




# Digital resilience in turbulent times: How small, medium and microenterprises leverage social media advertising for survival in a volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity environment



## Authors:

Atuwani Jawadu<sup>1</sup>   
 Sinaye A. Mtimba<sup>1</sup>   
 Ayanda P. Deliwe<sup>2</sup> 

## Affiliations:

<sup>1</sup>Department of Business Management, Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, Nelson Mandela University, Gqeberha, South Africa

<sup>2</sup>Department of Applied Management Administration and Ethical Leadership, Faculty of Commerce and Management, University of Fort Hare, East London, South Africa

## Corresponding author:

Ayanda Deliwe,  
 ADeliwe@ufh.ac.za

## Dates:

Received: 15 July 2025  
 Accepted: 05 Jan. 2026  
 Published: 13 Apr. 2026

## How to cite this article:

Jawadu, A., Mtimba, S.A. & Deliwe, A.P., 2026, 'Digital resilience in turbulent times: How small, medium and microenterprises leverage social media advertising for survival in a volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity environment', *Southern African Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management* 18(1), a1211. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajesbm.v18i1.1211>

## Read online:



Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

**Background:** In a volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA) business environment, the survival of small, medium and microenterprises (SMMEs) depends on adopting adaptive, customer-focused marketing strategies.

**Aim:** This study explores the perceptions of SMME owners or managers in South Africa's beauty industry regarding the use of social media advertising platforms for business survival.

**Setting:** The research focused on SMME owners and managers within the South African beauty industry.

**Methods:** Guided by the 4Cs Marketing Mix (Customer needs, Cost, Convenience and Communication) and the customer experience framework, this qualitative study engaged 15 SMME participants through semi-structured interviews to examine how social media enhances customer experience and operational resilience.

**Results:** Findings show that platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram and TikTok provide advantages in ensuring convenience and enabling effective, real-time communication. Participants highlighted automated messaging, digital catalogues, direct messaging and influencer marketing as cost-effective tools for customer engagement and service delivery. These practices align with the 4Cs and customer experience framework, showing how SMMEs can meet consumer expectations, reduce costs and remain relevant in a changing digital marketplace.

**Conclusion:** The findings suggest that using the 4Cs Marketing Mix and customer experience through social media can improve brand visibility, customer loyalty and long-term survival of SMMEs in a VUCA environment.

**Contribution:** This study adds to limited literature on digital advertising in the SMME sector by highlighting the role of customer experience in advertising.

**Keywords:** SMMEs; social media advertising; 4Cs marketing mix; VUCA; customer experience; digital marketing.

## Introduction

Small, medium and microenterprises (SMMEs) play a pivotal role in driving economic growth, creating jobs and fostering innovation. These organisations make up over 90% of all enterprises in developing nations (Matekenya & Moyo 2022). In South Africa, the government initiated support for SMMEs in 1996 to enhance job creation, reduce poverty and strengthen the economy (Bruwer 2020:148). The government provided support to SMMEs through relevant support structures, including the Small Enterprise Development Agency, which assists with financing, training and franchising, as well as the National Empowerment Fund, which focuses on supporting black-owned SMMEs. Khula Finance and Industrial Development Corporation primarily finances SMMEs through a network of retail financial intermediaries and partnerships with banks (Bruwer 2020:148). Despite their significance, many SMMEs face challenges, with a high start-up failure rate of between 70% and 80% within the first 5 years (Wentzel, Fapohunda & Haldenwang 2022:1049).

**Copyright:** © 2026. The Authors. Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Small, medium and microenterprises, which are defined by factors such as turnover and employee count, are dynamic, innovative and technology oriented. These contribute to market innovation and agility (Matekenya & Moyo 2022:459). However, the changing business landscape, intensified by the volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA) world, presents a risk to SMMEs' survival (Troise et al. 2022:14). The VUCA environment demands flexibility, agility and a shift from conventional corporate strategies to creative and adaptable approaches (Makkar & Rani 2024; Teece, Peteraf & Leih 2016). Effective advertising emerges as a critical aspect for SMMEs, especially in the VUCA world (Bennett & Lemoine 2014). Traditional advertising methods are no longer sufficient; this requires SMMEs to embrace innovative technologies (Mas-Manchón 2020). Social media platforms, augmented reality and virtual reality offer avenues for creating immersive advertising experiences that reach and captivate target audiences (Bennett & Lemoine 2014; Quesenberry 2020:3).

However, despite their importance, many SMMEs struggle to survive beyond their first few years of operation because of various factors. One is the use of outdated or ineffective advertising platforms, which can limit the reach and impact of their marketing efforts (Mas-Manchón 2020:77). Some SMMEs may not have advertising at all, making it difficult for them to compete with larger, more established businesses. Ferreira, Robertson and Pitt (2022:45) highlight the challenges SMMEs face in South Africa, including the need for more effective advertising strategies to improve their longevity and competitiveness.

Small, medium and microenterprises in South Africa have been the subject of numerous studies, including those that examine their prospects, problems and economic impact. For instance, Basson and Omoruyi (2025:2) found that the primary obstacles SMMEs in South Africa faced were poor infrastructure, a lack of skills and limited financial access. In a similar vein, a recent survey conducted by Build One South Africa (BOSA 2025) revealed that the most frequent barriers were 100% of respondents receiving no training support, no help with market access or infrastructure support and inability to obtain capital (because of a lack of collateral or official financial records). Although these studies offer valuable insights into the challenges SMMEs face, there is a notable lack of research on digital marketing and advertising platforms that can help these organisations overcome these difficulties.

### **Purpose of the study**

This gap in the literature highlights the need for further research on effective advertising strategies for SMMEs in South Africa. Thus, this study aimed to address this gap by exploring advertising platforms for SMMEs in South Africa in the VUCA world. Therefore, the research objective of this qualitative study is to determine the perceptions of SMMEs (owners or managers) of social media advertising platforms on the survival of SMMEs in the VUCA world.

## **Literature review**

### **Advertising**

Advertising is defined as 'brand-initiated communication intent on impacting people'. Furthermore, advertising is defined as a message sent by a company to a broad audience with the intention of raising awareness or the probability that a product or service will be purchased (Singh, Mishra & He 2025). In the business sector, advertising is essential for several reasons. Firstly, it increases demand by educating and convincing customers about a particular set of items, thereby fostering a favourable perception, and arousing customer curiosity (Balaskas, Panagiotarou & Rigou 2022:129). Secondly, competition pushes businesses to be the best and differentiate themselves in the market (Fennis & Stroebe 2020:45). Furthermore, advertising strengthens consumer trust and connection by increasing brand familiarity and loyalty (Sharma et al. 2022:125). The foundation of digital marketing strategies is advertising, which has moved from traditional to online and social media platforms in the digital age (Syafudin et al. 2025). Through tailored messaging and quantifiable interaction data, this shift enables SMMEs to connect with particular consumers. Additionally, employing digital platforms helps organisations stay visible and adapt to challenges such as technological advancements or economic shocks by promoting digital resilience (Mbatha 2024).

