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Transformative Potential: The Impact of Social Media Adoption and Engagement on Small-Scale Business Success in Uganda's Kikuubo Trading Hub

By: *Ammine Louise*¹, *Engotoit Benard*² and *Prof. Kyeyune Robert*³

Abstract

Purpose – In Uganda, many small-scale businesses fail to reach their fifth anniversary due to limited innovations, financing, and stringent business environments. Digital marketing, specifically social media, can enhance business performance and transformation. This study examines the influence of social media adoption and engagement on small-scale business transformation in Uganda.

Design/methodology/approach - A cross-sectional quantitative research design was employed with a sample of 379 small-scale business traders. A self-administered questionnaire was utilized to collect data, which was analyzed using SPSS software.

Findings - The study identified a positive significant relationship between social media adoption, social media engagement, and small-scale business transformation in Uganda. Furthermore, social media engagement emerged as the significant factor influencing business transformation.

Originality/value - This study contributes to the existing literature on small-scale businesses by presenting social media as a strategic tool for business transformation in a developing country context. It also highlights the importance of social media adoption and engagement as significant predictors of small-scale business transformation in Uganda's informal sector.

Key Words: *Social media adoption, social media engagement, small scale business, business transformation*

1. Introduction

Globally, small scale enterprises are regarded as important contributors to the global GDP and particularly to the GDP of many developing countries. Statistics from the World Bank indicate that small scale enterprises account for over 90% of businesses worldwide, contribute to over 50% of employment figures as well as impacting on economic growth globally (Adian et al., 2020). In low income countries such as Uganda, small scale enterprises are categorized as micro enterprises (employing up to four people, with an annual sales/revenue turnover or total assets not exceeding Uganda shillings 10 million), small enterprises (employing between 5 and 49 and have total assets between UGX:10 million but not exceeding 100 million) and medium enterprises (employing between 50 and 100 with total assets more than 100 million but not exceeding 360 million) (FSD Uganda, 2015). Small scale and informal enterprises are said to account for over 60% of GDP and over 70% of total employment in least developing countries and in Uganda, they create employment for a significant share of the Ugandan labour force, comprising about 45% of labor force and a contribution of only about 20% to the national GDP (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2019; Kisame et

¹Department of Computer Science, Makerere University Business School

²Department of Information Systems, Makerere University Business School, Email: bengotoit@mubs.ac.ug

³Associate Professor, Department of Applied Computing and IT, Makerere University Business School

al., 2022). It is often reported that majority of small scale enterprises in Uganda fail to reach their 5th birthday. Particularly, Orobia et al. (2020) reveal that 30 percent of these small scale enterprises shut down before witnessing their third birthday.

Majority of small scale enterprises in Uganda fail to transform their businesses due to the poor performance. This is mainly attributed to limited application of innovation, limited financing, stringent business environment, among others (Esperance, 2021). Innovations such as digital marketing are said to improve on performance of small scale businesses hence their transformation. However, small scale enterprises have remained reluctant to embrace digital technologies in their business processes despite their benefits (Ndagire, 2023). One of the digital innovations that are encouraged for small scale enterprises is social media. It is considered as one of the main components with the most significant impact on business among all other applications in use today (Kikawa, 2022). According to Lindner, 2023, globally, 91% of small businesses used social media in 2021, and 63% of the small business owners discovered that social media marketing positively impacted on their business sales. Among the social media applications used globally, Facebook was the most used social media platform for engaging with customers with over 74% of small businesses using it. In comparison with developing countries such as Kenya, 43% of firms used Facebook, 32% WhatsApp, and others considered time spent on social media as an important aspect to increasing sales (Solomon et al., 2023). In this study, we consider social media as an important element and when adopted effectively and leads to customer engagement, it can lead to improved business transformation of SMEs in Uganda.

