


The Impact of Online Marketing Strategies and Challenges on the Financial Performance of Small-Scale Enterprises in Juba City, South Sudan

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of online marketing strategies and the challenges affecting their adoption on the financial performance of small-scale enterprises (SSEs) in Juba City, South Sudan. As digital platforms increasingly shape business promotion, SSEs face both opportunities and constraints in leveraging online marketing to enhance competitiveness, customer reach, and profitability. Employing a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through structured questionnaires and focus group discussions to examine the extent of online marketing adoption, the barriers encountered, and the relationship between digital marketing practices and financial outcomes. The findings reveal that while many SSEs have begun using social media, mobile advertising, and e-commerce tools, adoption remains constrained by infrastructural limitations, low digital literacy, high internet costs, and inconsistent government policies. Nevertheless, enterprises that systematically integrate online marketing strategies achieve higher sales, broader customer engagement, and improved financial performance compared to those relying solely on traditional marketing. The study concludes that online marketing holds substantial potential for driving SSE growth in Juba City, contingent on strengthened policy support, capacity-building initiatives, and improved digital infrastructure. These findings contribute to the literature on digital entrepreneurship in developing economies and provide actionable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and entrepreneurs aiming to foster sustainable small-scale business growth.

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Keywords: Online marketing, small-scale business enterprises (SSBEs), digital marketing strategies, Juba City, South Sudan, mixed-methods research.

1. Introduction

In the contemporary business environment, online marketing has emerged as a transformative force, reshaping how enterprises interact with customers, promote products, and sustain competitive advantage. With the rapid penetration of digital technologies and the expansion of internet connectivity, businesses of all sizes are increasingly shifting from traditional marketing methods to digital platforms (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). For small-scale enterprises (SSEs),

which often operate under conditions of limited resources, online marketing presents both significant opportunities and considerable challenges (Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014). By enabling direct consumer engagement, cost-effective promotion, and broader market access, digital marketing has the potential to improve competitiveness and financial performance for SSEs, particularly in resource-constrained contexts.

Empirical studies highlight the pivotal role of marketing strategies in shaping financial outcomes and organizational sustainability across diverse business contexts. For instance, Setiadi, Batu, and Soesanto (2017) demonstrate that strategic orientation, including environmental and product differentiation strategies, positively influences both marketing and financial performance among exporting firms in Indonesia. Similarly, Putri and Bandi (2023) reveal that marketing strategies, along with managerial self-efficacy and locus of control, significantly affect MSME performance in Surakarta, indicating that managerial capability and confidence are critical for effective strategy implementation. Gao et al. (2023) further emphasize that e-commerce adoption and digital marketing substantially impact the financial resilience of MSMEs in Bangladesh, particularly during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, illustrating the growing relevance of digital platforms for sustaining business operations. Complementary studies from Sumantri et al. (2022) and Taherdangkoo et al. (2019) suggest that marketing strategies aligned with environmental and contextual factors enhance both marketing and financial performance. In African contexts, research by Abasilim (2015), Hoque and Awang (2016), and others reinforces the importance of marketing mix and entrepreneurial marketing strategies for SME growth and profitability. Collectively, these findings underscore the critical influence of strategic marketing, particularly digital tools, in improving business outcomes and provide a theoretical foundation for exploring online marketing adoption among SSEs in Juba City.

In Juba City, the capital of South Sudan, the small-scale business sector plays a vital role in sustaining livelihoods, generating employment, and supporting local economic development (World Bank, 2020). Despite this, many SSEs face structural challenges, including limited capital, inadequate infrastructure, and restricted access to advanced technologies (UNDP, 2021). In such an environment, the adoption of online marketing strategies becomes an essential pathway for businesses to enhance visibility, reach new customers, and improve financial performance (Alford & Page, 2015). Online marketing encompasses a range of strategies—including social media advertising, email campaigns, search engine optimization, and mobile marketing—that enable small enterprises to engage with consumers directly and cost-effectively compared to traditional media (Kotler et al., 2021). However, the effective implementation of these strategies is often constrained by challenges such as limited digital literacy, unstable internet connectivity, inadequate technical skills, and scarce financial resources (Boateng, 2016; Mutula, 2022). These constraints can substantially affect the success of online marketing initiatives and, consequently, the economic performance of small enterprises in developing economies such as South Sudan. This study examines the interplay between online marketing strategies and the challenges affecting their adoption among small-scale business enterprises in Juba City. Specifically, it investigates the types of digital marketing strategies employed, the barriers to their effective use, and the influence of these factors on financial performance. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for policymakers, business owners, and development practitioners, as it offers actionable insights into leveraging digital marketing to enhance small business growth, promote innovation, and strengthen economic resilience in fragile economies (Nuseir, 2018; Bresciani & Eppler, 2010).

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was initially developed by Fred Davis in 1989, based on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), a psychological theory that explains human behavior. TAM has two fundamental constructs that predict the likelihood of technology adoption: Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) (Davis, 1989). Perceived Usefulness

refers to the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance their job performance. On the other hand, Perceived Ease of Use is the degree to which a person believes that using a system would be free from effort. These two factors determine individuals' attitudes toward using a technology, which, in turn, influences their intention to use it, leading to actual system usage. TAM was refined and extended in subsequent years, notably by Venkatesh and Davis (2000), who introduced the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), which combined elements of TAM and other models to provide a more comprehensive explanation of technology adoption.