### **The volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity world**

According to Dhillon and Nguyen (2021:1), the VUCA world – which is characterised by VUCA – presents unprecedented challenges and opportunities. In this environment, adaptive leadership, innovative strategies and a willingness to embrace change are crucial (Dhillon & Nguyen 2021:1). Businesses and individuals must navigate this landscape by harnessing innovation, fostering resilience and addressing complexities. Success in the VUCA world hinges on adaptability, continuous learning, agility and the ability to anticipate and respond to change (Grosskopf & Barmeyer 2021:195). Embracing a mindset that values change, collaboration and new opportunities is essential for thriving in this dynamic environment (Rath, Grosskopf & Barmeyer 2021:196). Business owners or managers must understand the intricacies of the business environment, foster continuous learning and create a culture conducive to innovation (Pieter, Massie & Saerang 2021). Developing digital resilience, the capacity to use technology and digital marketing tools to sustain continuity during disruption, is necessary for SMMEs in the beauty sector to operate in this unstable and uncertain environment (Mbatha 2024). Because of its heavy reliance on visual presentation, personal branding and experiential consumption, the beauty industry is a digitally unique category of SMMEs (Djafarova & Bowes 2021). Beauty firms rely primarily on aesthetic appeal, before-and-after transformations, demonstrations and social validation to influence consumer decision-making, in contrast to many traditional retail or service-based SMMEs (Casaló, Flavián & Ibáñez-Sánchez 2020). Therefore, social media sites like

Instagram, TikTok and WhatsApp are not just promotional tools, but also essential operational infrastructures that help beauty SMMEs demonstrate their expertise, foster client trust and co-create value (Lou & Yuan 2019). The beauty industry is a perfect setting for studying digital resilience in a VUCA environment because of its digital distinctiveness, which makes it more susceptible to shifts in online interaction patterns, algorithmic visibility and platform affordances (Quesenberry 2020). Small, medium and microenterprises can improve the entire customer experience by quickly adapting to shifting consumer preferences through agile web advertising (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2025).

### Small, medium and microenterprises

Small, medium and microenterprises are described as businesses that vary in size based on their number of employees and annual turnover (Dhillon & Nguyen 2021). Globally, SMMEs are recognised as essential drivers of economic growth, contributing significantly to job creation and innovation (Modisane & Jokonya 2021:784). They represent a large portion of the business landscape, with varying definitions across countries but generally encompass businesses with limited resources as compared to larger corporations (Modisane & Jokonya 2021:784). In Africa, SMMEs play a crucial role in economic development, particularly in job creation and poverty alleviation (Hadar et al. 2020:5730). These account for a substantial share of employment and gross domestic product (GDP) across the continent (Zhou & Gumbo 2021:7). However, South African SMMEs often face challenges such as limited access to finance, regulatory hurdles and market competition. Despite these obstacles, initiatives aimed at supporting SMME growth have gained traction so recognising their potential to enhance economic resilience (Afolayan & De la Harpe 2020:697). Given these limitations, digital marketing provides SMMEs with an affordable way to connect with customers (Kingsnorth 2025). Platforms like Instagram, TikTok and YouTube enable SMMEs to present their items creatively, increase brand loyalty and gather customer insights in visually focused industries like beauty in South Africa. Small, medium and microenterprises gain digital resilience by ongoing digital interaction, which helps businesses quickly adjust to shifts in consumer behaviour and technology (Mbatha 2024).

Over the past decade, the South African beauty and personal care sector has experienced steady growth, driven by rising urbanisation, shifting consumer preferences and an increasing emphasis on appearance and self-care. The industry encompasses professional services, such as salons and spas, as well as skincare, cosmetics, fragrance and haircare products, all of which make a substantial contribution to the nation's retail economy. Gebashe et al. (2022:3) claim that the growth of cosmeceutical industry products, which combine medications and cosmetics, demonstrates how innovation and consumer health consciousness are transforming the local beauty scene. Demand for ethically sourced, eco-friendly goods has increased because of the growing preference for natural and

sustainable ingredients, aligning with global 'clean beauty' trends. Furthermore, Singh, Telukdarie and Mongwe (2024:195) emphasise that social media and digital influencers have a significant impact on how consumers make purchasing decisions in South Africa's beauty industry, particularly among younger generations. The beauty value chain has also changed as a result of digitalisation and internet shopping. Technology has made beauty experts more accessible, visible and competitive, especially in the hair and skincare industries, according to Kokong and Naidoo (2022:7). Small, medium and microenterprises in the beauty industry are now able to increase their market reach and boost brand awareness thanks to the integration of social media marketing and e-commerce. When taken as a whole, these trends show that South Africa's beauty sector is changing in terms of creativity, inclusion and sustainability in addition to increasing in economic worth.

### Social media advertising platforms

Social media advertising platforms are essential tools for businesses looking to promote their products or services in today's digital landscape (Bruns 2021:30). These platforms – including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn and TikTok – provide a variety of options for targeted advertising, so allowing marketers the opportunity to reach specific audiences based on demographics, interests and behaviours (Kargeti et al. 2022:395). Table 1 presents the identified platforms, along with a description of each platform. Brands may establish emotional bonds with customers through influencers, user-generated content and interactive storytelling. In addition to increasing brand awareness and sales, this connection helps SMMEs become more digitally resilient by guaranteeing company continuity and flexibility in quickly evolving markets (Mbatha 2024). The strategic significance of digital marketing is reinforced by SMMEs' ability to assess campaign efficacy and make data-driven decisions through the use of analytics features on social media platforms (Smith 2022).

Because customer evaluation of beauty products and services is mostly subjective, experiential and socially driven, social media advertising is structurally fundamental to the beauty SMME sector (Casaló et al. 2020; Djafarova & Bowes 2021). Instead of relying solely on objective product specs, purchasing decisions are often influenced by peer evaluations, influencer endorsements, visual demonstrations and real-time engagement (Lou & Yuan 2019). Therefore, rather than serving as auxiliary marketing tools, platforms that facilitate visual storytelling, two-way communication and social proof are integrated into the fundamental business models of beauty SMMEs. In this industry, social media advertising blurs the lines between marketing, sales and customer service by concurrently supporting promotion, customer education, booking coordination, relationship management and post-purchase engagement (Ebrahim 2020). Compared to many other small company sectors, social media advertising is disproportionately important to the survival and competitiveness of beauty SMMEs, which can be explained by this structural integration (Quesenberry 2020).

**TABLE 1:** Social media platforms.

Social media platforms	Description
Facebook	According to Ebrahim (2020), Facebook is an effective tool for businesses to use for marketing purposes. It offers a range of features and approaches to help increase brand awareness, reach a wider online audience, generate leads and boost sales of goods and services.
Instagram	Instagram is a powerful marketing tool for companies seeking to engage with customers and expand their online presence. Instagram is a highly visual medium that is ideal for promoting innovative, creative, intriguing and stunning products and services. Instagram has over 2 billion monthly active users (Han et al. 2021).
Snapchat	According to Ben Amor and Mzoughi (2023:130), businesses can benefit from using Snapchat as a marketing tool, particularly if they aim to reach a younger demographic.
X	X is a potent marketing tool that can be utilised to increase audience engagement, brand recognition and sales. It provides companies with the opportunity to generate and disseminate a variety of content types, including text, photographs, videos and polls, through both organic and sponsored marketing channels (Quesenberry 2020).
TikTok	With its unique capabilities to raise brand awareness, engage with a broader audience and even drive sales, TikTok has the potential to be a powerful marketing tool. Owing to the platform's built-in effects, filters and editing capabilities, marketers can easily create and share genuine and captivating content (Pieter et al. 2021:11).
WhatsApp	WhatsApp marketing is a tactic used by companies to interact with, and promote to, their target audience directly through the WhatsApp platform. Using the platform, this strategy includes sending out promotional messages, offering customer support and carrying out transactions (Srivastava and Fernandes 2022:135).
Pinterest	There are various ways that businesses can use Pinterest for marketing and advertising. Businesses can advertise their goods and services on Pinterest by using sponsored pins that appear in users' feeds (Krumay and Brandtweiner 2015).
LinkedIn	LinkedIn is a social networking site designed specifically for the business community. It allows registered members to establish and document professional networks, find jobs, research companies and remain up to date on industry news and business connections (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010).
MySpace	MySpace's early success was mostly ascribed to its capacity to bring people together through diverse content and cultural exchanges (Pieter et al. 2021).

