



Research Article

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The Role and Importance of Marketing in South African Township SMMEs

Prof. M. C. Cant

*Department of Marketing and Retail Management
University of South Africa, South Africa*

Prof. J. A. Wiid

*Department of Marketing and Retail Management
University of South Africa, South Africa*

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Abstract

Small, Micro and Medium Enterprises (SMMEs) in South African townships, as in many countries worldwide, has a high failure rate. Effective use of marketing and other initiatives made available by the South African government, can help to decrease the number of failures. In order to assist SMMEs effectively, it is necessary to know how they approach marketing, what their training needs are and if they are aware of the initiatives available to assist them with various business functions. A survey was conducted in this regard with small business owners across South African townships. It can be concluded from the research that marketing plays a vital role in the growth and sustainability of a SMME. SMMEs that experienced a decline in growth in the previous year required more marketing training. The growth decline ratio is 1:1.08. It is furthermore clear from the marketing approach in relation to turnover ratios, that SMMEs that grew in turnover over the past three years are almost twice as active in performing marketing functions as the SMMEs that experienced a decline in turnover in the past three years. The need for marketing training was also pointed out as the most poignant training required by SMMEs. It can thus be deduced that the role and importance thereof cannot be overstated since the need expressed warrants the importance. The majority of respondents also indicated that they are not aware of any governmental programmes to assist SMMEs with their marketing..

Keywords: *marketing communication, marketing training, township, government initiatives, SMMEs*

1. Introduction

According to Statistics South Africa (2017), South Africa's national unemployment rate is one of the highest in the world at 27.7% in the last quarter of 2017. Government has made SMMEs a priority growth sector in South Africa in order to create employment opportunities and to grow the economy (OECD 2017). With five out of seven SMMEs failing within the first year, more support needs to be provided to current as well as new SMMEs (Entrepreneur 2015).

In a previous study by Abor and Qaurtey (2010:218) it was noted that in South Africa SMMEs account for 91% of formal businesses and that these SMMEs contribute up to 57% to the South African GDP. With the current economic conditions in the world as well as the increasing rate of unemployment, specifically in South Africa, SMMEs are becoming even more important. Unemployment is however a world-wide problem and similar problems are experienced by countries

such as Ghana, Brazil, Asia and European union countries (European Commission 2013:9, Abor & Quartey 2010:218).

Usually, countries comprise of two separate geographic areas namely rural and urban, but in South Africa it also includes townships and informal settlements that house close to half of South Africa's urban population (The World Bank 2014). Further, according to The World Bank (2014), South African townships and informal settlements house approximately 38% of working age citizens in South Africa but nearly 60% of township residents are unemployed.

The National Development Plan (NDP) of the South African government set a goal to triple the size of South Africa's economy by 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2015) which is largely centred on the development of the SMME sector. In order to achieve this objective it is imperative that SMMEs are assisted in any way possible to survive and to make a contribution to the economy of the country. However, many SMMEs are closing their doors for business every year and this is not solely due to unpredictable or unstable external conditions. Many of these closures can be attributed to management not being able to react and make correct decisions with regard to the changes in the business environment (Williams 2014:91). This problem of not reacting to changes correctly needs to be addressed in order for SMME's to be able to function better and to contribute to economic growth and development. A strategic business plan, which includes marketing, may assist in reducing this problem by providing a clear roadmap that guides SMMEs towards the successful running of their businesses. The question can thus be asked: do SMMEs operating in South African townships see marketing as a contributor to business sustainability and success? Given the goal to triple the size of the economy, which is mainly centred on the development of the SMME sector, another question can be asked: are SMME's aware of the initiatives from government to support and promote the sector?

This study makes several key contributions at contextual and managerial levels. At a contextual level, the study contributes knowledge with regards to the marketing practices of SMMEs in townships in South Africa. On a managerial level, the study contributes to managerial practices by underscoring the importance of marketing in SMMEs.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *The importance of marketing in business development*

Marketing is defined by Kotler and Keller (2012:28) as "...meeting needs profitably". It is about knowing and understanding the consumer in such a way that you can tailor a product or service that meets the customers' needs. Customers will be happier and thereby the company will be more profitable (Iacobucci 2018).

