

# **The Influence of Digital Marketing Strategies on IT Organisations in Botswana**

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**Field Study submitted to the University of the Free State Business School in  
the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences**

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**16 November 2020**

## **DECLARATION**

I declare that the field study hereby handed in for the qualification of Master's Degree in Business Administration at the University of the Free State Business School is my independent work and that I have not previously submitted the same, either as a whole or in part, for qualification as/in another university/faculty.

*S. KUWALI*

**Signature of student**

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**Date:** 16 November 2020

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*Proverbs 4:7 Wisdom is supreme, therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. (NIV).*

*May God bless you.*

## **ABSTRACT**

In the technological era, organisations are migrating to digital marketing strategies for competitiveness. However, the influence of digital marketing strategies has not been fully explored. The research's primary objective is to determine the influence of digital marketing strategies on Information Technology (IT) organisations in Botswana. The focus was on IT organisations based in Gaborone, Botswana only. The empirical data comprises 12 semi-structured interviews. Theoretical convergences emerged from the participants' answers, whose responses were adequate to conclude the study. The researcher used literature on the proponents and critics of digital marketing strategies and rigorous theoretical models such as the SOSTAC® model, the Technology Acceptance Model and Digital Marketing Communications Model were applied as the basis for data analysis.

The research is qualitative, cross-sectional study in a non-contrived setting. The researcher's epistemological approach is interpretivism and the ontological position is that of constructionism. The researcher seeks to explore the phenomena under study and attempts to generate themes based on the collective social constructs obtained from the interview participants drawn from the IT organisations. The target population was 18 IT organisations in Gaborone. Non-probability purposive sampling was used to select the participants for the study. A total of 15 participants formed the sample size for the study. The targets were experts from the marketing departments. However, upon interviewing 12 participants, theoretical convergence was achieved.

The research findings reveal that digital marketing strategies have an impact on organisational strategies. The common theme shows organisational preference for owned media digital platforms rather than paid media or shared media. There is, however, no substantial evidence on the presence of knowledge platforms such as LinkedIn. Secondly, the research findings expose the lack of marketing analytical skills among the participants. There are no indications of formal training or the efforts by management to acquiesce marketing experts with such skills. The resultant findings are that marketers confine the data exploitation to what is familiar. The final significant finding is that the use of technology affects the level of decision-making.

The interview results depict a curtailed use of data extrapolation for meaningful strategic purposes.

The researcher concluded that the study produces compelling evidence that organisations are migrating towards digital marketing strategies, although at a slow pace. The migration is not imposed by industry competition alone, but also by technology-savvy customers. Therefore, the findings disclose managerial implications for the lack of concerted investment into digital migration, exploration of new possibilities and human resource skills. The impact of analytical skills is also determined. The findings show that a lack of skills affects the quality of decision-making. The marketers confine themselves to that which is familiar. In the same vein, technology impacts decision-making relating to the skills level of the participants. The results affirm that no technologically enabled performance analysis, attribution modelling, digital consumer research and trend forecasting, for example, is made possible without comprehensive systems in place.

This research contributes to the body of knowledge on digital marketing strategy on organisations. This study pioneers exploring the digital marketing strategies phenomena in detail, seeking to illuminate the influence of digital marketing strategies on IT organisations in Botswana. The findings expose the gaps for further research related to the field of digital marketing analytics and the application of technology for strategy formulation.

Key Words: Digital Marketing, Digital Metrics, Digital Platforms, IT Organisations, Marketing experts, SOSTAC<sup>®</sup> Model, Strategy, TAM Model, Technology, Theoretical Models

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the technological advancement era, businesses perceive the use of digital marketing strategies as vital for executing proficient marketing strategies (Nambisan, Siegel & Kenney, 2018:354). Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, email or online marketing are the most commonly used tools for customer interaction; maintaining visibility and reach. Digital marketing tools have gained prominence with many organisations over the years with a perceived positive impact (Mazzarol, 2015:81). Investigating the influence of digital marketing strategies on organisations is a continuing concern with researchers, including this researcher. According to the Botswana Communications and Regulatory Authority (BOCRA) Annual Report (2018:27), there are 63 licensed Information Technology (IT) organisations in the country. These organisations are registered in the Services and Applications Provider category, competing in a homogenous market. The organisations offer specialised data, voice and telecommunication products and services. The 2019 Botswana Telecommunications Corporation (BTC) business directory, however, indicates that only 18 of these IT organisations concentrated in Gaborone are active in the market.

Despite significant investments in digital marketing strategies by IT organisations, the influence of the adopted digital marketing strategies seems to be underexplored, according to the Botswana Institute for Development Policy Analysis (2017:17). The perceived strategic expectations by organisations are to gain first-mover advantages over competitors, servicing a market niche based on the low cost (Hough, Thompson, Strickland, Gamble, Human, Makin & Braxton, 2008:141). The IT industry has homogenous buyer segments; and the products and services offered are generally indistinguishable. Hough et al. (2011:57) argue that all companies operate in macro-environments that pose strategic influences on organisational decisions and direction. Among the strategic influences are population demographics, government legislation and regulation, the industry and its competitive arena (Hough et al., 2011:57). The main interest of this research study was to examine the influence of digital marketing strategies on IT organisations based in Gaborone, Botswana. Further, the implementation of digital marketing

strategic decisions may be hampered by the analytic abilities of marketing experts in determining which key metrics for digital analysis are relevant for organisational goals (Hemann & Burbary, 2013:13). Aversion to numbers is often a result of the lack of clarity and familiarity with key technologies (Hemann & Burbary, 2013:13). The latter concern was addressed as a sub-problem regarding technology acceptance by the marketing experts. Chaffey and Chadwick (2016:560-561) submit that organisations need to select suitable tools for collecting, collating, reporting and analysing accurately the metrics of marketing performance.

Ryan (2014:4) submits that technology and the evolution of marketing are inextricably intertwined. Four key processes that are inferable to this research are highlighted by Ryan (2014:4): First, technology has been initially the preserve of technologists and early adopters; second, technology has gradually gained popularity on the marketing radar; third, innovative marketers need to harness the power of technology to connect with the greater audience; and finally, technology has migrated into the mainstream standard marketing practice. These arguments imply that the perceived technology acceptance by marketing experts cannot be disregarded and indeed does influence digital marketing strategies within organisations. How marketers accept digital technology and the assumed benefits thereof present a sub-problem to the research. The skills in digital technologies are perceived to influence the implementation of digital marketing strategies. Requisite analytical skills of the participants in this study are, therefore, investigated.

At the turn of the millennium, Wind and Mahajan (2001:4) argued that the digital revolution, with its global access and empowerment, also comes with tremendous strategic uncertainty. In this digital age, Ardley and McIntosh (2019:235) confirm the current business mantra that technology has become the driver of economic growth and competitiveness among organisations. Technology is used in every country, transcends all business sectors and more than two billion people make use of technology (Ardley & McIntosh, 2019:235). The literature on the proponents and critics of digital marketing strategies is reviewed and examined, together with the competing theoretical models on digital marketing strategy as highlighted in this research proposal. The modern school of thought on digital marketing strategies such as the SOSTAC® (Situation Analysis, Objectives, Strategy, Tactics, Action and

Control), planning framework (PrSmith.org, 2020) has been applied in an attempt to address the research problem.

### **1.1 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the research was to investigate the influence of digital marketing strategies on IT organisations in Botswana.

