

**A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE ROLE OF E-COMMERCE ON
MARKETING STRATEGIES OF SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED
ENTERPRISES(SMES)**

BY

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DECLARATION:

In accordance with Rule G5.6.3, I hereby declare that the above-mentioned treatise/dissertation/thesis is my own work and that I have not previously been submitted to another University or for another qualification

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my younger brother. Your journey is a powerful reminder that no matter how long it takes, determination will carry you to the finish line.

As daddy always says, *“a few years of sacrifice leads to a lifetime of pleasure.”*

This work stands as a testament to the belief that anything is possible through perseverance, self-belief, and the quiet strength of those who never give up.

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ABSTRACT

This study conducts a systematic literature review to examine the role of e-commerce in shaping the marketing strategies of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in emerging economies, with a specific focus on South Africa. With the digital economy rapidly expanding, SMEs must leverage online platforms to enhance market reach, improve customer engagement, and boost operational efficiency for sustained competitiveness. Guided by the Technology Acceptance Model and Resource-Based Theory, this research synthesizes qualitative evidence from peer-reviewed literature. The primary objectives are to identify key drivers, barriers, and measurable outcomes of e-commerce adoption by SMEs. The findings aim to inform policymakers and business stakeholders on effective digital strategies to foster sustainable SME growth and innovation in emerging markets.

Key words: E-commerce; Marketing strategies; Small and Medium-sized; Systematic literature review

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CHAPTER ONE

INTROCUITION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

E-commerce is the successful interchange of information, purchase, and sale of goods and services using electronic networks, the internet, mobile devices, or digital technologies (Reedy, Schullo & Zimmerman , 2020:26). In recent years, the e-commerce sector has expanded quickly, giving customers more access to products and services at more convenient times and places. E-commerce has played a significant role in the transformation of the way businesses operate and how customers make purchases (Zhang, Zhou & Cao, 2020:9). Technology advancements and the expansion of the internet have led to the digitization of both information and non-information items, which has forced businesses to reconsider their marketing strategies. The growth of online markets has increased competition, putting pressure on the traditional retailers to adapt to stay competitive (Cham, Cheah, Memon & Laszlo, 2022:103). A country's economy depends greatly on the growth of its small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs), public procurement can be a crucial source of revenue for these businesses. Many economies place a high value on SMEs (Peprah, Mensah & Akosah, 2016:26).

SMEs are widely acknowledged as an entrepreneurial activity that is a major factor in a country's economic growth. In an era of rapidly shifting businesses transactions to digital and more automated forms, a more specialized demand, and a service-based economy, it may be argued that the rules of the game regarding foreign expansion for these SMEs have altered (Organisation for Economic Cooperation, 2017:4). According to recent research in international entrepreneurship, SMEs can expand further by implementing access to unexplored customer groups and new market prospects (Tolstoy, Nordman, Hånell & Özbek, 2021:3). Economic growth is mostly driven by SMEs, particularly in developing nations. To be competitive, however, marketing strategies must change due to the quick advancement of technology (Basir, 2024:2).

SMEs have reshaped the marketing landscape by introducing customer focused and resource- efficient strategies that contrast with the structured approaches of larger

firms. Entrepreneurial marketing, which is defined by informal, instinctive and opportunity driven strategies has become more popular because of their limited budgets and efficient operations (Mahfuz, Habib & Islam 2025:95).

This systematic literature review aims to critically analyse the existing research on the impact of e-commerce on SMEs marketing strategies in context to South Africa. The study will provide insights into how SMEs may use e-commerce to gain a competitive edge and sustain growth by combining data from academic sources

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the importance of e-commerce on marketing strategies of SMEs, the problem prompting the undertaking of this study is the lack of consolidated and systematic evidence on how e-commerce specifically transforms core marketing strategies within SMEs in the context of emerging economies like South Africa. According to Urban & Maphathe (2021:2) most prior research on e-commerce have focused on Western contexts, which has left little information about how these technologies are used in African countries such as South Africa. Complementing this view Mbatha and Moodley (2024:27) points out that SMEs in South Africa still encounter challenges in adopting digital marketing strategies. These limitations highlight the necessity for empirical, research that examines how e-commerce technologies specifically transform marketing tasks within SMEs operating in emerging economies.

Although SMEs are increasingly using e-commerce, the influence on basic marketing tactics is uncertain. Existing research emphasizes generic benefits but provides little insight into how e-commerce improves customer involvement, branding and competitive positioning. Without this insight, SMEs may struggle to improve their marketing strategy for growth. Although South African SMEs are using e-commerce platforms and tools more frequently, Urban *et al* (2021:1) note that this usage is unplanned and lacks strategic focus. The inability of many businesses to use these tools in a coherent marketing strategy restricts their capability to increase brand awareness and promote customer engagement. Sharma (2020:219) reaffirms this concern, stating that SMEs frequently encounter challenges relating to funding and experience that keep them from incorporating e-commerce into a cohesive marketing

plan. These constraints limit a firm's ability to build brand visibility, engage with customers and maintain a competitive advantage.

Against this background, there is limited research that has been done on how e-commerce impact marketing strategies of SMEs. Therefore, this study seeks to systematically examine and synthesize existing literature to understand the extent, nature and strategic implications of the impact of e-commerce on marketing strategies.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1.3.1 PRIMARY RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The primary research objective of this study is to undertake a systematic literature review (SLR) on how E-Commerce impact marketing strategies of SMEs.

1.3.2 SECONDARY RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To achieve the primary research objective of this study, the following secondary research objectives (SOs) have been formulated:

- SO¹: To investigate how e-commerce enhances the marketing strategies of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)
- SO²: To explore how SMEs are utilising e-commerce platforms to drive and stimulate growth, improve customer reach, and increase revenues.
- SO³: To investigate the difficulties SMEs have while implementing digital marketing and E-commerce strategies and pinpoint solutions.

1.3.3 METHODOLOGICAL OBJECTIVES

To achieve the above-mentioned primary and secondary research objectives, the methodological objectives (MO) are:

- MO¹: To conduct a systematic literature review on impact of E-Commerce on marketing strategies of SMEs
- MO²: To determine the most suited research methodology to address the primary and secondary objectives
- MO³: To identify the theoretical framework that will be used for the collection and analysis of data

MO4: To provide conclusions and recommendations and use comparative analysis to synthesis findings.

1.4 **SCOPE AND DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

The primary research objective of this study is to undertake a systematic literature review (SLR) on how E-Commerce impact marketing strategies of SMEs. The geographical focus is primarily on emerging economies, with emphasis on South Africa, to contextualise findings within the digital transformation faced by SMEs in developing countries. This study purely focuses on the secondary data sources, specifically peer reviewed journal articles from databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, Sabinet, EBSCOhost and Web of Science. Furthermore, the literature review does not include articles not available in English. The study does not empirically test the impact of e-commerce but rather synthesizes existing findings to identify patterns, gaps and theoretical implications.

1.5 **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to understanding how e-commerce impacts and transforms the marketing strategies of SMEs particularly within the dynamic of emerging economies like South Africa. SMEs play an important role in job creation, innovation and economic growth. By systematically reviewing the current academic work, this study will clarify the strategic role of e-commerce in shaping digital marketing strategies. In addition to guiding future studies this research will provide findings that aim to guide researchers, policymakers, and SME stakeholders in harnessing e-commerce as a catalyst for sustainable marketing innovation.

1.6 **STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH TO FOLLOW**

The structure of the study comprises of five chapters, which will be outlined below together with the content in each.

Chapter One provides an introduction and background to the study. The problem statement as well as the research objectives, being the primary, secondary and methodological objectives, together with the research question to follow. The scope and significance of the study is explained. Chapter One concludes by underlining the outline of the chapters to follow.

Chapter Two provides a systematic literature review of the impact of e-commerce on marketing strategies of SMEs. It discusses the nature and importance of e-commerce, as well as the nature and importance of SMEs. The impact of e-commerce on marketing strategies is discussed and analysed. The theoretical frameworks such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Resource- Based View (RBV) are discussed which underpin the conceptual understanding of e-commerce and its impact of marketing strategies in SMEs.

Chapter Three outlines the research design in methodology. The research paradigm, approach to theory development, methodological choice, time dimension and data collection and analysis is explained. This chapter also focuses on the steps that need to be taken in conducting a systematic literature review as well as the considerations to ensure rigour within this research. Chapter Three concludes with the ethical considerations.

Chapter Four presents the empirical results of the study. A descriptive account of the articles and the journals within the articles were published are provided. The chapter provides thematic results of the SLR organised into key themes such as digital marketing transformation, customer engagement, market expansion and capabilities and challenges faced by SMEs.

Chapter Five is the final chapter of the research. Within an overview of each chapter is provided. The achievements of the research objectives are then outlined followed by a discussion of the descriptive and thematic results of Chapter Four, from which recommendations for the future are provided. Based on the discussion of the empirical findings, a theoretical framework of factors that leads to the impact of e-commerce on marketing strategies intentions is then proposed. The chapter, and therefore this study, concludes by acknowledging its limitations and contributions to research on the impact of e-commerce on marketing strategies with context to SMEs.

1.7 **SUMMARY**

Chapter one provided introduction and background to the study. The problem statement, research objectives, scope and delimitation of the study as well as significance of the study were highlighted. Chapter two will provide an overview of the nature and importance of e-commerce and SMEs. The chapter will discuss the nature, importance and the impact of marketing strategies on e-commerce as well as illustrate how digital platforms will drive business growth, expand customer reach and contribute to increased revenue generation.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE OVERVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter one provided an introduction and background to the study. It highlighted the problem statement, research objectives, scope and delimitation of the study, as well as the significance of the research. Chapter two provides an overview of the nature and importance of E-Commerce and SMEs. Attention is then shifted to the impact of E-Commerce on marketing strategies and how E-Commerce platforms drive and stimulate growth, improve customer reach and increase the revenues of the business. Following this, the potential theoretical frameworks of this study will be discussed.

2.2 NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF E-COMMERCE

2.2.1 NATURE OF E-COMMERCE

Electronic commerce also known as e-commerce is defined as the purchasing and selling of goods and services over the internet (Jain, Malviya & Arya, 2021:775). Additionally, electronic appliances such as smartphones, tablets and computers can all be used for e-commerce. Currently, almost every single product and service can be purchased online, and e-commerce has completely changed the way many companies' conduct business and how sectors operate . The e-commerce platform provides customers with a user-friendly design where they can track orders, browse, buy products and get updates on delivery status. In addition to selling and handling payments e-commerce apps offer solutions for inventory, shipping, and tax management (Parikshith & Natesan, 2023:5). E-commerce, which facilitates transactions via digital networks, has revolutionized conventional business approaches. In contrast to retail outlets, it provides customers with constant product availability, larger assortment, simplified pricing and improved delivery effectiveness (Michielsen, Gevaers & Duwulf, 2025:2).

Public policy regarding e-commerce looks at applicable laws, rules, policies, procedures, and processes (Chimeri & Shumba, 2025:2). It is evident that shrinkage of electronic commerce, which has blurred the lines between time and location, presents a new difficulty for society and the government in attempting to enact rules (Murdiana & Hajaoui, 2020:33). Traditional competition law principles which were

originally crafted to govern tangible goods and conventional market settings, frequently find it challenging to effectively handle the intricate realities of digital ecosystems. These environments are shaped by data – driven strategies and platform-based dynamics that challenge conventional regulatory approaches (Kira, Srinivasan & Sinha, 2021:1338). Therefore, it is imperative that governments and regulatory agencies create flexible legal frameworks that consider the constant evolving environment of e-commerce. The rapidly evolving digital landscape is reshaping the legal framework, which in turn impacts the digital environment. The ongoing interaction between law and technology highlights the critical need for legal systems to remain flexible and responsive to continuous technological advancements and evolving circumstances (Mokofe, 2023:2). To illustrate the multifaceted nature of these regulatory challenges, Figure 2.1 outlines five key domains that constrain the scope of e-commerce.