In order for a business to be profitable, it is imperative for companies to plan their marketing strategy carefully. When a clear marketing strategy is developed the company will know exactly who their market is, why they buy from them and what type of marketing they should use to reach a specific audience, which in turn can result in a higher return on investment (Dryburgh, 2009:14). Resnick, Cheng, Simpson and Lourenço (2016) however argue that in small businesses, marketing is not formally planned, but seen as opportunistic and intuition is often used to describe why certain activities occur. Hulbert et al (2013) agrees and indicates that conventional marketing theories that emphasises planning, marketing research, advertising and the marketing mix are more typically intended for large organisations where financial resources and marketing expertise are readily available. Marketing is an integral part of business operations and is usually instigated and undertaken by the owner and every other employee with no separate department that is responsible for marketing in the business (Reijonen 2010; Resnick, Cheng, Simpson & Lourenço 2016). Obstacles to marketing by SMMEs include financial restrictions, time and expertise (Reijonen 2010; Cronin-Gilmore 2012; Resnick et al. 2013).

A marketing strategy and objectives provide the organisation with detailed and measurable targets that can drive an organisation towards achieving the goals that they set (Ferrell & Hartline,

2011:144). With the limited resources that small businesses have, they cannot afford to not reach their intended target market and money spent should result in sales and profit. Thus, planning of a marketing strategy is not only important for big corporations with generous marketing budgets but even more so for SMMEs with limited marketing budgets since marketing is a form of communication. Marketing on a continuous basis will increase profitability and growth of the business and should be seen as an investment rather than an expense (Groenewald, Prinsloo & Pelsler, 2014).

2.2 *Global integrated marketing communication usage by SMMEs*

Organisations make use of marketing communication to inform, persuade, remind or connect with existing and potential customers. The marketing communication mix consists of advertising, public relations, sales promotion, personal selling, content marketing and social media (Lamb, Hair & McDaniel 2018). All of these marketing communication elements can be used successfully by SMMEs depending on certain factors. These factors include the nature of the product, the stage in the product life cycle, the target market characteristics, the available funds and the push and pull strategies (Lamb, Hair & McDaniel 2018). Advertising, public relations, sales promotion and personal selling are considered as traditional marketing communication. This can be either offline or online or both. Whereas, content marketing and social media are known as e-marketing communication and is fully online. The types of traditional marketing communication tools to SMMEs disposal include word-of-mouth, pamphlets, printed banners, hosting events and advertising on radio or in newspapers. E-marketing communication tools that SMMEs have to their disposal include social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn.

2.2.1 *Traditional and e-marketing communication*

Several studies have been conducted on the use of traditional marketing communication used by SMMEs globally. In the UK, word-of-mouth referrals emerged as the most important marketing activity followed by building long-term relationships (Resnick et al. 2013). SMMEs did not make use of press, television advertising and public relations as it is perceived as being expensive, aggressive, insincere and not value for money (Resnick et al. 2013). South African SMMEs reported using advertising (including brochures/pamphlets), sales promotions in the form of special offers, and personal selling (Lekhanya 2015).

In first world countries, the most used online marketing communication elements by SMMEs include websites and social media. In a study conducted in Finland, online visibility was considered the most important element of the digital marketing mix as websites and SEO were most used (Taiminen & Karjaluo 2015). In the UK, websites were also deemed an important communication element but was not monitored by owners (Resnick et al. 2013). Social media enables companies to build relationships with customers anywhere in the world (Bolotaeva & Cata 2011). Social media can hold opportunities for SMMEs with limited budgets. SMMEs make use of social media marketing to promote their companies, to gain visibility and to sustainably survive in the competitive environment (Tanjela & Toombs 2014). Taiminen and Karjaluo (2015) however argued that SMMEs lack knowledge of online marketing, which results in SMMEs not using these tools to their full potential and thus not benefitting fully from it. In developing countries, like South Africa, online marketing is not the most used marketing communication element, especially in townships. Government plays a vital role in teaching SMMEs in learning how to use these different types of e-marketing tools.

2.3 *Government assistance for SMMEs*

With government's vested interest in the success of the SMME sector, the support of government in the development of the SMME sector is of great importance. Factors which influence viability of

SMMEs in the Vaal Triangle in South Africa for example, were identified by Worku (2016) as difficulty in securing loans, lack of training opportunities, and shortage of entrepreneurial skills. The South African government recognised the importance of the sector and established a Ministry of Small Business Development to facilitate the promotion and development of small businesses in South Africa (The Small Enterprise Development Agency 2016). Over and above funding initiatives, the South African government has partnerships in place to provide SMMEs with further support in developing business plans, conducting market research, managing a small business, legal requirements, marketing, business development and advice on tender processes (The Small Enterprise Development Agency 2016).

