

ADVANCEMENTS IN BUSINESS USE OF INTERNET MARKETING: POST-COVID-19 ERA IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to gain insights into the effects of developments in the digital space on business marketing interactions in the South African economy. The objective of the study was to identify and analyse the impact of the internet on corporate and social environments and the challenges or opportunities digital marketing presents to the marketing disciplines in business. Qualitative research was conducted through literature reviews based on contemporary research and global institutes/bodies' reports, as well as primary research through telephonic interviews using a selected sample of marketing leaders from different organisations. Insights were sought on how the internet affected business-cum-marketing strategies and innovations. The findings revealed a continuous need for shifts in marketing approaches in line with the vast digitisation of most of the global space. Market stratification in South Africa affects marketing as stakeholders are at varying levels of adaptation of the internet in the South African economy. Another major finding was that the Southern African economy was stratified in terms of language, where English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Zulu and Sesotho are dominant languages. Hence they warrant marketing representation for businesses to thrive. The dynamics of each cluster are varied, posing a challenge over and above the required internet-related adjustments. While gains are derived from the internationalisation of trade through the internet, the established challenges radiated around the continuous adaptation of digitalised marketing while keeping up with product innovations presented by the internet competition. Internet security was mostly outsourced and requires to be localised for customer confidence on data security and confidentiality issues.

Keywords: ICT developments; data intelligence; data engineering; economy; online marketing.

1. INTRODUCTION

The internet in business comprises the use of online platforms such as the initial giants, Yahoo and the modern-day Mozilla Firefox, Chrome, and Microsoft, among others, including commercial websites like eBay (Altan, 2017). These internet tools gave way to the creation of social networks and personal pages and websites, hence advancements by marketers to push online marketing through the available platforms. As internet users increased both at individual and organisational levels, marketers face the challenge to be agile, that is being innovative, adaptive, and future-focused (Jones et al., 2011).

Marketing in the South African economy has even traditionally drawn importance in the visual aspects of products and services and are assisted by online systems through banners that have been used effectively. Highlights by Balmer and Yen (2017) suggest that progression that occurred in the advertising industry through digitalised marketing created online awareness of products and brands. The significance of the internet is shifting to a main market communications channel or media as opposed to the various traditional marketing media. Websites are also created to assist interested parties access company as well as product information through creating attractive and easy to navigate company profiles. Given that globally the most used browser is Google, there is a need for websites to be compatible with that browser and mobile devices/gadgets for greater accessibility (Korobkov, 2016).

Most South Africans now transact through their mobile devices and most service providers provide seamless experiences over the internet connectivity for banking, payments, purchases among other services. This necessitates the need to harness the mobile use of the internet for market initiatives by organisations. The current trend has been the creation of applications by companies for personalised services with individual clients whom they engage with through their mobile devices thereby enhancing the digitalisation of marketing. However, scepticism arises among users based on cyber security issues.

The advent and expansion of social platforms on the internet have modernised the way of life for most economies, including South Africa. Most people, especially the youth, share their social lives on social networks such as Facebook, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Twitter, among others, and the interactive nature of social visibility provides a platform for surfing the market as well as targeting customers for products, as well as appropriately advertising them. Interactions on social media platforms can be beneficial through targeting the viewers for advertisements, product launches, brand awareness and building of social blogs. Companies need to apply data intelligence to be able to filter out the authenticity of the information acquired, as well as to secure it from competitors.

According to recent statistics for January 2020, 4.54 billion people are active internet users, encompassing 59 % of the global population (Statista, 2020). Along with this trend, it is observed that digital and social media marketing enables companies to achieve their marketing objectives at a relatively low cost (Ajina, 2019). Considering these developments and the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, consumers have faced shopping challenges. Ardently, the increases in the use of digital marketing and social media have positively influenced consumer attitudes toward online shopping with an increasing market share for eCommerce centric organisations (Alam, 2019).

The increasing number of shopping channels has also influenced consumer behaviour (Hossain et al., 2019, 2020). Rukuni et al. (2020) indicate that social media strategies are informative, entertaining, avoid irritation and are credible as sources. People spend an increasing amount of time online searching for information on products and services, communicating with other consumers about their experiences,

and engaging with companies. Moreover, consumer complaints today can be instantly communicated to millions of people (negative electronic word-of-mouth) all of which can have negative consequences for the business concerned (Javornik et al., 2020).

