correlation coefficient used to assess the degree of reliability. The Cronbach's alpha test is one of the measures used to determine the scale of reliability and internal consistency, which indicates how closely a set of items are when associated as a group, to indicate that a Cronbach Alpha was fit for purpose in the study (Taber 2018).

Researchers such as Bhattacharjee (2012) and Alzeban (2015) confirmed the use of Cronbach's reliability alpha in their research to estimate the internal consistency of the study instruments. This study, therefore, used Cronbach's alpha to confirm reliability and internal consistency.

4.13.2.4 Inferential statistics and Chi-square test

The inferential statistics in the research study are utilised to make assumptions, including inferences, regarding a population, through using the z-test and t-test, in association with population parameters or characteristics (Krishnaswami and Satyaprasad 2010: 161). This implies these tests allow a researcher to make specific assumptions regarding the estimates of population characteristics, or parameters.

However, the Chi-square (X^2) is a test that does not allow any use of population parameters and the normal distribution underlying the research study (Jackson 2012: 190; Abebe 2019). The Chi-square (X^2) test purpose is to ascertain any existing relationship between two or more variables in contingency tabled rows and columns (Foster 2001: 156; Rana and Singhal 2015). Therefore, the test intended to compare the number of cases, in order to establish any discrepancies with regard to the association between the variables that form the table (Foster 2001: 156; Hayes 2021).

In this study, the researcher used the Chi-square (X^2) test to determine the goodness of fit and test the relationships between the variables (Gravetter and Wallnau 2009; Onchiri 2013: 1235). The research objectives of the study assisted and guided the testing of the study variables, with the tests in utilised to assist and guide in ascertaining and proving the study hypotheses. Moreover, the Chi-Square test in this study was conducted because the sample data comprised numerical scores, which made it easier to determine various relationships between the tested variables.

4.13.2.5 Correlation analysis

Statistical correlation analysis in research is used to measure the degree of correlation between or amongst the variables of the quantitative research study. The study intends to describe results of the correlation tests in order to permit the researcher to establish which variables interrelate and what sort of association is evident in the study (CIRT 2019; Nickolas 2021; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2003). In the context of this study, +5 and-5 represented the strength of the relationship between two classified, quantifiable variables (Li 2013: 3325; Yang *et al.* 2019). For the purpose of this study, correlations were used for the identification of critical factors influencing the use of social media by SMMEs in rural KZN for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

4.13.2.6 Factor analysis

The collected data will be analysed using descriptive and interferential statistics in order test theory and formulated hypotheses (Creswell 2009:207-209). The author highlights the research should use factor analysis and research study should allow the process of reliability checks for the internal consistency of the scales through Cronbach's alpha statistic (Creswell 2009). This was applicable and adopted in this study, as Saunders *et al.* (2012) pointed out some researchers use multiple regression, while others utilise other multivariate methods such as factor analysis, which group many variables into smaller groups of variables.

Remler and Van Ryzin (2015) highlight two types of factor analysis, namely, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). On the one hand, EFA is mainly used to reveal complicated relationships by searching the dataset and testing predictions. On the other hand, CFA is used to verify hypotheses and develop path analysis diagrams to represent factors and variables (Yong and Pearce 2013). Tabachnick and Fidell (2007, cited in Yong & Pearce 2013: 81) noted the correlation 'r' must always be 0.40 or more, since anything lower will lead to an unacceptable relationship between the variables. In this study, correlations below 0.40 were eliminated to enhance the relationship between the variables.

The questionnaire used in this study was designed for ease of completion by the participants, who were regarded as well-versed in the use of social media by KZN rural SMMEs, for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. After piloting the questionnaire to determine the validity of the responses, the five-point Likert scale questionnaire was amended and SPSS software (version 27.0) was utilised to produce the preliminary descriptive statistics and generate inferential statistics, correlation and factor analysis (Sekaran 2003; Dimi, Padia, & Maroun 2014:).

4.14 RELIABILITY

Reliability is regarded as the consistency, over time, where a questionnaire produces the same results in the same situation, when administered twice over a short period such as a few days or a week (Gerrish and Lathlean 2015: 415). According to Saunders *et al.* (2009), there are four threats to reliability, which are subject or participant error, subject or participant bias, observer error and observer bias. To estimate the reliability of the data, Cronbach's alpha is used to calculate for the main constructs in the questionnaire in order to find internal consistency (Nirmala, Edison and Suni 2011; Eldridge 2020).

A high reliability score indicates a strong relationship between the items on the test and a reliability estimate at or above 0.70 can be accepted for research purposes (Mohamed *et al.* 2015: 166). Therefore, it is important to have high levels of reliability in quantitative research, as it evaluates the solidity and correctness of the collected results, thus increasing the opportunity to make correct decisions (Haradhan 2017). In case of this study, to improve reliability of the instrument, internal consistency was measured using Cronbach's coefficient alpha at 0.70. Internal consistency estimates reliability by grouping questions in a questionnaire that measure the same concept (Nirmala *et al.* 2011: 122). A high degree of internal consistency indicates that items meant to assess the same construct yield similar scores.

Cronbach‘s Alpha is reliability which seeks to find out how the items in a groups are positively correlated to each other (Sekaran and Bougie 2009: 324). In case of this study, Cronbach‘s Alpha was utilised to test the reliability of the data in the study (Eldridge 2020). Accordingly, to ascertain the reliability and validity of the quantitative data, the descriptive techniques and factor analysis was used. In addition, the Kaizer-Meyer- Olkin Test of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was used in this study (Remler and Van Ryzin 2015). It was important that a reliability test was done for this study, because it enabled the researcher to have confidence the measure taken was close to the true measure (Goodwin 2010: 134). All data are required to demonstrate reliability for usefulness (Vannest, Davis and Parker 2013: 96).

4.15 VALIDITY

Validity has to do with the process whether the research is measuring what it is supposed to be measured (Middleton 2019). Additionally, testing the validity of measure includes several theoretical and empirical tasks associated with three types of reliability, namely, content, criterion, and construct validity (Wagner *et al.* 2012; Blanche, Durrheim and Painter 2006; Salkind 2014: 174-175). Saunders *et al*. (2012) stated content validity is addressed by using a panel of individuals to evaluate the questionnaire questions, with the intention of attending the research questions, with this approach adopted in the case of this study. According to Wagner *et al*. (2012) and Msweli (2015) five types of validity are considered in questionnaire construction, discussed as follows:

4.15.1 Construct validity

Construct validity refers to the degree to which an instrument measures the characteristic or theoretical concept that it is designed to measure. It uses a hypothetical construct for comparison rather than having a comparison criterion. Construct validity measured what is planned to be measured and it accurately performed functions that are supposed to be performed. Therefore, the structured questionnaire used was simple and easy to comprehend to avoid errors. It measured the internal buildup of an instrument and the concepts that were supposed to be measured (Ali 2021). The questions in the questionnaire must measure what they are supposed to measure and thus, the questionnaire must be constructed in a way whereby it provides a measure of the investigated concept that is accurate (Wong, Ong, & Kuek 2012; Anderson & Sellbom 2015).

In the context of construct validity, studies need to have a specific theory as a foundation, permitting the constructed inferences that need to make an addition to that theory's body (Schimmack 2010; Anderson & Sellbom 2015). For example, this study researches rural SMME survival and growth, therefore, it must contribute to survival-based and growth theories for rural SMME survival and growth during crises, such as the Covid-19 crisis.

4.15.2 Content validity

Content validity is a significant dimension of validity measurement. It checks the normality between the manifested variable and the latent content. Moreover, content validity is also determined by theory (Ali 2021). According to Msweli (2015), content validity is regarded as the possibility of a measure inadequately capturing the field being measured Validity in this study was established when the items used for measurement were theoretically reliable, according to the description of a variable.

4.15.3 Criterion–related validity

Criterion validity relates to theory. When a researcher registers a measurement, the researcher theoretically connects it with other measures or attempts to measure possible impacts (Ali 2021). In addition, criterion validity assesses whether a certain set of abilities is exhibited by the items of a questionnaire. This implies. in order to permit measurement of a questionnaire's criterion validity; the questionnaire must be standardised against itself (Larsson *et al.* 2019; Mishra & Allen 2023).

4.15.4 Face validity

The degree to which responses to questions accurately represent the examined issues is known as face validity (Mishra *et al.* 2023). Pre-testing of the survey questionnaire was done through selecting 10 participants, which were rural SMME owners and managers, to identify possible weaknesses, ambiguity and invalidity of questions. Czajkowski, Giergiczny, and Greene (2014) assert pre-testing validates the questionnaire and in this study, questionnaire validity was improved once piloted, as it was amended based on the 10 participants' feedback.

4.15.5 Predictive validity

To establish predictive validity, the measure to which it "predicts future events that are logically related to the construct" is determined (Blanche *et al.* 2006 :148). In the context of this study, this validity type was used in Section B of the questionnaire, 15: The perception of rural SMME owners and managers on the use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

4.16 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Tustin *et al*. (2005: 46) and Matthews and Ross (2010: 73-78) maintain researchers have certain general obligations to study participants. The study will adhere to these ethical considerations and obligations to ensure it follows clearly laid down procedures of ethics for the research process. The study will, therefore, ensure permission is obtained; participants have given informed consent; confidentiality and anonymity are ensured; no harm comes to participants; participants should not be deceived. Hence, this study adopted these obligations (Saunders *et al.* 2012).

The researcher, in addition, acquired ethical approval from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee at the DUT. The covering letter of information that accompanied the structured questionnaire outlines the covered aspects, such as the study purpose; the procedures and confidentiality of participants; and identification of the benefit in participating (Creswell 2009). The researcher provided assurance that participation and data obtained will be treated confidentially and would never be used for any purpose other than this research study.

4.16.1 Anonymity and confidentiality

In the case of this study, anonymity is critical, and study participants will not be requested to indicate their names during the process of questionnaire completion. Mouton (2014) and Pillay (2014) posit participant names should remain unknown in order to maintain their confidentiality. Participation is voluntary and participants can withdraw at any time without providing a reason. Additionally, Fleming and Zegwaard (2018: 211) suggest participant information should be kept anonymous and confidential, while also offering assurance their names are protected. This includes avoiding use of “self-identifying statements and information”. This implies participants were protected from possible harm in this study.

4.16.2 Ensuring no harm comes to participants.

The organisers have the obligation of safeguarding the well-being of all participants, including protection against potential harm, whether of a psychological or physical kind. In order to safeguard participants’ psychological well-being, strict measures were used to ensure confidentiality during the entire study process (Apuke 2017: 45).

4.16.3 Ensuring Permission

Prior to commencing the research, it is essential to obtain authorisation from the relevant government bodies (Apuke 2017: 45). Individuals who express a willingness to discontinue their participation were not forced to continue with the study. Participants were requested to sign a permission form as a means of indicating their willingness to participate in the research. In order to conduct a study, authorisation should be explicitly obtained and granted (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2003, 2019). The proposal was presented to the DUT Research Ethics Committee for approval and authorisation.

4.16.4 Ensuring participants have provided informed consent.

Providing sufficient information to participants is considered a fundamental principle in the realm of research ethics. The primary objective of obtaining permission from participants, is to guarantee these individuals participating in research may do so in a voluntary manner and with a comprehensive understanding of the potential dangers and advantages associated with their involvement (Apuke 2017).

In adherence to ethical imperatives, the study diligently secured informed consent from all participants (Booth 2020). A comprehensive and comprehensible account of the research objectives, methods, and potential ramifications was conveyed, empowering participants to make informed decisions. Participation was strictly voluntary, with the prerogative to withdraw without any repercussions. To further ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were utilised, and any sensitive data remained anonymous to shield identities. The research participants were provided with comprehensive information on the nature of the research and the implications of their participation in the study, signing an informed consent form to indicate this.

4.17 DATA STORAGE AND PROTECTION

Data protection is based on the idea that information should be always kept safe and accessible (Flick 2015). Data may be safeguarded through storage technologies such as disc, tape, or cloud backup by storing copies of the data for later use (Saunders *et al.* 2016). According to Blomzon *et al*. (2019, data storage refers to the volume and kind of data saved, the security of data against loss or alteration, and the required period for which a researcher must retain study data. In addition, O'Toole *et al.* (2018) emphasised data storage and protection is one of the most significant aspects in a research study in order to respect the privacy of the research subjects, adhere to protocol and requirement compliance, because it can result in serious consequences when a researcher may unintentionally disclose sensitive identified information that may cause vulnerability to the institution of the research study, such as theft, institutional reputation, financial loss, and emotional embarrassment, as well as any other harm.

In this study, data were kept in a secured and undisclosed area to unauthorised persons. It was locked in a filing cabinet in a secure office, with password-protected and encrypted storage. The life span of the data collected is five years and remains the property of the DUT.

4.18 ELIMINATION AND TREATMENT OF BIAS

According to Trnka and Smelik (2020), elimination of bias is described as the process whereby any instances that surface may implicate the provided results or conclusions, which vary systematically from the reality or that may affect or contaminate the entire spectrum of the research study, such as the design, analysis, interpretation, and reporting. In this study, a structured questionnaire was enlisted in a simple format and dialect to be easily understood by all participants, with both genders represented in the research study.

4.19 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter illustrated the presentation and rationale for using the selected research methods in executing this research study. Positivism was used to determine the research methods and strategies to collect data for the study, which also provided a suitable research design for this research. Positivism was adopted for this research study, because it was for the use of quantitative research and advocated for the formulation of hypotheses and deductive reasoning in the research study.

The quantitative research design for this study was highlighted, outlining the scientific methods used, along with the structured questionnaire. This study used a closed-ended questionnaire to allow rural SMME owner/manager respondents, to choose options appropriate to them. The chapter further emphasised the importance of ethical requirements and explained how these requirements had been fulfilled, as stipulated by the university's ethical requirements. The procedures employed in the quantitative collection processes used to gather data were also discussed. In the process, SPSS (version 27.0) was used to analyse the quantitative study data. The detailed results are expanded in Chapter 5, which reflects the presentation of results, interpretation and discussion of findings and Chapter 6, which outlines the conclusions and recommendations of this study.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this quantitative study was to investigate the critical factors impacting the use of social media as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth in rural KZN, during the Covid-19 crisis, and to develop and propose a social media model as a driving tool for rural SMME survival and growth in KZN during the Covid-19 crisis as well as during future pandemics. Chapter four dealt with the methodology used to elucidate the research questions designed in chapter one.

This chapter presents the results, discussions and interpretation of findings for the detailed quantitative analysis, relating to a survey questionnaire on the use of social media by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crises, conducted with 374 rural KZN SMME managers and owners. The closed ended questionnaire adopted a 5-point Likert scale, which ranged from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1) and was used for the quantitative data collection. The data collected from the responses were analysed with SPSS version 27.0. Primarily, demographic information and descriptive statistics are discussed. The quantitative data results are depicted through descriptive statistics, graphs, cross-tabulation tables, inferential techniques, and the use of Chi-square tests that are interpreted by p-values. The findings of the study are pronounced after the validity and reliability of the instrument were presented.

5.2 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The questionnaire for this study embraced a Likert Scale format, comprised only closed-ended questions, which intended to investigate the factors influencing SMME in rural KZN use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. A pilot study was used to determine reliability and validity of the research instrument. The closed-ended questionnaire (5-point Likert scale with the rating scale: **1= strongly disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Neutral; 4= Agree** and **5= Strongly agree)** was distributed to 10 respondents from rural KZN, who were selected from the main study to complete the closed-ended questionnaire. The 10 respondents that participated in the pilot study were excluded from the main study. The questionnaire was divided into two sections, where section A covered biographical information and section B that comprised the themes in accordance with the research study objectives. Section A, which is the biographical data, covered the following categories**:**

Section A (1-12) Bibliographical data:

1. Position in the business,
2. Number of years the business has existed,
3. Gender,
4. Age group,
5. Race,
6. Highest qualification,
7. Nature of the business,
8. Type of ownership,
9. Source of finance,
10. Reason for starting the business,
11. Business location,
12. Business scope.

Section B (13-18) of the questionnaire consisted of six themes, which are in accordance with the research objectives, as follows:

13. Factors influencing the use of social media for rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.
14.The extent to which rural SMMEs used social media drive for survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.
15.The perceptions of rural SMME owners and managers on the use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis.
16.The impact of the Covid-19 crisis on rural SMME survival and growth during these crises.
17.The social media marketing strategies for rural SMMEs survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.
18. The use of social media as a strategy for rural SMME survival and growth during future pandemics.

The following section will depict the sample data, demographic data and the main results, categorised in accordance with the research objectives that will be analysed, interpreted and discussed briefly, as follows**:**

5.3 SAMPLE DATA

The sample data of the main study are tabulated as follows**:**

Table 5.1: Administration of questionnaire for the main study

Questionnaire distributed to rural SMMEs managers and owners in KZN	Questionnaire completed by rural SMMEs managers and owners in KZN	Frequency	Percentage
374	**374**	**374**	**100%**

Table 5.1 portrays a total of 374 questionnaires were issued to respondents and all were completed, with a 100 percent completion rate thus achieved in this regard. Achievement of a 100 percent response rate signals an excellent representation of the population that was attained, permitting definite generalisations that can be realised in this research study. The response rate of this study is supported by Creswell (2014), who suggested a response rate between 35-40 percent is suitable for quantitative study. Ramshaw (2017) concurred with Creswell (2014), asserting a response rate above 25 percent is regarded as a good research study response rate. This is also supported by Sivo *et al*. (2006), who emphasised responses in line with the accepted rule of (≥70 percent), are regarded as reliable to continue with data analysis and thereafter, the presentation of findings. Thus, this response rate is referred to as a good response rate, since it depicted representative responses (Massey and Tourangeau 2013). This infers the 100 percent response rate could made conclusions acceptable to be generalised to the population of this study.

5.4 ADMINISTRATION OF COLLECTED DATA

The data collected from rural SMME owners and managers were clustered and grouped in accordance with the structured questionnaire, which was drafted according to the research objectives, whereby the literature review was instrumental in design of the questionnaire. Thereafter the data were captured in an excel spreadsheet, with coding used in this regard.

As stated above, the questionnaire adopted a 5-point Likert Scale format, which comprised only closed-ended questions, to ascertain respondents' experience regarding critical factors impacting the use of social media drive as a tool for rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. The respondents were required to select their responses based on predetermined statements under each construct, as depicted in Table 5.2 below. The relationship between the variables of the study were tested using cross-tabulations.

Moreover, a reliability test was also conducted in accordance with the sections of the closed-ended questionnaire. The variables of the study were tested by means of a Chi–square test, including a reliability test based on the closed-ended questionnaire sections.

5.5 RELIABILITY STATISTICS

The reliability statistics comprises two critical aspects, namely reliability and validity. Reliability is computed through executing several measurements on the same subject comprising a reliability coefficient of **0.70** or higher, which is regarded as acceptable (Eldridge 2020). The table below depicts the Cronbach's alpha score for the questionnaire items.

Table 5.2: Reliability Scores

		N of items	Cronbach's Alpha
B13	Factors influencing the use of social media for rural SMMEs survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis	21	0.985
B14	The extent in which the rural SMMEs use social media drive for survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis	8	0.948
B15	The perception of rural SMMEs owners and managers on the use of social media for survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis	5	0.928
B16	The impact of Covid-19 crisis on rural SMMEs use of social media for their survival and growth	4	0.878
B17	The social media marketing strategies for rural SMMEs survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis	4	0.888
B18	The use of social media as a strategy for rural SMMEs survival and growth during future pandemics	11	0.952

Table 5.2 depicts results from the reliability test conducted on all the designed questionnaire statements, which were categorised according to the research themes in line with the research aim. As shown in Table 5.2, the reliability scores of all the constructs of the questionnaire exceeded the 0.70 acceptable Cronbach's alpha value. This implies these newly calculated Cronbach's Alpha values denote a degree of acceptance, with the reliable scoring for this part of the research in totality.

5.6 FACTOR ANALYSIS

This section reflects the results obtained from quantitative data through the use of 5-point Likert scale statements of the closed-ended questionnaire. The study focused on respondent views regarding the factors impacting on the use of social media as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth in rural KZN during the Covid-19 crisis, based on six key principal variables. These are factors influencing the use of social media for rural SMME survival and growth; the extent to which rural SMMEs use social media drive for survival and growth; the perception of rural SMME owners and managers on the use of social media for survival and growth ; the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on rural SMME use of social media for their survival and growth; the social media marketing strategies for rural SMME survival and growth; and the use of social media as a strategy for rural SMME survival and growth during future pandemics.

5.6.1 KMO and Bartlett's test of Sphericity

Table 5.3: KMO and Bartlett's test of Sphericity scores

		Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity		
			Approx. Chi-Square	Df	Sig.
B13	Factors influencing the use of social media for rural SMMEs survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis	0.989	9629.259	210	0.000
B14	The extent in which the rural SMMEs use social media	0,957	2499.589	28	0.000

	drive for survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis				
B15	The perception of rural SMMEs owners, managers, and entrepreneurs on the use of social media for survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis	0.900	1406.986	10	<0.001
B16	The impact of Covid-19 crisis on rural SMMEs use of social media for their survival and growth	0.830	803.793	6	<0.001
B17	The social media marketing strategies for rural SMMEs survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis	0.838	821.315	6	<0.001
B18	The use of social media as a strategy for rural SMMEs survival and growth during future pandemics	0.965	3219.852	55	0.000

Table 5.3 depicted that all the requirements and conditions have been realised in order to permit factor analysis, which summarised the results of the KMO and Bartlett's Test. This suggests a requirement greater than 0.500 KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy and less than 0.05 significance value for Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity (Levine 2016). The results indicate all the themes are acceptable and significant in terms of a statistics point of view (Traynor and Andrews 2015: 479). The test, moreover, depicts a 0.989 KMO measure of sampling adequacy, showing a very strong significant influence (<0.001) by the Covid-19 crisis impact on rural SMME use of social media for their survival and growth in KZN.

5.7 USE OF DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS TO PRESENT BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

The questionnaire was divided into two sections, biographical information and factors influencing the use of social media by rural SMMEs in KZN during the Covid-19 crisis. Section A consisted of 12 statements based on current position in business, number of years of business, gender, and age group, as well as race, highest qualification, nature of business, and type of ownership, in addition to the source of finance for the business, reason for starting the business, along with the business location and its scope. The collected data were presented by means of frequencies and percentages, as follows:

5.7.1 Position in the Business

Table 5.4: Position in the business

Please indicate your position in the business

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SMMEs Owner	339	90.6	90.6	90.6
	SMMEs Manager	35	9.4	9.4	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

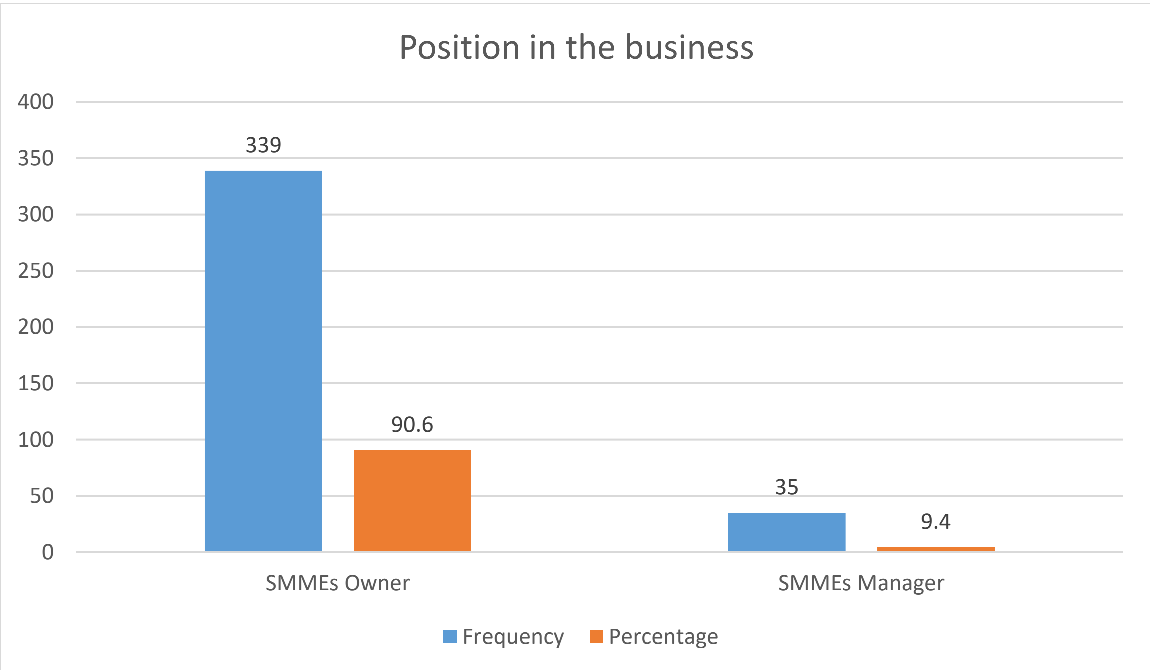


Figure 5.1: Position in the business

Table 5.4 and figure 5.1 show most respondents were SMME owners (339 or 90.6 percent), while the minority respondents were SMME managers (35 or 9.4 percent). In this regard, Connelly (2013) argued position depicts the responsibility an individual has in the organisation. From this data, it was found there are more rural SMME owners than managers in KZN. This finding could have been beneficial to SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis, in the adoption and use of social media. This is in line with Maduku *et al.* (2016) and Maroufkhani *et al*. (2020), who highlighted the adoption and usage of new technology is the only prerogative that solely depends on the SMME owners, since they have a responsible position in rural SMMEs (Connelly 2013).

5.7.2 Number of years of existence in the business

Table 5.5: Number of years of existence in the business

Please indicate the number of years the business has been in existence

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0-4 years	101	27.0	27.0	27.0
	5-8 years	164	43.9	43.9	70.9
	9-12 years	93	24.9	24.9	95.7
	13-16 years	14	3.7	3.7	99.5
	Older than 16 years	2	.5	.5	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

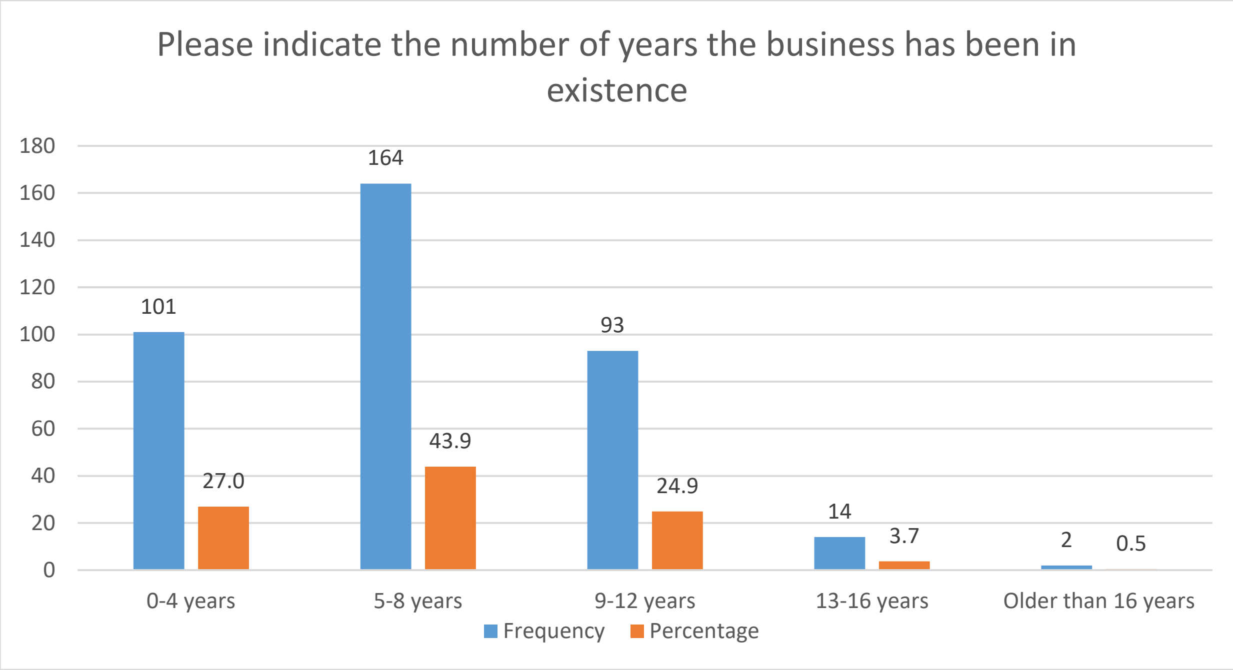


Figure 5.2: Number of years of existence in the business

Table 5.5 and figure 5.2 portray the majority rural SMMEs had been in existence between 5-8 years (164 or 43 percent), while 101 (27 percent) had been in existence for 0-4 years. In addition, 93 (24.9 percent) had been in existence for 9-12 years, while 14 (3.7 percent) had been existence for 13-16 years. Only two (0.5) had been in existence for more than 16 years. The findings recorded that some rural SMMEs had managed to survive and grow. However, the majority rural SMMEs were liquidated before they reached substantial growth.

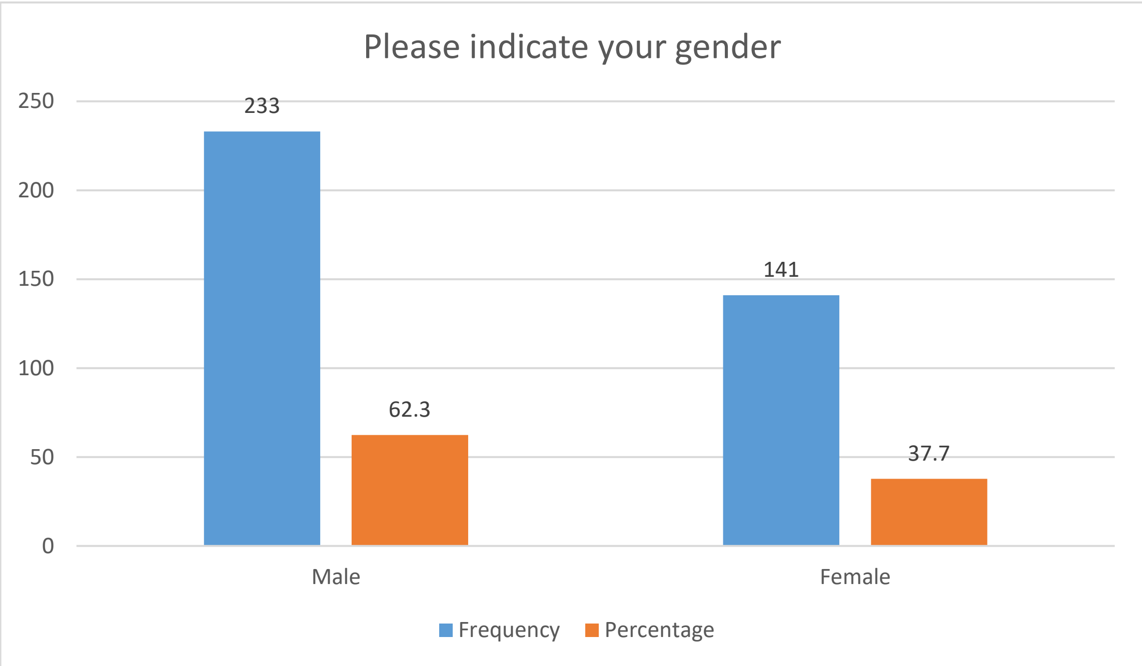
Some rural SMMEs were unable to survive for more than five years, which is supported by some researchers, who argued certain small businesses do not survive for more than five years, due the threats that affect their existence (Mclntyre 2018; Mashimbye 2018; Msomi and Olarewaju 2021; Olawale and Garwe 2010: 279). It also appeared as if rural SMMEs had a high failure rate, which portrayed a negative picture of job creation in SA. Hence, this raised some doubts and questions whether rural SMMEs would ever contribute meaningfully to job creation, the reduction of poverty and income inequality, as well as economic growth (WB 2018; Agyei 2018; SBI 2018; Fatoki 2021).

5.7.3 Gender

Table 5.6: Gender

Please indicate your gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	233	62.3	62.3	62.3
	Female	141	37.7	37.7	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	



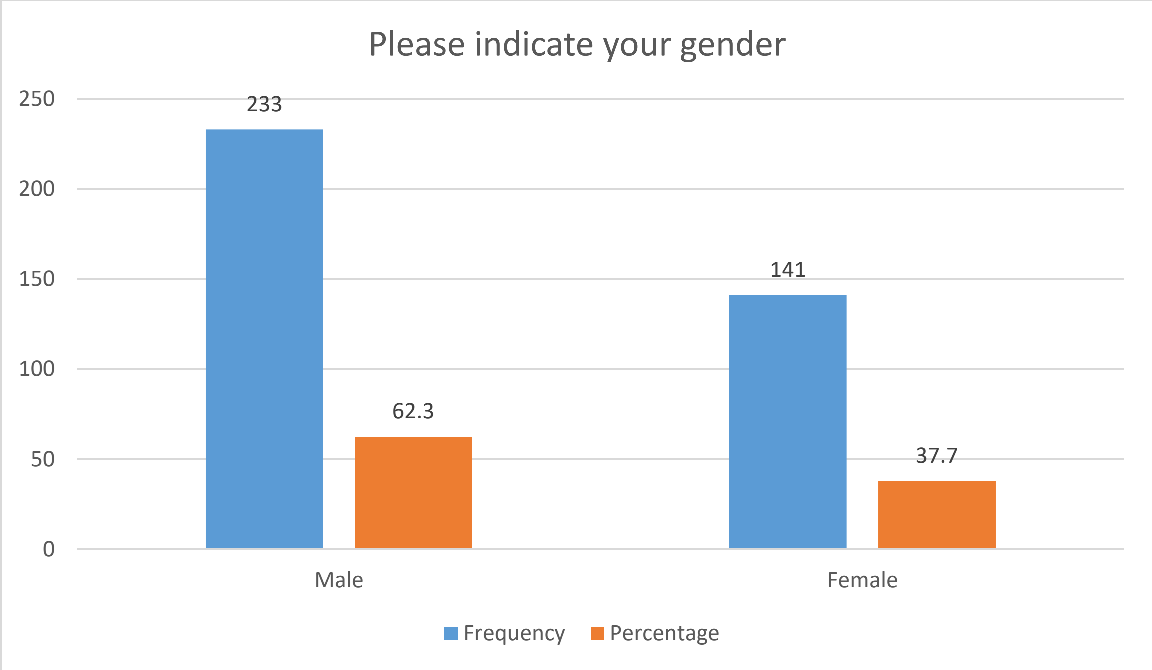


Figure 5.3: Gender

As depicted in table 5.5 and figure 5.3, the majority respondents (233 or 2.3 percent) are male, while 141 (37.7 percent) are female rural SMME owners/ managers. Notably, this figure indicates a significant number of males operating as rural SMMEs owners/managers. With regard to this finding, scholars argue men have a better attitude in terms of adopting and using social media, when compared to women, who are likely to moderate their subjective norm of perceived behaviour control, compared to others using social media platforms during the Covid-19 crisis (Venkatesh *et al*. 2000; Venkatesh *et al*. 2003; Venkatesh and Davis 2000).

5.7.4 Age group

Table 5.7 Age group

Please indicate your age group

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-24 years	167	44.7	44.7	44.7
	25-31 years	103	27.5	27.5	72.2
	32-38 years	24	6.4	6.4	78.6
	39-48 years	77	20.6	20.6	99.2
	49 years and more	3	.8	.8	100.0

Total	374	100.0	100.0	

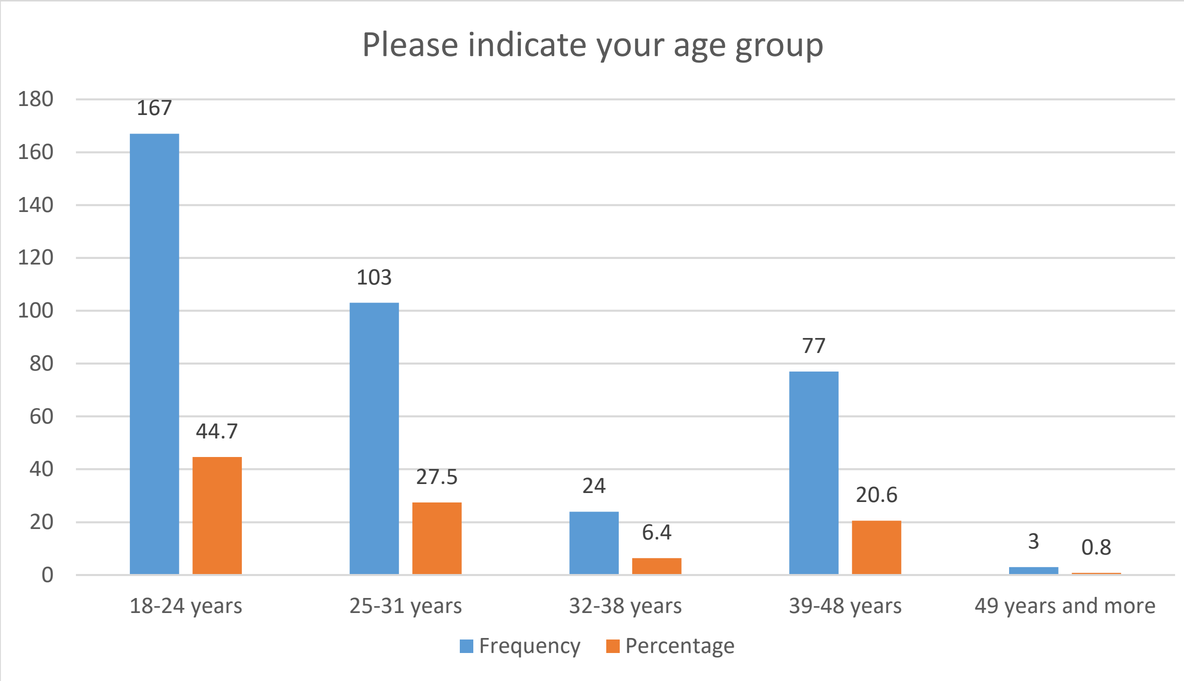


Figure 5.4: Age group

As illustrated in table 5.7 and figure 5.4, many respondents (167 or 44.7 percent) were aged between 18-24 years, followed by 103 (27.5 percent) between 25-31 years. The ages of 24 (6.4 percent) respondents were between 32-38 years, with 77 (20.6 percent) respondents aged between 39-48 years, while three (0.8 percent) were aged 49 years and more. Remarkably, these figures show the majority rural SMMEs managers /owners were young. This finding is supported by some researchers, who suggested young rural SMMEs would likely have a positive attitude to adopt and use social media platforms, as compared to older people, in terms of the behavioural intention to use social media platforms (Baker *et al*. 2007; Lu, Yu, and Liu 2006; Venkatesh *et al*. 2000, 2003).

5.7.5. Race

Table 5.8 Race

Please indicate your race

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	African	368	98.4	98.4	98.4
	Coloured	4	1.1	1.1	99.5

	Indian	1	.3	.3	99.7
	White	1	.3	.3	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

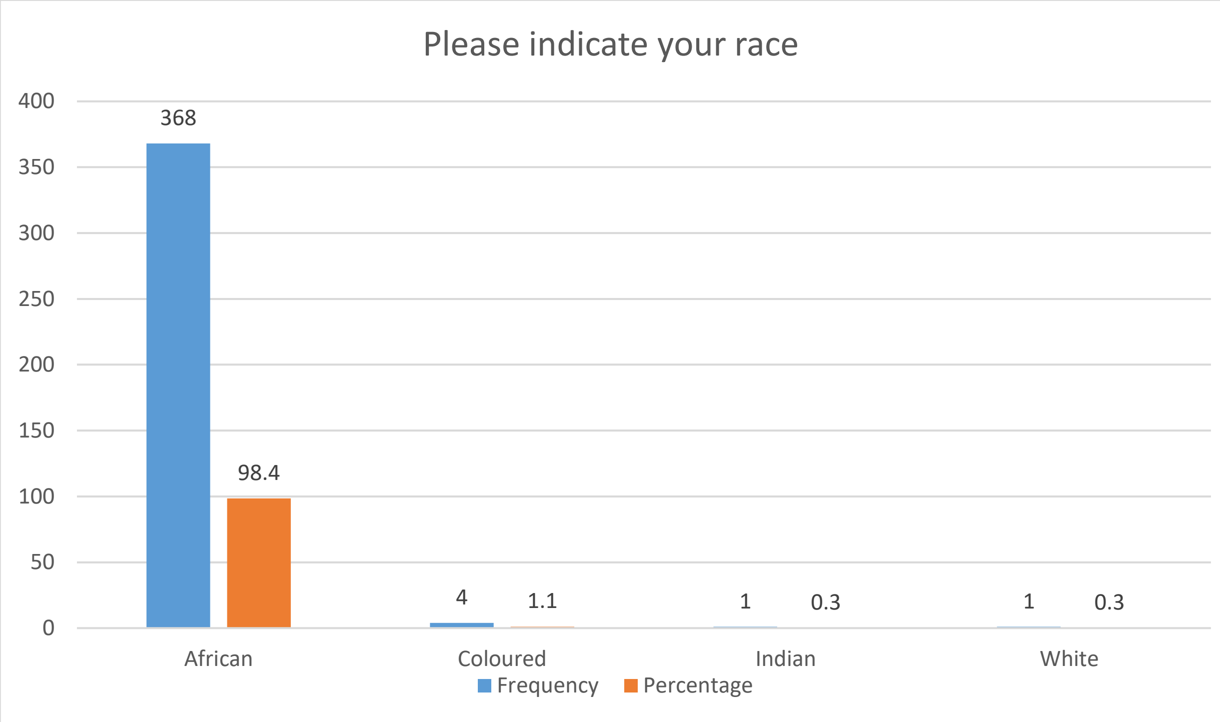


Figure 5.5: Race

As shown in table 5.8 and figure 5.5, the majority respondents (368 or 98.4 percent) are African, followed by those who are Coloured (four or 1.1 percent). The figures also indicated one (0.3) Indian and one (0.3) White respondent. Interestingly, this figure shows there are a considerable number of Africans within rural SMMEs in KZN.

5.7.6 Highest qualification

Table 5.9: Highest qualification

Please indicate your highest qualification

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	National Diploma	184	49.2	49.2	49.2
	B Tech	80	21.4	21.4	70.6

	Honours	8	2.1	2.1	72.7
	Masters	1	.3	.3	73.0
	PhD	1	.3	.3	73.3
	Others	100	26.7	26.7	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

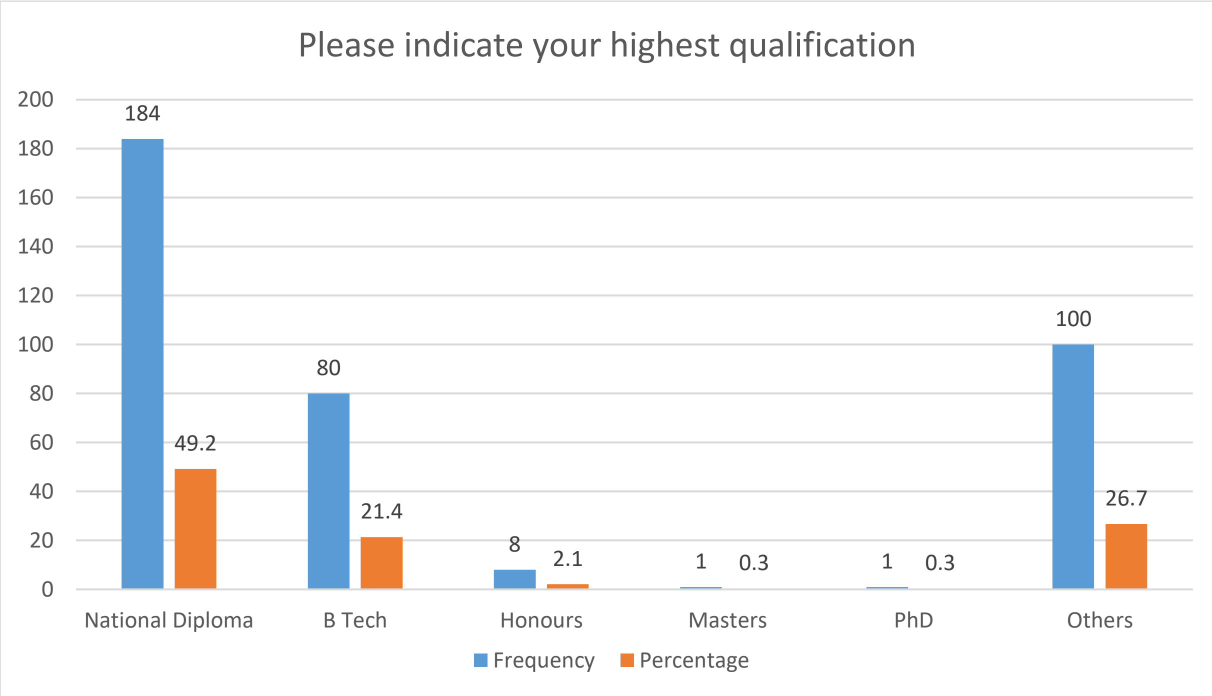


Figure 5.6: Highest qualification

Table 5.9 and figure 5.6 indicate many respondents had a moderate and below moderate level of education, namely National Diploma (184 or 49.2 percent) and BTech (80 or 21.4 percent) and one (0.3 percent) had a Master's Degree. A further 100 (26.7 percent) respondents had other qualifications such a Matric certificate and other below Matric certificates, while only one (0.3 percent) respondent held a PhD. These findings appeared to indicate some respondents had a shortage of managerial competencies, which may cause serious challenges in terms of rural SMME survival and growth in the marketplace.

This is in line with the study conducted by Peters and Naicker (2013) that revealed SMME owners and managers need to possess the necessary competencies to withstand barriers to survival and realise maintainable growth. Some findings of respondents with a National Diploma, BTech, Honours, Master and PhD qualifications are supported by the GEM report (2016-2017), which recognises South African small businesses with tertiary level education have displayed a constant increase over the years. The Trade and Industry Policy Strategy (2017: 16) concurred with the GEM report (2016-2017), stating the noticeable improvement in the formal education level of SMME owners/managers, which is regarded as a critical element for businesses survival and growth.

5.7.7 Nature of the business

Table 5.10: Nature of the business

Please indicate the nature of your business

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Financial	26	7.0	7.0	7.0
	Manufacturing	20	5.3	5.3	12.3
	Services	221	59.1	59.1	71.4
	Mining	74	19.8	19.8	91.2
	Others	33	8.8	8.8	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

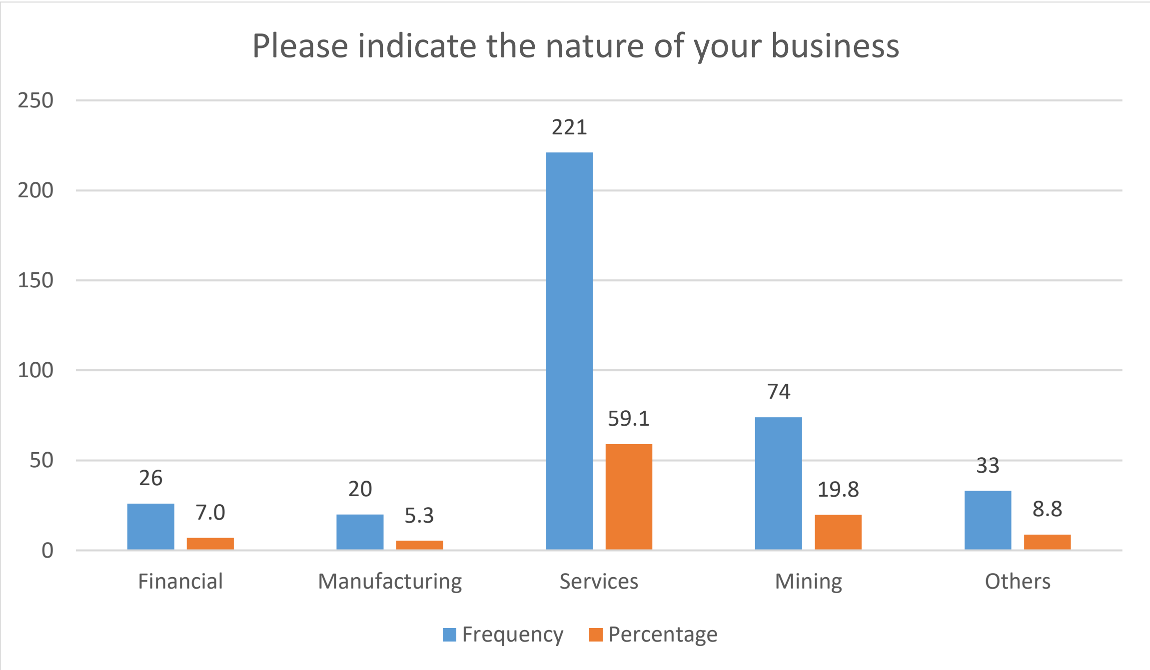


Figure 5.7: Nature of the business

As shown in table 5.10 and figure 7.7, many respondents (221 or 59.1 percent) are categorised as rural SMMEs that provided services to their customers, while 74 (19.8

percent) were in the mining sector. A further 26 (seven percent) respondents were in the financial sector, while 20 (5.3 percent) were in the manufacturing sector. Only 33 (8.8 percent) are in the "other" category. Notably, this figure depicts a considerable number of rural SMMEs operate within the services sector.

This finding is in line with the FinMark Trust (2010) study, conducted with regard to the business nature of SMMEs in SA, which revealed the majority of SMMEs rendered services to their customers.

5.7.8 Type of ownership

Table 5.11: Type of ownership

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Sole Proprietor	115	30.7	30.7	30.7
	Partnership	29	7.8	7.8	38.5
	Manager of the business and co-owned	3	.8	.8	39.3
	Corporation	173	46.3	46.3	85.6
	Others	54	14.4	14.4	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

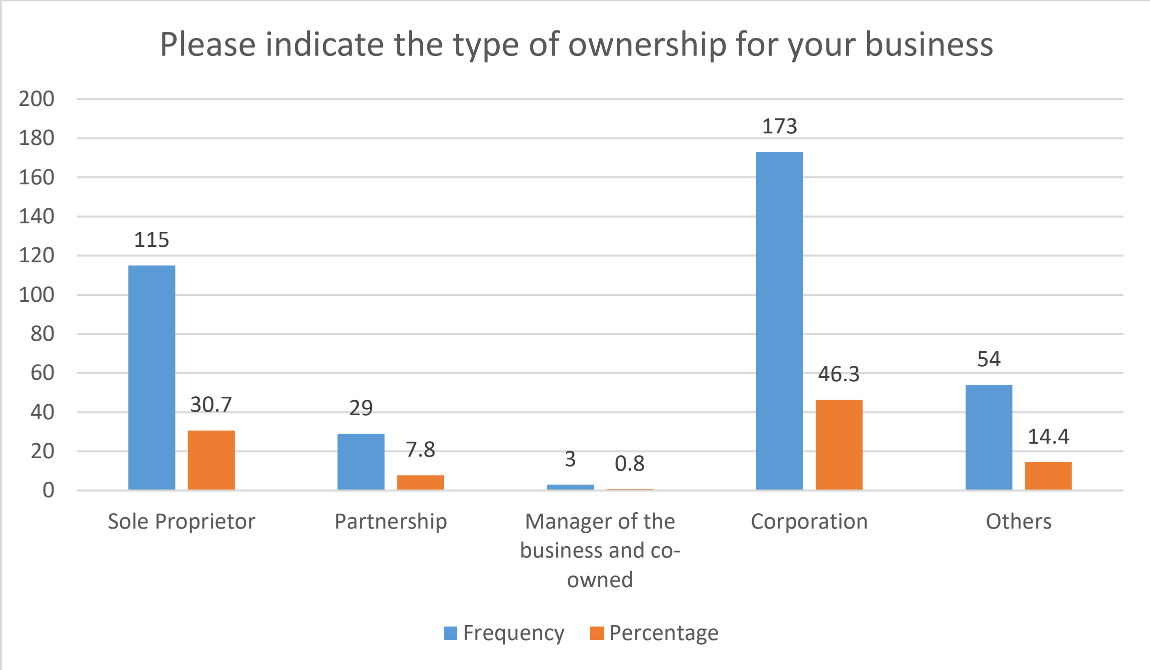


Figure 5.8: Type of ownership

Table 5.11 and figure 5.8 show that 173 (46.7 percent) of rural SMME respondents were classified as a corporation, while 115 (30.7 percent) respondents were sole proprietors. Only 29 (7.8 percent) of the SMMEs owners were owned in a form of partnership, while three (0.8 percent) of the respondents were managers of the business, which they co-owned., while 54 (14.4) were in the "other" category. These figures suggest most SMMEs are conducting their businesses as sole owners who have control of the business and make the decisions, while others prefer to obtain consensus prior to making decisions as corporations.

5.7.9 Source of finance for the business

Table 5.12: Source of finance for the business

Please indicate the source of finance for your business

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Own Capital	341	91.2	91.2	91.2
	Bank Loan	31	8.3	8.3	99.5
	Others	2	.5	.5	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

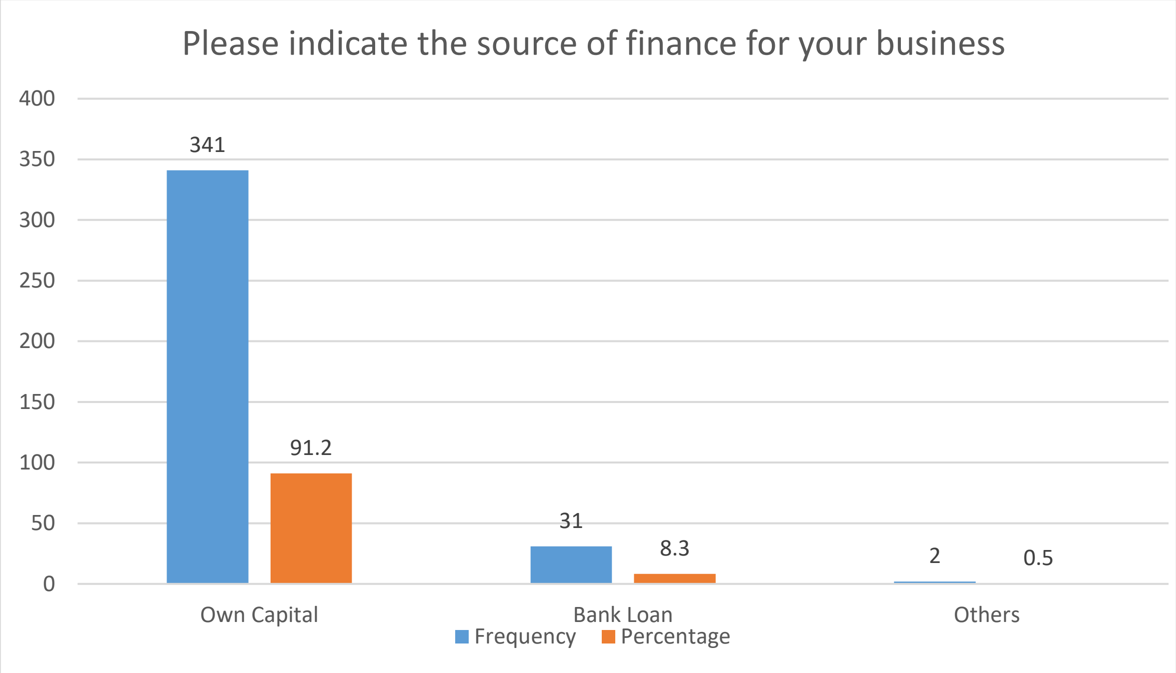


Figure 5.9: Source of finance for business

Table 5.12 and figure 5.9 depict that 341 (91.7 percent) of rural SMMEs had their own capital to finance their businesses, while 31 (8.3 percent) respondents indicated they were financed by the banks through loans for the operations of their businesses. Only two (0.5) are in the "other" category (table 5.12 and figure 5.9). Remarkably, these figures show a significant number of rural SMME owners /managers who financed the operations of their businesses. From these findings, it may appear most rural SMME respondents do not have access to banking system in SA to finance their businesses.

This is line with previous researchers who argued constrained access to external finance by SMMEs is due to the lack of financial skills SMME owners and managers exhibit in properly managing their finances. These studies highlight when SMMEs create good financial records it will assist with good credit records, which will stimulate the probabilities to access external formal financial institutions (Agyei 2018; Nunoo and Andoh 2012; Huston 2012, Fatoki 2014; Fatoki 2021; Bongomin *et al*. 2017; Hussain *et al.* 2018; Adomako, Danso and Damoah 2015).

5.7.10 Reason for starting the business

Table 5.13: Reason for starting the business

Please indicate the reason for starting your business

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent

Valid	Unemployment	219	58.6	58.6	58.6
	Alleviation of Poverty	149	39.8	39.8	98.4
	Extra Income	6	1.6	1.6	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Figure 5.10: Reason for starting the business

Table 5.13 and figure 5.10 show most respondents (219 or 58.6 percent) started their businesses because they were faced with unemployment, followed by 149 (39.8 percent) respondents that started their businesses because they were subjected to poverty, and established their enterprises to alleviate poverty. In addition, table 5.13 and figure 5.10 also indicate six (1.8 percent) respondents who started their business because they wanted to gain extra income.

Overall, these figures are in accordance with the purpose of the established of SMMEs, which state that SMMEs are established to improve GDP of SA, alleviating poverty, and to created employment (BER 2016; SEDA 2019; OECD 2017; Wiid and Cant 2021). It is supported by Manzoor *et al.* (2021) who cited that the SMMEs in rural areas are the necessity for providing jobs to poor rural employees and thus this is regarded as a vital instrument for rural development and reduction of poverty in rural places.