### **1.2 Context of Study**

The study focused on 18 active IT organisations based in Gaborone, Botswana. According to the Commonwealth of Nations Report (commonwealthofnations.org, 2020), Botswana has a small, upcoming advertising and marketing industry that spends approximately BWP300 million per annum. However, there is no substantive evidence to suggest how much of this portion is spent by IT organisations on digital marketing strategies. This further authenticated the need for this study and the perceived benefits of investing in digital marketing strategies. The extant literature review indicated that there are no studies undertaken in Botswana on the subject of the influence of digital marketing strategies on organisations. Extensive searches for journals or other prior studies on the influence of digital marketing strategies were not available. The study is a pioneer exploration in this field to investigate the influence of digital marketing strategies on IT organisations in Botswana.

Secondly, upon examining the competing theoretical models such as Forrester's 5Is, the Ten Cs of Marketing, the Technology Acceptance Model and the Honeycomb Model, to mention a few (see Table 1), *10 Classic Digital Marketing Models* (2016, available from [www.smartinsights.com](http://www.smartinsights.com), 2019) indicates that none of the models are capable of addressing the four key areas of digital marketing strategy on their own. The SOSTAC® Model (PrSmith.org, 2020) presents a modern alternative approach to digital marketing strategies. Thus, the researcher sought to test this theory in an attempt to address these gaps using the model and other selected competing theoretical models. The study contributes to the body of knowledge on this subject. This study presented an opportunity to explore theoretical expositions on digital marketing strategies on IT organisations in detail. Marketing experts were interviewed to establish how they make use of strategic analytics and the available technology for the benefit of their organisations.

### **1.2.1 Migration to Digital Marketing Strategies**

Thirdly, at the turn of the millennium, many organisations migrated to digital technologies in a bid to stay competitive (Wind & Mahajan, 2001:4). Paquette (2013:1) admits that the tools and approaches for communicating with customers have changed, forcing businesses to learn to implement technologies that are consistent with their business plan. Alves, Fernandes and Raposo (2016:1029) cite Porter's (2001) argument that the advent of new communication and information technologies have altered the market dynamics, posing a challenge to organisations' competitiveness. Previous studies did not adequately address the question of how digital marketing strategies influence the overall marketing strategies of IT organisations, particularly in Botswana.

## **1.3 Problem Statement**

### **1.3.1 Main Problem**

The primary objective of this research was to determine the influence of digital marketing strategies on IT organisations in Botswana. The Botswana Institute for Development Policy Analysis (2017:17) indicates that the annual percentage change in real GDP per economic activity of IT organisations declined consistently from 10.9% since 2012 to 6.6% in 2016. If this trend persists, business continuity for IT organisations will be adversely affected.

### **1.3.2 Sub-problems**

To investigate the IT analytical abilities required by marketing experts in strategic decision-making.

To investigate how IT in digital marketing technology is adopted in decision-making.

Thirdly, empirical data and findings on IT digital marketing strategies are analysed and applied to the research.

### **1.3.3 Primary and Secondary Objectives**

The primary objective of this research was to determine the influence of digital marketing strategies on IT organisations in Botswana.

The study examined the IT analytical abilities of marketing experts who collate and analyse the data.

Thirdly, the researcher sought to evaluate the extent to which IT in digital marketing technologies influences marketing decisions.

Finally, the experiential findings on the digital marketing strategy were analysed to consolidate the study and conclude.

#### **1.3.4 Problem Questions**

What influence do digital marketing strategies have on IT organisations?

What requisite IT skills do the marketing personnel need for the effective analyses of marketing metrics?

How do IT digital technologies influence marketers' decision-making?

What conclusions and recommendations can be drawn from the research findings of the study?

#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

This study pioneered the exploration of the digital marketing strategies phenomena in detail, seeking to illuminate the influence of digital marketing strategies on IT organisations in Botswana. The research findings made inferences to the SOSTAC® theoretical model as a cogent model in digital marketing strategy formulation. The research also examined the gaps in digital analytical abilities that are key to strategic decision-making and the use of the available technology by marketing experts. Further, the study provided leads for future studies in this research area, broadly being attributed to the field of digital marketing strategies in various sectors other than IT organisations and also contributed to the body of knowledge.

## **1.5 Delimitations and Limitations**

### **1.5.1 Delimitations**

The study was confined to 15 consenting IT organisations based in Gaborone, Botswana. The researcher envisaged that in pursuit of qualitative research, the sample size was adequate to achieve the theoretical convergences for the study (Bryman, Bell, Hirschsohn, Dos Santos, Du Toit, Masenge, Van Aardt & Wagner 2014:187). The study focuses on organisations in the same sector.

### **1.5.2 Limitations**

Time and financial constraints have limited this research to a cross-sectional study. Practical constraints have also limited the study to marketing experts in the digital marketing field only within the IT organisations under investigation.

## **1.6 Definition of Terms**

|                 |                                                                        |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>AI</b>       | Artificial Intelligence                                                |
| <b>BD</b>       | Business Directory                                                     |
| <b>BOCRA</b>    | Botswana Communications and Regulatory Authority                       |
| <b>BTC</b>      | Botswana Telecommunications Corporation                                |
| <b>COVID-19</b> | Coronavirus – 2019 Pandemic                                            |
| <b>ICTs</b>     | Information and Communication Technologies                             |
| <b>IPTV</b>     | Internet Protocol Television                                           |
| <b>IT</b>       | Information Technology                                                 |
| <b>KPIs</b>     | Key Performance Indicators                                             |
| <b>PPV</b>      | Pages Per Visit                                                        |
| <b>RACE</b>     | Reach – Act – Convert – Engage                                         |
| <b>ROI</b>      | Return on Investment                                                   |
| <b>SMEs</b>     | Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises                                     |
| <b>SOSTAC</b>   | Situation analysis, Objectives, Strategy, Tactics, Actions and Control |
| <b>SWOT</b>     | Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats                       |
| <b>VPV</b>      | Visits Per (unique) Visitor                                            |

## **1.7 Assumptions**

The researcher assumes that the participants answered questions honestly and objectively since the focus was on the experts in the marketing field.

The researcher also assumes that new knowledge has been gained from the study and adds to the body of knowledge. This is according to the observation that the research is a pioneer study on IT organisations in Botswana.

Finally, the researcher supposes that confining the study to IT organisations in Gaborone only is sufficient and does not render the study fatally flawed. Theoretical convergences were likely to be achieved within the selected population sample.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The preceding chapter introduces the topic, background and context of the study. The problem statement, objectives and the significance of the research are outlined. The current chapter reviews earlier studies within the research purpose area, summarising other researchers' work to make references to this study. The researcher makes inferences to literature that supports and critiques digital marketing strategies for a balanced investigation into the topic. The importance of digital metrics and analytics for strategy formulation are also explored, in line with the analytical abilities of the marketing experts. The perceived usefulness and ease of use of technology is perceived to be profound for this study, as digital technology seems to transcend all sectors of business. Relevant theoretical models such as the SOSTAC® model and other competing digital theoretical models as highlighted by Hanlon (2016, 2017, 2020) in Table 1 herein, have been selected to aid the research objectives and maintain the purpose of the study. The literature is related to the empirical data obtained from 15 semi-structured interviews obtained from the IT organisations' marketing experts for analysis and drawing recommendations and conclusions therefrom.