Figure 2.1: Scope of E-commerce

Source: (Indrajit, 2002:73; Johnson & Iyamu, 2019:6)

The scope of e-commerce is a conceptual framework that maps out the comprehensive reach of e-commerce across five key functional domains:

- Global E-Commerce Infrastructure – foundational systems such as digital payments, e-banking, security, and online marketplaces.
- Linking with Suppliers – processes around sourcing, procurement, and supplier relationships.
- Enterprise Management – internal operations like HR, accounting, logistics, and production planning.
- Linking with Retailers – coordination involving inventory, fulfillment, and payment.
- Interface with Consumers- customer-facing activities including web marketing, e-shopping and sales.

The main events that contributed to the development of e-commerce

Year	Major events in the field of e-commerce
1969	The first large e-commerce company was founded – CompuServe.
1979	Michael Aldrich invents e-shopping.
1982	Boston Computer Exchange is launched as one of the first e-commerce platforms.
1992	Book Stacks Unlimited is launched as one of the first online bookstores.
1994	Netscape launches Netscape Navigator, a web browser, making it easier for users to search the web.
1995	Launch Amazon and eBay.
1998	PayPal is launched as an online payment system.
1999	Alibaba.com is launched.
2000	Google launches AdWords as an online advertising search tool.
2005	Amazon launches Amazon Prime with accelerated fixed delivery for users.
2005	Esty, an online platform for launching handmade and vintage goods.
2009	BigCommerce is launched as an online store platform.
2009	Founded Square, Inc.
2011	Google Wallet is launched as an online payment system.
2011	Facebook is launching sponsored stories as a form of early advertising.
2011	The Stripe service starts
2014	Apple Pay is launched as a form of mobile payment.
2014	Jet.com is launched.
2017	Introduce posts on Instagram.
2017	Cyber Monday sales exceed \$ 6.5 billion

Figure 2.2: Developmental events of E-Commerce.

Source: (Simakov', 2020:87)

2.2.2 IMPORTANCE OF E-COMMERCE

The e-commerce application provides businesses with a complete and cost-effective solution for growing their clientele and managing their online operations effectively (Parikshith & Natesan, 2023:158). Moreover, applications for e-commerce helps businesses save time and resources while growing their internet-based companies by providing strong features and automating several business procedures (Parikshith *et al.*, 2023: 158). By automating important procedures and offering intuitive features that lower resource use and increase customer interaction, these applications increase productivity (Costa & Rodrigues, 2023: 2510). Automation plays a pivotal role in reshaping business operations by minimizing errors, optimizing workflow and enhancing cost control and operational efficiency (Sheth, 2023: 318).

E-commerce is a driver of digital change as well as a product, which forces businesses to incorporate digital technologies into their operations, which results in improved customer interaction, data-driven decision- making, and streamlined procedures (Sharma, Srivastva & Fatima, 2023:3). The evolution of e-commerce has significantly altered business operations and consumer behaviour, driven by advanced technologies such as AI , big data analytics, cloud computing and mobile platforms (Mittal, 2023:2967). Moreover, these innovations have enables businesses to deliver more ersonalized, seamless and efficient shopping experiences creating a major shift in how e-commerce is conducted (Mittal, 2023:2967).

The table below represents six types of E-commerce based on their characteristics.

Table 2.1: Types of E-commerce

TYPE OF E-COMMERCE	DENEFINITION
Business-to-Business (B2B)	All business- to - business (B2B) electronic product or service transfers are included in this category. Producers and conventional industrial wholesale businesses typically employ this strategy for online shopping
Business-to-Consumer (B2C)	All business -to-consumer(B2C) electronic products and services directly transfer products and services from the business to consumers.
Consumer-to-consumer (C2C)	All electronic trading in goods and services between consumers is included in C2C e-commerce. This exchange is usually carried out via a third party that provides an online platform for transactions.

Consumer-to-business (C2B)	This e-commerce approach is popular among crowdsourcing businesses. Individuals offer their goods and services to businesses that target specific service or product categories.
Business-to-administration (B2A)	All the online transactions between business and government are included in this section. This encompasses a broad range of various programmes such as healthcare, taxation and legal paperwork.
Consumer-to-administration (C2A)	The C2A model includes all of the purchases between the governments and individuals. This includes examples such as filling tax returns, making payments and distance learning.

Adapted from (Vipin, Bindoo & Satyendra,2021:667).

Understanding the differences between the various forms of e-commerce aids researchers and businesses in matching their models to technology capabilities and market demand. Each type of e-commerce plays a critical role in forming digital economies (Jayalekshimi, 2024:11).

2.3 NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF SMES

2.3.1 NATURE OF SMES

SMEs play a crucial role on job creation in emerging economies including South Africa (Sibiya, van der Westhuizen & Sibiya, 2023:2). Moreover, their importance stems from their role in reducing unemployment and poverty, primarily through initiatives that create employment opportunities for vulnerable populations. SMEs are often used as an entryway for recent graduates, offering important experience and chances for developing capabilities (Ramsuraj, 2023:285).

Implementing complex digital systems may be difficult for SMEs since they generally operate under strict staffing, technological and financial constraints (Sagala & Ori, 2024:672). However, their lean organisational structures and strong client relationships frequently result in innovative and flexible solutions (Sagala *et al.*,2024:672). Figure 2.3.1 displays that there are several definitions of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMES) that originate from different “official” governmental sources. Since SMEs are frequently used as the unit of analysis, it is important to have a precise definition and knowledge of SMES (Senderovitz, 2009: 985).

The European Commission	The Small Business Administration, US	The Australian Bureau of Statistics	Statistics Denmark
Definition of SMEs: - Micro firms: up to 10 full-time employees <i>and</i> an annual turnover or balance sheet of max. €2 million. - Small firms: up to 50 full-time employees and an annual turnover or balance sheet of max. €10 million. - Medium-sized firms: up to 250 full-time employees and an annual turnover of max. €50 million or a balance sheet of max. €43 million.	Definition of small firms: - Manufacturing firms: max. 500 employees. - Wholesale trade firms: max. 100 employees. - Agriculture: max. \$750,000 in average annual receipts. - Retail trade and most service firms: max. \$6.5 million in average annual receipts. - General and heavy construction (except dredging): average annual receipts of max. \$31 million.	Definition of SMEs: - Micro firms: less than 5 employees. - Small firms: between 5-19 employees. - Medium-sized firms: between 20-200 employees. - Large firms: more than 200 employees.	Definition of SMEs: - Micro firms: up to 9 full-time employees. - Small firms: 10-49 full-time employees. - Medium-sized firms: 50-100 full-time employees.

Figure 2.3: The official detentions of SMEs.

Source: (Senderovitz, 2009:985)

2.3.2 IMPORTANCE OF SMES

The foundation of the South African economy is composed of SMEs, which are essential accelerators for innovation, job creation, and economic expansion (Saah, Mbohwa & Madonsela, 2023:45). Furthermore, these businesses which are frequently recognised as the forgotten defenders of South African businesses, are a powerful force that greatly boosts employment and GDP (Guru, 2025:1). Moreover, SMEs are the driving force behind economic development of South Africa. Due to SMEs contribution to GDP, employment, taxation and job creation, firms make up 90% of enterprises in both developed and developing economies (Muiruri, 2017:35). Approximately 91% of South Africa's established firms are SMEs, which employ 60% of the workforce and contribute to nearly 34% of the nations overall economic output (Sibiya, *et al.*, 2023:1).

Despite SMEs small size, Sirayi (2025:7) emphasise that SMEs are important to national development objectives because they foster entrepreneurship, build local supply chains and foster innovation. Furthermore, South African SMEs are well-equipped to handle shifting market situations because of their adaptable structures.

cultivating networks, leveraging customer insights and managing risks strategically, SMEs strengthen their innovation capabilities and position themselves as competitive forces in the market (Weilbach & Smuts, 2024:378). However, Khumalo (2024:5) state that businesses still have to deal with constant challenges like limited financial availability, complex regulatory frameworks and a high failure rate (Syrovátka & Malesu, 2025:3).

2.4 NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF MARKETING STRATEGIES

2.4.1 NATURE OF MARKETING STRATEGIES

A marketing strategy is an essential component of any organizations success. The implementation of a successful marketing strategy is equally as essential as its conceptual development (Saif & Aimin, 2017:8). A firms success relies on its ability to deliver distinctive customer value, which is fundamental to building and maintaining competitive advantage (Sozuer, Carpenter, Kopalle, McAlister & Lehmann, 2020:164). Marketing strategy is defined by Sozuer *et al.* (2020:164) as the extent to which a firm effectively integrates decisions about its target markets, resource allocation and value creation to sustain long-term competitiveness.

The Integrated E-commerce Marketing Framework proposed by (Allen & Fjermestad, 2001:14) provides a thorough model that combines digital strategies designed for online markets with the traditional marketing mix components of product, price, place and promotion. The theory highlights how digital platforms change every aspect of marketing by combining data from four fundamental e-commerce models. Table 2.2 depicts the 4Ps of Marketing also known as the marketing mix which is a foundational framework used to craft effective strategies.

Table 2.2: The marketing mix

ELEMENT	DEFENITION	PURPOSE IN MARKETING
PRODUCT	The goods or services offered to meet customer needs and wants.	Focuses on features, design, quality, branding and packaging to deliver customer value
PRICE	The amount customers pay for the product or service.	Reflects perceived value, competitive positioning and profitability.

PLACE	The distribution through which the product reaches the customer.	Ensures availability in the right location at the right time-online or offline.
PROMOTION	The communication used to inform, persuade and remind customers.	Includes advertising, PR, digital marketing and sales promotions to drive awareness.

Source: (Xia, 2023:168)

According to the concept, businesses can simultaneously provide a wide range of products and in-depth informational content through digital channels which emphasise the evolving trade-offs between richness and reach. Businesses dealing with complexities of digital branding, online customer behaviour and value chain disruption in the e-commerce industry will find this integrated strategy very useful.

2.4.2 IMPORTANCE OF MARKETING STRATEGIES

Business techniques in a variety of industries are greatly influenced by digital marketing, which gives organisations an exceptional ability to accurately and extensively contact consumers than traditional marketing techniques (Smith, 2024: 2297). It is imperative for organisations to design and apply marketing strategies to strengthen the competitive edge of their products (Sudirjo, 2023: 64). Intense and shifting market conditions demand that firms grasp varied consumer behaviour and comply with regulatory standards across regions. Furthermore, a well crafted marketing strategy can boost brand exposure and support expansion into international markets (Rundh, 2023: 267).

2.5 THE IMPACT OF E-COMMERCE ON MARKETING STRATEGIES

Businesses have had to reconsider their marketing strategies because of the digitalization of information and non-information items that was caused by technological advancements and the expansion of the internet (Cham, Cheah, Memon & Laszlo, 2022:103). The establishment of an online marketplace has led to increased competition which competes with the physical marketplace (Moreira & Dantas, 2020).

The rise of e-commerce has radically changed how businesses approach marketing by enabling them to leverage digital tools, interactive platforms and real – time customer data (Rosário & Raimundo, 2021:3004). Building greater relationships with

clients, reaching a wider audience beyond traditional limits and customizing marketing strategies to specific goals are all made achievable by online environments (Rosário *et al.*, 2021:3004). Additionally, businesses can improve their overall marketing performance and online visibility by utilising social media platforms wisely. Strategies such as influencer collaborations, analytics-driven campaign planning and customized content enables brands to establish deeper connections with their target consumers (Shrivastava, 2020:2). Increased sales through digital platforms, improved brand awareness and improved customer connections are frequently the result of these initiatives (Vaseem, Abbasi & Hamid, 2024:163).

2.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

In line with MO³, a theoretical framework for this study is proposed. A framework is a crucial component of every research project since it provides a structure that directs the investigator during the investigation (Imenda, 2014:188; Mensah, Acquah, Frimpong, Babah & Dontoh 2020:54, 2020). The theoretical framework provides theoretical principles with the intention to provide fresh perspectives of a research challenge and explain the event (Imenda, 2014:188; Mensah, *et al.*, 2020). For the purposes of this study, two theoretical frameworks have been proposed. These frameworks include the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Resource-Based Theory (RBT).

TAM is a well-established framework used to understand how individuals adopt and interact with technological systems (Musa, Fatmawati, Nuryakin & Suyanto, 2023:2). Furthermore, it has been widely utilized in marketing research to interpret consumer responses to emerging digital products and services (Musa *et al.*, 2023:2). TAM continues to be a leading framework in information systems research, offering a reliable model for forecasting how users adopt technology (Davis & Granić, 2024:60). Moreover, it is based on two fundamental perceptions namely, how beneficial the technology is and how easy it is to use.