With all the support available to SMME's by the government, it is alarming that the majority of SMMEs still fail in the first three years (Worku 2016). In a previously conducted study, the lack of marketing skills and financial problems experienced by business were two of the reasons identified for business failure (Cant, 2012).

3. Aim and Objectives of the Study

The above discussion highlights the role and importance of marketing for SMMEs as well as the importance of government assistance to SMMEs to reach their overall target of job creation and growth in the economy. The correct application of marketing strategies can "...benefit SMMEs by securing transactions, while producing a range of relational benefits, acquiring and retaining customers, generating positive word of mouth and increasing the client base" (Ahmad & Saber 2015). With this in mind, the primary aim of this study is to investigate the role and importance of marketing in township SMMEs. This primary aim is supported by the following research objectives:

- To determine which marketing communication elements SMMEs are using in South African townships.
- To explore what the training need of SMMEs in South African townships are.
- To determine if SMMEs in South African townships are aware of the available government assistance programmes.

4. Methodology

4.1 Procedure and design

The study adopted an explorative approach utilizing a survey questionnaire to collect data from various SMMEs across townships in South Africa. The townships selected covered all the major provinces including the Western Cape, KwZulu-Natal, Gauteng, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, and Free State. For the purpose of this study, several questions pertaining to businesses in Townships, as well as the role and importance of marketing in township SMMEs, were included.

4.2 Sample

The total sample for the study consisted of 498 respondents (N = 498) with the majority being African (n = 377, 75.7%). In terms of gender, 299 respondents were male (60%) with 185 females (37.1%). Table 1 below provides a detailed demographic breakdown of the sample:

Table 1: Demographic breakdown of sample

	n	Percentage
Race		
African	377	75.7
White	15	3.0
Coloured	39	7.8
Indian	30	6.0
Other	21	4.2
Missing	16	3.2
Gender		
Male	299	60.0
Female	185	37.1
Missing	14	2.9
Age		
18 – 25	45	9.0
26 – 30	93	18.7
31 – 35	116	23.3
36 – 40	94	18.9
41 – 50	91	18.3
51 – 60	40	8.0
Older than 60	6	1.2
Missing	13	2.6

Table 2 below provides a breakdown of the type of SMMEs respondents are involved in., This table serves as an indicator of the sector in which the SMMEs operate which can have an impact on the ultimate strategy that can be followed.

Table 2: Type of business

	n	Percentage
Type of Business		
Service Providers/Stores	113	22.7
Food	78	15.7
Retail/Goods Stores	42	8.4
Salon/Beauty	41	8.2
Tuckshop/Spaza Shops	39	7.8
Internet/Electronic Stores	20	4.0
Day Care	16	3.2
Funeral Parlour/Services	16	3.2
Construction	14	2.8
Manufacturing	13	2.6
Clothing	13	2.6
Medical	9	1.8
Entertainment	8	1.6
Accommodation	8	1.6
Security	3	0.6
Other	22	4.4
Missing	43	8.6

The majority of respondents (n = 113, 22.7%) indicated that they are involved in businesses which provide services- which is not surprising as manufacturing for example normally requires more and better infrastructure. These services include mechanical services, garden services, carwash services, repair services, welding services, upholstery services, transport services, dry cleaning services as well

as various business services, such as bookkeeping, printing and communications. The other major types of businesses respondents highlighted, included the food industry (n = 78, 15.7%) which include restaurants, catering, taverns and liquor stores. Various retail stores (n = 42, 8.4%), hair and beauty salons (n = 41, 8.2%) and tuckshops or spaza shops (n = 39, 7.8%), were also among the types of businesses predominantly identified by the respondents.

4.3 Data analysis

Thematic analyses and basic descriptive statistics were utilised to identify the main themes which stemmed from the data with frequencies and percentages serving as a robust indication as to the relevance or importance of the extracted themes.

5. Findings and Results

In order to explore the role and importance of marketing in township SMMEs, the results will be presented, firstly by discussing the dominant reasons behind an increase of turnover, for the past 3 years, for some SMME owners. Furthermore, the perception regarding which training is deemed as most required by SMME owners will be examined. Following this, the current marketing approaches as well as the social media platforms utilised by SMMEs will be discussed. Finally, the awareness of governmental marketing assistance programmes by SMMEs will be examined.

5.1 Marketing implications on turnover and training required

In order to investigate the role and importance of marketing in township SMMEs, respondents were required to indicate whether their turnover grew, declined or stayed the same over the preceding three years.

