

## THE UPTAKE OF DIGITAL MARKETING BY RURAL COMMUNITIES IN FLAGSTAFF, SOUTH AFRICA

Zizipho Noqazo<sup>1</sup>, Elvis Madondo<sup>2\*</sup>, Veena Parboo Rawjee<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Public Relations Management Department, Faculty of Management Sciences, Durban University of Technology, South Africa

<sup>2</sup>Public Relations Management Department, Faculty of Management Sciences, Durban University of Technology, South Africa, [elvismadondo@gmail.com](mailto:elvismadondo@gmail.com)

### Abstract

Retail outlets in rural South African communities are increasingly concerned about sustainability. Many of these outlets are therefore adopting digital marketing as a means to assist with sustainability initiatives. The implementation of digital marketing within this context face challenges. These challenges therefore limit the full potential of digital marketing. This study therefore set out to assess the uptake of digital marketing among consumers in rural Flagstaff. Using a qualitative research approach, data was gathered through five focus-group discussions involving an average of six participants each. Thematic analysis of the data revealed a limited adoption of digital marketing by in Flagstaff, with some consumers admitting to never having used digital devices. The main barriers cited were inadequate internet access due to poor mobile network coverage and the absence of WiFi hotspots. To improve adoption rates, the study recommends enhancing network infrastructure, offering affordable data plans, and improving access to digital devices by rural consumers. These measures may aim to increase the utilisation of digital marketing initiatives within South African retail outlets.

**Keywords:** digital marketing, rural retailers, sustainability, rural consumers, adoption

### Introduction

According to Terblanche *et al.* (2016) retailing in South Africa (SA) is acknowledged as one of the most demanding and fiercely competitive sectors. The market faces intense competition from both local and global brands, highlighting its stature as the 20th largest retail market worldwide (Nabee and Swanepoe, 2021). According to McCallaghan and Heyns (2021), the South African retail environment is notably diverse and dynamic, encompassing both formal and informal retail businesses. Formal retail enterprises, such as Shoprite, Spar, and Mr Price, operate within the legal framework of South Africa, registering with the South African Revenue Services (SARS) and complying with tax regulations on their income. In contrast, informal retail consists of smaller, unregistered businesses often found in residential areas, including street vendors and home-based shops known as tuck shops or spaza shops (Masojada, 2019). The retail landscape in South Africa has undergone significant transformation with the advent of digital technology and globalization. Today, retailing involves more than mere transactional activities of buying and selling products; it encompasses a wide array of factors such as marketing and advertising strategies. The emergence of the internet and digital technologies has particularly revolutionized retailing, leading to the establishment of online retailing, also

known as e-commerce. Goga, Paelo, and Nyamwena (2019) define e-commerce as the sale of products or services conducted over the internet. The adoption of online retailing, however, presents challenges in South African rural areas, where infrastructure and connectivity issues often hinder widespread implementation and accessibility.

In rural areas like Flagstaff within the OR Tambo District Municipality in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, retail businesses play a pivotal role in the local economy. These businesses however, face a unique set of challenges that impact their viability and growth potential. According to Kativhu (2019), rural retail businesses are often vulnerable to failure due to limited resources available for management and marketing activities. These retail businesses typically rely heavily on the skills and expertise of their owners, given the restricted access to information and the smaller scale of operations. The reliance on owner-managers can sometimes hinder the adoption of new technologies, as noted by Morris, Morris, and Bowen (2022). The slow adoption of technology in rural retail settings can be attributed to factors such as perceived compatibility with existing practices, managerial skills, and the perceived advantages of adopting new technologies, as discussed by Malik, Chadhar, Vatanasakdakul, and Chetty (2021). Merrell, Phillipson, Gorton, and Cowie (2022) highlight that rural retail markets, including those in places like Flagstaff, are characterized by a mix of developed and underdeveloped, formal and informal markets. This diversity underscores the complexity of operating in rural retail environments, where infrastructure challenges and market segmentation can pose significant barriers to growth. In Flagstaff specifically, rapid population growth and the expansion of informal settlements into central town areas and surrounding backstreets occupy space that could potentially be utilized for retail development. This situation not only limits the physical space available for new retail stores but also affects the overall economic dynamics of the area, as reported by Property24 (2021). Despite these challenges, retail remains a critical economic driver in Flagstaff, catering primarily to the needs of rural communities in the vicinity. Enhancing the resilience and competitiveness of rural retail businesses requires addressing infrastructure deficits, improving access to information and technology, and fostering supportive policies that enable sustainable growth in this important sector of the local economy (Schmidt *et al.*, 2017).