5.7.11 Business Location

Table 5.14: Location of the business

Please indicate the location of your business

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Vryheid	244	65.2	65.2	65.2
	Ulundi	33	8.8	8.8	74.1
	Dundee	32	8.6	8.6	82.6
	Empangeni	23	6.1	6.1	88.8
	Richards Bay	20	5.3	5.3	94.1
	Newcastle	20	5.3	5.3	96.0

	Ixopo (Ubuhlebezwe)	15	4.0	4.0	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

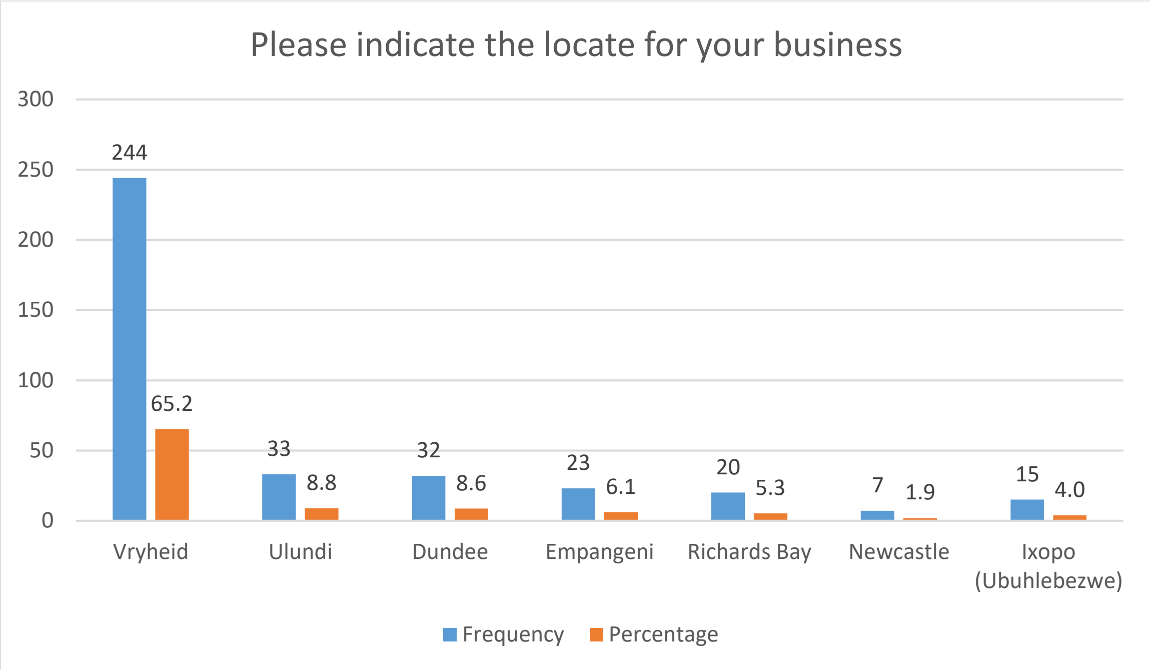


Figure 5.11: Location of the business

As shown in table 5.14 and figure 5.11, the majority respondents (244 or 65,2 percent) had their businesses in Vryheid, followed by Ulundi and Dundee with 33 (8.8 percent) and 32 (8.6 percent) respondents, respectively, while there were 23 (6.1 percent) respondents whose businesses were located at Empangeni. In addition, seven (1.9 percent) respondents had their business in Newcastle, while a further 15 (4.0) respondents had their businesses at Ixopo (Ubuhlebezwe).

5.7.12 Scope of the business

Table 5.15: Scope of the business

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Local	372	99.5	99.5	99.5
	National	2	.5	.5	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

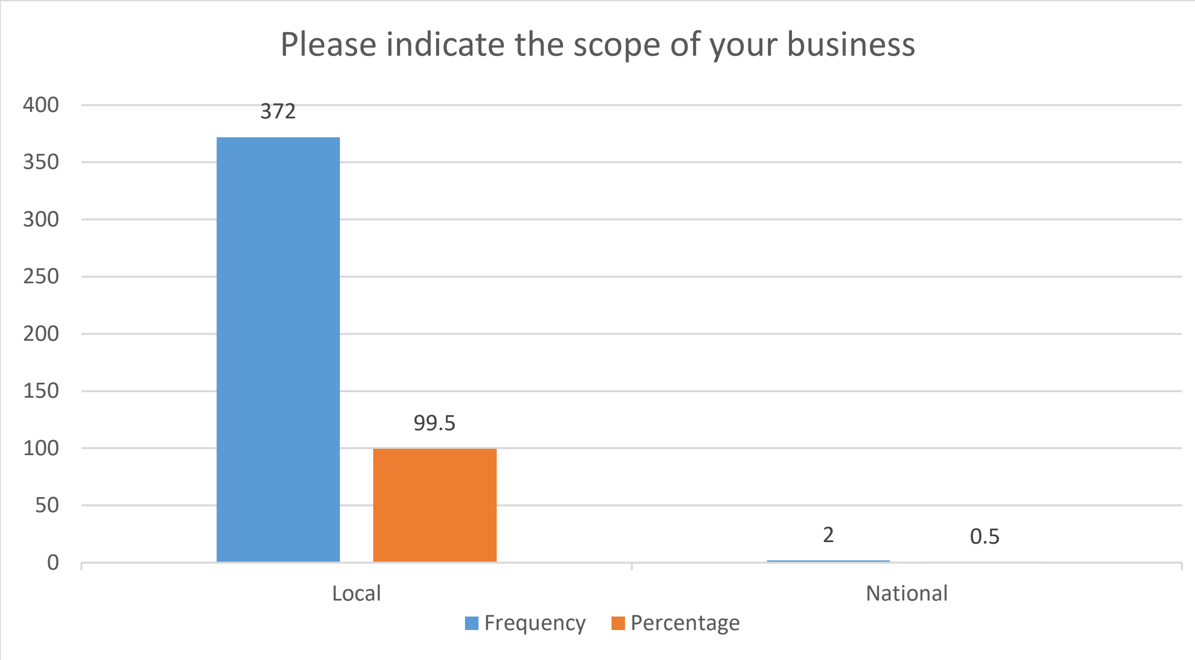


Figure 5.12: Scope of the business

Table 5.15 and figure 5.12 depict the majority respondents (372 or 95.5 percent) had their businesses based locally, while two (0.5 percent) respondents indicated their businesses were operating nationally. Interestingly, this figure shows a considerable number of rural SMMEs in KZN that conducted their businesses locally. It appeared the rural SMMEs lacked financial resources to market their businesses.

This is supported by previous research that found availability of financial resources signifies the existence of financial support, in which businesses can decide to adopt and use social media technologies for marketing their products and services (Kim & Garrison 2009 Sugandini *et al*. 2020; Potluri & Vajjhala 2018). Availability of financial resources is the only critical factor businesses consider when initiating the adoption of innovation, which is alleged as fundamental to the adoption process and subsequent use of social media technologies for their survival and growth in times of crisis (Maduku *et al*. 2016; To & Ngai 2006; Itliong 2020).

5.8 THE MAIN STUDY RESULTS

The presentation, discussion and interpretation of the main results focussed on factors impacting the use of social media as a driving tool for SMME in rural KZN survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. The presentation of main results was in relation to the themes from the research objectives of the study. The main aim of this section is to examine and gain an in-depth understanding of the internal and external critical factors affecting social media use by rural SMMEs in KZN during the Covid-19 crisis for their survival and growth in this crisis. These factors were categorised into six themes, with theme one comprising 21 statements; theme two with eight statements; theme three has five statements; theme four comprises four statements; theme five is made up of four statements, and theme six comprises 11 statements.

As mentioned above, these factors were identified through an in-depth literature review and were also used in the formation of the study aim and research objectives and, subsequently, in design of the closed-ended study questionnaire. The section below presents the findings regarding critical factors in the use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis by rural SMMEs in KZN. As with the biographical information, to represent the findings, frequencies and percentages were used in the form of tables and figures. The main results of this study are categorised according to the research objectives, from which the closed-ended questionnaire derived the themes; depicted as follows:

SUB-OBJECTIVE 1: FACTORS INFLUENCING THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR RURAL SMME SURVIVAL AND GROWTH DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

5.8.1 Lack of technical skills affect rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

Table 5.16: Lack of technical skills

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	35	9.4	9.4	9.4
	Disagree	37	9.9	9.9	19.3
	Neutral	38	10.2	10.2	29.4
	Agree	217	58.0	58.0	87.4
	Strongly agree	47	12.6	12.6	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

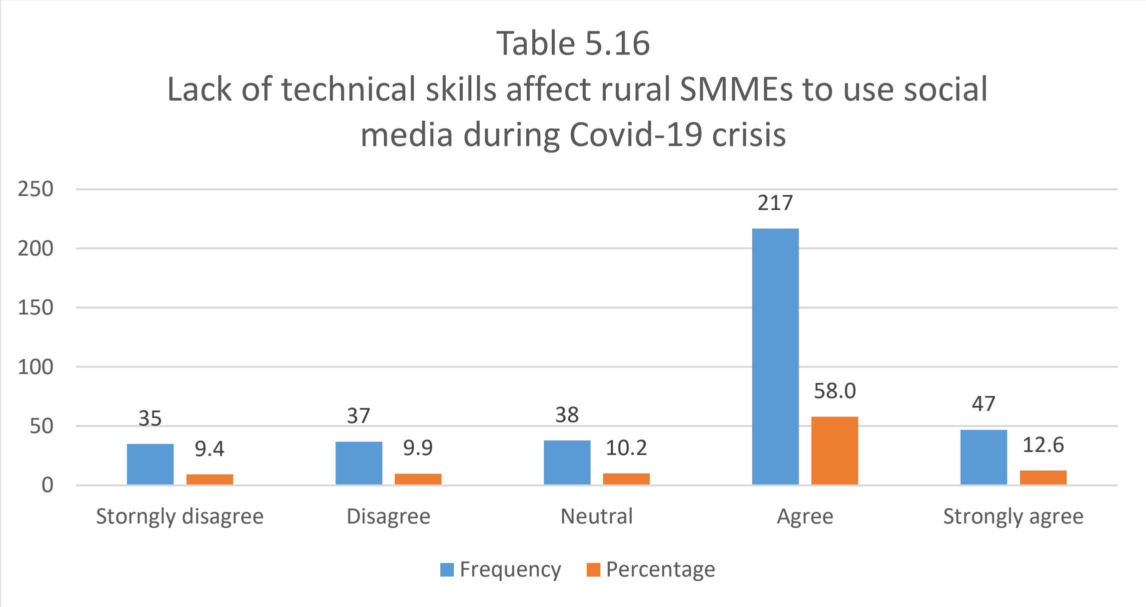


Figure 5.13: Lack of technical skills

As shown in table 5.16 and figure 5.13, many respondents agreed (217 or 58.0 percent) and 47 (12.6 percent) respondents further strongly agreed there was a lack of technical skills, which affected rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. A small number of the respondents were neutral (38 or 10.2 percent), while 37 (9.9 percent) disagreed with the statement and 35 (9.4 percent) strongly disagreed with the statement.

This finding concurs with Lekhanya (2018), whose study revealed SMME technical skills also create problems, even in developed countries such as the UK, where approximately 36 percent smaller companies were found to experience a shortage of skilled staff. Thus, it can be deduced SMMEs are in short supply of digital technology capabilities and orientation that can assist in the adoption and use of social media to increase market penetration and customer relationships, to improve sales that could give rise to increased SMME revenue during the economic disruptions caused by the Covid-19 crisis.

According to Lekhanya (2018), these technical skills are critical in aiding rural SMMEs to work towards growth and explore new opportunities in developing economies, with special reference to SA, Nigeria, Kenya, and Malaysia. Rural SMMEs, therefore, require technical skills that enable these enterprise owners-managers to deal with the intricacies of the technology-related adoption process, which is considered a fundamental for coping with innovation practices in order to survive and grow during the Covid-19 crisis. In addition, the previous experience of information systems by rural SMMEs can have a direct influence, in such a manner that it can facilitate the adoption and usage of social media by rural SMMEs (Lippert and Forman 2005; Kaun and Chau 2001). Thus, this factor could perhaps have been critical in driving social media adoption and usage by SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis.

To ascertain whether the lack of technical skills affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis, a Chi-square test was conducted. The results for this variable show (χ 2 = 339.048, df = 4; p < 0.001**),** which indicates a strong significant impact by the lack of technical skills on rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. These findings are in line with Lekhanya (2018), who further revealed technical skills for rural SMMEs are problematic, even in developed countries such as the UK, where it was found approximately 36 percent smaller companies experienced skilled staff shortages, which had a bearing on adopting and use of social media for their survival and growth.

5.8.2 Lack of social media awareness affected rural SMME use social media during Covid-19 crisis

Table 5.17: Lack of social media awareness

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	36	9.6	9.6	9.6
	Disagree	40	10.7	10.7	20.3
	Neutral	32	8.6	8.6	28.9
	Agree	189	50.5	50.5	79.4
	Strongly agree	77	20.6	20.6	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

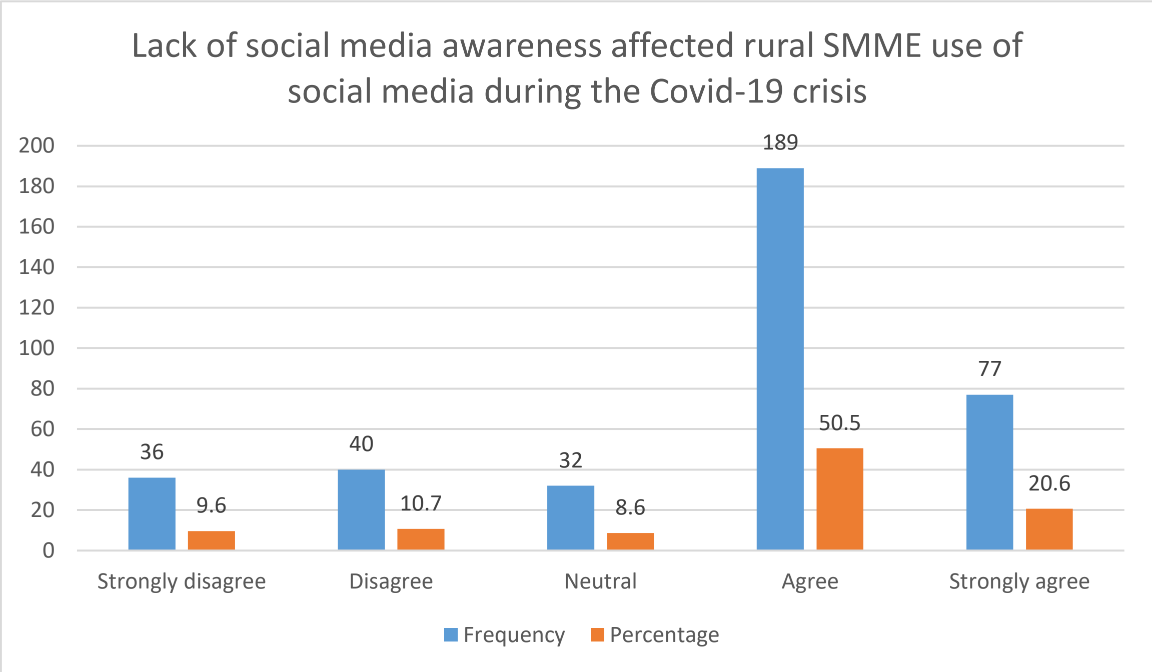


Figure 5.14: Lack of social media awareness

As depicted in table 5.17 and figure 5.14, a significant number of respondents (189 or 50.5 percent and 77 or 20.6 percent) agreed and strongly agreed, respectively, rural SMMEs experienced lack of social awareness with regard to social media use during the Covid-19 crisis. These findings are supported by a Chi-square test, conducted to establish whether social media awareness affected the use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. The results indicate (χ 2 = 235.225; df = 4; P < 0,001) for this variable, which shows a strong significant effect by the lack of social media awareness on rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. A smaller number of respondents (32 or 8. 6 percent) were neutral to the statement, while 40 (10.7 percent) disagreed, with 36 (9.6 percent) respondents that strongly disagreed. It seems this finding suggests rural SMMEs experienced a lack of social awareness on the use of social media, which affected their use of it during the Covid-19 crisis.

These findings are in accordance with Oyekan and Kamiyo (2008), whose research emphasised a lack of social awareness is regarded as one of the problems that contradicted the use of social media. This implies SMMEs found it difficult to use social media to communicate with their customers during the Covid-19 crisis, with Hew (2011) highlighting social media awareness is the primary determinant of informal scientific communication. Thus, this finding concurred with the finding of Lekhanya (2013), which revealed South African rural KZN SMMEs are dawdling, with regard to adopting and using social media to improve their businesses, through interacting with existing and potential customers. This would impede rural SMMEs from adopting and using social media during disasters such as the Covid-19 crisis, with Shem (2015) and Efendi *et al*. (2020) having suggested social awareness is a critical factor motivating the business to adopt and use technology such as social media.

5.8.3 Lack of managerial competencies affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis

Table 5.18: Lack of managerial competencies

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	34	9.1	9.1	9.1
	Disagree	40	10.7	10.7	19.8
	Neutral	35	9.4	9.4	29.1
	Agree	216	57.8	57.8	86.9
	Strongly agree	49	13.1	13.1	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

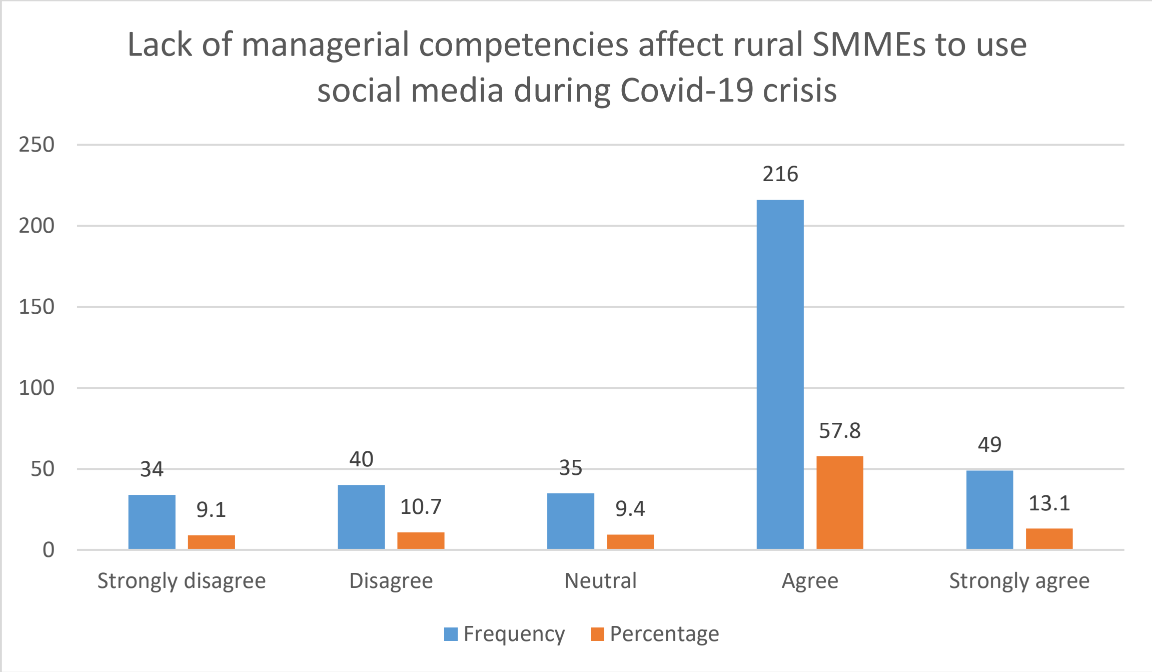


Figure 5.15: Lack of managerial competencies

As shown in table 5.18 and figure 5.15, a significant number of respondents (216 or 57.7. percent) and 49 (13.1 percent) agreed and strongly agreed, respectively, the lack of managerial competencies affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. These findings are supported by a Chi-square test, conducted to determine whether the lack of managerial competencies had an influence on rural SMME use of social media. The results show (χ 2 = 335.064; df = 4; P < 0,001) for this variable, indicating this notion is valid and has a strong significance in this regard. However, a smaller number of respondents (35 or 9.4 percent) were neutral to the statement, while 34 (9.1 percent) and 40 (10.7 percent) disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement.

These findings are supported by previous research that stated when management is reluctant to embrace the digital age, in return, this could have led to the failure of SMMEs to survive and grow during the Covid-19 crisis. SMMEs, including those in rural places, will be hindered to survive and grow when they are unable to align their business and technology strategy (ACCA 2012; Arham *et al*. 2013; Li *et al*. 2016). Thus, management competencies are critical to influence and motivate staff to adopt social marketing, through providing vision and cognitive support to members of the business (Li *et al.* 2016).

By inference, the lack of managerial competencies by rural SMMEs would have been a hindrance in the use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. Rambe and Makhalemele (2015) added managerial competencies are the prime factors that promote the survival of a business and lack of these competencies will lead to business failure (Zahra, Zandi and

Bahmani 2014). In the same vein, Herrington, Kew and Kew (2014) emphasised SMMEs in SA fail due to a lack of managerial competencies, which could have been detrimental to the survival and growth of rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis (Salamzadeh and Arbatani 2020).

5.8.4 Lack of financial resources affected rural SMME use social media during Covid-19 crisis

Table 5.19: Lack of financial resources

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	35	9.4	9.4	9.4
	Disagree	41	11.0	11.0	20.3
	Neutral	39	10.4	10.4	30.7
	Agree	183	48.9	48.9	79.7
	Strongly agree	76	20.3	20.3	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

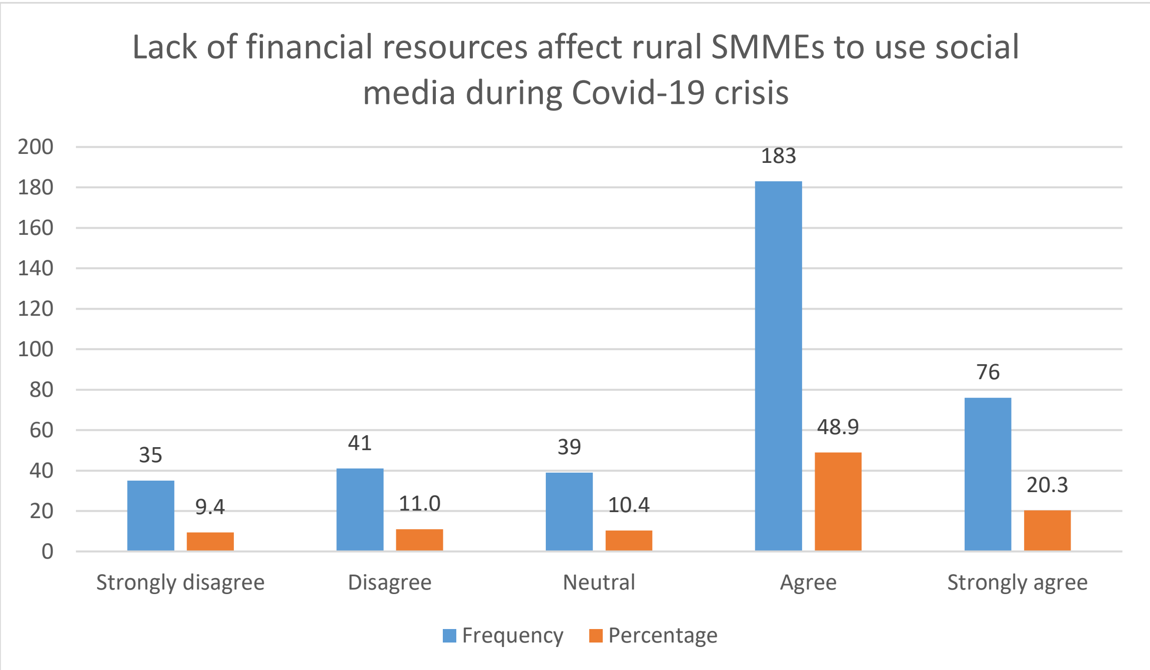


Figure 5.16: Lack of financial resources

A considerable number of respondents (183 or 48.9 percent) are shown to have agreed, with an additional 76 (20.3 percent) that strongly agreed the lack of financial resources affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. A small number of respondents were neutral (39 or 10.4 percent), while 35 (9.4 percent) disagreed and four (11.0 percent) disagreed with the statement, as depicted in table 5.19 and figure 5.16. To ascertain whether the lack of financial resources affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis, a Chi-square test was conducted. The results for this variable indicate (χ 2 =210.118; df = 4; P <0.001), signalling a strong significant impact on rural SMME by the lack of financial resource, thus, their use of social media during Covid-19 was affected. This infers many respondents suggested rural SMMEs had difficulties with financial resources, preventing them to adopt and use social media during this crisis.

However, financial resources are key resources that will dictate whether the rural SMME will use social media (Maduku *et al.* 2016; To & Ngai 2006; Itliong 2020). Therefore, the only critical factor businesses consider when they intend to embark on innovation adoption, is the availability of financial resources, which is alleged as the fundamental aspect of the process of adoption and usage of social media technologies by rural SMMEs, for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis (Maduku *et al*. 2016; To & Ngai 2006; Itliong 2020).

Agyei (2018) and Fatoki (2021) added, in line with this finding, the lack of financial skills by rural SMME owners and managers serves as a critical contributing factor in the lack of financial resources, which is the prime motivator for rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media as part of their marketing strategy during the Covid-19 crisis.

5.8.5 Lack of infrastructure affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis

Table 5.20: Lack of infrastructure

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	37	9.9	9.9	9.9
	Disagree	36	9.6	9.6	19.5
	Neutral	43	11.5	11.5	31.0
	Agree	187	50.0	50.0	81.0

	Strongly agree	71	19.0	19.0	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

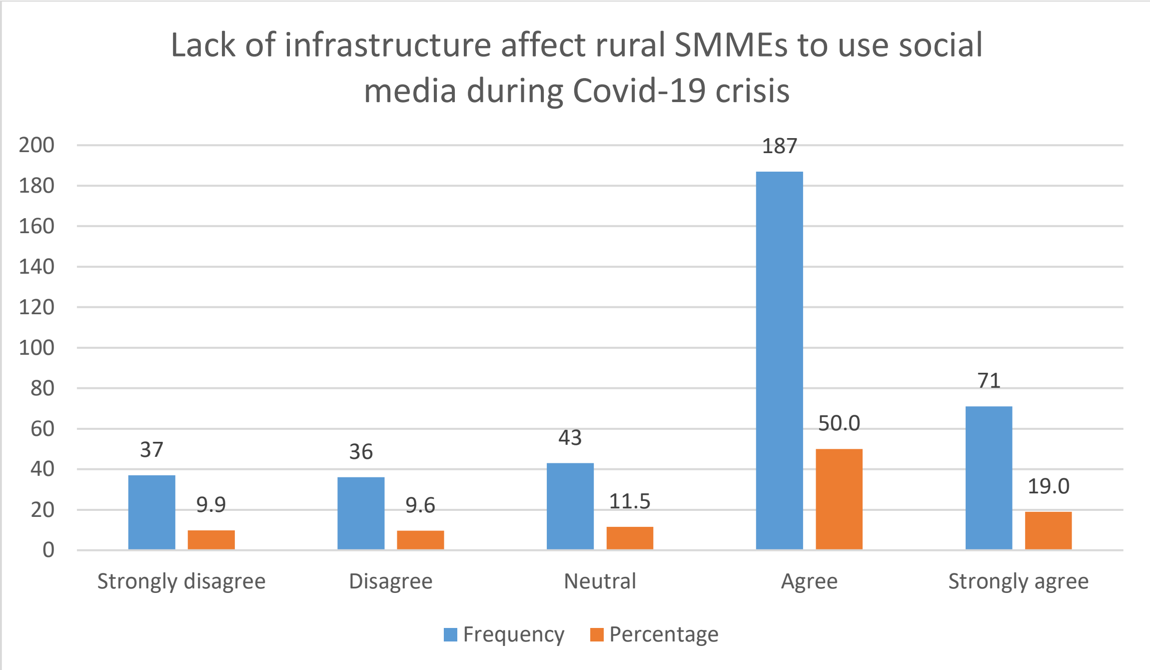


Figure 5.17: Lack of infrastructure

A considerable number of respondents (187 or 50.0 percent) are shown to have agreed, with an additional 71 (19.0 percent) that agreed lack of infrastructure affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. A small number of respondents were neutral (43 or 11.5 percent), while 37 (9.9 percent) disagreed and 36 (9.5 percent) disagreed with the statement, as depicted in table 5.20 and figure 5.17. To ascertain whether lack of infrastructure affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis, a Chi-square test was conducted. The results for this variable indicate (χ 2 =221.241; df = 4; P <0.001), signalling a strong significant impact on rural SMME by the lack of infrastructure, thus, their use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis was affected. This infers most respondents suggested rural SMMEs had a problem with the lack of infrastructure, as this hindered them to adopt and use social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

These findings are in line with the study conducted by Obokoh and Goldman (2016), in on the performance of rural SMMEs the context of Nigeria, which revealed a positive correlation between the status quo of infrastructure and the operational costs of rural SMMEs. It can be concluded, should the status quo of infrastructure deteriorate, the operational costs of rural SMMEs would increase**.** In the case of this finding, illustrated in table 5.20 and figure 5.17, it was found infrastructure was lacking, which equates to poor infrastructure for rural SMMEs.

In turn, this may put rural SMMEs in financial distress, which can be detrimental for rural SMMEs to adopt and use technology such as new social media technologies, during the Covid-19 crisis, due to unaffordability to finance the use of social media. A study by Nene (2021: 20-21) supports this finding, stating rural SMMEs are subjected to business failure due to the lack of managerial competencies, with these competencies regarded as key internal factors that contribute to business failure or success.

5.8.6. Lack of internet connectivity affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis

Table 5.21: Lack of internet connectivity

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	40	10.7	10.7	10.7
	Disagree	32	8.6	8.6	19.3
	Neutral	40	10.7	10.7	29.9
	Agree	178	47.6	47.6	77.5
	Strongly agree	84	22.5	22.5	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

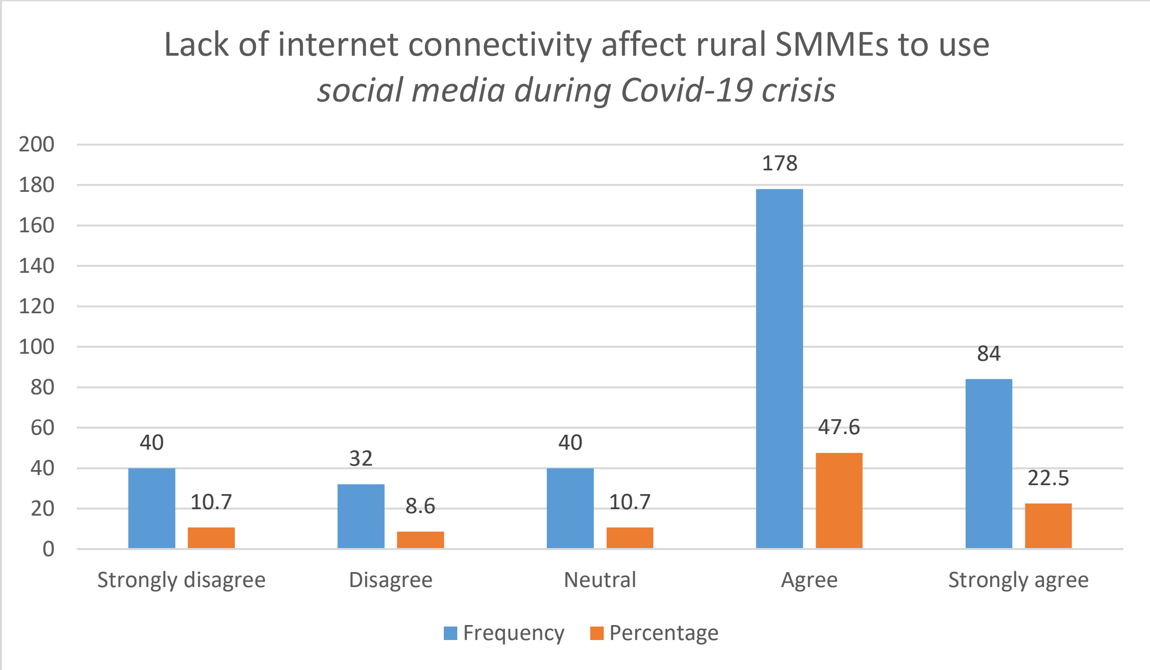


Figure 5.18: Lack of internet connectivity

As depicted in table 5.21 and figure 5.18, a significant number of respondents (178 or 47.6 percent and 84 or 22.5 percent) respectively agreed and strongly agreed the lack of internet connectivity affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. Fewer respondents (40 or 10.7 percent) were neutral, while 32 (8.6 percent) disagreed and a further 40 (10.7 percent) respondents strongly disagreed with the statement. A Chi-square test was conducted to establish whether the findings were valid. The results show (χ 2= 200.385; df = 4; P <0,001) for this variable, indicating a very strong significant effect on the lack of internet connectivity for rural SMMEs to use social media; thus, they were unable to sustain survival and growth of the businesses during the Covid-19 crisis. Respondent agreement indicates the lack of internet connectivity prevented SMMEs from adopting and using social media during this crisis.

In line with these findings, Cariolle and Léon (2022: 8-9) argued internet connectivity is a pre-requisite for the use of digital tools, therefore, lack of such connection is a barrier to their use and may also mirror a lack of ICT infrastructure. This hinders rural SMMEs in social media adoption and use for survival and growth, particularly during the Covid-19 crisis. In support of the study findings, the previous researchers pointed out small businesses remain hindered by their lack of internet connectivity, despite great technological advancements globally.

Without this technology, rural SMMEs may have found it difficult to survive during the Covid-19 crisis (Gqoboka, Anakpo and Mishi 2022: 1395-1396), as they were unable to communicate with their customers for the purpose of marketing their products and services. In addition, Guerriero (2015) maintained internet connectivity can contribute to rural SMME growth and it is essential for these enterprises to have access to internet connectivity, in order to adopt and use social media for survival and growth during disasters such as the Covid-19 crisis (Sugandini *et al*. 2020; Gqoboka *et al*. 2022).

5.8.7 Lack of technology infrastructure affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis

Table 5.22: Lack of technology infrastructure

Lack of technology infrastructure affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	37	9.9	9.9	9.9
	Disagree	36	9.6	9.6	19.5
	Neutral	34	9.1	9.1	28.6
	Agree	176	47.1	47.1	75.7
	Strongly agree	91	24.3	24.3	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

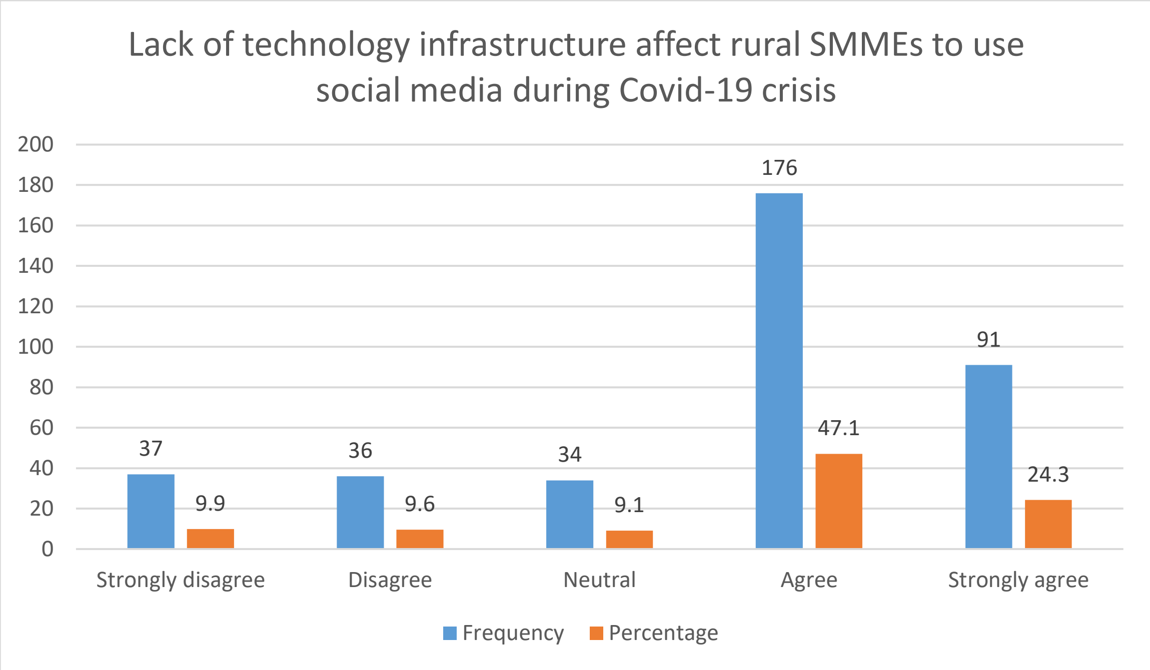


Figure 5.19: Lack of technology infrastructure

The majority respondents (176 or 47.1 percent) indicated their agreement, as illustrated in table 5.22 and figure 5.19, with 91 (24.3 percent) that indicated they strongly agreed the lack of technology infrastructure affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. Fewer respondents (34 or 9.1 percent) were neutral, while 36 (9.6 percent) disagreed and 37 (9.9 percent) respondents indicated strong disagreement with the statement. A Chi-square test was conducted to ascertain whether lack of technology infrastructure affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. The results for this variable show (χ 2 = 201.909; df = 4; P <0,001), signalling the use of social media by rural SMMEs in KZN is strong and significantly impacted by lack of technology infrastructure during the Covid-19 crisis. This suggests the government needs to support rural SMMEs by proving technology infrastructure in order to promote social media adoption and usage for their survival and growth.

This finding supports Mavimbela and Dube (2016), who posit rural SMMEs are faced with the slow pace of technology adoption and use, such as social media. The slow adoption pace has been attributed to poor infrastructure, lack of skills, and exorbitant cost of technology. By implication, rural SMMEs would have found it difficult to adopt and use social media to survive and grow during the Covid-19 crisis, due to the slow pace of embracing technology, which emanated from the lack of access and inability to use technology (Venter *et al*. 2015; Mavimbela and Dube 2016; Tendai, Nicole and Tafadzwa 2018). However, the previous researchers equally postulate the use of technology enhances SMME productivity and customer service, which means technology use by SMMEs, in the form of social media, would improve productivity and growth. It is, therefore, crucial for rural SMMEs to embrace technology adoption to use social media to improve performance (survival and growth) during disasters such as the Covid-19 crisis, in terms of financial performance (Sitharam and Hoque 2016; Asomaning and Abdulai 2015; Tendai *et al.* 2018; Dubihlela and Sandada 2014).

5.8.8 Competitive environments influenced rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

Table 5.23: Competitive environment

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	38	10.2	10.2	10.2
	Disagree	35	9.4	9.4	19.5
	Neutral	53	14.2	14.2	33.7
	Agree	173	46.3	46.3	79.9
	Strongly agree	75	20.1	20.1	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

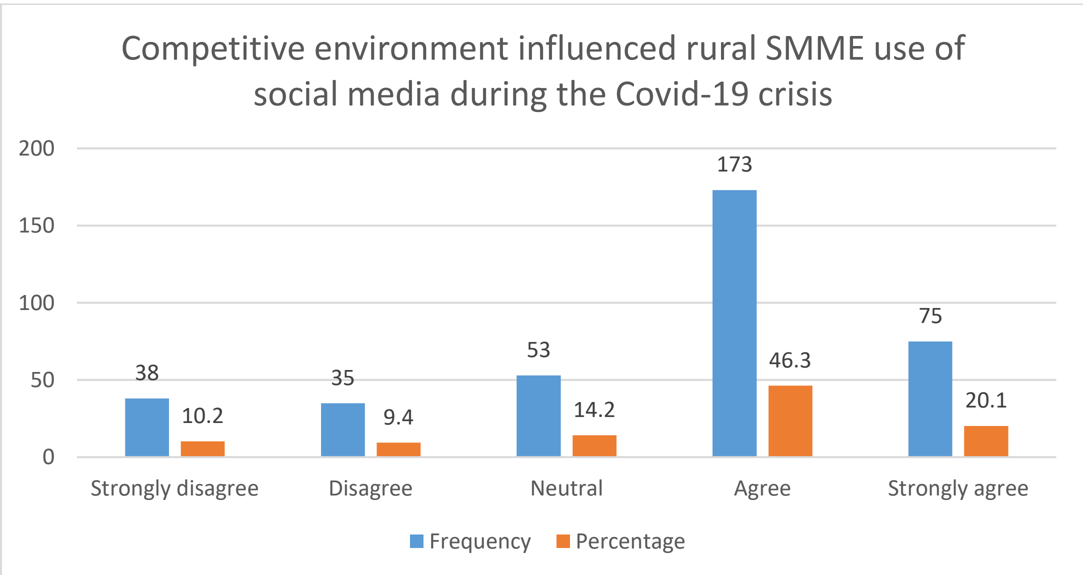


Figure 5.20: Competitive environments

Many respondents (173 or 46.3 percent) agreed, as depicted in table 5.23 and figure 5.20, with 75 (20.1 percent) that indicated they strongly agreed competitive environments influenced rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. A small number of respondents (53 or 14.2 percent) were neutral, while only 35 (9.4 percent) disagreed and 38 (10.2 percent) respondents indicated strong disagreement with the statement. A Chi-square test was conducted to ascertain whether competitive environments influenced rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. The results for this variable show ($\chi 2 = 174.556$; df = 4; P <0,001), signalling the use of social media by rural SMMEs in KZN as strong and significantly impacted by the influence of competitive environments, in their use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. This suggests competitive environments influenced rural SMME social media use during the Covid-19 crisis.

This finding was in accordance with the finding regarding rural SMMEs experiencing a high intensity of competitive pressure that caused uncertainty among these enterprises, where the high intensity of competitive pressure could have been a constraining factor to adopt and use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. This will negatively impact the survival and growth of rural SMMEs (McKinsey and Company 2020; Lin 2014). This finding was also in line with previous study findings that proposed a positive correlation between competitive pressure and purpose to adopt social media drive; where social media can assist rural SMMEs to advance their competitive advantage and boost their financial position for survival and growth (Lin 2014; Ahani *et al.* 2017).

5.8.9 Customer satisfaction influenced rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

Table 5.24: Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction influenced rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	37	9.9	9.9	9.9
	Disagree	33	8.8	8.8	18.7
	Neutral	59	15.8	15.8	34.5
	Agree	186	49.7	49.7	84.2

	Strongly agree	59	15.8	15.8	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

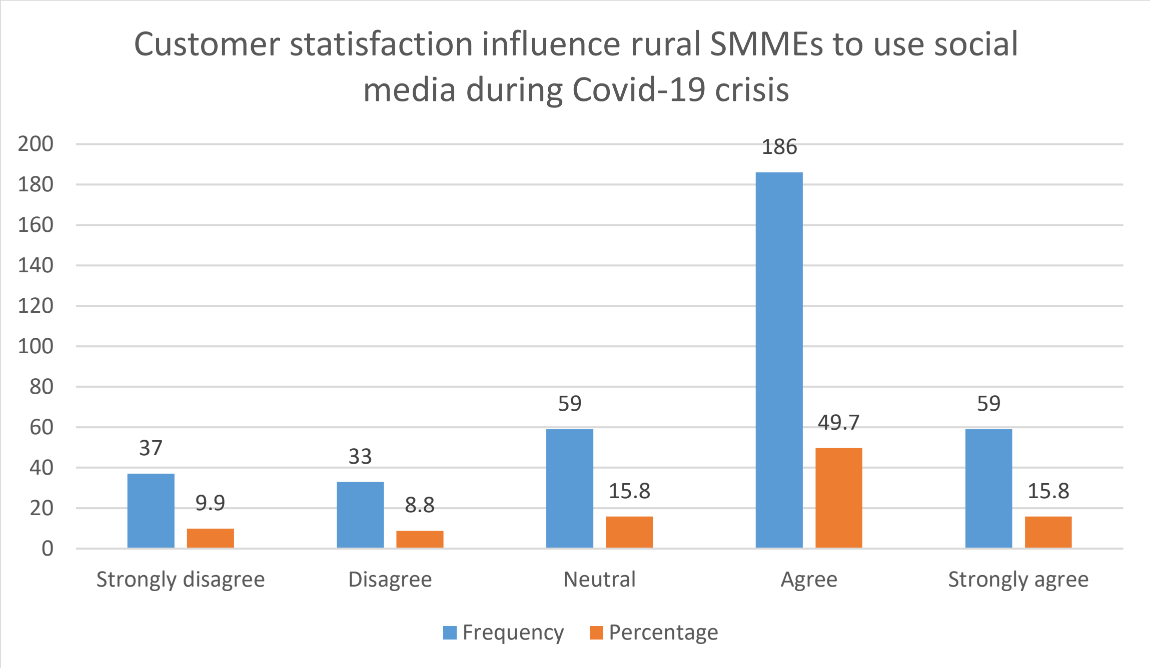


Figure 5.21: Customer satisfaction influenced rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

The majority respondents (186 or 49.7 percent) indicated they agreed, as shown in table 5.24 and figure 5.21, with 59 (15.8 percent) that indicated they strongly agreed customer satisfaction influenced rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. Fewer respondents (59 or 15.8 percent) were neutral, while only 37 (9.9 percent) disagreed and 33 (8.8 percent) respondents indicated strong disagreement with the statement. A Chi-square test was conducted to ascertain whether customer satisfaction influenced rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. The results for this variable show (χ 2 = 214.449; df = 4; P <0,001), signalling the use of social media by rural SMMEs in KZN is strong and significantly impacted by customer satisfaction during the Covid-19 crisis.

Research by Budree, Fietkiewicz and Lins (2019) and Prince (2019) support the findings, pointing out the lack of social media use by rural SMMEs in SA could also be due to the lack of customer satisfaction. In addition, some researchers highlighted the adoption of new technology has a positive correlation between intention to adopt and use technology and the pressure from customers (Ghobakhloo & Tang 2015; Maduku *et al*. 2016; Matikiti *et al*. 2018).

5.8.10 Large market scope influenced rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

Table 5.25: Large market scope

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	39	10.4	10.4	10.4
	Disagree	33	8.8	8.8	19.3
	Neutral	53	14.2	14.2	33.4
	Agree	191	51.1	51.1	84.5
	Strongly agree	58	15.5	15.5	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

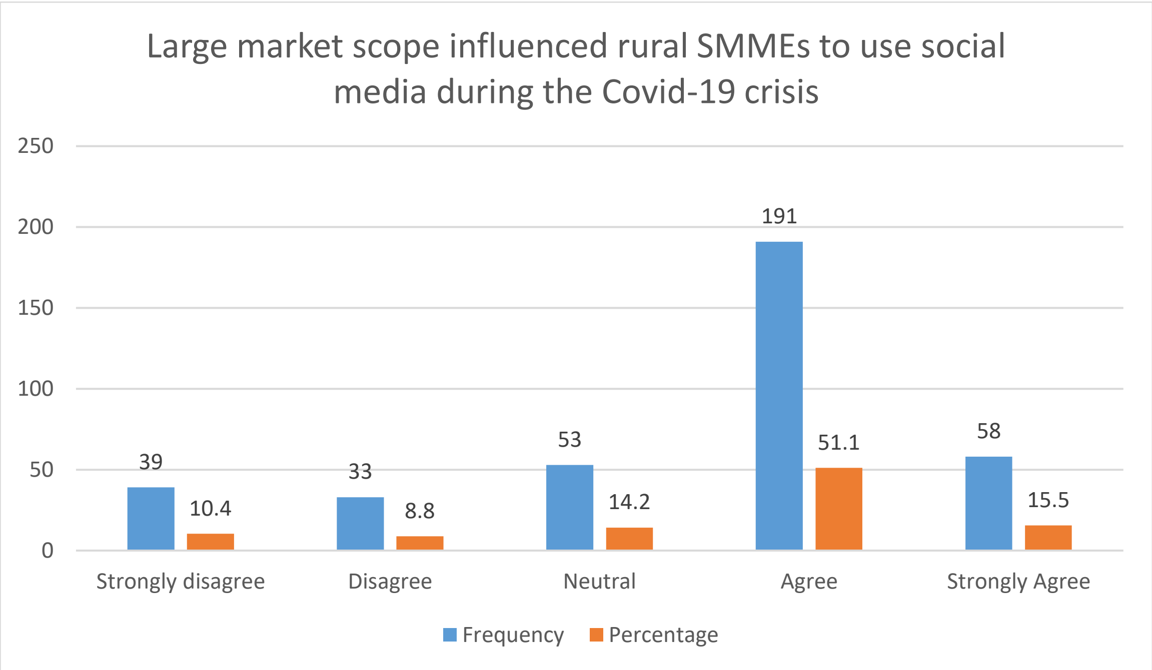


Figure 5.22: Large market scope

As table 5.25 and figure 5.22 show, many respondents (191 or 51.1 percent) agreed and 58 (15.5 percent) further strongly agreed large market scope influenced rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. Furthermore, 53 (14.2 percent) respondents took a neutral position to the statement, with 33 (8.8 percent) that disagreed, while 39 (10.4 percent) strongly disagreed with the statement. A Chi-square test was conducted to determine whether large market scope influenced rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. The results for this variable indicate ($\chi^2 = 231.134$; df = 4; $P < 0.001$), signalling large market scope significantly influenced rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

These findings concur with prior studies that it can, in general, be contended businesses with a larger market scope are more inclined to adopt new technologies than those with a limited market scope that tend to have a lower probability of adoption (Zhu, Kraemer and Xu 2003). In contrast, other scholars have found no correlation for market scope in relation to its influence on new technology adoption and usage (Yeboah-Boateng and Essandoh 2014; Alshamaila 2013; Ramdani, Kawalek and Lorenzo 2009; Boumediene and Kawalek 2008).

5.8.11 Poor government support affected rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

Table 5.26: Poor government support

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	37	9.9	9.9	9.9
	Disagree	34	9.1	9.1	19.0
	Neutral	53	14.2	14.2	33.2
	Agree	180	48.1	48.1	81.3
	Strongly agree	70	18.7	18.7	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

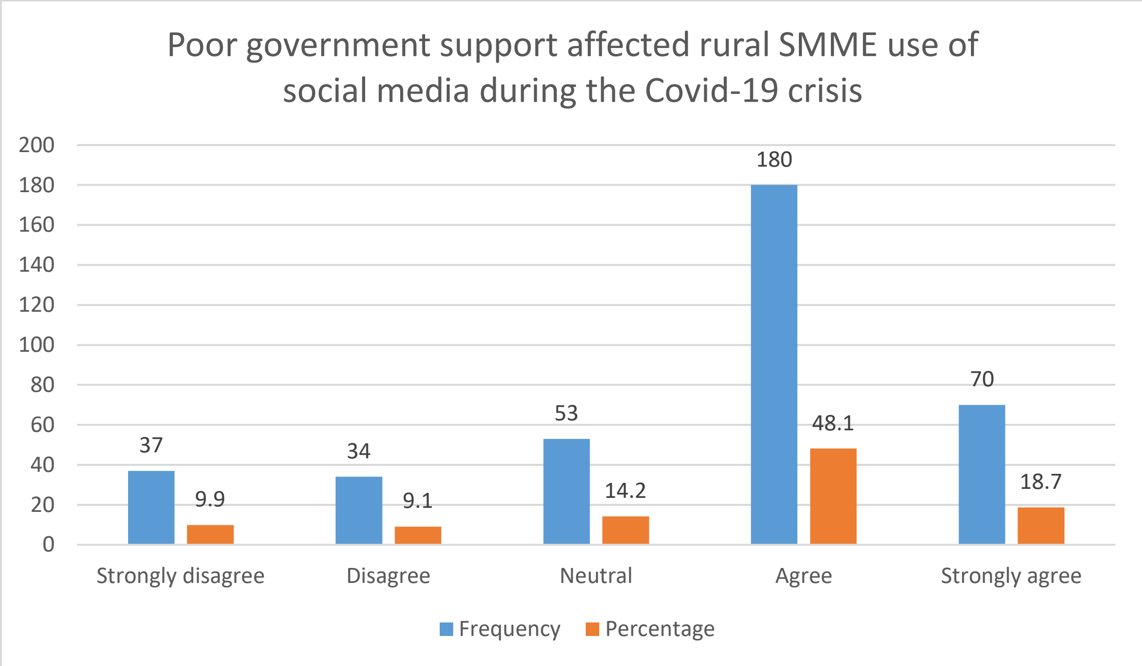


Figure 5.23: Poor government support

The majority respondents (180 or 48.1 percent) showed they agreed, as illustrated in table 5.26 and figure 5.23, with 70 (18.7 percent) respondents that strongly agreed poor government support affected rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. Fewer respondents (53 or 14.2 percent) were neutral, while only 37 (9.9 percent) disagreed and 34 (9.1 percent) respondents indicated strong disagreement with the statement. A Chi-square test was conducted to ascertain whether poor government support affected rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. The results for this variable show (χ 2 = 201.909; df = 4; P <0,001), signalling the use of social media by rural SMMEs is strong and significantly impacted by poor government support having affected rural SMMEs in KZN to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

This suggests most respondents agreed rural SMMEs were not supported by government to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. In line with fewer respondents indicating disagreement, some studies revealed the governments of countries put policy measures in place to assist SMMEs at regional level, including deferred tax payment, reducing rent costs, waiving administrative fees, and subsidising R&D costs for SMMEs, as well as social insurance subsidies, subsidies for training and purchasing teleworking services, and additional funding to spur SMMEs loans, with these measures implemented to reduce the negative impact on SMME survival and growth due to the crisis created by the Covid-19 pandemic (KPMG 2020; Fairlie and Fossen 2021).

Irrespective of governments instituting fiscal, monetary, and administrative measures to counteract the negative impact of the Covid-19 crisis on SMME survival, SMME owners are confronted with the spread of Covid-19 crisis; however, SMMEs continued to experience a decline of their financial performance. The economic recession resulting from the pandemic negatively impacted the day-to-day operations of SMMEs (Belitski *et al*. 2021; Graeber *et al*. 2021).

5.8.12 Lack of internet availability affected rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

Table 5.27: Lack of internet availability

Lack of internet availability affected rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	35	9.4	9.4	9.4
	Disagree	34	9.1	9.1	18.4
	Neutral	41	11.0	11.0	29.4
	Agree	183	48.9	48.9	78.3
	Strongly agree	81	21.7	21.7	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

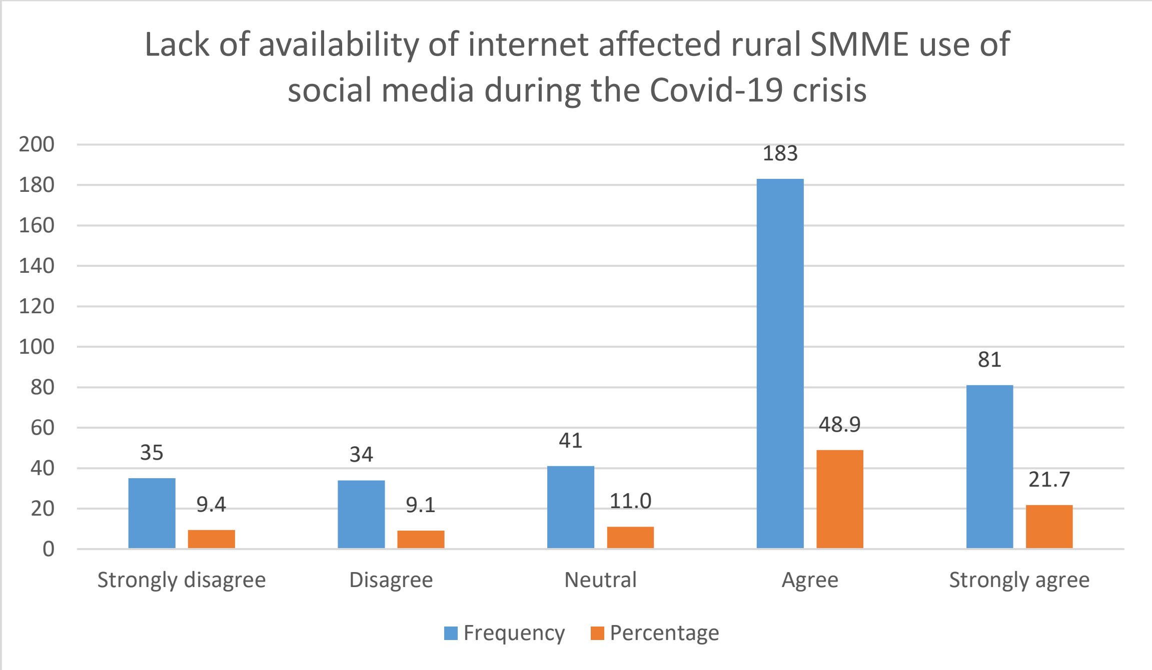


Figure 5.24: Lack of availability of internet

Availability of financial resources signifies the existence of financial support, in which businesses can decide to adopt and use social media technologies for marketing their products and services (Kim & Garrison 2009 Sugandini *et al*. 2020; Potluri & Vajjhala 2018).

It is illustrated by table 5.27 and figure 5.24 that the majority respondents (183 or 48.9 percent) agreed and 81 (21.7 percent) further strongly agreed the lack of internet availability affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. In addition, 41 (11.9 percent) respondents remained neutral, with 34 (9.1 percent) respondents that disagreed and 35 (9.4 percent) that indicated they strongly disagreed with the statement. These findings were supported by a Chi-square test performed to ascertain whether rural SMME social media use was affected by lack of internet availability during the Covid-19 crisis. The results for this variable indicate (χ 2 = 251.733; df = 4; P <0.001), which shows a lack of internet availability affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

This was supported by the Broadband Commission (2014b), which found the internet is still too highly priced in a variety of developing countries and fixed- broadband prices seem to be negatively correlated to the economic development level of developing countries, making it difficult for them to use internet connectivity (ITU 2014b).

Consequently, in light of table 5.27 and figure 5.24, non-availability and/ or partial internet connectivity can be an obstacle for rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media for survival and growth during disasters such as the Covid-19 crisis (Sugandini *et al*. 2020; Gqoboka *et al*. 2022).

5.8.13 Lack of internet affordability affected rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

Table 5.28: Lack of internet affordability

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	39	10.4	10.4	10.4
	Disagree	36	9.6	9.6	20.1
	Neutral	46	12.3	12.3	32.4
	Agree	178	47.6	47.6	79.9
	Strongly agree	75	20.1	20.1	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

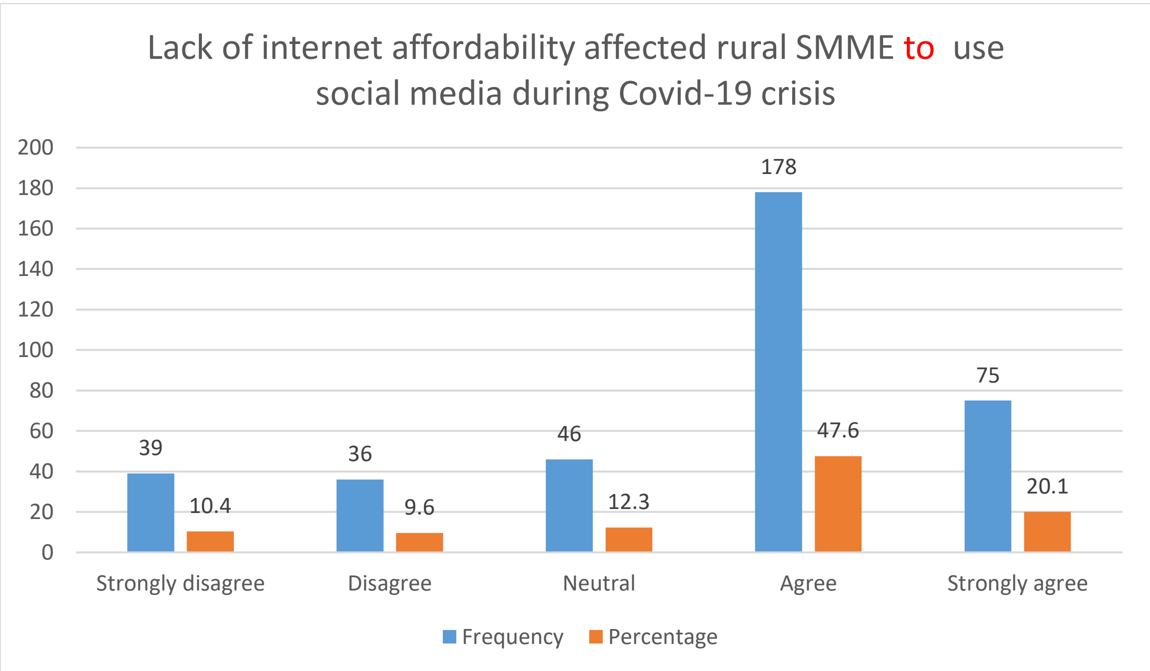


Figure 5.25: Lack of internet affordability

It is depicted by table 5.28 and figure 5.25 that the majority respondents (178 or 47.6 percent) agreed and 75 (20.1 percent) further strongly agreed that lack of affordability of internet affects rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis. Furthermore, 46 (12.3 percent) respondents remained neutral, with 36 (9.6 percent) respondents that disagreed and thirty-nine (10.4 percent) that indicated they strongly disagreed with the statement. These findings were supported by a Chi-square test that was performed to ascertain whether rural SMMEs to use social media are affected by Lack of affordability of internet during Covid-19 crisis. The results for this variable indicate that ($\chi 2 = 190.733$; df = 4; P <0.001), which shows a lack of affordability of internet affects rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis. This implies that most of the respondents had a view that the rural SMMEs were subjected to the lack of affordability of internet to use social media during Covid-19 crisis.