Organisations have responded to this change in consumer behaviour by making digital and social media an essential and integral component of their business marketing plans (Dwivedi et al., 2021). This study brings together the collective insights from literature and interviews from participants in the business arena to identify significant trends, possibilities and demands related to the key aspects of digital and social media marketing in the South African economy from a corporate perspective.

The main objective of the study was to identify trends in digital marketing for businesses in the post-COVID-19 South African economy. The sub-objectives were to:

- Establish the significance of the internet in marketing communications;
- Identify the challenges and opportunities of internet marketing;
- Identify the components that form the basis for internet marketing in post-COVID-19 South Africa.

The main and sub-research questions were derived directly from these research objectives.

The research approach applied to solve the research problem was qualitative through a descriptive study. A focus on the future needs to be shaped by a clear view of the current circumstances and their implications. The findings offer clarity of perspective to the academic platform as well as business, informing future research as well as decision-making focussing on the South African case. Moreover, the study is significant in these times when businesses have been affected economically by the deadly coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This points to the need for an increased focus on investments in marketing to increase and improve business visibility in the internet arena for businesses to be competitive. Online business visibility is now even more crucial because of lockdown restrictions on the physical accessibility of facilities, physical contact and movement that has marked the Internet as most needed and most relevant for serious scrutiny (Kumar & Bagga, 2020).

The next section comprises a review of the literature related to the study. This is followed by a description and justification of the research methodology applied in the study. The study findings are presented in the next section and finally, there is a discussion of the findings and conclusions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Schwab (2015), without referring directly to the Fourth Industrial Revolution, alluded to the notion of a new theory concerning the adoption of mobile technology devices based on the concept of experience in a 'life-world', instead of just the adoption of innovation by consumers. In this regard, Botha (2019) contends that

technological innovation should now consider that technology is not independent and neutral anymore but an integrated, dynamic, and value-adding shaping force to human life. Hence, technology is now intimately embraced as physically contiguous with human beings. Moreover, internet use has increased at a 'rapid' rate, a description by Blank and Dutton (2019), hence the need for an online presence as well as accessibility.

Online marketing has been clearly defined as *"the use of the internet and all associated digital electronic technologies to achieve marketing goals"* by reaching various users at their convenience (Chaffey et al., 2009 cited in Suleiman et al., 2020:165).

Social media are *"A group of internet-based applications that build on ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allow the creation of exchange of user-generated content"* (Kaplan, 2016). Simasathiansophon (2019) confirms that it also interferes with the way we conduct our social life and offers unparalleled opportunities for the marketing environment that can have a significant impact on businesses.

2.1 The significance of the internet on marketing communications

Globalisation makes it critical that local businesses remain competitive for economic development. Marketing approaches, connectivity coverage, operational standards and policies need to be aligned with the prevailing and forecasted internet environment. According to Deloitte (2021), there has been a great impact in the improvement of broadband speed and connectivity for economic growth through the boosting of the GDP. This highlights the importance of the penetration of the internet across all country communities. The impact of the internet on GDP growth was concluded to be higher than other technologies like fixed and mobile telephones (Deloitte, 2021).

2.2 Marketing developments

Developments in the digital world such as the internet serve as online resources in the form of information, websites, social networking platform and have, since the new millennium, turned into an essential and significant part of daily lives (Altan, 2017). The changes include online advertisements, e-mail marketing, search engine optimisation, affiliate marketing, social media marketing, viral marketing, online transactions, and digital currencies.

Marketing revolutions are averred into four groups by Nguyen and Simkin (2017) and Balmer and Yen (2017) as follows (Fig. 1):

- The establishment of a marketing philosophy;
- Adapting a marketing philosophy to services;
- Broadening of the marketing philosophy to stakeholders, that is brands and corporate identities;
- The Internet-of-Things (IoT) (the most prominent) requires a paradigm shift in marketing thought and philosophy in the digital age.

The fourth revolution of marketing is the one that has brought the greatest challenges to business as it attracts multi-facets of drivers for effective marketing. Vast digital capabilities need to be appropriately mixed to rise to the competition.

The forecast of an exponential increase in the average number of people connected to the IoT devices indicated a tenfold growth in the internet market between 2018 to 2025. This occurrence is expected to result in an individual connecting with over 4500 internet devices per day, way above the 298 and 584 times a day in 2010 and 2015 respectively (United Nations, 2019). Data intelligence is now considered not merely a side activity for companies for owning market information and for regular business but rather as a critical component of production processes. They are considered as resources for collecting and analysing complex data much faster and cheaper on the internet platform which has great effects on development and trade.