Currently formal and informal business operate within a digital era context, widely recognized as the most transformative and liberating phase of technological advancement in global history. According to Piranda, Sinaga, and Putri (2022), marketing constitutes a foundational element of retail operations, facilitating the promotion of products and services to target demographics. The integration of digital marketing has significantly revolutionized retail marketing strategies. Among the most advanced digital technologies applied in marketing, online marketing channels have emerged as indispensable tools for retailers seeking sustainability and competitiveness in the market (Tarabasz, 2024). The internet, with its rapid technological evolution, has equipped retailers with a plethora of online marketing tools, including email marketing, social media platforms, Pay-Per-Click (PPC), Search Engine Optimization (SEO), and pop-ups, among others. Despite an increasing adoption of these digital marketing tools by many South African rural businesses, their utilization remains limited in the rural regions of Flagstaff. Freeman, Park, and Middleton (2020) highlight that some of the challenges faced by consumers in these areas are lack of internet access or inadequate mobile network coverage, thereby hindering their engagement in online activities. Based on this, the primary objective of this study was to assess the uptake of digital marketing initiatives amongst consumers residing in rural areas of Flagstaff.

## Literature review

Digital marketing has emerged as a pivotal factor in enhancing the sustainability and expansion of retail enterprises. While some businesses have successfully leveraged digital marketing opportunities, others encounter barriers such as infrastructure limitations, lack of expertise, insufficient digital marketing knowledge, and low computer literacy (Bollweg *et al.*, 2020; Kamutuezu, Winschiers-Theophilus, & Peters, 2021). Srivastava and Gupta (2022) highlight that a lack of digital marketing knowledge among rural retail sectors impedes their growth and long-term viability. In this context, sustainability refers to the capacity of rural retail businesses to establish, operate, manage, and evolve over time through social, economic, and technological advancements and innovations (Son & Niehm, 2021). Thakur (2022) defines retailing as encompassing all activities involved in selling goods or services directly to end consumers for personal, and non-business purposes. It plays a crucial role in marketing strategies by facilitating targeted product distribution to specific consumer segments. The advent of digital marketing has empowered retailers to effectively market and deliver their offerings through new media platforms, primarily the Internet. Digital marketing utilizes various digital technologies to promote products and services to targeted customers (Esqueda-Walle, Marmolejo Rodríguez, & Villarreal Estrada, 2020), encompassing interactive technology-driven marketing activities. In the competitive landscape of retailing, all businesses face significant challenges, yet digital marketing equips retailers with essential tools to remain competitive (Gauri *et al.*, 2021).

## Digital Marketing Channels

According to Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019), digital marketing tools serve multiple objectives such as enhancing brand recognition, raising awareness, fostering brand favourability, and driving product purchases. These tools engage online media users by encouraging them to interact with brands or products through website visits, online purchases, or offline interactions via mobile devices. Digital marketing channels have transformed global connectivity, enabling social interaction on a massive scale. The rise of social media, facilitated by computers and mobile phones, exemplifies this evolution, leveraging Web 2.0 principles to facilitate user-generated content exchange (Soni & Gupta, 2022). McHaney (2023) further elaborates that Web 2.0 integrates interconnected social media channels, transforming how users engage with digital content and communicate. Digital marketing encompasses various strategies aimed at promoting products or services through digital channels. Key tools utilized by retailers include social media platforms, email marketing, Paid Search/Pay Per Click (PPC) advertising, and Search Engine Optimization (SEO). These tools enable retailers to effectively engage with their target audiences, enhance brand visibility, and drive sales through targeted digital marketing efforts.

### a) Social Media

Social media serves as a vital communication tool for retail businesses, integrating online communication into their strategic initiatives and serving as a powerful platform for effective advertising (Makrides, Vrontis, & Christofi, 2020). Compared to traditional marketing, online communication in retailing, as noted by Nesterenko, Miskiewicz, and Abazov (2023), holds distinctive significance. Retailers leverage social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube to enhance brand awareness, cultivate enduring brand-consumer

relationships, and expand their reach to a broader audience. This online communication capability plays a crucial role in helping retailers achieve their online sales objectives (Quinones *et al.*, 2023). Using social media reduces marketing costs, empowers consumers, and provides retailers with extensive communication benefits. It enables retailers to engage effectively with diverse demographic groups and maintain competitiveness by adopting innovative marketing methods and strategies (Ngcobo, 2023). Moreover, social media enhances consumer engagement levels, facilitates targeted marketing efforts, and fosters direct communication between small retail businesses and their customers.