In the context of small-scale businesses in Juba City, South Sudan, the adoption of online marketing technologies is influenced by how potential users perceive the benefits and ease of use of these tools. Given the growing importance of digital marketing for business success, especially in developing economies like South Sudan, understanding TAM can help small-scale businesses in Juba enhance their online marketing strategies. Perceived Usefulness (PU) plays a critical role in the adoption of online marketing tools by small-scale businesses in Juba. Business owners and entrepreneurs are more likely to adopt online marketing technologies if they believe these tools will help them reach more customers, increase sales, and improve brand visibility. As the internet penetration in Juba and South Sudan grows, business owners are beginning to realize the potential benefits of online marketing platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Google Ads. These platforms provide a cost-effective way to promote their businesses, especially for those with limited budgets for traditional marketing. On the other hand, Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) also plays an essential role. For small-scale businesses in Juba, many entrepreneurs may not have the technical expertise to navigate sophisticated digital marketing tools. Therefore, the ease with which business owners can use online marketing platforms becomes a critical factor in their adoption. Platforms that are intuitive, user-friendly, and require minimal training are more likely to be accepted and adopted by small-scale business owners who may not have advanced digital skills.

Research has shown that small businesses in emerging economies face various challenges in adopting new technologies, including online marketing tools. According to Molla and Licker (2005), small businesses in developing countries like South Sudan may experience a lack of technical infrastructure, low digital literacy, and limited access to affordable technology. These barriers affect both perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness, reducing the likelihood of technology adoption. However, when online marketing tools are tailored to local needs and are easy to use, small businesses in Juba can overcome these challenges and reap the benefits of digital marketing. The relevance of TAM to the online marketing of small-scale businesses in Juba lies in its ability to explain the factors that drive technology adoption in this context. According to Venkatesh et al. (2003), factors such as social influence, facilitating conditions, and individual perceptions play a significant role in determining the adoption of technology. In Juba, social influence may be critical, as many small-scale business owners often look to peers and community leaders for advice on adopting new technologies. Word of mouth, success stories, and the perceived popularity of online marketing tools within the business community could positively influence the adoption of these tools. Additionally, facilitating conditions, such as access to affordable internet services and digital marketing training, can enhance the perceived ease of use and usefulness of online marketing technologies. Policymakers and government institutions in Juba can play a vital role in creating a conducive environment for small-scale businesses by offering affordable internet services, providing digital literacy programs, and offering training on effective use of online marketing platforms. The Technology Acceptance Model provides valuable insights into the factors that influence the adoption of online marketing technologies by small-scale businesses in Juba City. By focusing on Perceived Usefulness and Perceived Ease of Use, small business owners in Juba can make more informed decisions about adopting online marketing tools. As the digital landscape in South Sudan continues to evolve, businesses in Juba can leverage online marketing to improve their competitiveness, reach new customers, and

enhance their overall business performance. Therefore, understanding TAM and addressing the barriers to technology adoption will be essential for the growth of small-scale businesses in Juba and other similar regions.

2.2 The Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory

The Resource-Based View (RBV) is a well-established strategic management theory that emphasizes the critical role of a firm's internal resources in achieving a competitive advantage. In contrast to external factors like market competition, RBV focuses on how unique, valuable, and hard-to-imitate resources within a business can be leveraged to gain strategic benefits (Barney, 1991). For small-scale businesses in Juba City, applying the principles of RBV can be transformative in maximizing their online marketing efforts, as it helps them utilize available resources effectively to enhance visibility, engage customers, and ultimately drive sales. At its core, the RBV framework identifies that firms have various resources that can be categorized into tangible and intangible assets. These resources, when strategically managed, serve as the foundation for competitive advantage. According to Barney (1991), these resources must meet four key criteria to help a business gain an edge in the marketplace: they must be valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable. In the case of small businesses in Juba City, these characteristics are particularly relevant when considering how internal resources such as knowledge about the local market, strong customer relationships, or innovative digital tools can be harnessed to distinguish themselves in the online marketplace. The impact of RBV on online marketing for small-scale businesses becomes apparent when examining the role that both tangible and intangible resources play in developing effective marketing strategies. In Juba City, where small businesses may face resource constraints, leveraging the unique capabilities available within the organization is key to competing in the digital space. One of the most valuable resources for small businesses is their ability to engage with the local community, tailor marketing messages, and provide personalized services that resonate with local consumers. By focusing on these strengths, businesses can create marketing strategies that are both cost-effective and highly targeted. Technological resources, for example, provide small-scale businesses in Juba City with the opportunity to enhance their online presence. The rise of digital marketing tools, such as social media platforms, websites, and e-commerce solutions, offers a powerful means for businesses to reach a broader audience. With strategic use, these tools allow businesses to engage with customers on a more personal level, creating unique, tailored content that can increase brand visibility and customer loyalty. Social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, for instance, offer small businesses the opportunity to connect directly with their customers, showcase their products, and build a strong brand identity. Moreover, knowledge of the local market is a particularly valuable resource for small businesses operating in Juba City. By understanding local consumer behavior, preferences, and cultural nuances, businesses can craft online marketing campaigns that are more likely to resonate with their audience. This deep knowledge is an advantage that larger competitors, often based outside the region, may not possess. By leveraging this knowledge in online marketing strategies—such as through search engine optimization (SEO), targeted social media ads, or localized content—small businesses can carve out a distinctive niche that appeals to local customers. In addition to tangible resources like technology, human resources also play a vital role in driving online marketing success. Employees with expertise in digital marketing, content creation, and customer service are invaluable assets for small businesses. These human resources can help businesses execute effective digital campaigns, respond to customer inquiries online, and ensure that the overall online experience aligns with the brand's message. In an environment where many small businesses have limited budgets, the expertise of employees becomes a key resource that can greatly impact a company's digital marketing efforts. Another significant intangible resource for small businesses in Juba City is their brand reputation and customer loyalty. Over time, businesses that offer quality products, excellent customer service, and a consistent brand experience can build strong relationships with their customers. This reputation becomes a resource that is difficult for competitors to replicate, and it is especially important in the realm of online marketing. Loyal customers can act as brand

advocates, promoting the business through word-of-mouth or by sharing their experiences on social media. This type of organic promotion not only increases a business's online visibility but also enhances its credibility in the eyes of potential customers.