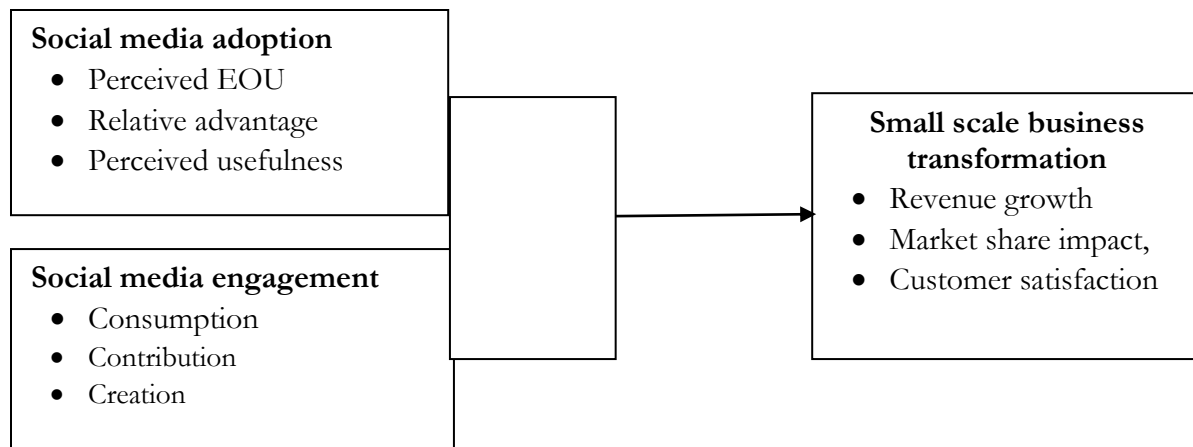
Engagement is measured as the most important factor for small businesses' social media success by 61% of the small business owners (Lindner, 2023). Social media customer engagement is derived from the social media engagement theory which argues that higher user engagement leads to greater usage of social media platforms. According to the theory, social media engagement involves individuals engaging with content on social media platforms by actively participating or interacting via the platform through likes, comments, shares and other forms of engagement (Gangi & Wasko, 2016). It includes user experience dimensions such as social interactions and technical features which affect user engagement and can in turn influence the usage frequency of the social media applications. Social media can thus provide low cost alternatives for small businesses create and

promote engagement with their products to expand customer outreach, hence business transformation (Solomon et al., 2023).

Social media on the other hand is a major driving force towards business success of SMEs not just in Uganda but globally (Kawa, 2022). Majority of SMEs are adopting social media for purposes of marketing to raise awareness and promote their brands to both current and potential customers (Onețiu, 2020). Social media adoption involves the use of various platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, twitter, Instagram, among others in the business management of SMEs with a focus on improving business performance through marketing and widening the market base. According to Kikawa (2022), there appears to be a huge literature gap regarding the impact of social media on the performance of SMEs in Uganda. Mugarura et al. (2023) also contends that little research exists to understand how SMEs performance can be impacted with the adoption and usage of social media applications in Uganda.

Quite a sizable number of small scale businesses fail to make it to their 5th birthday and therefore collapse. Several reasons are attributed to the collapse or poor performance of many small scale businesses and notable among them is the failure to digitize their services. Social media is said to be pivotal for the success of various small scale businesses given that they enable them to reach a wider and global market, build awareness, increase sales and also interact with customers easily. Whereas social media plays an important part in fostering digital transformation among small scale business establishments, there is low adoption and engagement of social media among small scale businesses in Africa (Kyakulumbye & Pather (2022). Particularly, in Uganda, statistics show that a number of small scale enterprises are unaware of the power that social media holds in fostering their business success (Daily Monitor, October, 2021). In his study while examining e-commerce usage in Uganda, Kasoma (2018) argued that only 1% of small scale business owners were using e-commerce platforms which also includes social media. Particularly, the use of digital technologies such as social media by small scale businesses is very low standing at only 0.4% (Oketch, 2023). Without proper use of digital channels such as social media, small scale businesses will continue to struggle and fail to transform leading to their collapse and ultimately loss of jobs, livelihoods, and affecting countries GDP.

This study therefore seeks to examine the influence of social media engagement and social media adoption on small scale business transformation in Uganda with focus on Kikuubo traders in downtown Kampala. Downtown, a famous trading hub in Kampala, the capital city of Uganda is selected as the scope of the study due to the large volume of trading that takes place in this area attracting traders and customers from all over the country and sometimes across the country. It is a mix of both formal and informal SMEs. Specifically the study will seek to investigate the relationship between social media engagement, social media adoption and small scale business transformation in Uganda. As such, this study makes important contributions to existing literature on small scale businesses by presenting social media as a strategic tool for business transformation in a developing country context. This study also makes contribution to literature on the antecedents of business transformation of small scale businesses by showing how social media adoption and social media engagement are significant predictors of small scale business transformation in Uganda, guided by the Technology Acceptance Model and the social media engagement theory as shown in the conceptual framework in figure 1.