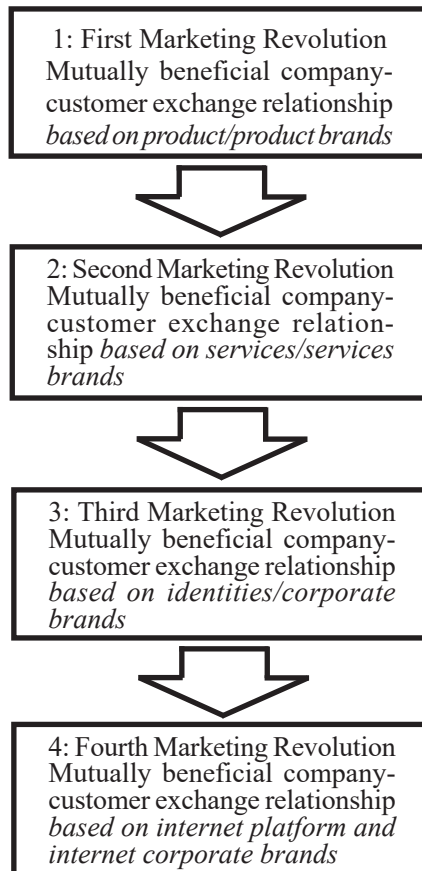


Figure 1. The four revolutions of marketing. Source: Nguyen & Simkin (2017).

2.3 The challenges and opportunities of internet marketing

The benefits derived from the IoT have to do with improved efficiencies in the form of meeting client needs which improves their lives as companies or other third parties gain access to information online regarding customer behaviour, preferences as well as influences.

Research in the mobile banking field in Africa provides insights into challenges that the density of smartphone distribution is relatively high in urban areas compared to rural areas mainly because of the lack of connectivity options that affect their distribution (Chigada & Hirschfelder, 2017). Comparatively, the population coverage of 4G networks in Sub-Saharan Africa is 53 % and 78 % in Eastern Europe (Bahia, and Delaporte 2020). Consequently, Africa’s mobile internet penetration has been relatively low compared to the rest of the world.

Moreover, there is a downside to the Internet as a source of business marketing information. According to Bostanshirin (2014) and West (2016), the downside has to do with the validity and reliability of the information, integrity problems, lack of trust, cyber-security, disaster preparedness, privacy, and security, as well as a lack of face-to-face contact (Table 1).

Table 1. Characteristics of the Internet. Source: Bostanshirin (2014).

Opportunities	Challenges
Empowerment Effect	Problem of Integrity
Elimination of geographic barriers	Lack of Trust
Round the clock availability	Possibility of impersonation
Cost effectiveness	Lack of face-to-face contact
Traceability	Privacy and Security
Personalisation	

2.4 Cultural and international perspective to internet marketing

An emphasis is applied by Arora and Sanini (2019) concerning the need for multinational companies to embrace cultural and ethnic differences as these are critical and most relevant in online marketing. The authors provide two categories of characteristic influences - local cultures’ influence on social media and cross-cultural motivations on social media. Cultural differences’ influence social media and social networking sites (Shneor & Efrat, 2014). People of the same culture join social media networks to seek information from those of a similar culture or ethnic background. However, there has also been increased cross-cultural collaboration on online platforms in the international arena (Arli, 2017; Arora & Sanini, 2019). This entails the utilisation of social networking sites and hence utilising social media platforms internationally and for the culture demographic clusters within the local market.

2.5 The components that form the basis for internet marketing

Literature confirms that the effect of the internet on marketing was the increased marketing costs (Korobkov, 2016; Grubor & Olja, 2018). To beat the competition,

companies increased marketing investment on the internet which consequently resulted in increased product costs that could be limited through data analytics. Critical components that form the basis for internet marketing analytics can therefore be identified (United Nations, 2019). Consumer, as well as competitor data, is then generated, collected, aggregated, and analysed for the desired purposes. The components of market data analytics that change the nature of competition that marketers face are data-driven discovery and innovation; radical personalisation; orthogonal data sets; hyper-scale real-time data matching and massive data integration (Henke et al., 2016).