The primary objective of TAM is to provide the foundation for examining how external influences affect user intention, belief and attitude. SMEs must evaluate their businesses utilizing this strategy given that they are being pressured to use new technologies to compete in the market (Davis, Bagozzi & Warshaw, 1989). For the

purpose of this study, this theory will assist in examining the factors that influence technology among SMEs, in relation to digital marketing platforms and tools. This is illustrated in figure 2.4, which represent the original TAM. The figure presented below outlines the relationship between key constructs such as perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, attitudes towards use, intention to use and the actual system usage. This framework provides a structured basis for analysing how external pressures and internal beliefs drive digital transformation within small business environments.

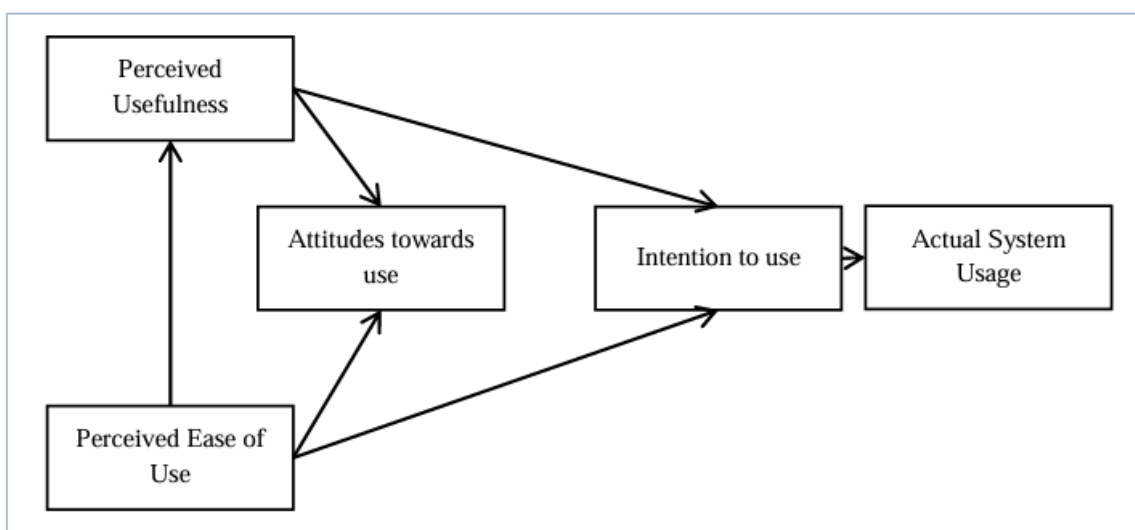


Figure 2.4: Represents the original acceptance model

Source: (Schorr, 2023:57)

It is stressed that customers propensity to participate with digital marketing tools such as mobile apps, AI-powered personalization and interactive e-commerce platform is largely influenced by perceived utility and ease of use. Real -time data, platform interaction and user engagemnt are sstrongly related to TAM construct which is becoming more important in current marketing startegies. Due to changing consumer expectations, the evolving digital landscape has forced marketers to create e-commerce experiences that are both technologically accepted and behaviourlly relevant (Musa, Fatmawati,Nuryakin & Suyanto, 2024:2009).

RBT provides a useful viewpoint on how businesses can build and maintain a competitive edge by focusing on their internal strengths, especially assets that are difficult for rival competitors to replicate. These assets that provide businesses with a competitive edge by not just being valuable but difficult to replicate or replace (Amaya, Bernal -Torres, Rojas & Ezcurra, 2022:1154). In the context of marketing strategies, RBT emphasizes that firms with superior capabilities such as brand equity and e-commerce infrastructure can outperform competitors by deploying these assets more efficiently.

Although RBT's decision-making processes are becoming more dynamic, businesses must continuously reorganize their resource portfolios to adapt to changing environmental conditions. In digital commerce, where intangible assets such as customer data, platform agility and content production capabilities act as strategic levers for market differentiation (Ridwan, Putro & Saillagan, 2023:7).

For the purpose of this study, RBT will assist in examining how SMEs leverage internal resources particularly, those that are valuable and difficult to replicate to gain a competitive edge in digital marketing. This is illustrated in table 2.3, which presents a conceptual model linking internal assets with VRIN attributes, strategic capabilities, and competitive outcomes. The table highlights how intangible resources such as customer data, content production, and platform agility act as strategic levers for differentiation in digital commerce.

Table 2.3: RBT model

Stage	Descriptio/example
Internal Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand Equity • E-commerce Infrastructure • Customer Data • Content Capabilities
VRIN Attributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valuable • Rare • Inimitable • Efficiency
Strategic Capabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Platform Agility • Personalization • Campaign Efficiency

Competitive Advantage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market Differentiation • Customer Loyalty • Digital Reach
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Source: Researcher's Own contribution (2025)

Table 2.3 applies the principles of the RBT to illustrate how SMEs can convert internal assets into long-term competitive advantage in digital marketing contexts. The model emphasizes the strategic importance of intangible resources. Assessing the internal assets through the VRIN criteria businesses can unlock strategic capabilities such as platform management. The capabilities contribute to key competitive outcomes including increased visibility across digital channels. The model reinforces the importance of intangible assets as core drivers of success in digital marketing environments.

2.4 SUMMARY

Chapter two provided a comprehensive understanding on the nature and importance of e-commerce and SMEs as well as the impact of e-commerce on marketing strategies. The theoretical frameworks were identified and elaborated on, followed by previous studied which identified factors of e-commerce that impact marketing strategies. Chapter three, the research design and methodology chapter to follow will elaborate on the empirical investigation.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Having presented the literature overview for this study in Chapter two, Chapter three will describe the research design and methodology adopted for both the literature review and the empirical investigation.

3.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review provides an overview of important contributions to the field of research and highlights the current state of knowledge and uncertainty surrounding the subject of the study. It is a fundamental component of all research as it provides the researcher with firsthand knowledge of the field, which establishes the foundation for the contribution to the body of the literature (Frederiksen, Phelps, & Kimmons, 2018:191; Li & Wang, 2018:123).

An important distinction between narrative reviews and systematic reviews is that: *Systematic reviews differ from traditional narrative reviews by adopting a replicable, scientific and transparent process, in other words a detailed technology, that aims to minimize bias through exhaustive literature searches of published and unpublished studies and by providing an audit trail of the reviewer's decisions, procedures and conclusions* (Tranfield, 2003:209).

A systematic literature review can assist in overcoming limitations and aid a variety of areas of the research process (Linnenluecke, 2017:2).

It can be done by:

- building a context and delimiting a research problem
- obtaining theoretical justification
- rationalizing a problem
- developing fresh paths of inquiry
- discriminating between what has been done and what should be done
- identifying the major outcomes and strategies employed in earlier studies
- minimizing unnecessary research.

A literature review is an assessment of existing research on a certain academic theme, topic, or subject that a researcher is investigating. It involves analyzing previously produced and released works in order to accomplish particular research goals distinct from those already met by the works being examined (Chigbu, Atiku & Du Plessie, 2023:3). The literature review undertaken for this study was presented in Chapter Two. In undertaking the literature review, data was collected from various databases and articles. The primary data bases that were used stemmed from NMU online database consisting of Google Scholar, Scopus, Sabinet and EBSCOhost. The search engines and key words used were, for example, 'e-commerce', 'impact of e-commerce on SMEs', 'impact of e-commerce on marketing strategies'.

3.3 EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Table 3.1 provides an explanation, together with justification, for the choices and options decided upon regarding the empirical investigation of this study. Following, the research strategy together with the techniques and procedures for data collection and analysis are elaborated on in detail.

Table 3.1: Research Methodology choices

Descriptor	Options	Description of choice and justification for use
Philosophy/Approach		
Philosophy/ Paradigm	Positivism	The positivist philosophy maintains that scientific knowledge, which results from rigorous scientific method's positive validation of theories, is the only true form of knowledge (Kerlinger, 2000:1). The aim of this study is to conduct a systematic literature review to analyse how E-commerce adoption enhances core marketing strategies for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Positivism supports the study as it ensures research is based on objective, empirical evidence rather than subjective interpretation.
Approach to study development	Deductive research	The study follows a deductive approach to theory development. This approach entails formulation a theory and putting it to the test rigorously using a variety of assertions. It is the most common method of study in the natural sciences, where laws provide the foundation for explanation, enable the prediction of occurrences, forecast their occurrence and allow for their control (Saunders, 2019). This means it begins with existing theories and literature on e-commerce adoption and SME marketing strategies and systematically applies them to analyse their impact.
Research design		
Purpose of the study	Exploratory	The study is exploratory because it seeks to investigate how E-commerce adoption enhances core marketing strategies in SMEs by systematically reviewing existing literature. It is a useful step in understanding the strategic implications of e-commerce, it also aids in the development of hypotheses to pursue confirmed studies (Daniel & Grimshaw, 2002:134).
Methodological choice	Mono-methodology	The study follows mono-methodology because it primarily employs a systematic literature review using secondary data analysis. This means that the study does not combine qualitative and quantitative primary data collection techniques.
Research strategy	Systematic literature review (SLR)	The research strategy is a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) because it follows a structured and methodical approach to analysing existing studies on e-commerce adoption and SME marketing strategies. The study will Synthesize peer-reviewed studies, industry reports, and theoretical frameworks to address the research gap
Time dimension	Cross- sectional	The research will use a cross-sectional time dimension, as it analyses existing literature at a single point in time rather than tracking changes over an extended period.
Techniques and procedures for data collection and analysis	Desktop study	A desktop study relies on publicly available documents and secondary data sources to gather insights without direct empirical data collection. The research will credible and publicly assessable materials such as Peer reviewed journal articles from databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, Sabinet and EBSCOhost.

Data analysis	Descriptive and thematic analysis	<p>Descriptive analysis involves examining data to uncover visible pattern and trends which enable researchers to address questions related to the nature, location and extent of observed phenomena. It provides a basic overview without delaying into interpretive depth or casual explanations (Loeb <i>et al.</i>, 2017:1).</p> <p>Thematic analysis is used in reference to a collection of texts, such as transcripts and interviews. To find recurring themes-topics, concepts and meaning patterns, the researcher carefully analyses the data (Caulfield, 2019).</p> <p>Thematic analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on identifying underlying themes and relationships within literature. • Provides a qualitative interpretation of how e-commerce adoption enhances SME marketing strategies
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Source: Researcher's Own contribution (2025)

3.3.1 RESEARCH STRATEGY

The research strategy used in this study is a systematic literature review (SLR) and archival research. The primary sources used in archival research can be found in archives, special collections libraries, and other sources. The archival research approach is an approach that collects data or records that the archives already contain (Kiron, 2021:4).

This study will use SLR and archival research since it analyses past research on the adoption of e-commerce and SME marketing strategies in an organized and methodological approach. The research deficit will be filling by combining industry reports, theoretical framework and peer- reviewed studies.

3.3.2 STEPS IN UNDERTAKING A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

Table 3.2 summarises the various phases used to undertake the SLR. To ensure a transparent and replicable process, the steps guiding the process in each of the six phases are also outlined.

Table 3.2: Steps to a systematic literature review

Phases	Steps
Phase 1: Topic formulation	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Specify the research gap.2. Conceptualisation of the topic and research question.3. Decide upon a theoretical approach4. Define the theoretical framework
Phase 2: Literature scope and identification	<ol style="list-style-type: none">5. Determine the inclusion and exclusion criteria6. Identify sources and databases to be searched.7. Identify search terms and develop search strings.
Phase 3: Literature search	<ol style="list-style-type: none">8. Search databases for relevant literature.9.
Phase 4: Selection of relevant literature	<ol style="list-style-type: none">10. Include or exclude retrieved literature based on the criteria set in Phase 2.11. Literature appraisal on quality.
Phase 5: Literature synthesis and analysis	<ol style="list-style-type: none">12. Ensure validity and reliability (research rigour).