Adopted from literature by Dwivedi *et al.* (2023), Gangi & Wasko, (2016), Solomon *et al.*, 2023, Trunfio & Rossi (2021), Schivinski *et al.* (2016), Adegbuyi *et al.* (2015).

This article proceeds with a concise review of the literature pertaining to the Technology Acceptance Model and Social Media Engagement Theory, as well as the relationships between social media adoption, social media engagement, and the transformation of small-scale enterprises. Following this review, we delineate our methodological framework and analytical procedures, which are succeeded

by a presentation of our findings. The article concludes with a discussion on the theoretical implications and directions for future research.

Technology acceptance model and the social media engagement theory

This study is hinged on Davis (1989) technology acceptance model (TAM) and the social media engagement theory (SME) by Di Gangi and Wasko (2016). The TAM by Davis (1989) gets its roots from the theory of reasoned action which was mainly psychological perspective theory relating to human behavior and was missing in IS literature. According to Davis (1989), there exist two primary factors that influence an individual's intentions to use technological innovations, these include perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness. Davis (1989) defined perceived usefulness as the individual's perception using a given technology improves performance, while perceived ease of use was defined as the degree to which a user believed that using a given technology was free of effort, hence no difficulty in use. TAM is regarded as one of the most influential theories in explaining technology acceptance and adoption. Whereas TAM has been criticized for some of its weaknesses, it is generally regarded as a useful framework by several literature investigations when examining factors that influence users' intentions to adopt and use new technology (Charness & Boot, 2016). In this study, we use TAM to explain how social media adoption leads to SME business transformation while examining the role of perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and relative advantage.

The social media engagement theory by Di Gangi and Wasko (2016) notes that social interactions occur among users and can be supported by adoption of social media platforms provided by an organization. The theory is based on the concept of user engagement which Di Gangi and Wasko (2016) define as a user's state of mind that brings about increased user involvement and results in a personally meaningful benefit. According to the theory, an increase in user engagement brings about greater usage of social media platforms leading to enhanced business transformation. When users frequently take part in a variety of activities such as consumption, creation and contribution in social media, the social media platforms become more valuable to the users as well as the organization, hence, leading to business transformation.

Social media adoption and Small scale business transformation

Social media adoption refers to the process of individuals or organizations starting to use social media platforms. It involves creating accounts, learning how to navigate the platforms, and beginning to post

content. Adoption focuses on the initial steps of entering the social media space and establishing a presence. Several studies have examined the relationship between social media adoption and small scale business transformation. Business transformation is looked at in different contexts such as improved business performance, business success, among others. In their study, Wu *et al.* (2015) while exploring the influence of social media adoption on small businesses, found that indeed social media adoption has a significant positive influence on the success of small businesses. Further, according to Dwivedi *et al.* (2021), social media adoption is significantly linked to digital transformation of businesses today since it leads to brand awareness, knowledge creation, and corporate credibility, acquisition of new customers, sales person performance and sustainability. In their study on social media adoption and SME performance in a rural district in Uganda, Mugarura *et al.* (2023) concluded that indeed social media adoption significantly impacts on SME performance and transformation. According to Mugarura *et al.* (2023), social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, among others significantly influence SME performance by fostering brand value, sales growth, customer trust, and loyalty. Hence the hypothesis;

H₁. Social media adoption has a positive significant relationship with small scale business transformation

Social media engagement and small scale business transformation

Social media engagement refers to the interactions and relationships that occur on social media after adoption. It involves how users interact with content, such as liking, sharing, commenting, and participating in discussions. Engagement measures the quality and depth of interactions, indicating how actively users are involved with the content and the community. According to Rahman *et al.* (2017), businesses need to know if their efforts to promote user activities on their social media platforms are effective and lead to success. Users can like, comment, share, and click on posts, which may be an indication of how they feel about the content displayed about the company's products. This can have positive consequences on the company such as business transformation in terms of increased sales and expanded market, among others. While analyzing the role of social media engagement on improving SMEs' performance, Rozak *et al.* (2021) found that social media engagement helped to build brand reputation, promote and interact with customers, making businesses more agile and more adaptive to changes from the environment and thus significantly impacted on business transformation. Similarly, Santini *et al.* (2020) also found that customer engagement using social media indeed substantially increased the value for companies, directly influencing firm performance. Upon this, the study hypothesizes that;