For efficiency and effectiveness of business operations, there is a need for continuous innovations in the generation of data, its analysis, and more so, its dissemination. Marketing intelligence has to be placed at strategic levels in organisations so that they can be mainstreamed into strategic approaches of company brands and performance. Profit maximisation can be achieved through the appropriate analysis of marketing information available on the internet (Kumar & Bagga, 2020).

In a review of the internet communications paradigm, Arora and Sanini (2019), concluded that with an awareness of emerging future trends of online communications, companies need to revamp the traditional promotional mix and be oriented on social media marketing. The authors suggest incorporation of platforms such as social media blogs, discussion forums, electronic word of mouth, consumer online reviews, functional social media networks with video sharing capabilities, and open channels of communications between firms and consumers resulting in open interactions. A critical feature of digital industrialisation that affects marketing is policy guidance and conceptual frameworks that guide the economic and social shift (Singh, 2019). They emphasise that companies do not have to concentrate on creating new marketplaces, at the expense of owning critical market data.

2.6 COVID-19 and internet expansion in the South African economy

South Africa is currently under a national state of disaster because of the COVID-19 global pandemic. One of the strategic responses instituted by governments across the world has been total or partial lockdowns to advance social distancing to slow down the spread of the coronavirus (Deloitte, 2020). At its strictest level, only essential services are permitted to operate during the lockdown and working from home has been encouraged, while many people have not been able to work at all. Consequently, business operations, including that of telecommunication companies, have been disrupted amidst the economic slowdown.

Internet coverage and infrastructure is considered more advanced in South Africa compared to the situation in the African continent. However, security solutions continue to be outsourced from international providers and resold by agents in the local market. This is the highest setback on market leverage for the South African economy which has the strongest internet network and supporting infrastructure in Africa (Kumar & Bagga, 2020; Henke et al., 2016).

South Africa also lags on local skills to offer cyber security services and therefore

has turned to the finance and banking sector for internet security. Traditionally, reliance was on off-the-shelf and in-house products, which cannot sustain the dynamics of an evolving internet world. The appetite for the economy to equip itself with the requirements for the internet age, as well as the temporary outsourcing of security services, serve as appropriate foundations to adapt to the new age. This has been demonstrated by the July 2021 cyber-attacks on Transnet’s operating systems which was unprecedented (ISS, 2021).

Cyber security inadequacy and doubts on the security thereof is highlighted as an impediment as well on the advancement in acceptance and use of digital currencies and mobile payment systems which remain limited in South Africa. This is also an impediment that affects the marketing arena. The economy needs an entrance of companies that stand for exposing security breaches and guarding the playground to boost the acceptance and confidence of society on the digital and cryptocurrency route that is proving to be one major development in the internet revolution (Singh, 2019). Henke et al. (2016) provides a forecast of industry drivers and constraints in South Africa from 2017–2022, which highlight a perspective on the major challenges and opportunities for the marketing sector. These are rated high (H), medium (M) and low (L) (Table 2).

Table 2. South African industry drivers and restraints 2017–2022. Source: Henke et al. (2016).

Drivers of Industry	2017-18	2019-20	2021-22
Broadband service demand is driven by affordable mobile and wireless solutions.	H	H	H
Cyber security costs and efforts are driven by high-security concerns.	H	H	H
Investment in Internet-of-Things (IoT) applications is driven by sector-wide attention on digital transformation.	H	H	H
Restraints on Industry			
Costly projects are being set aside by companies to cut high IT budgets as a result of slowdowns in economic growth.	H	M	M
The deployment of a 4G network is being held by uncertainties concerning the future of digitisation as this is a fast-evolving aspect of connectivity.	M	M	L
Some sectors are reluctant to move to hosted solutions over data security concerns.	M	M	L

The setback of low economic growth seems impede fast-tracked investments in IoT applications and requirements. However, high-security concerns are restraining confidence in data sharing by users. This has a propensity to drive compliance by organisations and still bear the costs involved.

1.1 Means economic benefits can be enhanced in the internet era

While viewing the internet as revolutionary in corporate marketing, Balmer and Yen (2017) suggest a radical shift in marketing strategies as well as marketing

education, by embracing the IoT. The author argues for a high level of attention to be placed on corporate communications which the authors purport are rapidly advancing, hence the focus on a “Corporate Internet Marketing Revolution”. It is argued that opportunities have been identified by many companies in marketing, as the internet revolution unfolds with clients and their organisations’ interfaces shifting to a broader scope. Arora and Sanini (2019) confirm that identifying existing marketing inefficiencies should be the first step to unveiling business opportunities and as such they must be reappraised.