The Resource-Based View is highly relevant to the study of online marketing for small-scale businesses in Juba City because it provides a framework for understanding how these businesses can harness their existing resources to compete effectively in the digital space. By focusing on leveraging internal resources such as technological tools, local market knowledge, skilled employees, and a strong brand reputation, small businesses can build a sustainable competitive advantage in the online marketplace. The RBV emphasizes that these resources should be unique and difficult for competitors to imitate, thus providing a long-term advantage for businesses that invest in developing and utilizing them effectively. For businesses in Juba City, the challenges of operating in a resource-constrained environment mean that every internal asset must be carefully managed and optimized. The RBV offers a clear pathway for these businesses to focus on what they already have—whether that is technological expertise, deep knowledge of the local market, or customer relationships—and use it to create more personalized and impactful online marketing strategies. By doing so, these businesses can not only survive but thrive in the increasingly competitive digital economy. The Resource-Based View (RBV) offers invaluable insights for small-scale businesses in Juba City looking to enhance their online marketing strategies. By identifying and leveraging their unique internal resources, whether technological, human, or knowledge-based, businesses can carve out a competitive advantage in the digital space. As the online marketplace continues to grow, small businesses must continue to focus on their strengths and adapt their marketing strategies accordingly to ensure long-term success.

2.3 The Diffusion of Innovation Theory

The Diffusion of Innovation Theory, proposed by Rogers (2003), explains how new ideas, practices, or technologies spread within a social system over time. According to the theory, the adoption of innovations occurs through a process involving five stages: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation. Individuals move through these stages as they learn about and decide to adopt or reject an innovation. Rogers (2003) also categorized adopters into five groups based on their readiness to adopt: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. Innovators are the first to adopt and are willing to take risks, while laggards are the last, often resistant to change. The rate of adoption is influenced by the innovation's perceived relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability — characteristics that affect how appealing and understandable the innovation is to potential adopters (Rogers, 2003). This theory highlights the role of communication channels, social networks, and opinion leaders in spreading innovations, emphasizing that adoption is both an individual and a social process shaped by cultural and contextual factors (Rogers, 2003).

The Diffusion of Innovation Theory (DOI) provides a framework for understanding how, why, and at what rate new ideas and technologies spread across societies. This theory has significant implications for various sectors, particularly in the realm of business and marketing. In the context of small-scale business enterprises in Juba City, South Sudan, the DOI theory provides a structured approach to analyzing how innovations, such as online marketing tools, can be adopted. By examining the key elements of the theory and their relevance to the local business landscape, we gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities that small businesses in Juba face as they embrace digital marketing. Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Theory is built around five core components: innovation, communication channels, time, social system, and adopter categories. These elements help explain how innovations are adopted and spread within a society.

The first component, **innovation**, refers to the new idea or technology that is being introduced. In the case of small businesses, innovations can include various forms of online marketing tools

such as websites, social media platforms, email campaigns, or search engine optimization (SEO). These tools offer significant advantages in reaching broader audiences and improving brand visibility at relatively low costs.

Communication channels are the means through which information about the innovation is shared. For small-scale businesses in Juba, these channels often include word-of-mouth, online communities, and local business networks. Social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp, which are widely used in South Sudan, play an essential role in communicating the benefits of online marketing tools to business owners. **Time** refers to the rate at which the innovation is adopted. Rogers identifies different adopter categories that illustrate how businesses or individuals take different amounts of time to embrace innovations. The adoption process typically follows an S-curve, starting with early adopters and gradually spreading to the majority. This is crucial for understanding how small businesses in Juba, many of which operate under resource constraints, might slowly adopt online marketing strategies. The **social system** refers to the broader environment in which the innovation is diffusing. In the case of Juba, this system includes local business associations, influential community leaders, and other entrepreneurial networks that can help accelerate or hinder the adoption of online marketing tools. The social system's role in diffusion is critical because it creates a network of influences that shape the decisions of business owners. Finally, **adopter categories** classify individuals or organizations based on their willingness to embrace innovation. Rogers identifies five categories: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. Innovators are the first to adopt new technologies and are often risk-takers. Early adopters are more cautious but are still willing to leap when they see the value in the innovation. The early majority adopts the innovation once its benefits are proven, while the late majority and laggards are more reluctant and often adopt only after widespread use is established.

In Juba City, the diffusion of online marketing tools is influenced by several factors identified in the DOI theory, including the relative advantage of these tools, their compatibility with existing business practices, their complexity, trialability, and observability. **Relative advantage** refers to how much better the innovation is compared to existing practices. For small businesses in Juba, the relative advantage of online marketing is substantial. Traditional marketing methods such as print media, radio, and face-to-face interactions often require substantial financial investment. In contrast, online marketing tools like social media platforms offer more cost-effective options for reaching larger audiences and enhancing brand visibility. The ability to target specific customer demographics further increases the appeal of these tools, making them highly attractive for businesses seeking to maximize their reach while minimizing costs. **Compatibility** concerns how well the innovation fits with the existing values, experiences, and practices of the business owners. In Juba, small businesses tend to rely on personal relationships and local networks, which means that any online marketing strategy must align with these values. For instance, businesses that heavily depend on word-of-mouth and direct customer interactions will likely be more willing to adopt marketing tools that allow them to engage with customers directly, such as WhatsApp or Facebook. The **complexity** of online marketing tools is another important consideration. Small businesses in Juba may be hesitant to adopt these tools if they perceive them as difficult to use or understand. This barrier can be mitigated by offering training and support to local entrepreneurs, helping them navigate the complexities of online marketing strategies. Simple and user-friendly platforms will likely be more successful in gaining widespread adoption. **Trialability** refers to the extent to which an innovation can be experimented with on a limited basis. For small businesses in Juba, the ability to test online marketing tools on a small scale is critical. Businesses are more likely to adopt these tools if they can experiment with low-risk, low-cost strategies such as running a short-term Facebook ad campaign or using a free website-building platform. This trial period allows business owners to evaluate the effectiveness of the innovation before fully committing to it. Finally, **observability** concerns how visible the benefits of the innovation are to others. In Juba, businesses are more likely to adopt online marketing strategies if they observe the success of others who have used these tools effectively. As more

businesses in the community begin to use online platforms and experience tangible benefits, the diffusion of these technologies will accelerate.