### **b) Email Marketing**

Email marketing involves the dissemination of promotional messages through email, either as standalone emails or as part of broader email communications. Recipients typically have the option to unsubscribe from future emails, indicating either a spontaneous outreach or consent given by recipients to receive communications from specific companies or brands. Companies employ outbound marketing strategies to engage with customers and prospects via automated emails, aiming to drive purchases or promote products (Vavilovs, 2023). According to Olson *et al.* (2021), email stands out as a premier digital marketing tool utilized by businesses to effectively promote their products and services online.

### **c) Paid Search/ Pay Per Click (PPC) marketing**

Paid media marketing encompasses various forms of advertising that are paid for, including search ads, banners, billboard posters, Pay Per Click (PPC) ads, and promoted posts or stories (Desai and Vidyapeeth, 2019). PPC ads typically consist of text with a link to a company's webpage, triggered when specific keywords are entered into a search engine. According to Sjöblom *et al.* (2019), these ads often appear prominently at the top of search results, marked as sponsored links. Google has focused on enhancing the relevance of paid media ads, particularly for retail, by emphasizing product value directly within the ad. The term "Pay Per Click" reflects the payment structure where marketers incur costs each time a user clicks on the ad link.

### **d) Search Engine Optimization (SEO)**

SEO, or Search Engine Optimization, refers to the process of enhancing the visibility of a website or webpage in search engine results. The goal of SEO is to increase the frequency and prominence of a webpage's appearance in search engine results pages (SERPs), thereby attracting more visitors compared to lower-ranked sites. SEO strategies can target various types of searches, including image search, location-based search, academic information retrieval, and news updates (Kadam, 2019). By optimizing content and structure, SEO aims to make a website more relevant to search queries, thereby improving its ranking in search engine results.

## **The Uptake of Digital Marketing**

Rural retail managers and owners leverage the Internet as a crucial tool for marketing and supporting their businesses, adapting their strategies based on their specific market environments (Kupa, 2023; Olazo, 2023). However, these businesses often struggle to fully harness digital marketing's potential due to resource constraints (Tiwasing, Clark, & Gkartzios, 2022). This technological lag places rural retailers at a distinct disadvantage compared to their urban counterparts (Philip & Williams, 2019), a phenomenon commonly referred to as the 'digital divide.' This divide encompasses disparities in access to information and communication technologies, as well as in the utilization of the internet for various activities

across different socio-economic levels and geographical areas. Barriers to the adoption of digital marketing in rural areas are closely linked to socio-economic factors, demographics, financial status, and educational attainment of individuals who may not be digitally engaged (Abdinasir & Mohamed, 2023). Specific challenges faced by rural communities include inadequate infrastructure for online shopping and delivery services, which significantly influence their perceptions and behaviors towards digital marketing (Schutte & Chauke, 2022). Despite these challenges, younger, more educated individuals are noted for their high digital engagement and mobile phone usage, presenting opportunities for marketers to connect with them effectively (Schutte & Chauke, 2022). In rural areas like Flagstaff, retailers commonly refrain from offering online shopping due to a variety of challenges associated with digital technologies, including delivery logistics, postal services, and consumer trust in online payment systems (Goga, Paelo, & Nyamwena, 2019). Furthermore, low digital literacy among rural consumers, particularly the elderly, contributes to the limited uptake of online shopping in these communities. Additional factors such as high mobile data costs and consumer skepticism towards online transactions further hinder the adoption of digital retail practices in rural settings (Goga, Paelo, & Nyamwena, 2019).