	13. Conduct statistical analysis. 14. Code data against pre-defined constructs.
Phase 6: Reporting and results	15. Present results from Phase 5. 16. Core findings presented and discussed providing further insight. 17. Describe implications for future research

Source: (Kraus, Breier, & Dasí-Rodríguez ,2020:1027; Thomé, Scavarda, & Scavarda,2016:3;Lamé, 2019:1635)

Phase one required that the researcher determined the need for SLR by referring to and analysing existing literature in the field of interest. Within the problem statement of Chapter one of this research the impact of e-commerce on marketing strategies on SMEs was identified as the field of interest. As noted in table 3.1, a deductive approach was adopted in this study and a chosen framework provided the theoretical ground on which the impact of e-commerce on marketing strategies on SMEs can be analysed.

Phase two involved determining the inclusion and exclusion criteria, identifying the sources and databases to be searched as well as identifying search terms and developing search strings.

The literature to be included in a SLR was required to meet the following criteria:

- Published in accredited journals only
- Published in the English language
- Full- text available

The databases searched were Sabinet, Scopus, Google Scholar and Web of Science (WoS). In searching for the articles to be included, search terms relating to the topic of this research and the research question were identified. For example, ‘e-commerce’, ‘impact of e-commerce on SMEs’, ‘impact of e-commerce on marketing strategies.

Phase three consisted of searching for the articles in the identified databases. For this research, articles qualified for selection where the search terms appear in either the title, abstract, or in-text. Phase four commenced once literature collection from Phase

three was complete. Literature not meeting the inclusion criteria provided for in Phase two was discarded.

Phase five consisted of synthesising and analysing the selected literature. Ensuring the validity and reliability (Step 11), is further discussed in Section 3.4. information pertaining to the journals in which the articles appeared was abstracted and displayed in the form of descriptive statistics. In phase six, the results from the previous phase are reported. Core results and themes identified were discussed and interpreted further. The implications of the findings and suggestions for future research were also addressed.

3.4 RESEARCH RIGOUR

In qualitative research, rigour pertains to the overall quality, credibility, and dependability of the research method and results. The objective is to maximize the accuracy and reliability of the findings by making sure that the study design, procedures and conclusions are correct, functioning and absent of bias (McLeod, 2024:6). Table 3.3 outlines the actions taken in this research to ensure its trustworthiness.

Table 3.3: Ensuring trustworthiness in the current study

Trustworthiness criterion	Actions to be taken in this research
Credibility	It is essential to apply rigorous source selection, peer-reviewed literature, and triangulation of multiple studies e-commerce adoption in SMEs
Transferability	It is vital to clearly identify the study parameters, enabling application of results to other SME markets, especially in developing economies embracing e-commerce.
Dependability	The study uses systematic review protocols, ensuring consistency in evaluating SME e-commerce studies and replicability of findings.
Confirmability	Incorporating transparent methodologies such as PRISMA guidelines, ensuring unbiased interpretation of SMEs e-commerce impact.

Source: Researcher's Own contribution (2025)

3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The systematic literature review used desk research which means that there were no human participants involved in the data collection. The collection of data is not private, not for personal use and the data was collected without the involvement of people so there is no requirement for special clearance. However, the researcher, their study leader and the head of the Department of Business management have all signed an ethics form, known as Form E. Form E is attached to this document as Annexure A.

3.6 SUMMARY

Chapter three described research design and methodology adopted in this research with regards to the literature review and the empirical investigation. The various options, choices made and justification for choices with regards to the empirical investigation were elaborated on. Thereafter, the research strategy, research rigour and the techniques and procedures for data collection and analysis were described in detail. Chapter four, the empirical results chapter to follow, will present the results of implementing Phases Three to Five as identified in table 3.2.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter three outlined the research design and methodology employed in this study, covering both the literature review and the empirical investigation. It detailed the methodological choices made, along with justifications for those decisions. The chapter also addressed the research strategy, the measures taken to ensure rigour, and the specific techniques and procedures used for data collection and analysis. Chapter four presents the findings and interpretation of data gathered through the systematic literature review and empirical investigation outlined in previous chapters, followed by the results of the descriptive analysis and thematic analysis. It builds on the theoretical foundations established earlier to explore how SMEs embrace and apply digital marketing tools and strategies.

4.2 DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

The descriptive analysis will offer a detailed summary of key academic contributions in e-commerce and digital marketing, emphasising their relevance to SMEs and developing countries. Through an analysis of citation counts, publishing patterns and thematic focus, it identifies influential studies that have played a significant role in shaping contemporary knowledge and strategic approaches in the field. Table 4.1 provides a list of highly cited articles, offering insight into evolving research.

Table 4.1: Most cited articles

Article Title	Author(s)	Year	Journal/Publisher	Citation
A systematic review and proposition of an e-commerce framework for African SMEs	Obinna-Azubuike et al.	2023	International Journal of Business & Management Studies	4
Accelerating E-Commerce Growth through Digital Transformation	Mittal, S.	2023	International Research Journal on Advanced Engineering Hub	28
Marketing Research Trends Using Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)	Hussein Gibreel Musa et al.	2023	Cogent Business & Management	108

Innovative digital marketing strategies for SMEs	Idemudia Ignatius Ijomah et al.	2024	International Journal of Management & Entrepreneurship Research	167
Consumer marketing strategy and e-commerce in the last decade	Albérico Rosário, R.	2021	Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research	494

Source: Researcher's Own Contribution (2025)

Table 4.1 presents a selection of the most cited articles relevant to e-commerce and digital marketing strategies, particularly within the context of SMEs and emerging markets. The article by Rosairo (2021) leads with 494 citations, reflecting its significant influence in shaping consumer marketing over the past decade. Following closely is Ijomah *et al.*, (2024) with 167 citations, highlighting the growing academic interest in innovative digital marketing approaches for SMEs. Musa *et al.* (2023) cited 108 times shows its relevance in current marketing strategies. Mittal (2023) has 28 citations, indicating growing interest, while Obinna-Azubuike *et al.*, (2023) has 4 citations, reflecting potential relevance in future research and policy development.

Table 4.2: Most theories used

Name	Author(s)	Year	Article Title	Times Used
Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)	Hussein Gibreel Musa et al.	2023	Marketing Research Trends Using Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)	5
Resource-Based View (RBV)	Mittal, S. / Albérico Rosário, R. R.	2023 / 2021	Accelerating E-Commerce Growth through Digital Transformation / Consumer marketing strategy and e-commerce in the last decade	3
Innovation Diffusion Theory	Idemudia Ignatius Ijomah et al.	2024	Innovative digital marketing strategies for SMEs	2

Source: Researcher's Own Contribution (2025)

Table 4.2 outlines the three most applied theories across the reviewed articles, emphasizing their foundational role in e-commerce and digital marketing research. The TAM is the most frequently used framework, appearing in 5 articles that explores how SMEs embrace and interact with e-commerce tools. The RBT is used in 3 studies,

emphasizing how internal resources contribute to a firm’s competitive edge. The Innovation Diffusion Theory appears in 2 articles and explains how technology and marketing approaches are used by SMEs. These theories provide a foundation of understanding for strategic development in emerging markets.

4.3 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The thematic analysis outlines the main themes that emerged from a detailed review of the selected literature, structured in alignment with the study’s research objective and interpreted through the guiding theoretical frameworks. Each theme, sub-theme and codes reflects consistent trends, strategic insights and contextual challenges that SMEs encounter as they adopt e-commerce technologies and integrate digital platforms into their marketing efforts.

4.3.1 DIGITAL MARKETING, INNOVATION, AND MARKET EXPANSION

Table 4.3 showcases theme one: marketing enhancement, focusing on how SMEs use digital marketing, innovation, and market expansion to drive growth. It highlights broadening audience reach, building brand engagement through social media, adopting targeted online marketing strategies, and leveraging data for informed decisions. Innovation and technology adoption underpin SMEs ability to optimize performance and meet rising demand, emphasizing their evolving role in a digital economy.

Table 4.3: Theme one: Marketing enhancement

Theme	Sub-Themes	Codes
Digital Marketing, Innovation, and Market Expansion	Audience & Market Reach	Audience Reach, Broader Audience, Global Reach, Market Access, Outreach, Targeted Outreach, Visibility
	Branding & Engagement	Branding Limitations, Customer Service, Immersive Experience, Inspiration, Product Interaction, Social Media Marketing, Marketing Engagement
	Marketing Strategy & Promotion	E-commerce Promotion, Online Marketing, Online Platforms, Online Purchasing, Sales Channels, Targeted Marketing, Strategies, Competitiveness
	Data-Driven Decision Making	Data Accuracy, Data Management, Data Utilization, Marketing Insights, Market Orientation

	Innovation & Growth	Complementary Techniques, Empowerment, Experimentation, Innovation, New Ideas, Research and Development, Strategic Innovation
	Performance & Productivity	Productivity, Productivity Growth, Project Focus, Resource Optimization, Rising Demand, Sales Growth
	Technology & ICT	ICT Adoption, Information Access, Technology Knowledge

Source: Researcher's Own Contribution (2025)

The findings of this study underscore the pivotal role of Digital Marketing, innovation, and market expansion in enhancing the competitive positioning and growth of SMEs. Access to the Sub-Theme: Audience & market reach, which includes *audience reach, broader audience, global reach, market access, outreach, targeted outreach, and visibility*, significantly empowers SMEs to expand their market boundaries. Effective digital marketing strategies using social media, search engines, and email marketing enable SMEs to connect with diverse customer segments, overcoming geographic limitations (Sharma, 2023; Mittal, 2023). This expansion is critical for building broader customer bases and competing in global markets (Idemudia *et al.*, 2024; Rosairo, 2021).

Sub-Theme: Branding & Engagement encompass *branding limitations, customer service, immersive experience, inspiration, product interaction, social media marketing, and marketing engagement*. SMEs use immersive digital experiences and social media marketing to overcome branding constraints and boost customer loyalty. These efforts drive sustained engagement and market competitiveness (Sheth, 2023; Azubuikie *et al.*, 2023).

Sub-Theme: Marketing Strategy & Promotion includes *e-commerce promotion, online marketing, online platforms, online purchasing, sales channels, targeted marketing, strategies, and competitiveness*. SMEs adopt multi-channel sales strategies and target campaigns to enhance visibility and sales. Strategic online promotions increase competitiveness and optimize resources (Sharma, 2023; Kaur *et al.*, 2024).

Sub-Theme: Data-driven decision making involves *data accuracy, data management, data utilization, marketing insights, and market orientation*. SMEs increasingly use

data analytics to gain actionable marketing insights, leading to better market targeting and campaign effectiveness (Iyelolu *et al.*, 2024; Okeke *et al.*, 2024).

Sub-Theme: Innovation & growth covers *complementary techniques, empowerment, experimentation, innovation, new ideas, research and development, and strategic innovation*. SMEs that innovate and adopt new marketing technologies maintain market relevance and seize opportunities for growth (Azubuiké *et al.*, 2023; Kaur *et al.*, 2024).

Sub-Theme: Performance & productivity, which *entails productivity, productivity growth, project focus, resource optimization, rising demand, and sales growth*, improves as focused marketing efforts align with organizational goals, leading to better sales and efficiency (Musa *et al.*, 2023; Mittal, 2023).

Sub-Theme: Technology & ICT includes *ICT adoption, information access, and technology knowledge*. The adoption of ICT tools supports effective digital marketing and automation, helping SMES stay competitive (Kozlenkova *et al.*, 2014; Sharma, 2023). Together, these factors enable SMEs to expand market reach, deepen customer engagement, innovate strategically, and optimize performance for sustained growth in digital markets.

4.3.2 BUSINESS GROWTH & E-COMMERCE DEVELOPMENT

Table 4.4 presents Theme two: Growth Utilisation, summarizing key factors driving SME business growth and e-commerce development. It covers essential sub-themes such as market expansion, customer dynamics, sales growth, and e-commerce adoption. The table also highlights innovation, technology use, competitive advantage, and digital engagement as critical enablers. Additionally, it reflects the economic impact of SMEs and the balance between traditional and modern methods.