2.4 Online Marketing Strategies for Small-Scale Business Enterprises in Juba City

2.4.1 Social Media Marketing: Facebook-First, Visual, and Community-Anchored

Social media platforms offer SSBs low-cost reach, rich targeting, and social proof dynamics that are especially valuable for firms lacking brand recognition (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann et al., 2011). Global literature identifies three pillars of effective small-firm social media strategy: (a) consistent, value-adding content (how-to tips, product demos), (b) community building via two-way dialogue, and (c) lightweight paid promotion to amplify high-performing posts (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014). In SSA, Facebook and Instagram remain dominant for consumer discovery, with short-form video (Reels) improving organic reach; meanwhile, low-bandwidth constraints favor compressed visuals, concise captions, and call-to-action (CTA) formats that minimize clicks (GSMA, 2023; ITU, 2023). For Juba SSBs, practical tactics include: Facebook Business Pages with accurate NAP (name-address-phone), “Shop” catalogs for price transparency, geotargeted Boosts around markets and transport hubs, and testimonial posts to mitigate trust barriers. Influencer micro-collaborations—local creators with niche credibility rather than celebrity reach, can provide affordable endorsement effects if disclosure and fit are managed (Bala & Verma, 2018; Kotler et al., 2017).

2.4.2. Conversational Commerce via WhatsApp Business

Conversational commerce; selling through chat has surged across SSA because it mirrors existing buyer-seller norms, tolerates intermittent connectivity, and supports negotiation, bundling, and after-sales support (GSMA, 2023). WhatsApp Business adds catalogs, quick replies, labels (lead, new order, paid), and click-to-WhatsApp ads from Facebook/Instagram, allowing SSBs to convert social discovery into 1-to-1 sales conversations and maintain a lightweight CRM (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Best practices include: (a) a dedicated business number; (b) templated responses that preserve a personal tone; (c) status updates for new stock and promotions; and (d) end-of-day follow-ups that respect opt-in norms for messaging consent (Strauss & Frost, 2014; Kotler et al., 2017). In Juba, where data costs and device constraints affect media sharing, compressing images, limiting video length, and providing clear pickup/delivery options are crucial.

2.4.3 Search, Local SEO, and Lightweight Websites

While social and messaging often dominate first contact in emerging markets, search remains a critical “verification” step; customers look up hours, directions, reviews, and contact details (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). For SSBs, a “minimum viable web” approach is recommended: claim and optimize Google Business Profile (where available), ensure consistent NAP citations, use descriptive categories, upload photos, and solicit reviews. A single-page, mobile-first website (fast theme, compressed assets, click-to-call/WhatsApp buttons, embedded map) supports credibility and acts as a canonical source for prices and policies (Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014). Content strategy should target problem-solution queries (“best affordable... in Juba,” “where to repair... near me”) and emphasize local modifiers (neighborhoods, landmarks). Schema markup for local businesses and products can further improve visibility (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

2.4.4 Marketplaces and Social Commerce Shops

Where formal e-commerce infrastructure is nascent, SSBs often leverage platform-layer commerce; Facebook Shops/Marketplace and Instagram Shopping, reducing the need for payment gateways and complex logistics (UNCTAD, 2020). Benefits include built-in discovery and messaging integration; constraints include limited control over data and algorithmic reach. A hybrid approach, hosting a slim product catalog on a website while syndicating featured items to Facebook/Instagram, balances control with reach (Kotler et al., 2017). Cross-posting stock lists

to community groups can work, provided sellers follow group norms and prioritize responsiveness (Bala & Verma, 2018).

2.4.5 Email and SMS for Retention

Although social media marketing is effective for acquisition, owned channels (email/SMS) are superior for retention and repeat purchases due to deliverability and algorithm independence (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Strauss & Frost, 2014). For Juba, SMS remains salient because it is device-agnostic and resilient to data interruptions (GSMA, 2023). Ethical list building (opt-in at point-of-sale or WhatsApp chat), monthly newsletters (new arrivals, tips), and event-triggered messages (abandoned inquiry follow-ups, service reminders) can materially lift lifetime value. Pairing email/SMS with WhatsApp broadcast lists (used judiciously) gives layered reach while respecting customer preferences.

2.4.6 Content Strategy: Proof, Utility, and Trust

Across contexts, content that reduces perceived risk and offers practical utility performs best for small businesses (Tiago & Verissimo, 2014). Trust-building formats include customer testimonials, before-and-after visuals, short explainer videos, price lists, warranties/return policies, and fulfillment photos (package, rider, delivery confirmation). Educational micro-content care instructions, sizing guides, “how to choose” posts, signal expertise, and lower search costs for buyers (Kotler et al., 2017; Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). In low-bandwidth settings, carousels and image sequences often outperform long videos; multilingual captions (Arabic/English/local languages) can broaden reach.