## **Materials and Methods**

Creswell and Clark (2017) emphasize that in research endeavours, the research design encompasses the entire process of data collection, evaluation, interpretation, and documentation. This study adopted a descriptive research design within the qualitative research approach to achieve its objectives. According to Saunders and Lewis (2017), descriptive research aims to provide accurate descriptions of situations, individuals, or events, often employing methods such as interviews and focus group discussions. Roller (2019) further elaborates that qualitative data analysis, particularly through methods like thematic analysis, involves interpreting datasets such as transcripts from interviews or focus groups, and identifying patterns in meaning across the data. In the context of this study, focus groups were conducted with members of the public, specifically, customers gathered at public locations near shopping facilities in Flagstaff. The sample comprised thirty respondents divided into five groups of six participants each. Each group engaged in discussions focusing on various variables related to the adoption of digital marketing by rural communities in Flagstaff. In terms of sampling, this study employed a non-probability sampling method to recruit participants from the customer population in Flagstaff, specifically using a simple random sampling approach. Thematic analysis was applied to analyse the data collected from these focus group discussions, identifying overarching themes and sub-themes that emerged from the discussions.

## **Results and Discussion**

To present qualitative data, themes were identified upon the analysis of the data obtained from focus group discussions and are consistent with accomplishing the research objectives.

### **Level of understanding and use of digital marketing**

The findings indicate that many consumers in Flagstaff possess limited knowledge of digital marketing and underutilize digital platforms. Challenges associated with basic internet usage in rural areas contribute to this, compounded by perceptions among some older and less educated individuals who do not see the necessity of engaging with digital technologies. Participants noted that digital marketing is often perceived as associated with modern

education, predominantly understood by younger generations. This aligns with Morris *et al.*'s (2022) assertion that rural consumers lack awareness of digital marketing, with only a minority familiar with online networks, primarily among the 18-30 age group. This demographic trend is consistent with Ruiz-Herrera *et al.*'s (2023) findings that younger individuals are more adept at using the internet and readily adopt technological innovations, including online networks.

### **Exposure to digital marketing**

Responses in this group reveal that only a small number of consumers in Flagstaff have encountered digital marketing primarily through Facebook, where retailers post promotional catalogues and alerts about new stock. Some marketing communications are also sent via mobile phones and email. Due to their restricted familiarity and comprehension of digital marketing's utility, few consumers in Flagstaff have embraced its application, particularly among the younger demographic. This finding aligns with Shava and Chinyamurindi's (2018) observation that despite disparities in digital access, a significant proportion of South Africa's youth have access to social media and various online platforms.

### **Uptake of digital marketing in rural areas**

The findings indicate that while digital marketing is present in Flagstaff, its effectiveness is constrained by the area's poor rural infrastructure and underdeveloped network. Guzana and Msosa (2022) highlight that while digital marketing has proven effective across South African retail businesses, its implementation in rural settings faces significant challenges. These include the persistent digital divide and the gap in technological literacy, which hinder widespread adoption among rural populations. Consequently, rural retailers continue to grapple with the dilemma of how to transition from traditional marketing methods to more optimal digital marketing platforms.

### **Preference between digital and traditional communication**

The research findings indicated a preference among rural residents for traditional communication methods over online channels due to limited digital access, with some lacking devices altogether. Print materials such as catalogues obtained from retail stores in Flagstaff remain vital sources of information for these populations, underscoring the continued relevance of traditional media. Effective communication between retail businesses and customers is essential for business success, necessitating an understanding of preferred communication methods among both current and prospective clientele (More, 2023).

### **Challenges and barriers in using digital marketing**

The themes of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) literacy, digital divide, network coverage, affordability, and language barrier emerged prominently in addressing this issue. Elderly, impoverished, and less educated individuals in rural areas emphasized their lack of access to computers, mobile devices, or internet-connected phones due to the absence of public Wi-Fi hotspots in their vicinity. Consequently, they must travel long distances to urban centres to use internet cafes. These participants expressed their financial constraints and lack of resources to acquire knowledge about digital marketing, thereby hindering their ability to utilize online platforms.

Participants further noted that Flagstaff, being a rural area, does not prioritize online services. Many residents lack smart digital devices, which limits their engagement with digital technologies. This highlights a significant segment of the population in rural areas who have never used digital devices, with the absence of internet cafes exacerbating their isolation from digital resources. These observations align with Henry's (2019) findings, which underscore the stark digital divide between urban and rural areas.