### **2.2 Definition of Topic or Background Discussion**

#### **2.2.1 Extant Literature Defining Digital Marketing**

Previous studies define digital marketing as the marketing of products and services using digital channels (Kannan & Li, 2017:23). Elsewhere, (Nuseir, 2018:2) in an exploration of the digital impact on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) adopts the Business Dictionary (BD, 2017) definition that says that digitised content (texts, graphics, audio and video) are those that can be transmitted over internet or computer networks. The researcher prefers the earlier definition for its simplicity and appropriateness to this research.

#### **2.2.2 Defining Traditional Marketing**

According to Kotler and Keller (2006:6), the traditional definition of marketing says that marketing management is the art and science of choosing target markets; getting, keeping and growing customers through creating, delivering and

communicating superior customer value. The researcher posits that these facets of marketing are now also being delivered strategically in digital form.

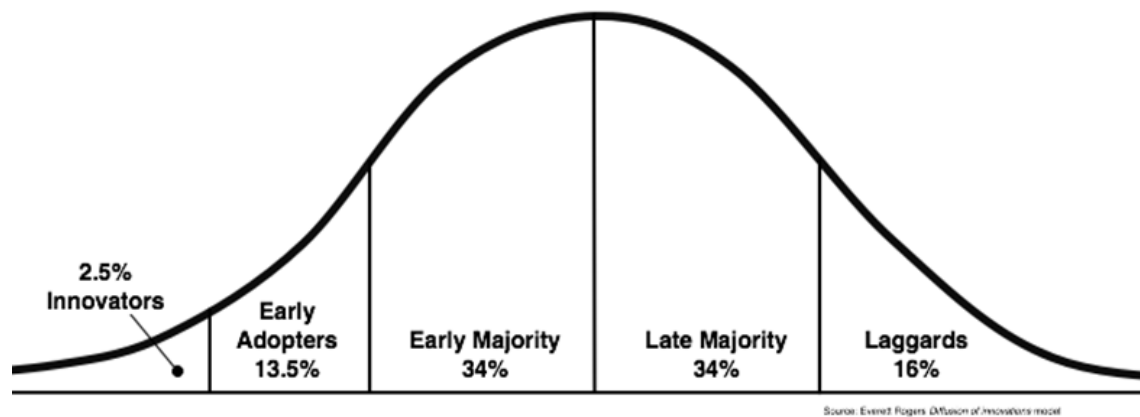
## **2.3 Defining Strategy**

Strategy, according to Hough et al. (2011:5) is management's action plan for the running of the business and conducting operations, to build, grow, maintain clientele and outcompete rivals. The organisational strategy pays particular attention to how every department performs. In the case of a perceived strategic failure, Brown (2011:195) suggests organisational intervention strategies that relate to integrating different organisational improvement activities over a set period to achieve the objectives.

### **2.3.1 Background to Study**

#### **2.3.1.1 Industry Competition and Strategic Risk**

There are approximately 18 known competing IT organisations in Botswana according to the BTC business directory (2019), serving the same industry. Prior search on digital platforms indicates that the competing organisations have adopted digital marketing strategies. This suggests an increase in the intensity of competing for markets. Winkler (2015:6) concedes that the success or failure in business is determined by the buyers and the market competition. The prominence on digital platforms suggests that none of the IT organisations consider themselves as laggards regarding the uptake of new technologies. Ardley and McIntosh (2019:325) submit that an online absence induces customer despondency and reticence, implying that technology has a perceived concomitant and significant impact on digital marketing. LaMorte (2019) cites Roger's Diffusion of Innovation Theory ([www.sphweb.bumc.bu.edu](http://www.sphweb.bumc.bu.edu), 2019) explaining how an idea or a product gains momentum and diffuses through a specific population or a social system. The resultant expectation is that people will view the product, idea or behaviour as innovative. The theory suggests that innovators are venturesome; they take risks, try new ideas and constitute only 2.5% of the general population. An exposition of the theory is highlighted. The major limitation of the theory is that it is not necessarily tested against the industry under investigation. However, the theory is considered cogent among scholars and researchers, and it has gained prominence over the years.



**Figure 1.1: Roger's Diffusion of innovation theory**

(Source: ([www://blog.leanmonitor.com/early-adopters](http://www://blog.leanmonitor.com/early-adopters), 2019)

The competing IT organisations fall into the innovators' category by implementing digital marketing strategies, taking risks associated with the group. Ardley and McIntosh (2019:330) conclude that due to the advent of technology, organisations are less likely to employ traditional methods of marketing; instead, they will create value through the exploitation of the power vested in the customer. It is against the backdrop of these observations that the researcher investigated the supposed influence of digital marketing strategies on IT organisations in Botswana. The supposition being that the assumed strategies are ineffective, prompting the need to investigate the efficacies of current strategies. Hough et al. (2011:108-109) posit that an organisation must consider its competitive scope and position within the industry, including evaluating the performance of the prevailing strategies.

### **2.3.1.2 A Global Perspective on Migration to Digital Technologies**

The current mantra, according to Alford and Page (2015:665), compels organisations to invest and adopt digital technologies in marketing, but it seems little has been researched on the actual impact that these technologies have on organisations. From a global perspective, Alford and Page (2015:665) embarked on a qualitative study of 24 owner-managed small businesses, alluding to the fact that little is understood about the owner-manager practice in this area. The authors postulate that indeed the use of technologies drives business growth in a variety of areas including customer relationship marketing, access to new markets and business-to-business collaboration. Although these strategies imply growth in

customer base and an increase in return on investment (ROI), evidence to the contrary seems to prevail for IT organisations in Botswana. Further, Alford and Page (2015:657) submit that numerous studies relating to the adoption of technology for marketing are also influenced by the business owner-managers. The foregoing arguments present an opportunity to explore and evaluate the availability of digital marketing expertise in Botswana and the ability to advantageously exploit these technologies.

## **2.4 The influence of Digital Marketing Strategies on IT Organisations**

### **2.4.1 An Overview of Digital Marketing Strategies**

Chaffey and Chadwick (2019:144) describe the importance of digital strategy and digital transformation, alluding to the fact that the phenomenon is becoming pervasive across organisational activities. The importance of digital transformation requires that all concerned organisational functions are synchronised and there is a buy-in by all to minimise conflicts (Chaffey & Chadwick, 2019:144). This researcher proposes that to achieve organisational objectives, a coherent model such as the SOSTAC® model is a useful planning framework for discussing alternative digital strategic models (Chaffey & Smith, 2017:3). Alternative digital marketing models are discussed herein as highlighted by Hanlon (2016, 2017, 2020), including the submissions by Chaffey and Chadwick (2019) on the Reach-Act-Convert-Engage (RACE) marketing model and the Mckinsey's consumer decision journey (www.Mckinsey, 2020), among other considerations.

### **2.4.2 The SOSTAC® Planning Framework**

The model provides a current template upon which digital marketing planning takes place. The model has gained popularity with both academics and the industry, asserting it as a persuasive tool for digital marketing planning (PrSmith.org, 2020). Figure 2 provides a conceptual framework to discuss the IT organisations' situational analysis, their intended objectives on migrating to digital marketing strategies and the examination of incumbent strategies. The framework is used to mitigate the tactical plans to the objectives as well as the actions and controls required to achieve the objectives. While not every aspect of the model is examined in detail, the relevant concepts have been interrogated to evaluate and find

recommendations. The key areas of this model were applied in discussing the IT organisations in Botswana concerning digital marketing strategies.