Table 4.4: Theme two: Growth utilisation

Theme	Sub-Themes	Codes
Business Growth & E-Commerce Development	Market Expansion & Presence	Market Access, Market Expansion, Market Presence, Market Reach, Opportunities, Expansion
	Consumer & Customer Dynamics	Consumer Attraction, Consumer Demand, Customer Engagement, Customer Insights, Customer Reach, Product Demand
	Sales & Revenue Growth	Increased Sales, Online Sales, Sales Growth, Sales Increase, Online Services, Promotion, Sales Channels
	E-Commerce Adoption & Platforms	E-commerce, E-commerce Adoption, E-commerce Participation, E-commerce Platforms, E-Marketplaces, Digital Ecosystem
	Growth Strategies & Initiatives	Growth, Growth Facilitation, Growth Factor, Growth Impact, Growth Initiatives, Growth Opportunities, Growth Strategies, SME Growth, First-Mover Advantage
	Innovation & Product Development	Innovation, Product Development, Research and Development, Research Development, Project Identification, Complementary Strategy
	Technology Utilization & Skills	ICT Utilization, IT Skills, Technology Utilization, Technological Factors, Data-Driven Decisions, Information Utilization
	Competitive Advantage & Productivity	Competitive Advantage, Productivity, Productivity Growth, Productivity Impact, Resource Concentration, Investment
	Digital & Social Media Engagement	Social media, Social Media Growth, Engagement
	Economic Impact	Economic Contribution, Economic Growth
	Country Context	Bangladesh
Traditional Methods	Traditional Selling	

Source: Researcher’s Own Contribution (2025)

The findings highlight the dynamic role of Growth Utilisation in Driving SME Development and E-Commerce Success, supported by insights from key sources.

Sub – theme: Market Expansion & Presence, including *market access, expansion, presence, reach, and opportunities*, is central to SME growth. SMEs utilize strategic digital platforms and targeted market entry to extend their footprint and capitalize on emerging opportunities (Idemudia *et al.*, 2024; Mittal, 2023).

Sub-Theme: Consumer & Customer Dynamics emphasize the significance of *consumer attraction, demand, engagement, reach and insights*. SMEs that effectively integrate customer feedback and tailor offerings accordingly enhance product demand and expand consumer reach (Sharma, 2023; Azubuiké *et al.*, 2023)

Sub-Theme: Sales & Revenue Growth, driven by *increased online sales, services, promotions, and diversified sales channels*, is crucial for SME sustainability. Leveraging e-commerce platforms and targeted promotional campaigns boosts sales volume and market competitiveness (Kaur *et al.*, 2024; Rosairo, 2021).

Sub-Theme: E-Commerce Adoption & Platforms enable SMEs to efficiently participate in *e-marketplaces, e-commerce participation and digital ecosystems*, including e-marketplaces, underpinning operational improvements and broader market access (Iyelolu *et al.*, 2024; Okeke *et al.*, 2024).

Sub-Theme: Growth Strategies & Initiatives, incorporating proactive *growth facilitation, factor, impact initiatives, opportunities strategies and first-mover advantages*, support SME resilience and market positioning (Sheth, 2023; Musa *et al.*, 2023).

Sub-Theme: Innovation & product development, powered by *product development, research and development as well as research and complementary strategies*, fosters competitiveness and sustainable expansion through continuous improvement (Sharma, 2020; Mittal, 2023).

Sub-Theme: Technology utilization & skills, particularly *ICT adoption, IT skills, technology utilization and data-driven decision making*, empower SMES to optimize processes and remain adaptable in evolving markets (Kozlenkova *et al.*, 2014; Azubuiké *et al.*, 2023).

Sub-Theme: Competitive advantages & productivity arise from *effective resource management, resource concentration and productivity growth*, supporting sustainable SMEs performance (Azubuiké *et al.*, 2023).

Sub-Theme: Digital & social media engagement enhances *market visibility, social media growth and customer interaction*, driving growth in the digital marketplace (Rosairo, 2021).

Sub-Theme: Economic impact examines SMEs contributions to *overall economic growth and development*, especially highlighting their role in employment generation and GDP contributions in contexts like *Bangladesh*. Furthermore, Sub-Theme: Traditional methods acknowledge that Despite reliance on *traditional selling methods*, many SMEs integrate modern strategies to maximize economic impact (Sharma, 2023).

In summary, these insights collectively demonstrate that integrating strategic growth initiatives, technological adoption, innovation, and customer-centric approaches are fundamental for SMEs growth and e-commerce success.

4.3.3 BUSINESS & DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION CHALLENGES

Table 4.5 summarises Theme Three: Implementation Challenges faced by SMEs in their business and digital transformation efforts. The table highlights key sub-themes such as adaptation and strategic issues, policy and regulatory factors, market and competitive pressures, and infrastructure and connectivity barriers. It also includes data and information gaps, knowledge and expertise limitations, human capital shortages, resource and financial constraints, operational and logistical challenges, technology and innovation barriers, socioeconomic and environmental challenges, and digital and e-commerce obstacles. These challenges collectively reflect the complex environment SMEs navigate in adopting and scaling digital technologies effectively.

Table 4.5: Theme three: Implementation challenges

Theme	Sub-Themes	Codes
Business & Digital Transformation Challenges	Adaptation & Strategic Issues	Adaptation Issues, Strategic Innovation, Strategic Limitations, Implementation Barriers, Implementation Issues, Progress Challenges, Scope Challenges, Output Uncertainty
	Authority, Policy & Regulatory Factors	Authority, Government Support, Policy Changes, Regulatory Impact
	Market & Competitive Pressures	Business Seizure, Global Competition, Market Access Issues, Market Barriers, Market Coverage, Local Operations, Small Industries, SME Challenges
	Infrastructure & Connectivity Barriers	Connectivity, Internet Connectivity, Internet Quality, Poor Connectivity, Slow Speeds, Limited Internet Access, Infrastructure, Infrastructure Issues
	Data & Information Gaps	Data Analysis, Data Management, Data Management Issues, Data Requirement, Data Security, Data Storage, Data Utilization, Limited Data, Limited Data Access, Information Deficiency, Privacy Concerns
	Knowledge & Expertise Limitations	Expertise Gap, Expertise Limitations, Expertise Requirement, Lack of Expertise, Knowledge Gap, Specialized Knowledge, Technical Expertise
	Human Capital & Labor Shortage	Human Capital, Skilled Labor Shortage, Talent Shortage
	Resource & Financial Constraints	Funding Needs, Resource Allocation, Resource Investment, Resource Limitations, Resource Needs, Limited Resources, Limited Scale, Time Investment
	Operational & Logistical Challenges	Logistics, Logistics Costs, Transport, Transportation Costs, Warehousing, Warehousing Costs, Uncoordinated Production, Operational Challenges
	Technology & Innovation Barriers	Technology Barriers, R&D Challenges, Research Weakness
	Socioeconomic & Environmental Barriers	Economic Disparity, Education Barriers, Rural Challenges, Geographical Limitations, Geography, Environmental Issues, Lockdown
Digital & E-commerce Barriers	Digital Marketing Hurdles, E-commerce Adoption	

Source: Researcher's Own Contribution (2025)

The finding of this study highlights Business & Digital Transformation Challenges faced by SMEs. Business & Digital Transformation Challenges include Sub-Theme: Adaptation and strategic issues including *strategic innovation and limitations, progress challenges and output uncertainty*. SMEs encounter barriers such as low digital literacy, unclear innovation pathways, and uncertainty about digital technology

outcomes. These challenges slow progress and impede the full integration of digital tools into business operations (Sharma, 2023; Mittal, 2023).

Sub-Theme: Authority, Policy & Regulatory Factors affect SME growth through the impact of *government support, frequent policy changes, and regulatory requirements*. While policies aimed at digitalizing SMEs exist, inconsistent enforcement and complex regulations often hinder smooth implementation and scaling (Sheth, 2023).

Sub-Theme: Market & Competitive Pressures present obstacles including *global competition, market access restrictions, business seizure risks, and challenges specific to small industries*. SMEs face intense competition both locally and internationally, requiring agile strategies to maintain market presence (Idemudia *et al.*, 2024; Azubuike *et al.*, 2023).

Sub- Theme: Infrastructure & Connectivity Barriers are among the largest hurdles, with poor *internet quality, limited access, slow speeds, and inadequate infrastructure* blocking SME e-commerce and digital marketing activities (Iyelolu *et al.*, 2024; Sharma, 2023).

Sub-Theme: Data & Information Gaps involve issues with *data analysis, management, security, storage, utilization and limited access*, restricting SMEs' ability to leverage data for decision-making and customer reach. Privacy concerns further complicate digital adoption (Okeke *et al.*, 2024).

Sub-Theme: Knowledge & Expertise Limitations focus on the scarcity of *specialized skills, knowledge gap, expertise requirement, and lack of expertise* required to adopt and maintain digital and innovative practices successfully. This expertise gap slows technological advancement among SMEs (Kaur *et al.*, 2024).

Sub-Theme: Human Capital & Labor Shortage reflects the *lack of skilled labour and talent* necessary to drive growth and innovation in SMEs. This shortage limits productivity and the capacity to implement new technologies (Musa *et al.*, 2023).

Sub-Theme: Resource & Financial Constraints focuses on *funding needs, resource allocation, investment, limitations and needs*. Constraints such as *limited resources* hamper SMEs' ability to invest in technology, R&D, and scaling initiatives due to limited funding, resource allocation, and time (Sharma, 2020).

Sub-Theme: Operational & Logistical Challenges, including high *logistics costs, transport costs and warehousing costs* and uncoordinated production processes, add to SMEs' operational burdens, affecting efficiency and growth potential (Rosairo, 2021).

Sub-Theme: Technology & Innovation Barriers arise from limited access to *advanced technologies, research and development challenges and weak research capacity*, limiting the ability of SMEs to innovate and remain competitive (Azubuike *et al.*, 2023).

Sub-Theme: Socioeconomic & Environmental Barriers such as *economic inequality, education access issues, rural operational difficulties, geographical barriers, environmental issues and lockdowns* exacerbate the challenges SMEs face in sustaining business activities (Sharma, 2023).

Finally, Sub-Theme: Digital & E-commerce Barriers include *difficulties in digital marketing and e-commerce adoption*, with SMEs struggling to build an effective online presence and transition to new business models (Iyelolu *et al.*, 2024). Collectively, these challenges illustrate the multiple, interconnected barriers SMEs in Bangladesh must address to achieve successful digital transformation, emphasizing the need for coordinated support in policy, infrastructure, skills development, and finance.

4.3.4 CAPACITY BUILDING AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT FOR E-COMMERCE GROWTH

Table 4.6 provides a summary of Theme Four: Solutions Exploration, highlighting key sub-themes and codes identified through literature review. These include critical factors and strategic enablers such as technology and infrastructure, education and skills development, financial support, policy and governance, data management, networking, strategic planning, and market opportunities. Together, these elements are essential for capacity building and strategic development to drive e-commerce growth among small SMEs.

Table 4.6: Theme four: Solutions exploration

Theme	Sub-Themes	Codes
Capacity Building and Strategic Development for E-Commerce Growth	Technology & Infrastructure	Affordable Technology, Information Technology, IT Skills
	Education & Skills Development	Education, Training, Training Programs, Knowledge Provision, Empowerment
	Financial & Resource Support	Financial Support, Resource Allocation
	Policy & Governance	Policy Implications, Supportive Policies
	Data & Knowledge Management	Data Management
	Networking & Collaboration	Networking
	Strategic Planning & Solutions	Challenge Mitigation, Problem Solving, Solutions, Strategic Solutions, Strategy Development, Project Focus
	Market Opportunity	E-commerce Potential

Source: Researcher's Own Contribution (2025)

The findings of this study underscore the pivotal role of Capacity Building and Strategic Development in fostering e-commerce growth among SMEs. Access to Sub-Theme: Technology & Infrastructure including *affordable technology, IT resources*, significantly enhances e-commerce adoption, enabling SMEs to operate more efficiently and reach broader markets. However, *lack of IT skills* remains a substantial barrier, limiting the effective utilization of digital tools. This aligns with findings by Azubuike *et al.* (2023), who highlight that SMEs often face challenges in understanding and utilizing e-commerce platforms due to limited IT skills within their workforce.

Sub-Theme: Education & Skills Development is another critical enabler of e-commerce growth. *Training programs, education, knowledge provision* enhance the knowledge and capabilities of business owners, empowering them to adopt e-commerce strategies effectively. Conversely, *insufficient knowledge provision* restricts SMEs' readiness to engage in online markets. This is consistent with Nazir and Roomi (2021), who note that limited IT skills hinder SMEs' ability to leverage e-commerce platforms effectively.