This finding was supported by the finding of Lekhanya (2014) who emphasised that the high cost of infrastructure installation, exorbitant technology price, shortage of highly skilled workers and lack of management vision to adopt internet technology are the hindrances of rural SMMEs to adopt new modern technologies such as the social media in South Africa. This infers rural SMMEs were subject to internet affordability by rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

5.8.14 Lack of broadband internet affected rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

Table 5.29: Lack of broadband internet

Lack of broadband internet affected rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	39	10.4	10.4	10.4
	Disagree	34	9.1	9.1	19.5
	Neutral	37	9.9	9.9	29.4
	Agree	192	51.3	51.3	80.7
	Strongly agree	72	19.3	19.3	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

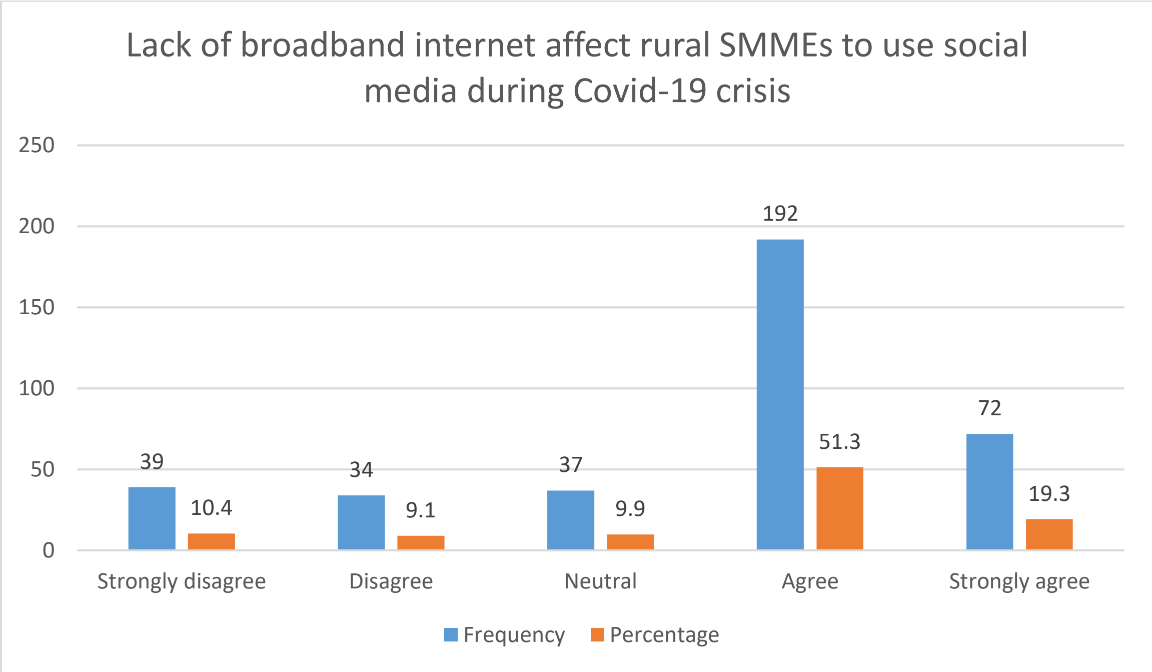


Figure 5.26: Lack of broadband internet affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis

As shown in table 5.29 and figure 5.26, a larger number of respondents (192 or 51.3 percent) agreed and 72 (19.3 percent) further strongly agreed the lack of broadband internet affected rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. Further to this, 37 (9.9 percent) respondents remained neutral, with 34 (9.1 percent) respondents that disagreed and 39 (10.4 percent) that indicated they strongly disagreed with the statement. These findings were supported by a Chi-square test performed to ascertain whether rural SMME use of social media was affected by lack of broadband internet during the Covid-19 crisis. The results for this variable indicate (χ 2 = 442.230; df = 4; P <0.001), which shows a lack of broadband internet affected rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. This implies most respondents suggested rural SMMEs were faced with a lack of broadband internet to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

In support of the above finding, it was found access to the internet is still too highly priced in a variety of developing countries (Broadband Commission 2014b), with fixed-broadband prices that seem to be negatively correlated to the level of developing countries' economic development, making it difficult for them to use internet connectivity (ITU 2014b). In light of the above, Lekhanya (2014) emphasised infrastructure installation costs are high, and technology prices are excessive, while skilled workers are in short supply and management lack the vision to adopt internet technology, all of which hindered rural SMMEs from adopting social media in SA.

5.8.15 High social media cost affected rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

Table 5.30: High social media cost

High social media cost affected rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	34	9.1	9.1	9.1
	Disagree	39	10.4	10.4	19.5
	Neutral	41	11.0	11.0	30.5
	Agree	185	49.5	49.5	79.9
	Strongly agree	75	20.1	20.1	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

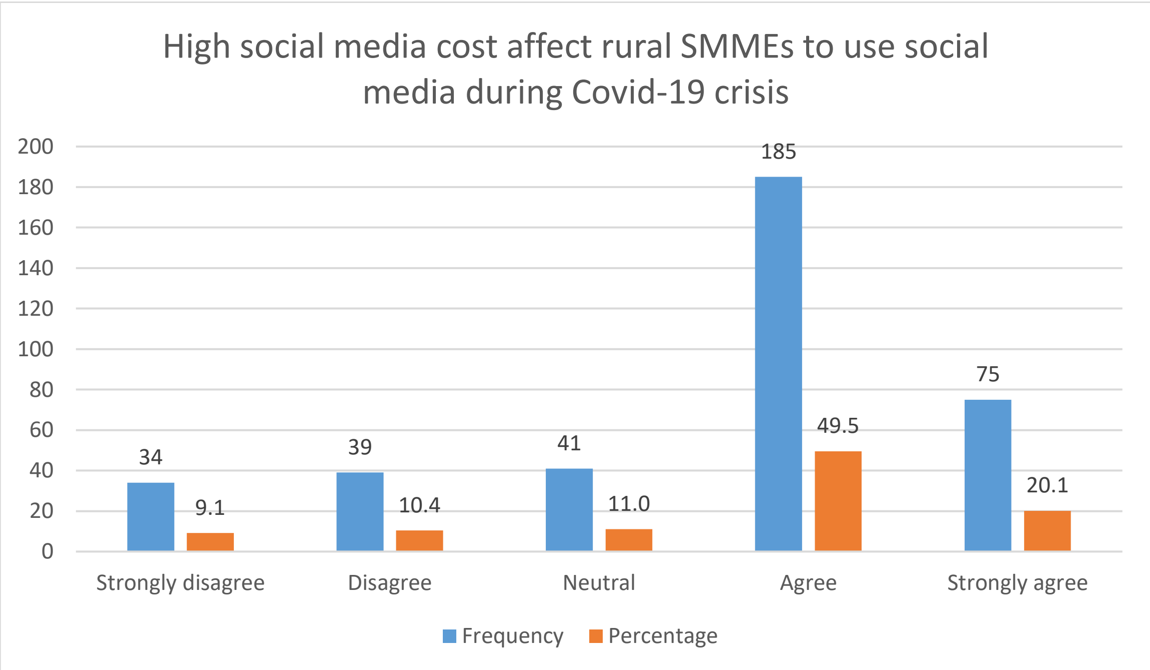


Figure 5.27: High social media cost

Many respondents (185 or 49.5 percent) agreed and 75 (20.1 percent) further strongly agreed rural SMMEs were affected by high social media cost to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. Additionally, 41 (11.0 percent) respondents remained neutral, with 39 (10.4 percent) that disagreed and a further 34 (9.1 percent) that indicated strong disagreement with the statement, as shown in table 5.30 and figure 5.27. A Chi-square test determined whether rural SMME use of social media was affected by high social media cost during the Covid-19 crises. For this variable, results indicate (χ 2 = 217.016; df = 4; P <0.001), illustrating rural SMMEs were affected by high social media cost in the use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

These findings are in line with other studies that found rural SMMEs cannot afford social media cost, due to critical factors including the outbreak and spread of Covid-19 and the crisis and economic turmoil that followed, which caused a negative financial position for their businesses (Laudon & Laudon 2019; Abdul Rashid 2016; Akpan *et al.* 2020). In conclusion, rural SMMEs cannot afford to pay social media costs as they were severely impacted by the Covid-19 crisis and resulting economic crisis, which caused negative financial positions for SMMEs (Laudon & Laudon 2019; Abdul Rashid 2016; Akpan *et al*. 2020).

5.8.16 Lack of cyber security affected rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

Table 5.31: Lack of cyber security

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	40	10.7	10.7	10.7
	Disagree	35	9.4	9.4	20.1
	Neutral	38	10.2	10.2	30.2
	Agree	178	47.6	47.6	77.8
	Strongly agree	83	22.2	22.2	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

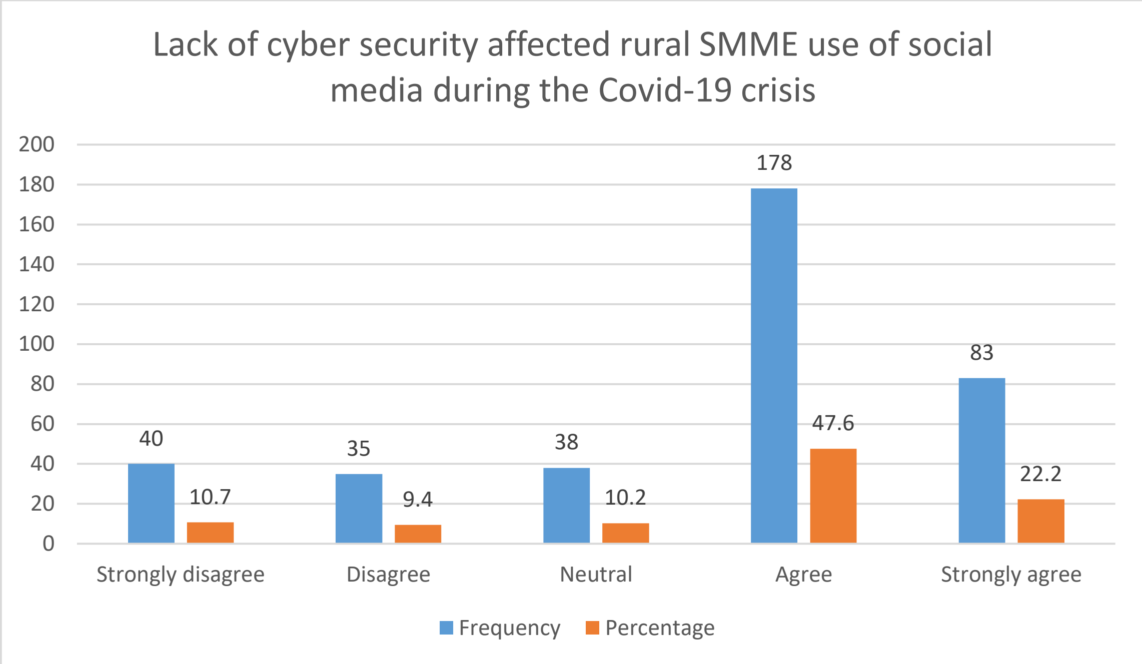


Figure 5.28: Lack of cyber security

Table 5.31 and figure 5.28 show most respondents (178 or 47.6 percent) agreed and 83 (22.2 percent) further strongly agreed the lack of cyber security affected rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. In addition, 38 (10.2 percent) respondents remained neutral, with 35 (9.4 percent) respondents that disagreed with the statement and four (10.7 percent) that indicated strong disagreement. A Chi-square test was conducted to ascertain whether lack of cyber security affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. The results for this variable indicate ($\chi 2 = 198.754$; df = 4; P <0.001), which signals lack of cyber security affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. In view of table 5.31 and figure 5.28, the majority respondents were of the opinion rural SMMEs have a lack of cyber security, which affected their social media use during the Covid-19 crisis that could have made them vulnerable to cyber security attacks during the Covid-19 crisis.

These findings are supported by Kabanda, Tanner, and Kent (2018), who revealed small business perception of cybersecurity is inhibited by internal factors such as the lack of budget, insufficient management support, and attitudes towards cybersecurity. It was also found small businesses cybersecurity was affected by institutional pressures. Thus, the challenges faced by rural SMMEs include their vulnerability to cyber-attacks and lack of cyber security measures (PwC 2020).

5.8.17 Lack of resources to implement cyber security solutions affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

Table 5.32: Lack of resources to implement cyber security solutions.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	37	9.9	9.9	9.9
	Disagree	35	9.4	9.4	19.3
	Neutral	39	10.4	10.4	29.7
	Agree	188	50.3	50.3	79.9
	Strongly agree	75	20.1	20.1	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

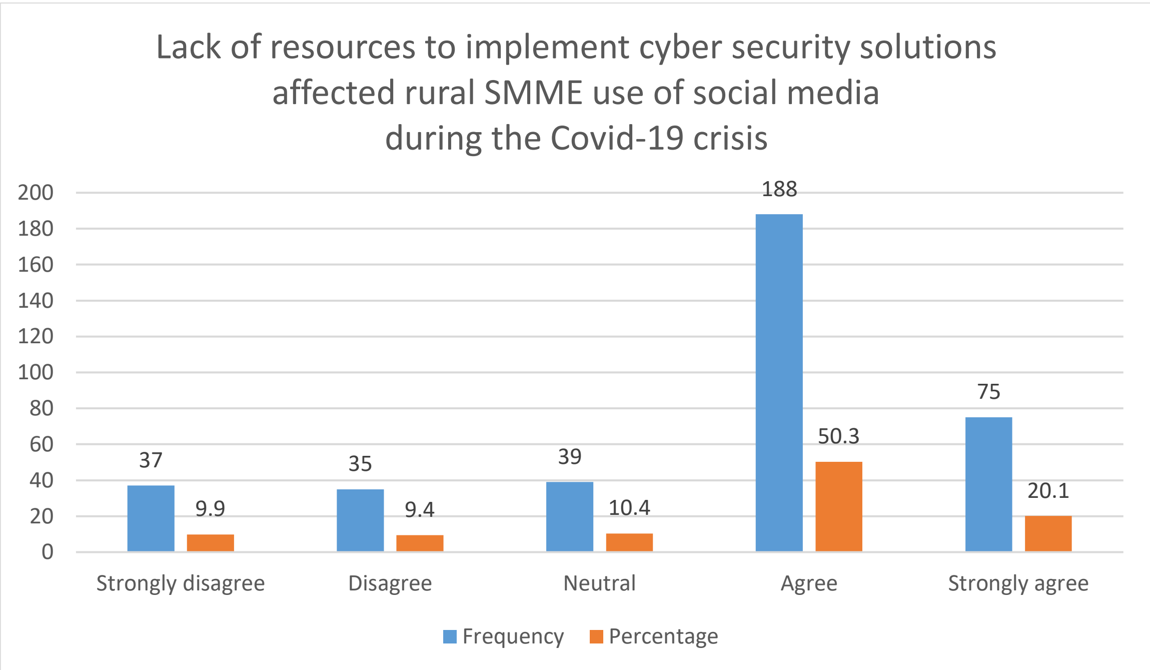


Figure 5.29: Lack of resources to implement cyber security solutions.

Financial resources are key resources that will dictate whether rural SMMEs will use social media, as stated by Maduku *et al*. (2016), To and Ngai (2006) and Itliong (2020). Therefore, financial capability is the only critical factor businesses consider when they intend to embark on new innovation adoption. This supports the findings, as majority respondents (188 or 50.3 percent) indicated agreement and 75 (20.1 percent) further strongly agreed the lack of resources to implement cyber security solutions affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. A smaller number of 39 (10.4 percent) respondents indicated neutral, while 35 (9.4 percent) disagreed, with 37 (9.9 percent) respondents that strongly disagreed with the statement (Table 5.32 and Figure 5.29). A Chi-square test was conducted to determine whether the lack of resources to implement cyber security solutions affects rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis. For this variable, the results indicate ($\chi^2 = 288.727$; df = 4; $P < 0.001$), which shows the lack of resources to implement cyber security solutions affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis in KZN.

This was supported by Kabanda *et al*. (2018), who found small businesses were unable to implement cyber security solutions due to the lack of financial resources. This implies low budget allocation to support cyber security implementation by small businesses.

5.8.18 Inadequate government regulations affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis

Table 5.33: Inadequate government regulations

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	35	9.4	9.4	9.4
	Disagree	38	10.2	10.2	19.5
	Neutral	45	12.0	12.0	31.6
	Agree	181	48.4	48.4	79.9
	Strongly agree	75	20.1	20.1	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

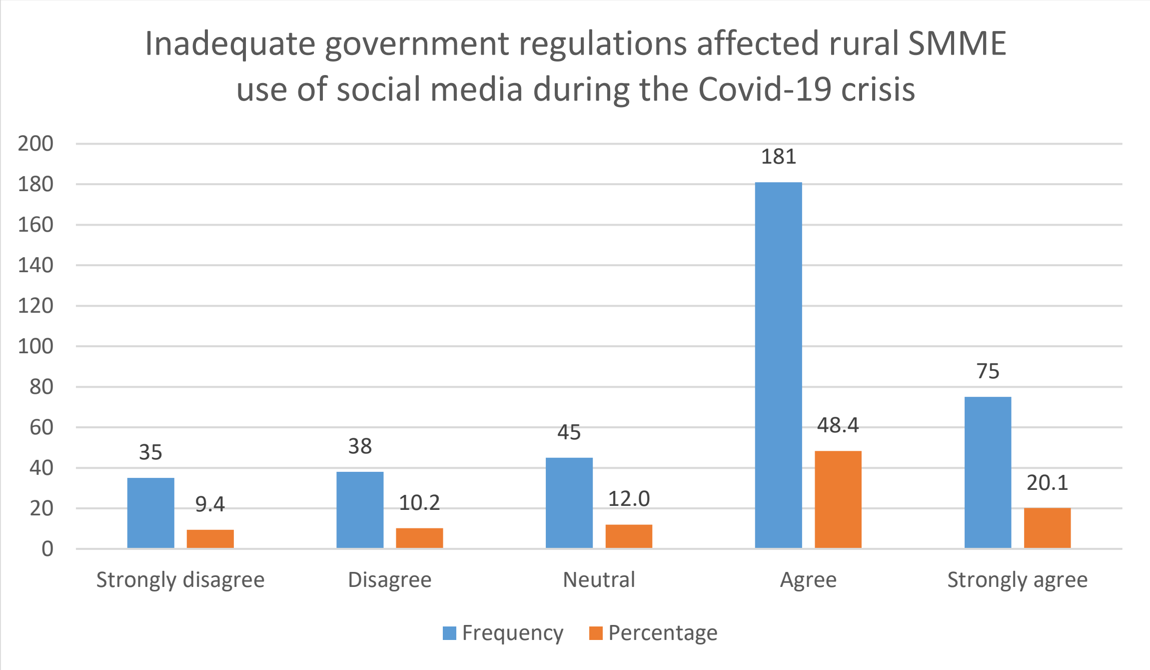


Figure 5.30: Inadequate government regulations

Table 5.33 and figure 5.30 indicate most respondents (181 or 48.1 percent) agreed and 75 (20.1 percent) further strongly agreed inadequate government regulations affected rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. Moreover, 45 (12.0 percent) respondents remained neutral, with 38 (10.2 percent) respondents that disagreed with the statement and 35 (9.4 percent) that indicated strong disagreement. A Chi-square test was conducted to ascertain whether inadequate government regulations affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. The results for this variable indicate (χ 2 = 198.754; df = 4; P <0.001), which signals inadequate government regulations affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

In line with these findings, Seethamraju (2015) and Rangwetsi *et al.* (2021) argued government support through legislation is one of the environmental factors that influence technology adoption in the TOE framework. Regulations established by the Government can motivate and prevent businesses from adopting technological innovations, such as the social media drive. In conclusion, as illustrated by the findings shown in table 5.33 and figure 5.30, laws and regulations may be the main stumbling blocks, due to the compliance and administrative burdens imposed by Acts and regulations, which impeded rural SMMEs from having sufficient funds to adopt social media technologies during the Covid-19 crisis. This has special reference to the growth and development of rural SMMEs in KZN (Sugandini *et al*. 2020; Thomas and Luvhengo 2020).

5.8.19 Lack of patent security affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

Table 5.34: Lack of patent security

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	36	9.6	9.6	9.6
	Disagree	37	9.9	9.9	19.5
	Neutral	46	12.3	12.3	31.8
	Agree	183	48.9	48.9	80.7
	Strongly agree	72	19.3	19.3	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

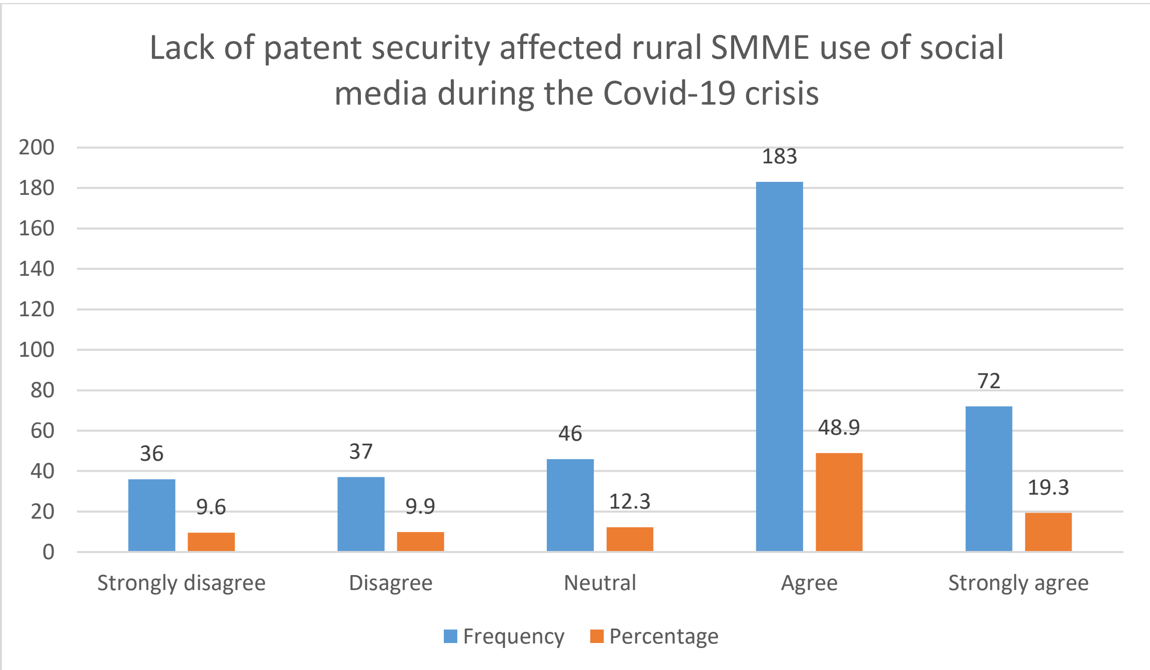


Figure 5.31: Lack of patent security

Table 5.34 and figure 5.31 indicate most respondents (183 or 48.9 percent) agreed and 72 (19.3 percent) further strongly agreed the lack of patent security affected rural SMME social media use during Covid-19 crisis. Additionally, 46 (12.3 percent) respondents remained neutral, with 37 (9.9 percent) respondents that disagreed with the statement and

36 (9.6 percent) that indicated strong disagreement. A Chi-square test was conducted to ascertain whether lack of patent security affects rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis. The results for this variable indicate (χ 2 = 206.936; df = 4; P <0.001), which signals that inadequate government regulations affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis. This implies most respondents were of the opinion rural SMMEs experienced challenges regarding the lack of patent security for using social media, which would allow business competitors to use the business products for their benefit during the Covid-19 crisis. Hughes *et al.* (2010) further highlighted that small businesses are not in the position of investing in patents as compared to larger businesses because of the lack of affordability of resources on the side of small businesses.

5.8.20 Low business profit due to the small size of rural SMMEs affected their social media use during the Covid-19 crisis.

Table 5.35: Low business profit due to the small size of rural SMMEs

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	35	9.4	9.4	9.4
	Disagree	38	10.2	10.2	19.5
	Neutral	42	11.2	11.2	30.7
	Agree	191	51.1	51.1	81.8
	Strongly agree	68	18.2	18.2	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

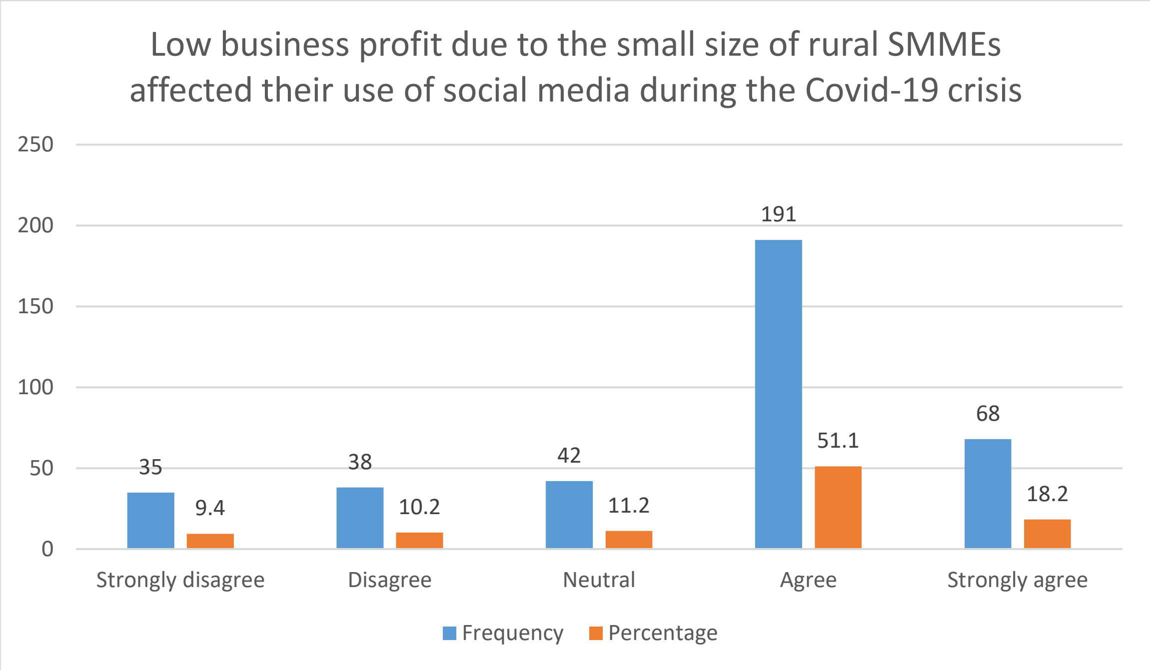


Figure 5.32: Low business profit due to the small size of rural SMMEs

Table 5.35 and figure 5.32 indicate a large number of respondents (191 or 51.1 percent) agreed and 68 (18.2 percent) further strongly agreed low business profit, due to the small size of rural SMMEs, affected their social media use during Covid-19 crisis. Furthermore, 42 (11.2 percent) respondents remained neutral, with 38 (10.2 percent) respondents that disagreed with the statement and 35 (9.4 percent) that indicated strong disagreement. A Chi-square test was conducted to ascertain whether low business profit due to the small size of rural SMMEs affected their social media use during Covid-19 crisis. The results for this variable indicate (χ 2 = 234.797; df = 4; P <0.001), which signals low business profit, due to the small size of rural SMMEs, affected their use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

This finding was in line with the finding of Oliveira and Martins (2011), who argued the flexible and simple managerial structure of small businesses generally assists them to react and adapt quickly to turbulences of their business environment, including new technology adoption. With large enterprises, their reactions tend to be sluggish due to bureaucracy levels concerned in the decision-making process. This infers the SMME business size can be an obstacle in adopting and use of social media technologies (Rahayu and Day 2015).

5.8.21 Lack of social support affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis

Table 5.36: Lack of social support

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	36	9.6	9.6	9.6
	Disagree	36	9.6	9.6	19.3
	Neutral	37	9.9	9.9	29.1
	Agree	183	48.9	48.9	78.1
	Strongly agree	82	21.9	21.9	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

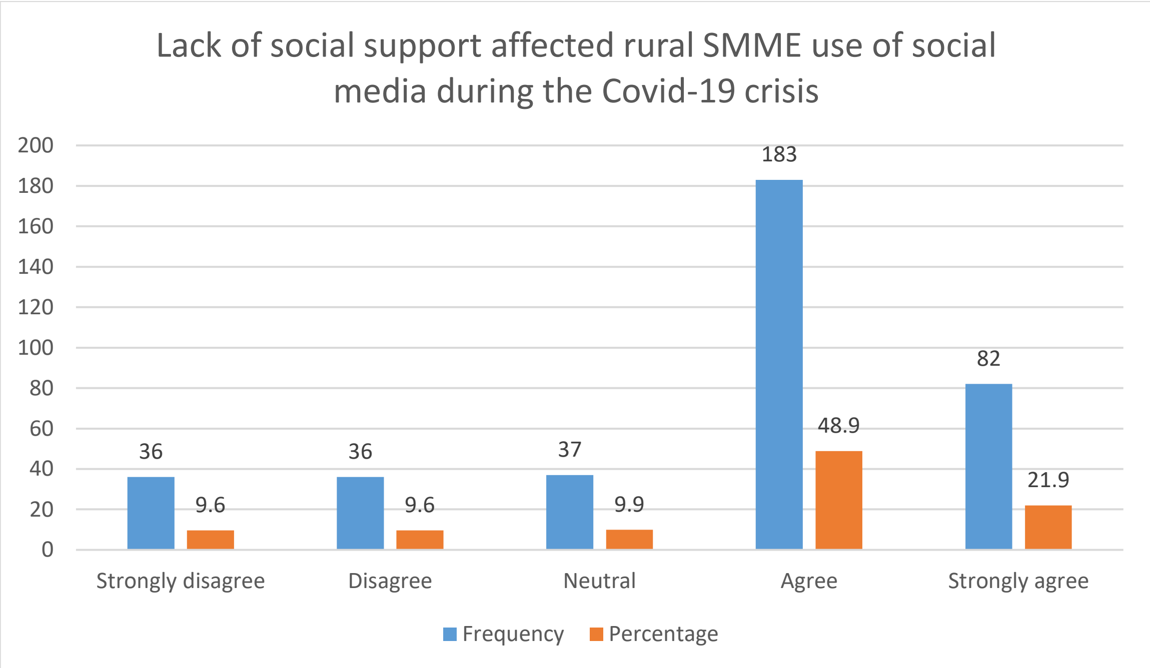


Figure 5.33: Lack of social support

Table 5.36 and figure 5.33 depict that a large number of respondents (183 or 48.9 percent) agreed and 82 (21.9 percent) further strongly agreed the lack of social support affected rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. In addition, 37 (9.9 percent) respondents remained neutral, with 36 (9.6 percent) respondents that disagreed with the statement and 36 (9.6 percent) that indicated strong disagreement. A Chi-square test was conducted to ascertain whether lack of social support affected rural SMME social media use during the Covid-19 crisis. The results for this variable indicate (χ 2 = 216.561; df =

4; P <0.001), which signals the lack of social support affected rural SMME social media use during the Covid-19 crisis.

These findings were supported by some researchers who found social support influences the social perspective on technology adoption (Malik *et al.* 2019; Chukwuere, Mavetera & Mnkandla 2017; Joshua, Nehemiah & Ernest 2015; Lekhanya 2013).

Component matrix: factors as they relate to influence of social media use for SMME survival and growth in rural KZN during the Covid-19 crisis.

Table 5.37: Component matrix: factors that influenced rural KZN SMME social media use for survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis

Component Matrix[a]

B13	Component 1
Lack of technical skills affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	0.883
Lack of social media awareness affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	0.893
Lack of managerial competencies affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	0.889
Lack of financial resources affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	0.884
Lack of infrastructure affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	0.876
Lack of internet connectivity affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	0.885
Lack of technology infrastructure affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	0.893
Competitive environments influence rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	0.854
Customer satisfaction influence rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	0.847
Large market scope influence rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	0.862

Poor government support affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	0.852
Lack of availability of internet affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	0.876
Lack of affordability of internet affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	0.882
Lack of broadband internet affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	0.894
High social media cost affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	0.863
Lack of cyber security affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	0.890
Lack of resources to implement cyber security solutions affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	0.880
Inadequate government regulations affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	0.856
Lack of patent security affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	0.884
Low business profit due to the small size of rural SMMEs affect their use of social media during Covid-19 crisis	0.873
Lack of social support affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	0.879

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 1 components extracted.

An additional statistical analysis was performed for the above-mentioned figures (Figures 5.13 to 5.33). A component test was conducted on the statement regarding the factors influencing social media use for SMME survival and growth in rural KZN during the Covid-19 crisis. Respondents indicated to some of the category components tested that reflect positive significance and others show negative significance. A component test was performed on the statement regarding whether lack of broadband internet affected rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis, and a strong positive significance of 0.894 was determined.

The test whether the lack of social media awareness and lack of technology infrastructure affected rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis revealed the same score of 0.893 for the same statements. A strong positive significance of 0.890 was further established for the statement whether lack of cyber security affected rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. This implies the lack of cyber security can expose rural SMMEs to cybercrime. The other variable pertaining to whether lack of managerial competencies affects rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis, a positive significance of 0.889 is depicted while the statement to test whether lack of internet connectivity affects rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis recorded a score of 0.885. This infers that the lack of internet connectivity had a negative impact on a rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media during Covid-19 crisis.

A figure of 0.884 is reflected for respondents who agreed rural SMMEs were affected by a lack of patent security to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. On the variable pertaining to lack of financial resources that affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis, the component test indicates a positive significance of 0.884. This indicates the respondents believed lack of financial resources would have discouraged rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media during the Covid-19 crisis for their survival and growth, which will impact negatively on rural SMME revenues. Therefore, this will negatively impact the economic growth of KZN and eventually, the economic growth of SA.

This is line with the component tests conducted to establish whether lack of internet affordability and resources to implement cyber security solutions to use social media affected rural SMME use of social media during Covid-19 crisis, with recorded scores of 0.882 and 0.880, respectively. This denotes some rural SMMEs were unable to use social media due to the lack of financial resources to secure internet services, while the lack of financial resources was also an impediment to rural SMMEs in securing cyber security solutions to protect them from cybercrime during the Covid-19 crisis.

This was supported by the test conducted to determine whether low business profit, due to the small size of rural SMMEs, affected their use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis, which was confirmed by a score of 0.873, depicting that the small size contributed to low business profit, which had a bearing on rural SMME adoption and use social media during the Covid-19 crisis, for their survival and growth in rural KZN. The other variable shows the reluctance of rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media, due to the high media cost, was confirmed with the test conducted to find out whether high social media cost affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis, where a positive significance of 0.863 was recorded in this regard.

The variable pertaining to whether a lack of technical skills affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis, recorded a positive significance of 0.883, while the other variable to test the component whether lack of internet availability affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis, a score of 0.876 is recorded. This was in line with the test conducted regarding whether lack of infrastructure affected rural SMME social media use during the Covid-19 crisis, where a strong positive significance was recorded with a score of 0.876. Concerning the statement whether large market scope influenced rural SMME social media use during the Covid-19 crisis, a positive significance of 0.862 is shown, while respondents believed the competitive environment influenced rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis, with a strong positive significance of 0.854 recorded in this regard.

The respondents were also of the opinion that inadequate government regulations and poor government support affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis, where tests conducted recorded scores of 0.856 and 0.852, respectively. However, the variable indicated the lack of support affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis, denoted by results from the test conducted, which revealed a strong significance with a score of 0.879. This score had a relationship with the statement that customer satisfaction influenced rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis, with a strong positive of 0.847 recorded.

SUB-OBJECTIVE 2: THE EXTENT TO WHICH RURAL SMMEs USED SOCIAL MEDIA DRIVE FOR SURVIVAL AND GROWTH DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

5.8.22 Rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to increase dominance in the market during the Covid-19 crisis.

Table 5.38: Rural SMME used WhatsApp to increase dominance in the market.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	119	31.8	31.8	31.8

	Disagree	187	50.0	50.0	81.8
	Neutral	26	7.0	7.0	88.8
	Agree	26	7.0	7.0	95.7
	Strongly agree	16	4.3	4.3	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

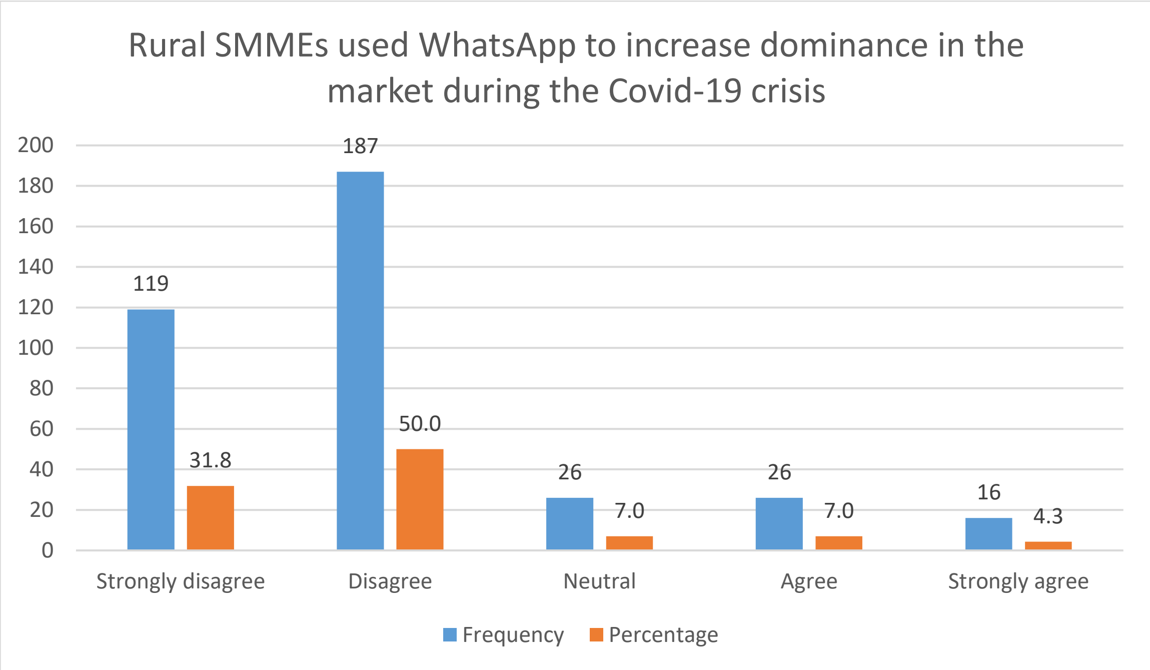


Figure 5.34: Rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to increase dominance in the market.

Goi (2014) and Jordan (2018) pointed out business enterprises adopted and used social media platforms to communicate with existing and potential customers, with the intention of creating relationships to shape future loyalty. As depicted in table 5.38 and figure 5.34, a large number of respondents (187 or 50.0 percent) disagreed and 119 (31.8 percent) further strongly disagreed rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to increase dominance in the market during the Covid-19 crisis.

A smaller number of respondents (26 or seven percent) were neutral, while 26 (seven percent) and 16 (4.3 percent) respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively, with the statement. A Chi-square test was conducted to ascertain the extent to which rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to increase dominance in the market during the Covid-19 crisis. The results indicate (χ 2 =304.316; df = 4; P< 0,001) for this variable, which shows WhatsApp had no significant use by rural SMMEs to increase dominance in the market during the Covid-19 crisis. In light of this finding, it was determined business enterprises can use WhatsApp as a marketing tool to promote their business, as they can interact with users by sending and receiving text and media files using the rich interface by requesting early access to the platform (Stone & Logan 2018).

5.8.23 Rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to market their products during the Covid-19 crisis.

Table 5.39: Rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to market their products.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	105	28.1	28.1	28.1
	Disagree	207	55.3	55.3	83.4
	Neutral	19	5.1	5.1	88.5
	Agree	31	8.3	8.3	96.8
	Strongly agree	12	3.2	3.2	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

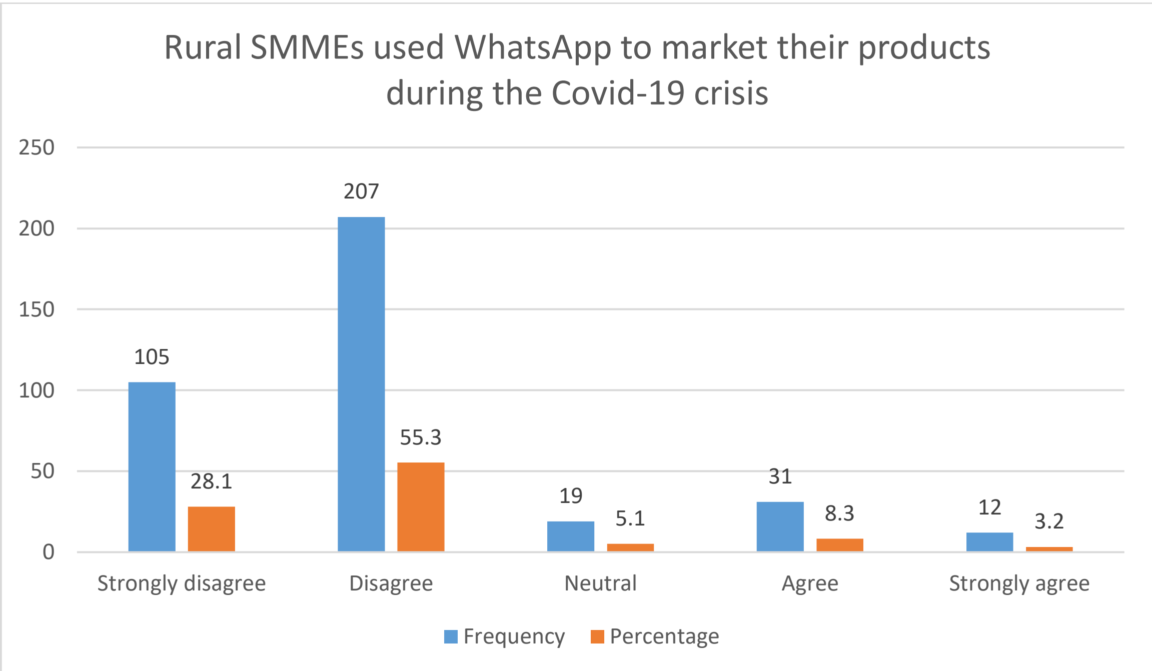


Figure 5.35: Rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to market their products.

Many respondents (207 or 55.3 percent) disagreed and 105 (28.1 percent) further strongly disagreed rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to market their products during the Covid-19 crisis. Furthermore, 19 (5.1 percent) respondents remained neutral, with 31 (8.3 percent) that agreed and a further 12 (3.2 percent) that indicated strong agreement with the statement (Table 5.39 and figure 5.35). A Chi-square test was conducted to ascertain the extent to which rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to market their products during the Covid-19 crisis. For this variable, results indicate (χ 2 = 365.840; df = 4; P <0.001), illustrating the use of WhatsApp by rural SMMEs had no significant impact in marketing their products during the Covid-19 crises. This shows rural SMMEs were unable to appropriately use WhatsApp to market their products during the Covid-19 crisis.

The result is supported by Kakumbi and Phiri (2022), who posit the adoption of social media among rural SMMEs is low, even though it can have a huge impact on their survival and growth. This was confirmed by some researchers, who argued WhatsApp can assist the enterprises to stay in touch with customers and expand their market base by effectively promoting the business, irrespective of where the users reside (Dar *et al.* 2017).

5.8.24 Rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to increase sales during the Covid-19 crisis.

Table 5.40: Rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to increase sales.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	88	23.5	23.5	23.5
	Disagree	221	59.1	59.1	82.6
	Neutral	20	5.3	5.3	88.0
	Agree	28	7.5	7.5	95.5
	Strongly agree	17	4.5	4.5	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

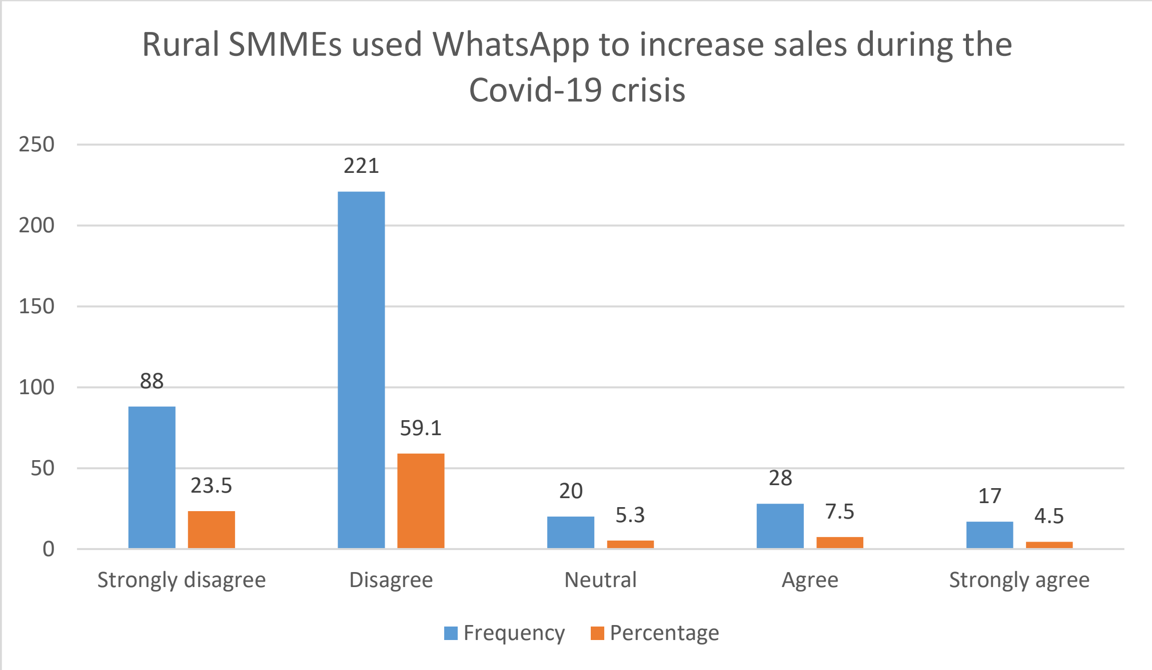


Figure 5.36: Rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to increase sales.

As reflected in table 5.40 and figure 5.36, a significant number of respondents (221 or 59.1 percent) indicated disagreement, with a further 88 (23.5 percent) respondents that strongly disagreed rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to increase sales during the Covid-19 crisis. A further 20 (5.3 percent) respondents remained neutral, with 28 (7.5 percent) that agreed and 17 (4.5 percent) that strongly agreed with the statement. To ascertain the extent to which rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to increase sales during the Covid-19 crisis, a Chi-square test was conducted. The results for this variable show (χ 2 = 402.176; df = 4; P <0.001), which indicates rural SMMEs were unable to significantly use WhatsApp to increase sales during the Covid-19 crisis.

These findings reflect a lack of social media awareness by rural SMMEs, which Oyekan and Kamiyo (2008) indicated is one of the problems that contradicts the use of social media, despite the notion of social media awareness being the primary determinant of informal scientific communication (Hew 2011). This was confirmed in table 5.40 and figure 5.36, which depicted a large number of respondents (312 or 83.43 percent) was in disagreement with the statement. However, previous researchers argued WhatsApp is prime factor business enterprises can use to stay in touch with customers and expand their market base by effectively promoting the business, regardless where users reside (Dar *et al.* 2017).

5.8.25 Rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to create awareness of their products and services during the Covid-19 crisis

Table 5.41: Rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to create product and service awareness.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	92	24.6	24.6	24.6
	Disagree	214	57.2	57.2	81.8
	Neutral	24	6.4	6.4	88.2
	Agree	30	8.0	8.0	96.3
	Strongly agree	14	3.7	3.7	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

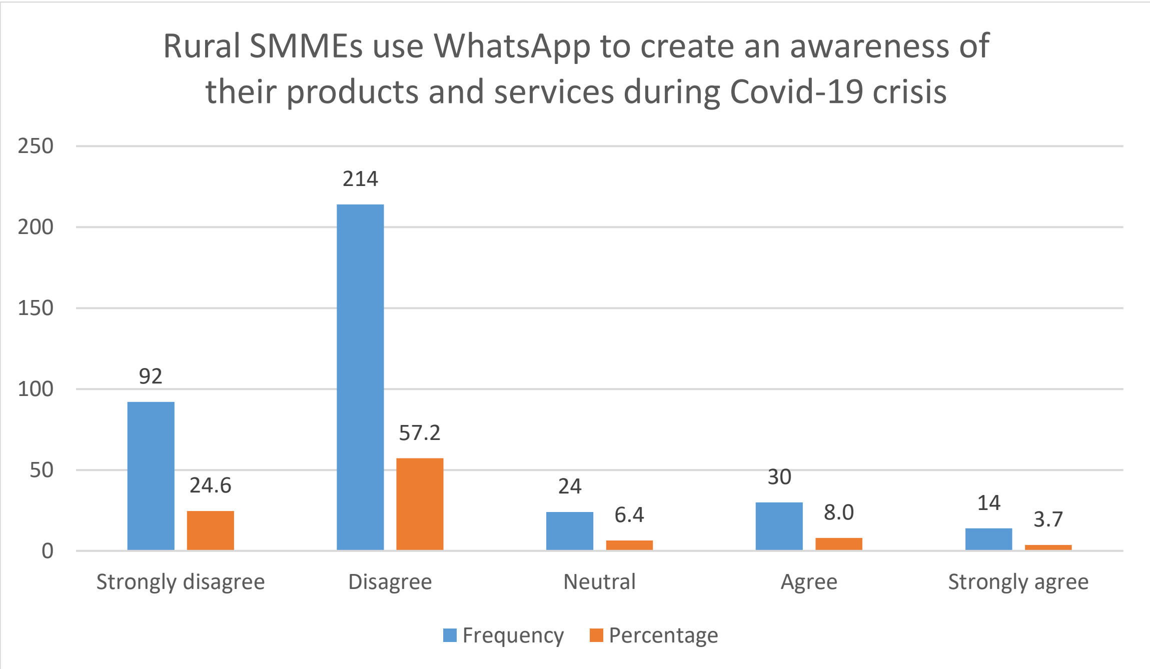


Figure 5.37: Rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to create product and service awareness.

Bugshan (2019) states social media awareness has become a means of diffusion and improvement of information, which follows on from Praveena and Thomas (2014) and Shen (2015), who agreed such awareness is an essential factor influencing the intention to continue to adopt web technology. The findings in table 5.41 and figure 5.37 also confirm that creating an awareness of rural SMMEs products and services was critical for their survival and growth.

As illustrated in table 5.41 and figure 5.37 confirm creating awareness of rural SMME products and services is critical for their survival and growth, where a significant number of respondents (214 or 57.2 percent) disagreed, with 92 (24.6 percent) respondents that strongly disagreed with the statement. A further 24 (6.4 percent) respondents remained neutral, with 30 (eight percent) that agreed and 14 (3.7 percent) that strongly agreed with the statement. To ascertain the extent to which rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to create awareness of their products and services during the Covid-19 crisis, a Chi-square test was conducted. The results for this variable show (χ 2 = 373.754; df = 4; P <0.001), which reflects that rural SMMEs were unable to significantly use WhatsApp to create awareness of their products and services during the Covid-19 crisis.

These findings are supported by Oji *et al.* (2017), Budree *et al*. (2019) and Prince (2019), who pointed out the lack of social media strategies to support the survival and growth of rural SMMEs in SA; this was a major obstacle in dealing with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

5.8.26 Rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to keep current customers during the Covid-19 crisis.

Table 5.42: Rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to keep current customers

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	109	29.1	29.1	29.1
	Disagree	202	54.0	54.0	83.2
	Neutral	18	4.8	4.8	88.0
	Agree	27	7.2	7.2	95.2
	Strongly agree	18	4.8	4.8	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

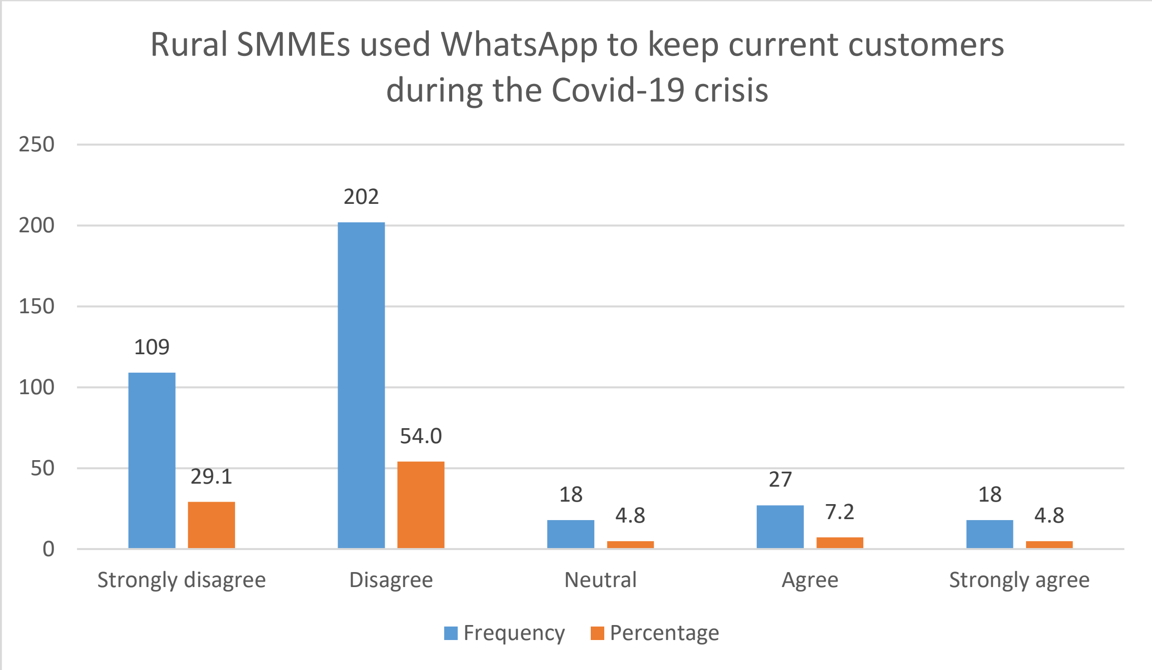


Figure 5.38: Rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to keep current customers.

As illustrated in table 5.42 and figure 5.38, a significant number of respondents (202 or 54.0 percent) disagreed, with 109 (29.1 percent) that strongly disagreed with the statement. A further 18 (4.8 percent) respondents remained neutral, with 27 (7.2 percent) that agreed and 18 (4.8 percent) that strongly agreed with the statement. To ascertain the extent to which rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to keep current customers during the Covid-19 crisis, a Chi-square test was conducted. The results for this variable show (χ 2 = 348.754; df = 4; P <0.001), this indicates rural SMMEs in KZN were unable to significantly use WhatsApp to keep current customers during the Covid-19 crisis.

These findings are in line with studies that highlighted SMMEs are sluggish in social media platform use to market their products and services, with the intention of keeping current customers to ensure their growth, with special reference to rural KZN (Budree, Fietkiewicz and Lins 2019; Prince 2019). This confirms findings by Lekhanya (2013), highlighting South African rural KZN SMMEs' lethargic attitude towards adopting and using social media to improve their businesses, through interacting with existing and potential customers.

5.8.27 Rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to receive customer feedback on existing products during the Covid-19 crisis.

Table 5.43: Rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to receive customer feedback on existing products.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	123	32.9	32.9	32.9
	Disagree	188	50.3	50.3	83.2
	Neutral	21	5.6	5.6	88.8
	Agree	28	7.5	7.5	96.3
	Strongly agree	14	3.7	3.7	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

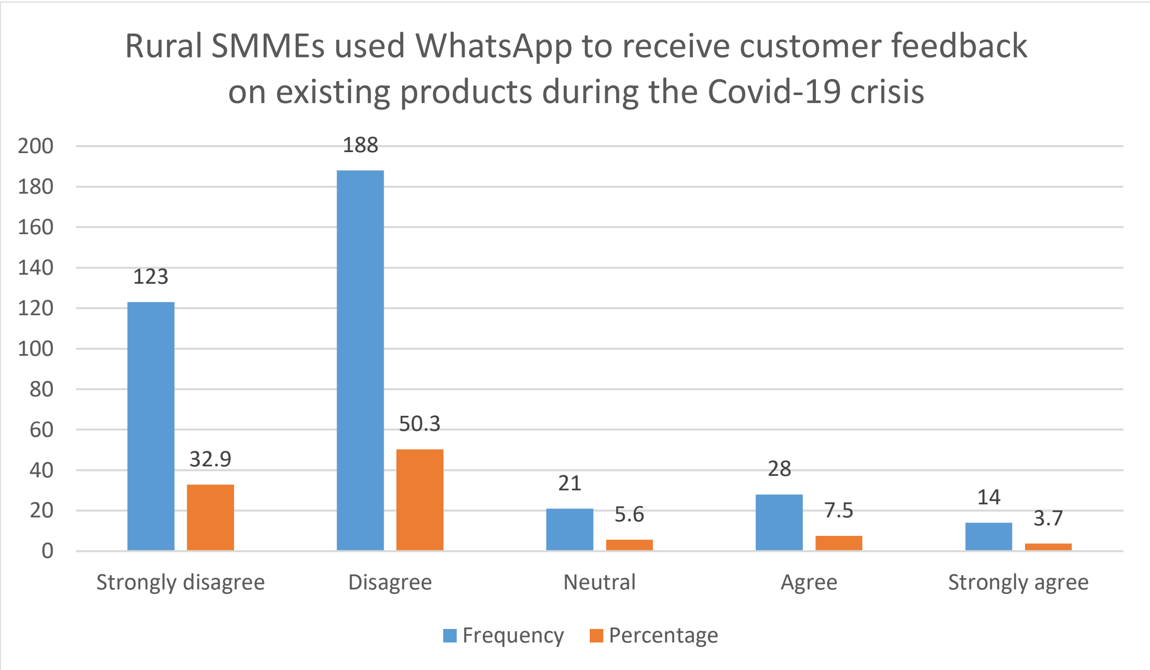


Figure 5.39: Rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to receive customer feedback on existing products.

As illustrated in table 5.43 and figure 5.39, a large number of respondents (188 or 50.3 percent) disagreed and 123 (32.9 percent) respondents strongly disagreed with the statement. A further 21 (5.6 percent) respondents remained neutral, with 28 (7.5 percent) that agreed and 14 (3.7 percent) that strongly agreed with the statement. To ascertain the extent to which rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to receive customer feedback on existing products during the Covid-19 crisis, a Chi-square test was conducted. The results for this variable show (χ^2 = 319.770; df = 4; P <0.001), which illustrates rural SMMEs in KZN were unable to significantly use WhatsApp to receive customer feedback on existing products during the Covid-19 crisis.