Videos and Posts Related to SOSTAC® Planning  
April 2020



**Figure 1.2: PR SMITH SOSTAC® PLANNING MODEL**

(Source: [www.PRSmith.org/sostac](http://www.PRSmith.org/sostac), 2020)

The model is explained henceforth in the context and objectives of this research focusing on IT organisations in Botswana. This model provides a modern template upon which businesses can plan and formulate strategies.

### **2.4.2.1 Situational Analysis**

The marketplace for IT organisations in Botswana is perceived to be highly competitive, with the organisations offering homogenous products and services. Fuertes, Alfaro, Vargas, Gutierrez, Ternero and Sabattin (2020:2) suggest that in a highly competitive environment, management is tasked with the conception of the general strategy based on the rationale of resource allocation and profitability. Fuertes et al. (2020:3-6) further submit that management must formulate a company strategy at the corporate level, business level and functional level to outcompete rivals. Also, the strategies are to reinforce the competitive position of organisations in the market. Sridhar and Fang (2019:977) cite Varadarajan (2010), Palmatier and Sridhar (2017) and also Morgan (2019), proposing that organisational decisions and actions should create stakeholder value through justifiable differential advantage – thus, perhaps the relentless investment into digital marketing strategies by the IT organisations.

- **Strategic Digital Platforms:** Chaffey and Chadwick (2016:12) discuss the available digital platforms for organisations to pursue. They are classified under three categories, namely paid, owned and earned media.
- **Paid Media:** Refers to a direct payment made to a site owner or an advertising network, whenever an advertisement, sponsorship or pay for a click, lead or sale is generated. Examples include print, TV advertising and direct mailing.
- **Owned Media:** These are different forms of online media owned and controlled by the organisation including their website, blogs, direct email and lists, and social media presence.
- **Earned Media:** The audience is reached through editorial comments and sharing online.

Organisations may maintain a presence on any or all of the platforms mentioned above, depending on their perceived strategic advantages over competitors. The key features of digital marketing strategies, according to Chaffey and Chadwick (2016:16), are that there must be an alignment with the business and marketing strategy, objectives and online presence must be clear. Chaffey and Chadwick (2016:16) advocate for consistency with customer interaction and reach through the channel, supporting the customer journey through the purchasing process and a

differentiated value proposition is beneficial. The features are not exhaustive; however, organisations should tailor what is best suited for their customer interactions.

#### **2.4.2.2 Objectives**

The perceived major objectives of the competing IT organisations are to obtain and maintain customers profitably. Vieira, De Almeida, Agnihotri, Da Silva and Arunachalam (2019:1085) observe that B2B e-business is outgrowing B2C due to an increase in B2B mobile applications, thus customers must be captured in the context of B2B rather than B2C. These arguments seem to present a dynamic shift for marketers when setting out organisational objectives. Digital marketing models such as the 6Cs of customer motivation, Hofacker's five stages of information processing and the RACE marketing model by Chaffey and Chadwick (2019) cited in [www.smartinsights.com](http://www.smartinsights.com) (2019) are the key performance indicators (KPIs) for setting objectives for the IT organisations.

- **Customer Convenience:** Ryan (2014:104) argues that the chances of potential customers stumbling on an organisation's site fortuitously are now negligible; therefore, customer convenience is a key objective, suggesting that the site must maximise customer experience. Ryan (2014:106) proposes that the search engine must allow the organisation to market products, services or brands at the precise time the customers are looking for exactly what the organisation is selling.
- **Search Engine Optimisation:** Ryan (2014:106) emphasises the following reasons why customer convenience is important, stating that 70-80% of users ignore paid advertisements on any search engine, preferring to focus on the original search. Also, 75% of users are said never to go beyond the first page, thus companies with an indexed page are more likely to obtain better results, typically a 14.6% close rate compared to a 1.7% close rate for direct mail or print advertising.

#### **2.4.2.3 Strategy**

The generic strategies being implemented by IT organisations seem to focus on the maintenance of a digital presence, web content and online marketing. Emergent strategies are not readily detectable, possibly because they are trade secrets unique

to each organisation. Chaffey (2019, cited in [www.smartinsights.com](http://www.smartinsights.com), 2020) suggests the implementation of the RACE digital planning framework, which was developed to help marketers strategically plan their activities in a more structured way. This researcher seeks to explore whether or not the prevailing digital marketing strategies are effective. De-Leon (2019:43) postulates that there is a shift from value creation to digital ecosystems; the latter term refers to collaborative organisations that are digitally connected but delineate hierarchical authority. De-Leon (2019:44) cites Jacobides (2019), suggesting that strategy formulation is no longer a straightforward routine, but a process requiring industry collaboration and the application of complementary models. A major advantage of strategic industry collaboration, according to De-Leon (2019:44), is transaction cost reduction between the independent, yet competing, organisations among other benefits.

#### **2.4.2.4 Tactics**

Tactical responsibilities and organisational structures have been greatly impacted, owing to the integration of digital technologies into the marketers' duties in organisations (Cluley, Green & Owen, 2020:27). Elsewhere, Alexandra and Elena (2019:119) submit that organisational tactics ought to adapt to the new requirements and expectations of customers, further suggesting that digital technology has revolutionised the marketing effort. The researcher seeks to explore the tactical plans being implemented by IT organisations in Botswana, based on the findings on the analytical abilities of the marketing experts.

#### **2.4.2.5 Actions**

Organisational systems and procedures seem to impact the effective implementation of the strategy. Fuertes et al. (2020:6) advocate that organisational structures moderate organisational behaviour, performance and overall work, including leadership influence. Liu, Wang and Koehler (2019:2537) corroborate that within the digital marketing context, organisational actions are influenced by technology acceptance and usage behaviour or system use, although the arguments are inconclusive. Elsewhere, Okundaye, Fan and Dwyer (2019:32) allude to the fact that the shortage of skills, inadequate technological funding and inefficient infrastructure, among other factors, hamper organisational actions. The action plans of the marketers have been put under scrutiny in the study, with the bid

to establish what is attained from the marketing analytics and metrics obtained from the digital platforms.

#### **2.4.2.6 Control**

The major challenges of digital marketing in organisations seem to also emanate from organisational controls, particularly the area of knowledge and performance-based analysis of digital marketing strategies (Saura, Sanchez & Herraiez, 2020:2). IT organisations have been investigated for adequacies in the implementation of digital marketing audit models highlighted in Table 1 of the competing theoretical models. Hanlon (2016) suggests the application of Forrester's 5Is, Lauterborn's 4Cs and the Ten Cs of Marketing as digital marketing control measures (www.smartinsights.com, 2020). The study seeks to interrogate the marketing experts on who monitors and controls what within the organisation and how the performance is audited and evaluated for strategic appraisals within the various IT organisations under study.

#### **2.4.3 Structuring the Digital Marketing Strategy**

Chaffey and Chadwick (2019:146) posit that to construct a digital marketing strategy, there are requisite principles to be followed, namely the organisation has to begin with the right goal, have a clear definition of the value proposition, differ from the competition, be ready for trade-offs (collaborating with other organisations in the related industry), create an organisational fit and establish continuity. The digital marketing strategy has to create what Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan (2017:110) term the digital anthropology, which focuses on the nexus between human and digital technology interaction for network increase. The system key features of organisational network increase, according to Kotler et al. (2017:110-112), are highlighted below:

- **Social Listening:** This is the process of monitoring what is being said about the organisation (or brand) on the internet. This is considered a useful tool for identifying leads, understanding prospects and customer relationship management.
- **Netnography:** This term refers to a method that adopts the practice of ethnography to understand human behaviours in what is termed e-tribes or

online communities. Online communities are perceived to influence organisation's networks, from the customer's perception of the products and the quality of services offered. This method is similar to ethnography, in that the marketers immerse themselves in the natural settings of the communities in an attempt to obtain an in-depth understanding of the participants (herein the organisation's customers).