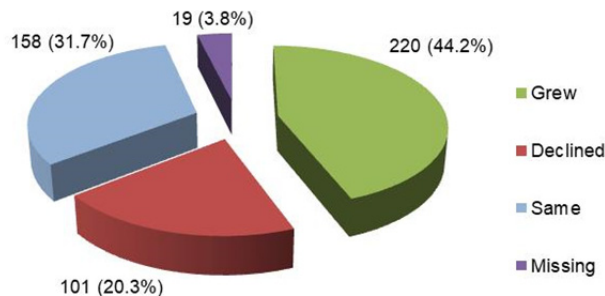


Figure 1: Turnover in last 3 years

As depicted in Figure 1, the majority (75,9%) of SMMEs' turnover remained the same (31,7%) or grew (44,2%) in the last three years. A minority (20,3%) experienced a decline in turnover. With 52% of SMMEs' turnover declining or staying the same, it may indicate that a contributing factor can be a lack of marketing by SMMEs although other contributing factors cannot be excluded. This lack of growth however further highlights the importance and need of marketing for SMMEs. Table 3 below provides a breakdown of the main reasons identified by respondents that indicated a growth in their turnover:

Table 3: Reasons for growth in turnover

Turnover Grew (n = 220)	n	Percentage
Improved my marketing	161	73.2
Cost-saving measures	106	48.2
More people unemployed	55	25.0
Too much competition	47	21.4
Economy is bad	39	17.7
Reputation/Word of Mouth	2	10.0
Other	20	9.1
Other* Themes (n = 20)		
Expanding business	7	35.0
Lack of competition	3	15.0
Government support/tenders	3	15.0
Growing market	2	10.0
Loyalty from customers	2	10.0
Hard work/effort	1	5.0
Quality service/products	1	5.0

*Respondents indicated more than one element thus total n & total percentage > 100%

The majority of respondents (n = 161, 73.2%) indicated ‘improved my marketing’ as the main reason for a growth in turnover which seems to indicate that marketing made an important contribution to increased sales – something the other respondents should maybe have focussed on more. Furthermore, 48.2% (n = 106) of respondents indicated they implemented ‘cost-saving measures’ which improved profits.

In addition to the above, respondents were asked to indicate the specific training they think is required in order to improve their businesses. Table 4 below provides a breakdown of the most important training required:

Table 4: Training required based on turnover

Training Needs	Grew (n = 220)		Declined (n = 101)		Stayed the same (n = 158)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Marketing	139	63.2	69	68.3	99	62.7
Financial Training	124	56.4	57	56.4	103	65.2
Management	115	52.3	56	55.4	86	54.4
Admin	83	37.7	29	28.7	59	37.3
Purchasing	75	34.1	22	21.8	45	28.5
Other	24	10.9	8	7.9	11	7

The main area where respondents felt a need for training was in marketing (n = 307, 61.64%), while 57.03% (n = 284) of respondents indicated that they had a need for financial training. Based on percentages, a comparison was drawn between the training required and turnover. The ratios were calculated with a growth in turnover as baseline, (see Table 5).

Table 5: Training required based on turnover ratio

Training Required	Grew	Declined	Stayed the same
Marketing	1	1.08	0.99
Financial Training	1	1.00	1.16
Management	1	1.06	1.04
Admin	1	0.76	0.99
Purchasing	1	0.64	0.84
Other	1	0.72	0.64

It is evident from Table 5 that respondents of SMMEs that experienced a decline in turnover during the past three years, might benefit from more marketing training. The ratio is 1 : 1.08 : 0.99. This means that for every 1 (one) SMME that experienced growth, there is 1,08 (one comma zero eight) SMMEs that experienced a decline and 0.99 (zero comma nine nine) SMMEs that experienced a stay in turnover, which is an indication that marketing training is required.