H₂. Social media engagement positively influences small scale business transformation

2. Methodology

2.1 Research design

The study used a cross sectional quantitative research design with a sample of 379 small scale business traders drawn from a population of 35000 kikuubo traders in downtown Kampala, Uganda (Nankunda, 2021). This was determined using Krejcie and Morgan (1970)'s sampling table. A response rate of 65% was attained since 247 useable questionnaires were received out of the 379 distributed questionnaires from the traders. This research design is selected because the researcher is able to generate more data in a short period of time and it facilitate faster analysis of the data collected (Creswell, 2013). Moreover, generalizing of the findings to the overall population from which the sample was drawn is made possible with cross sectional studies (Field, 2009).

2.2 Sample selection and data collection

The study used purposive sampling to select the 379 small scale business traders in Kikuubo trading hub. Purposive sampling is often used when there is need to gain a deeper understanding of phenomena from a specific perspective or within a specific context (Campbell, 2020). Purposive sampling, was used to pick only respondents who had relevant knowledge on the social media adoption and social media engagement as feasible strategies that can potentially lead to small scale business transformation. In order to collect data a self-administered questionnaire was used to gather the quantitative data for the study. The questionnaire instrument covered items relating to the respondents background characteristics, social media adoption, social media engagement and small scale business transformation. The questionnaire was designed based on a Likert scale and the values were assigned and graded on the scale of 5 to 1 in order of; 5-Strongly Agree, 4-Agree, 3- Not sure, 2-Disagree and 1-Strongly Disagree. A likert scale was used because according to Johns (2010), it provides a moderate number of choices for the respondent to select. The researcher made appointments with some of the traders who were not available at that time for an appropriate time for which they could answer the questions asked in the questionnaire.

2.3 Measurement and operationalization of the study variables

The dependent variable in this study was small scale business transformation measured using three items namely revenue growth, market share impact and customer satisfaction (Adegbuyi *et al.*, 2015).

On the other hand, the independent variables were social media adoption and social media engagement. Social media adoption was operationalized using three items namely; perceived EOU, relative advantage and perceived usefulness (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2023; Solomon *et al.*, 2023). Social media engagement was operationalized using three items namely; consumption, contribution and creation (Gangi & Wasko, 2016; Trunfio & Rossi, 2021).

2.4 Validity and reliability

In order to measure for validity of the research instrument, the researcher used content validity index (CVI). This involved printing a questionnaire and distributing to two people who were knowledgeable in the subject matter whose content validity indices were captured. All the CVIs were above the required threshold of 0.7 as recommended by (Field, 2009). On the other hand, reliability of the research instrument was tested using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient. Just like many researchers recommend, coefficients greater than 0.72 were accepted while less than 0.7 was unacceptable (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). Results are shown in table 1 below:

Table 1. Validity and reliability results

Study variables	Number of questions	Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (CAC)	Content validity index (CVI)
Social media adoption	11	.700	0.90
Social media engagement	9	.832	0.87
Small scale business transformation	13	.863	0.79

Source: primary data

2.5 Data analysis

Statistical treatment of captured primary data involved prior sorting, editing, classified and coded into a coding sheet, processed and analysed using a Statistical Package for Social Scientist (SPSS) version 28.0 for descriptive and inferential analysis of measurable relationships between study variables. According to the study objectives, Pearson's correlation analysis was used for measuring the associations between the study variables while regression analysis also was used to determine the predictive power of the independent variables on the dependent variable.

3. Findings

3.1 Correlation analysis of the Study Variables

The study used Pearson (r) correlation analysis to examine the relationship between social media adoption, social media engagement and small scale business transformation. From table 2 below, it was established that there was a significant positive association between social media adoption and small scale business transformation ($r= 0.366^{**}$, $p<.01$). This means that an enhancement in social media adoption is likely to lead to improvement in small scale business transformation. Therefore, owners and managers of small scale businesses should focus more on adopting social media tools so as to positively transform their small scale businesses.

Further, it was also established that there was a positive association between social media engagement and small scale business transformation ($r= 0.670^{**}$, $p<.01$). This means that social media engagement is likely to lead to an improvement in the transformation of small scale businesses. Therefore, the when there is consumption, contribution and creation of digital content by the customers and the business owners, small scale businesses will be in position to experience improvement in business transformation.