- **Emphatic research:** This method of attempting to grow the organisation's network typically involves participatory observation and immersion in the context of customer communities to uncover latent customer needs. This requires observation, dialogue as well as brainstorming among researchers and communities; this may be done in person or using digital methods. This method is closest to traditional ethnography. The digital bearings of these aspects are also examined in line with the competing theoretical models as highlighted in Table 1.

#### **2.4.4 The Need for Strategic Intervention**

The current IT organisations' marketing strategies are perceived to be flawed, prompting the need for strategy revision. Hough et al. (2008:248) assert that when weak performance is caused by poor strategy, there is a need to overhaul the entire strategy; by either changing to a new competitive approach, overhauling internal operations and functional areas within the organisations, or evaluating the requisite skills of the respective departments. Also, a strategic merger with other organisations (trade-offs) may be optional, as suggested by De-Leon (2019:44), considering the seemingly shrinking market for IT organisations in Botswana.

#### **2.4.5 Perceived Strategic Challenges**

The perceived challenges imply reverting to traditional marketing methods and finding a sustainable mix with the incumbent strategies. Nhedzi (2018:35) investigates the relationship between traditional and digital media as an influence on generational consumer preference, concluding that younger educated and affluent groups tend to adopt digital media with relative ease. Thus, the disparities between digital and traditional strategies have consequences on the organisation's target market. Sinclair (2008:41) submits that the distinction between the 'old' and 'new' media is spurious, creating a false dichotomy between a proprietary direction

and corporate financial gain. The proposed mediated position is for IT organisations to straddle both the traditional and digital worlds in strategy formulation.

#### **2.4.6 Summary of Literature**

In summary, the foregoing literature suggests that advancement in ICTs fosters the emergence of value networks, thereby increasing organisational efficiencies and effectiveness in business (Nasir, 2015:82-83). However, should the current trend persist, business continuity for most IT organisations in Botswana will be adversely affected. Resultantly, the organisations may fail to meet investor and stakeholder obligations, with possible downsizing and the inevitable loss of employment in the industry sector.

### **2.5 Digital Marketing and Marketing Metrics Defined**

Chaffey and Chadwick (2016:38) propound on the definitions of digital marketing and key terminologies relating to marketing metrics with which marketers should familiarise themselves. Some key definitions are highlighted below.

- **Digital Marketing:** Is defined as the application of the internet and related digital technologies in conjunction with traditional communications to achieve marketing objectives.
- **Digital Media Communications:** Are facilitated through content and interactive services delivered by different technology platforms, including the internet, web, mobile phone, interactive TV, Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) and digital signage.
- **Online Company Presence:** These are different forms of online media controlled by a company including their website, blogs, email list and social media presence. This is also known as “owned media”. Other media forms are paid media such as offline traditional media entailing print as well as TV advertising. The other form of media is called earned media, which comprises PR (public relations), word of mouth, viral and social marketing, social networks and communities.
- **Digital Marketing Strategy:** Is the definition of the approach by which applying digital technology platforms will support marketing and business objectives (Chaffey & Chadwick, 2016:178). Various theoretical models,

including the SOSTAC® model and the digital marketing models as discussed herein, are applied in testing the influence of digital marketing strategies.

- **Marketing Metrics:** According to Chaffey and Chadwick (2016:557), the web or digital analytics are the techniques used to assess and improve the contribution of digital marketing to a business, including reviewing traffic volume, referrals, clickstreams, online reach data, customer satisfaction surveys, leads and sales. The tools and techniques for collecting marketing metrics are highlighted by Chaffey and Chadwick (2016:562-563) as follows: site-visitor activity data, pages per visit (PPV) and visits per (unique) visitor (VPV), among other parameters. This researcher argues that marketers have to be adequately equipped and skilled to extract and derive meaningful data out of the quantitative measures and convert them into strategic business sense.

In similar research on digital analytics and their contribution to marketing strategy, Kovala (2017:48-74) discusses how digital marketing analytics assist in extracting certain parameters that were not easy to measure before; however, this also comes with cumbersome work for the marketers. In conclusion, Kovala (2017:88) alludes to the fact that digital analytics offer possibilities for strategic marketing decisions. The findings augmented the need to study the analytical skills of the marketers to establish how the available information translates to digital marketing decisions.

### **2.5.1 Customer Information From Digital Metrics**

Digital media is a conduit for marketing intelligence about customers, as discussed by Chaffey and Chadwick (2016:37), particularly about perceptions, products and services. Further individualisation information may be obtained through analysing customer preferences, patterns and behaviours based on the data attained from site visitors (Chaffey & Chadwick, 2016:37). Also, the information acquired about customers allows for marketing communications integration, including industry restructuring – this latter term refers to the basic decision by the organisation as to on which intermediaries they ought to be represented – and lastly, the independence of location, meaning that organisations are enabled to reach a global market.

## **2.6 Investigating the Metrics Analysis Skills for IT Organisations**

### **2.6.1 Skills Audit of Incumbent Personnel**

Chaffey and Chadwick (2016:16) accentuate that new skills and the familiarisation with digital technology and new terminology is essential for marketing practitioners today. The rapid changes in marketing jargon and technology demand that marketers continually upgrade their skills. When organisations attempt to improve on efficiencies, Brown (2011:196-198) advocates that implementation of structural, technological and behavioural strategies are the three basic organisational intervention strategies. These strategies relate to integrating and improving the entire organisational performance. Recent studies by Mazzarol (2015:81) and Paswan (2018:8) expose that the popularity of digital marketing strategies over the past two decades has gained incremental attention among scholars, customers and marketers. However, Brown (2011:196-198) argues that there is a need to investigate personnel capabilities. For the purposes of this research, marketing experts were interviewed on how well equipped they are with digital technologies and what they do with the marketing metrics obtained from the organisation's digital platforms. Hough et al. (2011:262) affirms that core competencies and competitive capabilities are crucial in the execution of strategy. The new technologies may not be easily applicable or diffusible to the industry owing to the nature of the products and services. Therefore, Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart and Wright (2006:74) advocate for concentration strategies that focus on market share increase, a reduction in cost, the creation and maintenance of market niche for products and services; these arguments are also supported by De-Leon (2019:44).

### **2.6.2 Key Skills Challenges of Digital Marketing**

The foregoing arguments on the skills audit for marketing personnel are corroborated by Chaffey and Chadwick (2019:35), who posits that digital marketing presents the following challenges:

- **Complexity:** In-house marketers may lack specialised skills and the time to configure campaigns, thus requiring outsourcing of such expertise.
- **Response to the competition:** Monitoring and responding to competitor activities requires resources and appropriate skills.

- **Responding to changes in technology and marketing platforms:** The constant need to innovate and offer better digital capabilities means that marketers must constantly upgrade their skills.
- **Cost:** The above complexities always come with costs to the organisation and expenses also relate to costs per click.

### **2.6.3 Organisational Structure and Human Resource Implications**

Considerations for organisational renewal is perceived to be fundamental. This entails viewing the entire organisation as a system with subsystems, as proposed by Brown (2011:58-65); that the organisation is an open system comprising resource inputs, the transformation process and the desired outputs. Resource inputs include money, people, technology and other factors that contribute to the overall system. Within the organisational transformation process, there is a need to review individual effectiveness, team effectiveness and overall organisational performance. Human resource skills and abilities are interrogated. The organisational structures may require radical change for effective strategy implementation.