5.2 Current marketing communication in relation to turnover

In order to further explore the role and importance of marketing in township SMMEs, respondents were required to indicate what form of marketing they are currently applying in the business. Respondents were not limited in the amount of options they could select. Table 6 below provides a breakdown of the current forms of marketing which business owners engage in:

Table 6: Current marketing in relation to turnover

Type of marketing	Grew		Declined		Stayed same		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Word of mouth	159	72.3	61	60.4	98	62.0	318	63.86
Personal selling	103	46.8	39	38.6	79	50.0	221	44.38
Social media	103	46.8	26	25.7	63	39.9	192	38.55
Pamphlets	78	35.5	29	28.7	47	29.7	154	30.92
Banners	42	19.1	17	16.8	24	15.2	83	16.67
Events	52	23.6	12	11.9	14	8.9	78	15.66
Radio	44	20.0	8	7.9	6	3.8	58	11.65
Newspaper	33	15.0	7	6.9	9	5.7	49	9.84
Nothing	4	1.8	18	17.8	12	7.6	34	6.83
Other	11	5.0	10	9.9	6	3.8	27	5.42

The main types of marketing identified by respondents regarding whether there was a growth, decline or stay in the turnover, included Word of Mouth (63,86%; n = 318), Personal Selling (44,38%; n =221), Social Media (38,55%; n = 192) and Pamphlets (30,92%; n = 154). ‘Other’ (n = 27, 5,42%) responses ranged from door-to-door selling/surveys, car branding and providing of discounts. No dominant theme emerged from the other responses (see Table 9). Based on percentages, a comparison was drawn between the marketing approach and turnover. The ratio was calculated with a growth in turnover as baseline (see Table 7).

Table 7: Current marketing in relation to turnover ratio

Type of marketing	Grew	Declined	Stayed the same
Word of mouth	1.00	0.84	0.86
Personal selling	1.00	0.82	1.07
Social media	1.00	0.55	0.85
Pamphlets	1.00	0.81	0.84
Banners	1.00	0.88	0.80
Events	1.00	0.50	0.38
Radio	1.00	0.40	0.19
Newspaper	1.00	0.46	0.38
Nothing	1.00	9.89	4.22
Other	1.00	1.98	0.76

As depicted in Table 7, the main difference in marketing approaches applied between those that

experienced a growth in turnover, and those that experienced a decline or stay in turnover, are radio. SMMEs that experienced growth, was almost twice as active when it comes to the use of the radio (with a ratio 1 : 0.40 : 0.19) in comparison with the SMMEs that experienced a decline and almost five times more active than the SMMEs that experienced a stay in turnover. Newspapers with a ratio of 1 : 0.46 : 0.38, Events with a ratio of 1: 0.5 : 0.38 and Social media with a ratio of 1 : 0.55 : 0.85.

Respondents that indicated the utilisation of social media, were asked to further indicate which platforms they utilise. No limit was placed on the number of options that could be selected. Table 8 below provides a breakdown of the different platforms employed by the owners utilising social media:

Table 8: Social media marketing in relation to turnover

Social media used	Grew (n = 103)		Declined (n = 26)		Stayed same (n = 63)		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Facebook	85	82.5	18	69.2	50	79.4	153	79.69
SMS	56	54.4	12	46.2	29	46.0	97	50.52
Internet	56	54.4	7	26.9	18	28.6	81	42.19
Twitter	26	25.2	4	15.4	12	19.0	42	21.88
Instagram	14	13.6	2	7.7	9	14.3	25	13.02
LinkedIn	17	16.5	5	19.2	2	3.2	24	12.50
Other	12	11.7	6	23.1	6	9.5	24	12.50

*Respondents indicated more than one element thus total n & total percentage > 100%

The majority of respondents (n = 153, 79.69%) indicated that they use Facebook as the main platform for social media marketing, while respondents who utilized SMS (n = 97, 50.52%) and the Internet (n = 81, 42.19%) emerged as also important social media platforms utilized. Respondents who selected the ‘other’ option (n = 24, 12.5%) mainly noted the use of WhatsApp as the social media platform that they use.

Based on percentages, a comparison was drawn between the social media marketing platform used and turnover. The ratio was calculated with a growth in turnover as baseline, (see Table 9).

Table 9: Social Media marketing in relation to turnover ratio

Social Media Platform	Grew	Declined	Stayed the same
Facebook	1.00	0.84	0.96
SMS	1.00	0.85	0.85
Internet	1.00	0.49	0.53
Twitter	1.00	0.61	0.75
Instagram	1.00	0.57	1.05
LinkedIn	1.00	1.16	0.19
Other	1.00	1.97	0.81

As depicted in Table 9, the main difference in the social media marketing platform used between the SMMEs that experienced a growth in turnover and the SMMEs that experienced a decline, or stay in turnover, is the Internet with a ratio of 1 : 0.49 : 0.53. This means that the SMMEs that experienced a growth was almost twice as active when it comes to the use of the Internet in comparison to the SMMEs that experienced a decline and stay in turnover. Instagram with a ratio of 1 : 0.57 : 1.05 and Twitter with a ratio of 1 : 0.61 : 0.75.