Note: Please see the full reference list of this article, Jawadu, A., Mtimba, S.A. & Deliwe, A.P., 2026, 'Digital resilience in turbulent times: How small, medium and microenterprises leverage social media advertising for survival in a volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity environment', *Southern African Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management* 18(1), a1211. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajesbm.v18i1.1211>, for more information.

## Theories underlying this study

Theories play a crucial role in guiding research by providing a structured framework that enhances one's understanding of complex phenomena (Braun, Clarke & Hayfield 2022). These helps clarify research objectives, inform methodology and facilitate the interpretation of findings, ultimately contributing to the credibility and depth of the study (Okpighe 2020:356). In this context, this research explored the customer needs, cost, convenience and communication (4Cs) Marketing Mix and the customer experience framework. The 4Cs Marketing Mix, developed by Robert Lauterborn in 1990, is a customer-centric framework that provides a more holistic approach to marketing as compared to the traditional 4Ps (Product, Price, Place and Promotion). The 4Cs consist of Customer needs and wants, Cost to the customer, Convenience and Communication. The focus of the 4Cs is on understanding the customer's needs and wants rather than merely the product features. This involves conducting market research, analysing customer behaviour and creating buyer personas to tailor marketing strategies (Abedian et al. 2022:139). The cost to the customer extends beyond the price

tag and encompasses all the expenses associated with acquiring and utilising the product or service, including monetary costs, time costs, energy costs and psychological costs. The goal is to minimise these costs for the customer (Winaryati & Hidayat 2020:173).

Numerous studies have utilised the 4Cs framework to explore its impact on marketing effectiveness. For instance, research has shown that companies adopting a consumer-focused approach often experience higher customer satisfaction rates and increased loyalty (Lim 2021:453). A study by Lim (2021:453) highlighted that brands that effectively communicate with their customers tend to perform better in terms of sales growth as compared to those relying on traditional advertising methods. Another study by Lim (2021) found that small businesses that implemented the 4Cs framework were able to adapt more quickly to market changes and consumer preferences, resulting in improved competitive advantage. In this study, the 4Cs will be used to analyse how SMMEs use social media platforms to comprehend customer needs, manage cost-related perceptions, provide convenience and effectively interact with their target audience. To gauge the degree of adoption and its influence on marketing results, survey and interview questions will be matched with each of the four Cs.

In the context of SMMEs operating within a VUCA environment, the 4Cs Marketing Mix provides critical insights for navigating the challenges associated with rapid market changes and unpredictable consumer behaviour. By focusing on understanding consumer needs (the first C), SMMEs can develop more relevant products or services that resonate with their target audience. The emphasis on cost encourages businesses to consider not just pricing strategies, but also how they can deliver value in a way that minimises consumer effort or sacrifice.

Creating a product or service that is easy for people to purchase involves several key aspects, including accessibility, ease-of-use and availability. Convenience can be increased by providing a variety of buying channels, such as online and offline options (Shukla & Shamurailatpam 2024:2). The primary goals of two-way communication are to build relationships, engage in conversation and interact with customers (Lim 2021:453). This entails communicating with clients across a variety of platforms, including social media, to get their input and swiftly resolve any issues they may have (Lim 2021:453). Businesses can develop a more customer-centric strategy that fits the requirements and preferences of their target audience by implementing the 4Cs Marketing Mix (Gribble & Beckmann 2023:13). Increased client happiness, loyalty and eventually business success can result from this. This is represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1 represents the 4Cs Marketing Mix Model. This involves clients, for whom the company determines and

understands their needs and desires before creating the right service or solution to meet them. Convenience ensures accessibility and ease throughout the purchasing process by taking into account the customer's preferred method and location. The cost includes all expenses associated with meeting customer needs, including the organisation's and the client's financial, time and effort expenditures. All interactions between the company and its clients are considered forms of communication, with an emphasis on developing relationships, fostering trust and having meaningful conversations.

The customer experience framework encompasses various strategies and methodologies designed to enhance interactions between businesses and their customers. The omni-channel approach integrates various communication channels, enabling customers to engage through their preferred platforms, including websites, mobile apps and in-store visits (Ewim et al. 2024). A holistic framework unites sensory, emotional, social and intellectual experiences, aiming to create pleasurable interactions that increase customer satisfaction (Kuo 2010). The Enhancing Customer Experience Framework combines quality function deployment, business process re-engineering and simulation to align business processes with customer needs (Botha, De Vries & Kruger 2012). This framework allows businesses to test the impact of process improvements on customer experience, ensuring that services are tailored to meet customer expectations. The customer experience framework will be used in this study to evaluate how SMMEs improve their social media customer interactions. To assess the success of customer experience strategies, information on customer engagement, satisfaction and feedback systems will be gathered.



Source: Siripipatthanakul, S., Limna, P., Kraiwanit, T. & Siripipattanakul, S., 2022, 'Predicting intention to use smart education technology during the COVID-19 pandemic: The case of higher education students in Thailand', *International Conference on Research and Development (ICORAD)* 1(2), 8–22. <https://doi.org/10.47841/ICORAD.V1I2.46>

FIGURE 1: The 4Cs of the marketing mix model.

Small, medium and microenterprises must prioritise understanding their customers' expectations and preferences through data analytics and feedback mechanisms (Kumar & Mokha 2021). Tailoring social media content to meet the specific needs of target audiences can enhance engagement and loyalty (Ewim et al. 2024). Furthermore, implementing an omni-channel strategy allows SMMEs to provide consistent interactions across various platforms, improving customer satisfaction (Ewim et al. 2024). In contrast, while the frameworks emphasise the importance of customer experience, some SMMEs may struggle with resource constraints, limiting their ability to implement comprehensive strategies effectively.

The customer experience framework can be integrated into the 4C Marketing Mix Model in the following way:

- The customer experience framework prioritises understanding customer needs and preferences, aligning with the customer aspect of the 4Cs. This involves gathering insights through customer research and touchpoint analysis (Da Silva & Minciotti 2022).
- Effective customer experience management can lead to reduced costs by streamlining processes and enhancing service delivery, as seen in omni-channel strategies that optimise resource allocation (Verhoef et al. 2009).
- The omni-channel framework facilitates seamless interactions across various platforms, ensuring that customers can engage with businesses in their preferred manner, thus enhancing convenience (Verhoef et al. 2009).
- A robust customer experience framework incorporates effective communication strategies, ensuring that customers receive timely and relevant information, which is essential for building trust and loyalty (Nai-Wen & An-Yi 2006).

Figure 2 shows the integrated customer experience and 4C marketing mix model.

In order to assess how SMMEs use digital marketing techniques to enhance customer engagement, satisfaction and business performance, this study will combine the 4Cs Marketing Mix with the Customer Experience Framework. The research tools will be informed by each theoretical construct, directing data collection and analysis to provide a direct connection between theory and practice.

## Research methods and design

The research onion, which outlines the different steps a researcher must take throughout the research process, was used in this study. Each of the six layers that make up the research onion describes the actions and choices a researcher makes during the course of the investigation. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019:130), these layers include the research philosophy, approach to theory creation, methodological selection, research strategy, time horizon and procedures used in a study.