Sub-Theme: Financial & Resource Support also influences e-commerce adoption. *Financial support, resource allocation* allows SMEs to invest in digital infrastructure, while insufficient resources hamper their ability to scale online operations. This is corroborated by Azubuike *et al.*, (2023), which identifies technology, environment, and customer trust as the main challenges affecting e-commerce adoption.

Sub-Theme: Policy & Governance significantly shapes the e-commerce landscape. *Supportive policies, policy gaps* encourage adoption when present, whereas gaps create barriers for SMEs seeking to expand online. This is evident in the work of Azubuike *et al.* (2023), who discuss the role of supportive regulatory frameworks in stimulating e-commerce growth.

Sub-Theme: Networking & Collaboration facilitates knowledge exchange, partnerships, and strategic alliances. *Networking, collaboration* enhance growth opportunities, whereas poor collaboration limits access to critical resources and market insights. This is supported by Azubuike *et al.* (2023).

Sub-Theme: Strategic Planning & Solutions helps mitigate operational challenges. *Problem solving, strategic solutions* enhance the effectiveness of e-commerce initiatives and ensure projects remain goal oriented. This aligns with Azubuike *et al.* (2023).

Finally, Sub-Theme: Market Opportunity drives engagement in online commerce. *E-commerce potential, market awareness* encourages SMEs to invest in digital platforms and innovative strategies, whereas limited market knowledge reduces the perceived benefits of online expansion. This is consistent with Azubuike *et al.* (2023).

Overall, these findings suggest that a combination of technological access, skill development, financial support, effective policy, collaborative networks, strategic problem-solving, and market awareness collectively strengthens SMEs' capacity to grow and sustain e-commerce operations.

4.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

4.4.1 TECHNOLOGY ACCEPTANCE MODEL (TAM)

The TAM remains a relevant framework for understanding e-commerce among SMEs. According to Putri *et al.*, (2023:19) there is a strong link between how useful SMEs perceive e-commerce platforms to be and their intention to embrace them. When SMEs identify clear advantages such as enhanced operational outcomes and growth potential, they are more inclined to integrate e-commerce into their practices (Putri *et al.*, 2023:19). Furthermore, the authors highlight that perceived ease of use significantly influences how SMEs evaluate the usefulness of e-commerce, particularly when SMEs lack advanced digital skills and technological infrastructure.

Recent studies including Al-Sartawi *et al.*, (2021:68), emphasize that perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease (PEOU) of use remain fundamental factors influencing technology integration. These perspectives strengthen the relevance of the TAM in understanding how SMEs evaluate and implement e-commerce platforms. The TAM serves as a valuable framework that helps SMEs make informed decisions about investigating intuitive technologies and enhancing digital capabilities (Azubuike, Herrieth & Rahim 2023:68). Expanded versions of TAM incorporate elements such as trust, financial concerns and market competitiveness provide a comprehensive understanding of how SMEs manage and react to digital transformation as the e-commerce ecosystem develops (Azubuike *et al.*, 2023:68).

4.4.2 RESOURCE-BASED THEORY (RBT)

Ristyawan, Putro & Siallagan (2023:4) explain that organisations can build and maintain a competitive edge by utilising internal resources that are distinctively valuable, difficult to replicate and irreplaceable. RBT has been widely applied in the context of SMEs, emphasising the critical role of internal resources and capabilities

in achieving and sustaining competitive advantage (Kaur & Kumar, 2024:3). In the sphere of e-commerce, essential internal resources may encompass sophisticated digital infrastructure, highly trained staff, comprehensive customer analytics and a responsive organisational structure (Ristryawan *et al.*, 2023:4).

RBT has transitioned from broad industry-level evaluations to a focused analysis at the organisational level which concentrates on unique internal assets such as brand-related capabilities, company culture and customer engagement (Kozlenkova, Samaha & Palmatier, 2019:4). Moreover, it is difficult to replicate and holds strategic significance.

4.5 SUMMARY

Chapter four presented the findings and interpretation of the empirical investigation, followed by the results of the thematic analysis. The thematic analysis included four themes, and two theoretical frameworks were discussed. In chapter five the recommendations for future research will be highlighted. In addition, the limitations of this study and its theoretical and practical contribution will be highlighted.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter four presented the findings and interpretation of the empirical investigation, followed by the results of the thematic analysis. The thematic analysis included four themes, and two theoretical frameworks were discussed. Chapter five is the final chapter of this study. A brief overview of the study is provided thereafter; the findings related to the descriptive and thematic analysis are discussed. The study limitations and contributions are then outlined. This chapter concludes with a summary of the study.

5.2 OVERVIEW OF THIS STUDY

Chapter one provided a comprehensive introduction and background to the study emphasizing the role of e-commerce in transforming marketing strategies within SMEs, particularly in emerging economies like South Africa. The chapter highlighted the lack of consolidated evidence on how e-commerce transforms core marketing strategies for SMEs in this context. It set clear research objectives, including primary, secondary, and methodological aims, to guide a systematic literature review on the subject. The scope and delimitations were clarified, and the significance of the study was discussed. Finally, an overview of the entire research structure was presented, setting the foundation for subsequent chapters that will deepen the understanding of e-commerce's impact on SME marketing strategies.

Chapter two provides a detailed literature overview of the nature and importance of e-commerce, SMEs and marketing strategies. This chapter discussed the impact of e-commerce on marketing strategies and how e-commerce has transformed marketing strategies by using digital tools to facilitate customer relationships. This chapter discussed two key theoretical frameworks' namely, the TAM and RBT which offer valuable insights into how SMEs enhance digital tools and leverage internal resources for competitive advantage. Chapter two set the foundation for the research design and methodology that will be presented in Chapter three.

Chapter three details the research design and methodology for the study, focusing on the SLR and empirical investigation. The research paradigm, approach to theory development, methodological choice, time dimension, data collection and analysis techniques were identified and discussed. The chapter outlines the structured steps for conducting SLR and emphasises measures taken to ensure the research rigour was highlighted. Ethical considerations were addressed, noting no human participation was involved. The chapter sets the foundation for the empirical results presented in Chapter four.

Chapter four presented the finding and interpretations arising from the empirical investigation through SLR. The descriptive analysis identified key influential studies and used theoretical frameworks, notably the TAM and RBT. Selected articles were grouped forming tables describing the most cited articles used as well as the most theories used in this study. The thematic analysis revealed four main themes: Theme one focuses on digital marketing, innovation and market expansion; Theme two addresses business growth and e-commerce development; Theme three highlights business and digital transformation challenges and Theme four explores capacity building and strategic development for e-commerce growth. These findings highlight how SMEs are using e-commerce to enhance marketing strategies.

Chapter five will elaborate of the empirical results discussed in Chapter four. This overview of the study provides confirmation of the primary; secondary and methodological objectives being achieved.

5.3 ACHIEVING THE STUDY OBJECTIVES

In table 5.1 , the relevant research objective along with the chapter in which it was achieved is provided.

Table 5.1: Accomplishment of research objective per chapter

Primary research objective:	Chapter
The primary objective of this study is to undertake a systematic literature review (SLR) on how E-Commerce impact marketing strategies of SMEs.	Chapter 4

Secondary research objective:		
SO ¹	To investigate how e-commerce enhances the marketing strategies of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)	Chapter 4
SO ²	To explore how SMEs are utilising e-commerce platforms to drive and stimulate growth, improve customer reach, and increase revenues.	Chapter 4
SO ³	To investigate the difficulties SMES have while implementing digital marketing and e-commerce strategies and pinpoint solutions	Chapter 4
Methodological research objective:		
MO ¹	To conduct a systematic literature review on impact of e-commerce on marketing strategies of SMES	Chapter 2
MO ²	To determine the most suited research methodology to address the primary and secondary objectives	Chapter 3
MO ³	To identify the theoretical framework that will be used for the collection and analysis of data	Chapter 2 and 4
MO ⁴	To provide conclusions and recommendations and use comparative analysis to synthesis findings	Chapter 5

Source: Researcher's Own Contribution (2025)

5.4 DISCUSSION OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The empirical findings demonstrate that e-commerce plays a pivotal role in transforming SME marketing strategies, particularly in emerging economies such as South Africa. SMEs integrating e-commerce and digital marketing experience expanded market reach, increased customer engagement, and higher sales and revenue growth. However, successful enhancement depends on SMEs technological readiness, strategic positioning, and ability to navigate competitive pressures from larger e-commerce platforms.

Key challenges identified include resource constraints, digital skills gaps, infrastructure limitations, and the need for supportive policy frameworks. SMEs

leveraging technology and data-driven marketing can achieve competitive advantages but require continuous capacity building and strategic development to sustain growth.

Recommendations include enhancing digital literacy and training programs tailored to SMEs, improving access to affordable technology and infrastructure, and fostering supportive governance and financial support. Encouraging strategic partnerships between SMEs and large e-commerce platforms can also mitigate risks while maximizing growth opportunities.

SMEs that effectively enhance e-commerce platforms and integrate digital marketing into their strategies are better positioned to thrive in dynamic digital markets, contributing significantly to economic development and competitiveness in emerging markets.

5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study when interpreting its findings. While this study provides valuable insights into the adoption and strategic development of e-commerce among SMEs, several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. Firstly, the research methodology relied exclusively on a systematic literature review (SLR), which inherently depends on the availability and accessibility of published academic sources. This approach may have excluded relevant grey literature, industry reports, or unpublished studies that could offer additional perspectives and enrich the findings. Additionally, the scope of included literature was limited to English-language, peer-reviewed articles, potentially biasing the review by excluding important regional insights from non-English sources and relevant non-peer-reviewed knowledge.

Secondly, the thematic analysis conducted was constrained by the scope and depth of the selected articles. Despite rigorous coding, theme interpretations may reflect subjective bias, particularly in categorizing complex challenges and strategic responses. Moreover, the absence of primary data collection such as interviews or

surveys with SMES limits understanding of real-time experiences and contextual variations within different local SMEs environments.

Thirdly, this study focused on emerging economies with an emphasis on South Africa. Although contextually relevant, this regional focus does not capture the full diversity of SMEs experiences across other developing countries or regions, which may face distinct e-commerce adoption dynamics driven by different socio-economic, regulatory, and infrastructural factors. Furthermore, the reliance on foundational theoretical frameworks such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Resource-Based Theory (RBT), while useful, may not fully capture the multifaceted complexities of digital transformation in diverse socio-economic contexts.

Lastly, e-commerce and related digital technologies are rapidly evolving fields. Consequently, some findings may become outdated as new technological innovations, market developments, and policy shifts emerge. Future research incorporating longitudinal data, mixed methods approaches and broader geographic and linguistic coverage could address these limitations, providing more nuanced and generalizable insights into SME e-commerce enhancement and strategic development.

These limitations underscore the importance of contextualizing this study's findings within its methodological and scope boundaries, while also outlining directions for further scholarly inquiry to build a more comprehensive understanding of SME digital transformation in emerging markets.

5.6 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

This study makes significant contributions to the understanding of e-commerce's impact on SME marketing strategies in emerging economies. By focusing on systematic literature review findings, it consolidates fragmented knowledge and highlights how SMEs leverage digital marketing and e-commerce platforms to expand market reach, engage customers, and drive revenue growth. This synthesis provides a robust foundation for scholars and practitioners seeking to understand the dynamic

interplay between technology adoption and SME competitiveness in developing regions.

The integration of theoretical frameworks such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Resource-Based Theory (RBT) offers a nuanced perspective on the factors influencing e-commerce adoption by SMEs. The study demonstrates that technological readiness and strategic resource utilization are critical drivers of successful digital marketing and business growth. This theoretical contribution adds depth to existing literature by linking technology acceptance with the sustainable competitive advantage of SMEs in digital marketplaces.

Furthermore, the research identifies critical challenges faced by SMEs, including technological, infrastructural, financial, and regulatory barriers. It also emphasizes the importance of capacity building, supportive policies, and strategic partnerships in enabling SMEs to overcome these obstacles. The practical recommendations derived from these insights provide actionable guidance for policymakers, development agencies, and SME support organizations aiming to foster digital transformation and economic development.

Finally, this study lays the groundwork for future research by identifying existing knowledge gaps, such as the need for primary data from diverse local contexts and longitudinal studies to assess long-term impacts. In doing so, it encourages continued investigation into tailored strategies that can further enhance SME growth and competitiveness in rapidly evolving digital economies. These contributions collectively advance academic knowledge and practical understanding of how SMEs can harness e-commerce to achieve sustainable growth and contribute to broader economic development in emerging markets.