It is acknowledged that South Africa has remained one of the most advanced African economies in terms of ICT technologies adaptation and infrastructure adoption in Africa (ITA 2021). Nevertheless, there is still an accessibility gap in rural areas and other more remote areas of the economy. These areas have limited electricity access, hence the need for erecting power systems and satellites for mobile and internet connectivity. Some of these areas are important and strategic zones that harbour critical business operations such as mining.

The South African economy is reported to have been gradually deteriorating in recent years, despite being the location of headquarters for most multinationals and the recipient of foreign direct investment providing advanced telecommunications space in the South African economy. Varadarajan and Yadav (2017) opine that the main marketing objective is for the nation to position itself for an advantage against competitors in the market through a competitive marketing strategy that focuses on the evolving electronic market field. Moreover, the landscape for business competition has broadened because of the internet as well as the evolving market, hence proposing a focus shift on marketing strategy and infrastructure responsiveness. Varadarajan and Yadav (2017) further emphasise the different approaches specific to industries, products, customers, and the characteristics of the buying environment. This is consistent with the report that by eliminating distribution to those they do not want to reach, companies can free up millions in cash to reinvest in more efficient channels (such as digital targeting) and to double-down on customers more responsive to its circulars (Henke et al., 2016).

Informed marketing frameworks are critical to harnessing opportunities and raising awareness and alertness concerning the challenges of online marketing and having an online presence (United Nations, 2019). Cyber security domains (Table 3) has been given critical attention as well as risk monitoring and ensuring prompt responses considering the confidentiality of the data in the possession of companies. The internet implies the combination of people, information, process information and technology information, (Fovino et al., 2020). Since information breaches are becoming more sophisticated in their regulation and management, there is a need for progressive systems to evolve in line with the rate of sophistication of cybercrime. Part of the key findings of the International Trade Administration (ITA 2021) is the threat of cyber-attacks accompanying digitisation growth in South Africa and the response of individual organisations investing in cyber security.

Table 3. Cyber Security domains. Adapted from Fovino et al. (2020).

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Human Aspects• Education and Training• Trust Management, Assurance and Accountability• Security Measurements• Assurance, Audit and Certification• Technology and Legal Aspects• Identity and Access Management (IAM)• Cryptology• Network and Distributed Systems• Theoretical Foundations of Security Analysis and Design• Software and Hardware Security Engineering• Data Security and Privacy• Security Management and Governance• Operational Incident Handling and Digital Forensics

3. METHODOLOGY

An inductive approach was undertaken that according to Greener (2008) and Saunders and Lewis, (2007), generates conclusions from research findings. This was combined with an interpretivist research paradigm which also constructs knowledge from the findings.

To complete the study, in-depth secondary research was conducted through published academic research, business research, national and international organisations, and official government-released information. Studies highlight the questionable validity of secondary data in research as the purposes of the initial researcher as well as scope may differ rendering it not representative of facts (Rowlands, 2005; Greener, 2008; MacDonald & Headlam, 2016). To counter this important point, and ensure the validity of research sources, research based on the South African economy was used and essentially acquired from published academic journals, global and national reports falling within a space of 10 years. Moreover, Olabode et al. (2018) further confirm that secondary data provides a major advantage in the use of existing data sources, with a profusion of information, at a relatively cheaper cost and easily available for research purposes. In this study, data from sources other than those specified were used for comparative and directive purposes only.

Primary research sources were used to affirm the results from the desk research through triangulation. Ten participants were selected from the South African business arena. Considering the contact restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, telephonic invitations and interviews were conducted to achieve the research objectives. The market size in South Africa is broad and could not be covered because of time and resource limitations, hence a stratified approach in the sample selection was applied.

This qualitative approach is justified through the perspectives of Rowlands (2005) and Olabode et al. (2018) who insist that this method is appropriate for business research as behaviours cannot be isolated for quantifiable analysis since they are dynamic and homogenous and the area under this study considers the effects of the internet on marketing.

The interviews administered were designed in a semi-structured form. Care was taken to immediately document the interview notes after conducting each interview which served as a safeguard against forgetting and using personal impressions in capturing findings. This included immediate transcribing of the recorded interviews to enable requests for a retake and validation of unclear issues to avoid the risk of losing the information since recordings storage tends to be more vulnerable (da Silva Nascimento & Steinbruch, 2019). This also assisted to give room for the improvement of interviewing skills for consecutive participants in areas observed as requiring improvement from prior interviews.