<b>Customer experience</b> <b>Enhancing interactions between businesses and customers</b>			
<b>Customers</b> What are the customer needs	<b>Costs</b> Consider all costs involved in satisfying clients	<b>Convenience</b> How and where the customer wants to purchase	<b>Communication</b> Interaction between your organisation and customers

**FIGURE 2:** The integrated customer experience and 4C marketing mix model.

The philosophy of interpretivism, which posits that reality is socially and subjectively constructed, was employed in this study. Interpretivism, as an epistemological viewpoint, views knowledge as acquired through comprehension of meanings and interpretations as opposed to objective measurement (Saunders et al. 2019:149). The study incorporated subjective interpretations and viewpoints, recognising the inquiry's value-laden character. An interpretivist approach enables the examination of socially constructed meanings and experiences pertinent to the studied topic.

While abductive reasoning employs an unexpected fact to define or characterise a conclusion, deductive reasoning is generally used to examine pre-existing theories or hypotheses (Saunders et al. 2019:130). Conversely, an inductive technique aims to produce autonomous conclusions or inferences that rely on the information acquired throughout the research (Myers 2019:26). The researchers used the inductive approach, where the researchers collected data, identified themes and explained a theory deduced from data analysis.

According to Myers (2019:7), the chosen methodology should be determined by the research objective, which can be exploratory, explanatory or descriptive. The goal of descriptive research is to accurately describe occurrences or circumstances. The goal of explanatory study is to prove that one variable causes another. The goal of exploratory research is to learn more about phenomena that are not well understood (Dubey & Kothari 2022:85). Whether qualitative, quantitative or hybrid methodologies are best suited for generating the necessary knowledge depends on the researcher's objectives. The overall design is strengthened when the research questions and purpose are carefully matched with the methodology. The researchers employed a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis, as this study was exploratory.

A research plan is a methodical process, directed by clearly specified objectives, for collecting and analysing data for a study (Rahi 2017:2). A variety of research methodologies are used in qualitative investigations, according to Saunders et al. (2019:189). Action research, case study research, ethnography, grounded theory and narrative inquiry are some of the methods used in qualitative investigations. The research questions and objectives impact or direct the choice of research strategy (Howitt 2019:45). In order to accomplish the study's main goal, which is to investigate the social media advertising platforms that SMMEs may employ to survive in the VUCA environment, SMMEs in Nelson Mandela Bay served as the main case study.

## Data collection and procedure

The data were collected from Nelson Mandela Bay's SMMEs. According to the inclusion criteria, the enterprises must be operating as Nelson Mandela Bay SMMEs. The study's primary focus was on SMMEs in the beauty sector. Cosmetics, skincare and associated services are among the items and services that fall under this industry. South Africa's beauty business is expanding significantly, as seen by the rise of multiple SMMEs in the cosmeceuticals sector (Gebashe et al. 2022:5). These SMMEs are an important part of the industry's growth and economic contribution, which makes them a pertinent research topic.

Because of the lack of thorough data on the number of beauty sector enterprises in Nelson Mandela Bay, the sample frame is unknown. This restriction suggests that the study was unable to use random sampling or extrapolate results to all local beauty businesses. Purposive sampling, on the other hand, allowed the researchers to choose volunteers with pertinent expertise and experience in the beauty industry, so addressing this shortcoming. This ensured that rich and contextually relevant data were collected to fulfil the study's goals even in the absence of a predetermined sample frame.

The researchers conducted interviews with 15 people to achieve data saturation (Fusch & Ness 2015). To acquire rich and ideal data, for example, three additional interviews are recommended, even though research suggests 12 interviews are necessary to achieve saturation (Bougie & Sekaran 2019:1).

Based on study parameters, business availability and willingness to participate and other factors, purpose sampling was utilised to select participants with a wealth of information. Choosing participants who are regarded as authorities or experts in the research topic is known as purposeful sampling (Hennink & Kaiser 2022:26). Because business owners may turn to their networks and contacts, snowball sampling can also help find participants who are more suited (Oregon State University 2017:1). Finding possible research participants and giving them enough information to determine whether they are interested in taking part in a proposed study was part of the recruitment procedure. The Nelson Mandela Bay Facebook page is one of the social media sites used to find study participants. The researcher's contact information was included in the material. An email inviting participants to an interview was sent to those who expressed interest.

Fifteen small business owners in Nelson Mandela Bay who have been in the beauty sector for more than 5 years were interviewed for this study. The researchers followed an interview schedule that included a series of preset open-ended questions that acted as a checklist to guarantee that all pertinent subjects are methodically covered and as a constant guide for the interview process throughout all dialogues (Tracy 2020:56). During the preparation stage, the interview schedule was carefully created based on research questions and a thorough analysis of the relevant academic and business literature.

The interview schedule's questions were developed using the model examined within the theoretical framework. Data were collected from July to September 2024. Interviews were audio recorded with signed consent from each participant. This allowed for verbatim transcription and analysis, which was complemented by the interviewer's concurrent notetaking and observation diaries (Groenland & Dana 2019:88). Throughout the roughly 60–90-minute interviews, the researchers built rapport at the beginning, asked direct questions from the schedule while permitting some deviation, actively listened to responses without interjecting, and gently asked for additional information or examples when clarification was required. The interview structure will be in two sections. Section A of the interview schedule covered demographic data such as the age of the business owners, the number of employees and the location. Section B covered questions that helped answer the research objectives.

## Data analysis

Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative research method that involves identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. Developed by Braun and Clarke (2023:1), it follows a systematic six-phase process that enhances the rigour and clarity of the analysis (Finlay 2021:103). The first phase, familiarisation, the researchers immersed themselves in the data by reading and re-reading transcripts or notes to gain a comprehensive understanding of the material.

In the second phase, code generation, the researchers created initial codes by identifying features of the data relevant to the research question and labelling segments of text accordingly. The third phase involves generating themes, where the researchers examine the codes to identify broader patterns and group these into potential themes that capture significant aspects of the data. Following this, in the fourth phase – reviewing themes – the researchers refined these themes by checking them against the coded data and the entire dataset to ensure they accurately represent the underlying meanings.

The fifth phase focuses on defining and naming themes, where researchers clarify each theme and develop a detailed analysis that includes informative names reflecting their essence. Finally, in the sixth phase – creating the report – the researchers compiled their findings into a structured document that contextualises the analysis within existing literature and outlines the implications of their findings. This flexible approach enables adaptability across various research contexts while ensuring thoroughness in qualitative analysis (Thompson 2022:1).

The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis, a qualitative technique that identifies, analyses and reports patterns and themes within the data (ed. Madondo 2021:141). Following transcription, the researchers become familiar with the entire dataset by repeatedly reading the transcripts.

Initial codes will be developed to label significant excerpts. Codes were collated into potential overarching themes that characterise the data. The themes were reviewed for coherence and refined through an iterative process. The themes were defined, named and contextualised in a codebook. A thematic map was visualised relationships between themes (Eisend & Kuss 2019:181). Extract examples will clarify themes, incorporating participants' perspectives. Through the analysis the researchers identified key themes that are aligned with the research questions regarding experiences, practices, challenges and recommendations by people responsible for the advertisement. Thematic analysis provided a rich, detailed and nuanced account of the qualitative dataset for the case study.

We employed techniques such as member checking, where participants reviewed the results to verify the accuracy of their answers, and triangulation of data through multiple interviews with diverse participants to ensure the study's validity. To ensure that the study could be tracked and examined by future researchers, we maintained a thorough audit trail that documented the research process, including interview protocols, coding choices and analytical techniques. These actions improve the trustworthiness and credibility of our research on the concepts of digital marketing, customer experience and digital resilience in the beauty sector.

## Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from Nelson Mandela University and Faculty Ethics Committee (Business and Economic Sciences) (No. [0928]). The researchers ensured that the SMMEs owners or managers granted permission to be interviewed and for the interview to be audio recorded by signing the consent form prior to the interview. The recordings were stored securely in the Nelson Mandela University One Drive in a password-protected folder, which only the researchers have access to.

## Results

The data for this study was gathered through semi-structured interviews, which allowed for a flexible yet focused approach to understanding participants' perspectives. Individual interviews were conducted with a total of 15 participants, a number deemed sufficient to achieve data saturation (Faulkner & Trotter 2017:2).

## Participants' biographical information

The first section of the interview was on the biographical information of the participants. The interview strictly targeted SMME owners in Nelson Mandela Bay. The inclusion criteria specified that the businesses should have been operating for at least 5 years, covering the period before, during and after the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. All the businesses should be in the beauty industry with no specification of gender as seen in Figure 3.

All participants had to be in the beauty industry, operating for more than 5 years. Three participants were nail technicians, three were lash technicians, three were wig specialists, two were hair traders, two were make-up artists, one was a loctician and one was a barber.

### Themes identified from interviews

In answering the reserach objective on the perceptions pf SMMEs (owners or managers) of social media advertising platforms on the survival of SMMEs in the VUCA world, two main themes were developed. These include ensuring convinience and effective communication. These themes reflect core dimensions of customer experience within social media advertising, with convenience primarily expressed through productivity, efficiency and ease of access, and communication manifested through navigability, responsiveness and platform usability. The 'convenience' theme was comprised of two codes: Automated messages and WhatsApp catalogues. The effective communication theme consisted of four codes: WhatsApp messaging, Instagram direct messages, posting story updates and TikTok direct messaging (DM). Theme 2, in other words, indicates that the participants have a positive view of their ability to communicate effectively with their clients, suggesting that they do not struggle to convey their messages. They highlighted WhatsApp messaging, Instagram DM, posting updates on stories and TikTok DM as their main communication platforms with their clients.

### Themes and codes

Theme 1: Ensuring convenience:

- Code 1: Automated messages
- Code 2: WhatsApp catalogues

Theme 2: Effective communication:

- Code 1: WhatsApp messaging
- Code 2: Instagram direct message (DM)
- Code 3: Story updates
- Code 4: TikTok DM

### Illustrative quotes from participants

Table 2 shows some answers from the participants relating to themes:

### Alignment with theoretical frameworks

The findings from the participants highlight the effectiveness of influencer marketing and personalised customer engagement strategies in enhancing brand recognition and sales, so aligning well with the 4Cs Marketing Mix – Customer, Cost, Convenience and Communication. Participant 6's use of influencer marketing to engage small-to-medium-sized content creators is particularly relevant, as this approach not only increases brand awareness, but also effectively targets specific demographics. The findings from participants 10, 8 and 14 highlight the importance of effective communication

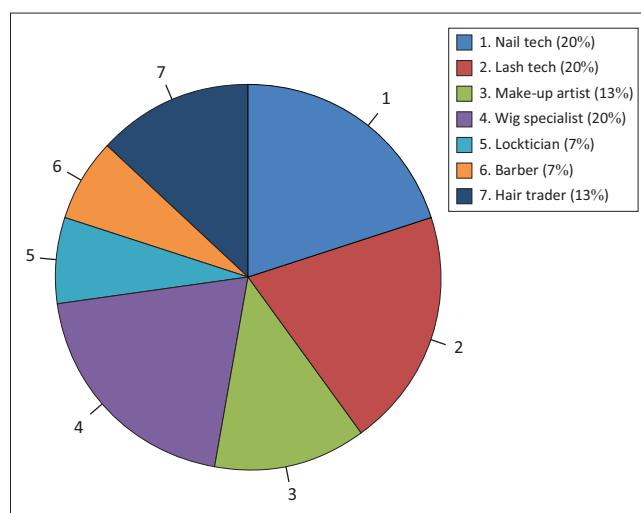


FIGURE 3: Participants' occupation.

TABLE 2: Answers from participants relating to themes.

Perceptions of consumers	Quotes
Ensuring convenience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Under each of my videos I post a link that takes any customer interested directly to my website, or another link directly to my WhatsApp. In that way they are able to see my catalogue that shows the different services I offer and the prices.' (Participant 1: Lash technician, female, 7 years experience)</li> <li>• 'We use influencer marketing, where we pay small-to-medium content creators to create content using our products on Instagram.' (Participant 6: Make-up artist, female, 6 years experience)</li> <li>• 'It's easy to book with me, very straight forward, there is an automatic response letting them know up to how much time it may take for me to get back to them. I may not always be available to respond to clients, but I always try as much as possible to respond to clients as promptly as possible. They speak to me directly instead of speaking to a machine or an app ensuring convenience for my clients.' (Participant 12: Make-up artist, female, 6 years experience)</li> <li>• 'I have a business number that answers them with an automated message explaining if I'm not available at the moment, I will eventually respond.' (Participant 14: Nail technician, female, 7 years experience)</li> </ul>
Effective communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'We normally communicate through WhatsApp or Instagram DMs, some that don't have WhatsApp or any other social media are able to call me or send me an SMS and I'll create the booking for them.' (Participant 2: Barber, male, 8 years experience)</li> <li>• 'I maintain communication through direct messaging on WhatsApp and Instagram, where I respond to queries and help customers with bookings. On Facebook and TikTok, I use posts and stories to share updates, promotions, and tips about the beauty services I offer. Google My Business helps with visibility, allowing customers to leave reviews and see my business hours and location easily.' (Participant 10: Loctician, male, 8 years experience)</li> <li>• 'I communicate with them mostly on WhatsApp, but some customers prefer email or text messages. Some clients prefer to call but I always prefer to have a paper trail of how the conversation went via text for clarity sake. I am currently working on a booking system.' (Participant 8: Wig specialist, female, 6 years experience)</li> </ul>

DM, direct messaging; SMS, short message service.

and digital presence in the beauty industry, aligning well with the 4Cs Marketing Mix – Customer, Cost, Convenience and Communication and the customer experience framework. Participant 10's use of DM on platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram for customer inquiries and bookings demonstrates a commitment to customer engagement. The discussion section interprets the empirically derived themes of ensuring

convenience and effective communication by analytically examining their operational manifestations within SMMEs' day-to-day practices. Specifically, productivity and efficiency are discussed as mechanisms that facilitate convenience, while navigation and ease-of-use are examined as enabling conditions for effective communication across social media platforms.

## Discussion

### Theme 1: Ensuring convenience through productivity and efficiency

This theme expands on the results section's finding of ensuring convenience by illustrating how productivity and efficiency function as practical mechanisms through which convenience is delivered to customers via social media platforms. Two themes were identified, namely productivity and efficiency, as well as navigation and ease-of-use. These topics demonstrate how SMMEs utilise social media platforms to efficiently communicate with clients and streamline their operations, according to participant responses. Participants highlighted several advantages of using social media for their businesses, particularly the flexibility and accessibility it offers. These findings were supported by Tang, Luo & Su (2024:141), who state that social media platforms are designed to be user-friendly, enabling SMMEs to interact with clients and run their companies without being restricted by a physical office, which is consistent with the idea of productivity and efficiency. Participants' examples of automated messages and WhatsApp catalogues that expedite consumer encounters serve as practical illustrations of productivity and efficiency. By leveraging the flexibility and accessibility of these platforms, businesses can easily engage with customers and manage their advertising efforts without the limitations of a physical office.