5.7 CONCLUSION

The study undertook a SLR to identify the impact of e-commerce on marketing strategies of SMEs. The primary objective was to gain a clear understanding of the role e-commerce plays in enhancing SME marketing efforts, especially in emerging

economies focusing on South Africa. The findings indicate that e-commerce significantly enhances SME marketing efforts by enabling businesses to expand their customer base, improve engagement, and drive business growth, despite facing challenges such as limited resources and adapting to new technologies. These insights are critical for developing effective strategies that empower SMEs to leverage digital tools for sustained competitive advantage and long-term success. Addressing the identified challenges and capitalising on digital opportunities will be pivotal for SMEs to thrive in increasingly dynamic digital markets. Future research should explore primary data and context-specific factors to deepen understanding and support tailored interventions for SME digital transformation.

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ANNEXURE 1: LEARNING AGREEMENT



FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC SCIENCES LEARNING AGREEMENT BETWEEN STUDY LEADER AND POSTGRADUATE STUDENT FOR BCOM HONS MINI-TREATISE QUALIFICATIONS

The aim of this learning agreement is to provide postgraduate students and their study leaders an opportunity to develop a sound and productive working plan. This document should be read in conjunction with the following Nelson Mandela University Policy documents:

- The General Prospectus
- Faculty of Business and Economic Sciences Prospectus
- University Code of Ethics Policy
- Policy on Intellectual Property
- Promotion of Academic Integrity and Prevention of Plagiarism

These documents are available on the Nelson Mandela University's website (<http://my.mandela.ac.za/default.asp?id=308&IRCno=>)

The Faculty of Business and Economic Sciences requires all postgraduate students and their study leader(s) to complete a learning agreement. Postgraduate students and their study leader(s) should discuss the issues outlined in this agreement, to have clarity and consistency regarding the conduct of the Postgraduate student and study leader. The document should be signed in each other's physical presence.

The postgraduate student and study leader should keep a copy of this learning agreement, and a copy must be sent to the module coordinator (Shelley.Farrington@mandela.ac.za).

PART A: DETAILS OF POSTGRADUATE STUDENT, STUDY LEADER(S) AND QUALIFICATION

NAME & SURNAME:	TARRYN CATHERINE BARRY
STUDENT NUMBER:	224084909
QUALIFICATION:	BCOM HONS BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

YEAR OF REGISTRATION:	2025
DEPARTMENT:	BUSINESS MANAGEMENT
STUDY LEADER:	N KHUMALO

PART B: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE POSTGRADUATE STUDENT AND STUDY LEADER(S)

- **POSTGRADUATE STUDENT:**

As a postgraduate candidate, the student is expected to apply him- or herself to meeting the following reasonable responsibilities.

The postgraduate Student accepts and undertake the following responsibilities:

DESCRIPTION	INITIAL
Complete all the required components of the academic programme as stipulated.	TCB
Plan and execute the research study as agreed to with the guidance of the study leader (and co-study leader, where applicable).	TCB
Ensure that the research proposal (Chapter 1-3) is submitted at the stipulated date.	TCB
Adhere to the principles of accepted safety and health standards, ethical research practice as per Nelson Mandela University Code of Conduct for Researchers (IRC 404.01), Policy on Research Ethics (IRC 404.02), specific codes of the discipline (where applicable) and conventions regarding plagiarism as per Nelson Mandela Policy for the Promotion of Academic Integrity and Prevention of Plagiarism (IRC 305.04).	TCB
Make regular appointments with study leader(s) to update study leaders(s) on progress or any difficulties encountered in executing the academic project as planned to ensure timeous remedial action where required.	TCB
Keep written record of supervision sessions and the decisions agreed to.	TCB
Submit regular outputs from the academic project to ensure effective guidance and input by study leader(s).	TCB
Ensure that written work submitted has been proofread and of an acceptable academic standard.	TCB
Ensure that the necessary amendments or revisions decided upon with study leader(s) are made regularly and resubmitted as agreed for further guidance.	TCB
Take responsibility for the final production of the treatise for examination and final submission at the specified dates.	TCB
Submit a manuscript to the study leader prior to the time of the approval of examiner reports (for purpose of awarding the doctoral degree).	TCB
The postgraduate student has read all the relevant strategic and policy documents related to their relevant qualification.	TCB
The postgraduate student has familiarised him- or herself with the internet-based plagiarism detection service; Turnitin software.	TCB
The postgraduate student endeavours to partake in workshops and training related to the research project	TCB

- **STUDY LEADER / CO-STUDY LEADER:**

The responsibilities outlined below are reasonable expectations of academics or any other persons who are undertaking the supervision of candidates.

The study leader(s) accepts and undertake the following responsibilities:

DESCRIPTION	INITIAL
Clarify respective roles of student, study leader, and co-study leader (where relevant) to ensure that student and study leader (s) are clear about channels of communication as well as expectations. Preferably such clarification should be contained in a study leader or learning agreement	NK
Confer or make contact with the student regularly (minimum once a month) to provide academic guidance to ensure the development of research skills and competencies	NK

relevant to the discipline and the specific study, and to ensure adherence to university requirements and/or discipline standards.	NK
Monitor progress of the student and submit reports on student progress as required by the university and by relevant scholarship funding bodies.	NK
Keep a record of supervision sessions and provide feedback, within the timeframe agreed upon, to enable student progress.	NK
Study leaders must maintain an adherence to accepted safety and health standards, as well as ethical research practice as per Nelson Mandela University Code of Conduct for Researchers (IRC 404.01), Policy on Research Ethics (IRC 404.02), specific codes of the discipline (where applicable) and conventions regarding plagiarism as per Nelson Mandela Policy for the Promotion of Academic Integrity and Prevention of Plagiarism (IRC 305.04) and advise their students to maintain these standards as well.	NK
Provide the relevant information to the student so that the candidate submits the treatise for examination and final submission on the correct date and format.	NK
The study leader(s) to consult Turnitin report submitted by the student to the internet-based plagiarism detection service; Turnitin software.	NK

PART C: TERMS OF LEARNING AGREEMENT

FREQUENCY OF COMMUNICATION			
The contact details of the study leader(s) were provided to the postgraduate student.	<table border="1"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> <td style="text-align: center;">NO <input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>		
Specify frequency and communication channel for meetings (i.e. telephone, email, face-to-face).	Emails monthly MS Teams meetings when necessary		
In case of the appointment of a co-study leader(s), how will meetings and communication between all be organised?	N/A - but should a co-supervisor be appointed, The supervisor will organise meetings. The student will CC both, supervisor and co-supervisor, in all email correspondence.		
Specify who is responsible for scheduling meetings and how far in advance these meetings should be scheduled.	Supervisor is responsible for scheduling meetings. Meetings will be scheduled at least one week in advance. In instances where the student needs urgent assistance or guidance, meetings may be scheduled on short notice, given that the time of such a meeting suits both parties.		
Specify the procedure for changing the meeting date and time.	Notice will be given via email and possible times/dates for rescheduling must be provided by party who rescheduled.		
Specify frequency and duration of meetings (approx.).	Monthly meetings, duration between 30 minutes – 1 hour.		
Specify who will set the agenda and take notes.	per chapter - supervisor. special meetings - student. student responsible for note taking always		
Clarify whether there will be any expectation regarding regular email communication.	Communication can be expected on feedback and progress, monthly Response time will be maximum 72 hours (except over weekends)		
Indicate the availability of communication of study leader during period of research and/or ordinary leave.	Unavailable during leave.		
List the roles, responsibilities of study leader, co-study leader(s) and student.	Discussed in introductory meeting		
Comments:			
RESEARCH PLAN / TIMEFRAME			
Specify the research plan and timeframe	As per Module submission dates		
Specify how changes to the research plan / timeframe will be dealt with.	Discussed and agreed upon in a meeting		
Was the postgraduate student informed of the timeframes	<table border="1"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">YES <input type="checkbox"/></td> <td style="text-align: center;">NO <input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>		
Specify remedial action if schedule is not adhered to?	Module co-ordinator will be consulted		
Comments:			

SUBMISSION OF WRITTEN MATERIAL AND FEEDBACK	
Specify how often written work should be submitted to the study leader(s).	At least once a month, if work not submitted, student must communicate about progress being made
Specify the timeframe for feedback.	maximum 2 weeks after the submission date. Student to continue working whilst they wait for feedback.
Specify remedial action if feedback agreement is not adhered to?	Module co-ordinator will be consulted

ETHICS APPROVAL		
	YES	NO
The postgraduate student was informed that all research projects require ethical approval?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The postgraduate student was informed that it is his/her responsibility to apply for ethics?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments: Student was informed that this study will only require Form E, with which the supervisor will assist completing		
INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY		
	YES	NO
The postgraduate student was informed that all intellectual property resulting from research conducted for postgraduate degrees, including all publications, is governed by the Intellectual Property Policy (IRC 401.01)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student was informed that the intellectual property rights resulting from a postgraduate's research shall vest in the University	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments:		

The **STUDENT** and the **STUDY LEADER** confirms that:

1. They have read and understood this Learning Agreement,
2. They agree to accept its content for the duration of the study period as per the qualification stipulated above.

SIGNATURES:

Student:

... *Taryn Barry*

Date:

15 April 2025
.....

Study leader:

Nonkululeko Khumalo
.....

Co-study leader:

.....N/A.....

Date:

03 April 2025
.....

ANNEXURE 2: ETHICAL CLEARANCE

NELSON MANDELA

UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION FOR HONOURS TREATISE (non-publication route)

INSTRUCTIONS

- Should be completed by study leader and student.
- Must be signed off by the student, study leader and HOD.
- Submit the completed and signed form to the module coordinator who will submit to Mrs Kim.Alexander@mandela.ac.za.
- Please ensure that a summary of the research methodology section of the treatise is attached to this form (*Complete Annexure A to this Form*).
- ***Please note that by following this ethics route, the study will NOT be allocated an ethics clearance number.***

SECTION A – STUDENT ACKNOWLEDGMENT

- The student acknowledges that their research project is for academic qualification purposes only. As such, the research report or any sections thereof ***may not be published.***
- The student also acknowledges that their research project ***will be a desktop study*** and will ***make use of publicly available documents or secondary data.*** No human subjects will be involved in the study as primary sources of data.

Secondary data, in this instance, refers to data that was collected and processed by someone else for some other purpose but is now being used by the researcher for another reason (Tripathy, 2013). Research utilising secondary data that both exists and has been collected in a public, academic database, for example Google Scholar, is considered desktop research, and generally does not require full ethical approval (Creswell & Poth 2017).

SECTION B – STUDENT AND RESEARCH PROJECT DETAILS

Student name & surname	Tarryn Catherine Barry
Student number	224084909

Title of treatise	The role of e-commerce on the marketing strategies of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)
Qualification	BCOM HONS BUSINESS MANAGEMENT
Department	Business Management
Study leader	Ms N Khumalo

SECTION C – ETHICS CRITERIA

	<i>(Please tick the appropriate block)</i>	YES	NO
1.	Is there any risk of harm, embarrassment of offence, however slight or temporary, to the participant, third parties or to the communities at large?		✓
2.	Is the study based on a research population defined as 'vulnerable' in terms of age, physical characteristics and/or disease status?		✓
2.1	Are subjects/participants/respondents of your study:		
2.1.1	Children under the age of 18?		✓
2.1.2	NMU staff?		✓
2.1.3	NMU students?		✓
2.1.4	The elderly/persons over the age of 60?		✓
2.1.5	A sample from an institution (e.g. hospital/school)?		✓
2.1.6	Handicapped (e.g. mentally or physically)?		✓
3.	Does the data that will be collected require consent of an institutional authority for this study? (An institutional authority refers to an organisation that is established by government to protect vulnerable people)		✓
3.1	Are you intending to access participant data from an existing, stored repository (e.g. school, institutional or university records)?		✓
4.	Will the participant's privacy, anonymity or confidentiality be compromised?		✓
4.1	Are you administering a questionnaire/survey that:		
4.1.1	Collects sensitive/identifiable data from participants?		✓
4.1.2	Does not guarantee the anonymity of the participant?		✓
4.1.3	Does not guarantee the confidentiality of the participant and the data?		✓
4.1.4	Will offer an incentive to respondents to participate, i.e. a lucky draw or any other prize?		✓
4.1.5	Will create doubt whether sample control measures are in place?		✓
5.	Do you wish to publish any research output (i.e. article) from this study?		✓

Please note that if ANY of the questions above have been answered in the affirmative (YES) the student will need to complete the full ethics clearance form (MEOS REC-H application)

The student hereby certifies that he/she has given his/her research careful ethical consideration and full ethics approval is not required.