The established themes and ideas were gathered and categorised in line with the research objectives. Categorising of data enabled the summarising of interview data by grouping similar responses through a constant comparative method (Lukosevicius et al., 2019). These results are presented in the next section.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The demographics of the interview participants mainly surround the occupations and organisational positions that were considered relevant and adequate for the research triangulation concerned. The research engaged middle to top-level marketing managers from different companies. Their strategic level positions guaranteed informed global perspectives on the market economic factors under study. A 100 % response rate was received from the 10 invited and scheduled telephonic interviews and the results in line with research questions are summarised below:

4.1 The significance of the internet on marketing communications

The participants indicated that there was a fast change in the way of conducting business and the use of the traditional offline marketing mix that has been overtaken by internet opportunities. The internet appears to be a more ideal and easier route to use. However, it comes with many emerging changes that companies should embrace.

The internet marketing strategies were not walk-over activities as there were challenges of authenticity, easy copying of strategies by competitors as well as a need for high-brand marketing for more visibility. Hard work and effort were involved. However, in South Africa, enabling infrastructure was being continuously upgraded.

A sceptical perspective was highlighted concerning the fast-paced change which resulted in some expensive investments being overtaken by developments before recouping their capital costs, which meant outsourcing was a more ideal route despite the security compromises that could be involved.

4.2 The challenges and opportunities of internet marketing

The major challenges indicated were high capital costs involved, data security issues, data integrity and high-paced revolving of the IoT that meant there was no stability season but agility in every aspect of the business to remain competitive.

The opportunities were in the supporting infrastructure that was provided by the government and mobile service providers, in the form of internet coverage infrastructure and electricity accessibility to the economy, even the most remote.

In this COVID-19 pandemic era, better-positioned companies on the internet utilise digitalised business strategies to keep their businesses viable which may prove to be an opportunity in an uncertain environment. Even small-scale companies are moving to adopt digitalised business models.

Most economies in Africa are behind in digitalisation which poses challenges in tapping into the regional and continental markets. Most digitalised marketing communications are smooth locally and include international players.

4.3 Cultural and international perspective to internet marketing

To penetrate some communities, internet marketing had to be driven through relevant languages.

Some traditional sectors such as mining were conservative and did not share information online. International companies were mostly ahead in internet technology hence were harsh competitors in the international trade.

Local companies needed a statutory quota system to be able to compete with multinational companies operating locally and with high data intelligence technology.

4.4 How economic benefits can be enhanced in the internet era

The education system needs to be enhanced to meet current needs through programmes in ICT developments, data intelligence and data engineering to avoid costly outsourcing that also compromises national sovereignty and data security. More statutory guidelines and regulations are required to keep track of developments and to remain relevant and appropriate for the evolving developments.

4.5 Discussion

Technological innovation should now consider that technology is not independent and neutral anymore but an integrated, dynamic, and value-adding shaping force to human life. It is now intimately enclapsed as physically connecting with human beings. Marketing this type of technology further brings the producer and the consumer very close to each other and this has implications for close integration in the consumer's life thereby bringing new meaning to a product life cycle. Furthermore, technology constrains the way people conduct their social life and provides abundant opportunities for the marketing environment with significant impact on businesses.

For South Africa, in the area of marketing communications, there has been an influence on improvements of broadband speed and connectivity and this has assisted economic growth by boosting of the GDP. This calls attention to the importance of penetrating the internet across all country communities.

In marketing developments, the internet serves as online resource through provision of information, websites, social networking platforms and have, since

the new millennium, is now an essential and significant part of daily lives (Altan, 2017). In particular, the fourth revolution of marketing is the one that has brought the greatest challenges to business as it attracts multi-facets of drivers for effective marketing. It was also highlighted that data intelligence is now considered not merely a side activity for companies for owning market information and for regular business but rather as a critical component of production processes. For example, successful companies are using analytics to identify valuable business opportunities from the data to drive decisions and improve marketing return on investment (MROI).

There are also challenges of internet marketing in Africa. Firstly, the mobile banking field offers insights into constraints that the density of smartphone distribution is high in urban areas relative to rural areas mainly because of the lack of connectivity options. Additionally, the validity and reliability of the information, integrity problems, lack of trust, cyber-security, disaster preparedness, privacy, and security, as well as a lack of face-to-face contact are other challenges that hinder effective use of internet marketing.