### Theme 2: Effective communication enabled by navigation and ease-of-use

In alignment with the results theme of effective communication, this discussion examines navigation and ease-of-use as critical enablers that allow SMMEs to maintain responsive, clear and consistent communication with customers across multiple social media platforms. Participants highlighted how these platforms enable the easy posting of updates, content and management of advertisements, which enhances the overall customer experience. As an illustration of the navigation and ease-of-use topic, Participant 1 mentioned how automatic links and catalogues streamline client access. Studies show that user-friendly platforms promote greater engagement and enable effective communication between businesses and consumers (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010). The findings emphasise the importance of identifying effective social media advertising platforms that can help SMMEs navigate the challenges of a VUCA environment. Participant experiences verify that these platforms offer flexibility in adapting to shifting customer demands, bolstering SMMEs' ability to withstand market volatility. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram are particularly adept at engaging younger

audiences, which is crucial for shaping consumer behaviour. Automated messaging and agile content creation help SMMEs respond to market volatility and shift consumer expectations in real time, enhancing their resilience in a VUCA environment. Integration of participant insights with literature reveals useful tactics that SMMEs can use to improve online visibility, customer interaction and operational effectiveness. By strategically utilising these platforms, businesses can enhance their digital presence and adapt to the rapidly evolving market landscape, ultimately improving their chances of success.

Although the beauty industry is the focus of this study, other digitally mediated, customer-facing SMMEs like fashion, hospitality, wellness and creative services might benefit from its findings. The focus on customer experience, ease and real-time communication is indicative of larger trends in the digitalisation of small businesses. The results are better used as sector-specific analytical insights rather than broadly applicable conclusions, though, as transferability may be restricted in industries with reduced visual dependency, longer purchase cycles or business-to-business (B2B) orientations.

### Limitations

Even though this study offers insightful information about how SMMEs in the beauty industry use social media advertising, there are several limitations. The findings may not be as applicable to other beauty SMMEs because of the small study size (15 participants). Furthermore, the geographic emphasis on Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality might not accurately represent experiences in other areas or nations. Additionally, the data were based on participant's own perspectives, which may have introduced bias or subjective interpretations. Notwithstanding these drawbacks, the results provide industry-specific insights and a starting point for further studies examining digital marketing tactics in more general settings.

### Future recommendations

To maximise the benefits of social media advertising, SMMEs should prioritise the use of user-friendly platforms that enhance productivity and efficiency. Business owners should strategically leverage social media advertising platforms to enhance brand visibility and customer engagement, with a particular focus on TikTok and Instagram, to connect with younger demographics, such as Generation Z and Millennials. Research indicates that effective social media marketing not only improves brand awareness, but also drives sales as a significant portion of users make purchases based on online content (Wong et al. 2021). Participant 6's use of influencer marketing demonstrates how small-to-medium content producers effectively target key demographics and increase brand awareness.

To maximise impact, businesses should create authentic and engaging content that resonates with their target audience while ensuring a seamless user experience across multiple platforms. Additionally, adopting a focused approach to

social media strategy can simplify management and optimise marketing efforts in an increasingly complex digital landscape (Pikhart & Botezat 2021).

Beauty industry business owners should enhance customer engagement by focusing on effective communication and a strong digital presence that is aligned with the 4Cs Marketing Mix and the customer experience framework. By understanding and addressing specific customer needs and wants, brands can tailor their offerings, leading to higher satisfaction and loyalty (Londhe 2014:5). Participants 10, 8 and 14 emphasised the value of direct communication and timely responses in fostering client trust, illustrating the importance of personalised engagement. Additionally, offering competitive pricing and value ensures that customers feel they are receiving quality for their investment, thus enhancing perceived value and encouraging repeat purchases (Zeithaml 1988). Facilitating easy access through multiple channels, such as social media and messaging apps, aligns with consumer expectations for convenience, ultimately driving sales and improving customer experiences. Effective two-way communication fosters trust and brand loyalty, enabling businesses to engage customers meaningfully and respond promptly to inquiries, which is crucial in the beauty sector (Lim 2021:453).

## Conclusion

The research objectives were meticulously designed to explore how these platforms can be strategically utilised to enhance resilience and adaptability among SMMEs. The findings indicate that social media advertising not only increases brand visibility, but also facilitates cost-effective marketing strategies tailored to the unique needs of smaller enterprises. By identifying key platforms and assessing the perceptions and usage of social media among SMME owners, this study highlights the importance of integrating social media into marketing strategies.

Moreover, it highlights the necessity for ongoing training and support to empower SMMEs in effectively leveraging these digital tools. As the landscape of consumer behaviour continues to evolve towards digital interactions, SMMEs must remain proactive in adapting their marketing approaches. By embracing social media advertising, these enterprises can navigate challenges more effectively, foster customer loyalty and ultimately secure their position in an increasingly competitive market. The insights gained from this study serve as a valuable resource for SMMEs seeking to thrive in a dynamic business environment, thus emphasising that with the correct strategies and support, they can not only survive but flourish amid uncertainty.

## Acknowledgements

### Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

## CRedit authorship contribution

Atuweni Jawadu: Conceptualisation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Visualisation, Writing – original draft. Sinaye A. Mtimba: Conceptualisation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Supervision, Visualisation, Writing – original draft. Ayanda P. Deliwe: Conceptualisation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Supervision, Visualisation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. All authors reviewed the article, contributed to the discussion of results, approved the final version for submission and publication, and take responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

## Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

## Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, Ayanda P. Deliwe, upon reasonable request.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and are the product of professional research. They do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency or that of the publisher. The authors are responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

## References

- Abedian, M., Amindoust, A., Maddahi, R. & Jouzdani, J., 2022, 'A game theory approach to selecting marketing-mix strategies', *Journal of Advances in Management Research* 19(1), 139–158. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JAMR-10-2020-0264>
- Afolayan, A.O. & De la Harpe, A.C., 2020, 'The role of evaluation in SMMEs' strategic decision-making on new technology adoption', *Technology Analysis & Strategic Management* 32(6), 697–710. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09537325.2019.1702637>
- Balaskas, S., Panagiotarou, A. & Rigou, M., 2022, 'The influence of trustworthiness and technology acceptance factors on the usage of e-government services during COVID-19: A case study of post COVID-19 Greece', *Administrative Sciences* 12(4), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci12040129>
- Basson, N. & Omoruyi, O., 2025, 'Internal and external factors affecting the growth of SMMEs: A qualitative study', *The Southern African Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management* 17(1), 919. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajesbm.v17i1.919>
- Ben Amor, N.E.H. & Mzoughi, M.N., 2023, 'Do millennials' motives for using Snapchat influence the effectiveness of Snap ads?', *Sage Open* 13(3), 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231187875>
- Bennett, N. & Lemoine, J., 2014, 'What VUCA really means for you', *Harvard Business Review* 92(1/2), viewed 23 July 2024, from <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2389563>.
- Botha, J., De Vries, M. & Kruger, P., 2012, 'Enhancing customer experience through business process improvement: An introduction to the enhanced customer experience framework (theory and methodology, < Special English Issue> The 40th International Conference on Computers and Industrial Engineering (CIE 40))', *Journal of Japan Industrial Management Association* 62(6), 286–293. <https://doi.org/10.11221/jima.62.286>
- Bougie, R. & Sekaran, U., 2019, *Research methods for business: A skill building approach*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, NY.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V., 2023, 'Toward good practice in thematic analysis: Avoiding common problems and being a knowing researcher', *International Journal of Transgender Health* 24(1), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1080/26895269.2022.2129597>
- Braun, V., Clarke, V. & Hayfield, N., 2022, "A starting point for your journey, not a map": Nikki Hayfield in conversation with Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke about thematic analysis', *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 19(2), 424–445. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2019.1670765>