These findings are in accordance with studies that determined a lack of social media use by SMMEs, with special reference to rural KZN. This has added to the challenges rural SMMEs are faced with in their daily operations (Budree, Fietkiewicz and Lins 2019; Prince 2019).

5.8.28 Rural SMMEs used WhatsApp as a cost-effective measure to communicate during the Covid-19 crisis.

Table 5.44: Rural SMMEs used WhatsApp as a cost-effective measure to communicate.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	101	27.0	27.0	27.0
	Disagree	212	56.7	56.7	83.7
	Neutral	18	4.8	4.8	88.5
	Agree	25	6.7	6.7	95.2
	Strongly agree	18	4.8	4.8	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

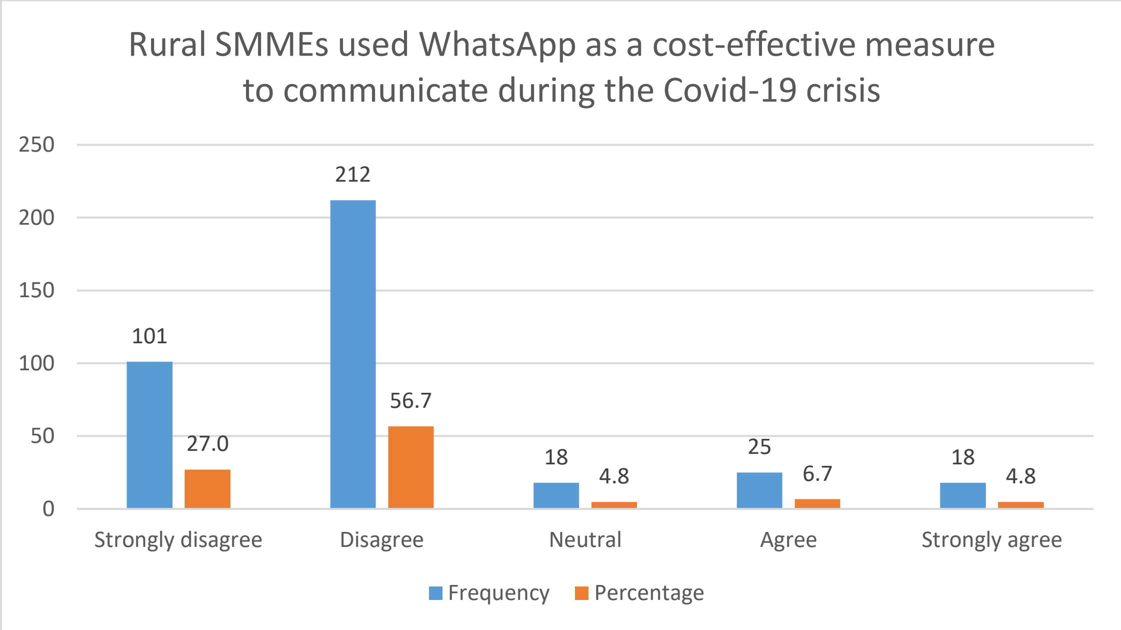


Figure 5.40: Rural SMMEs used WhatsApp as a cost-effective measure to communicate.

As shown in table 5.44 and figure 5.40, a large number of respondents (212 or 56.7 percent) disagreed and 101 (27.0 percent) respondents strongly disagreed with the statement. Furthermore, 18 (4.8 percent) respondents remained neutral, with 25 (6.7 percent) that agreed and 18 (4.8 percent) that strongly agreed with the statement. To ascertain the extent to which rural SMMEs used WhatsApp as a cost-effective measure to communicate during the Covid-19 crisis, a Chi-square test was conducted. The results for this variable show (χ 2 = 380.251; df = 4; P <0.001), which confirms rural SMMEs in KZN were unable to significantly use WhatsApp as a cost-effective measure to communicate during the Covid-19 crisis.

These findings are confirmed by prior research that found a lack of social media use by SMMEs, with special reference to rural KZN. These findings contradict those of the study conducted by Kottani and Kumar (2021), which established the use of WhatsApp by business enterprises is the most cost-effective platform and is also regarded as a powerful tool for communication with customers. This platform was popular during the Covid-19 crisis in India among small businesses as a communication tool to market their products to increase their revenues. This shows rural SMMEs in KZN lacked the social media awareness to use WhatsApp as a cost-effective measure to communicate during the Covid-19 crisis.

5.8.29 Rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to network with other SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis.

Table 5.45: Rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to network with other SMMEs.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	124	33.2	33.2	33.2
	Disagree	171	45.7	45.7	78.9
	Neutral	34	9.1	9.1	88.0
	Agree	32	8.6	8.6	96.5
	Strongly agree	13	3.5	3.5	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

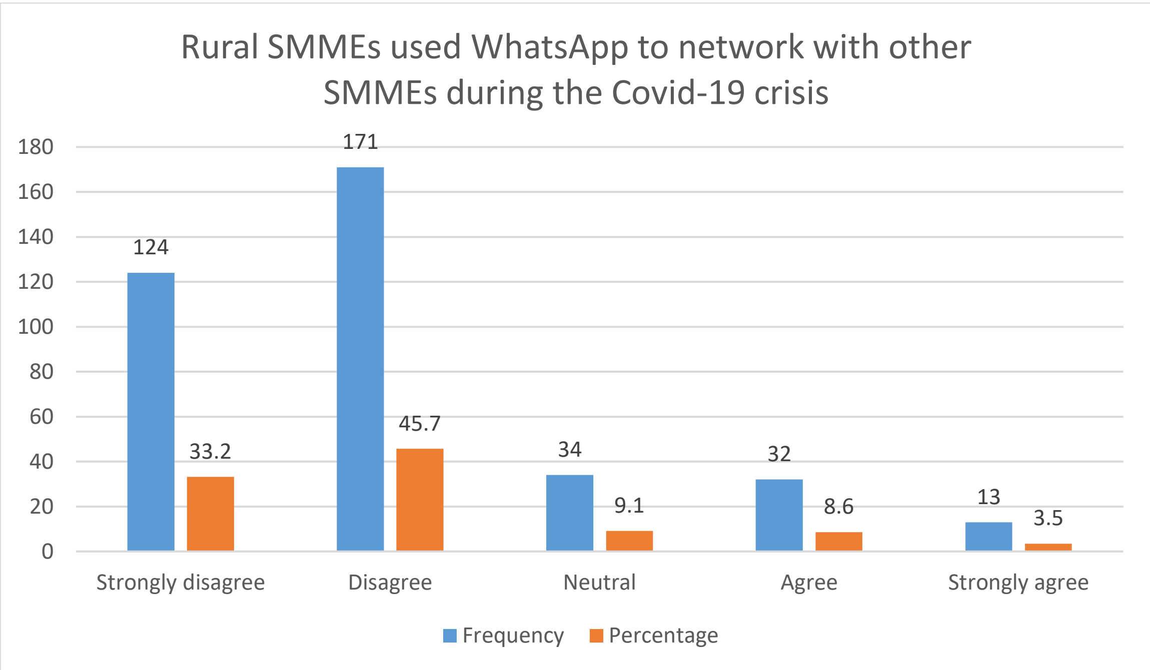


Figure 5.41: Rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to network with other SMMEs.

As depicted in table 5.45 and figure 5.41, a large number of respondents (171 or 45.7 percent) disagreed, while 124 (33.2 percent) respondents strongly disagreed with the statement. A further 34 (9.1 percent) respondents remained neutral, with 32 (8.6 percent) that agreed and 13 (3.5 percent) that strongly agreed with the statement. To ascertain the extent to which rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to network with other SMMEs during the

Covid-19 crisis, a Chi-square test was conducted. The results for this variable show (χ^2 = 253.888; df = 4; P <0.001), this indicates rural SMMEs in KZN were unable to significantly use WhatsApp to network with other SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis.

These findings are supported by some researchers such as Prince (2019), who pointed out there are rare entrepreneurs who utilise social media platforms with the intention to gain visibility, viability and sustainability to market their products and services. In support, Lokmanya (2013) stated that developing and developed economies are interested in using social media for only the purpose of entertainment, socializing, and information gathering as opposed to brand promotions and competitive differentiation.

Component matrix: Rural SMMEs extent as it relates to the use of social media drive for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crises.

Table 5.46: Component matrix: Rural SMMEs extent as it relates to the use of social media drive for their survival and growth.

Component Matrix[a]

B14

	Component 1
Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to increase dominance in the market during Covid-19 crisis	.849
Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to market their products during Covid-19 crisis	.869
Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to increase sales during Covid-19 crisis	.872
Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to create an awareness of their product and services during Covid-19 crisis	.867
Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to keep current customers during Covid-19 crisis	.877
Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to receive customer's feedback on existing products during Covid-19 crisis	.859
Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp as a cost-effective measure to communicate during Covid-19 crisis	.877
Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to network with other SMMEs during Covid-19 crisis	.789

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 1 component extracted.

This component matrix is an additional statistical analysis on the above-mentioned figures (figure 5.4 to 5.41). Only one category of components was indicated to by respondents, with a very strong significance shown by all components. The one component category recorded a strong positive significance of 0.877, regarding the statement whether rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to keep current customers or whether they used WhatsApp as a cost-effective measure to communicate during the Covid-19 crisis. A figure of 0.872 is reflected for respondents who indicated rural SMMEs were unable to use WhatsApp to increase sales during the Covid-19 crisis.

On the variable regarding the use of WhatsApp by rural SMMEs to market their products during the Covid-19 crisis, the component test shows a negative significance of 0869, indicating respondents did not believe rural SMMEs were able to use WhatsApp to market their products during the Covid-19 crisis. The other variables, on whether rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to create product and service awareness and to receive customer feedback on existing products during the Covid-19 crisis, showed 0.867 and 0.859, respectively.

The statement to indicate whether rural SMMEs managed to use WhatsApp to increase dominance in the market in order to survive and grow during Covid-19 crisis, reflects a negative significance of 0.849. The other variable, concerning whether rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to network with other SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis, recorded a score of 0.789. Therefore, the above tested variable showed a very strong significance regarding the extent to which rural SMMEs used social media drive for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. Based on the component test, it is clear all variables tested had a negative significance, indicating SMMEs in rural KZN were unable to use social media drive for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

SUB-OBJECTIVE 3: **PERCEPTIONS OF RURAL SMMEs OWNERS AND MANAGERS ON SOCIAL MEDIA USE DURING THE COVID-19 CRISES**

5.8.30 Rural SMMEs perceived social media to be useful during the Covid-19 crisis

Table 5.47: Rural SMMEs perceived social media to be useful

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	90	24.1	24.1	24.1
	Disagree	203	54.3	54.3	78.3
	Neutral	35	9.4	9.4	87.7
	Agree	35	9.4	9.4	97.1
	Strongly agree	11	2.9	2.9	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

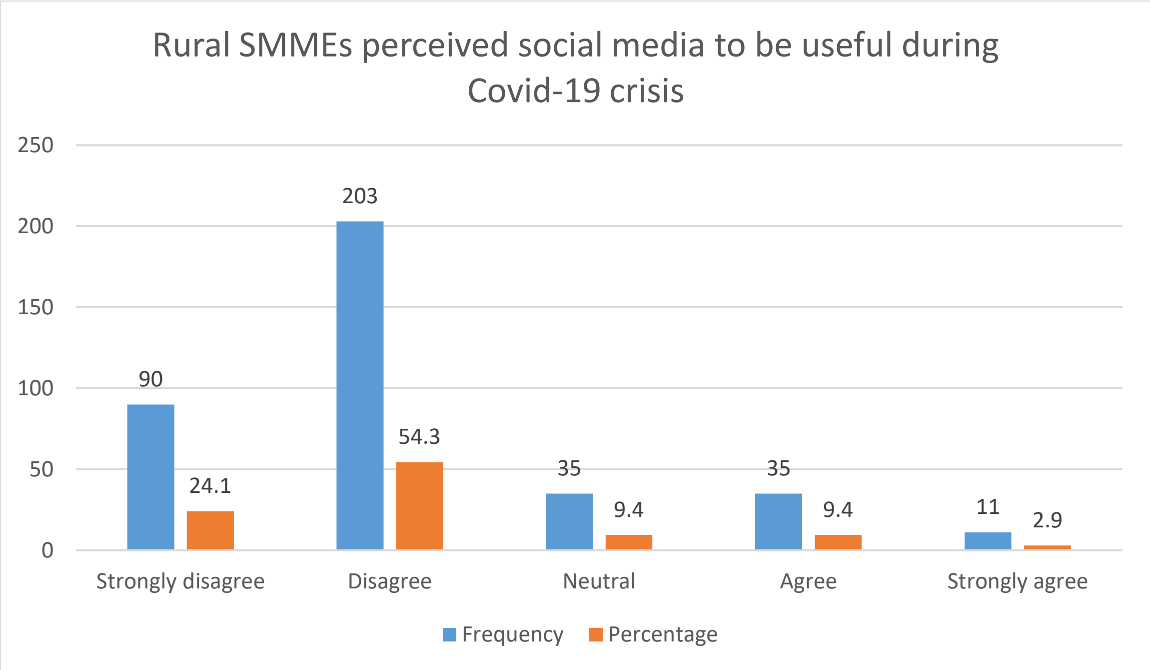


Figure 5.42: Rural SMMEs perceived social media to be useful.

As reflected in table 5.47 and figure 5.42, a significant number of respondents disagreed (203 or 54.3 percent) and strongly disagreed (90 or 24.1 percent) the use of social media was perceived useful by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis. Only 35 respondents (9.4 percent) were neutral to the statement, while 35 respondents (9.4 percent) agreed and 11 (2.9 percent) strongly agreed with the statement.

These findings are in line with studies conducted by researchers such as Oji *et al.* (2017), Budree *et al.* (2019) and Prince (2019), who pointed out the lack of social media strategies to support rural SMME growth in SA; this is a major obstacle in dealing with the Covid-19 outbreak and pandemic crisis. However, there were indicators a small number of rural

SMMEs agreed with the findings of Nurqamarani *et al.* (2021), who suggested PU by customers portrayed them as believing technology is useful for business enterprise survival and growth. This was confirmed by those respondents who strongly agreed (11 or 2.9 percent) and agreed (35 or 9.4 percent) that rural SMMEs perceived social media to be useful during the Covid-19 crisis.

A Chi-square test was conducted to establish how rural SMMEs perceived the usefulness of social media during the Covid-19 crisis for their survival and growth in KZN. For this variable, results indicate (χ 2 = 319.583; df = 4; P <0.001), illustrating insufficient PU of social media impacted the use of social media by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis. Furthermore, previous researchers argued, when rural SMME managers/owners have a negative perception of adopting social media, under economic constraints such as the Covid-19 crisis, they will decrease the chances of marketing their goods and services during restrictions imposed by governments of countries worldwide. These factors can disadvantage rural SMME survival and growth during economic turmoil (Nyawo 2020; Zeidy 2020; Janssen and Van der Voort 2020; Kottika *et al*. 2020).

5.8.31 Rural SMMEs perceived social media to be easy to use during the Covid-19 crisis

Table 5.48: Rural SMMEs perceived social media to be easy to use

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	78	20.9	20.9	20.9
	Disagree	224	59.9	59.9	80.7
	Neutral	23	6.1	6.1	86.9
	Agree	35	9.4	9.4	96.3
	Strongly agree	14	3.7	3.7	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

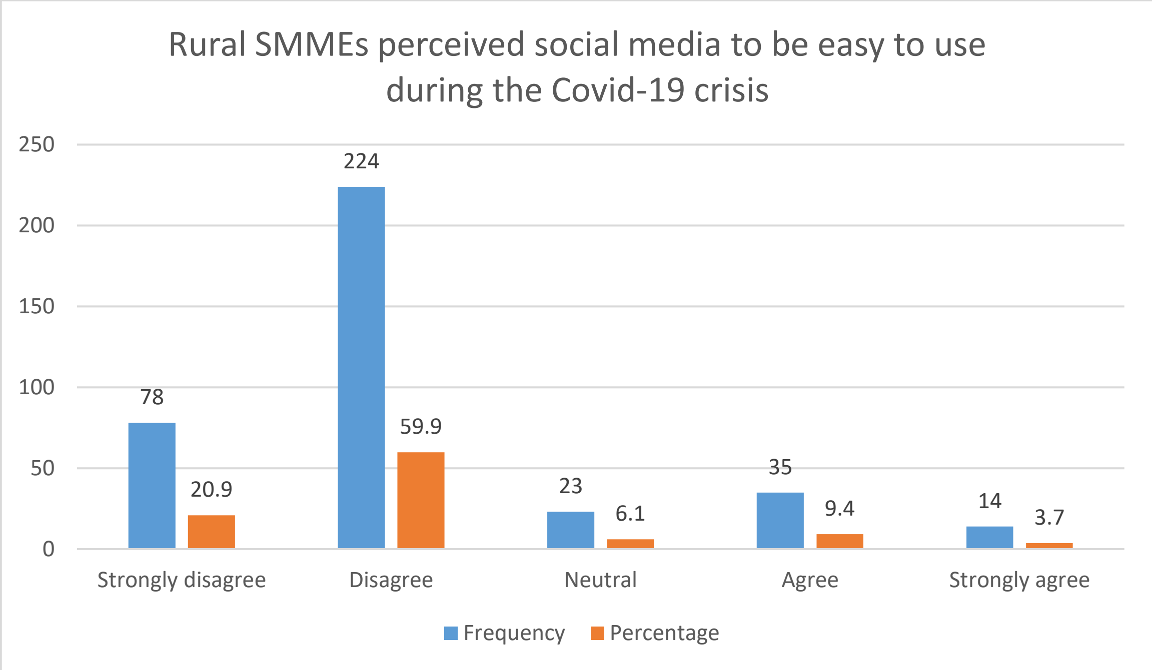


Figure 5.43: Rural SMMEs perceived social media to be easy to use

Table 4.48 and figure 5.43 illustrated that a large number of respondents (224 or 59.9 percent) disagreed and 78 (20.9 percent) strongly disagreed the use of social media was perceived easy to use by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis. Only 23 (6.1 percent) remained neutral to the statement, while 35 (9.4 percent) and 14 (3.7 percent) respondents, respectively, agreed and strongly agreed with the statement. A Chi-square test was conducted to establish whether rural SMMEs perceived social media as easy to use during the Covid-19 crisis, for their survival and growth in KZN. Results for this variable indicate (χ 2 = 404.209; df = 4; P <0.001), illustrating that unsatisfactory perceived ease of using social media impacted on its use by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis.

In line with these findings, Najib and Fahma (2020) argued users of new technology will benefit from learning to operate the new technology (such as social media), which would be easy and more flexible to use. It may, thus, be deduced that perceived ease of using social media by rural SMMEs in the Covid-19 crisis would have encouraged rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media to attract existing and prospective customers, thereby increasing their revenues during the Covid-19 crisis, ensuring their survival and growth.

However, the findings illustrated in table 4.46 and figure 5.43 are in accordance with the study of Lekhanya (2018), which revealed technical skills of SMMEs are also problematic. This is also confirmed in developed countries such as the UK, where it was found approximately 36 percent smaller companies experienced a shortage of skilled staff, which had a bearing on their survival and growth. As indicated by the majority respondents that strongly disagreed and disagreed (Table 4.46 and figure 5.43) social media use was not perceived easy to use by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis.

5.8.32 Rural SMMEs trusted the use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis

Table 5.49: Rural SMMEs trusted the use of social media

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	104	27.8	27.8	27.8
	Disagree	192	51.3	51.3	79.1
	Neutral	29	7.8	7.8	86.9
	Agree	35	9.4	9.4	96.3
	Strongly agree	14	3.7	3.7	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

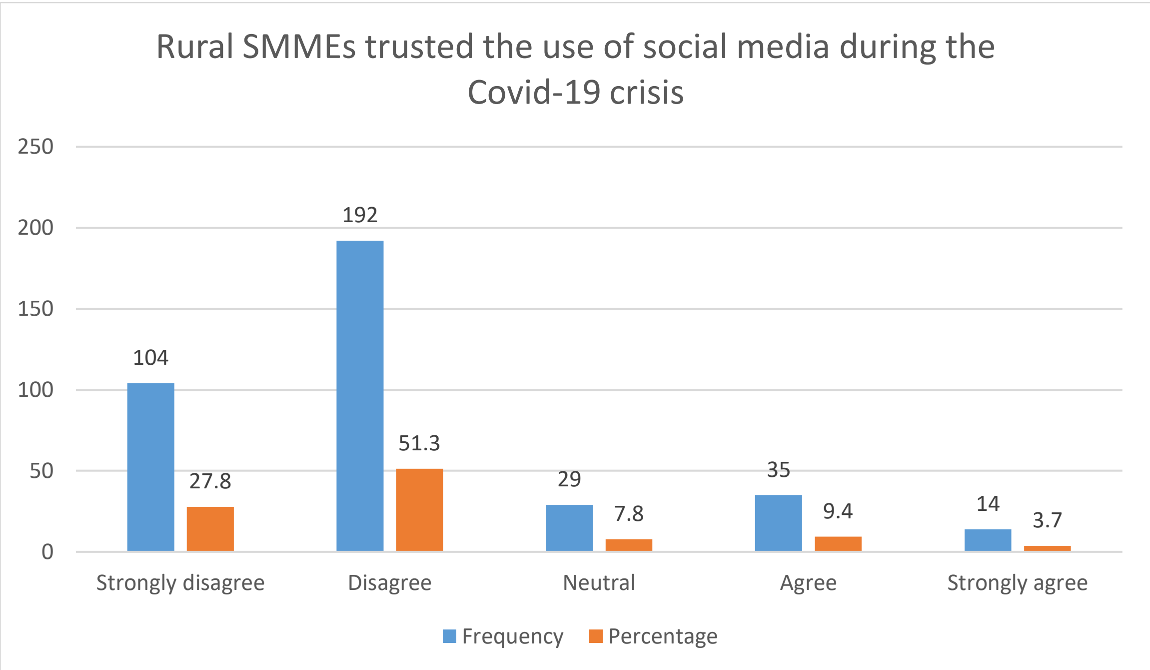


Figure 5.44: Rural SMMEs trusted the use of social media

As depicted in table 5.49 and figure 5.44, a significant number of respondents (192 or 51.3 percent) disagreed and 104 (27.8 percent) strongly disagreed rural SMMEs trusted the use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. A smaller number of respondents (29 or 7.8 percent) remained neutral with the statement, while 35 (9.4 percent) respondents agreed and only 14 (3.7 percent) strongly agreed with the statement. A Chi-square test was conducted to establish whether rural SMMEs trusted the use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis, for their survival and growth in KZN. For this variable, results indicate (χ^2=293.674; df = 4; P <0.001), illustrating that unsatisfactory perceived trust to use social media impacted on its use by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis. In line with these findings, Che Nawi *et al.* (2019) asserted perceived trust is expected to affect the adoption of social media as a business platform and to positively affect social media adoption.

5.8.33 Rural SMMEs perceived the use of social media not risky during the Covid-19 crisis

Table 5.50: Rural SMMEs perceived the use of social media as not risky

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	115	30.7	30.7	30.7
	Disagree	188	50.3	50.3	81.0
	Neutral	22	5.9	5.9	86.9
	Agree	35	9.4	9.4	96.3
	Strongly agree	14	3.7	3.7	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

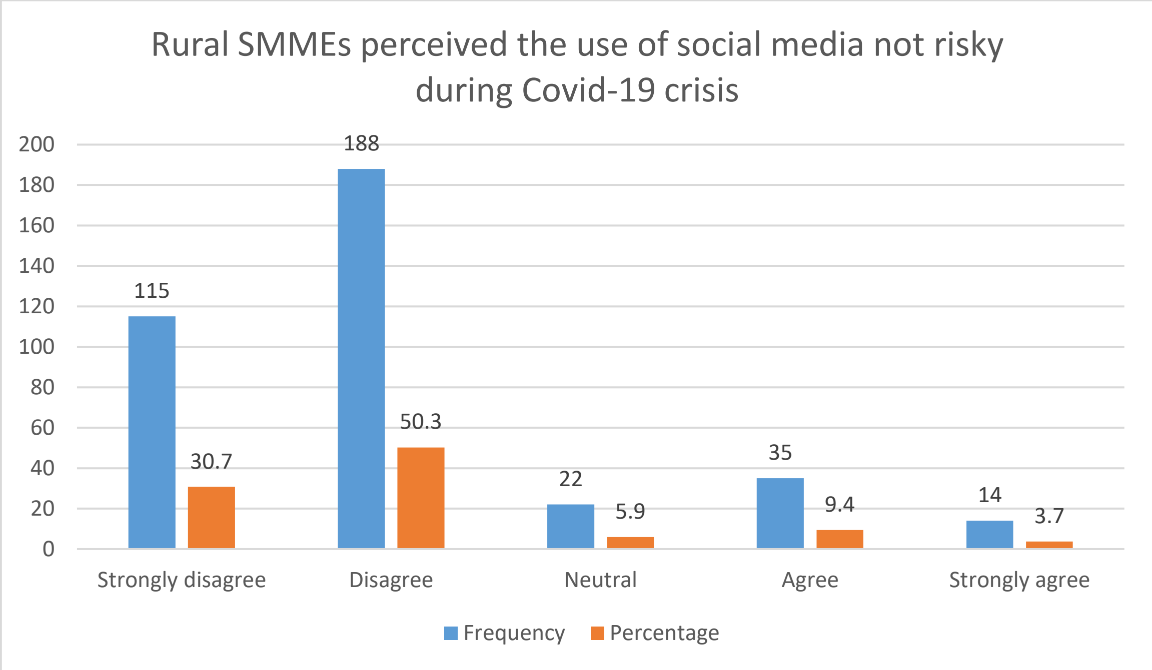


Figure 5.45: Rural SMMEs perceived the use of social media as not risky

As illustrated in table 5.50 and figure 5.45, a significant number of respondents (188 or 50.3 percent) disagreed and 115 (30.7 percent) strongly disagreed rural SMMEs perceived the use of social media not risky during the Covid-19 crisis. A smaller number of respondents (22 or 5.9 percent) remained neutral with the statement, while 35 (9.4 percent) respondents agreed and only 14 (3.7 percent) strongly agreed with the statement. A Chi-square test was conducted to establish whether rural SMMEs perceived the use of social media as risky during the Covid-19 crisis for their survival and growth in KZN. For this variable, results indicate (χ 2=300.786; df = 4; P <0.001), illustrating a strongly significant perceived risk on the use of social media by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis.

These findings are in line with previous studies that found perceived risk hinders the adoption of technology, and when the perceived risk is lowered, it is more likely a new technology will be adopted (Mishra & Tyagi 2015; Che Nawi *et al*. 2019).

5.8.34 Rural SMMEs perceived the use of social media to be enjoyable during the Covid-19 crisis

Table 5.51: Rural SMMEs perceived the use of social media to be enjoyable

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent

Valid	Strongly disagree	78	20.9	20.9	20.9
	Disagree	223	59.6	59.6	80.5
	Neutral	25	6.7	6.7	87.2
	Agree	26	7.0	7.0	94.1
	Strongly agree	22	5.9	5.9	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

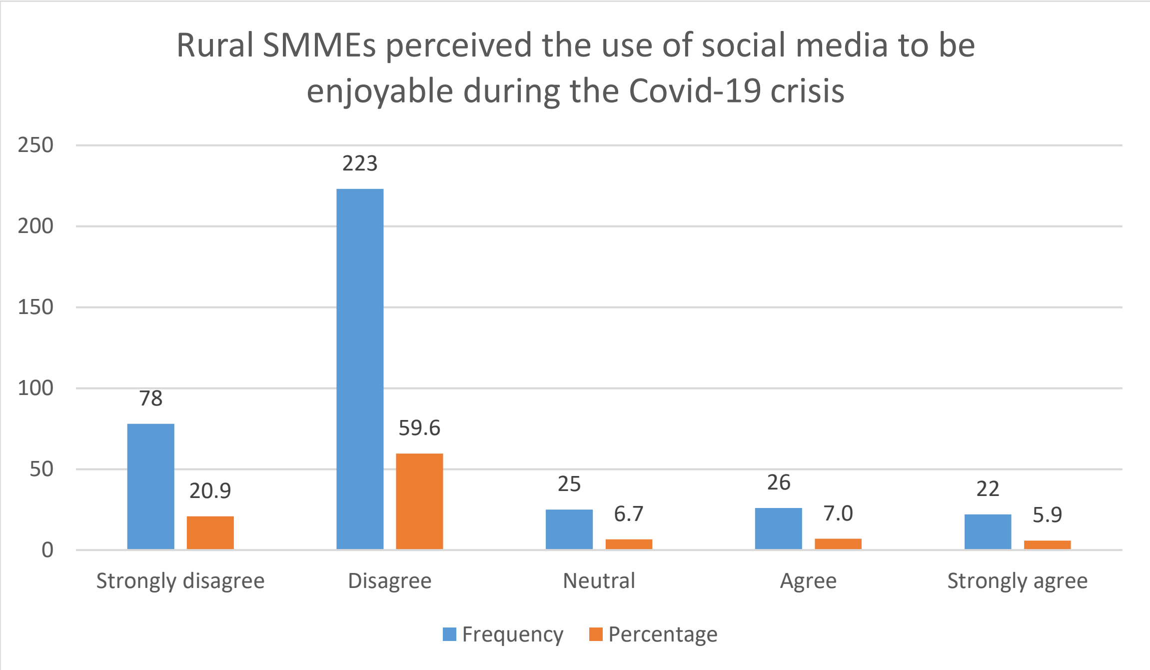


Figure 5.46: Rural SMMEs perceived the use of social media to be enjoyable

As illustrated in table 5.51 and figure 5.46, a large number of respondents (223 or 59.6 percent) disagreed and 78 (20.9 percent) strongly disagreed rural SMMEs perceived the use of social media to be enjoyable during the Covid-19 crisis. A smaller number of respondents (25 or 6.7 percent) remained neutral with the statement, while 26 (7.0 percent) respondents agreed and only 22 (5.9 percent) strongly agreed with the statement. A Chi-square test was conducted to establish whether rural SMMEs perceived the use of social media to be enjoyable during the Covid-19 crisis, for their survival and growth in KZN. For this variable, results indicate (χ 2=396.027; df = 4; P <0.001), illustrating a strongly significant perception it was not enjoyable for rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. These findings are in line with studies that state perceived risk impedes technology adoption, however, when there is lower perceived risk, new technology will more likely be adopted (Mishra & Tyagi 2015; Che Nawi *et al*. 2019).

Component matrix: Rural SMME owner and manager perceptions regarding social media use during the Covid-19 crisis

Table 5.52: Component matrix: Rural SMME owner and manager perceptions regarding social media use

Component Matrix[a]

B15	Component 1
Rural SMMEs perceived social media to be useful during Covid-19 crisis	.858
Rural SMMEs perceived social media to be easy to use during Covid-19 crisis	.887
Rural SMMEs trust the use of social media during Covid-19 crisis	.884
Rural SMMEs perceived the use of social media not risky during Covid-19 crisis	.892
Rural SMMEs perceived the use of social media to be enjoyable during Covid-19 crisis	.885

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 1 components extracted.

These components are a further statistical analysis of the figures (figures 5.42 to 5.46) as mentioned above. A component test was conducted on the statement concerning the perceptions of rural SMME owners and managers regarding social media use during the Covid-19 crisis. The respondents indicated to only one category of component, with all components tested reflecting a strong negative significance. On the statement to establish whether rural SMMEs perceived social media use as not risky during the Covid-19 crisis, for their survival and growth in KZN, a strong positive significance of 0.892 is shown. This means the respondents felt it was risky for rural SMMEs in KZN to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. Another variable, to ascertain the perceptions of easy-to-use social media during the Covid-19 crisis in KZN, shows a strong positive significance of 0.887. This signals respondents did not believe it was easy for rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. The other variable that showed a strong positive significance pertained to whether rural SMMEs perceived social media use as enjoyable during the Covid-19 crisis, where the component test shows 0.885. This implies respondents perceived it was not easy for rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

Regarding rural SMME trust in the use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis, a component test conducted showed a 0.884 score, which indicates respondents did not trust social media use during the Covid-19 crisis would yield positive results for rural SMME survival and growth in KZN. However, a component test perception of rural SMMEs on the use of social media, recorded a significant score of 0.858, which means respondents held the view it was not useful to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis (Figure 5.43). All tested variables showed a very strong negative significance, which means rural SMME owners and managers had negative perceptions on the use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis for them to survive and grow.

SUB-OBJECTIVE 4: IMPACT OF COVID-19 CRISIS ON RURAL SMME SURVIVAL AND GROWTH DURING THE CRISIS

5.8.35 The Covid-19 crisis influenced rural SMME use of social media to minimise product distribution costs

Table 5.53: The Covid-19 crisis influenced rural SMME use of social media to minimise product distribution costs

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	90	24.1	24.1	24.1
	Disagree	234	62.6	62.6	86.6
	Neutral	22	5.9	5.9	92.5
	Agree	18	4.8	4.8	97.3
	Strongly agree	10	2.7	2.7	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

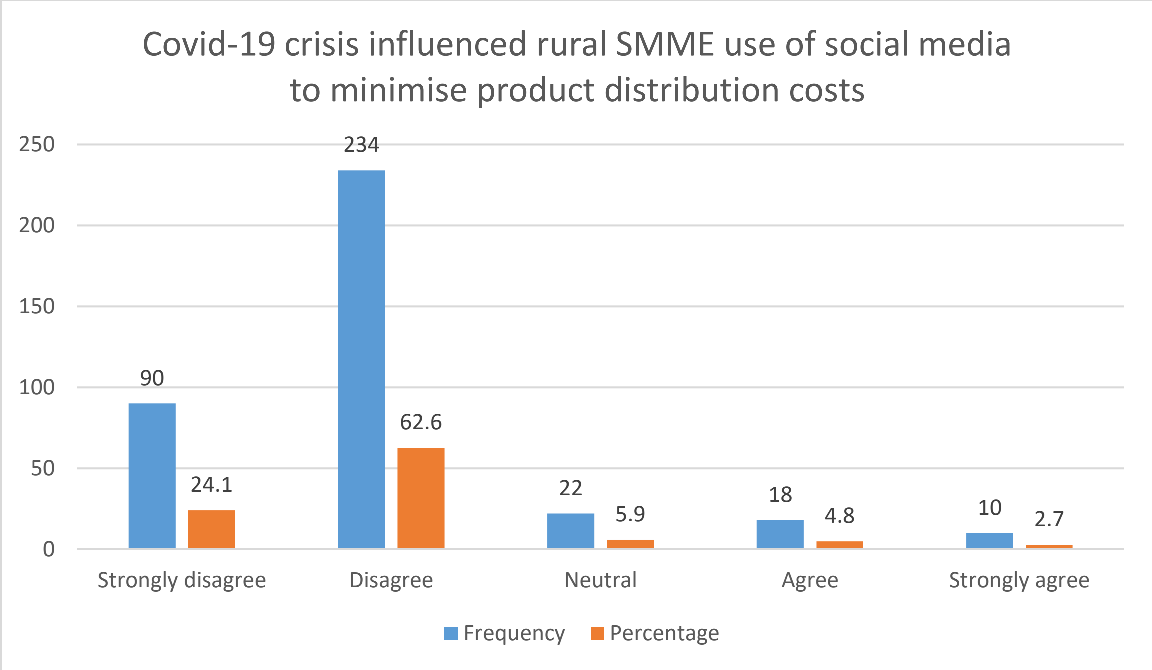


Figure 5.47: Covid-19 crisis influenced rural SMMEs to use social media to improve product distribution costs

As depicted in table 5.53 and figure 5.47, a significant number of respondents (234 or 62.6 percent) and 90 (24.1 percent) disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively, the Covid-19 crisis influenced rural SMMEs to use social media to minimise product distribution costs. These findings are supported by a Chi-square test conducted to determine whether the Covid-19 crisis influenced rural SMMEs to use social media to minimise product distribution costs. The results show (χ 2= 478.460; df = 4; P < 0,001) for this variable, indicating the respondents viewed the Covid-19 crisis had no influence in minimising product distribution costs. However, a smaller number of respondents (22 or 5.9 percent) were neutral to the statement, while only 18 (4.8 percent) and 10 (2.7 percent) agreed and strongly agreed with the statement.

A small number of respondents (table 5.50 and figure 5.47) concurred with the findings of De Pandey and Pal (2020), who highlighted the outbreak and spread of the Covid-19 crisis compelled small businesses to use digital technologies, such as social media, due to physical distancing and global lockdowns, which minimised product distribution costs for SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis.

5.8.36 The Covid-19 crisis influenced rural SMMEs to use social media to improve demand for their products and services.

Table 5.54: The Covid-19 crisis influenced rural SMME use of social media to improve demand for their products and services

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	94	25.1	25.1	25.1
	Disagree	235	62.8	62.8	88.0
	Neutral	17	4.5	4.5	92.5
	Agree	19	5.1	5.1	97.6
	Strongly agree	9	2.4	2.4	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

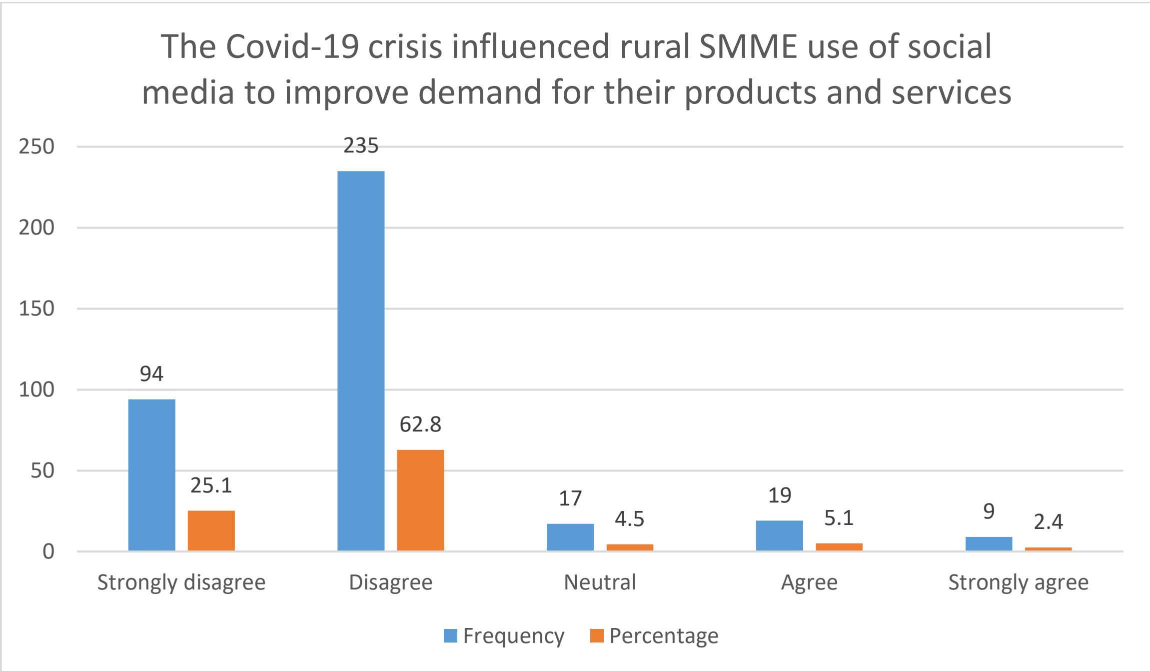


Figure 5.48: The Covid-19 crisis influenced rural SMME use of social media to improve demand for their products and services

As depicted in table 5.54 and figure 5.48, a significant number of respondents (235 or 62.8 percent and 94 or ,25.1 percent) disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively, the Covid-19 crisis influenced rural SMMEs to use social media to improve demand for their products and services. These findings are supported by a Chi-square test conducted to determine whether the lack of demand for products and services due to the Covid-19 crisis influenced rural SMMEs to use social media. The results show (χ 2 = 492.203; df = 4; P

< 0,001) for this variable, indicating the respondents viewed the Covid-19 crisis as an epidemic crisis, which did not impact rural SMMEs to use social media to enhance demand for their products and services. However, a smaller number of respondents (17 or 4.5 percent) were neutral to the statement, while only 19 (5.1 percent) and nine (2.4 percent) agreed and strongly agreed with the statement.

The small number of respondents indicated in table 5.51 and figure 5.48 concurred with findings of a study conducted by Mbatha (2022), who explored the benefits of SNS use to enhance work productivity in small tourism sector businesses, which revealed social media improved the work productivity of the tourism sector. Social media has transformed the way small businesses operate on a daily basis, with special reference to communication and marketing strategies.

5.8.37 The Covid-19 crisis influenced rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media as a tool to reach more customers

Table 5.55: The Covid-19 crisis influenced rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media as a tool to reach more customers

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	94	25.1	25.1	25.1
	Disagree	236	63.1	63.1	88.2
	Neutral	16	4.3	4.3	92.5
	Agree	20	5.3	5.3	97.9
	Strongly agree	8	2.1	2.1	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

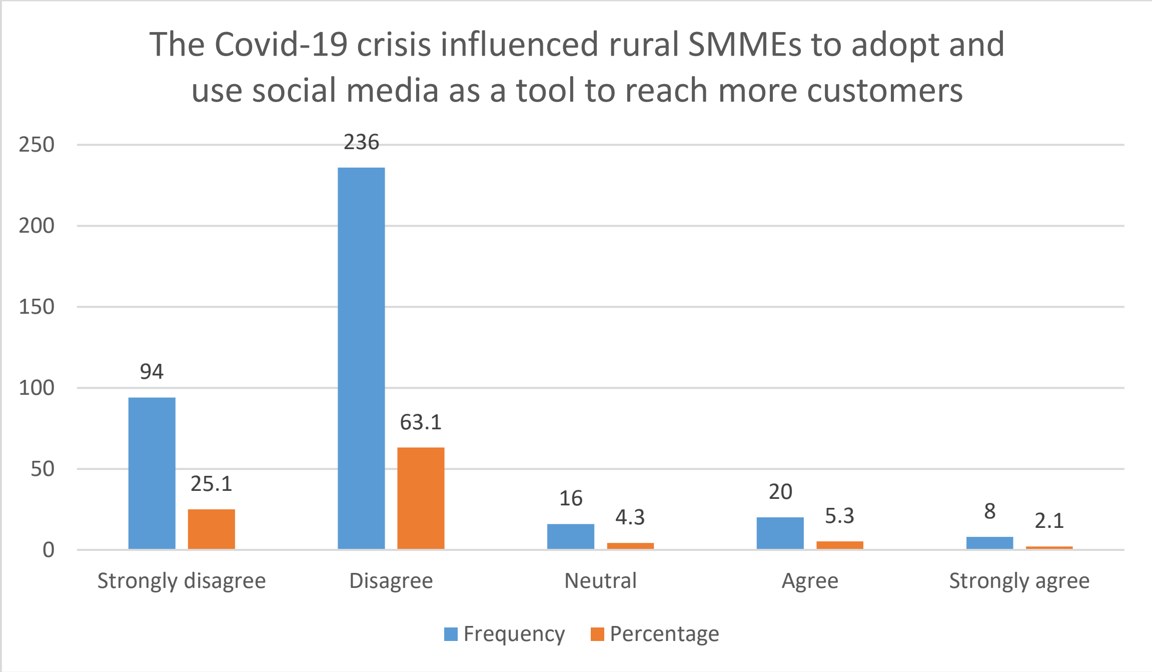


Figure 5.49: The Covid-19 crisis influenced rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media as a tool to reach more customers

As depicted in table 5.55 and figure 5.49, a significant number of respondents (236 or 63.1 percent and 94 or 25.1 percent) disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively, the Covid-19 crisis influenced rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media as a tool to reach more customers. These findings are supported by a Chi-square test conducted to determine whether the Covid-19 crisis influenced rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media as a tool to reach more customers. The results show (χ 2 = 498.353; df = 4; P < 0,001) for this variable, indicating respondents believed the Covid-19 crisis had no influence on rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media as a tool to reach more customers. However, a smaller number of respondents (16 or 4.3 percent) were neutral to the statement, while only 20 (5.3 percent) and eight (2.1 percent) agreed and strongly agreed with the statement.

The small number of respondents in table 5.52 and figure 5.49 supported the findings by Kietzmann (2011) and De *et al*. (2020), who contend business should have invested in the use of social media to reach more customers during the Covid-19 crisis, as their reputation would be enhanced, increasing sales, as well as survival, growth and sustainability in this crisis.

5.8.38 The Covid-19 crisis influenced rural SMME use of social media to increase their revenue

Table 5.56: The Covid-19 crisis influenced rural SMME use of social media to increase their revenue

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	144	38.5	38.5	38.5
	Disagree	178	47.6	47.6	86.1
	Neutral	27	7.2	7.2	93.3
	Agree	17	4.5	4.5	97.9
	Strongly agree	8	2.1	2.1	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

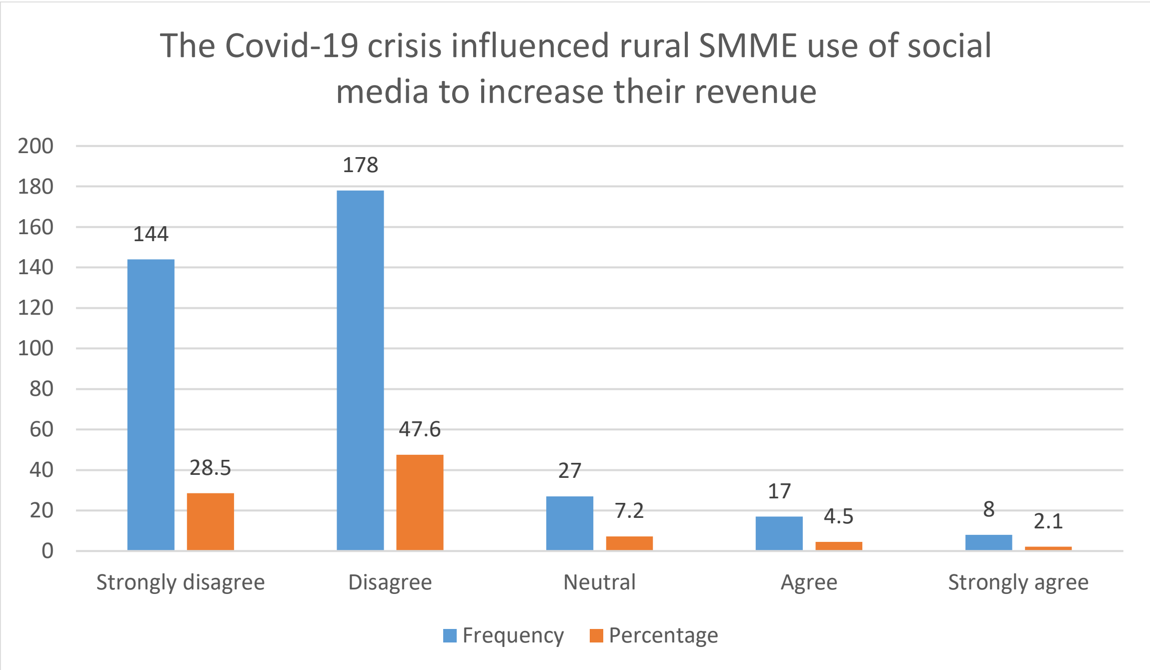


Figure 5.50: The Covid-19 crisis influenced rural SMME use of social media to increase their revenue

According to Gray (2020), small businesses are faced with economic turmoil due to the outbreak and uncontrollable spread of the Covid-19 virus and subsequent health and economic crises. This resulted in a lack of finance for rural SMMEs and some were temporarily closed. Hence, it may be deduced it was difficult for some SMMEs to adopt and use social media to penetrate the marketplace to advertise their products and services to their customers, thus stimulating rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis that caused disruptions and failure to the businesses. As depicted in table 5.56 and figure 5.50, in line with Gray (2020), a significant number of respondents (178 or 47.6. percent and 144 or 28.5 percent) disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively, the Covid-19 crisis influenced rural SMMEs to use social media to increase their revenue. These findings are supported by a Chi-square test conducted to determine whether the Covid-19 crisis influenced rural SMMEs to use social media to increase their revenue. The results show ($\chi 2 = 341.267$; df = 4; $P < 0,001$) for this variable, indicating the respondents viewed the Covid-19 crisis as an epidemic crisis, with no significant influence on rural SMMEs to use social media to increase their revenue.

However, a smaller group of respondents (27 or 7.2 percent) were neutral to the statement, whilst only 17 (4.5 percent) and eight (2.1 percent) agreed and strongly agreed with the statement. The small number of respondents in table 5.53 and figure 5.50 supported the study findings of some researchers who stated the Covid-19 crisis had a positive and significant impact on strategic digital entrepreneurship, including digital marketing and encouraged the speed of adopting digital technology. It can be concluded the Covid-19 crisis had a positive and significant impact in the culinary sector in Bali, regarding digital marketing adoption by rural SMMEs (Minai *et al*. 2021; Jiang and Wen 2020; Kimuli *et al*. 2021).

These findings are supported by Karacsony (2020) and Kornelius *et al*. (2020), who determined small businesses were negatively influenced by the Covid-19 crisis, with some rural SMMEs regarded as technically insolvent, due to the economic distress caused by these epidemic crises. By inference, rural SMMEs can use social media during Covid-19 disruptions and improve productivity (Mbatha 2022), should they have had working capital to adopt and use social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

Component matrix: Covid-19 crisis as it relates to rural SMME survival and growth during the crisis

Table 5.57: Component matrix: Covid-19 crisis as it relates to rural SMME survival and growth during the crisis

Component Matrix[a]

B16	Component 1
Covid-19 crisis influence rural SMMEs to use social media to minimise cost of distribution of products	.875

Covid-19 crisis influence rural SMMEs to use social media to improve demand for their products and services	.881
Covid-19 crisis influence rural SMMEs to adapt and use social media as a tool to reach more customers	.891
Covid-19 crisis influence rural SMMEs to use social media to increase their revenue	.778

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 1 components extracted.

These components are a further statistical analysis of the figures (figure 5.47 to 5.50) as mentioned above. A component test was performed on the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on rural SMME survival and growth during the crisis. One category of component was responded to, where the statement whether the Covid-19 crisis influenced rural SMMEs to adapt and use social media as a tool to reach more customers, which shows a strong positive significance of 0.891. Respondents who indicated there was no influence on rural SMMEs to use social media in order to improve demand for their products and services in KZN, generated a score of 0.881. The other variable, whether the Covid-19 crisis was significant in influencing rural SMMEs to use social media to minimise product distribution costs in KZN, depicted a score of 0.875. With regard to the variable that most rural SMMEs were of the view the Covid-19 crisis did not have a limited influence on social media use to increase their revenue, where a positive significance of 0.778 is shown by the component test, which indicates the Covid-19 crisis had no persuasion on rural KZN SMMEs to use social media to increase their revenue.

The tested variables above, therefore, indicated a strong significance on the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on rural SMME survival and growth during the crisis that influenced social media use for SMME survival and growth in rural KZN. This also means the high component measured in the aforementioned table further supports the reliability of the research data collection instrument.

SUB-OBJECTIVE 5: SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR RURAL SMME SURVIVAL AND GROWTH DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

5.8.39 Rural SMMEs used social media to sell products to customers during the Covid-19 crisis

Table 5.58: Rural SMMEs used social media to sell products to customers

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	108	28.9	28.9	28.9
	Disagree	222	59.4	59.4	88.2
	Neutral	18	4.8	4.8	93.0
	Agree	19	5.1	5.1	98.1
	Strongly agree	7	1.9	1.9	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

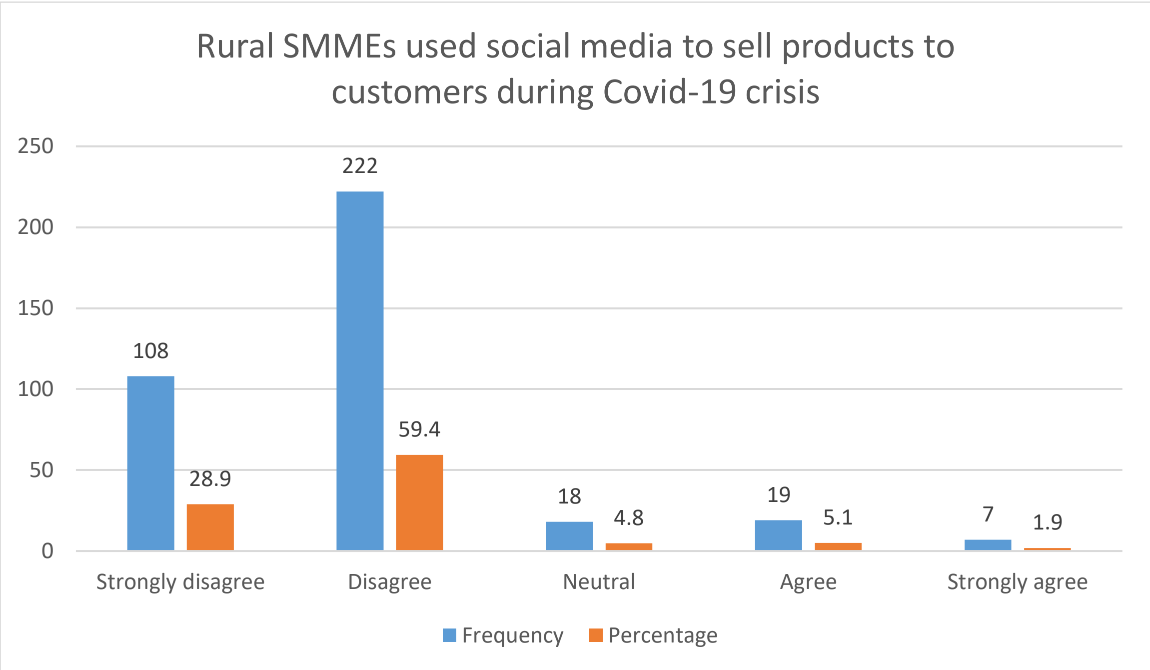


Figure 5.51: Rural SMMEs used social media to sell products to customers

Li *et al.* (2020) and Ryden *et al.* (2015: 6) posit social media is not used only to create conversation and engagement, but is also used by business owners to sell products to customers. In relation to the findings in table 5.58 and figure 5.51, clear disagreement was indicated by respondents that rural SMMEs used social media to sell products to customers. The smallest group of respondents (19 or 5.1 percent) agreed or strongly agreed (seven or 1.9 percent) with this notion. In addition, 18 (4.8 percent) respondents remained neutral concerning the statement, with most respondents (222 or 59.2 percent) that disagreed and 108 (28.9 percent) that indicated they strongly disagreed. Thus, the majority (330 or 88.24 percent) respondents were of the view rural SMMEs did not use social media to sell products to customers during the Covid-19 crisis. A Chi-square test was conducted to determine whether rural SMMEs used social media to sell products to customers during the Covid-19 crisis. Result indicated ($\chi2 = 450.626$; df = 4; $P < 0.001$) for this variable, showing a strong significance that social media was not used by rural SMMEs in KZN to sell their products to customers during the Covid-19 crisis. In light of the above, Herman (2015) argued social media is effective and efficient for reaching customers worldwide, to advertise the products and services of business enterprises to existing and prospective customers.

5.8.40 Rural SMMEs used social media to create branding during the Covid-19 crisis

Table 5.59: Rural SMMEs used social media to create branding

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	132	35.3	35.3	35.3
	Disagree	204	54.5	54.5	89.8
	Neutral	12	3.2	3.2	93.0
	Agree	18	4.8	4.8	97.9
	Strongly agree	8	2.1	2.1	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

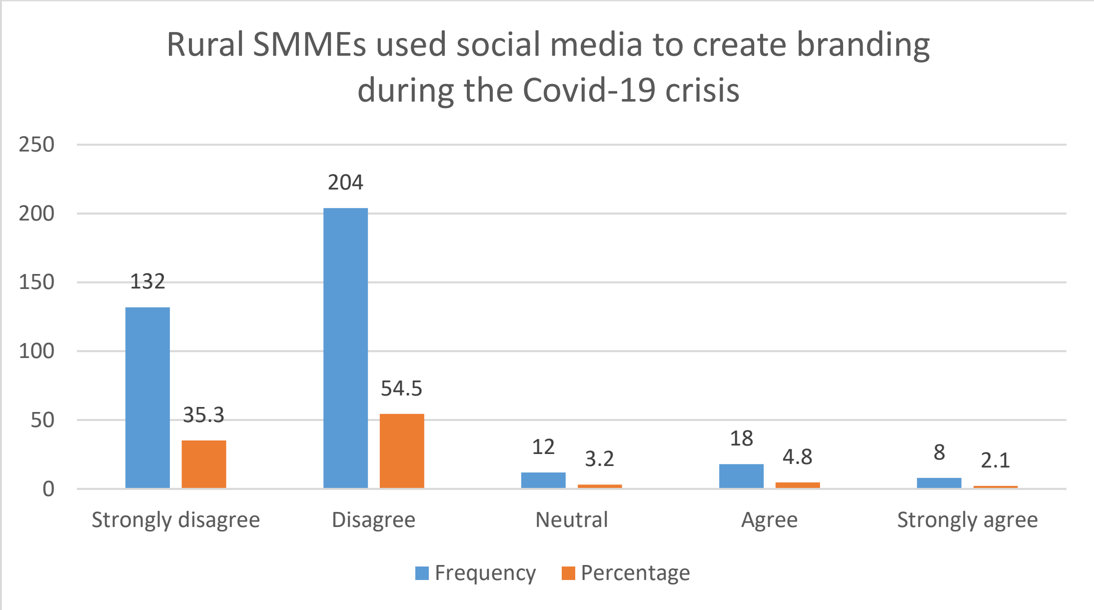


Figure 5.52: Rural SMMEs used social media to create branding

Previous researchers posit social media is used for knowledge sharing between customers and business enterprises, increased customer loyalty to business, improved awareness of new products and business services, as well as brand recognition (Schivinski and Dabrowski 2016; Holliman and Rowley 2014). This shows, by creating the right branding strategy, rural SMMEs can create customer loyalty to their businesses.

As illustrated by table 5.59 and figure 5.52, the majority respondents (204 or 54.5 percent) disagreed and 132 (35.5 percent) further strongly disagreed rural SMMEs used social media to create branding during the Covid-19 crisis. Furthermore, 12 (3.2 percent) respondents remained neutral, with 18 (4.8 percent) respondents that agreed and eight (2.1 percent) that strongly agreed with the statement. These findings were supported by a Chi-square test, performed to ascertain whether social media was used by rural SMMEs to create branding during the Covid-19 crisis.

The results for this variable indicate ($\chi\ 2 = 422.417$; df = 4; P <0.001), which shows social media was not significantly used by rural SMMEs to create branding during the Covid-19 crisis, with table 5.52 and figure 5.52 showing a small group of respondents (26 or 6.96 percent) that signalled rural SMMEs used social media to create branding during the Covid-19 crisis.

In light of the above, Kietzmann (2011) and De *et al*. (2020) contend the business should invest in the use of social media during crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic for reputation, increasing sales, as well as SMME survival, growth and sustainability. In this context, most business enterprises, including SMMEs, should start developing brand equity online, including online services and digital advertisement. In addition, Thevenot (2007) mentioned small businesses can make a swift turn through using social media, because it can assist to increase awareness and remain relevant with their customers globally, in times such as the Covid-19 crisis, for rural SMME survival and growth (Mbatha 2022).