There are also cultural and international implications for internet marketing. Traditionally, people of the same culture join social media networks to seek information from those of a similar culture or ethnic background. However, there has also been a trend towards increased cross-cultural collaboration on online platforms in the international arena (Arli, 2017; Arora & Sanini, 2019).

One of the strategic responses instituted by governments across the world has been total or partial lockdowns to advance social distancing to slow down the spread of the coronavirus (Deloitte, 2020). However, security solutions continue to be outsourced from international providers and resold by agents in the local market. This is the highest setback on market leverage for the South African economy which has the strongest internet network and supporting infrastructure in Africa (Kumar & Bagga, 2020).

South Africa also faces challenges on lack of local skills to offer cyber security services and therefore has turned to the finance and banking sector for internet security. There is need for investments from companies that are capable of exposing security breaches and guarding the internet platforms to boost the acceptance and confidence of society on the digital and cryptocurrency route that is proving to be one major development in the internet revolution (Singh, 2019). Moreover, since information breaches are becoming more sophisticated in their regulation and management, there is a need for progressive systems to evolve in line with the rate of sophistication of cybercrime.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study's sub-objectives were to establish the following:

- The significance of the internet on marketing communications;
- The challenges and opportunities of internet marketing;
- Cultural and international perspective to internet marketing.

5.1 The significance of the internet on marketing communications

The significance of the internet is shifting to a main market communications channel or media as opposed to the various traditional marketing media. More significantly, traditional marketing is based on linear communication whereas social media marketing is considered to be an interpersonal and interactional form of communication. In the digital age, communication is a fundamental condition for individual existence and social coexistence. Communication on the Internet is always unexpected, the choice of channel depends on the relationship between the parties, and the relationship affects the choice of channel.

Moreover, the advent of Web 2.0 is giving a Big Bang to the business world, especially in marketing, and making it easier for companies to measure their brand health through social media platforms. For example, using Web 2.0, it creates two ways of communication between customers and business communities, thereby ensuring active interaction between them.

Information and Communication technologies (ICT) and digital media have a significant impact on how people communicate and meet their socio-economic, emotional and material needs. ICT and digital media, such as email, search engines, websites and social networking sites, are already widely used by individuals for a variety of activities, including searching for daily news and updates on important events; connecting with family and friends; reviewing products, services and locations; selling and buying goods; access to transportation, travel and personal financial services; and managing jobs. These social media platforms have implications for businesses who must now out of necessity engage their customers using these media.

5.2 The challenges and opportunities of internet marketing

The components that form the basis for internet marketing, implies that economic benefits can be enhanced in the internet era in South Africa. The critical factor that is of paramount importance was the moderating effect of international perspectives as well as cultural perspectives on internal and external firm interactions that overall impact on an improved brand, effective promotion, organisational growth, and consequently economic growth. Economic growth can be derived from both GDP growth and improved standards of living through effective internet interaction. This has to do with client accessibility and market coverage. The study established that the South African economy has been responsive to the IoT, and the infrastructure required in the digital age. Mobile and broadband coverage is currently adequate as well as having a large subscriber base despite the limited access to electricity in some remote areas. The marketing sector, hence, has a strong base as a platform from which to draw the internet marketing inclinations. However, internal dynamics that have to do with the localisation of internet security services, hosting, and data intelligence learning are still a work in progress.

5.3 Cultural and international perspective to internet marketing.

Another major finding revealed that the Southern African economy was stratified in terms of language, where English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Zulu, Sesotho are dominant languages and warrant marketing representation for businesses to thrive. As of 2018, the languages most commonly spoken by individuals inside of South African households were isiZulu at 25.3 %, isiXhosa at 14.8 % and Afrikaans at 12.2 %. While English only accounts for the sixth most common language spoken inside of South African households at 8.1 %, it is the second-most prevalent language spoken outside of homes, at 16.6 % (Statista, 2022). The dynamics of each cluster varied, posing a challenge over and above the internet-related adjustments required. While gains are derived from the internationalisation of trade through the internet, challenges radiated around the continuous adaptation to the digitalised marketing while retaining product innovation presented by internet competition. Internet security was mostly outsourced and needed to be localised for customer confidence on data security and confidentiality issues.

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