2.4.7 Payments, Fulfillment, and Last-Mile Communication

Conversion in SSA frequently hinges on non-marketing frictions: payment options, delivery reliability, and after-sales support (UNCTAD, 2020; GSMA, 2023). SSBes benefit from clearly advertising payment choices (cash on delivery, mobile money where available), order cut-off times, delivery windows, and pickup points. Post-purchase messages (receipt, delivery ETA, satisfaction check-ins) both reinforce trust and generate review prompts. Simple returns/exchanges policies, stated upfront and repeated in confirmation messages, lower perceived risk, and improve social referrals.

2.4.8 Analytics and Lightweight Performance Measurement

For small firms, a pragmatic analytics stack balances insight with simplicity: Facebook/Instagram Insights for reach/engagement, WhatsApp Business labels and message counts for lead tracking, Google Business Profile for discovery and calls, and spreadsheet-based sales logs for campaign attribution (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Reibstein, 2019). Useful micro-metrics include: cost per conversation (ad spend ÷ new WhatsApp chats), chat-to-sale conversion rate, repeat-purchase rate, and delivery-on-time rate. A monthly “test-and-learn” cadence—two creatives, two audiences, two offers—supports incremental optimization without overwhelming capacity (Kotler et al., 2017).

2.4.9 Capability Building and Ecosystem Partnerships

Adoption constraints, skills gaps, time scarcity, and creative production costs are common among SSBes (UNCTAD, 2020). Short, focused upskilling on smartphone content production, catalog creation, and customer messaging etiquette yields outsized returns. Partnerships with rider networks, community admins, and local micro-influencers provide distribution and social proof at low cost. Where available, MSME support programs (accelerators, chambers of commerce) can offer training and shared services (photography, copywriting). Aligning with mobile-money providers and logistics actors helps reduce checkout friction and increases the credibility of online offers (GSMA, 2023).

2.5 Challenges to Online Marketing of Small-Scale Business Enterprises in Juba City

Small-scale business enterprises (SMEs) play a significant role in Juba City's informal economy, yet their participation in online marketing remains minimal. Despite the global digital revolution, SMEs in Juba face multiple barriers in adopting and effectively using online marketing tools. These challenges span technological, infrastructural, economic, educational, and socio-political domains.

2.5.1 Poor Internet Infrastructure and Connectivity

One of the most critical barriers is the underdeveloped internet infrastructure. Internet penetration in South Sudan is extremely low, and even in Juba, where access is comparatively better, connectivity remains unreliable and expensive (International Telecommunication Union [ITU], 2023). Many SMEs operate without a stable internet connection, which makes consistent digital engagement nearly impossible. Without affordable and high-speed internet, businesses cannot effectively utilize digital platforms such as websites, social media, or e-commerce tools.

2.5.2 High Cost of Digital Equipment and Services

Most SMEs in Juba are constrained by limited financial resources, which restrict their ability to invest in digital infrastructure such as computers, smartphones, and software. The cost of data bundles is also high relative to average income levels (World Bank, 2022). As a result, many small business owners cannot afford to maintain an online presence, subscribe to digital tools, or hire professionals for digital marketing services.

2.5.3 Limited Digital Literacy

Another significant challenge is the low level of digital literacy among SME owners and staff. Many entrepreneurs lack the technical know-how required to design, manage, and market products online. This includes poor understanding of search engine optimization (SEO), social media algorithms, or even basic web navigation (Dada, 2020). Without training and capacity building, most small-scale entrepreneurs are unable to utilize the internet for business growth effectively.

2.5.4 Inadequate Online Payment Systems

E-commerce is tightly linked to electronic payment systems, but in Juba, there is a lack of reliable digital payment platforms. The banking system is underdeveloped, mobile money services are limited, and online transaction platforms such as PayPal or Stripe are largely unavailable (Makuei, 2023). This discourages both entrepreneurs and consumers from engaging in online trade due to fears over transaction security and inefficiency.

2.5.5 Lack of Trust and Consumer Awareness

Consumer skepticism also hinders online marketing. Due to frequent fraud, poor online service experiences, and delivery challenges, many consumers in Juba are hesitant to buy products or services through digital platforms (Bol, 2021). This lack of trust undermines the potential for online transactions and makes it difficult for SMEs to build a consistent digital customer base.

2.5.6 Political Instability and Power Outages

Political instability and frequent power outages also negatively impact online marketing efforts. Unreliable electricity limits the ability to use digital devices and maintain consistent communication online. Furthermore, periods of unrest disrupt business continuity and discourage long-term investments in online infrastructure (African Development Bank [AfDB], 2023).

2.5.7 Weak Legal and Policy Frameworks

There is also a lack of supportive legal and regulatory frameworks for e-commerce and digital trade in South Sudan. This includes the absence of legislation on data privacy, consumer

protection, and digital taxation. In such an environment, SMEs operate without formal protection or incentives to digitize their operations (UNCTAD, 2021).

While online marketing offers a significant opportunity for growth, small-scale business enterprises in Juba City face numerous challenges that hinder adoption and sustainability. Addressing issues such as infrastructure, digital literacy, financial constraints, and regulatory support is essential to creating an enabling environment for digital business transformation. Public-private partnerships, donor support, and targeted training programs are critical for overcoming these barriers and integrating Juba's SMEs into the broader digital economy.

3.0 Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design that combined both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the strategies and challenges of online marketing among small-scale business enterprises (SSBEs) in the three Payams (Munuki, Juba, and Kator) of Juba City. Mixed-methods design is particularly appropriate when exploring complex social and economic issues, as it allows for triangulation and validation of findings across different data sources (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The quantitative component captures measurable aspects such as the extent of adoption and financial performance, while the qualitative component provides deeper insights into contextual challenges faced by entrepreneurs.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The target population of this study consisted of 315 small-scale business enterprises operating within Juba City that engage in online marketing practices. Given the limited availability of formal databases in South Sudan, purposive and stratified sampling techniques were employed to ensure representation across different business categories. Stratified sampling enabled the researcher to capture variations across sectors, while purposive sampling ensured the inclusion of enterprises actively experimenting with online marketing strategies (Etikan & Bala, 2017).