Table 2: Correlation Analysis

	Mean	SD	1	2	3
Social media adoption -1	4.3897	.46588	1.000		
Social media engagement -2	4.3708	.45713	.468**	1.000	
Small scale business transformation -3	4.4258	.41425	.366**	.670**	1.000

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

3.2 Regression Analysis

A multiple linear regression model was used to examine the extent to which social media adoption and social media engagement can predict small scale business transformation as shown in table 3. From the regression results, Findings indicate that social media engagement appears to be a stronger predictor of small scale business transformation with (Beta = .639, sig. = .000) compared to technological context factors with (Beta = .067, sig. = .216). This implies that social media engagement is key in promoting small scale business transformation among Kikuubo traders in downtown

Kampala. Findings further indicate that both social media adoption and social media engagement positively predict 44.8% of the variations in small scale business transformation among Kikuubo traders in downtown Kampala. The remaining 55.2% can be explained by other factors not considered in this study. It is also concluded that the regression model in this study is statistically significant signified by the F statistic=100.9, sig=0.000^b).

Table 3. Regression Model Analysis

	<i>Unstandardized</i>		<i>Standardized</i>	T	Sig
	<i>Coefficients</i>		<i>Coefficients</i>		
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.635	.218		7.490	.000
Social media adoption	.059	.048	.067	1.242	.216
Social media engagement	.579	.049	.639	11.924	.000
Dependent Variable: small scale business transformation					
R	0.673 ^a				
R Square	.453				
Adjusted R Square	.448				
Std. Error of the Estimate	.307				
F Statistic	100.9				
Sig.	.000 ^b				

4. Discussion of Findings

4.1 Social media adoption and small scale business transformation

The study established a positive significant association between social media adoption and small scale business transformation among kikuubo traders in downtown Kampala. Further, the regression analysis results revealed that social media adoption predicted small scale business transformation though not significantly. This means that however much there exists a significant association between the two variables, social media adoption in terms of perceived ease of use, relative advantage and

perceived usefulness does not significantly predict small scale business transformation. Therefore, adopting social media tools can impact on small scale business transformation though not significantly. These findings are supported by the works Wu *et al.* (2015) who found that indeed social media adoption has a significant positive influence on the success of small businesses. Further, Dwivedi *et al.* (2021), also argued that social media adoption is significantly linked to digital transformation of businesses today since it leads to brand awareness, knowledge creation, and corporate credibility, acquisition of new customers, sales person performance and sustainability. In their study on social media adoption and SME performance in a rural district in Uganda, Mugarura *et al.* (2023) also concluded that social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, among others significantly influence SME performance by fostering brand value, sales growth, customer trust, and loyalty.

4.2 Social media engagement and small scale business transformation

The study established a positive and statistically significant relationship between social media engagement and small scale business transformation among Kikuubo traders in downtown Kampala. Further, the regression analysis results confirmed that social media engagement is a significant predictor of small scale business transformation among Kikuubo traders in downtown Kampala. This implies that when customers of small scale business consume digital content, create digital content and make contributions to digital content through commenting, sharing, liking, posting, publishing, uploading, among others, there is likely to be an improvement in the business transformation of small scale businesses. Therefore, social media engagement enhance small scale business transformation. These findings are supported by Rahman *et al.* (2017) who found that if users can like, comment, share, and click on posts shared by the company, this can have positive consequences on the company such as business transformation in terms of increased sales and expanded market, among others. Rozak *et al.* (2021) also found that social media engagement helped to build brand reputation, promote and interact with customers, making businesses more agile and more adaptive to changes from the environment and thus significantly impacted on business transformation. Similarly, Santini *et al.* (2020) also found that customer engagement using social media indeed substantially increased the value for companies, directly influencing firm performance.

4.3 Social media adoption, social media engagement and small scale business transformation

The study findings reveals that social media adoption and social media engagement significantly predict small-scale business transformation among Kikuubo traders in downtown Kampala. This means that small-scale business transformation is strongly influenced by both social media adoption and social media engagement besides other factors that may influence small-scale business transformation among Kikuubo traders in downtown Kampala. Furthermore, study findings highlight that social media engagement has stronger predictive power compared to social media adoption which implies that social media engagement in terms of consumption, creation and contribution of social media content can highly contribute to small-scale business transformation. These findings are in line with scholars such as Rahman *et al.* (2017), Rozak *et al.* (2021), Santini *et al.* (2020) who argue that both social media adoption and social media engagement can significantly impact the success of small businesses in developing countries.