5.8.41 Rural SMMEs used social media to respond to customer needs and complaints during the Covid-19 crisis

Table 5.60: Rural SMMEs used social media to respond to customer needs and complaints

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	138	36.9	36.9	36.9
	Disagree	198	52.9	52.9	89.8
	Neutral	13	3.5	3.5	93.3
	Agree	12	3.2	3.2	96.5
	Strongly agree	13	3.5	3.5	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

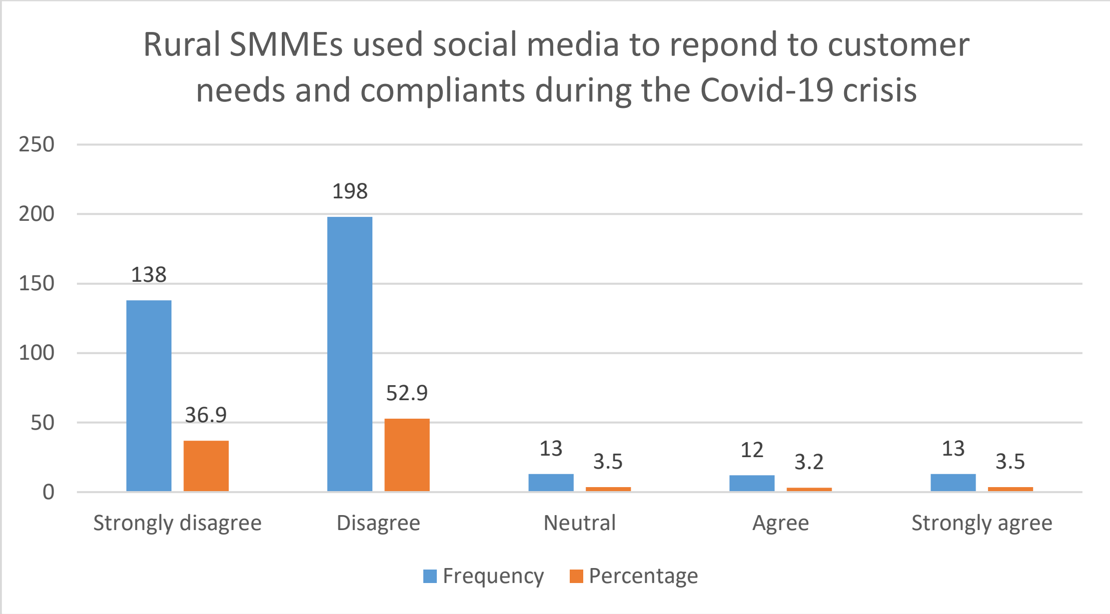


Figure 5.53: Rural SMMEs used social media to respond to customer needs and complaints

Turner and Shah (2014) and Lee *et al.* (2014) argued business managers should have clear goals and objectives for using social media and should, thus, identify suitable social media management tools for the business to communicate with their customers. This implies rural SMMEs can have social media management tools to address the needs and complaints of their customers.

Table 5.60 and figure 5.53 illustrate most respondents (198 or 52.9 percent) disagreed and 138 (36.9 percent) further strongly disagreed rural SMMEs used social media to respond to customer needs and complaints during the Covid-19 crisis. Additionally, 13 (3.5 percent) respondents remained neutral, with 12 (3.2 percent) respondents that agreed with the statement, while 13 (3.5 percent) indicated strong disagreement. A Chi-square test was conducted to ascertain whether rural SMMEs used social media to respond to customer needs and complaints during the Covid-19 crisis. The results for this variable indicate (χ 2 = 411.160; df = 4; P <0.001), which indicates social media was not significantly used by rural SMMEs to respond to customer needs and complaints during the Covid-19 crisis.

In addition to these findings, Turner and Shah (2014) and Li *et al*. (2020) argued social media is used to attend to customer service needs, resolve complaints quickly and promote the image of business to the customers. Moreover, Sajid (2016) and Jordan (2018) emphasised business owners could use social media to learn more about the needs, habits and complaints, as well as other customer information.

5.8.42 Rural SMMEs used social media to retain customers during the Covid-19 crisis

Table 5.61: Rural SMMEs used social media to retain customers

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	115	30.7	30.7	30.7
	Disagree	215	57.5	57.5	88.2
	Neutral	19	5.1	5.1	93.3
	Agree	17	4.5	4.5	97.9
	Strongly agree	8	2.1	2.1	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

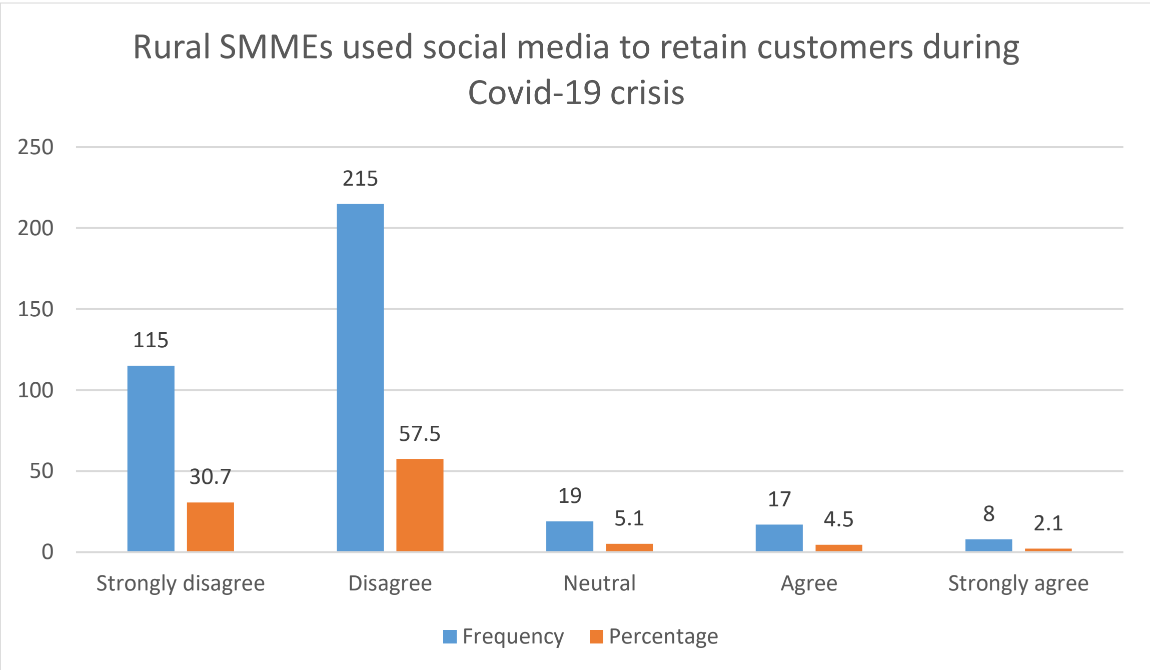


Figure 5.54: Rural SMMEs used social media to retain customers

Table 5.61 and figure 5.54 depicts the majority respondents (215 or 57.5 percent) disagreed, with 115 (30.7 percent) that strongly disagreed with the statement, whereas 19 (5.1 percent) respondents remained neutral to the statement. In addition, a small number of respondents (17 or 4.5 percent) were in agreement with the statement, while eight (2.1 percent) respondents strongly agreed in this regard. A Chi-square test was conducted to ascertain whether rural SMMEs used social media to retain customers during the Covid-19 crisis. The results for this variable indicate (χ 2 = 430.332; df = 4; P <0.001), which shows rural social media was not significantly used by rural SMMEs to retain customers during the Covid-19 crisis. These findings contrast with studies that highlighted social media use to retain existing customers for business survival and growth (Swani *et al*. 2017; Li *et al.* 2020).

Component matrix: social media marketing strategies as they impact rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis

Table 5.62: Component matrix: social media marketing strategies as they impact rural SMME survival and growth

Component Matrix[a]

B17	Component 1
Rural SMMEs used social media to sell products to customers during Covid-19 crisis	.854
Rural SMMEs used social media to create branding during Covid-19 crisis	.875
Rural SMMEs used social media to respond to customer's needs and complaints during Covid-19 crisis	.886
Rural SMMEs used social media to retain customers during Covid-19 crisis	.846

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 1 components extracted.

These components are drawn from additional statistical analysis of the figures discussed above (Figures 5.51 to 5.54), with regard to whether social media marketing strategies impacted rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. The respondents indicated to one category of component, where a strong positive significance of 0.886 was shown on the statement whether rural SMMEs used social media to respond to customer needs and complaints during the Covid-19 crisis. On the variable whether rural SMMEs used social media to create branding during the Covid-19 crisis, a positive significance of

0.875 is shown. The other variables on rural SMME use of social media to sell products to and retain customers during the Covid-19 crisis impacted rural SMME survival and growth showed a figure of 0.854 and 0.846. This means all variables tested revealed a very strong significance to explore the need for social media marketing strategies as support for rural SMME survival and growth, as the driving tool during the Covid-19 crisis.

SUB-OBJECTIVE 6: THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS A STRATEGY FOR RURAL SMMEs SURVIVAL AND GROWTH DURING FUTURE PANDEMICS

5.8.43 Rural SMMEs can use social media to overcome customer pressure during a pandemic

Table 5.63: Rural SMMEs can use social media to overcome customer pressure during a pandemic

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	13	3.5	3.5	3.5
	Disagree	12	3.2	3.2	6.7
	Neutral	31	8.3	8.3	15.0
	Agree	233	62.3	62.3	77.3
	Strongly agree	85	22.7	22.7	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

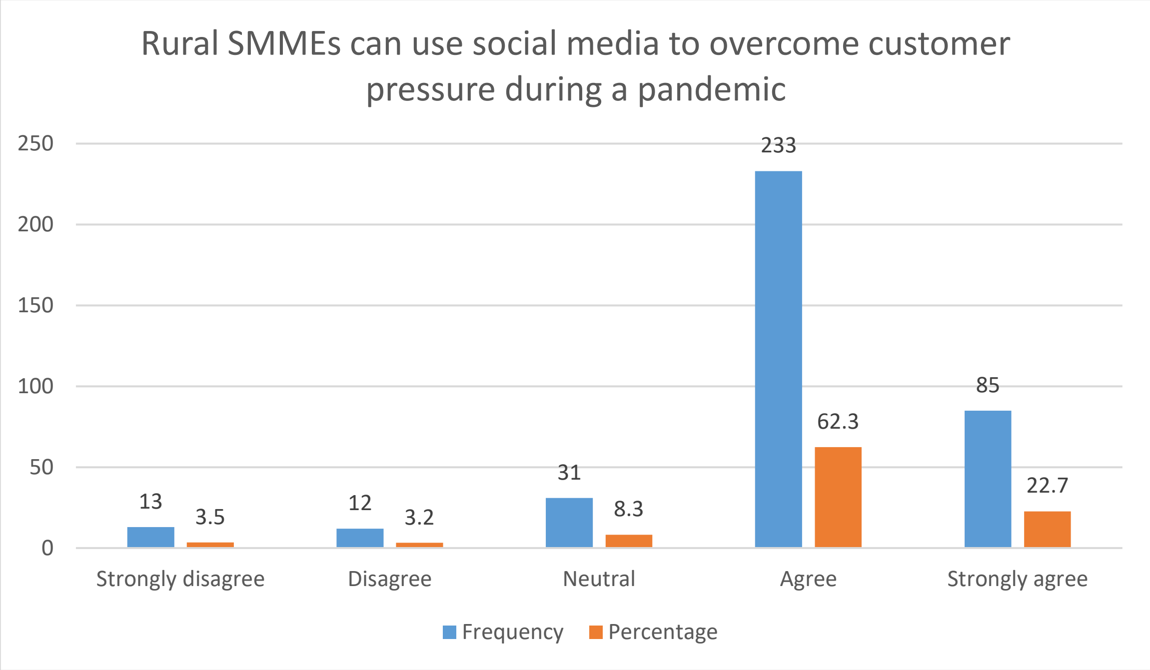


Figure 5.55: Rural SMMEs can use social media to overcome customer pressure during a pandemic

Zhang and Sharifi (2000) argued small businesses must develop their competitive abilities that use strategic agility. This includes speed, flexibility, competence, and accountability, in which strategic agility involves enhanced information systems and advanced production technologies, with its main aim to ensure innovation occurs speedily and customers have more power in the business enterprises, such as SMMEs, in order to enhance their survival and growth (Hutton & Eldridge 2019). Table 5.63 and figure 5.55 depicted that the majority respondents (233 or 62.3) agreed, with 85 (22.7 percent) that strongly agreed with the statement, whereas 31 (8.3 percent) respondents remained neutral with the statement. Furthermore, a small number of respondents (12 or 3.2 percent) were in disagreement with the statement, while 13 (3.5 percent) respondents strongly disagreed in this regard. A Chi-square test was conducted to ascertain whether rural SMMEs can use social media to overcome customer pressure during a pandemic. The results for this variable indicate (χ 2 = 465.412; df = 4; P <0.001), which shows rural SMMEs can use social media to overcome customer pressure during a pandemic.

These findings are supported by studies that highlighted rural SMMEs should be prepared to learn and reach a stage of flexibility, and overall efficiency in learning, along with the capability to keep adjusting the business' positioning, in order to gain optimal outcome out of the economic turmoil, such as the economic recession caused by the Covid-19 crisis (Seyadi & Elali 2021: 32; OECD 2020; Masago *et al*. 2021).

5.8.44 Rural SMMEs can use social media to meet market demand during a pandemic

Table 5.64: Rural SMMEs can use social media to meet market demand during a pandemic

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	11	2.9	2.9	2.9
	Disagree	14	3.7	3.7	6.7
	Neutral	22	5.9	5.9	12.6
	Agree	229	61.2	61.2	73.8
	Strongly agree	98	26.2	26.2	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

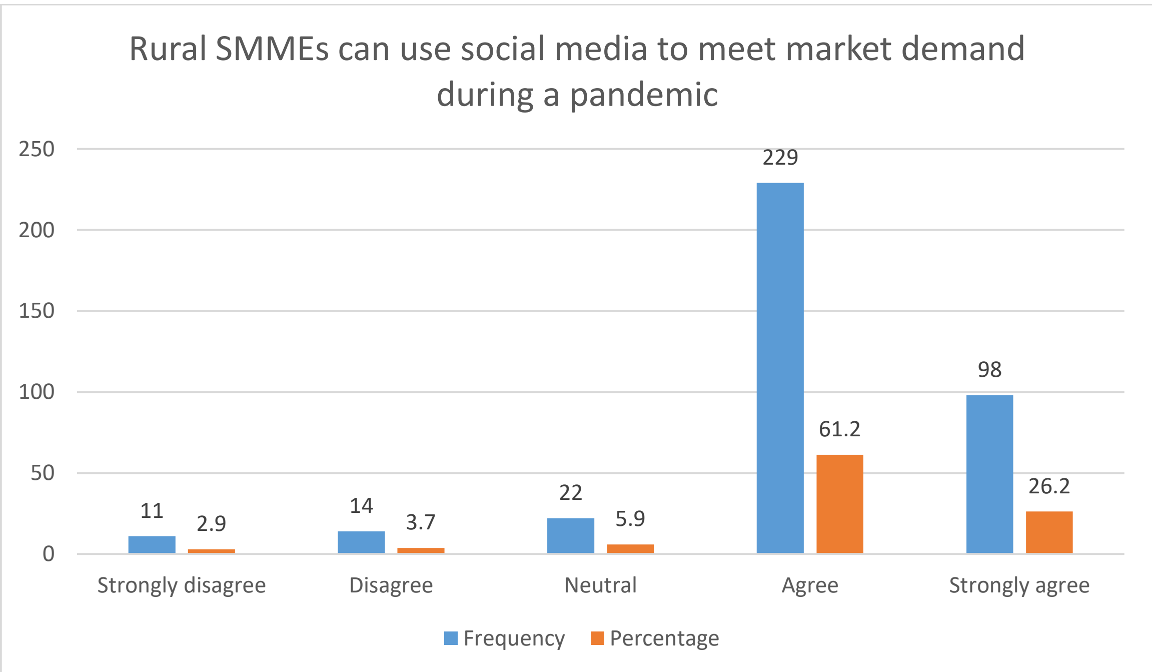


Figure 5.56: Rural SMMEs can use social media to meet market demand during a pandemic

Table 5.64 and figure 5.56 portrayed that a larger number of respondents (229 or 61.2 percent) agreed, with 98 (26.2 percent) that strongly agreed with the statement, while 22 (5.9) respondents remained neutral with the statement. Additionally, a small number of respondents (14 or 3.7 percent) were in disagreement with the statement, while 11 (2.9 percent) respondents strongly disagreed. A Chi-square test was conducted to ascertain whether rural SMMEs can use social media to meet market demand during a pandemic. The results for this variable indicate (χ 2 = 466.187; df = 4; P <0.001), which indicates rural SMMEs can use social media to meet market demand during a pandemic.

These findings are supported by researchers who suggested the business enterprises such as the rural SMMEs spend a lot of financial and non -financial resources in activities related to marketing pertaining sales, promotion, and distribution to increase their revenues in economic recession caused by Covid-19 crisis (Rachman *et al*. 2022; Moore 2002; Keh *et al.* 2006). In support of this finding, Rachman *et al.* (2022) and Naidoo (2010) pointed out businesses such as SMMEs must put marketing plans in place that are actionable, in order to apply their dynamic capability to attract prospective and retain existing customers in global crises, for instance, the Covid-19 pandemic.

5.8.45 Rural SMMEs can use social media as an innovative practice during a pandemic

Table 5.65: Rural SMMEs can use social media as an innovative practice during a pandemic

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	8	2.1	2.1	2.1
	Disagree	17	4.5	4.5	6.7
	Neutral	28	7.5	7.5	14.2
	Agree	227	60.7	60.7	74.9
	Strongly agree	94	25.1	25.1	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

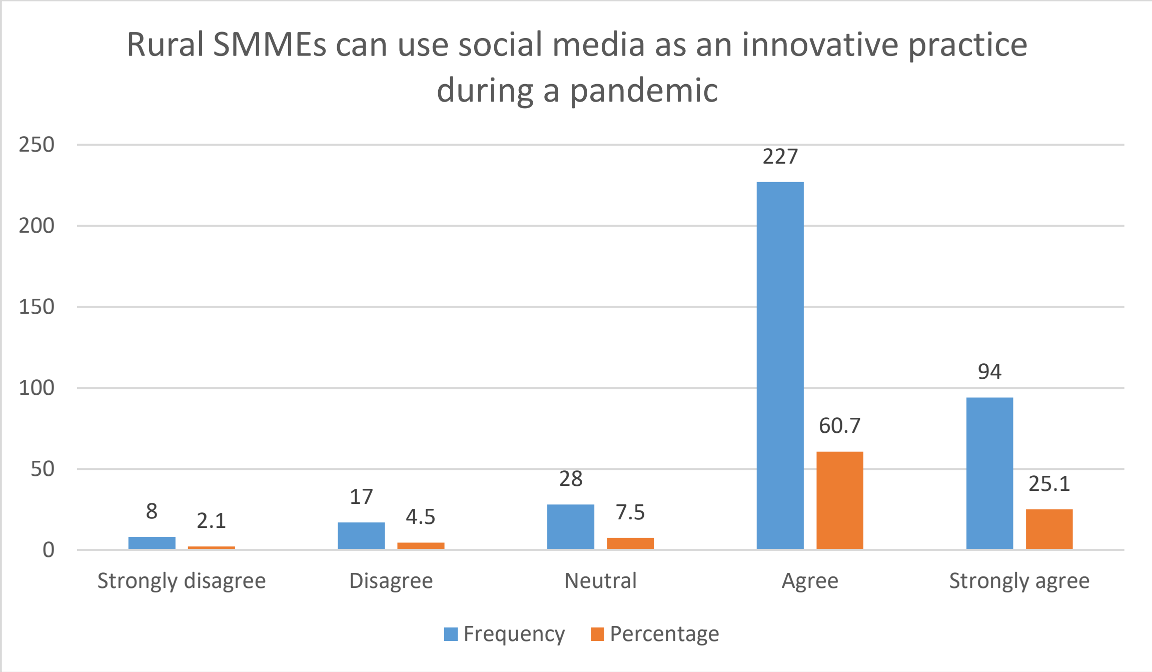


Figure 5.57: Rural SMMEs can use social media as an innovative practice during a pandemic

Previous researchers postulate SMMEs, in response to Covid-19 pandemics in future, must develop an innovative-based culture, subjected to orientation of dynamic capability to adopt and use digital technologies, such as social media, as well as location-based mobile applications. This will provide the interactive business environment necessary between the SMMEs and consumers, enabling product and service marketing to increase revenues, thus ensuring survival and growth in future pandemics (Parise *et al.* 2016; Homburg *et al.* 2017; Bolton *et al.* 2018; Zhou and Li, 2010, Rahman *et al.* 2022). Innovation capability means that business enterprises are able to continuously design new or modified products and services, including the introduction of new techniques as a response to unstable business environments (Rahman *et al*. 2022; Cefis and Marsili 2012).

Table 5.65 and figure 5.57 show a larger number of respondents (227 or 60.7 percent) agreed, with 94 (25.1 percent) that strongly agreed with the statement, while 28 (7.5 percent) respondents remained neutral with the statement. Additionally, a small number of respondents (17 or 4.5 percent) were in disagreement with the statement, while eight (2.1 percent) respondents strongly disagreed. A Chi-square test was conducted to ascertain whether rural SMMEs can use social media as an innovative practice during a pandemic. The results for this variable indicate (χ 2 = 448.219; df = 4; P <0.001), which suggests rural SMMEs can use social media as an innovative practice during a pandemic.

These findings are supported by various studies that highlighted SMME innovation capability depends on the resources, size and business environment. In this regard, rural SMMEs require dynamic capability to respond to global crises such as the Covid-19 crisis, in order to respond to customer pressure and market demands (Guijarro *et al*. 2013; Jeng and Pak 2016; Eggers 2020). In addition, where turbulence caused by the Covid-19 crisis is concerned, rural SMMEs must constantly use innovation practices as presentative measures, including social media technologies (Gajda 2017; Rahman *et al*. 2022).

5.8.46 Rural SMMEs can use social media to penetrate the market to reach customers during a pandemic

Table 5.66: Rural SMMEs can use social media to penetrate the market to reach customers during a pandemic

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	14	3.7	3.7	3.7
	Disagree	13	3.5	3.5	7.2
	Neutral	17	4.5	4.5	11.8
	Agree	215	57.5	57.5	69.3
	Strongly agree	115	30.7	30.7	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

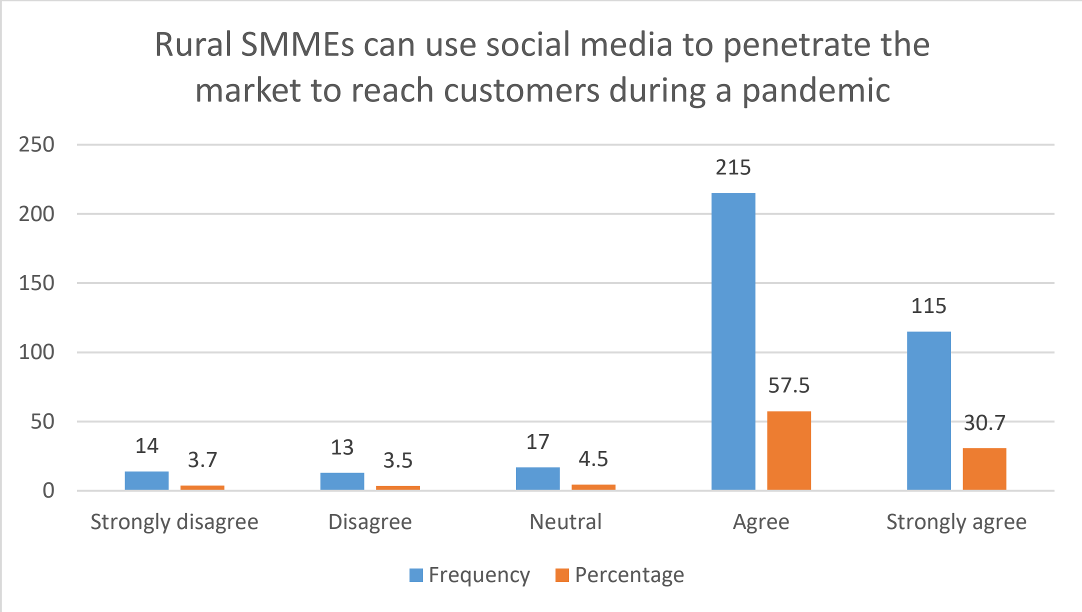


Figure 5.58: Rural SMMEs can use social media to penetrate the market to reach customers during a pandemic

Table 5.66 and figure 5.58 illustrate the majority respondents (215 or 57.5 percent) agreed, and 115 (30.7 percent) that strongly agreed with the statement, while 17 (4.5 percent) respondents remained neutral to the statement. In addition, a small number of respondents (13 or 3.5 percent) were in disagreement, whereas 14 (3.7 percent) strongly disagreed with regard to the statement. A Chi-square test was conducted to ascertain whether rural SMMEs can use social media to penetrate the market to reach customers during a pandemic. The results for this variable indicate (χ 2 = 429.529; df = 4; P <0.001), which reflects that rural SMMEs can use social media to penetrate the market to reach customers during a pandemic.

These findings are supported by Yi (2020), whose study revealed the Covid-19 crisis was an eye opener for SMMEs, showing the need to integrate their marketing activities with new technology innovations, such as social media technologies. Therefore, rural SMME owners are expected to respond to market demands and customer pressure in the times of global crises, for instance, the Covid-19 crisis, through adopting and using social media in sales operations (Prohorovs 2020). In other words, rural SMME owners are expected to respond to market demands and customer pressure by adopting and using social media in sales operations to reach customers during a pandemic, which means marketing operational efficiency is one of the survival strategies rural SMMEs may use in crisis situations (Rahman *et al*. 2022; White *et al*. 2020; Ashworth 2012).

5.8.47 Rural SMMEs can use social media to increase product sales during a pandemic

Table 5.67: Rural SMMEs can use social media to increase product sales during a pandemic

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	16	4.3	4.3	4.3
	Disagree	10	2.7	2.7	7.0
	Neutral	19	5.1	5.1	12.0
	Agree	239	63.9	63.9	75.9
	Strongly agree	90	24.1	24.1	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

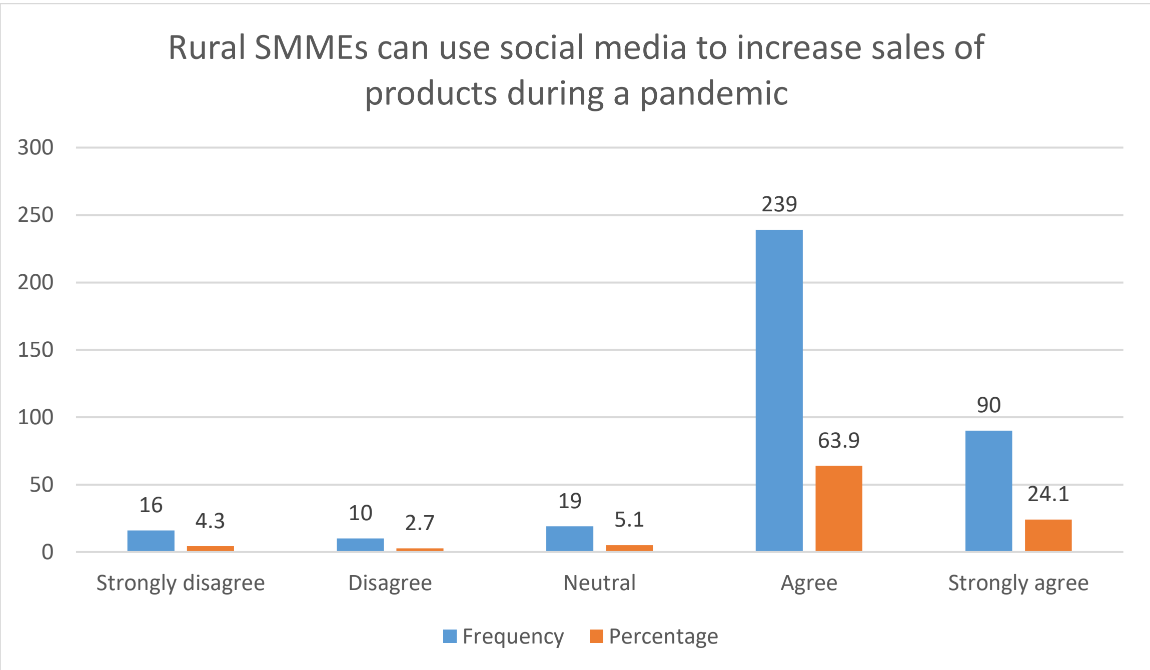


Figure 5.59: Rural SMMEs can use social media to increase product sales during a pandemic

Table 5.67 and figure 5.59 indicate a large number of respondents (239 or 63.9 percent) agreed and 90 (24.1 percent) strongly agreed with the statement, whereas 19 (5.1 percent) respondents remained neutral with the statement. In addition, a small number of respondents (10 or 2.7 percent) were in disagreement with the statement, while 16 (4.3 percent) respondents strongly disagreed with regard to the statement. A Chi-square test was conducted to ascertain whether rural SMMEs can use social media to increase product sales during a pandemic. The results for this variable indicate (χ 2 = 507.524; df = 4; P <0.001), which suggests rural SMMEs can use social media to increase product sales during a pandemic.

These findings are supported by Rahman *et al.* (2020), whose study findings emphasised businesses enterprises such as rural SMMEs, must have marketing strategies to increase revenues in the economic recession caused by the Covid-19 crisis. This can be achieved through their dynamic capability to attract prospective and retain existing customers in global crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic, through the use of social media networking sites, which according to Statista (2023: 11 October), reached an estimated 3.96 billion users in 2022.

5.8.48 Rural SMMEs can use Facebook for their survival and growth in future pandemics

Table 5.68: Rural SMMEs can use Facebook for their survival and growth in future pandemics

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	13	3.5	3.5	3.5
	Disagree	13	3.5	3.5	7.0
	Neutral	17	4.5	4.5	11.5
	Agree	222	59.4	59.4	70.9
	Strongly agree	109	29.1	29.1	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

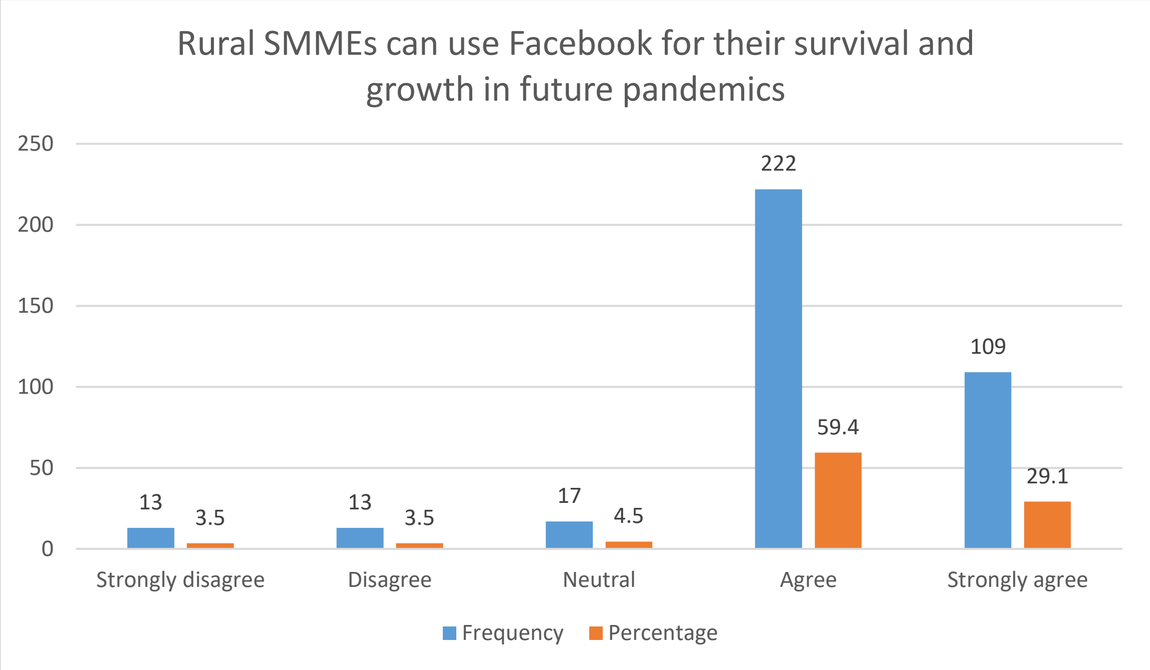


Figure 5.60: Rural SMMEs can use Facebook for their survival and growth in future pandemics

Table 5.68 and figure 5.60 show a large number of respondents (222 or 59.4 percent) agreed, with 109 (29.1 percent) that strongly agreed and 17 (4.5 percent) that remained neutral to the statement. In addition, a small number of respondents (13 or 3.5 percent) were in disagreement with the statement, while 13 (3.5 percent) respondents strongly disagreed with regard to the statement. A Chi-square test was conducted to ascertain whether rural SMMEs can use Facebook for their survival and growth in future pandemics. The results for this variable indicate (χ 2 = 452.096; df = 4; P <0.001), which signifies that rural SMMEs can use Facebook for their survival and growth in future pandemics.

These findings are in line with recent research, such as the study conducted by Tlapana and Dike (2020), which found SMMEs can use Facebook to reach targeted customers and improve their brand awareness of the SMMEs. According to Statista (2023), the Facebook social media platform, which is the core platform for social media giant Meta, currently has more than 2.9 billion monthly active users. This implies Facebook can be used by rural SMMEs as a marketing tool to communicate with existing customers and attract new customers, thereby increasing their sales during a crisis, such as that caused by Covid-19, for their survival and growth in this economic turmoil.

5.8.49 Rural SMMEs can use Twitter for their survival and growth in future pandemics

Table 5.69: Rural SMMEs can use Twitter for their survival and growth in future pandemics

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	13	3.5	3.5	3.5
	Disagree	11	2.9	2.9	6.4
	Neutral	18	4.8	4.8	11.2
	Agree	251	67.1	67.1	78.3
	Strongly agree	81	21.7	21.7	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

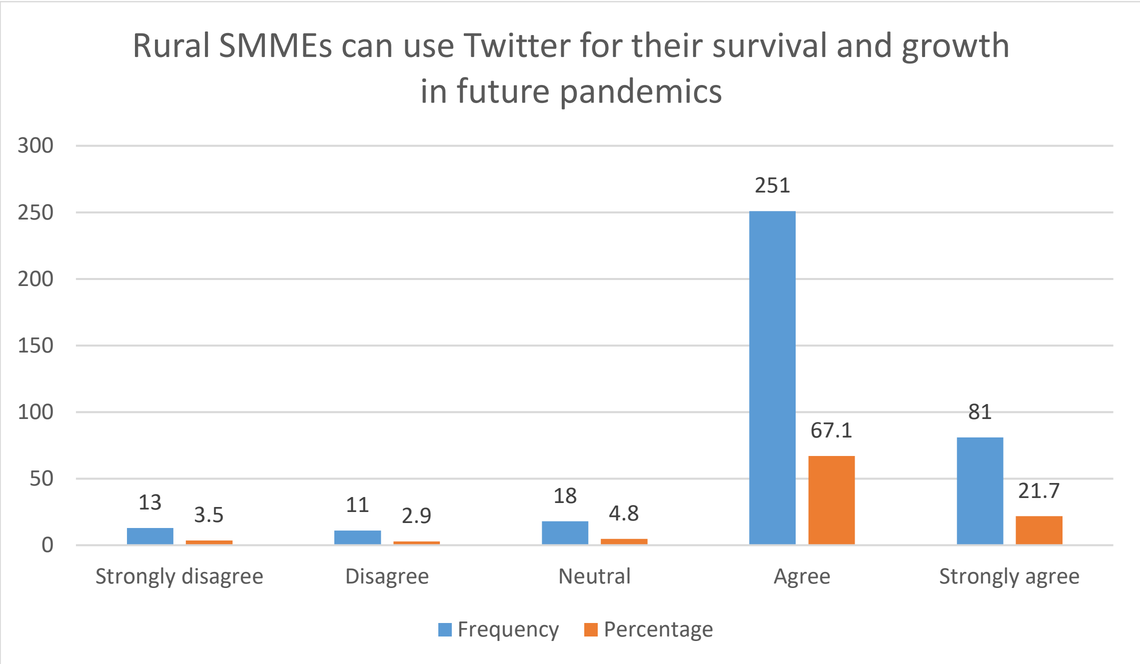


Figure 5.61: Rural SMMEs can use Twitter for their survival and growth in future pandemics

Table 5.69 and figure 5.61 reveal a large number of respondents (251 or 67.1 percent) agreed, with 81 (21.7 percent) that strongly agreed to the statement. while 18 (4.8 percent) respondents remained neutral to the statement. Furthermore, a small number of respondents (11 or 2.9 percent) were in disagreement with the statement, while 13 (3.5 percent) respondents strongly disagreed with regard to the statement. A Chi-square test was conducted to ascertain whether rural SMMEs can use Twitter for their survival and growth in future pandemics. The results for this variable indicate (χ 2 = 464.182; df = 4; P <0.001), which suggests rural SMMEs can use Twitter for their survival and growth in future pandemics.

These findings are supported by Tlapana and Dike (2020), who explain Twitter is a social networking system that conveys business messages to different customers. Statista (2023) shows the social media platform audience for X/Twitter, as of December 2022, accounted for more than 368 million monthly active users worldwide. In this regard, rural SMMEs should use this type of platform to reach out to customers in promoting their business. This would have allowed instant feedback regarding products or services during the Covid-19 crisis and also enable rural SMME survival and growth in future pandemics.

5.8.50 Rural SMMEs can use WhatsApp for their survival and growth in future pandemics

Table 5.70: Rural SMMEs can use WhatsApp for their survival and growth in future pandemics

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	11	2.9	2.9	2.9
	Disagree	13	3.5	3.5	6.4
	Neutral	13	3.5	3.5	9.9
	Agree	198	52.9	52.9	62.8
	Strongly agree	139	37.2	37.2	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

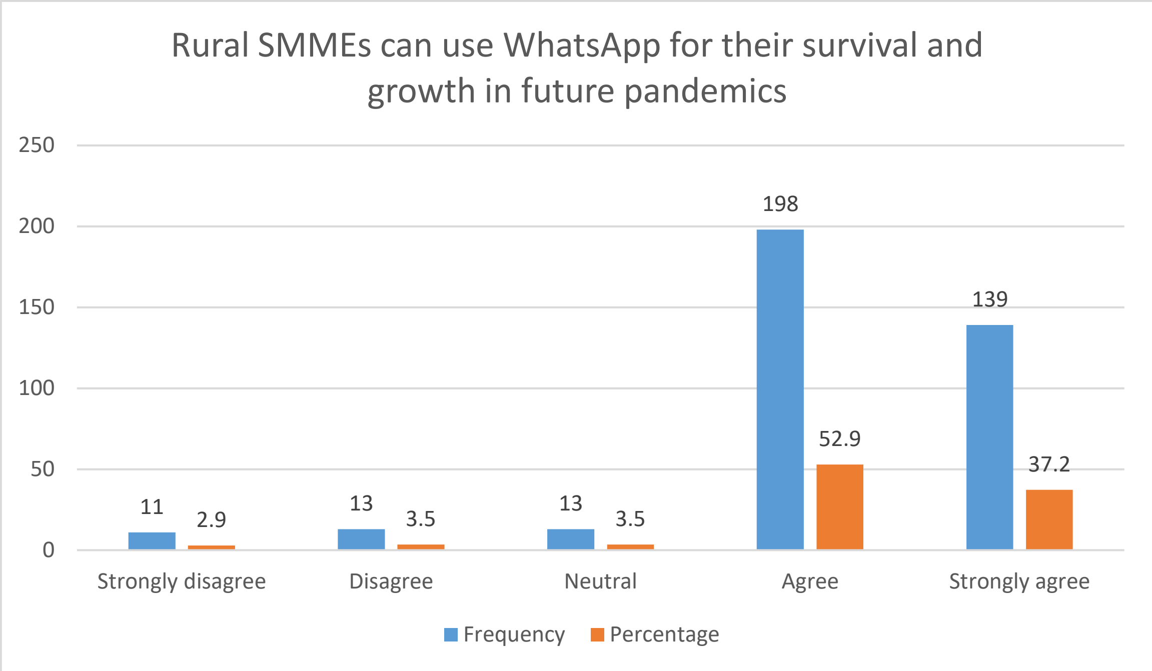


Figure 5.61: Rural SMMEs can use WhatsApp for their survival and growth in future pandemics

Table 5.70 and figure 5.61 show the majority respondents (198 or 52.9 percent) agreed, with 139 (37.2 percent) that strongly agreed to the statement, while 13 (4.8 percent) respondents remained neutral to the statement. Furthermore, a small number of respondents (13 or 3.5 percent) were in disagreement, whereas 11 (2.9 percent) respondents strongly disagreed with regard to the statement. A Chi-square test was conducted to ascertain whether rural SMMEs can use WhatsApp for their survival and growth in future pandemics. The results for this variable indicate (χ 2 = 414.556; df = 4; P <0.001), which implies rural SMMEs can use WhatsApp for their survival and growth in future pandemics.

These findings correspond with other scholars, who indicated WhatsApp enables enterprises to stay in touch with customers and expand their market base, by effectively using the app and promoting the business, irrespective of where the users reside (Dar *et al.* 2017). This suggests rural SMMEs can use WhatsApp for their survival and growth in future pandemics. Statista (2023: 11 October) shows the most popular social networks worldwide, ranked by number of monthly active users, where WhatsApp is widely received and in 2022, was used by 1.26 billion global consumers and companies.

5.8.51 Rural SMMEs can use Instagram for their survival and growth in future pandemics

Table 5.71: Rural SMMEs can use Instagram for their survival and growth in future pandemics

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	17	4.5	4.5	4.5
	Disagree	8	2.1	2.1	6.7
	Neutral	19	5.1	5.1	11.8
	Agree	238	63.6	63.6	75.4
	Strongly agree	92	24.6	24.6	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

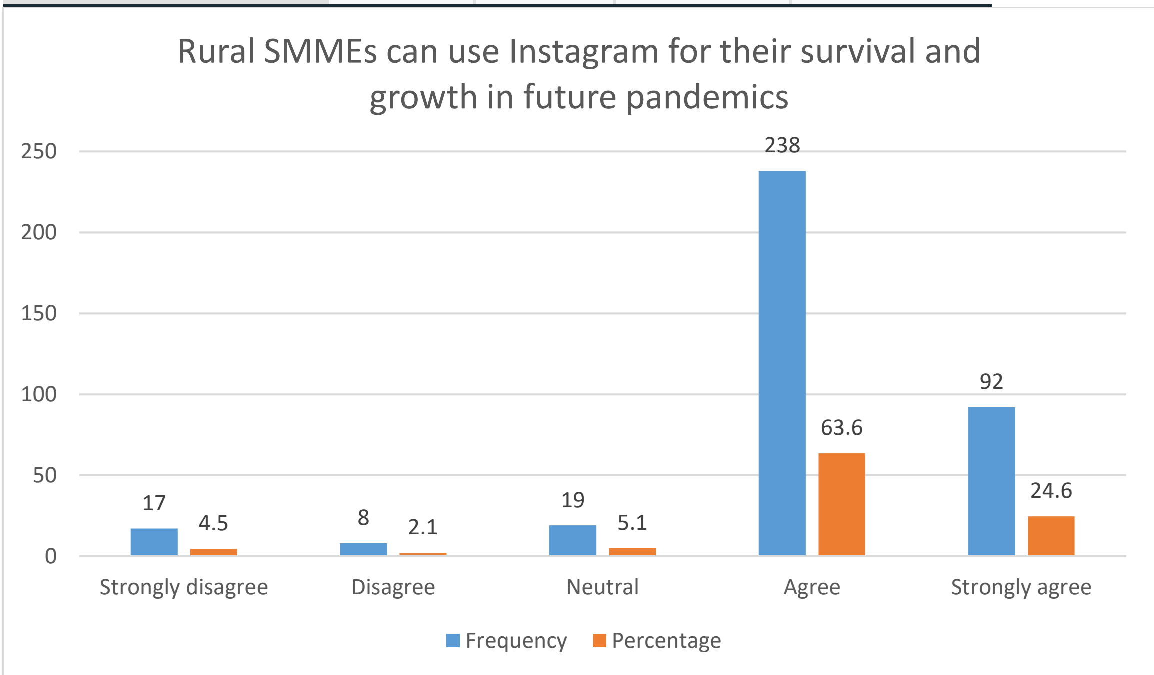


Figure 5.62: Rural SMMEs can use Instagram for their survival and growth in future pandemics

Table 5.71 and figure 5.62 depict that the majority respondents (238 or 63.6 percent) agreed, with 92 (24.6 percent) that strongly agreed to the statement, while 19 (5.1 percent) respondents remained neutral to the statement. Moreover, a very small number of respondents (eight or 2.1 percent) were in disagreement with the statement, whereas 17

(4.5 percent) respondents strongly disagreed with regard to the statement. A Chi-square test was conducted to ascertain whether rural SMMEs can use Instagram for their survival and growth in future pandemics. The results for this variable indicate (χ 2 = 505.973; df = 4; P <0.001), which signals rural SMMEs can use Instagram for their survival and growth in future pandemics.

These findings are supported by studies that pointed out Instagram is a SNS that allows users to filter photos, videos, and post them on various sites, including Instagram, affording SMMEs the opportunity to follow social trends and information on consumer tastes and preferences (Tlapana & Dike 2020). In 2021, active monthly Instagram users totalled 1.21 billion, as indicated by Statista (2023: August 29), with Instagram considered the fourth most popular social media platform in the world, where user numbers are concerned. This infers Instagram can allow rural SMMEs to provide customers with services and products according to their needs, thereby creating customer loyalty to sustain their survival and growth in future pandemics.

5.8.52 Rural SMMEs can use YouTube for their survival and growth in future pandemics

Table 5.72: Rural SMMEs can use YouTube for their survival and growth in future pandemics

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	13	3.5	3.5	3.5
	Disagree	12	3.2	3.2	6.7
	Neutral	22	5.9	5.9	12.6
	Agree	235	62.8	62.8	75.4
	Strongly agree	92	24.6	24.6	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

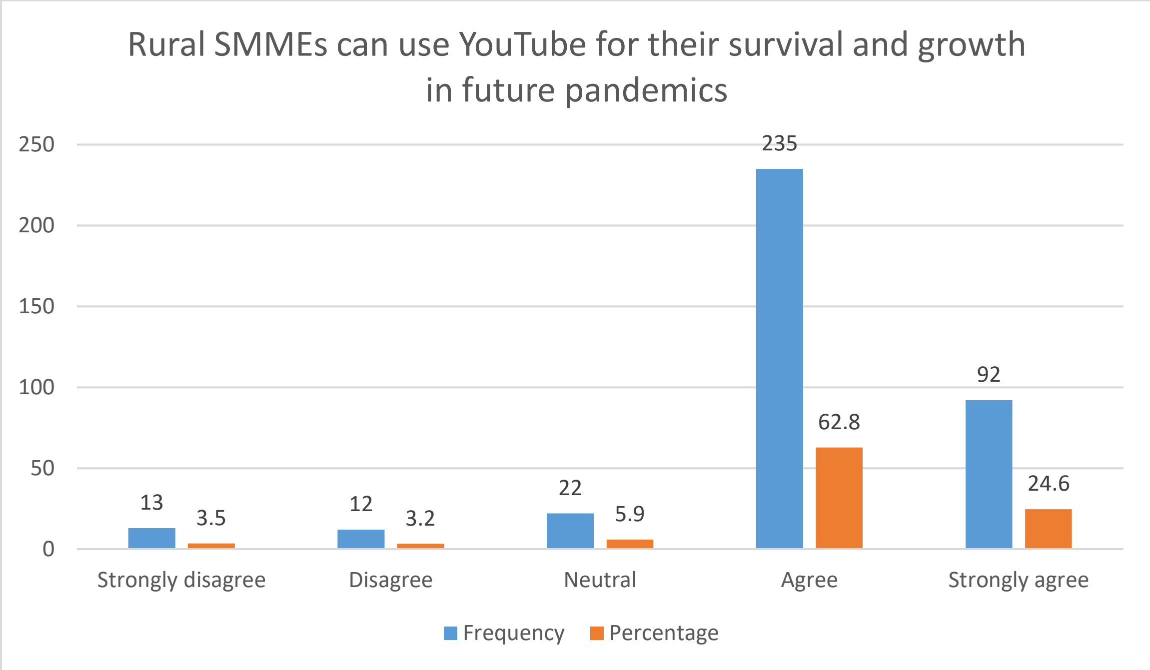


Figure 5.63: Rural SMMEs can use YouTube for their survival and growth in future pandemics

Table 5.72 and figure 5.63 show the majority respondents (235 or 62.8 percent) agreed, with 92 (24.6 percent) that strongly agreed with the statement, whereas 22 (5.9 percent) respondents remained neutral to the statement. Furthermore, a small number of respondents (12 or 3.2 percent) disagreed with the statement, while 13 (3.5 percent) respondents strongly disagreed with the statement. A Chi-square test was conducted to ascertain whether rural SMMEs can use YouTube for their survival and growth in future pandemics. The results for this variable indicate (χ 2 = 488.112; df = 4; P <0.001), which suggest rural SMMEs can use YouTube for their survival and growth in future pandemics.

These findings are in accordance with prior studies, which suggest SMMEs can use YouTube to market their products and services, since YouTube is accessible to 1.5 billion monthly users (Göbel *et al.* 2017; Gupta *et al*. 2018). The social media platform added YouTube Shorts in 2021, launched globally in June of that year; by February 2023, daily views of YouTube Shorts exceeded 50 billion (Statista 2023: 31 August). Thus, it may be concluded YouTube can be a valuable marketing tool for rural SMMEs to market their products and services and improve their sales during Covid-19 crisis, thereby forging business survival and growth in future pandemics.

5.8.53 Rural SMMEs can use social media to interact with customers in future pandemics

Table 5.73: Rural SMMEs can use social media to interact with customers in future pandemics

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	14	3.7	3.7	3.7
	Disagree	11	2.9	2.9	6.7
	Neutral	17	4.5	4.5	11.2
	Agree	228	61.0	61.0	72.2
	Strongly agree	104	27.8	27.8	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

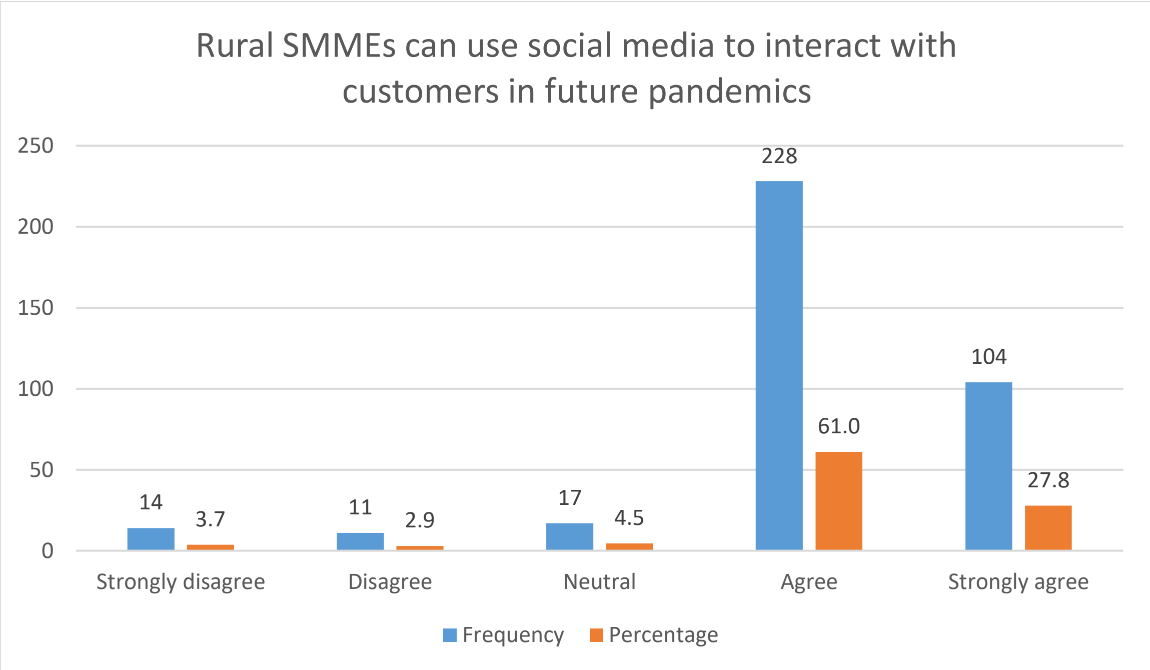


Figure 5.64: Rural SMMEs can use social media to interact with customers in future pandemics

Table 5.73 and figure 5.64 present results showing the majority respondents (228 or 61.1 percent) agreed, with 104 (27.8 percent) that strongly agreed to the statement, while 17 (4.5 percent) respondents remained neutral to the statement. Additionally, a small number of respondents (11 or 2.9 percent) disagreed with the statement, whereas 14 (3.7 percent) respondents strongly disagreed with the statement. A Chi-square test was conducted to ascertain whether rural SMMEs can use social media to interact with customers in future pandemics. The results for this variable indicate (χ 2 = 473.674; df = 4; P <0.001), which implies rural SMMEs can use social media to interact with customers in future pandemics.

These findings are supported by studies conducted by Goi (2014) and Jordan (2018), which pointed out business enterprises adopted and used social media platforms to communicate with existing and potential customers, intent on creating relationships to forge future loyalty. In this regard, Kakumbi and Phiri (2022) highlighted the adoption and usage of social media amongst rural SMMEs is low, whereas the use of social media by rural SMMEs has a huge impact on the growth of these small enterprises. However, studies by Rodriguez *et al.* (2014) and Moghavvemi (2015), revealed the use of Facebook improves sales and customer relationships, which create customer loyalty to the business. The most popular social media platforms are Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, with customers spending much time in their use to share similar interests with their customers, as well as positive or negative service experiences regarding the business' services and products (Valos *et al.* 2016; Schulze *et al*. 2014; Kumar *et al*. 2016).

Component matrix: The use of social media as a strategy relates to rural SMME survival and growth during future pandemics

Table 5.74: Component matrix: The use of social media as a strategy relates to rural SMME survival and growth during future pandemics

Component Matrix[a]

B18	Component 1
Rural SMMEs can use social media to overcome customer pressure during a pandemic	0.787
Rural SMMEs can use social media to meet market demand during a pandemic	0.790
Rural SMMEs can use social media as an innovative practice during a pandemic	0.765
Rural SMMEs can use social media to penetrate the market to reach customer during a pandemic	0.828
Rural SMMEs can use social media to increase sales of product during a pandemic	0.843
Rural SMMEs can use Facebook for their survival and growth in future pandemics	0.840

Rural SMMEs can use Twitter for their survival and growth in future pandemics	0.858
Rural SMMEs can use WhatsApp for their survival and growth in future pandemics	0.841
Rural SMMEs can use Instagram for their survival and growth in future pandemics	0.835
Rural SMMEs can use YouTube for their survival and growth in future pandemics	0.833
Rural SMMEs can use social media to interact with customers in future pandemics	0.821

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 1 components extracted.

This component matrix is an additional statistical analysis of the above figures (Figure 5.55 to 5.64). A component test was conducted on the statements regarding the use of social media as a strategy for rural SMME survival and growth during future pandemics. The respondents indicated to only one category of component, with all components tested reflecting a positive significance. On the statement to ascertain whether rural SMMEs can use Twitter for their survival and growth in future pandemics, a strong positive significance of 0.858 is shown. This means respondents felt Twitter can be used by rural SMMEs in KZN for their survival and growth in future pandemics.

Another variable, to establish whether rural SMMEs can use social media to increase product sales during a pandemic, recorded a strong positive significance of 0.843, which shows rural SMMEs can use social media to increase product sales during a pandemic. The other variable that depicted a strong positive significance concerning whether rural SMMEs can use WhatsApp for their survival and growth in future pandemics, showed 0.841 for the component test. Regarding the use of Facebook to increase sales of product by rural SMMEs for their survival and growth in future pandemics, a component test conducted indicated a 0.840 score.

On the variable whether rural SMMEs can use social media to penetrate the market to reach customers during a pandemic, a positive significance of 0.828 is shown, whereas the other variables to ascertain whether rural SMMEs can use Instagram and YouTube for their survival and growth in future pandemics, showed a figure of 0.835 and 0.833, respectively. With regard to whether rural SMMEs can use social media to interact with customers in future pandemics, the respondents were in agreement, as depicted by the significance of a 0.821 score.

A strong positive significance of 0.7.90 was further established for the statement whether rural SMMEs can use social media to meet market demand during a pandemic. A score of 0.787 is reflected for the statement relating to whether rural SMMEs can use social media to overcome customer pressure during a pandemic. The last variable reflects a figure of 0.765 on the statement regarding whether rural SMMEs can use social media as an innovative practice during a pandemic. In figures 5.55 and 5.65, it can be seen the component obtained from each rotational matrix is precise and close to a score of 1. All variables tested were based on statements regarding the use of social media as a strategy for rural SMME survival and growth during future pandemics, where these reflected a very strong significance towards social media as a strategy for rural SMMEs survival and growth. This means they strongly believed social media will be able to act as a strategy for rural SMMEs, which can promote their survival and growth, while also enhancing the sustainability of rural SMMEs during future pandemics. Furthermore, the component test reveals SMMEs see social media as a driving tool for their survival and growth in rural KZN.

5.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The data analysis and empirical findings of this study indicated SMMEs in rural KZN were faced with some challenges in adopting and using social media during the Covid-19 crisis. Rural SMMEs were mainly subject to the lack of financial resources, which has a major impact on them to adopt and use social media. The tested variables in this study outlined an in-depth picture of the main issues, challenges and shortcomings rural SMMEs are faced with. The findings suggested the lack of broadband internet is a key challenge for rural SMMEs to use social media, followed by both lack of technology infrastructure and insufficient social media awareness. Further to this, the findings also illustrated the lack of technical skills and financial resources by rural SMMEs contributed to the key challenges that discouraged rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. Overall, rural SMMEs should have prioritised social media awareness as an integral part of their business to improve survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis, as well as any future pandemics. The discussion of the empirical study findings, therefore, supports the literature of this study. The chapter that follows will provide a detailed discussion of the study conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to investigate the critical factors impacting social media use as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN, in accordance with the study findings, to develop and propose a social media model as a driving tool for rural SMME survival and growth during crises, such as the Covid-19 crisis. The aim of the study was realised through the collection of secondary and primary data. The secondary data were derived from a thorough literature review, whereas the comprehensive empirical study provided the primary data, which were generally analysed to establish any substantial correlation between the research study variables.

In Chapter 6, the review of chapters will be outlined as part of the presented conclusions, which will offer a broad view of the key findings summary and portrays the picture of the research objectives addressed in this study. In addition, this chapter will illustrate the explanation of key findings, based on the literature reviewed and study objectives, while the hypotheses will be discussed in relation to the empirical findings of the research study. The limitations and recommendations associated with empirical findings based on the study are also explained. Furthermore, recommendations for further study that may be conducted from the empirical findings of this chapter, are outlined.