3.3 Data Collection Methods

Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires and focus group discussions. The questionnaires were distributed to a sample of SSBE owners and managers to gather quantitative data on the types of online marketing strategies used, perceived effectiveness, and measurable outcomes. Focus group discussions were conducted with selected entrepreneurs, marketing experts, and policymakers to capture in-depth qualitative insights into the challenges and opportunities within the Juba context. Employing both methods ensured that the study not only measured patterns but also uncovered challenges and strategies influencing online marketing adoption (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to establish online marketing strategies. This approach enables the identification of significant predictors of SSBE success in online marketing adoption (Field, 2018). Qualitative data from focus group discussions were transcribed, coded, and thematically analyzed. Thematic analysis allowed the researcher to identify recurring patterns and key themes related to challenges in Juba City. The integration of both analyses enhanced the validity of the findings through methodological triangulation (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The research adhered to ethical standards by ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality of participants. No personal identifiers were disclosed, and participants were

free to withdraw at any stage of the study. These ethical protocols align with best practices in social science research (Resnik, 2020).

4.0 Results and Discussions

4.1 Strategies to online marketing of small- scale business enterprises in Juba City

Table 1. Showing strategies used for online marketing of SSBs in Juba City

Strategy used for online marketing	Likert Scale					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)
Using a Website for Marketing	170 (54%)	60 (19%)	47 (14.9%)	17 (5.4%)	21 (6.7%)	315 (100%)
Using Google listing	169 (53.7%)	50 (15.9%)	61 (19.4%)	16 (5.1%)	19 (6.0%)	315 (100%)
Using YouTube	162 (51.4%)	52 (16.5%)	62 (19.7%)	16 (5.1%)	23 (7.3%)	315 (100%)
Facebook (Meta) marketing	90 (28.6%)	34 (10.8%)	58 (18.4%)	41 (13.0%)	92 (29.2%)	315 (100%)
X(Formerly Twitter) marketing	167 (53.0%)	45 (14.3%)	51 (16.2%)	29 (9.2%)	23 (7.3%)	315 (100%)
Tiktok marketing	149 (47.3%)	45 (14.3%)	55 (17.5%)	30 (9.5%)	36 (11.4%)	315 (100%)
Email marketing	124 (39.4%)	36 (11.4%)	61 (19.4%)	41 (13.0%)	53 (16.8%)	315 (100%)
WhatsApp Marketing	68 (21.6%)	21 (6.7%)	29 (9.2%)	34 (10.8%)	163 (51.7%)	315 (100%)
Using Messenger for Marketing	101 (32.1%)	37 (11.7%)	44 (14.0%)	29 (7.2%)	104 (33.0%)	315 (100%)

Source: Primary Data

The findings (table 1) reveal a diverse landscape of online marketing strategies adopted by small-scale business enterprises (SSBs) in Juba City, with varying levels of acceptance and effectiveness across platforms. The data illustrates not only the popularity of certain tools but also the preferences and digital behaviors of both businesses and consumers within the South Sudanese context. A notable observation is the dominance of websites, Google listings, and YouTube as formalized online marketing strategies. More than half of the respondents strongly agreed to using websites (54%), Google listings (53.7%), and YouTube (51.4%) as primary marketing channels. This suggests a preference for structured, content-driven platforms that allow for broader visibility and credibility in a competitive business environment. These platforms provide businesses with the opportunity to establish brand identity, increase accessibility to information, and reach customers beyond geographical limitations. However, the relatively lower percentages of those who agreed (14.9–19.7%) or were neutral toward these tools imply that while formal platforms are recognized, their sustained use may be hindered by resource constraints, technical know-how, or limited local customer engagement. Conversely, Facebook (Meta) and WhatsApp emerged as the most interactive and widely adopted platforms for digital engagement. Unlike the other platforms, Facebook showed a more balanced distribution across responses, with 29.2% strongly agreeing and 18.4% agreeing, reflecting its role as a dynamic space for both promotional content and direct consumer interaction. WhatsApp marketing stood out distinctly, with 51.7% of respondents strongly agreeing to its use, making it the most popular strategy among all. This finding highlights the centrality of instant messaging in Juba's digital economy, where cost efficiency, accessibility, and interpersonal communication are highly valued. WhatsApp's ability to blend social interaction with business communication makes it particularly effective in local contexts where formal digital infrastructure is still developing. On the other hand, platforms such as Twitter (now X) and TikTok were comparatively less utilized, with more than half of respondents either strongly disagreeing or disagreeing with

their use. For example, 53% strongly disagreed with using Twitter, and 47.3% expressed the same for TikTok. This may be attributed to factors such as the limited popularity of these platforms among local consumers, perceived irrelevance to business promotion, or the absence of technical skills to leverage their potential. While TikTok has proven globally effective in viral marketing, its relatively low uptake in Juba could also reflect cultural and generational differences in platform adoption.

Interestingly, email marketing and Messenger marketing occupy an intermediate position. While 39.4% strongly disagreed with email marketing, a significant 16.8% strongly agreed, suggesting that despite infrastructural and literacy challenges, some businesses are attempting to utilize more formal digital communication strategies. Messenger, similarly, had 33% strong agreement, reflecting its integration with Facebook and relative familiarity among local users. These findings indicate that while messaging-based tools are widely embraced, more formal or content-heavy channels may require higher levels of digital literacy, customer awareness, and infrastructural support to reach their full potential. Critically, the data underscores the contextual digital divide within Juba City. Strategies requiring higher technological skills and infrastructure, such as websites, YouTube, and Google listings, appear to attract recognition but face limited active utilization compared to simpler, interactive tools like WhatsApp and Facebook. This highlights a paradox where SSBs acknowledge the importance of professional online presence but primarily rely on cost-effective and accessible platforms for actual marketing. It also suggests that the consumer base in Juba is more responsive to platforms integrated into daily communication rather than formalized corporate structures.