5. Conclusion

The current study sought to examine the influence of social media adoption and social media engagement on small scale business transformation among Kikuubo traders in downtown Kampala. Consequently, three objectives were formulated. Objective (1) sought to examine the relationship between social media adoption and small-scale business transformation. The findings revealed a positive significant association but not significant prediction between social media adoption and small-scale business transformation. Therefore, this study concludes that whereas there is a positive significant association between social media adoption and small-scale business transformation, social media adoption does not significantly predict small-scale business transformation among Kikuubo traders in downtown Kampala. Objective (2) sought to examine the relationship between social media engagement and small-scale business transformation. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between social media engagement and small-scale business transformation. Since there was no discrepancy with existing literature, the current study concludes that social media engagement significantly influences small-scale business transformation among Kikuubo traders in downtown Kampala.

Lastly, objective (3) sought out to examine the combined influence of social media adoption and social media engagement on small-scale business transformation among Kikuubo traders in downtown Kampala. The study findings revealed that both social media adoption and social media engagement

were significant predictors of small scale business transformation though social media engagement was a stronger predictor of small scale business transformation than social media adoption. It can therefore be concluded that social media adoption and social media engagement are both significant predictors of small scale business transformation among Kikuubo traders in downtown Kampala.

6. Recommendations

The study findings revealed a positive relationship between social media adoption and small scale business transformation among Kikuubo traders in downtown Kampala. This means that an increase in the levels of social media adoption would lead to a corresponding increase in small scale business transformation. Therefore, small scale businesses need to ensure that there is perceived ease of use, relative advantage and perceived usefulness of the social media tools among its customers and staff and make sure that these factors are prioritized if heightened levels of social media adoption are to be achieved leading to improved small scale business transformation.

The study findings also revealed a significant positive relationship between social media engagement and small scale business transformation among Kikuubo traders in downtown Kampala. This means that an increase in social media engagement would significantly lead to an increase in small scale business transformation. Therefore, there is a need for small scale businesses to promote the consumption, creation and contribution of digital content used in social media platforms among its customers and staff so as to increase the levels of social media engagement. This can go a long way in improving small scale business transformation in terms of increased revenue growth, increased market share and improved customer satisfaction.

The study findings also revealed that both social media adoption and social media engagement significantly predict small scale business transformation among Kikuubo traders in downtown Kampala given that the predictor variables explained small scale business transformation by 44.8% leaving the remaining 55.2% to be explained by other factors. The study also found that social media engagement contributed more to small-scale business transformation compared to social media adoption. Therefore, small-scale businesses should focus on adopting social media tools and actively engaging with their customers on social media platforms to enhance their business transformation by emphasizing the ease of use of social media applications, the relative advantage social media applications have over conventional means engagement, the usefulness of social media applications

to customers and staff. Further, small scale businesses should also promote the consumption, creation and contribution of their social media content among their customers and staff. However, emphasis should be put on promoting social media engagement given that it is a stronger predictor of small scale business transformation among Kikuubo traders in downtown Kampala. Results suggests that active engagement on social media platforms plays a vital role in promoting small scale business transformation among Kikuubo traders in downtown Kampala. These insights can assist small scale business owners and managers in developing effective strategies to leverage social media for business growth and success.

7. Limitations of the study and future insights

It is worth noting that this study has certain limitations that should be considered. First, the study focused on Kikuubo traders in downtown Kampala, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Future research should replicate this study in different geographical locations to validate the results. Second, the study only considered social media adoption and engagement as predictors of small scale business transformation, neglecting other potential factors. Future studies should explore additional variables to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants of business transformation. Third, the study used only quantitative research methods to collect, analyze, and interpret data. Given the numerous limitations of quantitative studies in investigating behavioral aspects such as small-scale business transformation, certain non-quantifiable aspects of the study may have been left out. Future studies can utilize a mixed research method emphasizing on the qualitative aspects of data. Despite these limitations, the findings of this study contribute to the existing literature on social media and small-scale business transformation, providing valuable insights for practitioners and researchers in the field.

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