6.2 REVIEW OF CHAPTERS

The purpose of the study was to develop and propose a social media model as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth in times of crisis, such as the Covid-19 crisis, in rural KZN. The intention is to provide SMMEs and their owners and managers with an in-depth understanding of the influence social media use has as a driver for their business success. The study investigated the critical factors impacting social media use as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis, in rural KZN. The study was divided into six chapters, briefly outlined as follows:

Chapter 1 provided a comprehensive introduction and background to the research problem of the study. It also briefly discussed a general overview of the theories that underpinned the study, as well as South African and KZN initiatives influencing SMME survival and growth. This chapter further depicted the research study aim, problem statement, research objectives and questions, along with the study scope, and significance.

In addition, the chapter also illustrated the framework the study followed from the start to the end.

Chapter 2 critically discussed the literature reviewed regarding factors that influence rural SMME social media use during events such as the Covid-19 crisis. Additionally, it discussed the different types of survival and growth strategies employed by SMMEs in international as well as African countries, including SA, for survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

Chapter 3 presented the theoretical framework best suited for this study, which included the UTAUT model, DoI theory, TAM, and TOE, as well as firm growth and survival-based theories. This chapter also provided the linkage of theories, in terms of how they complement and supplement each other in supporting and providing the basic foundation of this study. Furthermore, it depicted the characteristics of the research model that emanated from the comprehensive literature review of the study.

Chapter 4 outlined the research methodology of the study, where the research design and methods used in conducting this study were discussed and justifications for their choice provided. This chapter also examined the research method, sampling, population, and sample size, along with the quantitative data instrument developed, in relation to the study aim and objectives. The chapter also focussed on the ethical considerations for the study.

Chapter 5 dealt with the quantitative data collection, where 374 structured questionnaires were distributed and collected from SMME owners and managers in rural KZN. The data were analysed and interpreted in accordance with the research objectives, as follows:

- To investigate the factors that influenced the use of social media as driver for SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN.
- To ascertain the extent to which SMMEs used social media as driver for survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN.
- To measure SMME owner and manager perceptions towards adopting and using social media for SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN.
- To determine the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on SMME survival and growth in rural KZN.

- To identify the social media marketing strategies that can be employed by SMMEs for survival and growth during emergencies, such as the Covid-19 crises, in rural KZN.
- To design and propose a social media model as a driving tool for use by SMMEs to survive and grow during the Covid -19 crisis in rural KZN.

Chapter 6 concludes the analysis and offers conclusions and recommendations of the research study. It compared the key findings and literature reviewed in line with the research objectives of this study and empirical findings were tested in line with generated hypotheses. Chapter six also delineates the main purpose of the study, in developing and proposing a social media model that can be used by SMMEs as a driving tool to survive and grow during the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN. The model can also be used by SMMEs to survive and grow during future pandemics in rural KZN.

6.3 KEY FINDINGS BASED ON LITERATURE REVIEW AND STUDY OBJECTIVES

6.3.1 Introduction

In this section a comprehensive overview of the key empirical findings of the study is provided, along with a comparison between these and the literature reviewed for this research. The discussions are based on the research objectives and relevant questions/ statements within the conducted survey. This section discusses the key findings in line with the literature review and the research objectives. As stated in Chapter one, the discussion of the key findings of the research was in accordance with the study objectives, outlined below.

Sub-objective 1: The factors that influenced the use of social media as driver for SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN.

Sub-objective 2: The extent to which SMMEs used social media as driver for survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN.

Sub-objective 3: The perceptions of SMME owners and managers towards adopting and using social media for SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN.

Sub-objective 4: The impact of the Covid-19 crisis on SMME survival and growth in rural KZN.

Sub-objective 5: The social media marketing strategies that can be employed by SMMEs for survival and growth during emergencies, such as the Covid-19 crises, in rural KZN.

Sub-objective 6: The social media model as a driving tool that can be used by SMMEs to survive and grow during the Covid -19 crisis in rural KZN.

Based on the above illustration of study sub-objectives, the discussion of the key findings of the study was done in accordance with the research objectives

6.3.2 Key findings of objective 1

Factors that influenced social media use as driver for SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN

Factors that affected social media use by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis are both internal and external environmental factors; these comprise technology infrastructure, social media awareness, internet connectivity, and the Covid-19 crisis, as well as investment in technology, cyber security, broadband internet, and availability of resources, along with business technical skills and government regulations (Abed 2020; Wang *et al*. 2016; Bloom, Fletcher and Yeh 2021; Fairlie and Fossen 2021; Mpofu *et al*. 2013; Esmaeilpour *et al*. 2016). These factors were discovered to influence social media adoption and usage by rural SMMEs, as well as their survival and growth in rural KZN (Nene 2021; Kotulaa *et al.* 2021; Itliong 2020; Sugandini *et al*. 2020; Lekhanya 2013; Kokemuller 2018).

6.3.2.1 Technical Skills

The studies conducted show SMME technical skills are problematic, even in developed countries such as the UK, where it was found approximately 36 percent smaller companies experienced a shortage of skilled staff. It can thus be deduced SMMEs are lacking in digital technology capabilities and orientation that can assist in social media adoption and use to improve market penetration and customer relationships, thereby increasing sales that can give rise to added revenue in times of economic disruptions, such as caused by the Covid-19 crisis (Lekhanya 2018; Cheng *et al*. 2019). Ardito *et al.* (2021) argued digital orientation fosters digital transformation and provides a competitive advantage. This follows from digital technology capabilities and orientation, referred to as the technical skills, which rural SMME owners needed to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis, for their survival and growth (Dollens *et al.* 2020; Bodziany *et al*. 2021).

The prior research discussed above further supports the study findings, since a significant number of respondents (264 or 71 percent) confirmed a lack of technical skills affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. Based on the above study findings, Javani *et al*. (2017) contended technical skills provide the essential knowledge, skills and practical competencies that enable SMMEs owners and managers to effectively execute their obligations, in order to promote SMME survival and growth. In conclusion, Smidt (2021 postulates in SA, one of the chief challenges detrimental to SMME owners and managers, remains the lack of technical skills to adopt digital technologies.

6.3.2.2 Social media awareness

A significant number of respondents (266 or 71 percent) suggested rural SMMEs lacked social awareness on the use of social media during the Covid-19 crises. These empirical findings are confirmed by studies highlighting this lack of awareness, which is, therefore, one of the problems that contradicts the use of social media (Oyekan and Kamiyo 2008). Hew (2011) states social media awareness is the primary determinant of informal scientific communication. This is echoed by Alencar (2016), who made a significant contribution from the results of his research, to understanding the meaningful relationship between social media awareness and its adoption for informal scientific communication. It can be deduced it is critical for SMMEs to create an awareness of social media, and to adopt and use social media during crises, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, for their survival and growth (Kakumbi and Phiri 2022).

6.3.2.3 Managerial competencies

Various studies have shown managerial competencies comprise acquired knowledge, skills and behaviour, which promote the effectiveness and efficiency of managers in executing their duties and responsibilities and achieving the business goals and objectives (Velie and Manxhari 2017; Ogunsola 2017). These competencies are crucial factors that promote the survival and growth of a business. Fatoki (2014) argued managerial competencies are chief resources for the survival and growth of SMMEs; this indicates rural SMMEs need to identify the competencies that will enable them to use social media during crises (Bodziany *et al*. 2021).

Yaghoubi Farani *et al.* (2022) and Lekhanya (2015) pointed out rural SMME owners-managers are generally confronted with a lack of managerial skills and would prefer to use the traditional way of advertising their products and services, rather than using new technology such as social media. The study findings support the literature, as a significant number of respondents (73.3 percent) agreed insufficient management competence and skills affect social entrepreneurs' activities and their contribution to sustainable development.

6.3.2.4 Financial resources

A considerable number of respondents (259 or 69 percent) agreed the lack of financial resources affected rural SMME social media use during the Covid-19 crisis. These empirical findings are confirmed by several studies indicating many SMME owners need financial management skills to be successful. This implies the success or failure of their enterprises is highly dependent on the availability of resources, including owner-manager financial skills (Agyei 2018; Fatoki, 2021). Some researchers pointed out the availability of financial resources signifies the existence of financial support, in which businesses can decide to adopt and use social media technologies for marketing their products and services (Kim & Garrison 2009 Sugandini *et al*. 2020; Potluri & Vajjhala 2018). This was supported by empirical findings associated with financial resources, which cited the majority respondents (264 or 71 percent) believed the lack of internet availability affected rural SMME social media use during Covid-19 crisis. Furthermore, the majority respondents (253 or 68 percent) agreed internet affordability affected rural SMME social media use during the Covid-19 crisis.

In addition to support from the reviewed literature, as per the empirical findings regarding lack of financial resources depicted above, a large number of respondents (260 or 70 percent) agreed rural SMMEs are affected by high costs in using social media during the Covid-19 crisis. This was confirmed by another empirical finding, as the majority respondents (263 or 70.3 percent) agreed the lack of resources to implement cyber security solutions affected social media use by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis.

Based on the above, Agyei (2018) and Fatoki (2021) emphasised insufficient financial skills by rural SMME owners and managers serves as a critical factor that contributes to the lack of financial resources, which is the prime factor motivating rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media as part of their marketing strategy to market their businesses during the Covid-19 crisis. However, some researchers argued the lack of financial literacy by rural SMME owners-managers can lead to bad financial decisions with negative consequences to an SMME's operations, financial structure and mandate (Agyapong and Attram 2019; Barney 1991; Eniola and Ektebang 2014; Abdulsaleh and Worthington 2013).

The above empirical findings, supported with literature, overall suggests rural SMMEs will encounter difficulties in adopting social media as a driving tool for their survival and growth during emergencies such as the Covid-19 crisis. This emanates from the lack of resources and huge cost of technology SMMEs are subjected to, including rural SMMEs in KZN (Sugandini *et al*. 2020; Lekhanya 2013).

6.3.2.5 Internet connectivity

The empirical findings revealed a considerable number of respondents (70.1 percent) agreed the lack of internet connectivity affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. This was confirmed by literature, where Cariolle and Léon (2022: 8-9) argued the lack of internet connectivity is an obstacle for SMMEs to use digital tools and is regarded as an indication of inadequate ICT infrastructure, which disadvantaged rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media during the Covid-19 crisis for survival and growth. This implies internet connectivity can contribute to rural SMME growth, which means it is critical for rural SMMEs to have internet connectivity, in order to adopt and use social media for survival and growth during disasters such as the Covid-19 crisis (Sugandini *et al*. 2020; Gqoboka *et al*. 2022).

6.3.2.6 Technology infrastructure

A number of studies revealed rural SMMEs in KZN are faced with a lack of technology and poor infrastructure has a negative influence on rural small businesses to survive and grow (Lekhanya 2014, 2016). This is supported by the study findings, with 71.4 percent respondents that indicated the lack of technology infrastructure affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. This was also confirmed by Mavimbela and Dube (2016), who posited rural SMMEs are faced with a slow pace to adopt and use technology such as social media. This implies rural SMMEs will find it difficult to adopt and use social media to survive and grow during crises similar to the Covid-19 crisis, due to the slow pace at which they embrace technology, with this emanating from the lack of access and inability to use technology (Venter *et al*. 2015; Mavimbela and Dube 2016; Tendai, Nicole and Tafadzwa 2018).

6.3.2.7 Competitive environments

McKinsey and Company (2020) and Lin (2014) highlighted the positive correlation between competitive pressure and purpose to adopt social media drive, where social media can assist rural SMMEs to advance their competitive advantage and boost their financial position for survival and growth (Lin 2014; Ahani *et al.* 2017). This literature was supported by empirical findings, as many respondents (248 or 66 percent) agreed competitive environments influenced rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

In light of the above, Zhu *et al*. (2003) asserted competition within the industry can permit firms such as SMMEs to adopt new technologies to sustain their competitive edge, despite crises such as Covid-19. Therefore, in the context of this study, the Covid-19 crisis could have motivated rural SMMEs to adapt to the turbulences, through adopting and using social media (Rahman *et al*. 2022; Sugandini *et al*. 2020). This is in correlation with another empirical finding regarding competitive environments, which depicted a considerable number of respondents (249 or 67 percent) agreed large market scope influenced rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. This implies businesses with a larger market scope are more inclined to adopt new technologies than businesses with a limited market scope, which tend to have a lower probability of adoption (Zhu, Kraemer and Xu 2003). Consequently, it may be deduced customer pressure had a strong positive correlating pressure on rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media to survive and grow during the Covid-19 crisis (Matikiti *et al*. 2018; Rahman *et al*. 2022).

6.3.2.8 Customer satisfaction

Manneh (2017) suggested the internet has significantly contributed to the way people communicate by means of different social media platforms to interact without physically meeting. This mode of communication allows businesses to liaise with their customers, in order to motivate them to products, while customers are able to resolve any issues with ease during the buying process, through social media interactivity. This increases the probabilities of customer satisfaction (Ramanathan *et al.* 2017). Huang and Liu (2015) and Jan, de Jager and Sultan (2020) assert content in marketing can be used by business enterprises to share information to targeted customers online, regarding their services and products, in order to create familiarity with their products. This will influence customer satisfaction (du Plessis 2015; Zahay,2014).

Based on the above, Pazeraite and Repoviene (2016) argued acknowledging the complexities of the content marketing process indicates it should be managed with caution, since it has a directly proportional impact on customer satisfaction. In addition, Cheng *et al.* (2019) and Cui and Wu (2016) considered the utilisation of social media to influence CRM as crucial for customer involvement in the new product or service development process. These findings are in line with the empirical findings, which showed the majority respondents agreed (186 or 49.7 percent) and strongly agreed (59 or 15.8 percent) customer satisfaction influenced rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

6.3.2.9 Government support

Nieuwenhuizen (2019), Nyamwanza *et al*. (2016) and Herrington and Kew (2017) emphasised the stagnation of SMMEs emanated from legislation and regulations imposed by governments of developing countries, which constrain SMME growth and survival. The studies conducted by Herrington and Kew (2017) and Cant and Wiid (2013) concurred with the above notion. Regulations established by the Government can motivate or prevent businesses from adopting technological innovations such as social media. When the Government issues special regulations requiring businesses to have strict control and testing tools for industrial safety, these government regulations tend to hamper adoption (Seethamraju 2015).

These points are supported by the study findings, as a significant number of respondents (250 or 67 percent) agreed poor government support affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. This implies the government regulations were inadequate to support rural SMMEs in social media adoption and use for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in KZN. This is supported by the empirical findings, as a considerable number of respondents (256 or 68 percent) agreed inadequate government regulations affect rural SMME social media use during the Covid-19 crisis. In support of the above, some researchers highlighted laws and regulations may be the main stumbling blocks, due to the compliance and administrative burdens imposed by Acts and regulations that impeded rural SMMEs from having sufficient funds to adopt social media technologies during the Covid-19 crisis. This has special reference to rural SMME growth and development in KZN (Sugandini *et al*. 2020; Thomas and Luvhengo 2020).

6.3.2.10 Broadband internet

Several studies indicated small businesses in rural areas are faced with the inability to gain access to broadband internet, where a country such as America, has approximately 23 million people that are faced with lack of broadband internet (Belson 2020; Lekhanya 2014). This was confirmed by the study findings, which reflected 71 percent respondents that agreed a lack of broadband internet affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. Lekhanya (2014) also argued the high cost of infrastructure installation, the exorbitant technology price, the shortage of skilled workers and the lack of management vision to adopt internet technology, hindered rural SMMEs from adopting social media in SA.

6.3.2.11 Cyber security

In terms cyber security, most respondents (271 or 70 percent) agreed the lack of cyber security affected rural SMME social media use during the Covid-19 crisis. These findings are supported by literature, as Kabanda *et al.* (2018) showed small businesses perception of cybersecurity is inhibited by internal factors; such as the lack of budget, inadequate management support, and attitudes towards cybersecurity. This is also cited by PwC (2020), in pointing out small business cybersecurity is affected by institutional pressures. Therefore, the challenges faced by rural SMMEs include being vulnerable to cyber-attacks and the lack of cyber security measures (PwC 2020).

6.3.2.12 Patent security

Most respondents (255 or 68.2 percent) agreed the lack of patent security affected rural SMMEs in their use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. These findings are supported by literature, which reveals patent security is regarded as a system to protect the intellectual assets of business enterprises such as SMMEs (Dou *et al.* 2012). However, although most SMMEs are faced with the lack of human and financial resources in practice, they should continue to develop their own patents (Dou *et al*.2012; Hughes *et al*.2010). Hughes *et al*. (2010) further highlighted small businesses are not in the position of investing in patents, as compared to larger businesses, because of resource affordability on the side of small businesses.

6.3.2.13 Business profit based on small size of SMMEs

Enterprise size is one of the core organisation characteristics commonly researched in adoption of new technologies and their use in the business enterprise and is viewed as a good catalyst that influences new technology adoption, such as social media, by business enterprises including SMMEs (Pan and Jang 2008; Zhu, Kraemer and Xu 2003)

The business size may positively contribute to SMME willingness to adopt and use social media, due to the simple and more flexible structure in adapting to business environment turmoil, for instance the Covid-19 crisis, in order to survive and grow through building clientele to increase revenue by using social media in this crisis (Pan and Jang 2008; Zhu, Kraemer and Xu 2003; Premkumar and Roberts 1999). However, SMMEs have insufficient financial and organisational resources to invest in infrastructure technology and lack technical skills related to IT expertise, which would have made it difficult to adopt and use social media in the Covid-19 crisis to survive and grow in this crisis (Haller and Siedschlag 2011; Premkumar and Roberts 1999; Damanpour 1992).

Based on the above, Owusu *et al*. (2021) emphasised lack of finance resources inhibits small businesses from survival and growth, while also impeding small businesses innovations in producing new products and services (Owusu *et al*. 2021). These findings are supported by the empirical findings, as a large number of respondents (191 or 51.1 percent) agreed and 68 (18.2 percent) further strongly agreed low business profits, due to the small size of rural SMMEs, affected their use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

6.3.2.14 Social support

A number of studies show the contribution by SMME owners/managers for the businesses to adopt new technology is crucial, because they possess the power and authority to influence the behaviour of individuals at all levels of the organisations. This implies SMME management has a critical responsibility to motivate their business to adopt social marketing, through providing vision and cognitive support to the business and for SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis (Maroufkhani *et al*. 2020).

Social factors play a critical role when business enterprises are supposed to craft and implement marketing strategies for their businesses (Henry 2010; Gachuhi 2016). It is highlighted SMMEs lack comprehensive understanding, with regard to the social environment impact in their day-to-day operations, for survival of rural SMMEs, with regard to embarking on innovation (OECD 2017; Henry 2010; Gachuhi 2016; Luebke 2017; Indris and Primiana 2015; Ngibe 2020). This literature was supported by the empirical findings, as a large number of respondents (265 or 71 percent) agreed the lack of social support affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. Overall, it may be deduced social support influenced technology adoption (Malik *et al.* 2019; Chukwuere, Mavetera & Mnkandla 2017; Joshua, Nehemiah & Ernest 2015; Lekhanya 2013) during the Covid-19 crisis, for rural SMME survival and growth in rural KZN (Nyawo 2020).

6.3.3 Key findings of objective 2

The extent to which SMMEs used social media as driver for survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN

Goi (2014) and Jordan (2018) pointed out business enterprises adopt and use social media platforms to communicate with customers, whether existing or potential, aimed at creating relationships that will shape future loyalty. Some studies show social media was one of the critical techniques small businesses could use to reduce the severity of the Covid-19 crisis (Indriastuti & Fuad 2020; Trawnih *et al.* 2021). However, most small businesses are reluctant to adopt and use social media, due to behavioural, environmental, attitude and technology acceptable considerations (Govinnage & Sachitra 2019). This further supports the study findings, with 81 percent respondents that disagreed regarding rural SMME use of WhatsApp for increasing dominance in product and service marketing during the Covid-19 crisis.

Dar *et al.* (2017) argued SMMEs can liaise with their existing and prospective customers by means of WhatsApp in order promote and market business, irrespective of the distance between the enterprise location and customers. The empirical findings, considering the above, revealed many respondents (312 or 83 percent) disagreed rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to market their products during the Covid-19 crisis. This implies the SMMEs were reluctant to use WhatsApp during the Covid-19 crisis to market their products for their survival and growth. Bugshan (2019) states social media awareness has become a means of diffusion and improvement of information, which follows on from Praveena and Thomas (2014) and Shen (2015), who agreed such awareness is an essential factor influencing the intention to continue to adopt web technology.

In other words, creating an awareness of rural SMME products and services was critical for their survival and growth, as indicated by the findings, with 81 percent respondents that disagreed rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to create awareness of their products and services during the Covid-19 crisis. A variety of studies concluded rural SMMEs are faced with a lack of social media strategies to survive and grow in SA, which is regarded a prime obstacle in dealing with, for example, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent crisis (Oji *et al.*2017; Budree *et al*. 2019; Prince 2019). This was confirmed by 82 percent respondents that disagreed rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to increase sales during the Covid-19 crisis.

A significant number of respondents (311 or 83 percent) disagreed rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to keep existing customers during the Covid-19 crisis. These findings are in line with the literature, which highlighted SMMEs are sluggish in using social media platforms to market their products and services, with the intention of retaining customers and thus ensuring continued growth, with special reference to rural KZN (Budree, Fietkiewicz and Lins 2019; Prince 2019). These studies endorse findings by Lekhanya (2013) regarding the "Use of Social Media and Social Networks as the Promotional Tool" for rural SMMEs in KZN, wherein South African rural KZN SMMEs' tardiness is highlighted, towards adopting and using social media to improve their businesses through interacting with existing and potential customers. This literature was also supported by 83 percent respondents who disagreed rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to receive customer feedback on existing products during the Covid-19 crisis.

The study by Kottani and Kumar (2021) on social media networking platforms, argued the use of WhatsApp by business enterprises is considered the most cost-effective platform, while it is also regarded as a powerful tool for customer communication. However, Lekhanya (2013) cautioned South African rural KZN SMMEs were found to be lethargic in social media adoption and use to improve their businesses through online networking with current and prospective customers. In support, 83 percent respondents disagreed rural SMMEs used WhatsApp as a cost-effective measure to communicate during the Covid-19 crisis.

Nonetheless, several studies revealed WhatsApp facilitates networks with current and probable customers allowing long lasting connections to be created that would result in a great deal spent in the long-term (Ainin *et al*. 2015; Jagongo and Kinyua 2013; Mbatha 2022). However, the empirical findings suggest a considerable number of respondents (87 percent), contrary to the literature, disagreed rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to network with other SMMEs during Covid-19 crisis.

6.3.4 Key findings of objective 3

The perceptions of SMME owners and managers towards adopting and using social media for SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN

6.3.4.1 Perceptions of SMMEs owners and managers

According to Mosweunyane *et al.* (2019), SMME manager and owner perceptions are regarded as their attitudes towards adopting and accepting social media platforms during the Covid-19 crisis, to ensure their survival and growth in the subsequent economic recession. Studies conducted by Praveena and Thomas (2014), Shen (2015) and Matikiti *et al.* (2018) revealed the knowledge of technology and acceptability of IT are subject to manager perceptions.

Previous researchers, however, highlighted when rural SMME managers/owners have a negative perception of adopting social media, particularly with economic constraints such as the Covid-19 crisis, this will decrease their chances to market their goods and services during restrictions imposed by governments of countries worldwide. Subsequently, this can disadvantage rural SMME to survive and grow during economic turmoil (Nyawo 2020; Zeidy 2020; Janssen and Van der Voort 2020; Kottika *et al*. 2020). The study findings support this, with 78 percent respondents that disagreed the use of social media was perceived useful by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis.

The studies showed the PEOU in social media will motivate the businesses to use social media to improve job performance. This infers new technology users will gain the benefits of acquiring new knowledge, making it easier and more agreeable to use new technology such as social media (Najib and Fahma 2020). It is further emphasised that ‘easy to use’ is known as the degree to which an individual believes using a specific system would be effort free (Davis 1989; 1986). In other words, the user would find it is not complicated to use a new technology, such as social media, to improve his/her own job performance. However, a large number of respondents (81 percent) disagreed the use of social media was perceived easy to use by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis.

This is further supported by the empirical findings, where a significant number of respondents (296 or 79 percent) disagreed rural SMMEs trusted the use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. Further evidenced by a large respondent number (303 or 81 percent) that disagreed rural SMMEs perceived the use of social media as not risky during the Covid-19 crisis.

This is contrary to Che Nawi *et al.* (2019), who argued perceived trust is expected to affect the adoption of social media as a business platform, with perceived trust expected to positively affect social media adoption. In addition, regarding the perceptions of respondents in terms of using social media during the Covid-19 crisis, a large number of respondents (301 or 81 percent) disagreed rural SMMEs perceived social media use as enjoyable during the Covid-19 crisis. These empirical findings are supported by literature, which indicates the knowledge of technology and acceptability of IT are subject to manager perceptions, whereas rural SMME managers/owners hold a negative perception of adopting social media during economic constraints such as the Covid-19 crisis. This will then decrease the chances of marketing their goods and services for SMME survival and growth (Janssen and Van der Voort 2020; Kottika *et al*. 2020; Matikiti *et al.* 2018).

6.3.5 Key findings of objective 4

The impact of the Covid-19 crisis on SMME survival and growth in rural KZN

6.3.5.1 Covid-19 crisis

Mazzanti *et al.* (2020) are among many studies conducted regarding the Covid-19 crisis, where it was confirmed businesses are faced by an economic recession resulting from the Covid-19 crisis, where some SMMEs were subjected to severe financial distress, while rural SMMEs were compelled to temporarily close and others have become insolvent (Gray 2020; Kornelius *et al*. 2020). The literature supports the findings, which shows a considerable number of respondents (87 percent) disagreed the Covid-19 crisis has influenced rural SMMEs to use social media in minimising product distribution costs. In addition, some researchers argued rural SMMEs were negatively impacted by the Covid-19 crisis, with some declared technically insolvent due to the economic distress (Karacsony 2020; Kornelius *et al*. 2020).

This implies the Covid-19 crisis caused harm, as it reduced the chances of rural SMME survival and growth (Okuwhere and Tafamel 2022). These points are supported by the study findings, with a significant number of respondents (88 percent) that disagreed the Covid-19 crisis influenced rural SMMEs to use social media to improve demand for their products and services. This means rural SMMEs could experience challenges to their survival and growth because they were unable to use social media to enhance demand for their products and services. Thus, rural SMMEs may become technically insolvent due to the economic distress caused by the Covid-19 crisis (Karacsony *et al*. 2020).

Moreover, a significant number of respondents (88 percent) disagreed the Covid-19 crisis influenced rural SMMEs to adapt and use social media as a tool to reach more customers. The literature confirmed these businesses should invest in the use of social media to reach more customers during a crisis, such as Covid-19, for reputation, increasing sales, as well as survival, growth and sustainability (Kietzmann 2011; De *et al.* 2020). This correlates with 76 percent respondents that disagreed the Covid-19 crisis influenced rural SMME social media use to increase their revenue. Mbatha (2020), in this regard, stated rural SMMEs could have used social media during the Covid-19 crisis to improve productivity, had they been in possession of working capital to adopt and use social media during the crisis.

6.3.6 Key findings of objective 5

Social media marketing strategies that can be employed by SMMEs for survival and growth during emergencies, such as the Covid-19 crises, in rural KZN.

6.3.6.1 Social media marketing strategies

According to Tortolero-Blanco *et al*. (2020) and Sulthana *et al*. (2021), social media marketing strategies in rural SMMEs played a prime role in their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. Li *et al.* (2020) and Ryden *et al.* (2015: 6) contended social media is not only used to create conversation, engagement and by business owners to sell products to customers, which requires SMMEs to possess capabilities for selling and use of various sales channels to align the effects of social media. However, the empirical findings suggest most respondents (88.1 percent) disagreed rural SMMEs used social media to sell products to customers.

Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016) and Holliman and Rowley (2014) added rural SMMEs should create a suitable branding strategy with the intention to create customer loyalty and customer attention for increasing business sales. Most respondents (90 percent), in light of the literature, disagreed rural SMMEs used social media to create branding during the Covid-19 crisis. This was supported by Schmitt (2010), who argued many small businesses were faced with financial and time constraints to portray their brands to customers, which created obstacles for rural SMMEs to attract new and prospective customers (Gustafsson and Li 2021). This means the Covid-19 crisis affected consumer behaviours, such as embracing digital technology. Therefore, brands faced the challenges of adapting to the economic turmoil caused by the Covid-19 crisis to satisfy existing customers and secure brand loyalty (Gustafsson *et al.* 2021). By implication, rural SMMEs should invest in developing brand equity online along with digital advertising, to avoid negative effects on SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis (Gustafsson *et al.* 2021; Homburg *et al*. 2010).

Turner and Shah (2014) and Lee *et al*. (2014) claimed business managers should have clear goals and objectives for using social media, as this will enable identifying the best suited social media management tools for the business to communicate with their customers.

This implies rural SMMEs can have the social media management tools to address customer needs and complaints. Based on this literature, most respondents (90 percent) disagreed rural SMMEs used social media to respond to customer needs and complaints during the Covid-19 crisis. The situation, therefore, affected rural SMME adoption and use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis for their survival and growth in KZN. In addition, 88.25 percent respondents disagreed rural SMMEs used social media to retain customers during the Covid-19 crisis. This implies numerous rural SMMEs temporarily closed and were compelled to lay off employees, since they were unable to retain customers during this crisis, due to a negative financial position caused by the Covid-19 crisis (Barreto *et al*. 2020: 17; Msimango-Galawe *et al*. 2020).

6.3.7 Key findings of objective 6

The social media model as a driving tool that can be used by SMMEs to survive and grow during the Covid -19 crisis in rural KZN

Hutton and Eldridge (2019) proposed SMMEs should embrace strategic agility, which includes improving information systems and advanced production technologies to ensure innovation occurs speedily and customers have more power in business enterprises such as SMMEs, in order to enhance their survival and growth. This suggests SMMEs should develop competitive business abilities that use strategic agility, comprising speed, flexibility, competence, and accountability **(**Zhang and Sharifi 2000). This was supported by 94 percent respondents that agreed rural SMMEs can use social media to meet market demand during a crisis such a Covid 19 pandemic.

In addition, a large number of respondents (87.4 percent) agreed rural SMMEs can use social media to meet market demand during a crisis such as created by the Covid-19 pandemic. Several authors confirmed SMMEs must put actionable marketing plans in place to apply their dynamic capability to attract prospective and retain existing customers in global crises such as the Covid-19 crisis, in order to increase their revenues in the economic recession caused by the Covid-19 crisis (Rahman *et al*. 2022; Moore 2002; Keh *et al.* 2006; Naidoo 2010).

This infers rural SMMEs should embark on innovation practices during situations such as the Covid-19 crisis and any future pandemic, to survive and grow (Rahman *et al*. 2022). Rural SMMEs have to develop innovative capability, which means rural SMMEs must be able to continuously design new or modified products and services, including introducing new techniques, in response to turbulent business environments (Rahman *et al*. 2022; Cefis and Marsili 2012).

The empirical study findings support the above, where 86 percent respondents indicated agreement with the notion that rural SMMEs can use social media as an innovative practice during a crisis such as the Covid -19 pandemic. This was also in line with the literature, which suggested SMMEs should develop an innovation-oriented culture to market their products and services, thus increasing their revenues for survival and growth in future pandemics (Parise *et al.* 2016; Homburg *et al.* 2017; Bolton *et al*. 2018; Rahman *et al.* 2022). This was also confirmed, with 88 percent respondents that indicated rural SMMEs can use social media to penetrate the market to reach customers during a pandemic. By inference, marketing operational efficiency is one of the survival strategies rural SMMEs may use in crisis situations (Rahman *et al*. 2022; White *et al*. 2020; Ashworth 2012). This supports the study findings, where a large number of respondents (88 percent) agreed rural SMMEs can use social media to increase product sales during a pandemic.

However, based on the above, studies by Rodriguez *et al.* (2014) and Moghavvemi (2015) revealed the use of Facebook was shown to improve sales and customer relationships, which create customer loyalty. The most popular social media platforms are Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, in which customers spend much time sharing similar interests with customers, as well as positive or negative service experiences regarding the business enterprise services and products (Valos *et al.* 2016; Schulze *et al*. 2014; Kumar *et al*. 2016).

6.3.7.1 Facebook use by rural SMMEs

A large number of respondents (89 percent) agreed rural SMMEs can use Facebook for their survival and growth in future pandemics. This was confirmed by literature, which pointed out SMMEs can use Facebook to reach targeted customers and improve SMME brand awareness to market products to increase their revenues in times of Covid-19 crisis (Tlapana and Dike 2020).

6.3.7.2 Twitter use by rural SMMEs

The study findings revealed a large number of respondents (89 percent) agreed rural SMMEs can use Twitter for their survival and growth in future pandemics. The literature supports the findings, highlighting Twitter is social networking rural SMMEs use as one of the platforms to reach out to customers to promote their business and receive instant feedback regarding their products or services during the Covid-19 crisis, thus able to survive and growth in future pandemics (Tlapana and Dike 2020).

6.3.7.3 WhatsApp use by rural SMMEs

The empirical findings indicated many respondents (90 percent) agreed rural SMMEs can use WhatsApp for their survival and growth in future pandemics. This was confirmed by Dar *et al.* (2017), who argued rural SMMEs can use WhatsApp for their survival and growth in future pandemics, since WhatsApp is widely received and used by 15 million subscribers. This means rural SMMEs can reach many existing and even prospective customers, in improving their sales for survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis and any future pandemics.

6.3.7.4 Instagram use by rural SMMEs

According to Tlapana and Dike (2020), Instagram can allow rural SMMEs to provide services and products according to customer needs in order to create customer loyalty, thereby sustaining their survival and growth in future pandemics. This was supported by the study findings, with 88 percent respondents that agreed rural SMMEs can use Instagram for their survival and growth in future pandemics.

6.3.7.5 YouTube use by rural SMMEs

Various studies showed SMMEs can use YouTube to market their products and services, since YouTube is accessible to 1.5 billion monthly users (Göbel *et al.* 2017; Gupta *et al*. 2018). Thus, it may be concluded YouTube can be a valuable marketing tool rural SMMEs can use to market their products and services, thereby improving their sales during the Covid-19 crisis, to ensure business survival and growth in future pandemics. The empirical findings are in line with the reviewed literature and revealed the majority respondents (87.43 percent) believed rural SMMEs can use YouTube for their survival and growth in future pandemics.

6.3.7.6 Social media use by rural SMMEs to interact with customers in future pandemics

The study findings show 89 percent respondents indicated rural SMMEs can use social media to interact with customers in future pandemics. These findings are supported by literature, where Goi (2014) and Jordan (2018) argued business enterprises can adopt and use social media platforms to communicate with existing and potential customers, with the aim to create relationships with them, thereby building future loyalty to increase sales for their survival and growth.

6.4 CONCLUSION ON RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

6.4.1 Overview of conclusion on research hypotheses

This section provides a detailed overview of the conclusions made in terms of the hypotheses set in Chapter One, which categorised and presented as the null hypothesis (Ho) and alternative hypothesis (Ha). The main hypotheses for this study are as follows**:**

6.4.2 Hypotheses

Ho1: There is no relationship between social media awareness and government support as factors that affect rural SMME social media use for survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

Ha1: There is a relationship between social media awareness and government support as factors that affect rural SMME social media use for survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

Ho2: There is no relationship between creating an awareness of their products and services and increased sales and the extent to which the use of social media could influence rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

Ha2: There is a relationship between creating an awareness of their products and services and increased sales and the extent to which the use of social media could influence rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

Ho3: There is no relationship between the level of trust in social media and its usefulness and the influence on the perception of rural SMME owners, managers, and entrepreneurs to use social media for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

Ha3: There is a relationship between the level of trust in social media and its usefulness and the influence on the perception of rural SMME owners, managers, and entrepreneurs to use social media for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

Ho4: There is no relationship between minimising product distribution costs and increasing revenue and the impact of Covid-19 on rural SMME use of social media for their survival and growth.

Ha4: There is a relationship between minimising product distribution costs and increasing revenue and the impact of Covid-19 on rural SMME use of social media for their survival and growth.

Ho5: There is no relationship between responding to customer needs and complaints and retaining customers and the influence on rural SMMEs to use social media as a marketing strategy for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

Ha5: There is a relationship between responding to customer needs and complaints and retaining customers and the influence on rural SMMEs to use social media as a marketing strategy for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

Ho6: There is no relationship between innovative practice and increasing product sales and the influence on rural SMMEs to use social media as a strategy for survival and growth during future pandemics.

Ha6: There is a relationship between innovative practice and increasing product sales and the influence on rural SMMEs to use social media as a strategy for survival and growth during future pandemics.

6.4.3 Hypotheses conclusions

Ha1: There is a relationship between social media awareness and government support as factors that affected rural SMME social media use for survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

The bivariate correlation results show the relationship between the tested variables is significantly positive at .745** (sig. <0.001) level. Therefore, rejection of the null hypothesis allows the conclusion that the level of social media awareness and government support are related and are factors that affected the use of social media for rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

Ha2: There is a relationship between creating an awareness of their products and services and increased sales and the extent to which the use of social media could influence rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

The bivariate correlation results show the relationship between the tested variables is significantly positive at .708** (sig. <0.001) level. Therefore, rejection of the null hypothesis allows the conclusion that creating an awareness of their product and services and increased sales are related and influence the extent to which the use of social media could influence SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

Ha3: There is a relationship between the level of trust in social media and its usefulness and the influence on the perception of rural SMME owners, managers, and entrepreneurs to use social media for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

The results of the bivariate correlation show the relationship between the tested variables is significantly positive at 673** (sig. <0.001) level. Therefore, rejection of the null hypothesis allows the conclusion that the level of trust in social media and its usefulness are related and influences the perception of rural SMME owners, managers and entrepreneurs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

Ha4: There is a relationship between minimising product distribution costs and increasing revenue and the impact of Covid-19 on rural SMME use of social media for their survival and growth.

The results of the bivariate correlation show the relationship between the tested variables is significantly positive at 559** (sig. <0.001) level. Therefore, rejection of the null hypothesis allows the conclusion that minimising distribution costs and increasing revenue are related and is an impact of Covid-19 on rural SMME use of social media for their survival and growth.

Ha5: There is a relationship between responding to customer needs and complaints and retaining customers and the influence on rural SMMEs to use social media as a marketing strategy for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

The bivariate correlation results show the relationship between the tested variables is significantly positive at 653** (sig. <0.001) level. Therefore, rejection of the null hypothesis allows the conclusion that responding to customer needs and complaints and retaining customers are related and influenced rural SMME use of social media as marketing strategy for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

Ha6: There is a relationship between innovative practice and increasing product sales and the influence on rural SMMEs to use social media as a strategy for survival and growth during future pandemics.

The bivariate correlation results show the relationship between the tested variables is significantly positive at 581** (sig. <0.001) level. Therefore, rejection of the null hypothesis allows the conclusion that innovative practice and increased product sales are related and influence rural SMMEs to use social media as a strategy for future pandemics.

6.5 CONCLUSIONS ON THE VARIABLES MATCHED WITH THEORIES

This section explores significant theories associated with SMME social media use in rural KZN, for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. These theories are also incorporated with the empirical findings of this research study.

6.5.1 Conclusions on the variables matched with UTAUT theory

According to Venkatesh *et al*. (2003), Bakar and Zaini (2022) and UTAUT theory, the critical factors that can potentially influence social media use during the Covid-19 crisis include PE and effort expectancy, as well as social influence and facilitating conditions. This means customers were of the view the use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis would benefit them and this would, in return, cause rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media to attract potential new customers and retain existing customers. This would promote rural SMME survival and growth in this crisis (Adamkolo *et al*. 2018).

Venkatesh *et al*. (2003) and UTAUT theory, furthermore, argued that technical infrastructures can support the use of a system or social media technology. Thus, the individual believes an organizational and technical infrastructure exists to support use of the system (Venkatesh *et al*. 2003; Abdat 2020). The empirical findings emphasised the lack of technology infrastructure affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. Rural SMMEs, therefore, needed to consider the processes of embracing and investing in technology, to address the difficulties of adopting and using social media, in order to survive and grow during the Covid-19 crisis.

The study findings additionally suggested the lack of social awareness on the use of social media affected rural SMME social media use during the Covid- 19 crisis. In view of this empirical finding, Oyekan and Kamiyo (2008) argued a lack of social awareness is regarded as one of the problems that contradicted the use of social media. This means social awareness is one of the critical factors that influenced rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media for their survival and growth in KZN.

6.5.2 Conclusions on the variables matched with TAM theory

Davis (1989), in the context of TAM theory, stated when users are subjected to new technology, the judgment on how and when to use it is influenced by several factors, such as PEOU, being enjoyable, risky, as well as its usefulness, and trust to use a new technology platform, including social media (Ahamat *et al.* 2017).

As highlighted in the empirical findings of the study, perceptions of rural SMMEs regarding social media PEOU, whether it is enjoyable, has risk attached, can be trusted and usefulness were, therefore, identified as critical factors in the adoption and use of social media by rural SMMEs, for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

Ahamat *et al*. (2021) revealed once social media is adopted and used, SMMEs would perceive the ease of use, its enjoyability, not being risky, as well as its usefulness, in addition to trust in using a new technology platform, for example social media, for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. Therefore, the empirical findings posit these factors have a significantly strong positive relationship with each other and the adoption and use of social media by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis, for them to penetrate the market and improve sales, ensuring SMME survival and growth in this crisis.

6.5.3 Conclusions on the variables matched with Diffusion of Innovation (DoI) theory

Rogers (1962) highlighted DoI theory suggests the internal and external characteristics of an organisation, including SMMEs, influence the decision to adopt and use a new technology. According to Rogers (2003), DoI comprises five perceived characteristics of innovation, which are: relative advantage; compatibility; complexity; and trialability; as well as observability. In addition, Moore and Benbasat (1991) proposed complexity and relative advantage refer to PEOU in the TAM and will increase the rate of adoption and social media use by rural SMMEs (Oliveira *et al*. 2014; Sugandini *et al*. 2020; Berman *et a*l. 2012; Zailani *et al*. 2015a). While Alshamaila (2013) argued SMMEs would find it difficult to adopt and use new technology such as social media technology when it is perceived awkward to use.

Hence, according to the empirical findings, lack of technical skills, financial resources and managerial competencies were identified by this study as factors that affect rural SMME adoption and use of social media, for their survival and growth in KZN during the Covid-19 crisis. Therefore, adoption of DoI theory by rural SMMEs will immensely assist to create positive perceptions towards adoption and use of social media, to improve SMME survival and growth in rural KZN. This implies rural SMME owners and managers with in-depth knowledge in technology use and adequate resources, would be motivated to implement new technology in the form of social media, to survive and grow in the times of the Covid-19 crisis.

6.5.4 Conclusions on the variables matched with survival and growth theories

The conclusions on the variables matched with survival and growth theories are briefly discussed as follows:

6.5.4.1 Conclusions on the variables matched with survival–based theory

According to survival-based theory, business enterprises have to deploy strategies aimed at ensuring operations that are not only very efficient but can also provide a rapid response to changing competitive environments (Cochrane 2009; Khairuddin 2005). The motive is to determine the one that is the fittest and best able to adapt to environment turbulences. The application of this theory is most suited in the field of corporate turnaround, in situations where organisations face challenges such as financial difficulties, failing products, or losing significant employees.

As survival-based theory argues, when it is not adapting to the turbulent environment and becoming efficient in it, the enterprise simply will not survive. Thus, the one that embarks on turnaround strategies successfully, is the one that would operate efficiently and successfully adapt to its surroundings (Abdullah *et al.* 2010; Orga *et al*. 2020). Therefore, as shown in the empirical findings of this study, competitive environments influenced rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. This was supported by survival-based theory that argued business enterprises, including rural SMME that survive, are referred to as the fittest and best able to adapt to environment turbulences, such as the spread of Covid-19 and the ensuing crisis, which caused several rural SMMEs to temporarily close down and lay off employees (Orga *et al*. 2020, Zeidy 2020). The other empirical findings for this study highlighted rural SMMEs lacked the use of social marketing strategies to sell products to customers during the Covid-19 crisis, to create branding during this crisis, to respond to customer needs and complaints during the Covid-19 crisis and to retain customers during this time.

The empirical findings of this study are in line with firm growth theory, which emphasises business enterprises have to consider to adopt turnaround strategies in order to operate efficiently and adapt successfully to their surroundings (Abdullah *et al.* 2010; Orga *et al*. 2020). Therefore, rural SMMEs in KZN had to consider adopting turnaround strategies, such as social marketing, in order to market their products and services as well as to retain existing and attract prospective customers, to survive and growth during the Covid-19 crisis (Zeidy 2020; Li *et al.* 2020; Orga *et al*. 2020; Schivinski and Dabrowski 2016; Sugandini *et al* 2020).

6.5.4.2 Conclusions on the variables matched with firm growth theory.

Firm growth theory highlights that SMME owners/managers are mostly concerned with proper management of finances, maintaining their relationship with other businesses and responding to changes in customer needs and entrepreneurial practices (Neil and Lewis 1983; Perényi & Selvarajah 2008). This theory is supported by the empirical finding of this study, which highlighted the lack of financial resources affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. This means empirical findings are confirmed by the study, indicating rural SMME owners and managers need financial management skills, in order for the businesses to be successful, in terms of realising their survival and growth. This is in accordance with survival-based theory, which emphasises business enterprises, including rural SMME owners/managers, are generally concerned with proper management of their business finances (Perényi & Selvarajah 2008).

In addition, other empirical findings suggested customer satisfaction influenced rural SMME social media use during the Covid-19 crisis. Some empirical findings of this study were in support of this theory, reflecting rural SMMEs can use social media to overcome customer pressure, to meet market demand, and practice innovation to penetrate the market to reach customers and increase product sales during a pandemic. Further to this, empirical findings for this study showed rural SMMEs can use social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and YouTube) for their survival and growth in future pandemics, with social media used by rural SMMEs to interact with customers in future pandemics. These empirical findings are in line with firm growth theory, which emphasises businesses enterprises must maintain their relationships with other businesses and respond to changes in customer needs and entrepreneurial practice (Neil and Lewis 1983; Perényi & Selvarajah 2008).

6.5.5 Conclusions on variables matched with TOE theory

The TOE framework theory has been found to be a predominant model in investigating numerous information system issues, including social media technologies. Empirical findings of studies pertaining to utilisation of the TOE model in the setting of SMMEs, established this model is a suitable framework for use in understanding technology-based adoption, such a social media (Ahmad *et al*. 2017; Cao *et al*. 2018; Qalati *et al*. 2021).

As highlighted in the empirical findings of this study, the lack of infrastructure, therefore, affected social media use by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis, where insufficient technology infrastructure was also shown to have affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. Other factors considered impactful include inadequate government regulations, poor government support, low business profit due to the small size of rural SMMEs as environmental factors that affect rural SMME use of social media during this crisis.

Ahmad *et al.* (2017) found the decision to adopt and use social media technology has a bearing on the situation, where the business perceived technology would bring benefits to the business enterprise; this includes rural SMMEs, in which managers/owners are the decision-makers in their businesses. Failure by rural SMMEs in adapting to internal and environmental factors was revealed as a hindrance for rural SMMEs to survive and grow during the Covid-19 crisis. Therefore, the adoption of TOE theory would immensely assist rural SMMEs to understand the internal and external factors that influence social media adoption and use by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis, for their survival and growth in KZN. This was supported by TOE theory being regarded as a robust framework to analyse different internal (technological and organisational) and external (environmental) factors that influence the adoption of different types of ICT in the SMME setting (Abeysinghe and Alsobhi 2013).

6.6 SUMMARY OF KEY FINGINGS

The primary aim of this research was to investigate the critical factors influencing the use of social media as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth in rural KZN during the Covid-19 crisis, and to develop and propose a social media model as a driving tool for rural SMME survival and growth during crises, such as the Covid-19 pandemic. The study used the empirical findings to draw the following conclusions:

6.6.1 Summary of key findings on biographical and background information

The biographical and background data gathered depict that:

- Most respondents are rural SMME owners;
- The largest number of SMME owners/managers were in the business between 5-8 years;
- Many rural SMME owners/managers are males;
- Most rural SMME owners/managers were between the ages of 18 and 24 years;
- The majority rural SMMEs are African;
- The largest group of rural SMMEs have attained a National Diploma / certificates;
- Most rural SMMEs provided services to customers;

- The majority rural SMMEs were classified as a corporation;
- Many rural SMMEs financed their businesses;
- The majority rural SMMEs started their businesses due to unemployment;
- Most rural SMMEs within the sample are from Vryheid;
- Most rural SMMEs within the sample operated their businesses locally.

6.6.2 Summary of key findings on research objectives

6.6.2.1 Key findings on research objective 1

With regard to technical skills, 71 percent respondents confirmed a lack of technical skills affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis, which affected the chances for rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media. These findings show technical skills are crucial for rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media for their survival and growth. In support, the literature review indicates SMME owner-manager technical skills played a key role to assist them in executing their responsibilities to enhance rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. In terms of managerial competencies of rural SMME owners-managers, 71 percent respondents believed a lack of managerial competencies affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. The literature confirms these findings, where managerial competencies are indicated as chief factors that stimulate the survival and growth of a business, with lack of these competencies leading to business failure.

The findings are also associated with the notion that rural SMMEs were unable to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis due to their lack of social media awareness (71 percent), with the literature emphasising lack of social awareness as one of the challenges that hindered the use of social media by rural SMMEs. Furthermore, 68 percent respondents felt rural SMMEs were subjected to poor government support that discouraged them to adopt and use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. This concurs with the findings, where 68 percent respondents highlighted inadequate government regulations affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

The literature confirms the study findings regarding government support through legislation, showing it is one of the environmental factors that influence technology adoption. In addition, 69 percent respondents indicated lack of financial resources had a negative impact on rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. This can be linked to literature showing the adoption of innovation depends on the availability of financial resources, which is regarded as a fundamental factor for rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media during crises, such as the Covid-19 crisis, for their survival and growth. Additionally, 70 percent respondents also believed lack of internet connectivity influenced rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis; which was supported by literature, stating rural SMMEs need to have access to internet connectivity in order to adopt and use social media for survival and growth during disasters such as the Covid-19 crisis.

This was associated with 70 percent respondents. who were of the view lack technology infrastructure hindered rural SMME social media adoption and use during the Covid-19 crisis. According to 66 percent respondents, customer satisfaction influenced rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. The lack of social media use by rural SMMEs in SA is, therefore, directly proportional to the lack of customer satisfaction, according to the literature, which had a negative bearing on rural SMME adoption and use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. Furthermore, 71 percent respondents also agreed lack of social support affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. The findings also support the literature, in that social support was observed as a catalyst in influencing rural SMME adoption of technology. Additionally, 72 percent respondents agreed the lack of cyber security affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis; according to the literature, rural SMMEs are exposed and thus vulnerable to cyber-attacks due to the lack of cyber security measures.

The general finding from most respondents revealed rural SMMEs were unable to adopt and use social media, for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis, due to the negative impact of critical factors. This implies most respondents failed to adopt and use social media to promote their business in order to realise their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. It can be further concluded there were environmental factor constraints associated with failure to use social media for survival and growth of rural SMMEs in KZN during the Covid-19 crisis.

6.6.2.2 Key findings on research objective 2

Rural SMME use of WhatsApp to increase dominance in the market during the Covid-19 crisis, was shown by 83 percent respondents as lacking. These findings indicate rural SMMEs were unable to increase their competitive advantage in order to ensure their business success. This is also linked to the empirical study findings, where 82 percent respondents disagreed rural SMMEs used WhatsApp to increase sales during the Covid-19 crisis. In addition, most respondents conformed these findings, with 83 percent respondents that agreed rural SMMEs in KZN did not use social media as driver to retain existing customers during the Covid-19 crisis for their survival and growth.

These empirical findings were linked to the literature, which emphasised SMMEs should adopt and use social media platforms to communicate with existing and potential customers, in order to market their products and services to increase sales. Moreover, most respondents, based on the above findings, revealed they were unable to use WhatsApp to receive customer feedback on existing products during the Covid-19 crisis.

Based on the empirical findings, it can, however, be concluded most rural SMMEs did not use WhatsApp as a tool to facilitate networks with existing and prospective customers to forge long lasting connections to promote business success for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. Hence, through the empirical findings, it is evident most respondents suggested rural SMMEs failed to use social media platforms (for example, WhatsApp) for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

6.6.2.3 Key findings on research objective 3

The empirical findings of this study revealed most respondents (81 percent) said the use of social media was not perceived easy by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis. A large number of respondents (79 percent) pointed out rural SMMEs did not trust the use of social media would assist them to survive and grow during the Covid-19 crisis. This was evident from most rural SMME owners-managers (81 percent) that perceived it risky to use social media for their survival and growth. These findings were confirmed with 81 percent respondents that highlighted rural SMMEs perceived it was not enjoyable to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. Therefore, most rural SMME owner-manager respondents had a negative behaviour attitude towards adopting and using social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

This was supported by the reviewed literature, which emphasises when rural SMME managers/owners have a negative perception of adopting social media, in economic constraints such as the Covid-19 crisis, this will decrease the chances of marketing their goods and services during restrictions imposed by governments of countries worldwide. Thus, these negative attitudes can disadvantage rural SMME to survive and grow during economic turmoil. This suggests management of rural SMMEs were subjected to constraints in terms of social media adoption and use. Hence, according to objective 2, the key summary of findings can be termed as; management perception constraints led to business failure, in terms of adopting and using social media for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

6.6.2.4 Key findings on research objective 4

Respondents identified the impact of the Covid-19 crisis as a significant variable that influenced rural SMME survival and growth in rural KZN, with 88 percent responses indicating the Covid-19 crisis did not influence rural SMMEs to use social media in improving demand for their products and services. These results also show 88 percent believed the Covid-19 crisis did not encourage rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media as a tool to reach more customers. Furthermore, 76 percent respondents believed the impact of the Covid-19 crisis did not influence rural SMMEs to use social media to increase their revenues for their survival and growth in this crisis.

In support, the review of literature showed SMMEs could use social media during the Covid-19 crisis to improve productivity; if they were in possession of working capital to adopt and use social media during the crisis. Rural SMME operations were, therefore, unable to be managed efficiently and effectively due to the negative impact of environmental factors, such as the Covid-19 crisis. In summary, it can be deduced rural SMMEs were exposed to environmental factor constraints, associated with the failure to use social media in relation to rural SMME survival and growth in KZN during the Covid-19 crisis.

6.6.2.5 Key findings on research objective 5

Most respondents in this study revealed rural SMMEs were faced with social media marketing constraints, which led to the failure of rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. This was confirmed by the empirical findings, with 88.1 percent respondents that disagreed rural SMMEs used social media to sell products to customers. This was also indicated by 90 percent of respondents indicating rural SMMEs were unable to use social media to create branding during the Covid-19 crisis. In addition, 90 and 88.25 percent respondents respectively indicated rural SMMEs failed to use social media to respond to customer needs and complaints and retain customers during the Covid-19 crisis.

This was in line with the literature, which showed rural SMMEs had to close temporarily and were compelled to lay off employees, since they were unable to retain customers. Moreover, their inability to adopt and use social media to market their products, due to financial constraints, caused some rural SMMEs to be technically insolvent. This was directly caused by the Covid-19 crisis.

6.6.2.6 Key findings on research objective 6

An overwhelming majority of respondents supported the notion that rural SMMEs could adopt and use survival strategies in order to survive and grow during the Covid-19 crisis. This is evident from 87.4 and 84 percent of respondents who, respectively, indicated rural SMMEs could use social media to meet market demand and use it as an innovative practice during crises such as that caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

This was confirmed by 88 percent respondents that indicated rural SMMEs could use social media to penetrate the market to reach customers during a pandemic. This was also evident with the responses indicating 88 percent respondents who agreed rural SMMEs can use social media to increase product sales during a pandemic. This is in line with literature, which stated rural SMMEs can use survival strategies to market their products and services to increase their revenues for survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis and in future pandemics. Therefore, from the above summary of key findings, the theme for these findings can be termed as survival strategies, leading to rural SMME use of social media for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis and in future pandemics.

In addition, most respondents revealed rural SMMEs could use social media platforms as their growth strategies during the Covid-19 crisis and in future pandemics. This was confirmed by the empirical findings, with 89 percent respondents agreed with regard to usage of both Facebook and Twitter, which confirmed rural SMMEs can use these digital mechanisms to survive and grow in future pandemics. These findings are in line with responses that indicated 90 and 88 percent respondents respectively believed rural SMMEs can use WhatsApp and Instagram for their survival and growth in future pandemics.

The theme for the key summary of findings, can be termed as the growth strategies leading to rural SMME use of social media for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis and in future pandemics.

6.6.2.7 Key findings on the combined research objectives 1, 2 and 6

In addition, the combination of objectives 1, 2 and 6 through the analysis resulted in the key theme finding, which was termed as social support and networking leading to failure of rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media for their survival and growth during the

Covid-19 crisis. The empirical findings show 71 percent respondents confirmed the lack of social support affected rural SMMEs to use social media during the Covid-19 crisis. This was confirmed by the study findings, with 67 percent respondents indicating poor government support affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. In addition, 79 percent respondents confirmed rural SMMEs were unable to use social platforms and SNS such as WhatsApp to network with other SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis.

6.7 CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions of this study are discussed as follows:

6.7.1 Overview of conclusions of the research objectives

The conclusions in this section were categorised in accordance with the research objectives. The statistical analysis for this study and tested hypotheses are an integral part of these conclusions. This implies the conclusions below include the tested variables derived from the closed-ended questionnaire, designed through the assistance of the literature review and research objectives. This questionnaire was used to gather the primary data for this study.

The in-depth analysis of data in this study allowed the identification of critical factors that influenced the use of social media by rural SMMEs for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. The empirical findings of this study suggest the social media model as a driving tool was a necessity, in order to address the knowledge gap identified in this study. Therefore, the findings suggest the social media model can be designed and proposed to benefit rural SMMEs, thus enhancing rural SMME survival and growth in KZN, so they may contribute to the GDP of KZN and eventually, the country. The key benefit of the designed and proposed model is to enhance rural SMME survival and growth during situations arising from the Covid-19 crisis. Thus, the designed and proposed social media model is illustrated and recommended in section 6.9 below.

6.7.1.1 Conclusions on research sub-objective 1:

To investigate the factors that influenced the use of social media as driver for SMME survival and growth in rural KZN during the Covid-19 crisis.

The environmental factors classified as internal and external were regarded critical factors that have a major contribution to rural SMME survival and growth the empirical findings showed, on the one hand, social media awareness, technical skills, managerial competencies and financial resources were identified as the chief internal factors affecting the use of social media for rural SMME survival and growth. On the other hand, technology infrastructure, competitive environments, satisfaction and broadband internet were the key external factors identified as affecting the adoption and usage of social media to contribute to the survival and growth of rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis. Therefore, it is concluded rural SMMEs were faced with environmental factor constraints associated with failure by rural SMMEs to use social media for survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in KZN. In order for rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media for survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis, these enterprises should take precautionary measures to counter the threats of environmental factors.

6.7.1.2 Conclusions on research sub-objective 2:

To ascertain the extent to which SMMEs used social media as driver for survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN.