4.2 Challenges to Online Marketing of Small-Scale Business Enterprises in Juba City

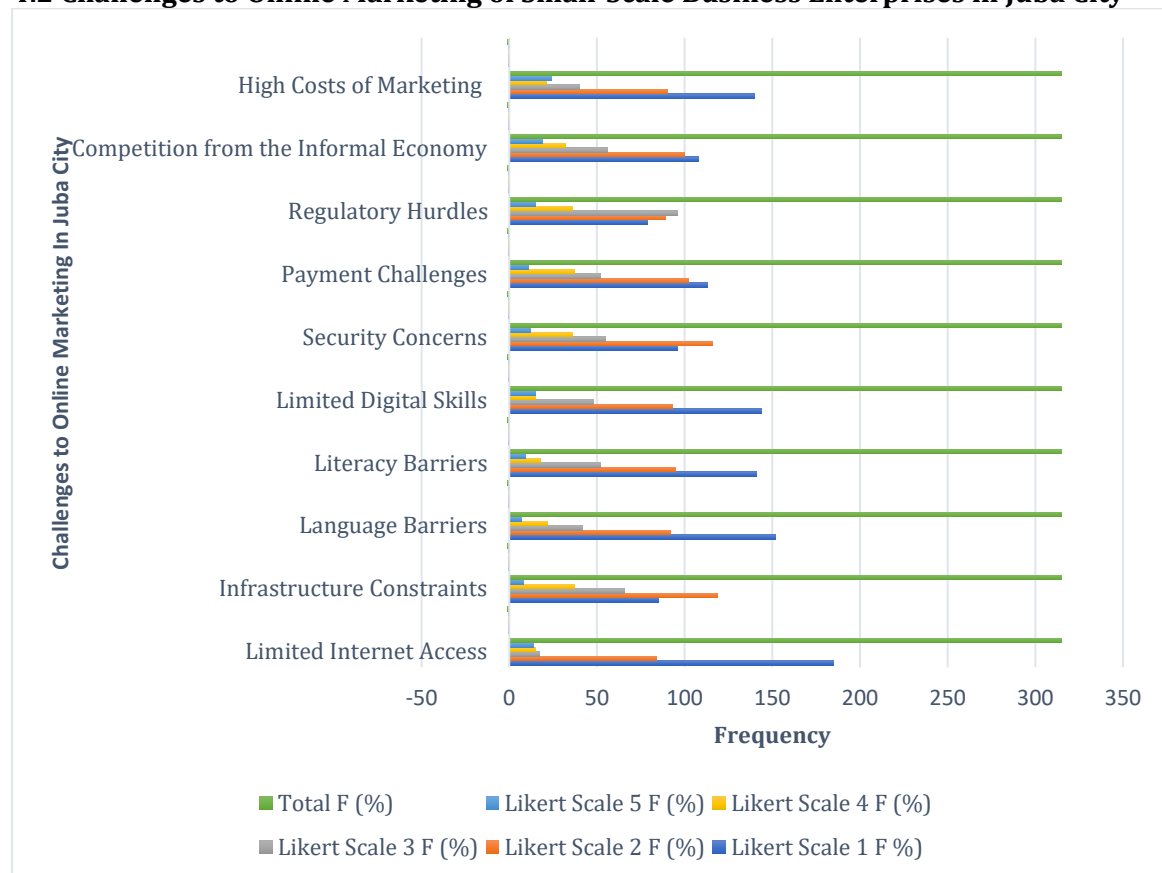


Figure 1. Showing challenges to the online marketing of SSBs in Juba City

Source: Primary Data

The study reveals that limited internet access emerged as the most significant barrier to the use of social media platforms for marketing among small-scale business enterprises in Juba City, with 185 respondents (58.7%) strongly agreeing that it constitutes a major challenge. This finding underscores the infrastructural limitations that constrain digital adoption in the city. Internet connectivity serves as the backbone of online marketing, and its unavailability or unreliability directly hampers entrepreneurs' ability to leverage social media tools. This observation reflects a structural problem that extends beyond individual enterprises and highlights the need for broader investment in information and communication technology infrastructure at the national level. Closely following connectivity issues, language barriers (48.3%), literacy challenges (44.8%), and limited digital skills (45.7%) were also cited as critical obstacles. These factors represent socio-cultural and educational constraints that persist even where access to internet services exists. The findings suggest that the mere expansion of internet infrastructure may not automatically translate into effective utilization of digital platforms. Instead, capacity-building initiatives that focus on improving digital literacy, creating multilingual content, and developing simplified marketing applications tailored to local contexts are essential. Without these interventions, many small-scale entrepreneurs may remain excluded from the benefits of online marketing.