### **Network coverage, affordability, and language barrier**

The study identified several challenges and barriers hindering the adoption of digital marketing in rural areas, including the high cost of mobile data, limited network coverage, and difficulties in comprehending online content language. Participants reported experiencing unreliable internet connections in certain parts of Flagstaff, which impede their ability to engage in digital marketing activities. They also expressed concerns about the escalating costs of mobile data, making it increasingly unaffordable. Furthermore, participants noted that the language used in online platforms is not always easy to understand, requiring regular online usage or higher levels of education to navigate effectively. These responses highlight that the digital divide significantly limits the widespread adoption of digital marketing in rural areas, leading some retailers to refrain from offering online shopping options. The findings suggest that challenges faced by rural consumers collectively diminish the impact of digital marketing tools adopted by retailers.

### **Recommendation**

The study draws multiple conclusions from both existing literature and empirical findings regarding the adoption of digital marketing by rural communities. Retail businesses in rural areas face significant challenges in implementing digital marketing strategies to their fullest extent, thereby missing out on potential benefits offered by digital marketing opportunities. This difficulty is compounded by the geographical dispersion of rural customers, making them harder to reach effectively. As a recommendation, the study suggests integrating digital marketing with traditional marketing and advertising methods in rural areas to ensure broader consumer outreach irrespective of geographic constraints. To enhance the adoption of digital marketing and improve consumer engagement, retailers could establish zero-rated platforms where customers can access information without incurring data charges. Additionally, it is recommended that stakeholders provide support by enhancing network coverage, offering affordable data packages, and facilitating easier access to digital devices. These efforts are crucial for enabling rural retail businesses to capitalize on emerging technologies and sustain their operations effectively.

### **Limitations**

The study's limitation was that while it focused on the rural aspect of Flagstaff, the area includes urban elements as well. This hybrid nature of the area may have introduced urban characteristics into the study results, potentially limiting the generalizability of findings to purely rural settings elsewhere in South Africa, which may exhibit distinct characteristics. Additionally, some participants in the focus groups had limited knowledge of digital marketing, affecting their ability to provide comprehensive responses. Future research could explore the specific impact of various digital marketing tools, aiming to help businesses identify which channels their target audience prefers and frequently uses. This could assist businesses in

focusing on the most effective digital marketing strategies tailored to their needs. Furthermore, future studies could compare the effectiveness of traditional marketing approaches with digital marketing in the rural retail sector.

## Conclusion

The study's findings indicate a limited adoption of digital marketing among older, less educated individuals, contrasting with the digitally savvy youth who show greater familiarity with digital platforms. Participants emphasized their preference for receiving communication from retailers through traditional channels due to easier accessibility compared to digital platforms. The study also revealed that customers in Flagstaff do not have a predetermined shopping method preference, but in-store shopping tends to be their primary choice, likely due to its widespread availability among retailers in the area. Moreover, the research identified significant barriers to digital marketing adoption in rural areas, including the digital divide, technological literacy gaps, high mobile data costs, low network coverage, and language barriers. These challenges collectively hinder rural consumers' ability to fully engage with digital marketing strategies implemented by retail businesses, thereby limiting their effectiveness in reaching these populations.

## Declaration of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Reference

- Abdinasir, A.M. & Mohamed, Z. A. (2023). Assessing the Challenges & Opportunities of Digital Marketing in Ethiopia: The case of Somali Regional State. *East African Journal of Business and Economics*, 6(2), 151-163. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajbe.6.2.1600>
- Bollweg, L., Lackes, R., Siepermann, M. & Weber, P. (2020). Drivers and barriers of the digitalization of local owner operated retail outlets. *Journal of Small Business & Entrepreneurship*, 32 (2), 173-201.
- Chaffey, D. & Ellis-Chadwick, F. (2019). *Digital marketing: strategy, implementation & practice*. Pearson: Uk.
- Creswell, J. W. & Clark, V. L. P. (2017). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Sage publications.
- Desai, V., & Vidyapeeth, B. (2019). Digital marketing: A review. *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development*, 5 (5), 196-200.
- Esqueda-Walle, R., Marmolejo Rodríguez, J. & Villarreal Estrada, K. (2020). Digital Marketing: A Conceptual Framework, Review, and Case Study Mixed Approach. *International Journal of Economics and Business Administration*, 8(3), 256-279. <https://doi.org/10.35808/ijeba/514>.
- Freeman, J., Park, S., & Middleton, C. (2020). Technological literacy and interrupted internet access. *Information, Communication & Society*, 23(13), 1947-1964. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2019.1623901>
- Gauri, D. K., Jindal, R. P., Ratchford, B., Fox, E., Bhatnagar, A., Pandey, A., & Howerton, E. (2021). Evolution of retail formats: Past, present, and future. *Journal of Retailing*, 97(1), 42-61. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2020.11.002>
- Goga, S., Paelo, A. & Nyamwena, J. (2019). *Online Retailing in South Africa: An Overview*. Industrial Development Think Tank, 1–45.