The study findings depicted the extent to which rural SMMEs used social media as a driver for survival and growth had a major impact on their business success. It is, therefore, concluded rural SMMEs were subjected to business failure to adopt and use social media platforms (for example, WhatsApp) for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. The conclusion is thus, for rural SMMEs in KZN to make a major contribution in business sustainability for their survival and growth, more attention should have been paid to use the benefits provided by SNS and social media platforms such as WhatsApp during Covid-19 crisis.

6.7.1.3 Conclusions on research sub-objective 3:

To measure the perceptions of SMME owners and managers towards adopting and using social media for SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in rural KZN.

It is concluded the perceptions of SMME owners and managers is a major contributing factor regarding their attitude in adopting and use of social media for rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. With regard to cognitive behaviour, negative behavioural responses depicted negative perceptions towards adopting and using social media to survive and grow in the economic turmoil caused by the Covid-19 crisis.

It is, therefore, concluded rural SMMEs were faced with management perception constraints, which led to business failure to adopt and use social media for survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

6.7.1.4 Conclusions on research sub-objective 4:

To determine the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on SMME survival and growth in rural KZN.

The study concludes rural SMMEs were constrained to operate efficiently and effectively due to being subjected to the negative impact of environmental factors, such as the Covid-19 crisis. Thus, it can be deduced and concluded rural SMMEs were exposed to environmental factor constraints, in the context of the Covid-19 crisis, associated with the use of social media failure in relation to rural SMME survival and growth in KZN during the Covid-19 crisis.

6.7.1.5 Conclusions on research sub-objective 5:

To identify the social media marketing strategies that can be employed by SMMEs for survival and growth during emergencies, such as the Covid-19 crisis, in rural KZN.

It is concluded rural SMME owners and managers believe they were faced with social media marketing constraints that led to failure by rural SMMEs to adopt and use social media to realise their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

It is further concluded rural SMMEs experienced business failure due to social media strategy constraints that hindered the creation of branding, retaining customers, attending to customer needs and complaints, and selling products to customers to promote their survival and growth. It can be deduced rural SMMEs were subjected to a decline of revenues due to these constraints. Furthermore, it is concluded rural SMMEs needed to have a comprehensive understanding of the benefits of social media marketing strategies to ensure their survival and growth and explore the opportunities to market their business during the Covid-19 crisis.

6.7.1.6 Conclusions on research sub-objective 6:

To design and propose a social media model as a driving tool that can be used by SMMEs to survive and grow during the Covid -19 crisis in rural KZN.

The study findings regarding the design and propose of social model as a driving concluded that survival strategies were critical in leading to rural SMMEs to use social media for their survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis and in future pandemics. The study concludes that rural need to be familiar with different types of survival strategies to use social media attend the difficulties of rural SMMEs to overcome customer, to meet market demand using social media as innovative practice and to penetrate the market to reach more customers.

It can be concluded rural SMME growth strategies were crucial in leading these rural enterprises to use social media for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis and in future pandemics. The study concludes rural SMMEs need to be familiar with the benefits of using social platforms and their contributions to business success, in order enhance rural SMME survival and growth during situations such as the Covid-19 crisis and in future pandemics.

6.7.1.7 Conclusions on the combined research sub-objectives 1, 2 and 6

The findings of this study conclude the lack of social support and networking hindered the adoption and usage of social media, which led to business failure for rural SMMEs, hindering their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. Rural SMMEs needed to consider partnering with government, customers and other SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis, to ensure their survival and growth.

6.8 IMPLICATIONS

The outcomes of this study include the effects and proposal of the social media model as a driving tool in realising rural SMME survival and growth in KZN during the Covid-19 crisis and future pandemics.

6.8.1 Implications of rural SMME survival and growth theory

The primary study was mainly focused on contributing to the body of knowledge by designing and proposing a social media model as a driving tool that can be used by SMMEs in rural KZN to survive and grow during the Covid -19 crisis.

The literature review and empirical research study findings confirmed SMMEs, globally, are confronted with different challenges that hinder their competitive advantage and, in turn, their survival and growth. This can eventually hinder their contribution to reducing the high unemployment rate, as well as inequalities, including reducing opportunities for rural SMMEs to sustain livelihoods in rural communities. The proposed social media model as a driving tool that can be used by SMMEs in rural KZN to survive and grow during the Covid-19 and similar crises (Figure 6.2) shows social support and networking, rural SMME owner-manager perceptions, the usage extent of social media platforms, and social media marketing strategies, as well as survival and growth strategies, and the impact of environmental factors, are on the main challenges to the use of social media by SMMEs in rural KZN during the Covid-19 crisis.

It is thus crucial for rural SMMEs to note these and other relevant strategies and theories that deal with innovation, survival and growth, which will assist and guide them in overcoming different challenges in their turbulent business environment. These theories can also enable rural SMMEs to understand survival and growth determinants and to develop an innovative, creative and favourable culture to survive and grow in times of crisis. A greater awareness in terms of the environmental factors that affect rural SMMEs in KZN was of significance to their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

In turn, these factors have a great potential in contributing towards economic growth of KZN and eventually, SA. As SMME survival and growth are critical globally, considering their substantial potential to sustain and grow economies, including SA, the development of new theories and conceptual frameworks reflect rural SMMEs need to invest in adopting and implementing business growth theories for the purpose of innovation. This would counteract the threats of environmental factors that threatened their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis and in future pandemics.

6.8.2 Implications for rural SMME rural survival and growth practice

Rural SMMEs could have survived and grown during the Covid-19 crisis and in future pandemics, in order to revive economies of countries faced with economic turmoil caused by the Covid-19 crisis. In addition, rural SMMEs have the potential to make a huge contribution towards reviving and transforming the economies of countries during post-Covid-19. Rural SMMEs also significantly contribute towards GDP, reduce the high unemployment rate, as well as poverty, and promote sustainability of livelihoods in rural communities, while also addressing social ills such as inequalities.

Against this background, the study intended to embark on the analyses of potential means, considered in enhancing and improving the survival and growth of rural SMMEs, through using social media as a driving tool for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. The empirical findings, rooted on rural SMME survival and grow, revealed these enterprises can enhance their survival and growth through acquiring suitable management competence and technical skills, as well as exposure to social media awareness and adapting to dynamic business environmental business.

When environment factors, management perceptions and networking constraints are reduced and the implementation of strategies to enhance social media marketing are considered, rural SMME owners and managers could be in a position to become innovative and be creative in implementing survival and growth strategies to reduce business failure. This should place rural SMMEs in an advantageous position to develop a social media model that will improve their chances of survival and growth during disasters such as the Covid-19 crisis. This should also be supplemented and complemented by government support, through the provision of policy and regulations that promote the growth of rural SMMEs, in terms of rendering financial and training support regarding social media awareness to rural SMMEs. Where communities are large, they should be engaged by government to support the business of rural SMMEs in order to gain more customers and improve their revenues, in such a manner the government can enhance its GDP.

Investing in technology and technical skills is a pre-requisite for rural SMME owners and managers to cope with technological advancement, in order to survive and sustain themselves in turbulence caused by ever-changing business environmental factors and economic turmoil resulting from the Covid-19 crisis. This will necessitate rural SMMEs to adapt to these dynamic, world-wide business environments, through moving from the traditional marketing strategies to innovative strategies that are technologically orientated, such as social media marketing strategies. This would allow rural SMMEs to reach many customers and attract more prospective customers, even when faced with situations such as the Covid-19 crisis, or when subjected to any future pandemics. Thus, social media marketing strategies could have assisted and guided their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis and in any future pandemics.

6.9 RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE STUDY RESULTS

The recommendations of this study are based on the literature review and empirical findings of the study, discussed below.

6.9.1 Theoretical framework formulated through variables identified from the literature review

The theoretical framework was formulated through variables identified from the literature review, as per previous chapters, as well as the formulation of the research objectives, hypotheses and the quantitative data collection instrument, which were also designed through assistance of the literature review. A fundamental foundation was formed with the literature review in identifying and choosing variables in support of the development of the study. It can be deduced, in relation to the literature review, the use of social media by rural SMMEs in KZN was influenced by several critical factors, which could have hindered their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. To create a focus for this study, the critical factors were identified and classified in research study themes. As established through the literature review, SMMEs within rural KZN were affected by various critical factors that could hinder their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. These critical factors were categorised into themes of research after the process of identification, as depicted in Figure 6.1 below.

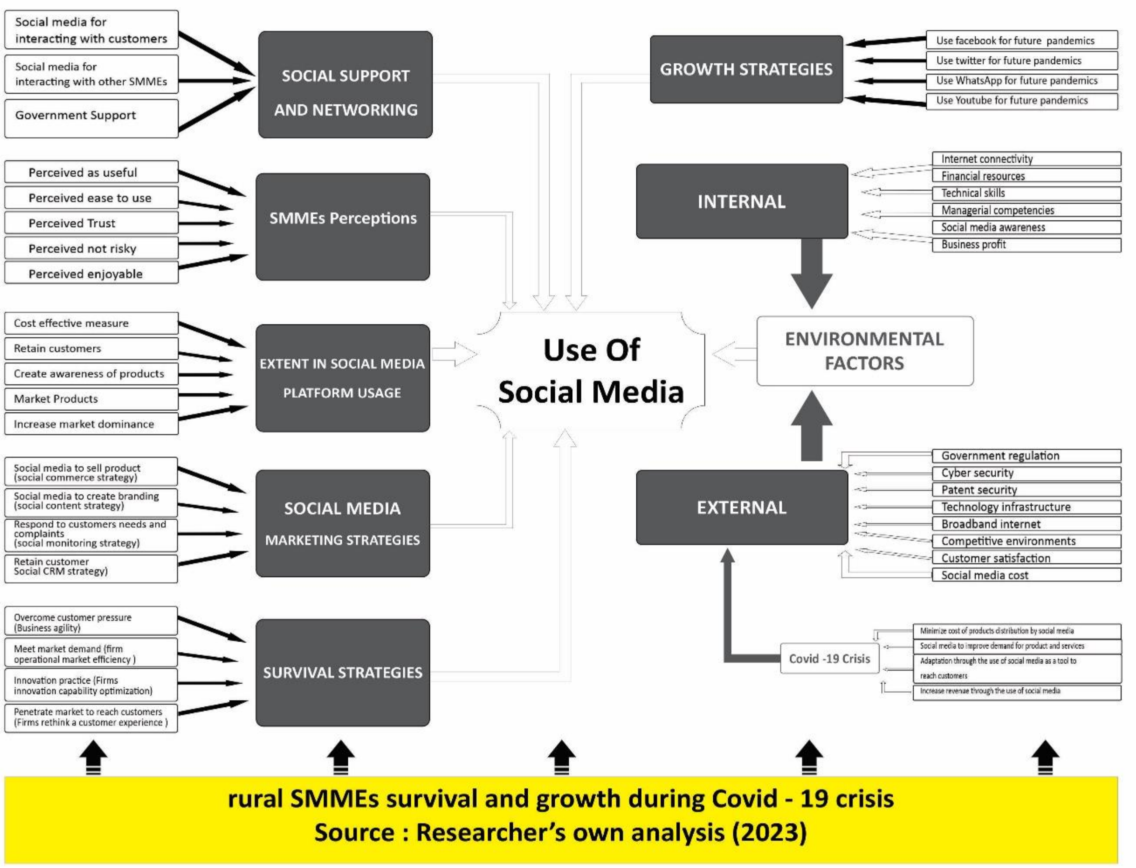


Figure 6.1: Conceptual framework for the research based on literature review

Figure 6.1 depicts seven research themes, which are: survival strategies, growth strategies, social media marketing strategies, and environmental factors, as well as SMME owner and manager perceptions, the extent of social media use, and social support and networking. These research themes, based on the critical factors according to the in-depth statistical analysis, influenced the use of social media by rural SMMEs for their survival and growth. This emanated from the lack of social media strategies to support SMME growth in SA, which is a major obstacle in dealing with the fallout of the Covid-19 crisis, as outlined in the research problem statement and substantiation of this study discussed above. Based on this, the knowledge gap suggested the design of the proposed social media model as a driving tool for rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 and similar crises, as discussed in Figure 6.2 below.

6.10 A PROPOSED SOCIAL MEDIA MODEL AS A DRIVING TOOL FOR RURAL SMMEs IN KWAZULU- NATAL TO SURVIVE AND GROW DURING COVID–19 CRISIS

The main purpose of this research study was to design and propose a social media model as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth, due to the slow social media adoption rate of rural SMMEs in rural KZN during the Covid-19 crisis. A social media model as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis was, therefore, developed based on the literature reviewed, as portrayed in Figure 6.2 below.

A social media model as a driving tool for SMMEs survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis was envisioned to address the research question of the study: “What social media model can be used as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth in rural KZN during the Covid-19 crisis?”

The development of a social media model as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis was in accordance with objective 6 of the study: “To design and propose a social media model as a driving tool that can be used by SMMEs in rural KZN to survive and grow during the Covid -19 crisis.”

The theoretical framework, as depicted in Figure 6.1, shows the variables used to develop the closed-ended questionnaire, which was tested scientifically, with the model developed, proposed and described as portrayed in Figure 6.2 below.

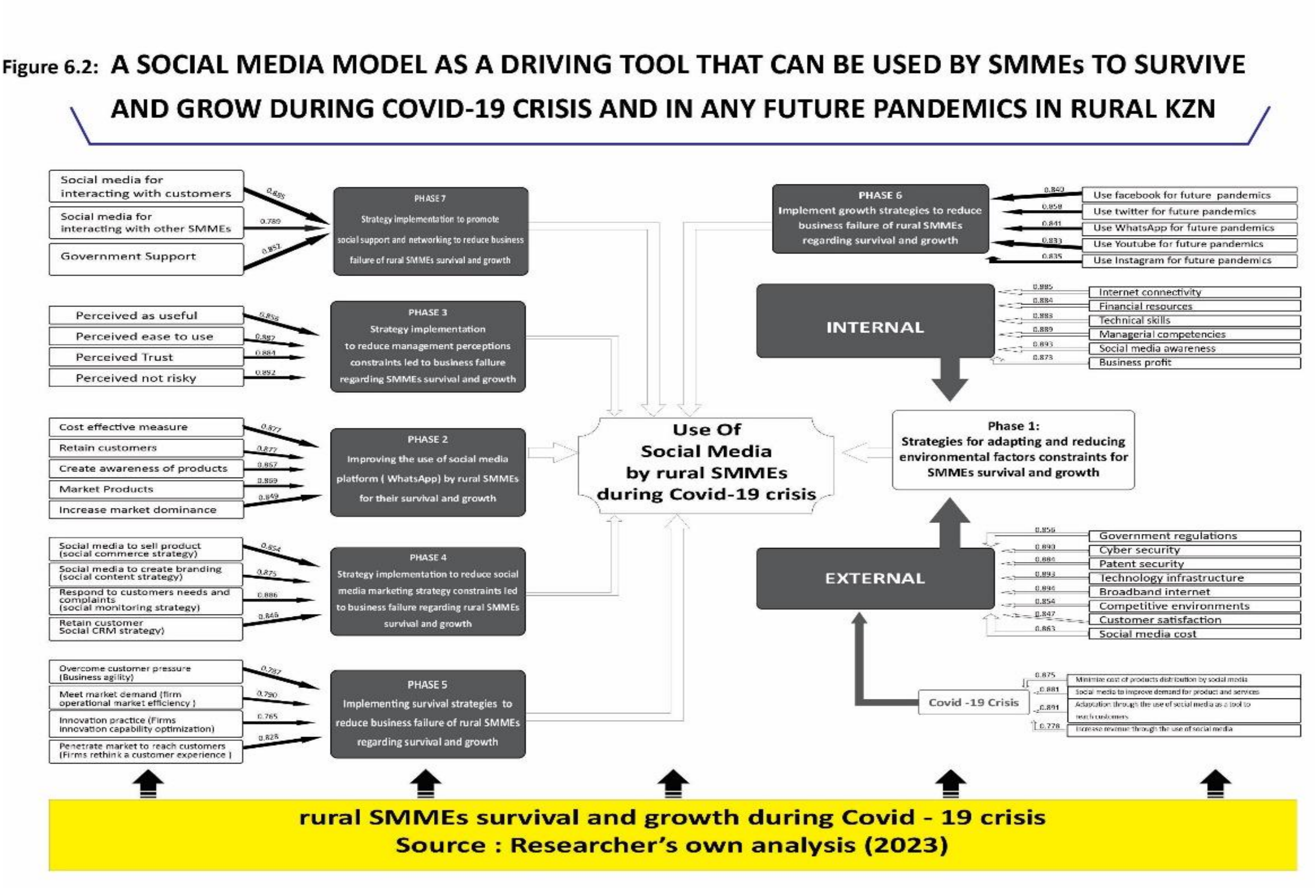


Figure 6.2: Social Media Model

Based on Figure 6.2 and the above stated findings of this study, the recommendations are summarised to address the findings of the study by means of a model, as depicted in Figure 6.2. The 7-stage social media model was developed to address the research problem, which investigated social media use and adoption as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth in rural KZN during the Covid-19 crisis and in future pandemics. The social media model (Figure 6.2) is further detailed below:

6.10.1 Seven-stage social media model as a driving tool for SMME survival and growth in rural KZN during the Covid-19 crisis and in future pandemics

The seven stage social media model is briefly discussed as follows:

6.10.1.1 Strategies adapting and reducing environmental factors constraints for rural SMMEs survival and growth

(i) Internal factors

According to empirical findings of this study, the financial resources, technical skills, managerial competencies, and social media awareness, along with internet connectivity and business profit, based on size of business enterprise, were found to be the major internal factors that had a critical impact on rural SMME ability to adopt and use social media during the Covid-19 crisis, for their survival and growth. It is, therefore, recommended rural SMMEs should conduct analyses, in terms of establishing their strengths and weaknesses, in relation to their operational internal business environment; this will allow them to devise business strategies that address their weaknesses and sustain the strengths in the ever-changing business environment. The government can provide training to rural SMMEs to equip them with critical skills such as managerial, technical and financial skills and competencies, in order to advance their business operations.

Financial resources: lack of financial resources affected rural SMME use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. However, financial resources are regarded as the critical factor businesses consider when they embark on the adoption of innovation, while finance is alleged as fundamental to the process of adoption and use of social media technologies for SMME survival and growth in times of crisis. The empirical findings suggested rural SMMEs are faced with the challenge of financial constraint, which perpetually affects their social media adoption and use as a new innovation technology with which to market their products and services for survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis in developing countries, with special reference to rural SMMEs in KZN.

It is, therefore, recommended the South African government establishes a system and user-friendly structures that motivate rural SMMEs to access financial assistance to start and sustain their businesses. Financial institutions such as banks must provide reasonable access to rural SMMEs to acquire loans at a reduced interest rate, in order to improve their performance so they may survive and realise the return of investment in the long run, irrespective of their business size, which will ensure these rural SMMEs generate a business profit.

Managerial skills: lack of managerial competencies were identified as one of the key findings that hinder rural SMME adoption and use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. However, managerial competencies are chief resources for the survival and growth of SMMEs. This means rural SMMEs must identify the competencies that will enable them to use social media during crises. It is, therefore, recommended rural SMME owners and managers embrace the digital age, since not doing so can lead to the business failure of SMMEs to survive and grow during disasters such as the Covid-19 crisis.

(ii) External factors

Inadequate government regulations, lack of cyber security, inadequate technology infrastructure, and competitive environments, as well as the effects from the Covid-19 crisis, were identified as chief external factors by this research study and shown to affect rural SMMEs, in terms of adopting and using social media during the Covid-19 crisis. Therefore, it is recommended rural SMMEs acquire in-depth insight of the effect of a turbulent business environment on their operations and develop strategic business mechanisms to adapt to the changing business environment, due to rapid technological changes, in order to ensure customer satisfaction during economic crises such as that caused by the Covid-19 crisis.

In addition, the empirical findings show rural SMMEs experienced inadequate government regulations, which were unable to support their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. It is against this background, the recommendation is made for government to provide a legal governance framework to promote a culture of innovation and technology adoption, thus creating a conducive environment for rural SMME survival and growth during crises such as the Covid-19 crisis.

Overall, it is recommended rural SMMEs enhance their performance to survive and grow, with special attention to the effects of the business environment, through conducting in-depth analyses of their internal and external environments. The main aim of the analyses would be to identify those factors that hinder their continued survival, as well as the critical success factors that could assist and guide them to grow. Based on the challenges to their business survival and growth, rural SMMEs may devise the most suitable remedial approaches to re-engineer their business operations. The social media model provided above could be used to conceptualise the best approaches for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis and future pandemics.

6.10.1.2 Improving the use of social media platform (WhatsApp) by rural SMMEs for their survival and growth

The findings and conclusions of the study indicated rural SMMEs were unable to use social media sufficiently as a cost-effective tool, to create an awareness of their products and services through marketing, and to increase their dominance in the market with the intention of increasing their sales. However, rural SMMEs missed the opportunities to retain existing customers and receive customer feedback regarding their needs. Therefore, rural SMMEs need to use this opportunity to implement the use of a social media platform, such as WhatsApp; since it was introduced into the market in 2009, WhatsApp reached half a billion active users in less than five years, which represents a remarkable accomplishment by any measure. This rapid means of diffusion suggests SMMEs may make use of the opportunity to connect with prospective and existing customers, to market their products and services during disasters such as the global Covid-19 crisis, in order to survive and grow.

Rural SMMEs are thus encouraged to constantly engage on social media platforms such as WhatsApp, to derive the benefits of using this social media platform to market their products and sales. In this way, rural SMMEs would increase their dominance through improved sales that could result in augmented revenues, ensuring their survival and growth during disasters and subsequent economic crises, such as the Covid-19 crisis.

6.10.1.3 Strategy implementation to reduce management perceptions constraints led to business failure regarding rural SMMEs survival and growth

The perceptions of SMMEs owners and managers was found to be a deciding factor for rural SMMEs to adopt social media use during the Covid-19 crisis. Rural SMMEs owners and managers with a positive attitude towards adopting and using social media, this was regarded a major contribution regarding adopting and using social media for rural SMMEs survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. The cognitive behaviour of rural SMMEs in this study in terms of perceived as useful, ease to use, trust, enjoyable and not risky to use social media by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis, through the use of TAM theory, indicated it was successfully used to create an in-depth understanding of their influence for rural SMME social media use during the Covid-19 crisis. The responses of SMME owners and managers in rural KZN was termed as negative behavioural responses, with regard to their perceptions to adopt and use social media to survive and grow in the economic turmoil caused by the Covid-19 crisis.

Rural SMMEs were faced with management perception constraints, which led to business failure in adopting and use of social media for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. This has created opportunities for rural SMMEs to consider strategy implementation to reduce management perception constraints. These rural enterprises need to gain social media awareness in terms of use benefits. They also need to develop technical and managerial competencies to use social media. This could have created a conducive environment for rural SMMEs to perceive social media use as useful, easy to use, trustworthy, enjoyable and not risky to use during the Covid-19 crisis. This implies should rural SMMEs possess digital orientated skills and managerial competencies, it could have exposed them to social media use, which would allow rural SMMEs to develop a positive attitude towards adopting and using social media during the Covid-19 crisis, for their survival and growth.

6.10.1.4 Strategy implementation to reduce social media marketing strategies constraints led to business failure regarding rural SMMEs survival and growth

Rural SMMEs must embark on strategy implementation to reduce social media marketing strategy constraints that led to business failure, with regard to rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis. This would have necessitated rural SMMEs to move from traditional to new marketing strategies during the Covid-19 crisis; this would have assisted and guided them to improve communication channels with their customers. This means rural SMMEs needed to embark on developing customer engagement strategies. These customer management mechanisms are necessary to promote effective social media marketing strategies, in order to engage with customers and market the business, its products and services, to ensure growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

The rural SMMEs should consider using four types of social media marketing objectives, with four mental models to guide social media marketing strategies. They must implement the four mental models, which are business-to-customers (to promote and sell), business-with-customer (to connect and collaborate), business-from-customers (to listen and learn) and business-for-customer (to empower and engage) during disasters such as the Covid-19 crisis, to position themselves to reach more customers and attract prospective customers for their survival and growth.

This implies rural SMMEs must implement social media marketing strategies, which are:

Social Commerce Strategy

This strategy can be used by rural SMMEs to gain access to customer information, allowing them to contact customers in a more efficient manner. This strategy will expose rural SMMEs and promote awareness to use social media use as a tool for selling, promotion and advertising platforms, which will, in turn, positively influence customers to purchase products and increase rural SMME sales. As a result, their increased revenues could have improved the financial position of rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis, ensuring business survival and growth through capabilities of promoting and selling products and services during the Covid-19 crisis. Therefore, rural SMMEs in KZN must implement social commerce strategies to sell their products and services during crises, such as Covid-19, for their survival and growth.

Social Content Strategy

The rural should use social content strategy create branding to their customers to deliver valuable content to persuade the customers react positively to this content, which comprises the products and services rural SMMEs are offering to their customers. This will allow SMMEs to create brand awareness through social media use to communicate their branding to attract customer attention, provide them with favourable news and focus on the strengths of the business products and services. This infers rural SMMEs could have the advantage of using social content strategy where social media is utilised by rural SMMEs to create branding to communicate their products and services to their customers for survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis in KZN.

Social Monitoring Strategy

Rural SMMEs must observe and analyse the customers behaviours in order to cater for the needs and complaints of customers through the use of social media strategy. This strategy will assist and guide rural SMMEs to use online social media to attend the needs and complaints of the customers. This means that rural SMMEs could be a better position to receive customers' feedback through use of social media with special to rural SMMEs products and services improve customer satisfaction and promote good relationships with their customers. Thus, through this strategy, it can create a conducive environment that rural SMMEs uses social media to listen and respond to customer needs and complaints Therefore, rural SMMEs must use this strategy as a two-way communication between them and their customers and this requires the rural SMMEs to possess the capabilities to attend to customers' online needs and complaints during Covid-19 crisis for their survival and growth in KZN.

Social CRM (SCRM) Strategy

Rural SMMEs must embrace the use technology platform such as social media for promoting customer engagement and retention in order to positively affect competitive advantage, performance, and growth of rural SMMEs.

Rural SMMEs must use SCRM as a collaborative interaction involving firm-customer, inter-organizational, and inter-customer intentions, where social media becomes the chief CRM enabler to connect with their customers and existing customers. Therefore, rural

SMMEs must retain their customers by means of social CRM strategy using social media as enabler in their business operations during Covid-19 crisis and in future pandemics to promote customer engagement and customer retention for survival and growth in KZN.

6.10.1.5 Implement survival strategies to reduce business failure of rural SMMEs regarding survival and growth

Rural SMMEs worldwide, including SA, with special reference to rural KZN, were suppsed to consider environmental analysis to develop survival strategies that should lead to their survival during the Covid-19 crisis, since it was already revealed rural SMMEs were unable to survive for more than five years, with Covid-19 worsening the entire situation, with regard to rural SMMEs survival in KZN. Such survival strategies could place rural SMMEs at an advantage to enhance their competitive advantage and establish their performance within their sectors during Covid-19 crisis. Thus, survival is a necessity for rural SMMEs to survive in developing industries, and they must continuously improve through embracing a change and advancement process. Therefore, rural SMMEs must embrace and embark on innovation in order to reach survival during emergencies such as the Covid-19 crisis.

In the Covid-19 crisis, rural SMMEs were threatened with financial distress, which weakened their survival, sales and revenues, due to the external turbulent environment. Therefore, it compelled rural SMMEs to implement survival strategies to reduce business failure regarding their survival and growth through considering innovativeness. Business survival is, nevertheless, a prerequisite for any rural SMME, therefore, implementing the following business survival strategies would have ensured their survival during the Covid-19 crisis:

- **Business agility**

Rural SMMEs must embark on overcoming customer pressure during crises, such as that caused by the Covid-19 crisis, through embracing a business agility approach. In this context, these rural enterprises must be prepared to reach a stage of flexibility and overall efficiency in learning, along with a capability to keep adjusting their positioning to gain optimally, despite economic turmoil such as the economic recession, caused by the Covid-19 crisis. In addition, rural SMMEs must react swiftly in adapting to changing markets, and to turbulent business environments, so they may meet the external demands of customers. The business agility approaches below could benefit rural SMMEs.

(i) Strategic business sensitivity

SMMEs must set survival business strategies in such a manner that responsiveness is aligned to the vision and mission statements of their businesses in times such as the Covid-19 crisis. This required strategic foresight to adopt and use social media technologies in order to survive during the Covid-19 pandemic, thereby forging relationships with potential and existing customers to ensure trust and customer loyalty. Rural SMMEs must also customise their strategic direction to become agile in their day-to-day operations; strategic business agility could provide the fundamental mechanisms for rural SMMEs to survive in turbulent. times

(ii) Resource fluidity

Rural SMMEs must prioritise the use of their resources in order to adjust and adapt to crises. This can be realised through using available resources to adopt social media to attract customers, which would have resulted in business sustainability and competitiveness during the Covid-19 crisis, for their survival ang growth. In this instance, rural SMMEs should have been provided government support with resources that would enable them to adopt and use social media during the Covid-19 crisis.

(iii) Collective management commitment (Management unity)

In the context of this study, SMME owners and managers must be decisive in taking decisions without hindrance of business politics. SMME owners and managers must, therefore, share values with the business and create internal, cultural and business ethics, allowing for more flexibility towards re-engineering business models. Rural SMME owners and managers must thus embrace new business models, which could have improved survival of their business during the Covid-19 crisis.

- **Firms operational market efficiency**

Rural SMMEs must invest in marketing, promotion and distribution, in order to increase their revenue in economic recessions such as that caused by the Covid-19 crisis. They should also put actionable marketing plans in place, in order to apply their dynamic capability to attract prospective and retain existing customers in times of global crises, such as Covid-19, through integrating marketing activities with new technology innovations such as social media.

SMME owners and managers in rural KZN should respond to market demands and customer pressure by adopting and using social media in sales operations. This means marketing operational efficiency could have assisted, as a survival strategy, to reduce the threat to rural SMMEs by this crisis situation, ensuring their survival and growth in order to meet market demands.

- **Firms rethink the customer experience**

SMMEs in rural areas should find solutions that could address their needs, such as how to motivate customers to access their products and services. This could be achieved by rural SMMEs through developing innovative-based cultures, with a dynamic capability to adopt digital technologies such as social media, in order for rural SMMEs to interact with their customers to market their products and services, thereby increasing revenues for survival during situations such as Covid-19 and the resulting to economic turmoil. Thus, rural SMMEs should embark on a rethink of the customer, which could allow them to penetrate their business market and reach customers. This would have allowed these enterprises to respond to customer pressure and customer purchase experiences, through adopting and using social media as a survival strategy, enabling interaction with customers with regard to their products and services, for their survival during the Covid-19 crisis.

- **Innovation practice - firms' innovation capability optimisation**

Rural SMMEs must continuously use innovation practices such as social media technologies as a preventative measure during disasters such as the Covid-19 crisis, for their survival and growth. This means rural SMMEs must apply innovative thinking to their businesses by adopting social media technologies that could create an innovative culture. This could further assist and guide rural SMMEs to provide a survival strategy that can enhance businesses competitiveness, thereby enabling them to survive in global crises, such as Covid-19. Overall, rural SMMEs must invest and implement innovation capability optimisation through adopting and using social media, to survive during the Covid-19 crisis.

6.10.1.6 Implement growth strategies to reduce business failure of rural SMMEs regarding survival and growth

The rural SMMEs suggested it was crucial for them to use social media platforms as growth strategies. These business enterprises adopted and used social media platforms to communicate with existing and potential customers, with the intention of creating relationships to forge future loyalty. It is, therefore, recommended rural SMMEs should implement growth strategies to reduce business failure; this would have allowed them to survive and grow during the Covid-19 crisis. The empirical findings of this research study are supported by firm growth theory, in that rural SMMEs have to undergo five stages to ensure their continued survival and growth. These stages comprise existence, followed by survival, take-off and reaching resource maturity, for their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis and future pandemics.

This theory is strategic to the growth process of rural SMMEs, since it deals with the growth and expansion process, therefore, this theory is rightfully linked to growth of SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis, as it provides a framework of how SMMEs grow from their inception to the maturity phase. Thus, in terms of growth strategies in line with firm growth theory, it is strongly recommended rural SMMEs use Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and YouTube, as well as Instagram, during disasters such as the Covid-19 crisis and in future pandemics, to ensure their survival and growth.

6.10.1.7 Strategy implementation to promote social support and networking to reduce business failures of rural SMME survival and growth

The developed and proposed conceptual framework indicates rural SMMEs were subjected to a lack of social media use to interact with customers and other rural SMMEs. In addition, rural SMMEs were faced with poor government support during the Covid-19 crisis to support their survival and growth. Therefore, rural SMMEs need to consider partnerships with government, customers and other SMMEs during turbulent times such as the Covid-19 crisis, as a survival strategy implemented to promote social support and networking, which would reduce business failures of rural SMMEs, ensuring survival and growth.

The scenario where rural SMMEs network with other rural SMMEs could provide a learning platform for these enterprises to learn new business strategies to survive and grow during crises such as Covid-19. This can promote the process of benchmarking rural SMMEs, offering an advantage to acquire international best practices, affording the opportunity to market their business in a competitive manner and offset threats such as those posed by the Covid-19 crisis towards their survival and growth. Furthermore, the process where rural SMMEs interact with customers could provide opportunities for rural SMMEs to increase sales through marketing their products and services, thereby improving rural SMME revenue to promote their survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis. Nevertheless, government support is regarded as critical for rural SMMEs to assist and guide them to cope in a turbulent business environment, in order to improve their day-to-day operations during crises such as Covid-19, for their continued survival and growth**.**

6.11 OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Additional recommendations are briefly discussed as follows**:**

6.11.1 Rural SMME social media awareness

The study findings revealed an inadequate understanding by rural SMMEs due to the lack of social awareness, which affected social media use during the Covid-19 crisis:

- It is recommended government educate rural SMMEs on the importance of using social media as part of marketing the business of rural SMMEs. This implies government must provide training to rural SMMEs in order to inform them regarding the use of social media. In addition, there should be workshops organised for rural SMMEs and communities, in order to emphasise the importance, survival and growth of rural SMMEs, as well as how communities and the country as a whole, could derive benefits from the growth of SMMEs. Moreover, this could assist the country to move towards realisation of the NDP goals of creating 90 percent new jobs by 2030.
- Rural KZN is governed by traditional leaders who are part of the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA). There are 21 Sector Education Training Authorities (SETAs) championing skills development in different sectors in SA, which involves partnerships with institutions of higher learning. It is, therefore, recommended government forms partnerships with traditional leaders, SETAs and Institutions of higher learning, with the intention of forming a professional forum where rural SMMEs, traditional leaders and Institutions of higher learning will meet and share the importance of ensuring rural SMME survival and growth.

  The 21 SETAs must provide training in different sectors to empower rural SMMEs with regard to technical and managerial skills, including digital skills applicable in the digital world to run a business. It should be a directive from the government that SETAs ought to empower rural SMMEs as part of rural development in each financial sector. In this way, a conducive environment can be created for rural SMME awareness of social media use, which could break a barrier for those rural SMMEs that cannot survive for more than five years.

6.11.2 Rural SMME survival and growth policy re-evaluation

According to the empirical findings of the study, rural SMMEs were faced with a lack of resources, insufficient financial resources, poor government support and inadequate government regulations, which negatively impacted their ability to adopt and use social media during the Covid-19 crisis for their survival and growth. It is therefore recommended:

- Government needs to provide assistance to rural SMMEs in making financial assistance available to them, because it is a major challenge for rural SMME survival and growth, since rural SMMEs could not afford to finance social media adoption and use due to limited financial resources. Financial institutions need to, through the intervention of government, develop a financial assistance scheme that will cater for rural SMMEs operating in SA, in order to assist and guide them to survive and grow, such as providing short-term loans with reasonable interest rates to rural SMMEs, through the assistance of government. Furthermore, the government should form a monitoring and evaluation department that is effective, efficient and capable in following the utilisation of funds allocated to assist rural SMMEs to survive and grow, so it cannot fall into wrong hands and defeat the purpose of assistance.
- Policy makers in SA must conduct an intensive review of policy and regulations and invest in policy and regulations that could promote rural SMME survival and growth in the country, particularly with regard to full registration of rural SMMEs, considering their contribution to social, economic and environmental prosperity of SA. This will create a conducive culture for rural SMME business to be effective and efficient, in terms of day-to day operations.
- The government should, furthermore, provide policy that will enforce periodic monitoring pertaining to rural SMME survival and growth, with the purpose to ascertain whether they are coping with business environment turbulence. There should, furthermore, be a policy that promotes evaluation studies on the survival and growth of rural SMMEs. These evaluation studies should share their findings at the professional forum suggested above. In addition, the government should promote the survival of new entrants (new rural SMMEs), by removing registration fees and reducing taxes.

6.11.3 Investment in technology development due to rapid changes

The empirical findings of the study show rural SMMEs were confronted with the lack of technology infrastructure, lack of general infrastructure and lack of internet connectivity, which negatively influenced rural SMME survival and growth in KZN during the Covid-19 crisis:

- It is critical for rural SMMEs to invest in technology development in order to cater for world-wide rapid changes due to technological advances. Technology is regarded as an enabler of business advancement in promoting innovation. Rural SMMEs are required to align their business activities to technology, as this would place them in a better position to adopt and use social technology, such as social media, to cope with turbulent business environments, including the Covid-19 crisis and future pandemics. This has the potential of helping and guiding rural SMMEs to develop strategic business mechanisms in line with new technology innovative processes, which will promote social networking by rural SMMEs. In turn, this will facilitate product and services marketing to both local and international customers, with the purpose of increasing sales to ensure their survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis and future pandemics.
- Government should provide support to rural SMMEs by assisting them to adapt to technological changes through workshops on technical skills and competencies. In the process, these enterprises will be able to re-engineer their businesses, thereby aligning with a culture inclined to technology, which would advance their business operations and allow them to survive and grow in turbulences caused by the business environment, including the Covid-19 crisis and future pandemics.
- Assistance should also be offered to rural SMMEs by the government to ensure there is technology infrastructure in rural places, providing rural SMMEs with internet connectivity to adopt and use social media in advancing their businesses and to survive and grow in any turbulence caused by the Covid-19 crisis and future pandemics.

6.11.4 Rural SMME owner and manager innovativeness

The empirical findings of this study reveal rural SMME technical skills are lacking, which has negatively impacted their survival and growth, since they were unable to adopt and use social media. This implies rural SMMEs were unable to embrace innovativeness in order to adopt and use social media during the Covid-19 crisis, due to the lack of technical skills. This is further supported by DoI theory in this study, which highlighted that DoI comprises five perceived characteristics of innovation, which are relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, and trialability, as well as observability. There are five DoI stages rural SMMEs could have followed in pursuit of the adoption and use of social media during the Covid-19 crisis. This means, through this theory, rural SMMEs are able to develop technical skills to cope with innovativeness to deal with rapid environmental changes, including the Covid-19 crisis and future pandemics.

- It is recommended government should play a leading role in working collaboratively with 21 SETAs and institutions of higher learning, to develop qualifications and provide workshops to rural SMMEs that will equip them with technical skills, which could promote SMME owner and manager innovativeness. The SETAs, through skills development, in partnership with institutions of higher learning, should offer qualifications and training to rural SMMEs in order to enhance their creativeness and innovativeness to deal with socio-economic challenges in communities at large and also to survive and grow. These technical skills could assist and guide rural SMMEs with innovativeness and enable them to operate optimally in the following stages of innovation, during the process of adopting and using social media in promoting innovation during the Covid-19 crisis and in future pandemics.

6.11.4.1 The Knowledge Stage

The institutions of higher learning, in partnering with the SETA, should train rural SMMEs supporting them with more information on the benefits they could derive from innovation in their businesses, in order to know how and why the innovation function in their businesses. Rural SMME owners should be aware of the benefits to accepting and use of new technology in the form of social media and know how to correctly use it and the principles involved in its use.

6.11.4.2 The Persuasion Stage

Through the knowledge gained in the initial phase, rural SMMEs should have undergone the process of the persuasion stage, in order to decide regarding accepting and using social media during the Covid-19 crisis, for their survival and growth.

6.11.4.3 The Decision Stage

Acquired knowledge of innovation through training enables rural SMMEs to reject or accept the innovation. Therefore, rural SMMEs had to also undergo this stage during the Covid-19 crisis in order to decide whether to accept or reject social media adoption and use for survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis.

6.11.4.4 The Implementation Stage

Rural SMMEs should have implemented social media during the Covid-19 crisis. However, uncertainty regarding the results of implementing the innovation can surface at this stage, requires government, institutions of higher learning and SETAs to intervene and provide technical assistance to rural SMMEs to help overcome this problem.

6.11.4.5 The Confirmation Stage

The constant use of social media by rural SMMEs could depend on the satisfaction of rural SMMEs owners that social media would meet their needs. It is, therefore, recommended government provide a monitoring period and evaluation policy, to ensure gaps are identified in advance and retraining provided to rural SMMEs, enabling them to continue with the use of social media to advance their businesses, thus allowing them to cope with threats posed by environmental factors, including the Covid-19 crisis and future pandemics.

It is thus critical for government to ensure rural SMMEs are reskilled continuously, through learning interventions provided by the country's SETAs. This would ensure the required technical skills for rural SMME survival and growth are constantly updated; as suggested by DoI theory, in order to promote rural SMME owner and manager innovativeness to survive and grow during the Covid-19 crisis and future pandemics. As a result of rural SMME innovativeness, their contribution to the GDP of KZN and the country, many job opportunities, and poverty alleviation as well as the sustainability of rural community livelihoods could be realised through rural SMME survival and growth.

6.12 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted in six rural places in the province of KZN and only focused on 374 rural SMMEs. The study did not cover rural places in other provinces. The findings were only for these places in rural KZN, not the entire SA. However, there are lessons to be learned by rural places in other provinces. Therefore, the study findings should be used with caution, since rural SMMEs in other provinces operate in a different context of business environment. Additionally, the primary data were gathered from 374 participants using a closed-ended questionnaire, which comprised predetermined statements, derived from an in-depth literature review and from the research objectives. This study used only a quantitative method, which offered only closed-ended questions, without open-ended questions to allow participants space for additional comments regarding their views in the questionnaire. This method disadvantaged participants in expressing their views and constrained researcher insights to respondent views.

6.13 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

According to the empirical findings of this study, it was evident and clear rural SMMEs were subjected to different types of risks during the Covid-19 crisis. Since this study only catered for rural KZN, it is recommended future research study should be based on:

A risk-based social media model for enhancing rural SMME survival and growth in KZN, during scenarios such as the Covid-19 crisis. This study will add the variable of risk management and would further ascertain the risk levels rural SMMEs are subjected to, during the Covid-19 crisis.

Based on the above suggested further research topic, the scope can be extended to the entire country. The further recommended research title can be: “A risk-based social media model for enhancing the survival and growth of rural SMMEs beyond the Covid-19 crisis in SA”.

The above suggested research topic and title would follow a longitudinal approach, where the designed model will be tested in the field, with mixed research methods employed in this longitudinal study. This will allow the researcher to gain in-depth insight regarding the risks rural SMMEs are faced with on the ground.

In addition, rural SMMEs are expected to make a contribution post Covid-19, in terms of economic growth, poverty alleviation, creating job opportunities as per set goals in the NDP, such as creating 90 percent new jobs by 2030, as well as promoting sustainability of livelihoods in rural communities.

6.14 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study emphasised the probabilities in rural SMME survival and growth during the Covid-19 crisis, where they were faced with economic turmoil during this crisis in rural places in KZN. The key critical factors influencing the use of social media by rural SMMEs during the Covid-19 crisis were discussed, since it is anticipated rural SMMEs can play a crucial role in addressing various socio-economic challenges in rural communities. Through the increasing rates of unemployment and poverty, as well as inequality and economic turmoil, worsened by uncontrollable crises in SA (Covid-19, electricity outages, lack of infrastructure or its collapse due to non-maintenance), adapting to the everchanging environment by rural SMMEs can make a critical difference.

Furthermore, a conducive environment is required in achieving the survival and growth of rural SMMEs during Covid-19 crisis, which should, in return, assist and guide rural SMMEs to gain a competitive advantage to withstand turbulences caused by the everchanging business environment and the outbreak and uncontrollable spread of the global Covid-19 virus. SA was not excluded in this case. The ever-changing business environment in SA poses a threat to rural SMMEs regarding their survival and growth, which compelled them to forge competitive advantage through continuously embarking on re-engineering their business management strategies, in order to successfully cope with a turbulent business environment and economic turmoil caused by the Covid-19 crisis for survival and growth.

The empirical data used during this study were based on questionnaires that were self-administered among rural SMME owners and managers of Vryheid, Dundee, Newcastle, and Ulundi, as well as Ixopo, Empangeni, and Richards Bay in the KZN province. The recommendations and conclusions discussed in this chapter represent some of the actionable recommendations that could have been considered to enhance rural SMMEs chances to survive and grow during the Covid-19 crisis and in future pandemics, in order to promote the economic growth of KZN, reduce the poverty and unemployment rates, and promote sustainable livelihoods of communities in rural KZN.

It is also hoped this study will enable government and other stakeholders to enhance their approach and partnership with rural SMMEs, to create a conducive environment for rural SMME survival and growth during crises such as the Covid-19 crisis and in future pandemics.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: LETTER OF INFORMATION

Title of the Research Study: The use of social media drive during Covid - 19 by small, medium and micro enterprises in rural KwaZulu–Natal

Principal Investigator/s/researcher: Godfrey Sabelo Mpungose, MBA, BCom (Hons) and BCom

Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s: Dr Lawrence Mpele Lekhanya, PhD (UWC): Management; DTech (DUT): Marketing; Dr Emem Anwana, PhD (Business Law)

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study

Good day,

I am student at DUT doing research for my Doctor of Philosophy degree in Management Sciences (Business Administration). I would like to invite you to participate in the research study. The purpose of the study is to investigate the critical factors impacting on the use of social media drive as a tool for SMMEs survival and growth during Covid-19 crises, and thereafter to develop and propose a social media model as a driving tool for SMMEs survival and growth during Covid-19 crises in rural KwaZulu-Natal due to the fact that the SMMEs are faced with the financial constraints posed by the outbreak and spread of Covid-19 crises.

Research

Research is a careful and comprehensive study into a specific problem using the scientific method to systematic search or enquiry for generalized new knowledge. In this research study, you are requested to ask as many questions as you can, if there are issues that are not clear to you for you to have fully understanding of this study.

Outline of the Procedures:

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the critical factors impacting on the use of social media as a driving tool for SMMEs survival and growth during Covid-19 crises in rural KwaZulu-Natal by investigating the factors that influencing the use of social media drive for SMMEs survival and growth in the times of Covid - 19 pandemic ; ascertaining the extent in which the SMMEs use social media drive for survival and growth in the times of Covid-19 pandemic ; determining the perceptions of SMMEs managers, owners and entrepreneurs with regards to the use of social media as a driving tool for SMMEs survival and growth in times of pandemic ; determining the impact of Covid-19 on SMMEs survival and growth during Covid 19 pandemic crises and to identify the social media marketing strategies that can be employed by SMMEs for survival and growth in the times of Covid-19 pandemic in rural KwaZulu-Natal.

Considering this, you are humbly requested to complete the questionnaire as depicted in **sections A and B** below. The questionnaire is designed in a way that can be completed in 35 minutes, whereby SMMEs owners, managers and entrepreneurs in rural KwaZulu-Natal are requested to complete the questionnaire.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may decline altogether or leave blank any questions you do not wish to answer. Please note that there are no correct or incorrect answers, only your honest opinion is requested.

The closed ended questionnaire as outlined in **sections A and B** below will be analysed and the findings will be used to develop and propose a social media model as a driving tool for SMMEs survival and growth in times of pandemic. This emanated from the fact that the SMMEs are subjected to Covid-19 pandemic crises, which resulted in financial burden on the SMMEs to cope with their day-to-day operations. The intention of designing and proposing a model is to provide guidelines to assist the SMMEs to survive, grow and sustain themselves to gain health financial positions for their businesses during Covid-19 crises in rural KwaZulu-Natal.

The risks or discomforts associated with the study:

There are no known risks to participation in the study concerning physical, psychological, social and economic risks. Your responses will remain confidential and anonymous, and the loss of confidentiality has been taken care of in this research study whereby the personal collected data will be coded as early in the activity as possible and securely stored so that only the researcher may access it.

In addition, for minimising of the risk for loss of confidentiality, the researcher will only collect personal information that is essential to the research activity as depicted in **Section A** below.

Furthermore, if the researcher intends to use data for a purpose other than the one for which it was originally collected and the data are still identifiable, the researcher will request the consent to the use it for another purpose.

Withdrawing from the study:

Kindly note that your participation in the study is voluntary and you are entitled to withdraw from the study at any time should you wish to do so and will continue to receive the appropriate standard of care. Please be informed that the data collected through your participation in this study will remain as part of the study records and will not be removed.

Benefits:

The findings of the study intend to design and propose a social media model as a driving tool for SMMEs survival and growth in times of pandemic in rural KwaZulu-Natal. This model seeks to assist the SMMEs owners, managers and entrepreneurs to develop guidelines to inform policy decision concerning SMMEs survival, growth and sustainability in order to gain health financial positions for their businesses in the times of Covid-19 in rural Kwazulu-Natal.

Remuneration:

There will be no remuneration that will be catered for the participants by participating to this study. This study intends to assist the SMMEs in rural KwaZulu-Natal to survive and growth during Covid-19 crises. This infers that you will not be remunerated or paid for partaking in this study.

Costs of the Study:

Kindly be informed that there are no costs that you should cover in the participation of this study. Your participation is free, and the study requires only your honest in responding to the questions of the study. This implies that there are no financial implications regarding participating in this study.

Confidentiality:

Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you are not supposed to put your names during the process of questionnaires completion. Your responses will remain confidential and anonymous. This includes avoid utilizing your "*self-identifying statements and information*". This implies that you are protected from possible harm. No one other than the researcher will know your individual answers to this questionnaire. Please note that there are no correct or incorrect answers, only your honest opinion is requested.

Results:

If you are interested in the results of the study, you can obtain them from the DUT repository where the thesis can be accessed, in approximately 12 months after the survey.

Research-related Injury:

There will be no research-related injury or adverse reaction since this study entails the completion of questions of the questionnaire, which is categorised into S**ections A** and **B.** The completion of questionnaire will only require 35 minutes of your time without any physical, psychological, social, and economic risks.

Storage of all electronic and hard copies including tape recordings

In addition, please note that the returned completed questionnaires will be stored in a safe storage/place for the period of five years. After five years, the data will be destroyed. Electronic records will be kept for five years and thereafter be deleted.

Persons to contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries during this study are as follows**:**

My supervisor: Dr Lawrence Mpele Lekhanya, telephone number: 031 373 5835 or lawrencel@dut.ac.za

The researcher**:** Godfrey Sabelo Mpungose, telephone number: 073 364 9116, or sabelo.mpungose@gmail.com

or the Institutional Research Ethics Administrator on 031 373 2375.

Complaints can be reported to the Director: Research and Postgraduate Support Dr L Linganiso on 031 373 2577 or researchdirector@dut.ac.za.

APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONNAIRE

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

I hereby kindly request that you complete the questionnaire that is directed to the SMMEs owners, managers and entrepreneurs for the study on the use of social media drive during Covid-19 by small, medium and micro enterprises in rural KwaZulu–Natal.

The questionnaire is divided in two sections (**Sections A and B**), which required 35 minutes of your time to complete it. The questionnaire is portrayed as follows**:**

SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Please place a cross (X) in the appropriate box to reflect your answer on the questionnaire, which is divided into two sections (Sections A and B):

1. Please indicate your position in a business

SMMEs Owner	1
SMMEs Manager	2
If other, please specify: ______________________	3

2. Please indicate the number of years the business has been in existence

0 - 4 years	1
5 - 8 years	2
9 - 12 years	3
13 - 16 years	4
More than 16 years, please specify: ___________________	5

3. Please indicate your gender?

Male	1
Female	2

4. Please indicate your age group

18 -24	1
25-31	2
32-38	3
39-48	4
49 and more Please specify: ________________________	5

5. Please indicate your race

African	1
Coloured	2
Indian	3
White	4
If other, please specify: ________________________	5

6. Please indicate your highest qualification

National Diploma	1
B Tech	2
Honours	3
Masters	4
PhD	5
If other, please specify: _______________________	6

7. Please indicate the nature of your business

Financial	1
Manufacturing	2
Services	3
Mining	4
If other, please specify: ________________________	5

8. Please indicate the type of ownership for your business

Sole proprietor	1
Partnership	2
Manager of the business and co-owned	3
Corporation	4
If other, please specify: ________________________	5

9. Please indicate the source of finance for your business

Own Capital	1
Bank Loan	2
If other, please specify: ________________________	3

10. Please indicate the reason for starting your business

Unemployment	1
Alleviation of Poverty	2
Extra Income	3

11. Please indicate a location of your business

Vryheid	1
Ulundi	2
Dundee	3
Empangeni	4
Richards Bay	5
Newcastle	6
Ixopo (ubuhlebezwe)	7
If other, please specify: ______________________________	8

12. Please indicate the scope of your business

Organisation's scope	
Local	1
National	2
International	3
If other, please specify: _____________________	4

SECTION B: THE CRITICAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY RURAL SMMEs FOR SURVIVAL AND GROWTH DURING COVID –19 CRISIS

The statements in the questionnaire comprise five category rating to indicate the extent in which you agree or disagree to these statements. Please indicate your response for each question by putting **X** over the most appropriate answer.

Rating Scale

1= Strongly disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4= Agree 5= Strongly agree

13.The factors influencing the use of social media for rural SMMEs survival and growth during Covid - 19 crisis

No	Statement	**Rating Scale**				
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
13.1	Lack of technical skills affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis					
13.2	Lack of social media awareness affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis					
13.3	Lack of managerial competencies affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis					
13.4	Lack of financial resources affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis					
13.5	Lack of infrastructure affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis					
13.6	Lack of internet connectivity affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis					
13.7	Lack of technology infrastructure affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis					
13.8	Competitive environments influence rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis					
13.9	Customer satisfaction influence rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis					
13.10	Large market scope influence rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis					
13.11	Poor government support affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis					
13.12	Lack of availability of internet affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis					
13.13	Lack of affordability of internet affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis					
13.14	Lack of broadband internet affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis					
13.15	High social media cost affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis					
13.16	Lack of cyber security affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis					
13.17	Lack of resources to implement cyber security solutions affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis					
13.18	Inadequate government regulations affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis					
13.19	Lack of patent security affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis					

13.20	Low business profit due to the small size of rural SMMEs affect their use of social media during Covid-19 crisis					
13.21	Lack of social support affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis					

14. The extent in which the rural SMMEs use social media drive for survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis

No	**Statement**	**Rating Scale**				
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
14.1	Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to increase dominance in the market during Covid-19 crisis					
14.2	Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to market the products during Covid -19 crisis					
14.3	Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to increase sales during Covid-19 crisis					
14.4	Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to create an awareness of the products and services during Covid-19 crises					
14.5	Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to keep current customers during Covid -19 crisis					
14.6	Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to receive customer feedback on existing products during Covid -19 crisis					
14.7	Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp as a cost-effective measure to communicate during Covid-19 crisis					
14.8	Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to network with other SMMEs during Covid-19 crisis					

15. The perception of rural SMMEs owners and managers on the use of social media for survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis

No	Statement	**Rating Scale**				
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
15.1	Rural SMMEs perceived social media to be useful during Covid-19 crisis					
15.2	Rural SMMEs perceived social media to be easy to use during Covid-19 crisis					
15.3	Rural SMMEs trust the use of social media during Covid-19 crisis					
15.4	Rural SMMEs perceived the use of social media not risky during Covid-19 crisis					
15.5	Rural SMMEs perceived the use of social media to be enjoyable during Covid-19 crisis					

16. The impact of Covid-19 crisis on rural SMMEs use of social media for their survival and growth

No	Statement	Rating Scale				
		1	2	3	4	5
16.1	Covid-19 crisis influence rural SMMEs to use social media to minimise cost of distribution of products					
16.2	Covid-19 crisis influence rural SMMEs to use social media to improve demand for their products and services					
16.3	Covid-19 crisis influence rural SMMEs to adapt and use social media as a tool to reach more customers					

16.4	Covid-19 crisis influence rural SMMEs to use social media to increase their revenue					

17. The social media marketing strategies for rural SMMEs survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis

No	Statement	Rating	Scale			
		1	2	3	4	5
17.1	Rural SMMEs used social media to sell products to customers during Covid-19 crisis					
17.2	Rural SMMEs used social media to create branding during Covid-19 crisis					
17.3	Rural SMMEs used social media to respond to customer's needs and complaints during Covid-19 crisis					
17.4	Rural SMMEs used social media to retain customers during Covid-19 crisis					

18. The use of social media as a strategy for rural SMMEs survival and growth during future pandemics

No	Statement	Rating	Scale			
		1	2	3	4	5
18.1	Rural SMMEs can use social media to overcome customer pressure during a pandemic					
18.2	Rural SMMEs can use social media to meet market demand during a pandemic					
18.3	Rural SMMEs can use social media as an innovative practice during a pandemic					
18.4	Rural SMMEs can use social media to penetrate the market to reach customer during a pandemic					
18.5	Rural SMMEs can use social media to increase sales of product during a pandemic					
18.6	Rural SMMEs can use Facebook for their survival and growth in future pandemics					
18.7	Rural SMMEs can use Twitter for their survival and growth in future pandemics					
18.8	Rural SMMEs can use WhatsApp for their survival and growth in future pandemics					
18.9	Rural SMMEs can use Instagram for their survival and growth in future pandemics					
18.10	Rural SMMEs can use YouTube for their survival and growth in future pandemics					
18.11	Rural SMMEs can use social media to interact with customers in future pandemics					

Thank you very much for devoting your time to compete this questionnaire.

APPENDIX 3: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

DUT DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

CONSENT

Full Title of the Study: The use of social media drive during COVID19 by small, medium and micro enterprises in rural KwaZulu–Natal

Name of Researcher: Godfrey Sabelo Mpungose

Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:

- ☐ I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, Sabelo Mpungose, about the nature, conduct, benefits, and risks of this study - Research Ethics Clearance Number: IREC 020/22,
- ☐ 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 this research which may relate to my participation will be made available to me.

_________________________	____________	________	__________________
Full Name of Participant	**Date**	**Time**	**Signature /Right Thumbprin**

I, **Godfrey Sabelo Mpungose** 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**

INHLOLOVO YEMIBUZO

Isithasiselo A: Incwadi echazayo /yolwazi

Isihloko Socwaningo: Ukusetshezwiswa kwezikundla zokuxhumana njengethulusi lokuthuthukisa amabhizinisi amancane ngesikhathini se COVID-19 ezindaweni zasemakhaya esifundazweni sakwaZuluNatali

Umcwaningi: Godfrey Sabelo Mpungose, MBA, BCom (Hons) and BCom

Umelukeki woncwaningi kanye nomsizi wakhe: Lawrence Mpele Lekhanya, PhD (UWC): Management; DTech (DUT): Marketing; Dr Emem Anwana, PHD (Business Law)

Isingeniso esifinqgiwe kanye nenhloso yocwaningo

Sawubona,

Ngingumfundi wase eThekwini eNyunivesi yobuchwepheshe owenza iziqu zobuDokotela emkhakheni wezokuphatha namabhizimisi. Ngithatha lelithuba ngiyakumema ukuba ube ingxenye yalolu cwaningo. Inhloso yalolu cwaningo ukuphenya izici ezibucayi ezinomthelela ekusebenziseni izinkundla zokuxhumana njengethulusi lokusiza amabhizinisi amancane ngesikhathi se COVID – 19 ngenhloso yokugcina ekhona nokuzithuthukisa mayelana nomnotho wawo. Uma sesithole imiphumela yocwaningo siyobe sesenza imodeli emayelana nezinkundla zokuxhumana ezingasetshenziswa amabhizinisi amancane ukuzivikela ukuthi angashabalaliswa yiCOVID-19 kanye nokuzithuthukisa ngezonmotho wawo ukuze avikeleke ezinqinambeni ezidalwa yiCOVID-19 ngokusabalala kwayo okungalawuleki esifundeni sakwaZuluNatali.