Financial challenges further compound these obstacles. A considerable proportion of respondents (44.4%) strongly agreed that high marketing costs impede their adoption of online platforms, while 35.9% identified payment infrastructure challenges as a significant hindrance. The predominance of cash-based transactions, weak financial integration, and limited availability of online payment gateways restrict the ability of small-scale businesses to engage in e-commerce effectively. These findings point to systemic economic barriers that disadvantage entrepreneurs with limited financial capacity and reduce the scalability of digital marketing strategies. The issue of competition from the informal economy, reported by 34.8% of respondents, introduces another dimension of concern. Informal enterprises often operate outside regulatory frameworks, enabling them to undercut formal businesses through lower pricing and avoidance of compliance costs. This reality suggests that even when businesses adopt social media marketing, their competitive advantage can be undermined by unregulated market forces. This observation reflects not only an economic challenge but also a governance gap, as the absence of clear policies and enforcement mechanisms perpetuates unequal market conditions. Although reported by a smaller proportion of respondents, security concerns (30.5%) and regulatory hurdles (25.7%) remain noteworthy. Security risks such as online fraud, cybercrime, and data privacy issues discourage trust in digital platforms, while unclear or inconsistent regulatory frameworks create uncertainty for entrepreneurs seeking to expand into digital markets. These challenges point to weak institutional support structures for e-commerce in South Sudan, further limiting the sustainability of online marketing initiatives. Taken together, the findings indicate that the challenges to online marketing in Juba City are multi-layered and interdependent. They span infrastructural barriers such as internet access, socio-cultural constraints like literacy and language, financial limitations including high costs and weak payment systems, and institutional issues related to regulation and security. Importantly, the relatively high percentages across multiple categories suggest that small-scale entrepreneurs are not confronted by isolated difficulties but by compounded and overlapping obstacles. Addressing only one challenge—such as improving internet access—will therefore be insufficient. Instead, a holistic approach that simultaneously strengthens infrastructure, enhances digital literacy, reduces financial barriers, and develops effective institutional frameworks is required to create an enabling environment for online marketing.

5. Applications of the Study

The findings of this study have significant practical, policy, and academic applications for small-scale business enterprises (SSBEs) in Juba City and similar developing economies. From a practical perspective, understanding which online marketing strategies are most effective allows

entrepreneurs to optimize their limited resources. The prominence of WhatsApp and Facebook as accessible and community-centered tools suggests that SSBEs can prioritize these platforms for customer engagement, sales conversion, and brand building, while gradually developing capacity for more formal platforms such as websites, Google listings, and YouTube to enhance credibility and reach. Insights into the relative adoption and effectiveness of various digital tools provide business owners with evidence-based guidance on designing marketing campaigns that align with local consumer behavior and technological realities. From a policy perspective, the study underscores the need for targeted interventions to overcome structural barriers to online marketing. Policymakers and development agencies can leverage these findings to design programs that improve internet infrastructure, expand affordable data access, and facilitate access to digital payment systems. Additionally, training initiatives aimed at increasing digital literacy and marketing skills among entrepreneurs can help bridge knowledge gaps, enabling more SSBEs to harness the benefits of digital platforms. The evidence on financial, regulatory, and socio-cultural challenges also provides a roadmap for institutional reforms, including simplified e-commerce regulations, consumer protection measures, and incentives for digital adoption.

From an academic and research standpoint, this study contributes to the growing literature on digital entrepreneurship in fragile and developing economies. By integrating theoretical frameworks such as the Technology Acceptance Model, the Resource-Based View, and the Diffusion of Innovation Theory, the research provides a nuanced understanding of how online marketing strategies are adopted and the contextual challenges that shape their effectiveness. Future researchers can build upon this work to examine longitudinal changes in digital adoption, compare patterns across different cities or countries in sub-Saharan Africa, and explore the role of emerging technologies such as mobile money, AI-driven marketing tools, or social commerce platforms in enhancing small business performance. Overall, the study's applications highlight the practical relevance of aligning digital marketing strategies with local realities, the importance of systemic interventions to mitigate structural barriers, and the potential for continued academic inquiry to inform sustainable growth of small-scale enterprises in Juba City and beyond.

6. Conclusion

These findings reveal that while Juba's SSBEs are gradually embracing diverse online marketing strategies, their choices are shaped by affordability, accessibility, consumer culture, and digital skills availability. WhatsApp and Facebook dominate as accessible, community-centered platforms, while websites and Google listings represent aspirational tools associated with formal business growth. The limited uptake of platforms such as Twitter, TikTok, and email marketing underscores persistent structural barriers. Therefore, the effectiveness of online marketing in Juba hinges on aligning strategies with local realities while progressively building the capacity to exploit more advanced tools. The findings also highlight that while digital marketing presents significant opportunities for small-scale business enterprises in Juba City, the environment remains constrained by deep-rooted structural, economic, and institutional challenges. The prominence of basic barriers such as internet access and literacy underscore the nascent stage of digital adoption in the city. For online marketing to evolve into a robust driver of small-scale business growth, coordinated interventions in policy, infrastructure, and capacity building are essential.

7. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite the valuable insights generated, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research focused exclusively on small-scale business enterprises (SSBEs) within the three Payams of Juba City—Munuki, Juba, and Kator—which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions of South Sudan or other developing countries with different socio-economic and infrastructural contexts. Second, the study relied on self-reported data collected through questionnaires and focus group discussions, which may be subject to response bias, social desirability, or inaccurate recall. Third, the cross-sectional design captures

a snapshot of online marketing adoption at a single point in time, limiting the ability to track changes in practices, consumer behavior, or the impact of evolving digital infrastructure over time. Finally, while the study explored a wide range of online marketing strategies, it did not quantify the precise financial impact of each strategy on business performance, leaving room for more granular economic analysis. Building on these limitations, future research can adopt longitudinal designs to examine how the adoption of online marketing strategies evolves over time and how such adoption influences long-term business performance in Juba City and other fragile economies. Comparative studies across multiple urban and rural centers in South Sudan could reveal regional differences in digital adoption, infrastructure constraints, and consumer behavior. Further research could also explore sector-specific adoption patterns, examining which industries benefit most from particular online marketing tools. Additionally, future studies could integrate quantitative financial metrics, such as return on investment or profit growth, to more precisely measure the economic impact of digital marketing strategies. Investigating the role of emerging technologies—such as mobile money integration, social commerce platforms, and artificial intelligence-driven marketing tools—could provide actionable insights for both practitioners and policymakers seeking to enhance the competitiveness of small-scale enterprises in resource-constrained environments.

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