5.3 Governmental marketing assistance programmes

Respondents were asked if they are aware of any government programmes that can help and assist

SMMEs with their marketing. Figure 2 below provides a breakdown of the responses pertaining to awareness of any government programmes that can help and assist SMMEs with their marketing by means of social media:

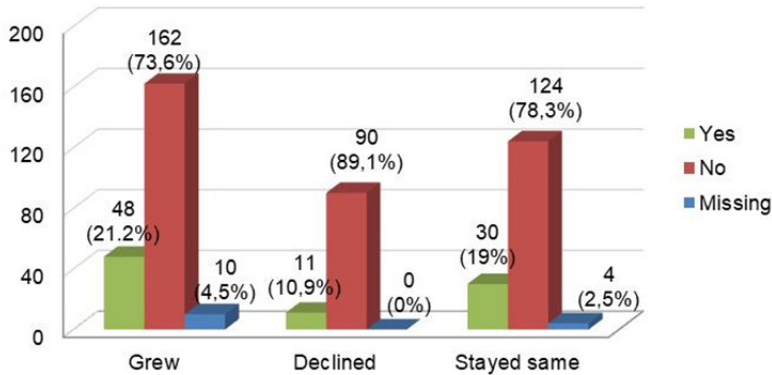


Figure 2: Awareness of government programmes

The majority of respondents, regardless whether the turnover of the SMME had grown (73.6%; n = 162), declined (89.1%; n = 90) or stayed the same (78.3%; n = 124) over the past three years, indicated that they are not aware of any such programmes to assist SMMEs with their marketing by means of social media. In contrast, 21.2% (n = 48) of SMMEs that experienced growth, 10.9% (n = 11) that experienced a decline in turnover and 19% (n = 124) that experienced a stay in turnover indicated awareness of such programmes.

Table 10 below provides a breakdown pertaining to specified programmes that respondents are aware of.

Table 10: Awareness of offered programmes

Programmes to assist with marketing (n = 89)	n	Percentage
SEDA/NYDA	23	25.8
Municipal/Government	8	9.0
SASETA	3	3.4
Other	9	10.1
Missing	46	51.7

The Small Enterprise Developmental Agency (SEDA) along with the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) were identified by 25.8 % (n = 23) of the respondents as the primary providers of programmes to assist with social media marketing, while 9% (n = 23) of respondents also highlighted Municipal/Governmental programmes. The specific programmes provided by these providers were however not elicited from the responses in the questionnaire. These responses are a clear indication that there is not a high level of awareness of these programmes amongst SMMEs

6. Discussion

It can be deduced from the above, that marketing plays a vital role in the growth and sustainability of

a SMME. SMMEs that experienced a decline in growth would seem to be in need of some marketing training. It is furthermore clear from the marketing approach in relation to turnover ratios, that SMMEs that grew in turnover over the past three years are almost twice as active in performing marketing functions as the SMMEs that experienced a decline in turnover in the past three years.

The data attributes an improvement in marketing as the main reason for a growth in turnover over the past three years by those SMMEs who reported a growth, thus, clearly indicating the importance of marketing with regards to business growth and sustainment.

The need for marketing training was also been pointed out as the most poignant training required by SMMEs. It can thus be deduced that the role and importance thereof cannot be overstated since the need expressed warrants the importance.

Word of mouth, followed by personal selling, emerged as the most dominant approaches followed by current owners in terms of marketing. These can however be viewed as more traditional ways of marketing being employed. Social media was also highlighted as a primary approach in order to conduct marketing with Facebook, being the most utilised platform in order to do so. In the current day and age, where most individuals have access to social media via a phone or computer, the need to utilise social media for marketing may be key and may potentially arise as the preferred way of conducting marketing in the future.

The majority of respondents however indicated that they are not aware of any governmental programmes to assist SMMEs with their marketing by means of social media. As highlighted above, the need for marketing training coupled with the importance of social media in marketing and the current void of such programmes, creates an avenue where the government and other organisations can get involved and assist the SMME owner in potentially growing his/her business through the implementation of social media marketing.

7. Conclusion

The importance and role of marketing in the success of the SMMEs cannot be underestimated. In light of the current economic environment, business owners will have to pursue innovative and traditional ways of marketing in order to ensure the long-term growth and success of their businesses. Social media may be one of those avenues, and training in the utilisation thereof could potentially be beneficial to the SMME owner in order to ensure the growth and sustainment of the business.

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