Umcwaningo

Ucwaningo luhlelwa kanzulu maqondana ngenkinga okubhekwane nazo kusetshenziswa isayensi ukuthola isixhazululo. Kulolucwaningo uyacelwa ukuthi ubuze imibuzo uma kukhona ongakuzwisisi noma ongakuqondisisi ngalolucwaningo ukuze ube nokuqonda okunzulu.

Ukuchaza imigomo ezolandelwa kulululucwaningo:

Inhloso ngqangi yalolucwaningo ukuphenya izici ezibucayi ezinomthelela ekusetshenzisweni kwezikundla zokuxhumana njengethulusi lokusiza amabhizinisi amancane ngesikhathi se COVID-19 ukuze angashabalali futhi athuthukiswe umnotho wawo ngalesisikhathi salolubhubhane.

Ngalesisikhathi ucwaningo lunenjongo yokuthola ukuthi amabhizinisi amancane asebenzisa kanjani izinkundla zokuxhumana ukuze angashabalali futhi azithuthukise ngesikhathi se COVID-19 ezindaweni zasemakhaya esifundazweni sakwaZuluNatali. Abuye athole uvo lwabaphathi, nabanikazi kanye nabahwebi bamabhizinisi amancane mayelana nokusetshenziswa kwezinkundla zokuxhumana nokuthi amabhizinisi amancane angashabalali futhi akwazi nokuzithuthukisa ngokwezomnotho wawo ngesikhathi seCOVID-19 ezindaweni zasemakhaya esifundeni sakwaZuluNatali.

Sibuye sithole nomthelela weCOVID-19 emabhizinisini amancane mayelana nokungashabalali kwayo kanye nokuzithuthukisa kwawo kwezomnotho wawo ngesikhathi salolubhubhane. Zizobuya sifune ukuthola amacebo okukhangisa angasetshenziswa amabhizinisi amancane ukuze angashabalali futhi abuye adlondlobale kwezomnotho ngalesisikhathi sobhubhane.

Lokhu kuthathelwa ekudlondlobaleni kweCOVID-19 engalawuleki ebhekene namabhizimisi amancane asencindezini yemali enomthelela ekusebenzeni kwenqubo mgomo yamabhizinisi abo usuku nosuku.

Ngalokhu okushiwo ngaphezulu niyacelwa ukuba nigcwalise loluhlu lwemibuzo equkethwe ezigabeni A kanye no B ngezansi. Loluhlu lwemibuzo liqoshwe ngendlela yokuthi ingakwazi ukuphendulwa ngemizuzu engamashumi amathathu nanhlanu (35 minutes). Ababanikazi, abaphathi kanye nabahwebi bamabhizinisi amancane esifundeni sakwaZuluNatali bayacelwa ukuba bagcwalise uhlu lwemibuzo.

Niyaziswa ukuthi awuphoqiwe ukuba ingxenye yalolucwaningo. Uvumelekile ukuhoxa noma inini kulolucwaningo uma ufisa. Uma ufisa ungashiya eminye imibuzo uyayiphendulanga. Uyaziswa ukuthi ayikho impendulo okuyothiwa ishaya emhlolweni noma ayishayi emhlolweni, inqobo nje uma unikeza impendulo ehambisana nemizwa yakho.

Uma uhlu lwemibuzo seligcwalisiwe njengoba lukhonjiswe ezigabeni A naku B, imiphumela yakho iyocuchungulwa bese isetshenziswa ukwakha imodeli yezinkundla zokuxhumana ezobuye iphakamiswe ukuba isetshenziswa ngamabhizinisi amancane njengethulusi ngesikhathi sobhubhane. Lokhu kuyobe kwenziwa ngenhloso yokunikeza umhlahlandlela wokusiza amabhizinisi amancane ukuba angashabalali, abuye azikhulise ukuze akwazi ukugcineka ukuza abe nesimo ezigculisayo ngakwezezimali kwezamabhizinisi abo ngezikhathi sesimo esiyingcuphe seCOVID-19 ezindaweni zasemakhaya esifundeni sakwaZuluNatali.

Izithiyo eziyamaniswa nocwaningo:

Azikho izithiyo ezaziwayo kulolucwaningo ngokuthintana, ngezengqondo ngezobudlelwano ngezomnotho. Izimpendulo zakho ziyogcinwa ziyifihlo futhi zingadalulwanga kwabanye mayelana nalolucwaningo. Neminininingwane eqondene nawe iyogcinwa iyimfihlo eyosetshenziselwa kulolucwaningo kuphela njengoba ikhonjiswe kusigaba A ngezansi. Uma umcwaningi efuna ukusebensisa imininingwane yakho kwenye inhloso engahambelani nocwaningo uyocela imvumo kuwe.

Ukuhoxisa ocwaningweni:

Ngiyacela ukuthatha lelithuba ngikwazisa ukuthi uvumelekile ukuhoxa kulolucwaningo noma ngasiphi isikhathi. Awuphoqiwe ukuzihlangasisa ngalolucwaningo. Uyaziswa ukuthi imininingwane yakho ezoqoqwa ngalolucwaningo izosetshenziswa kuphela ngokufeza inhloso yalolucwaningo.

Izingxwephezelo zocwaningo:

Imiphumela yalolucwaningo ihlose ukwakha futhi iphakamise imodeli yezinkundla zokuxhumana eyithulusi lokusiza ukuthi amabhizinisi amancane angashabalali njengamazolo futhi akwazi ukuzithuthukisa kwezomnotho wawo ngesikhathi seCOVID-19 ezindaweni zasemakhaya esifundazweni sakwaZuluNatali. Lemodeli izosiza abaphathi bamabhizinisi amancane kanye nabanikazi nabahwebi bamabhizinisi amancane ukuthi benze umhlahlandela ozosiza ukwenza isinqumo mayelana nokungashabalali kwamabhizinisi amancane futhi athuthukiswe kwezomnotho wawo ukuze abe nesimo sezimali zawo ezigculisayo kwezamabhizinisi abo esikhathini seCOVID-19 ezindaweni zasemakhaya esifundeni sakwaZuluNatali.

Umhlomulo:

Awukho umhlomulo ozowuthola ngokuba ingxenye yalolucwaningo. Lolucwaningo luhlose ukusiza osomabhizinisi abancane ezindaweni zasemakhaya esifundeni Sa KwaZulu-Natali ukuze kukwazi ukuvikelwa ukushabalala futhi kuqikelelwe ukuthi amabhizinisi amancane iyazithuthukisa kwezomnotho wawo.

Izindleko zocwaningo:

Ngicela ukukwazisa ukuthi azikho izindleko zokuzimbandakanya nalolucwaningo uyacelwa ukuthi uphendule imibuzo ngendlela ozizwa ngayo ngaphakathi.

Umcwaningo luyimfihlo:

Uyaziswa ukuthi akusiyona impoqo ukuzimbandakanya nocwaningo futhi akufanele ubhale amagama akho uma ugcalisa uhlu lwemibuzo. Izimpendulo zakho angeke zidalulwe kwabanye ziyosetshenziswa ocwaningweni kuphela. Azikho izimpendulo ezishaya emhlolweni nezingashayi emhlolweni. Uyosipha impendulo okholelwa kuyo.

Imiphumela yocwaningo:

Uma ufuna imiphumela yocwaningo uzokwazi ukuyithola emthonjeni wokugcina ucwaningo yase eThekwini eNyunivesi yobuchwepheshe. Emva kwezinyanga ezingamashumi amabili nambili emva kocwaningo ungayithola imiphumela yocwaningo emthonjeni wokugcina ucwaningo lwase Nyunivesi.

Ukulimala okuyamaniswa nocwaningo:

Akukho ukulimala okucike ocwaningweni ngoba uyonxuswa ukuthi ugcalisa uhlu lwemibuzo kuphela njengoba lukhonjiswe ezigabeni eziku A naku B ngezansi. Ukugcalisa uhlu lwemibuzo kuthatha imizuzu engamashumi amathathu nanhlanu ngaphandle kokuthola izingqinamba zomzimba, zomqondo ezokuxhumana kanye nezomnotho.

Ukugcina kwemininingwane yocwaningo:

Uhlu lwemibuzo egcwalisiwe iyogcinwa endaweni ephephile yokugcina imininingwane isikhathi esiyiminyaka emihlanu. Emva kweminyaka emihlanu imininingwane iyosuswa unomphele. Amarekhodi elekthronikhi azogcinwa electronical iminyaka emihlanu. Emva kwalokhu iyobe isiyasuswa inomphela.

Abantu abayothintwa uma kunezingqinamba noma imibuzo ngocwaningo ilaba abalandelayo:

Umeluleki wocwaningo: Dr Lawrence Mpele Lekhanya, inombolo yocingo: 031 373 5835 noma lawrencel@dut.ac.za

Umsizi womeluleki wocwaningo: Dr Emem Anwana, inombolo yocingo: 0313735469 noma emema@dut.ac.za

Umcwaningi: Godfrey Sabelo Mpungose, inombolo yocingo: 073 364 9116, noma sabelo.mpungose@gmail.com

noma uphiko locwaningo olubhekene nokuziphatha nayelana nocwaningo, inombolo yocingo: 031 373 **2375**.

Izikhalo mayelana nocwaningo zingabikwa kumqondisi wocwaningo kumnyango wocwaningo weziqu zeziqu wokusekela abafundi u Dr L Linganiso ongathintwa ngalemininingwane: 031 373 2577 noma researchdirector@dut.ac.za

Isithasiselo B: Uhlu lwemibuzo

Uhlu lwemibuzo luqondiswe kubanikazi, abaphathi kanye nabahwebi bamabhizinisi amancane mayelana nokusetshenziswa kwezikundla zokuxhumana njengethulusi ngesikhathi seCOVID-19 ngamabhizinisi amancane ezindaweni zasemakhaya esifundazweni sa KwaZulu-Natali. Uhlu lwemibuzo luhlukaniswe izigaba ezimbili eziwu **A** kanye no **B** okuzothatha imizuzu engamashumi amathathu nantathu

Bengicela ngokukhulu ukuzithoba nigcwalise uhlu lwemibuzo emayelana nokusetshenziswa kwezikundla zokuxhumana njengethulusi ngesikhathi seCOVID-19 ngamabhizinisi amancane ezindaweni zasemakhaya esifundazweni sakwaZulu-Natali.

SECTION A: ULWAZI LOMLANDO WOKUPHILA

Sicela uthikhe ngo X okukodwa okuyikho emabhokisini alandelayo

1.Ngicela usho isikhundla sakho ebhizinisini

Umnikazi webhizinisi	1
Uyimenenja yebhizinisi	2
Okunye, ngicela uchaze: ______________________	3

2. Ngicela usho ukuthi ibhizinisi ineminyaka emingakhi

0 -4 iminyaka	1
5 -8 iminyaka	2
9-12 iminyaka	3
13 – 16 iminyaka	4
Ngaphezulu ku16 yeminyaka, Ngicela uchaze: _____________	5

3. Ngicela usho ubulini bakho

Ngingowesilisa	1
Ngingowesifazane	2

4. Ngicela usho iqembu lobudala

Kusuka ku 18 kuya ku 24 yeminyaka	1
Kusuka ku 25 kuya ku 31 yeminyaka	2
Kusuka ku 32 kuya ku 38 yeminyaka	3
Kusuka ku 32 kuya ku 38 yeminyaka	
Kusuka ku 49 yeminyaka nangaphezulu Sicela uchaze) _______________________	5

5. Ngicela usho ibala lohlobo lwakho

UngumAfrica	1
Uyi Lawu	2
UnguMndiya	3
UnguMlungu	4
Abanye Sicela uchaze) _______________________	5

6. Ngicela usho iziqu zemfundo yakho ephakeme

I-National Diploma	1
Iziqu Zobuchwepheshe	2
iBachelor of Honours	3
Iziqu zeMasters	4
Iziqu zobuDokotela	
Okunye, ngicela uchaze: _____________________	5

7.Ngiccela usho uhlobo lwebhizinisi lakho

Ezezimali	1
Ezokukhiqiza	2
IBhizinisi yesevisi	3
Ezokumbiwa phansi	4

Okunye, ngicela uchaze: ___________________	5

8. Ngicela usho ubunikazi bebhizinisi lakho

Umnikazi oyedwa	1
Umphathibhizinisi ongumnini bhizinisi	2
Umphathibhizinisi ongumnini bhizinisi	3
Inkampani	4
Okunye, ngicela uchaze: ______________________________	5

9. Ngicela usho ukuthi imali yokusekela ibhizinisi ithathwaphi

Iphuma esikhwameni sebhizinisi	1
Imalimboleko yasebhanki	2
Okunye, ngicela uchaze**:** ____________	3

10. Ngicela usho isizathu sokuqala ibhizinisi

Ukungasebenzi	1
Ukuvikela ububha	2
Ukufuna imali eyengeziwe	3

11. Ngicela usho ukuthi ibhizinisi lakho likuphi

Vryheid	1
Ulundi	2
Dundee	3
Empangeni	4
Richards Bay	5
Newcastle	6
Ixopo (ubuhlebezwe)	7
Okunye, ngicela uchaze:	8

________________________	

12. Ngicela usho ububanzi bokuhweba kwebhizinisi lakho

Ububanzi kokuhweba kwebhizinisi	
iBhizinisi lendawo	1
iBhizinisi likazwelonke	2
iBhizinisi Lamazwe Ngamazwe	3
Okunye, ngicela uchaze: ____________________	4

ISIGABA B: Izinkundla zokuxhumana njengethulusi amabhizinisi amancane avikela ukuthi angashabalali futhi akhule ngokwezomnotho wawo ngesikhathi sobhubhane leCOVID-19

Izitatimende ezikoluhlu lwemibuzo zihlukaniswe izingxenye ezinhlanu. Uyacelwa usho ukuthi uyavuma noma awuvumi. Uyacelwa ukuthi uthikhe isikhala esihambisana nawe.

Isikali Sokukala

1=Angivumi kakhulu

2=Angivumi

3= Anginambono

4= Ngiyavuma

13. Izici ezinomthelela ekusetshenzisweni kwezikundla zokuxhumana njengethulusi lokuvikela ukushabalala kanye lokuthuthukisa kwamabhizinisi amancane ngezikhathi zobhubhane lweCOVID-19.

No	**Isitatimende**	**Isikali Sokulinganisa**				
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
13.1	Kunokuntuleka kwamakhono ezobuchwepheshe kumabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya ukusebenzisa izinkundla zokuxhumana ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
13.2	Kunokuntuleka kokumbulekelwa ngolwazi kwezinkundla zokuxhumana amabhizinisi amancane emakhaya ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
13.3	Kunokuntuleka kwamava okuphatha kwamabhizinisi amancane kunomuthelela ekusetshenzisweni kwezinkundla zokuxhumana ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					

13.4	Kunokuntuleka kwezezinsiza zezimali kwamabhizinisi amancane ekusetshenzisweni kobuchwepheshe obusha njengezinkundla zokuxhumana ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
13.5	Kunokushoda kwengqalasizinda kumabhizinisi amancane ukusebenzisa izinkundla zokuxhumana ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
13.6	Kunokushoda komxhumano lweinthanethi kumabhizinisi amancane ukusebenzisa izinkundla zokuxhumana ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
13.7	Kunokushoda kwengqalasizinda yezobuchwepheshe kosomabhizinisi abancane basemakhaya ukusebenzisa izinkundla zokuxhumana ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
13.8	Ukuncintisana okunamandla emakethe kuphoqe osomabhizinisi abancane basemakhaya ukuthi basebenzise izinkundla zokuxhumana ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
13.9	Ingcindezi yamakhasimende iphoqe osomabhizinisi abancane basemakhaya ukuthi basebenzise izinkundla zokuxhumana ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
13.10	Ububanzi bobukhulu bemakethe buphoqe osomabhizinisi abancane basemakhaya ukuthi basebenzise izinkundla zokuxhumana ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
13.11	Uhulumeni usekele osomabhizinisi abancane basemakhaya ngokusebenzisa izinkundla zokuxhumana ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
13.12	Kunokuntuleka kweinthanethi kosomabhizinisi abancane basemakhaya ukuthi bakwazi ukusebenzisa izinkundla zokuxhumana ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
13.13	Kunokushoda kwamandla kosomabhizinisi abancane basemakhaya ukumelana nezindleko zeinthanethi yokusebenzisa izinkundla zokuxhumana ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
13.14	Kunokushoda kwe-broadband ye-inthanethi kosomabhizinisi abancane basemakhaya ekusebensiseni izinkundla zokuxhumana ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
13.15	Izindleko zenkundla yezokuxhumana ayigquqguzeli osomabhizinisi basemakhaya ukusebenzisa inkundla yezokuxhumana ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
13.16	Kunokushoda kokuphepha kwe-cyber kosomabhizinisi abancane basemakhaya uma kusetshenziswa izinkundla zokuxhumana kuzodala ukuhlaselwa kwezokuphepha kuinthanethi ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
13.17	Kunokushoda kwezinsiza kusebenza ukusebenzisa izixalululo zokuphepha ku-inthanethi osomabhizinisi abancane basemakhaya uma kusetshenziswa izinkundla zokuxhumana kuzokhuphula amathuba okuhlasela i-inthanethi ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
1318	Imithetho kahulumeni izongqungquzela amabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya ukuqoka kanye nokusebenzisa izinkundla zokuxhumana ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
13.19	Kunokushoda kokuphepha kwelungelo lobunikazi bamabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya okungavumela izimbangi zebhizinisi sizuze ngokusebenzisa imikhiqizo yebhizinisi ngaphandle kwelungelo uma kusetshenziswa izinkundla zokuxhumana ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					

13.20	Ubuncane bamabhizinisi amancane bezoba nomthelela kunzuzo yebhizinisi ekusetshenzisweni kwezinkundla zokuxhumana ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
13.21	Kunokushoda ukwesekwa wumphakathi kwamabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya kunomthelela ekusebenziseni izinkundla zokuxhumana ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID -19					

14. Bungakanani ububanzi amabhizinisi amancane asebenzisa ngayo izinkundla zokuxhumana njengethulusi lwamabhizinisi amancane ukuthi angashabalali futhi athuthuke kwezomnotho wawo ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19

No	**Isitatimende**	**Isikali Sokulinganisa**				
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
14.1	Amabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya asebenzisa i-WhatsApp ukukhulisa ukukhonya kumakhethe yebhizisini ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
14.2	Amabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya asebenzisa i-WhatsApp ukukhangisa imikhiqizo ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
14.3	Amabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya asebenzisa i-WhatsApp ukwandisa ukuthengisa imikhiqizo ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
14.4	Amabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya asebenzisa i-WhatsApp ukudala ukuqwashisa ngemikhiqizo yebhizinisi ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
14.5	Amabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya asebenzisa i-WhatsApp ukugcina amakhasimende amanje ebhizinisi ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
14.6	Amabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya asebenzisa i-WhatsApp ukuthola umbono yekhasimende mayelana ngemikhiqizo yebhizinisi ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
14.7	Ukusethsenziswa kwe-WhatsApp kuyonga kakhulu ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
14.8	Amabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya awakaze asebenzisa i-WhatsApp ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					

15. Ukuqonda kubaphathi, nabanikazi kanye nabahwebi kwamabhizinisi amancane asebenzisa ngayo izinkundla zokuxhumana njengethulusi lwamabhizinisi amancane ukuthi angashabalali futhi athuthuke kwezomnotho wawo ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19

No	**Isitatimende**	**Isikali Sokulinganisa**				
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
15.1	Ukusetshenziswa kwezinkundla zokuxhumana kubonakala kuwusizo ngamabhizinisi amancane ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
15.2	Ukusetshenziswa kwezinkundla zokuxhumana kubonakala kulula ukuzisebenzisa					
15.3	Kunokungathembi kwamabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya ukusetshenziswa izinkundla zokuxhumana ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
15.4	Ukusetshenziswa kwezinkundla zokuxhumana kubonakala kunobungozi kumabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					

15.5	Ukusetshenziswa kwezinkundla zokuxhumana kubonakala kujabulisa amabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					

16. Umthelela wezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19 kumabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya mayelana nokusinda ngokukhulu ngesikhathi salezizinhlekelele

No	Isitatimende	Isikali Sokulinganisa				
		1	2	3	4	5
16.1	Ukusetshenziswa kwezinkundla zokuxhumana kunciphisa izindleko zokusabalaliswa kwemikhiqizo yamabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele seCOVID-19					
16.2	Ukushoda kwesidingo semikhiqizo namasevesi ebhizinisi ngenxa yesimo sezinhlekelele seCOVID-19 kuzongqungquzela amabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya ukuthi asebenzise izinkundla zokuxhumana					
16.3	Isimo sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19 sizongqungquzela amabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya ukuthi ajwayele ukusetshenziswa kwezinkundla zokuxhumana njengethulusi lokuxhumana namakhasimende amaningi					
16.4	Isimo sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19 sinciphisa imali engenayo kumabhizimisi amancane asemakhaya okumthelela omubi ekuqokeni nokusebenzisa izinkundla zokuxhumana ngesikhathi se-COVID-19					

17. Amasu ezinkundla zokuxhumana wokumaketha asesthsenziswe amabhizinisi amancane ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19

No	Isitatimende	Isikali Sokulinganisa				
		1	2	3	4	5
17.1	Izinkundla zokuxhumana ezisetshenziswa amabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya ukuthengisa imikhiqizo kumakhasimende ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
17.2	Izinkundla zokuxhumana ezisetshenziswa amabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya ukwenza zamakhasimende athembeke ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
17.3	Izinkundla zokuxhumana ezisetshenziswa amabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya ukuthola izidingo zamakhasimende kanye nokuxazulula izinkinga zabo ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
17.4	Izinkundla zokuxhumana ezisetshenziswa amabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya ukugcina amakhasimende ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					

18. Amasu okusinda nokukhula asekelwe yizinkundla zokuxhumana zamabhizinisi amancane ukuze angashabalali futhi akhule ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19

No	Isitatimende	Isikali Sokulinganisa				
		1	2	3	4	5
18.1	Amabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya asebenzisa izinkundla zokuxhumana njenge drayivu entsha ngenxa yengcindezi yamakhasimende ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
18.2	Amabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya asebenzisa izinkundla zokuxhumana ngenxa yengcindezi yezimfuno zemakhethe ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
18.3	Amabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya asebenzisa izinkundla zokuxhumana njengemikhuba eqanjwe kabusha ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					
18.4	Izinkundla zokuxhumana siyithuluzi elibalulekile lamabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya lokusinda ukuze angashabalali ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19:					
18.4.1	Asebenzisa izinkundla zokuxhumana ukuze afinyelele kumakhasimende					
18.4.2	Asebenzisa izinkundla zokuxhumana ukuze andise imakethe yamabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya ukwandisa ukuthengisa imikhiqizo uma izwe livalwe thaqa					
18.5	Amabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya afisa esikhathini esizayo ukusebenzisa lamapulatifomu ezinkundla zokuxhumana alandelayo ukubhekana nesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19**:**					
18.5.1	Facebook					
18.5.2	Twitter					
18.5.3	WhatsApp					
18.5.4	Instagram					
18.5.5	You tube					
18.6	Kunokushoda kokusebenziswa kwamapulatifomu ezinkundla zokuxhumana kumabhizinisi amancane asemakhaya ukuxhumana namakhasimende awo ngesikhathi sezinhlekelele zeCOVID-19					

Siyabonga kakhulu ukunikela ngesikhathi sakho ukugcalisa lo luhlu lwemibuzo

Isithasiselo C: Incwadi yemvume

IMVUME

<u>Isihloko socwaningo</u>: Ukusetshezwiswa kwezikundla zokuxhumana njengethulusi lokuthuthukisa amabhizinisi amancane ngesikhathini se COVID-19 ezindaweni zasemakhaya esifundazweni sakwaZuluNatali

Igama lomncwangi: Godfrey Sabelo Mpungose

<u>Isitatimende sesivumelwano sokubabha iqhaza kulolucwaningo:</u>

- ☐ Mina, Sabelo Mpungose ngifisa ukwenza isiqiniseko ukuthi abozoba yingxenye yokuphendula uhlu lwemibuzo busisiwe ngohlobo locwaningo nokuthi lizoqhutshwa kanjani nangeminininingwane mayelana nenzuzo kanjalo nobungozi kulolucwaningo mayelana nesimo nokuziphatha nenombolo yokuvumela lolucwaningo: IREC 020/22,
- ☐ Ngiyitholile, ngayifunda futhi ngayiqondisisa incwadi ebingazisa ukuthi ngiyingxenye yalolucwaningo.
- ☐ Ngasisiwe ukuthi imiphumela yalolucwaningo kanye Nemininingwane yami ethinta ubulili, usuku lokuzalwa, amagama ami, iminyaka yami nokunye okuvundululiwe kuyobe imfihlo kumbiko walolucwaningo.
- ☐ Ngokwezidingo zalolucwaningo ngiyavuma ukuthi idatha eqoqwe kulolucwaningo ingahlaziywa ngohlelo lwekhompuyutha.
- ☐ Noma ngasiphi isikhathi ngaphandle kobandlululo, ngingahoxisa imvumo yami yokuba ingxenye yalolucwaningo.
- ☐ Ngibe nalo ithuba elanele lokubuza imibuzo futhi ngiyavuma ngokwami ukuba ingxenye yalolucwaningo.
- ☐ Ngayaqondisisa ukuthi imiphumela emisha engavela ngesikhathi salolucwaningo engibe yingxenye yalolucwaningo ngivumelekile ukuyithola uma ngiyifuna.

______________________	__________	______	______________
Igama eliphelele lomhlanganyeli kwesokudla izigxivizo zesithupha	**Usuku**	**Isikhathi**	**Isogamete/**

Mina, **Godfrey Sabelo Mpungose** ngiyavuma ukuthi umhlanganyeli walolucwaningo obhalwe ngaphezulu wazisiwe ngohlobo lwalolucwaningo, nokuthi lozokweziwa kanjani kanye nobungozi balolicwaningo.

Igama eliphelele lomcwaningi	**Usuku**	**Isiginesha**
Igama eligcwele likafakazi **(**uma kufanelekile**)**	**usuku**	**Isiginesha**
Igama eligcwele lomqadi osemthethweni	**Usuku**	**Isigenesha**

APPENDIX 4: RESEARCH PROPOSAL APPROVAL LETTER

Professor Fulu G. Netswera

Executive Dean
Faculty of Management Sciences
Durban University of Technology
P O Box 1334, Durban,
4000,South Africa

03 November 2021

Student number: 22176171

Dear Mr G.S. Mpungose

<u>DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN MANAGEMENT SCIENCES: BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION</u>

This serves to confirm the approval of your research proposal by the Faculty Research Committee, at its meeting on **3rd November 2021**, as follows:

1. Research proposal and provisional dissertation title:
The use of social media drive during Covid19 by small, medium and micro enterprisesin rural KwaZulu–Natal

Supervisor: **Dr LM Lekhanya**

Co-supervisor: **Dr E Anwana**

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 ratificationthereof by the Higher Degrees Committee.

2. Research budget to the amount of: **R10 000.00(Masters) / R15 000(DPHIL)**
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. Pleasenote 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. Youmay apply to the Faculty Research Committee for an extension.

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

Please note that the following must be adhered to:

Registration:

1. Ensure 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 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 theEthics requirements and submit to the relevant bodies irrespective of the reviewer'srecommendation.***

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 a PDF signed copy must be

submitted to your supervisor along with the completed and signed **PG 7** form, **FMS Checklist** and signed **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 to be sent upon HDC ratification
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 2020 General Rule Book and the Postgraduate Students' Guide 2020 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,

Dr Melanie Lourens obo the FRC Chair/Executive Dean: Professor Netswera Faculty of Management Sciences

APPENDIX 5: ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

Institutional Research Ethics Committee Research and Postgraduate Support DDUT-IRECtorate2nd Floor, Berwyn Court
Gate 1, Steve Biko Campus Durban University of Technology
P O Box 1334, Durban, South Africa, 4001Tel: 031 373 2375
Email: lavishad@dut.ac.za
http://www.dut.ac.za/research/institutional_research_ethics
www.dut.ac.za

23 February 2023

Mr G S Mpungose
P.O. Box
10097
Vryheid
3100

Dear Mr Mpungose

The use of social media drive during COVID19 by small, medium and micro enterprises in rural KwaZulu-Natal

Ethical Clearance number IREC 020/22

The DUT-Institutional Research Ethics Committee acknowledges receipt of your final datacollection tool for review.

We are pleased to inform you that the data collection tool has been approved.

Kindly ensure that participants used for the pilot study are not part of the main study.

Please note that FULL APPROVAL is granted to your research proposal. You may proceed withdata collection.

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 DUT-IREC according to the DUT-IREC Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's).

Please note that any deviations from the approved proposal require the approval of the DUT-IREC as outlined in the DUT-IREC SOP's.

Yours Sincerely,

Prof J K Adam

Chairperson: DUT-IREC

APPENDIX 6: RELIABILITY TEST

Reliability Statistics

		N of items	Cronbach's Alpha
B13	Factors influencing the use of social media for rural SMMEs survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis	21	0.985
B14	The extent in which the rural SMMEs use social media drive for survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis	8	0.948
B15	The perception of rural SMMEs owners, managers, and entrepreneurs on the use of social media for survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis	5	0.928
B16	The impact of Covid-19 crisis on rural SMMEs use of social media for their survival and growth	4	0.878
B17	The social media marketing strategies for rural SMMEs survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis	4	0.888
B18	The use of social media as a strategy for rural SMMEs survival and growth during future pandemics	11	0.952

KMO and Bartlett's test of Sphericity

		Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	**Bartlett's Test of Sphericity**		
			Approx. Chi-Square	**df**	**Sig.**
B13	Factors influencing the use of social media for rural SMMEs survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis	0.989	9629.259	210	0.000

B14	The extent in which the rural SMMEs use social media drive for survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis	0,957	2499.589	28	0.000
B15	The perception of rural SMMEs owners, managers, and entrepreneurs on the use of social media for survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis	0.900	1406.986	10	<0.001
B16	The impact of Covid-19 crisis on rural SMMEs use of social media for their survival and growth	0.830	803.793	6	<0.001
B17	The social media marketing strategies for rural SMMEs survival and growth during Covid-19 crisis	0.838	821.315	6	<0.001
B18	The use of social media as a strategy for rural SMMEs survival and growth during future pandemics	0.965	3219.852	55	0.000

APPENDIX 7: FREQUENCY TABLES

Position

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SMMEs Owner	339	90.6	90.6	90.6
	SMMEs Manager	35	9.4	9.4	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Years of existence

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0-4 years	101	27.0	27.0	27.0
	5-8 years	164	43.9	43.9	70.9
	9-12 years	93	24.9	24.9	95.7
	13-16 years	14	3.7	3.7	99.5
	Older than 16 years	2	.5	.5	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	233	62.3	62.3	62.3
	Female	141	37.7	37.7	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Age group

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-24 years	167	44.7	44.7	44.7
	25-31 years	103	27.5	27.5	72.2
	32-38 years	24	6.4	6.4	78.6
	39-48 years	77	20.6	20.6	99.2
	49 years and more	3	.8	.8	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Race

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	African	368	98.4	98.4	98.4
	Coloured	4	1.1	1.1	99.5
	Indian	1	.3	.3	99.7
	White	1	.3	.3	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Qualification

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	National Diploma	184	49.2	49.2	49.2
	B Tech	80	21.4	21.4	70.6
	Honours	8	2.1	2.1	72.7
	Masters	1	.3	.3	73.0

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	PhD	1	.3	.3	73.3
	Others	100	26.7	26.7	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Nature of business

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Financial	26	7.0	7.0	7.0
	Manufacturing	20	5.3	5.3	12.3
	Services	221	59.1	59.1	71.4
	Mining	74	19.8	19.8	91.2
	Others	33	8.8	8.8	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Ownership

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Sole Proprietor	115	30.7	30.7	30.7
	Partnership	29	7.8	7.8	38.5
	Manager of the business and co-owned	3	.8	.8	39.3
	Corporation	173	46.3	46.3	85.6
	Others	54	14.4	14.4	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Source of finance

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Own Capital	341	91.2	91.2	91.2
	Bank Loan	31	8.3	8.3	99.5
	Others	2	.5	.5	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Reason

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Unemployment	219	58.6	58.6	58.6
	Alleviation of Poverty	149	39.8	39.8	98.4
	Extra Income	6	1.6	1.6	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Business location

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Vryheid	244	65.2	65.2	65.2
	Ulundi	33	8.8	8.8	74.1
	Dundee	32	8.6	8.6	82.6
	Empangeni	23	6.1	6.1	88.8
	Richards Bay	20	5.3	5.3	94.1
	Newcastle	7	1.9	1.9	96.0
	Ixopo (Ubuhlebezwe)	15	4.0	4.0	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Business scope

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Local	372	99.5	99.5	99.5
	National	2	.5	.5	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Technical

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	35	9.4	9.4	9.4
	Disagree	37	9.9	9.9	19.3
	Neutral	38	10.2	10.2	29.4
	Agree	217	58.0	58.0	87.4
	Strongly agree	47	12.6	12.6	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Awareness

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	36	9.6	9.6	9.6
	Disagree	40	10.7	10.7	20.3
	Neutral	32	8.6	8.6	28.9
	Agree	189	50.5	50.5	79.4
	Strongly agree	77	20.6	20.6	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Managerial competencies

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	34	9.1	9.1	9.1
	Disagree	40	10.7	10.7	19.8
	Neutral	35	9.4	9.4	29.1
	Agree	216	57.8	57.8	86.9
	Strongly agree	49	13.1	13.1	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Financial

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	35	9.4	9.4	9.4
	Disagree	41	11.0	11.0	20.3
	Neutral	39	10.4	10.4	30.7
	Agree	183	48.9	48.9	79.7
	Strongly agree	76	20.3	20.3	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Infrastructure

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	37	9.9	9.9	9.9
	Disagree	36	9.6	9.6	19.5
	Neutral	43	11.5	11.5	31.0
	Agree	187	50.0	50.0	81.0

	Strongly agree	71	19.0	19.0	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Internet connectivity

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	40	10.7	10.7	10.7
	Disagree	32	8.6	8.6	19.3
	Neutral	40	10.7	10.7	29.9
	Agree	178	47.6	47.6	77.5
	Strongly agree	84	22.5	22.5	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Technology infrastructure

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	37	9.9	9.9	9.9
	Disagree	36	9.6	9.6	19.5
	Neutral	34	9.1	9.1	28.6
	Agree	176	47.1	47.1	75.7
	Strongly agree	91	24.3	24.3	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Competitive environments

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	38	10.2	10.2	10.2
	Disagree	35	9.4	9.4	19.5
	Neutral	53	14.2	14.2	33.7
	Agree	173	46.3	46.3	79.9
	Strongly agree	75	20.1	20.1	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Customer satisfaction

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	37	9.9	9.9	9.9
	Disagree	33	8.8	8.8	18.7
	Neutral	59	15.8	15.8	34.5
	Agree	186	49.7	49.7	84.2
	Strongly agree	59	15.8	15.8	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Market scope

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	39	10.4	10.4	10.4
	Disagree	33	8.8	8.8	19.3
	Neutral	53	14.2	14.2	33.4
	Agree	191	51.1	51.1	84.5

	Strongly agree	58	15.5	15.5	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Government support

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	37	9.9	9.9	9.9
	Disagree	34	9.1	9.1	19.0
	Neutral	53	14.2	14.2	33.2
	Agree	180	48.1	48.1	81.3
	Strongly agree	70	18.7	18.7	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Availability of internet

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	35	9.4	9.4	9.4
	Disagree	34	9.1	9.1	18.4
	Neutral	41	11.0	11.0	29.4
	Agree	183	48.9	48.9	78.3
	Strongly agree	81	21.7	21.7	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Affordability of internet

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	39	10.4	10.4	10.4
	Disagree	36	9.6	9.6	20.1
	Neutral	46	12.3	12.3	32.4
	Agree	178	47.6	47.6	79.9
	Strongly agree	75	20.1	20.1	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Broadband internet

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	39	10.4	10.4	10.4
	Disagree	34	9.1	9.1	19.5
	Neutral	37	9.9	9.9	29.4
	Agree	192	51.3	51.3	80.7
	Strongly agree	72	19.3	19.3	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Cost

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	34	9.1	9.1	9.1
	Disagree	39	10.4	10.4	19.5
	Neutral	41	11.0	11.0	30.5
	Agree	185	49.5	49.5	79.9
	Strongly agree	75	20.1	20.1	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Cyber security

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	40	10.7	10.7	10.7
	Disagree	35	9.4	9.4	20.1
	Neutral	38	10.2	10.2	30.2
	Agree	178	47.6	47.6	77.8
	Strongly agree	83	22.2	22.2	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Cyber security solutions

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	37	9.9	9.9	9.9
	Disagree	35	9.4	9.4	19.3
	Neutral	39	10.4	10.4	29.7
	Agree	188	50.3	50.3	79.9
	Strongly agree	75	20.1	20.1	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Regulations

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	35	9.4	9.4	9.4
	Disagree	38	10.2	10.2	19.5
	Neutral	45	12.0	12.0	31.6
	Agree	181	48.4	48.4	79.9
	Strongly agree	75	20.1	20.1	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Patent security

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	36	9.6	9.6	9.6
	Disagree	37	9.9	9.9	19.5
	Neutral	46	12.3	12.3	31.8
	Agree	183	48.9	48.9	80.7
	Strongly agree	72	19.3	19.3	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Business profit

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	35	9.4	9.4	9.4
	Disagree	38	10.2	10.2	19.5
	Neutral	42	11.2	11.2	30.7
	Agree	191	51.1	51.1	81.8
	Strongly agree	68	18.2	18.2	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Social support

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	36	9.6	9.6	9.6
	Disagree	36	9.6	9.6	19.3
	Neutral	37	9.9	9.9	29.1
	Agree	183	48.9	48.9	78.1
	Strongly agree	82	21.9	21.9	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Dominance

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	119	31.8	31.8	31.8
	Disagree	187	50.0	50.0	81.8
	Neutral	26	7.0	7.0	88.8
	Agree	26	7.0	7.0	95.7
	Strongly agree	16	4.3	4.3	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

WhatsApp for product marketing

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	105	28.1	28.1	28.1
	Disagree	207	55.3	55.3	83.4
	Neutral	19	5.1	5.1	88.5
	Agree	31	8.3	8.3	96.8
	Strongly agree	12	3.2	3.2	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

WhatsApp to increase sales

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	88	23.5	23.5	23.5
	Disagree	221	59.1	59.1	82.6
	Neutral	20	5.3	5.3	88.0
	Agree	28	7.5	7.5	95.5
	Strongly agree	17	4.5	4.5	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

WhatsApp for product awareness

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	92	24.6	24.6	24.6
	Disagree	214	57.2	57.2	81.8
	Neutral	24	6.4	6.4	88.2
	Agree	30	8.0	8.0	96.3
	Strongly agree	14	3.7	3.7	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

WhatsApp to keep customers

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	109	29.1	29.1	29.1
	Disagree	202	54.0	54.0	83.2
	Neutral	18	4.8	4.8	88.0
	Agree	27	7.2	7.2	95.2
	Strongly agree	18	4.8	4.8	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

WhatsApp for customer's feedback

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	123	32.9	32.9	32.9
	Disagree	188	50.3	50.3	83.2
	Neutral	21	5.6	5.6	88.8
	Agree	28	7.5	7.5	96.3
	Strongly agree	14	3.7	3.7	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

WhatsApp a cost-effective measure

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	101	27.0	27.0	27.0
	Disagree	212	56.7	56.7	83.7
	Neutral	18	4.8	4.8	88.5
	Agree	25	6.7	6.7	95.2
	Strongly agree	18	4.8	4.8	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

WhatsApp for networking

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	124	33.2	33.2	33.2
	Disagree	171	45.7	45.7	78.9
	Neutral	34	9.1	9.1	88.0
	Agree	32	8.6	8.6	96.5
	Strongly agree	13	3.5	3.5	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Perceived useful

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	90	24.1	24.1	24.1
	Disagree	203	54.3	54.3	78.3
	Neutral	35	9.4	9.4	87.7
	Agree	35	9.4	9.4	97.1
	Strongly agree	11	2.9	2.9	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Perceived easy to use

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	78	20.9	20.9	20.9
	Disagree	224	59.9	59.9	80.7
	Neutral	23	6.1	6.1	86.9
	Agree	35	9.4	9.4	96.3
	Strongly agree	14	3.7	3.7	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Trust

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	104	27.8	27.8	27.8
	Disagree	192	51.3	51.3	79.1
	Neutral	29	7.8	7.8	86.9
	Agree	35	9.4	9.4	96.3
	Strongly agree	14	3.7	3.7	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Perceived not risky

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	115	30.7	30.7	30.7
	Disagree	188	50.3	50.3	81.0
	Neutral	22	5.9	5.9	86.9
	Agree	35	9.4	9.4	96.3
	Strongly agree	14	3.7	3.7	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Perceived enjoyable

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	78	20.9	20.9	20.9
	Disagree	223	59.6	59.6	80.5
	Neutral	25	6.7	6.7	87.2
	Agree	26	7.0	7.0	94.1
	Strongly agree	22	5.9	5.9	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Distribution cost

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	90	24.1	24.1	24.1
	Disagree	234	62.6	62.6	86.6
	Neutral	22	5.9	5.9	92.5
	Agree	18	4.8	4.8	97.3
	Strongly agree	10	2.7	2.7	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Demand for products & services

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	94	25.1	25.1	25.1
	Disagree	235	62.8	62.8	88.0
	Neutral	17	4.5	4.5	92.5
	Agree	19	5.1	5.1	97.6
	Strongly agree	9	2.4	2.4	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Tool

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	94	25.1	25.1	25.1
	Disagree	236	63.1	63.1	88.2
	Neutral	16	4.3	4.3	92.5
	Agree	20	5.3	5.3	97.9
	Strongly agree	8	2.1	2.1	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Revenue

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	144	38.5	38.5	38.5
	Disagree	178	47.6	47.6	86.1
	Neutral	27	7.2	7.2	93.3
	Agree	17	4.5	4.5	97.9
	Strongly agree	8	2.1	2.1	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Sell products

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	108	28.9	28.9	28.9
	Disagree	222	59.4	59.4	88.2
	Neutral	18	4.8	4.8	93.0
	Agree	19	5.1	5.1	98.1
	Strongly agree	7	1.9	1.9	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Branding

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	132	35.3	35.3	35.3
	Disagree	204	54.5	54.5	89.8
	Neutral	12	3.2	3.2	93.0
	Agree	18	4.8	4.8	97.9
	Strongly agree	8	2.1	2.1	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Customer needs and complaints

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	138	36.9	36.9	36.9
	Disagree	198	52.9	52.9	89.8
	Neutral	13	3.5	3.5	93.3
	Agree	12	3.2	3.2	96.5
	Strongly agree	13	3.5	3.5	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Retain customers

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	115	30.7	30.7	30.7
	Disagree	215	57.5	57.5	88.2
	Neutral	19	5.1	5.1	93.3
	Agree	17	4.5	4.5	97.9
	Strongly agree	8	2.1	2.1	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Customer pressure

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	13	3.5	3.5	3.5
	Disagree	12	3.2	3.2	6.7
	Neutral	31	8.3	8.3	15.0
	Agree	233	62.3	62.3	77.3
	Strongly agree	85	22.7	22.7	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Market demand

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	11	2.9	2.9	2.9
	Disagree	14	3.7	3.7	6.7
	Neutral	22	5.9	5.9	12.6
	Agree	229	61.2	61.2	73.8
	Strongly agree	98	26.2	26.2	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Innovative practice

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	8	2.1	2.1	2.1
	Disagree	17	4.5	4.5	6.7
	Neutral	28	7.5	7.5	14.2
	Agree	227	60.7	60.7	74.9
	Strongly agree	94	25.1	25.1	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Penetrate market

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	14	3.7	3.7	3.7
	Disagree	13	3.5	3.5	7.2
	Neutral	17	4.5	4.5	11.8
	Agree	215	57.5	57.5	69.3
	Strongly agree	115	30.7	30.7	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Increase sales

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	16	4.3	4.3	4.3
	Disagree	10	2.7	2.7	7.0
	Neutral	19	5.1	5.1	12.0
	Agree	239	63.9	63.9	75.9
	Strongly agree	90	24.1	24.1	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Facebook

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	13	3.5	3.5	3.5
	Disagree	13	3.5	3.5	7.0
	Neutral	17	4.5	4.5	11.5
	Agree	222	59.4	59.4	70.9
	Strongly agree	109	29.1	29.1	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Twitter

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	13	3.5	3.5	3.5
	Disagree	11	2.9	2.9	6.4
	Neutral	18	4.8	4.8	11.2
	Agree	251	67.1	67.1	78.3
	Strongly agree	81	21.7	21.7	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

WhatsApp

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	11	2.9	2.9	2.9
	Disagree	13	3.5	3.5	6.4
	Neutral	13	3.5	3.5	9.9
	Agree	198	52.9	52.9	62.8
	Strongly agree	139	37.2	37.2	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Instagram

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	17	4.5	4.5	4.5
	Disagree	8	2.1	2.1	6.7
	Neutral	19	5.1	5.1	11.8
	Agree	238	63.6	63.6	75.4
	Strongly agree	92	24.6	24.6	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

YouTube

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	13	3.5	3.5	3.5
	Disagree	12	3.2	3.2	6.7
	Neutral	22	5.9	5.9	12.6
	Agree	235	62.8	62.8	75.4
	Strongly agree	92	24.6	24.6	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

Interact with customers

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	14	3.7	3.7	3.7
	Disagree	11	2.9	2.9	6.7
	Neutral	17	4.5	4.5	11.2
	Agree	228	61.0	61.0	72.2
	Strongly agree	104	27.8	27.8	100.0
	Total	374	100.0	100.0	

APPENDIX 8: FACTOR ANALYSIS

B13

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.989
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	9629.259
	Df	210
	Sig.	.000

Component Matrix[a]

	Component 1
Lack of technical skills affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	.883
Lack of social media awareness affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	.893
Lack of managerial competencies affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	.889
Lack of financial resources affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	.884
Lack of infrastructure affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	.876
Lack of internet connectivity affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	.885
Lack of technology infrastructure affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	.893
Competitive environments influence rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	.854
Customer satisfaction influence rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	.847
Large market scope influence rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	.862

Poor government support affects rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	.852
Lack of availability of internet affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	.876
Lack of affordability of internet affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	.882
Lack of broadband internet affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	.894
High social media cost affects rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	.863
Lack of cyber security affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	.890
Lack of resources to implement cyber security solutions affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	.880
Inadequate government regulations affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	.856
Lack of patent security affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	.884
Low business profit due to the small size of rural SMMEs affect their use of social media during Covid-19 crisis	.873
Lack of social support affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	.879

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 1 components extracted.

B14

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.957
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2499.589
	Df	28
	Sig.	.000

Component Matrix[a]

	Component 1
Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to increase dominance in the market during Covid-19 crisis	.849
Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to market their products during Covid-19 crisis	.869
Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to increase sales during Covid-19 crisis	.872
Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to create an awareness of their product and services during Covid-19 crisis	.867
Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to keep current customers during Covid-19 crisis	.877
Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to receive customer's feedback on existing products during Covid-19 crisis	.859
Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp as a cost-effective measure to communicate during Covid-19 crisis	.877
Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to network with other SMMEs during Covid-19 crisis	.789

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 1 components extracted.

B 15

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.900
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1406.986
	df	10
	Sig.	<,001

Component Matrix[a]

	Component 1
Rural SMMEs perceived social media to be useful during Covid-19 crisis	.858
Rural SMMEs perceived social media to be easy to use during Covid-19 crisis	.887
Rural SMMEs trust the use of social media during Covid-19 crisis	.884
Rural SMMEs perceived the use of social media not risky during Covid-19 crisis	.892
Rural SMMEs perceived the use of social media to be enjoyable during Covid-19 crisis	.885

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 1 components extracted.

B16

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.830
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	803.793
	Df	6
	Sig.	<,001

Component Matrix[a]

	Component 1
Covid-19 crisis influence rural SMMEs to use social media to minimise cost of distribution of products	.875
Covid-19 crisis influence rural SMMEs to use social media to improve demand for their products and services	.881

Covid-19 crisis influence rural SMMEs to adapt and use social media as a tool to reach more customers	.891
Covid-19 crisis influence rural SMMEs to use social media to increase their revenue	.778

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 1 components extracted.

B17

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.838
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	821.315
	Df	6
	Sig.	<,001

Component Matrix[a]

	Component 1
Rural SMMEs used social media to sell products to customers during Covid-19 crisis	.854
Rural SMMEs used social media to create branding during Covid-19 crisis	.875
Rural SMMEs used social media to respond to customer's needs and complaints during Covid-19 crisis	.886
Rural SMMEs used social media to retain customers during Covid-19 crisis	.846

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 1 components extracted.

B18

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.965
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3219.852
	Df	55
	Sig.	.000

Component Matrix[a]

	Component
	1
Rural SMMEs can use social media to overcome customer pressure during a pandemic	.787
Rural SMMEs can use social media to meet market demand during a pandemic	.790
Rural SMMEs can use social media as an innovative practice during a pandemic	.765
Rural SMMEs can use social media to penetrate the market to reach customer during a pandemic	.828
Rural SMMEs can use social media to increase sales of product during a pandemic	.843
Rural SMMEs can use Facebook for their survival and growth in future pandemics	.840
Rural SMMEs can use Twitter for their survival and growth in future pandemics	.858
Rural SMMEs can use WhatsApp for their survival and growth in future pandemics	.841
Rural SMMEs can use Instagram for their survival and growth in future pandemics	.835

Rural SMMEs can use YouTube for their survival and growth in future pandemics	.833
Rural SMMEs can use social media to interact with customers in future pandemics	.821

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 1 components extracted.

APPENDIX 9: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Lack of technical skills affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	3.5455	1.12339
Lack of social media awareness affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	3.6176	1.20134
Lack of managerial competencies affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	3.5508	1.12792
Lack of financial resources affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	3.5989	1.19633
Lack of infrastructure affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	3.5856	1.18837
Lack of internet connectivity affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	3.6257	1.22485
Lack of technology infrastructure affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	3.6631	1.22480

Competitive environments influence rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	3.5668	1.20302
Customer satisfaction influence rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	3.5267	1.15690
Large market scope influence rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	3.5241	1.16849
Poor government support affects rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	3.5668	1.18280
Lack of availability of internet affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	3.6444	1.18718
Lack of affordability of internet affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	3.5722	1.21160
Lack of broadband internet affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	3.5989	1.19857
High social media cost affects rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	3.6096	1.18186

Lack of cyber security affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	3.6123	1.23051
Lack of resources to implement cyber security solutions affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	3.6123	1.19290
Inadequate government regulations affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	3.5963	1.18755
Lack of patent security affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	3.5829	1.18631
Low business profit due to the small size of rural SMMEs affect their use of social media during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	3.5856	1.17247
Lack of social support affect rural SMMEs to use social media during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	3.6390	1.20128
Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to increase dominance in the market during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	2.0187	1.02629
Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to market their products during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	2.0321	.97642

Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to increase sales during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	2.1043	.99453
Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to create an awareness of their product and services during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	2.0909	.98093
Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to keep current customers during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	2.0455	1.03067
Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to receive customer's feedback on existing products during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	1.9893	1.01194
Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp as a cost-effective measure to communicate during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	2.0561	1.00910
Rural SMMEs use WhatsApp to network with other SMMEs during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	2.0348	1.03885
Rural SMMEs perceived social media to be useful during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	2.1283	.97947
Rural SMMEs perceived social media to be easy to use during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	2.1524	.98011
Rural SMMEs trust the use of social media during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	2.0989	1.02951

Rural SMMEs perceived the use of social media not risky during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	2.0508	1.03819
Rural SMMEs perceived the use of social media to be enjoyable during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	2.1738	1.02738
Covid-19 crisis influence rural SMMEs to use social media to minimise cost of distribution of products	374	1.00	5.00	1.9947	.85706
Covid-19 crisis influence rural SMMEs to use social media to improve demand for their products and services	374	1.00	5.00	1.9679	.84703
Covid-19 crisis influence rural SMMEs to adapt and use social media as a tool to reach more customers	374	1.00	5.00	1.9626	.83726
Covid-19 crisis influence rural SMMEs to use social media to increase their revenue	374	1.00	5.00	1.8422	.89935
Rural SMMEs used social media to sell products to customers during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	1.9171	.83879
Rural SMMEs used social media to create branding during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	1.8396	.86389

Rural SMMEs used social media to respond to customer's needs and complaints during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	1.8342	.90533
Rural SMMEs used social media to retain customers during Covid-19 crisis	374	1.00	5.00	1.8984	.85102
Rural SMMEs can use social media to overcome customer pressure during a pandemic	374	1.00	5.00	3.9759	.86762
Rural SMMEs can use social media to meet market demand during a pandemic	374	1.00	5.00	4.0401	.85770
Rural SMMEs can use social media as an innovative practice during a pandemic	374	1.00	5.00	4.0214	.83783
Rural SMMEs can use social media to penetrate the market to reach customer during a pandemic	374	1.00	5.00	4.0802	.90810
Rural SMMEs can use social media to increase sales of product during a pandemic	374	1.00	5.00	4.0080	.88626
Rural SMMEs can use Facebook for their survival and growth in future pandemics	374	1.00	5.00	4.0722	.88637
Rural SMMEs can use Twitter for their survival and growth in future pandemics	374	1.00	5.00	4.0053	.83488

Rural SMMEs can use WhatsApp for their survival and growth in future pandemics	374	1.00	5.00	4.1791	.88326
Rural SMMEs can use Instagram for their survival and growth in future pandemics	374	1.00	5.00	4.0160	.89068
Rural SMMEs can use YouTube for their survival and growth in future pandemics	374	1.00	5.00	4.0187	.86466
Rural SMMEs can use social media to interact with customers in future pandemics	374	1.00	5.00	4.0615	.88112
Valid N (listwise)	374				

APPENDIX 10: CHI-SQUARE TEST

Test Statistics

Construct Key term	Chi-square	df	Asymp. Sig
Technical	339.048[a]	4	<,001
Awareness	235.225[a]	4	<,001
Managerial competencies	335.064[a]	4	<,001
Financial	210.118[a]	4	<,001
Infrastructure	221.241[a]	4	<,001
Internet connectivity	200.385[a]	4	<,001
Technology infrastructure	201.909[a]	4	<,001
Competitive environments	174.556[a]	4	<,001
Customer satisfaction	214.449[a]	4	<,001
Market scope	231.134[a]	4	<,001
Government support	195.973[a]	4	<,001
Internet availability	215.733[a]	4	<,001
Internet affordability	190.733[a]	4	<,001
Broadband internet	242.230[a]	4	<,001
Cost	217.016[a]	4	<,001
Cyber security	198.754[a]	4	<,001
Cyber security solutions	228.727[a]	4	<,001
Regulations	201.936[a]	4	<,001
Patent security	206.936[a]	4	<,001
Business profit	234.797[a]	4	<,001
Social support	216.561[a]	4	<,001
Dominance	304.316[a]	4	<,001
WhatsApp for marketing	365.840[a]	4	<,001
WhatsApp for sales	402.176[a]	4	<,001
WhatsApp for products awareness	373.754[a]	4	<,001
WhatsApp to keep customers	348.754[a]	4	<,001
WhatsApp for customer's feedback	319.770[a]	4	<,001
WhatsApp a cost-effective measure	380.251[a]	4	<,001
WhatsApp for networking	253.888[a]	4	<,001
Perceived useful	319.583[a]	4	<,001
Perceived easy to use	404.209[a]	4	<,001
Trust	293.674[a]	4	<,001
Perceived not risky	300.786[a]	4	<,001

Perceived enjoyable	396.027[a]	4	<,001
Distribution cost	478.460[a]	4	<,001
Demand for products & services	492.203[a]	4	<,001
Tool	498.353[a]	4	<,001
Revenue	341.267[a]	4	<,001
Sell products	450.626[a]	4	<,001
Branding	422.417[a]	4	<,001
Customer's needs and complaints	411.160[a]	4	<,001
Retain customers	430.332[a]	4	<,001
Customer pressure	465.412[a]	4	<,001
Market demand	466.187[a]	4	<,001
Innovative practice	448.219[a]	4	<,001
Penetrate market	429.529[a]	4	<,001
Increase sales	507.524[a]	4	<,001
Facebook	452.096[a]	4	<,001
Twitter	564.182[a]	4	<,001
WhatsApp	414.556[a]	4	<,001
Instagram	505.973[a]	4	<,001
YouTube	488.112[a]	4	<,001
Interact with customers	473.674[a]	4	<,001

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 74.8.

APPENDIX 11: TURNITIN REPORT

PG Mpungose

ORIGINALITY REPORT

0%	0%	0%	0%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	Submitted to North West University Student Paper	<1 %
2	Bvuma, Stella. "An ICT Adoption Framework for Township SMMEs", University of Johannesburg (South Africa), 2021 Publication	<1 %
3	Submitted to University of KwaZulu-Natal Student Paper	<1 %
4	digiresearch.vut.ac.za Internet Source	<1 %
5	Schachtebeck, Chris. "Individual-Level Intrapreneurial Orientation and Organisational Growth in Small and Medium Enterprises", University of Johannesburg (South Africa), 2021 Publication	<1 %
6	"The Implementation of Smart Technologies for Business Success and Sustainability", Springer Science and Business Media LLC, 2023 Publication	<1 %

7	iitk.ac.in Internet Source	<1 %
8	www.saibw.co.za Internet Source	<1 %
9	Harrison, Glynis Jane. "The Mediating Influence of Export Orientation and Innovation Capacity on SME Performance", University of Johannesburg (South Africa), 2023 Publication	<1 %
10	Tlou, Dineo. "Evaluating the Performance of the South African Breweries Foundation Tholoana Enterprise Fund", University of Johannesburg (South Africa), 2021 Publication	<1 %
11	hdl.handle.net Internet Source	<1 %

Exclude quotes	On	Exclude matches	< 10 words
Exclude bibliography	On		

APPENDIX 12: EDITOR'S LETTER

Helen Richter
Advanced Editing, Proofreading
& Copy writing

editassist2023@gmail.com
072 9227221

12 November 2023

To whom it may concern:

CERTIFICATE OF EDITING & AUTHENTICATION

I have proofread and language edited the PhD thesis titled:

"The use of social media during COVID-19 crisis by small, medium and micro enterprises in rural KwaZulu–Natal"
by

Godfrey Sabelo Mpungose

The work is the author's own work, to the best of my knowledge, and is free of spelling, grammar, and structural and stylistic errors.

With thanks.

H. S. Richter (Ms)