- Guzana, M. & Msosa, S. K. (2022). The challenges in employing digital marketing as a tool for improving sales at selected retail stores in the transkei region. *EUREKA: Social and Humanities*, (3), 3-12.
- Henry, L. (2019). Bridging the urban-rural digital divide and mobilizing technology for poverty eradication: challenges and gaps. University of the West Indies, St Augustine.
- Kadam, A. (2019). Search Engine Optimization Techniques and Tools. *International Journal of Scientific Research in Computer Science, Engineering and Information Technology*, 5(6), 312-316.
- Kativhu, S. (2019). Criteria for measuring resilience of youth-owned small retail businesses in selected rural areas of Vhembe District, South Africa (Doctoral dissertation, University of Venda)
- Kupa, N. K. (2023). Developing a management framework for sustainable retail SMMEs in Limpopo, South Africa. (Master's dissertation, North-West University). <http://hdl.handle.net/10394/42107>
- Makrides, A., Vrontis, D. & Christofi, M. (2020). The gold rush of digital marketing: assessing prospects of building brand awareness overseas. *Business Perspectives and Research*, 8 (1): 4-20.
- Malik, S., Chadhar, M., Vatanasakdakul, S., & Chetty, M. (2021). Factors affecting the organizational adoption of blockchain technology: Extending the technology–organization–environment (TOE) framework in the Australian context. *Sustainability*, 13(16), 9404. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13169404>
- Masojada, M. (2019). The South African retail landscape. Marketing to South African Consumers, in J. Lappeman, P. Egan, G. Rightford & T. Ramogase (eds.), *Marketing to South African consumers* (pp. 87–110). UCT Liberty Institute of Strategic Marketing & UCT Libraries, Cape Town. <https://doi.org/10.15641/0-7992-2548-8>
- McCallaghan, S. & Heyns, M. M. (2021). The validation of a diversity climate measurement instrument for the South African environment. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 47 (1): 1-8.
- McHaney, R. (2023). *The new digital shoreline: How Web 2.0 and millennials are revolutionizing higher education*. Taylor & Francis
- Merrell, I., Phillipson, J., Gorton, M., & Cowie, P. (2022). Enterprise hubs as a mechanism for local economic development in rural areas. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 93, 81-91. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2022.05.016>
- More, A. B. (2023). Implementing Digital Age Experience Marketing to Make Customer Relations More Sustainable. In: Nayyar, A., Naved, M., Rameshwar, R. (eds) *New Horizons for Industry 4.0 in Modern Business. Contributions to Environmental Sciences & Innovative Business Technology*. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-20443-2\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-20443-2_5)
- Morris, J., Morris, W., & Bowen, R. (2022). Implications of the digital divide on rural SME resilience. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 89, 369-377. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2022.01.005>
- Nabee, S.G. and Swanepoe, E. (2021) ‘Exploring supply chain business bullying of small and medium-sized business suppliers by dominant buyers in the apparel retail sector in Gauteng’, *Southern African Journal of Entrepreneurship & Small Business Management*, 13(1), pp. 1–11. doi:10.4102/sajesbm.v13i1.367.
- Nebaimoro, M. P. (2017). Attitudes and perceptions of mobile advertising among rural youth in the Limpopo Province. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Kwazulu Natal).