SECTION D – INFORMATION TO BE INCLUDED INTO THE RESEARCH REPORT

(The section below should be edited and aligned to the specifics of the study)

1. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study will follow the ethical research considerations that apply to all research in the social sciences, which are defined as moral rules and professional codes of conduct to the collection, analysis, reporting, and publication of information about research subjects (Pietilä, Nurmi, Halkoaho & Kyngäs, 2020:49). The research will, at all times, adhere to the following ethical considerations:

1.1 Informed Consent

Where data is freely available on the Internet, books or other public forum, permission for further use and analysis is implied, however, the ownership of the original data must be acknowledged (Tripathy, 2013).

1.2 Anonymity and Confidentiality

To ensure privacy and to protect individuals or institutions within the secondary data, a privacy plan or protocol will be in place to protect the confidentiality of the users. This may include removing identifiable information, securely storing the data and removing any sensitive information prior to distribution of the outcome of the study (where needed).

1.3 Action and Competence of Researchers

The study will be undertaken in an ethically correct manner. Under no circumstances would the researcher in this study make judgments about data, falsify data or plagiarise.

1.4 Respect of Intellectual Property

Intellectual property is the creation arising from intellectual activity, and this study will acknowledge and reference all ideas and sources used in the study.

1.5 Beneficence

The study topic being researched is for degree purposes only and will not be published.

1.6 Non-Maleficence

Non-maleficence makes sure that what is being done is not harmful and that harm is not done by omitting care or treatment. This study will make sure that no harm will come to anyone connected to the study. This body of work and the documents consulted will also adhere to the Protection of Personal Information Act (PoPIA). POPIA governs the collection, processing and sharing of personally identifiable information (PII).

1.7 Applying for ethical consideration

The researcher will apply for ethical consideration from the **Department of Business Management** (Nelson Mandela University) to have the right to research within the intended domain. The research process, in particular data collection, may only be conducted once ethical clearance has been granted, i.e., the ethics form has been signed by the student, the study leader and the Head of Department.

SECTION E – SIGNATURES AND DATES

Taryn Barry

15 April 2025

STUDENT

DATE

Nonkululeko Khumalo

03 April 2025

DATE

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

DATE

REFERENCES

- Cilliers, L. & Viljoen, K. (2021). A framework of ethical issues to consider when conducting internet- based research. *South African Journal of Information Management*, 23(1).
- Creswell, J.W. & Poth, C.N. (2017). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*, Sage, London.
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- Tripathy, J.P. (2013). Secondary Data Analysis: Ethical Issues and Challenges. *Iran Journal of Public Health*. 42(12): 1478–1479.

ANNEXURE A: BCOM HONOURS TREATISE – SUMMARY OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Please provide a summary of the research design and methodology employed in the study by completing the following template.

Treatise details	Title of treatise
	The role of E-commerce on the marketing strategies of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)
Background to the study	Introduction and background
	<i>Although SMEs can improve their marketing strategy by adopting E-commerce, its precise effects are still not fully understood. Through an analysis of how digital tools enhance competitive positioning, customer interaction, and branding, this study gives SMEs insights to maximize their digital marketing efforts</i>
	Problem statement
	<i>Although SMEs are increasingly using E-commerce, the influence on basic marketing tactics is uncertain. Existing research emphasizes generic benefits but provides little insight into how e-commerce improves customer involvement, branding and competitive positioning. Without this insight, SMEs may struggle to improve their marketing strategy for growth</i>
Objectives of the study	Primary objective
	<i>To investigate how E-commerce adoption specifically enhances core marketing strategies within the context of SMEs</i>
	Secondary objectives
	<i>SO¹: To investigate how e-commerce enhances the marketing strategies of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)</i>
	<i>SO²: To explore how SMEs are utilising e-commerce platforms to drive and stimulate growth, improve customer reach, and increase revenues.</i>
<i>SO³: To investigate the difficulties SMEs have while implementing digital marketing and E-commerce strategies and pinpoint solutions.</i>	
	Methodological objectives
	<i>MO¹: To conduct a systematic literature review on impact of E-Commerce on marketing strategies of SMEs</i>
	<i>MO²: To determine the most suited research methodology to address the</i>

	<p><i>primary and secondary objectives</i></p> <p><i>MO³: To identify the theoretical framework that will be used for the collection and analysis of data</i></p> <p><i>MO⁴: To provide conclusions and recommendations and use comparative analysis to synthesis findings.</i></p>
<p>Research design & methodology</p>	<p>Research philosophy / Paradigm (positivism, interpretivism etc.)</p>
	<p><i>Positivism</i> <i>The aim of this study is to conduct a systematic literature review to analyze how E-commerce adoption enhances core marketing strategies for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Positivism supports the study as it ensures research is based on objective, empirical evidence rather than subjective interpretation.</i></p>
	<p>Approach to theory development (inductive, deductive, abductive)</p>
	<p><i>Deductive</i> <i>The study follows a deductive approach to theory development. This means it begins with existing theories and literature on e-commerce adoption and SME marketing strategies and systematically applies them to analyze their impact.</i></p>
	<p>Purpose of study (descriptive, exploratory, comparative)</p>
	<p><i>Exploratory</i> <i>The study is exploratory because it seeks to investigate how E-commerce adoption enhances core marketing strategies in SMEs by systematically reviewing existing literature.</i></p>
	<p>Methodological choice (mono, multi, mixed methods)</p> <p><i>Mono-methodology</i> <i>The study follows mono-methodology because it primarily employs a systematic literature review using secondary data analysis. This means that the study does not combine qualitative and quantitative primary data collection techniques.</i></p>

	<p>Research approach (quantitative, qualitative, mixed)</p> <p><i>Qualitative</i> The study follows a qualitative research approach because it is based on a systematic literature review, focusing on analyzing and synthesizing existing studies rather than collecting numerical data. The study will examine theories, patterns, and interpretations related to e-commerce adoption and SMEs marketing strategies.</p> <p>Research strategy (SLR, literature review, archival research, case study)</p> <p><i>Systematic literature review</i> The research strategy is a Systematic Literature Review(SLR) because it follows a structured and methodical approach to analyzing existing studies on e-commerce adoption and SME marketing strategies. The study will Synthesize peer-reviewed studies, industry reports, and theoretical frameworks to address the research gap.</p> <p>Time dimension (cross-sectional, longitudinal)</p> <p><i>Cross-sectional</i> The research will use a cross-sectional time dimension, as it analyzes existing literature at a single point in time rather than tracking changes over an extended period.</p>
<p>Data collection*</p>	<p>Technique and procedures (desktop study / desk research)</p> <p>A desktop study relies on publicly available documents and secondary data sources to gather insights without direct empirical data collection. The research will credible and publicly assessable materials such as Peer-reviewed journal articles from databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus,Sabinet and EBSCOhost.</p> <p>Search strategy: Data inclusion criteria</p> <p><i>Studies must specifically focus on how e-commerce affects SME marketing strategies. Only peer-reviewed journal articles, case studies, government reports, and industry white papers will be used in this study.</i></p> <p>Search strategy: Sources of data (databases, websites etc.)</p> <p><i>The research relies on secondary data sources, including academic databases, industry websites, and official reports. Academic databases such as Google Scholar and EBSCOhost will be used.</i></p> <p>Search strategy: Search terms or word strings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>E-commerce adoption in SMEs</i> • <i>SME digital marketing strategies</i> • <i>E-commerce AND SME marketing strategies</i> • <i>Competitive advantage and E-commerce</i>
<p>Data analysis*</p>	<p>Data analysis techniques (content analysis, thematic analysis)</p> <p><i>Descriptive analysis involves examining data to uncover visible pattern and trends which enable researchers to address questions related to the nature, location and extent of observed phenomena. It provides a basic overview without delaying into interpretive depth or casual explanations (Loeb et al., 2017:1).</i></p> <p><i>Thematic analysis is used in reference to a collection of texts, such as transcripts and interviews. To find recurring themes-topics, concepts and meaning patterns, the researcher carefully analyses the data (Caulfield, 2019).</i></p>

	<p><i>Thematic analysis:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Focuses on identifying underlying themes and relationships within literature.</i> <p><i>Provides a qualitative interpretation of how e-commerce adoption enhances SME marketing strategies</i></p>
<p>Trustworthiness*</p>	<p>Quality criteria (credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability) (How will each of the aforementioned be ensured?)</p>
	<p><i>Credibility:</i> <i>the source selection will be peer-reviewed journals, industry reports, and government documents ensures findings are reliable.</i></p> <p><i>Dependability:</i> <i>the systematic review process will apply a structured methodology ensures a consistent selection of literature</i></p> <p><i>Transferability:</i> <i>there will be a Clear Research Framework using widely accepted theories and provides insights applicable beyond a single case study.</i></p> <p><i>Confirmability:</i> <i>the study will minimize bias by avoiding personal interpretations and relying solely on data-driven insights ensures impartial analysis.</i></p>

* The details in these section could vary. Be guided by your study leader.

ANNEXURE 3: TURNITIN SUMMARY REPORT

CHAPTER 1-5 turnitin.docx

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5	www.nature.com Internet Source	1%
6	Agnihotri, Vinod. "Factors Affecting the Adoption of E-Commerce in the B2B Specialty Chemicals Industry in South and Southeast Asia", SP Jain School of Global Management	<1%

ANNEXURE 4: GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN WRITING PROCESS – USAGE DECLARATION

According to Nelson Mandela University's Institutional Position Statement on the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (D_71_24_(2024-02-07), the following are considered recommended uses and unacceptable uses of AI by students and staff.

Recommended uses:

- Search engine
- Enhancing understanding
- Gaining insights
- Gathering information
- Clarifying concepts
- Critically evaluating information

Unacceptable uses:

- Copy and paste generated intellectual work.
- Claiming a generated product (text, image, creation) as your own.
- Generating information for assessments, projects, and assignments, unless this is explicitly instructed by the academic, who has provided clear guidelines in the form of permissions and prohibitions as to the appropriate use thereof as part of an assessment designed around the use of AI.
- Used for unfair advantage – when you are determined to deceive and do not use something in an appropriate manner.
- Making use of AI and not appropriately referencing the sources represented in the generated text, image and/or other product.
- Makes use of AI and does not ensure that the sources represented in the generated text, image and/or other product are accurate and represent the actual work of existing sources.
- Generating information via AI that may or may not represent the intellectual work of another person, people or AI and thereafter making further use of AI to disguise this information and then present it as one's own.
- When you do not follow permissions and prohibitions provided in assessment guidelines.
- When you are not transparent about its use, do not reference and acknowledge your sources.

Student declaration:

During the undertaking of preparing and writing this mini treatise,

I Tarryn Barry, with student number 224084909, declare that *I have not used AI in an unacceptable manner as described by Nelson Mandela University's Institutional Position Statement on the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence.*

I further declare that *I have used* [NAME TOOL(s) / SERVICE] *in order to* [REASON(s)].

I *also acknowledge* that I am ultimately responsible and accountable for the contents of this mini treatise.

SIGNATURE STUDENT: ~~Tarryn Barry~~

DATE: 10 October 2025

[NOTE: Students must declare in their mini treatise the use of AI and AI-assisted technologies in the process of writing their treatise by completing this declaration statement. This statement must be included as an Appendix/Annexure in their mini treatise. AI and AI-assisted technologies do not include basic tools for checking grammar, spelling, references etc. Should AI and AI-assisted technologies not have been used in the process of writing, *not applicable (N/A)* can be entered where the NAME of the AI and the REASON used is requested. Using AI and AI-assisted technologies in their mini treatise without completing this declaration amounts to academic dishonesty. Students should note that the use of AI is detected by Turnitin and in addition to this declaration a Turnitin report is required as an Appendix/Annexure to their mini treatise