Mazzarol (2015:81), in the review of small enterprise research, suggests that digital technology has a positive impact on SMEs; paradoxically, the same technology has become a threat. The absurdity emanates from the failure of SMEs to embrace opportunities that are presented by the digital marketing platforms. This view has historically been investigated by Rowan (2002:180), who propounds that several factors make measuring digital marketing difficult. According to Rowan (2002:180), these factors include the challenge of recognising what makes significant data among volumes of insignificant data. Secondly, the problem of developing structured testing plans that progressively edify an effective marketing strategy, organising the whole enterprise to make the best use of the available data remains. Thirdly, the determination of which department is responsible for which function seemingly exacerbates the organisation's marketing inefficiencies.

### **2.6.4 Proponents and Critics of Digital Marketing**

Proponents of digital marketing such as Paswan (2018:1) have attempted to quantify digital media as an important marketing tool. Further, Paswan (2018:8)

submitted statistics on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter as having two billion, 800 million and 330 million active users, respectively. Additionally, Paswan (2018:8) cites that 77% of Fortune 500 companies are using digital media and 90% of marketers are also using similar platforms to interact with customers. These figures give the researcher an insight into drawing inferences in quantifying the importance of digital marketing strategies by IT organisations.

Elsewhere, Nambisan, Siegel and Kenney (2018:354) concede that two platforms, namely open innovation and 'platformisation', have transformed the pursuit of entrepreneurship. 'Platformisation', according to Nambisan et al. (2018:354), refers to the increasing importance of digital platforms as a venue for value creation and capture. This exposition suggests the need for organisations to invest in digital marketing platforms to stay competitive. However, Winkler (2015:227) argues that while digital mailing as a marketing strategy, for example, is one of the most valuable forms of marketing, 60% of mailing lists are inaccurate and the average list is only about 80% effective. This argument presents a further need for research on the impact of digital marketing strategies on IT organisations. In the same vein, Rowan (2002:16) submits that online marketing should be driven more by the quality of communication rather than by quantity.

Similarly, in another research on the antecedents of retweeting, in a political marketing context, Walker, Baines, Dimitrui and McDonald (2017:275) allude to the fact that while tweets may be highly influential, little is known behind the dynamics of information-sharing. By inference, this prior research supports the need to explore this position by organisations that enjoy a huge following; yet the economic benefits of digital following are not understood. This school of thought provides a basis for the investigation of the decline in the IT market sector in Botswana, despite the implementation of digital marketing strategies.

In parallel research, Doran, Cooper and Mihalik (2015:227) surveyed athletics teams, to determine whether there was a correlation between the number of followers on Twitter and the content being featured. The findings and conclusions suggest that there is no correlation between content and followers (Doran et al., 2015:244). This argument suggests that followers on digital marketing platforms

may be driven by factors other than content posted on the web page. This position proposes that the nature of the product and services provided by the organisation may not necessarily be fully comprehended on digital platforms, requiring the need to exploit alternative forms of marketing as a contingency.

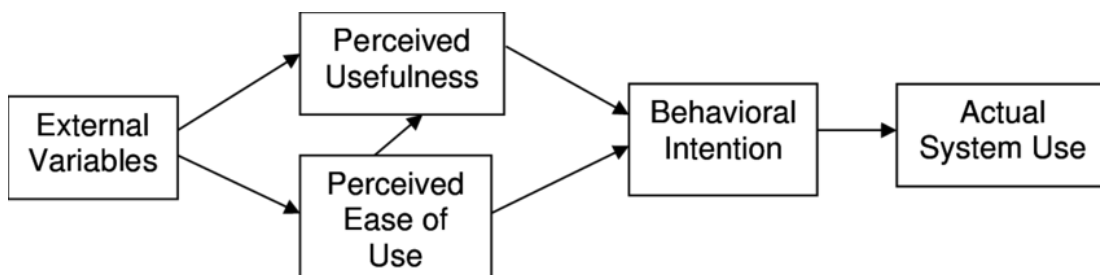
However, in studies carried out in Nigeria, Olaoye, Dabiri, Oladejo, Abdul, Olusegan, Jibril and Abdul (2012:218) maintain that ICT plays an important role in SME and entrepreneurial development. The study discusses ICT as a crucial component in start-up ventures, suggesting that perpetual implementation of ICTs is important. On the contrary, Bagheri and Zaidatol (2014:1) argue that both personal and environmental factors influence one's decision into entrepreneurship and the success is based on other factors such as entrepreneurial skills, subjective norms and personal attraction.

Further critics on digital marketing such as Sussan and Acs (2017:56) allude to the gap that exists between the digital ecosystem and the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Sussan and Acs (2017:56) seek to explore the gap in research between billion-dollar digital start-ups such as Walmart against the focus on small business entrepreneurship that seem to gain research preference. This exposition provides some indicators as to why digital marketing strategies are perceived to fail within SMEs. Digital marketing success is also perceived to be measured in terms of ROI, to the exclusion of other significant factors. This gap is further explored by examining the Technology Acceptance Model by Venkatesh and Davis (1996:451), who advocate that the model is useful in predicting user acceptance and application based on perceived ease of use and the usefulness of the technology. The model is applied together with other strategic digital marketing models to ferret the requisite expert skills in IT organisations.

Baker (2009:48) contends that digital marketing may harm the organisation on two fronts: first, media consultants hired by organisations often emphasise the numbers of Twitter or YouTube followers, for example, oblivious to the traditional measures of ROI. Second, Baker (2009:48) cautions on backlash emanating from being fixated on hard numbers by ignoring the harder-to-quantify dividends such as trust and goodwill. These findings suggest a possible case with IT organisations in Botswana,

where the influence of digital marketing on ROI may not be apparent, yet the immeasurable dividends could be on the increase.

In a literature analysis on digital marketing as a strategy, Venciute (2018:140) concludes that digital media should support the organisation's overall marketing strategy, not only as a standalone tool but also as a capability. This research seeks to expose the capabilities of digital marketing strategies within IT organisations and evaluate effective digital marketing models, further highlighting the effects of technology acceptance using the Technology Acceptance Model on the expert participants in this research to test the phenomena.



**Figure 1.3: The Technology Acceptance Model**

*Source: A Model of the Antecedents of Perceived Ease of Use; Development and Test. Decision Science TAM (1996) (Venkatesh & Davis, 1996:453)*

While the model is considered parsimonious, it explores why people (organisations in this case) use technology in the first place. The researcher expounds on the external variables such as the system characteristics, training and ease of use, user involvement in the design and the nature of implementation. The Technology Acceptance Model assists in discussing part of the competing digital strategies implementation highlighted in Table 1. Complementary models such as the 4 Cs of Marketing communications, which focus on strategy, and the Ten Cs of Marketing, which is a marketing audit model, are explored. The findings are perceived to provide answers to the influence of digital marketing strategies on IT organisations and other objective questions.

#### **2.6.4.1 Highlights of Technology Acceptance Model in the Context of IT Organisations in Botswana**

Gao and Huang (2019:4) validate the Technology Acceptance Model within the context of AI (artificial intelligence) in smart TV services, arguing that the user's behavioural intention can be determined by three constructs, namely perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and the evaluation of performance behaviour. By inference, these constructs aid in examining the participants' involvement, overall perception and attitude toward technology in digital marketing strategies.