- Nesterenko., V., Miskiewicz, R., & Abazov, R. (2023). Marketing Communications in the Era of Digital Transformation. *Virtual Economics*, 6(1), 57-70. [https://doi.org/10.34021/ve.2023.06.01\(4\)](https://doi.org/10.34021/ve.2023.06.01(4))
- Ngcobo, T. (2023). The use of Instagram as a communication tool in the Durban fashion industry. (Master's dissertation, Durban University of Technology).
- Olazo, D. B. (2023). Marketing competency, marketing innovation and sustainable competitive advantage of small and medium enterprises (SMEs): a mixed-method analysis. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 35(4), 890-907. <https://doi.org/10.1108/APJML-01-2022-0050>
- Olson, E. M., Olson, K. M., Czaplewski, A. J. & Key, T. M. (2021). Business strategy and the management of digital marketing. *Business horizons*, 64 (2): 285-293.
- Philip, L. & Williams, F. (2019). Remote rural home-based businesses and digital inequalities: Understanding needs and expectations in a digitally underserved community. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 68, 306-318.
- Piranda, D. R., Sinaga, D. Z., & Putri, E. E. (2022). Online Marketing Strategy In Facebook Marketplace As A Digital Marketing Tool. *Journal Of Humanities, Social Sciences And Business*, 1(3), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.55047/jhssb.v1i2.123>
- Property24. (2021). New Flagstaff mall opens in Eastern Cape, with another on the way. Article ID. Available: <https://www.property24.com/articles/new-flagstaff-mall-opens-in-eastern-cape-with-another-on-the-way/30708>.
- Quinones, M., Gomez-Suarez, M., Cruz-Roche, I., & Díaz-Martín, A. M. (2023). Technology: a strategic imperative for successful retailers. *International journal of retail & distribution management*, 51(4), 546-566. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJRDM-03-2022-0088>
- Roller, M. R. (2019, September). A quality approach to qualitative content analysis: Similarities and differences compared to other qualitative methods. In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 20(9), 1-21. <https://doi.org/19.17169/fqs-20.3.3385>
- Ruiz-Herrera, L. G., Valencia-Arias, A., Gallegos, A., Benjumea-Arias, M., & Flores-Siapo, E. (2023). Technology acceptance factors of e-commerce among young people: An integration of the technology acceptance model and theory of planned behavior. *Heliyon*, 9(6). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e16418>
- Saunders, M. & Lewis, P. (2017). *Doing research in business and management: An essential guide to planning your project*. Financial Times Prentice Hall, Pearson.
- Schutte, F. & Chauke, T. (2022). The impact of digital marketing on consumer behaviour: A case study of Millennials in South Africa. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 11(2), 875-886. <https://doi.org/10.46222/ajhtl.19770720.263>
- Schmidt, H. J., Mason, R. B., Bruwer, J. P. and Aspeling, J. (2017). Access to finance problems for small retail businesses in South Africa: comparative views from finance seekers (retailers) and finance providers (banks). *Banks and Bank Systems*, 12(2), 20-30.
- Shava, H. & Chinyamurindi, W. T. (2018). Determinants of social media usage among a sample of rural South African youth. *South African Journal of Information Management*, 20 (1): 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajim.v20i1.827>
- Sjöblom, M., Törhönen, M., Hamari, J. & Macey, J. (2019). The ingredients of Twitch streaming: Affordances of game streams. *Computers in human behavior*, 92, 20-28. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.10.012>
- Son, J., & Niehm, L. S. (2021). Using social media to navigate changing rural markets: The case of small community retail and service businesses. *Journal of Small Business & Entrepreneurship*, 33 (6): 619-637.

- Soni, P., & Gupta R. (2022). A Conceptual Framework Of Online Marketing Methods: Systematic Literature Review, *International Journal of Advanced Research in Commerce, Management & Social Science*, 5(2), 05-13.
- Srivastava, G., & Gupta, D. 2022. Barriers to Digital Marketing in Rural India. In *Recent Trends in Industrial and Production Engineering*. 127-133 Springer, Singapore. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-3330-0\\_11](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-3330-0_11)
- Tarabasz, A. (2024). The Impact of Digital on Marketing Strategy. In P. B. Pires, J. D. Santos, & I. V. Pereira (Eds.), *Digital Marketing: Analyzing Its Transversal Impact* (21-37). CRC Press. <https://doi.org/10.1201/9781003384960-3>
- Terblanche, N. 2013. *Retail management: A South African perspective*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Thakur, V. (2022). A Review On Recent Developments Of Retail Marketing In India. *Universal Research Reports*, 9(1), 21-30. <https://urr.shodhsagar.com/index.php/j/article/view/960>
- Tiwasing, P., Clark, B., & Gkartzios, M. (2022). How can rural businesses thrive in the digital economy? A UK perspective. *Heliyon*, 8(10). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e10745>
- Vavilovs, A. (2023). Customer Acquisition Plan Based on Inbound Marketing Strategy. (Master's Thesis, Metropolia University of Applied Sciences).