- Bruns, A., 2021, *The Routledge companion to political journalism*, Routledge, New York, NY.
- Bruwer, J.P., 2020, 'Fortifying South African small medium and micro enterprise sustainability through a proposed internal control framework: The sustenance framework', *Expert Journal of Business and Management* 8(2), 47–158, viewed 18 July 2024, from [https://business.expertjournals.com/ark:/16759/EJBM\\_811bruwer147-158.pdf](https://business.expertjournals.com/ark:/16759/EJBM_811bruwer147-158.pdf).
- Build One South Africa (BOSA), 2025, *SMME crisis demands attention in next week's budget*, viewed n.d., from <https://www.politicsweb.co.za/politics/smme-crisis-demands-attention-in-next-weeks-budget>.
- Casaló, L.V., Flavián, C. & Ibáñez-Sánchez, S., 2020, 'Influencers on Instagram: Antecedents and consequences of opinion leadership', *Journal of Business Research* 117, 510–519. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.07.005>
- Chaffey, D. & Ellis-Chadwick, F., 2025, *Digital marketing: Strategy, implementation and practice*, 9th edn., Pearson Education Limited, London.
- Da Silva, E.C. & Minciotti, S.A., 2022, 'Customer experience: A framework for managing and delivering value to customers', *Revista Alcance* 29(2), 192–207. [https://doi.org/10.14210/alcance.v29n2\(mai/ago\).p192-207](https://doi.org/10.14210/alcance.v29n2(mai/ago).p192-207)
- Dhillon, R. & Nguyen, Q.C., 2021, *Strategies to respond to a VUCA world*, viewed 30 June 2024, from <http://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/record/9040634>.
- Djafarova, E. & Bowes, T., 2021, "'Instagram made Me buy it!': Generation Z impulse purchases in fashion industry", *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 59, 102345. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102345>
- Dubey, U.K.B. & Kothari, D.P., 2022, *Research methodology: Techniques and trends*, Chapman & Hall/CRC, London.
- Ebrahim, R.S., 2020, 'The role of trust in understanding the impact of social media marketing on brand equity and brand loyalty', *Journal of Relationship Marketing* 19(4), 287–308. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332667.2019.1705742>
- Eisend, M. & Kuss, A., 2019, 'The philosophy of science viewpoint: Scientific realism', in M. Eisend & A. Kuss (eds.), *Research methodology in marketing: Theory development, empirical approaches and philosophy of science considerations*, pp. 59–81, Springer International Publishing, Cham.
- Ewim, C.P.M., Alabi, O.A., Okeke, N.I., Igwe, A.N. & Ofodile, O.C., 2024, 'Omni-channel customer experience framework: Enhancing service delivery in SMEs', *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews* 24(2), 655–670. <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2024.24.2.3335>
- Faulkner, S.L. & Trotter, S.P., 2017, 'Theoretical saturation', in M.S. Lewis-Beck, A. Bryman & T. Futing Liao (eds.), *The international encyclopedia of communication research methods*, pp. 1–2, Wiley-Blackwell, Hoboken, NJ.
- Fennis, B.M. & Stroebe, W., 2020, *The psychology of advertising*, 3rd edn., Routledge, London.
- Ferreira, C., Robertson, J. & Pitt, L., 2022, 'Business (Un)Usual: Critical Skills for the Next Normal', *Thunderbird International Business Review* 65(1), 39–47. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tie.22276>
- Finlay, L., 2021, 'Thematic analysis: The "good", the "bad" and the "ugly"', *European Journal for Qualitative Research in Psychotherapy* 11, 103–116. <https://doi.org/10.24377/EJQR.article3062>
- Fusch, P. & Ness, L., 2015, 'Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative research', *The Qualitative Report* 20(9), 1408–1416. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2015.2281>
- Gebashe, F.C., Naidoo, D., Amoo, S.O. & Masondo, N.A., 2022, 'Cosmeceuticals: A newly expanding industry in South Africa', *Cosmetics* 9(4), 77. <https://doi.org/10.3390/cosmetics9040077>
- Gribble, L. & Beckmann, E.A., 2023, 'The 4Cs strategy for disseminating innovations in university teaching: Classroom, corridors, campus, community', *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice* 20(1), 13–34. <https://doi.org/10.5376/1.20.01.04>
- Groenland, E. & Dana, L.-P., 2019, *Collection Methods: Toward Increased Rigour In Management Research*, World Scientific Publishing Company, Singapore.
- Grosskopf, S. & Barmeyer, C., 2021, 'Learning from multi-paradigmatic sensitivity in cross-cultural management? Empirical and theoretical considerations', *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management* 21(2), 181–202. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14705958211019437>
- Hadar, L.L., Ergas, O., Alpert, B. & Ariav, T., 2020, 'Rethinking teacher education in a VUCA world: Student teachers' social-emotional competencies during the COVID-19 crisis', *European Journal of Teacher Education* 43(4), 573–586. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1807513>
- Han, R., Lam, H.K., Zhan, Y., Wang, Y., Dwivedi, Y.K. & Tan, K.H., 2021, 'Artificial intelligence in business-to-business marketing: A bibliometric analysis of current research status, development and future directions', *Industrial Management & Data Systems* 121(12), 2467–2497. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IMDS-05-2021-0300>
- Hennink, M. & Kaiser, B.N., 2022, 'Sample sizes for saturation in qualitative research: A systematic review of empirical tests', *Social Science & Medicine* 292, 114523. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114523>
- Howitt, D., 2019, *Introduction to qualitative research methods in psychology*, Pearson, London.
- Kaplan, A.M. & Haenlein, M., 2010, 'Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media', *Business Horizons* 53(1), 59–68. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003>
- Kargeti, H., Singh, V., Paul, S.N. & Sagar, V., 2022, 'Assessment of M-commerce adoption and buying behaviour among youngsters using TAM model', *International Journal of Business Innovation and Research* 27(3), 95–412. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJBIR.2022.121713>
- Kingsnorth, S., 2025, *Digital marketing strategy: An integrated approach to online marketing*, Kogan Page Publishers, London.
- Kokong, L.N. & Naidoo, S., 2022, 'Digitalisation of the professional hairdressing industry and the impact on value chain stakeholders', *South African Journal of Information Management* 24(1), 1554. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajim.v24i1.1554>
- Krumay, B. & Brandtweiner, R., 2015, 'The role of information systems to support disaster management', *WIT Transactions on the Built Environment* 150, 301–313. <https://doi.org/10.2495/DMAN150271>
- Kumar, P. & Mokha, A.K., 2021, 'Relationship between E-CRM, customer experience, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty in banking industry: A review of literature', *Research Review: International Journal of Multidisciplinary* 6(2), 127–137. <https://doi.org/10.31305/riijm.2021.v06.i02.022>
- Kuo, N.W., 2010, 'Towards a holistic customer experience', in F. Ko (ed.), *The 6th International Conference on Networked Computing and Advanced Information Management*, Seoul, August 16–18, pp. 641–644, Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE), New York.
- Lim, W.M., 2021, 'History, lessons, and ways forward from the COVID-19 pandemic', *International Journal of Quality and Innovation* 5(2), 101–108.
- Londhe, B.R., 2014, 'Marketing mix for next generation marketing', *Procedia Economics and Finance* 11, 335–340. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671\(14\)00201-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671(14)00201-9)
- Lou, C. & Yuan, S., 2019, 'Influencer marketing: How message value and credibility affect consumer trust of branded content on social media', *Journal of Interactive Advertising* 19(1), 58–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2018.1533501>
- Madondo, S.M. (ed.), 2021, *Data analysis and methods of qualitative research: Emerging research and opportunities: Emerging research and opportunities*, IGI Global, New York, NY.
- Makkar, M. & Rani, N., 2024, 'Strategies to respond to VUCA world', *Drishtikon: A Management Journal* 15(2), 37–49, viewed 15 January 2026, from <http://www.publishingindia.com/drishtikon/>.
- Mas-Manchón, L., 2020, *Innovation in advertising and branding communication*, 1st edn., Routledge, New York, NY.
- Matekenya, W. & Moyo, C., 2022, 'Innovation as a driver of SMME performance in South Africa: A quantile regression approach', *African Journal of Economic and Management Studies* 13(3), 52–467. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AJEMS-06-2021-0306>
- Mbatha, B., 2024, 'Digital divide: A phenomenon of unequal adoption of technology by SMMEs in the agribusiness sector in South Africa', *Communicare: Journal for Communication Sciences in Southern Africa* 43(2), 64–75. <https://doi.org/10.36615/vdjgg265>
- Modisane, P. & Jokonya, O., 2021, 'Evaluating the benefits of cloud computing in small, medium and micro-sized enterprises (SMMEs)', *Procedia Computer Science* 181, 784–792. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2021.01.254>
- Myers, M.D., 2019, *Qualitative research in business and management*, SAGE Publications, Los Angeles, CA.
- Nai-Wen, K. & An-Yi, L., 2006, 'The high benefits internet marketing framework through customer experience', in *9th Joint International Conference on Information Sciences (JICIS-06)*, Kaohsiung, October 08–11, pp. 65–68, Atlantis Press, Paris.
- Okpige, S.G., 2020, 'The quest to re-strategize marketing mix strategizes: Mitigating the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on consumers in Nigeria', *Journal of International Conference Series* 1(6), 355–363.
- Oregon State University, 2017, *Snowball sampling*, Oregon State University Research Office, viewed 27 September 2023, from <https://research.oregonstate.edu/irb/policies-and-guidance-investigators/guidance/snowball-sampling>.
- Pieter, G.M., Massie, J.D. & Saerang, R.T., 2021, 'Exploring the effectiveness of using Tik Tok as a media for promotion: A case study of youth intention to buy products', *Jurnal EMBA: Jurnal Riset Ekonomi, Manajemen, Bisnis dan Akuntansi / EMBA Journal: Journal of Research in Economics, Management, Business, and Accounting* 9(4), 11–20.
- Pikhart, M. & Botezat, O., 2021, 'The impact of the use of social media on second language acquisition', *Procedia Computer Science* 192, 1621–1628. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2021.08.160>
- Quesenberry, K.A., 2020, *Social media strategy: Marketing, advertising, and public relations in the consumer revolution*, Rowman & Littlefield, London.
- Rahi, S., 2017, 'Research design and methods: A systematic review of research paradigms, sampling issues and instruments development', *International Journal of Economics & Management Sciences* 6(2), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.4172/2162-6359.1000403>
- Rath, C.R., Grosskopf, S. & Barmeyer, C., 2021, 'Leadership in the VUCA world-a systematic literature review and its link to intercultural competencies', *European Journal of Cross-Cultural Competence and Management* 5(3), 195–219. <https://doi.org/10.1504/EJCCM.2021.116890>
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A., 2019, *Research methods for business students*, Pearson Education, New York, NY.
- Sharma, A., Dwivedi, R., Mariani, M.M. & Islam, T., 2022, 'Investigating the effect of advertising irritation on digital advertising effectiveness: A moderated mediation model', *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 180, 121731. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2022.121731>
- Shukla, P. & Shamurailatpam, S.D., 2024, 'Financing of Sports Tourism Marketing in India: An Approach Toward Sustainable Development', in *Dynamics of the Tourism Industry*, pp. 195–207, Apple Academic Press.
- Singh, R., Telukdarie, A. & Mongwe, R., 2024, 'Digital social media influencers' impact on beauty and personal care purchases in South Africa', *Platforms* 2(4), 193–210. <https://doi.org/10.3390/platforms2040013>