#### **2.6.4.2 Perceived Intention – Behaviour Gap in the Technology Acceptance Model**

Liu et al. (2019:2537-39) discuss the potential constraints of the Technology Acceptance Model against several parameters, including habit, experience, knowledge and facilitating conditions in the teaching environment context. Possibly, similar parameters transcend research areas and are applicable within the context of IT organisations. In this study, Liu et al. (2019:2547) partly concluded that technology-mediated learning was not easy to facilitate. Similarly, Portz, Bayliss, Bull, Boxer, Bekelman, Gleason and Czaja (2019:2) affirm that a person's intent to use, usage behaviour, the specific technology's usefulness and ease of use mediated by external variables such as differences in individual characteristics, the system set up, social influences determine the effectiveness of technology adoption. It is, therefore, worthwhile exploring the participants' intention and behaviour gap in this research.

#### **2.6.5 Competing Digital Marketing Theoretical Models**

The competing theoretical models in Table 1 are discussed in the context of their merits and demerits in the formulation of effective digital marketing strategies. Highlights of each model are expounded. Preliminary observations indicate that none of the models are capable of addressing the four key aspects of digital marketing strategy, implying each model needs complementary support. The researcher seeks a theoretical position, having examined these models including the SOSTAC® model, own empirical findings and secondary sources from the IT organisations. The main challenges of digital marketing are highlighted in the context of complexity, how to respond to industry competition, the changes in

technology and marketing platforms, costs involved and the attention sought in paid advertising (Chaffey and Chadwick, 2019:35). The researcher selects models based on cogency and suitability to the underlying study, together with the grounded theory findings to suggest a theoretical position.

**Table 1: Competing Theoretical Models on Digital Marketing Strategies**

| Model                                         | Digital customer communications models | Digital marketing audit model | Digital marketing planning model | Digital marketing strategy model |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Forrester's 5Is                               | Y                                      | Y                             |                                  |                                  |
| Lauterborn's 4Cs                              |                                        | Y                             |                                  |                                  |
| Ten C's of marketing                          |                                        | Y                             |                                  |                                  |
| 6Cs of customer motivation                    | Y                                      |                               | Y                                |                                  |
| Hofacker's 5 Stages of information processing | Y                                      |                               | Y                                |                                  |
| RACE Planning                                 |                                        |                               | Y                                |                                  |
| Technology Acceptance Model                   | Y                                      |                               | Y                                |                                  |
| 4Cs for marketing communications              |                                        |                               |                                  | Y                                |
| McKinsey's consumer decision journey          | Y                                      |                               |                                  | Y                                |
| The Honeycomb Model                           | Y                                      |                               |                                  | Y                                |

Source: *Digital Marketing Models Guide 2016*, ([www.smartinsights.com](http://www.smartinsights.com), 2019)

### **2.6.5.1 Digital Customer Communication Models**

The competing theoretical models suggest that for effective customer communications, organisations must evaluate and employ appropriate models as highlighted in Table 1 ([www.smartinsights.com](http://www.smartinsights.com), 2020). The highlighted models

seem to be cogent and applicable to the digital platforms for the abstraction of relevant customer information, which is valuable for digital marketing communications strategy. Hofacker's five stages of information processing are considered relevant for customer communication through exposure, drawing attention, comprehension and perception, yielding and acceptance leading to retention of customers (Hanlon, 2016), including the 6Cs of marketing, also Hanlon (2016). The Honeycomb model (Hanlon, 2017) is highlighted for its merits and demerits as a customer communication strategy model. Further, Hanlon (2020) submits that Forrester's 5Is conjure five parameters such as customer involvement measured through web analytics, interaction, intimacy, influence and the individual. Davis (2019) advocates for the Technology Acceptance Model applied together with the SOSTAC® model; while Court, Elzinga, Mulder and Vetvik (2020) propose the McKinsey's consumer decision journey model. Customers are perceived to prefer continuous engagement throughout their decision-making journey; therefore, a convenient online presence by organisations is regarded to be important for retention.

#### **2.6.5.2 Digital Marketing Audit Models**

Auditing the digital marketing strategy is perceived to be significant for organisations in the context of checking the relevance of information that is obtainable from the digital platforms and how to make the best use of it for work improvement. The subject of audit complements the basis of this research, in an attempt to establish the influence of digital marketing strategies on organisations. Forrester's 5Is, together with Lauterborn's 4Cs and the Ten Cs of Marketing (Hanlon, 2016) are perceived to be key audit models. The Ten Cs of the marketing audit model is projected as the most robust as it encompasses a wider array of business facets. With the Ten Cs of Marketing, Hanlon (2016) emphasises the customer, corporate culture, convenience, communications, competition, consistency, creative content, customisation coordination and control. The latter model covers most of the aspects under study in this research and is perceived to be a useful tool for the extraction of customer information regarding marketing intelligence for marketers.

### **2.6.5.3 Digital Marketing Planning Models**

The digital planning models expose how well-crafted the digital marketing effort will be for organisations. The theoretical frameworks as cited by Hanlon (2016) and Chaffey and Chadwick (2019) include the 6Cs of customer motivation, Hofacker's five stages of information processing and the RACE planning model. Chaffey and Chadwick (2019) advocates the RACE planning model, arguing that this model is the most practical framework when attempting to improve digital marketing. The RACE model, according to Chaffey (2019), was formulated to aid marketers to manage their functionalities in a more structured way; it is a simpler framework compared with the other competing models and is best suited for any size of the business while optimising opportunities.

### **2.6.5.4 Digital Marketing Strategy Models**

An integrated application of digital models is perceived to yield valuable marketing information for IT organisations. The competing digital marketing strategies are highlighted by Hanlon (2016) such as the 4Cs of marketing communications, which is similar to Lauterborn's 4Cs, McKinsey's consumer decision journey, a model that compares the traditional allegory of consumer decision-making to the modern patterns of doing the same; and, thirdly, the expositions of the Honeycomb model. According to Hanlon (2016), the Honeycomb model is best suited for social media strategies; the major weakness of the model is that it does not help with decision-making. The McKinsey model emphasises consumer decision-making comparisons rather than clarity, credibility, consistency and competitiveness, as proposed by the 4Cs for marketing communications model (Hanlon, 2017). This implies that strategy formulation is not as straightforward as it may seem for IT organisations. A comprehensive analysis of exogenous and endogenous business factors is perceived to be important before the selection and adoption of a digital strategy. None of the above models comprehensively cover all the aspects of digital marketing strategy formulation.

## **2.7 Themes Derived for the Questionnaire**

The main literature themes that formed the basis for the research instrument are derived from the digital platforms that the IT organisations use for digital marketing strategies. These platforms formed the basis upon which the influence of digital

marketing strategy has been tested, using the SOSTAC® model and the competing theoretical models highlighted in Table 1. The second theme that built the research questionnaire has been derived from the importance of the analytical skills and abilities of the marketing experts. The literature arguments and other findings provided a guide for the importance of marketing analytics in decision-making. Finally, the researcher extracted the third theme from the information obtained from evaluating the extent to which digital technologies influence strategic marketing decisions. The Technology Acceptance Model guided this theme and questions were designed to obtain findings therefrom. Other empirical findings obtained during the research augmented the study and were incorporated in drawing conclusions and recommendations.