- Singh, R.K., Mishra, R. & He, Q., 2025, 'Sustainable supply chain and environmental collaboration in the supply chain management: Agenda for future research and implications', *Business Strategy and the Environment* 34(5), 5487–5513. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.4136>
- Siripipathanakul, S., Limna, P., Kraiwanit, T. & Siripipattanakul, S., 2022, 'Predicting intention to use smart education technology during the COVID-19 pandemic: The case of higher education students in Thailand', *International Conference on Research and Development (ICORAD)* 1(2), 8–22. <https://doi.org/10.47841/ICORAD.V1I2.46>
- Smith, P.R., 2022, *Digital marketing excellence: planning, optimizing and integrating online marketing*, Routledge, United Kingdom, UK.
- Srivastava, M. & Fernandes, S., 2022, 'Can Indian millennials be engaged through online customer gamified experience?', *Indian Journal of Marketing* 52(6), 24–40. <https://doi.org/10.17010/ijom/2022/v52/i6/169834>
- Syaifudin, S., Henriawan, D., Suzana, A., Budianto, E., & Oviana, R., 2025, 'Marketing Dynamics in the Digital Age: A Literacy Study on the Shift from Traditional Marketing to Social Media', *JOBM-Journal of Business Management Basic*, 7(1), 28–34.
- Tang, Y., Luo, C. & Su, Y., 2024, 'Understanding health misinformation sharing among the middle-aged or above in China: roles of social media health information seeking, misperceptions and information processing predispositions', *Online Information Review* 48(2), 314–333. <https://doi.org/10.1108/OIR-04-2023-0157>
- Teece, D., Peteraf, M. & Leih, S., 2016, 'Dynamic capabilities and organizational agility: Risk, uncertainty, and strategy in the innovation economy', *California Management Review* 58(4), 13–35. <https://doi.org/10.1525/cmr.2016.58.4.13>
- Thompson, J., 2022, 'A guide to abductive thematic analysis', *The qualitative report* 27(5), 1410–1421. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5340>
- Tracy, S.J., 2020, *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*, John Wiley and Sons, Inc., New York, NY.
- Troise, C., Corvello, V., Ghobadian, A. & O'Regan, N., 2022, 'How can SMEs successfully navigate VUCA environment: The role of agility in the digital transformation era', *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 174, 121227. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2021.121227>
- Verhoef, P.C., Lemon, K.N., Parasuraman, A., Roggeveen, A., Tsiros, M. & Schlesinger, L.A., 2009, 'Customer experience creation: Determinants, dynamics and management strategies', *Journal of Retailing* 85(1), 31–41. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2008.11.001>
- Wentzel, L., Fapohunda, J.A. & Haldenwang, R., 2022, 'The relationship between the integration of CSR and sustainable business performance: Perceptions of SMEs in the South African construction industry', *Sustainability* 14(3), 1049. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14031049>
- Winaryati, E. & Hidayat, M.T., 2020, 'Conceptual framework of evaluation model on 4 C'S-based learning supervision', *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 19(8), 173–193. <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.19.8.11>
- Wong, A., Ho, S., Olusanya, O., Antonini, M.V. & Lyness, D., 2021, 'The use of social media and online communications in times of pandemic COVID-19', *Journal of the Intensive Care Society* 22(3), 255–260. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1751143720966280>
- Zeithaml, V.A., 1988, 'Consumer perceptions of price, quality, and value: A means-end model and synthesis of evidence', *Journal of Marketing* 52(3), 2–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224298805200302>
- Zhou, H. & Gumbo, V., 2021, 'Rural-urban comparison of manufacturing SMMEs performance in KwaZulu Natal province, South Africa', *African Journal of Development Studies* 11(1), 7–31. <https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-3649/2021/v11n1a1>