## **2.8 Conclusion to Literature Review**

The researcher sought an understanding of the above intriguing and contrasting views in pursuit of the theoretical exposition on the influence of digital marketing strategies on IT organisations in Botswana. The influence of digital marketing strategies was tested against the SOSTAC® model, as this model is persuasive and rigorous for marketing planning. The model examines each organisation's current competitive position, objectives, strategic intent, tactics, actions and controls that are in place. The SOSTAC® model is regarded as a current and modern template by both researchers and scholars for examining digital marketing strategies. Complementary and competing theoretical digital models highlighted in Table 1, namely the digital customer communications models, audit models, planning models and the strategy models offer support in addressing the main research objective.

The marketing experts' skills in digital metrics analytics are perceived to have a bearing on digital marketing decisions. In this study, the analytical skills of the marketers seemed to have a concomitant effect on strategic decisions. The skills requirement complexities were discussed in the literature review, together with the difficulties of discriminating from useful and useless data. The discussion on proponents and critics of digital marketing in the foregoing chapter expounds on the skills challenges faced by organisations' attempting to implement digital marketing strategies today. It, therefore, is a prudent research objective to make findings on

the participants' analytical abilities, to draw a comprehensive conclusion to the main and sub-objectives.

The results obtained from investigating the participants' technology acceptance through the Technology Acceptance Model complement the research objectives of determining how technology is implemented in IT organisations for strategic decision-making. This model exposes the perceived usefulness of the technology, ease of use, behavioural intentions in making use of the technology and the actual use of the technology. The model does not discount external variables, which may affect technology acceptance. The implications of the Technology Acceptance Model are too significant to disregard as the research encompasses digital technologies. Other exogenous factors such as the overall industry competition, the economy, technological changes, may be examined following the research's empirical findings.

The data collection instrument used was semi-structured interviews targeted at experts within the marketing departments of participating organisations. The research paradigm and the methodology for this study are detailed in Chapter 3. The research methodology provides information on sources of primary and secondary data, the rationale of the study and the research design. The methodology has been carefully selected to reflect the purpose of the research, as the study seeks a profound understanding of the participants' contextual views regarding the influence of digital marketing strategy in their work settings.

Various prior research on the proponents and critics of the influence of digital marketing strategies have been explored in trying to understand the arguments behind the phenomena. There seem to be no ostensible arguments that support the influence of digital marketing strategies on IT organisations in Botswana or sub-Saharan Africa, validating this study as pioneer research. The findings are deemed to create a new renaissance in the use of digital marketing strategies in sub-Saharan Africa and beyond, adding to the body of knowledge in this era of the fourth industrial revolution and will be inferable to the entire IT and other industry sectors.

## **2.9 Hypothesis**

The researcher opts for non-directional hypotheses, since the area of research has no evidence of having been explored and there is no suggestion of any form of direction (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013:84). The pronounced lack of prior research into this topic makes the formalisation of robust hypotheses impractical and difficult. According to Bryman et al. (2014:9), depending on what is known, the researcher deduces a hypothesis that will be subjected to empirical scrutiny. Elsewhere, Kovala (2017:37) affirms that the contextual nature of qualitative research limits the extent to which it can predict future outcomes, but enables a complete understanding of the explored phenomena. Further, Kovala (2017:37) postulates that possible extraneous contingencies are examined without the prejudice of considering them as a source of bias.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Methodology/Paradigm**

The researcher pursued a qualitative research approach. This entailed the collection and analysis of non-numerical data in a semi-structured methodology. Inevitably, some data was quantitative, enabling the researcher to better comprehend the context and individual experiences about the phenomena under study (Leavy, 2017:20). The research method was guided by Bryman et al. (2014:41-42), asserting that the researcher sought to generate theories based on the findings and induce them into the construction of possible research positions. The researcher's ontological position was that of constructionism; Bryman et al. (2014:17) maintain that social phenomena and meanings are produced continually by those involved either individually or collectively through social interaction. Creswell and Creswell (2018:43) emphasise the importance of qualitative research in the context of exploring and understanding meanings ascribed by humans to their social settings, without the researcher disturbing the natural flow of things.

##### **3.1.1 Advantages and Disadvantages of Qualitative Research**

Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault (2016:7-11) propound on the major advantages of qualitative research, among them that the methodology addresses the meaning that people attach to issues affecting their lives. This research was inductive, implying that the researcher developed concepts, insights, themes and patterns that arose from the study. Also, Taylor et al. (2016:7-11) argue that the methodology is holistic in its approach to every aspect of the study, enabling the researchers to concern themselves with how people think. Further, Taylor et al. (2016:7-11) posit that the approach emphasises the meaningfulness of the research outcomes and that there is always something new to learn, qualifying the methodology as a craft.

However, the methodology is not without its disadvantages. Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014:30) expose the shortcomings of qualitative research, contending that although the method is based on observations, interviews, documents and artifacts that are within proximity, such data are not readily accessible for analysis, thus requiring further processing. Besides, Miles et al. (2014:30) allude to the fact that the processing of field notes is influenced by the researcher's implicit concepts and

this creates bias. The researcher's values, attitudes and beliefs may infringe on the research outcome. The actions of the participants are also not easy to interpret.

### **3.2 Research Design**

The study was cross-sectional, in a non-contrived setting. The merits of this approach are that data are collected once, while work events continued as normal and semi-structured interviewing techniques were used. The researcher's epistemological approach was interpretivism since the study sought to explore the reasons behind the phenomena (Bryman et al., 2014:14). Kumar (2011:31) posits that understanding or exploring the extent of a problem in a phenomenon, including its variation or diversity, requires an unstructured study approach. While Kumar (2011:106) acknowledges the simplicity of this method in that there is only a single contact with the study population, the major disadvantage is that any change that may occur during the study will not be measured.

### **3.3 Population and Sample**

#### **3.3.1 Population**

The target population was 18 IT organisations in Botswana, which are comparatively homogenous since the participants are in the same industry. When the population is homogenous there is less variation, and thus no need for a large sample (Bryman et al., 2014:177). However, the final participants were drawn from 15 consenting marketing experts from the various IT organisations in Gaborone, Botswana. The researcher interviewed 12 of the consenting participants. The population refers to the entire group of people, events or things that are of interest to the researcher (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013:240).

#### **3.3.2 Sampling Strategy**

Non-probability purposive sampling was used to select the participants for the study. A total of 15 participants formed the sample size for the study; and targets were experts from the marketing departments. The assumption was that the participants have the requisite knowledge that would assist in achieving the study objectives. Sekaran and Bougie (2013:252) affirm that purposive sampling helps the researcher in obtaining specific information for the study. The number of participants was

perceived to be adequate to achieve theoretical saturation for the study (Bryman et al., 2014:187).

### **3.4 Data Collection Methods**

The instrument used for data collection was semi-structured interviews. The technique allowed the researcher to be specific on matters while giving the interviewees some leeway in their responses (Bryman et al., 2014:225). The interview process was flexible, enabling the researcher to probe as much information as possible and clarify questions. Extreme precautions were taken during data collection due to the Coronavirus-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, to ensure the safety and the well-being of both parties. Where possible, available technologies such as Zoom, video-calling and Skype were used to minimise physical contact. The major drawbacks were the possibilities of bias and familiarity by both parties. Where accessing the participants during this lockdown period was cumbersome, alternative technology-enabled communication methods as mentioned above were used for interview purposes.

### **3.5 Participant Recruitment Strategy**

The researcher made preliminary contact with the potential participants telephonically, followed by more comprehensive direct emails requesting for permission to conduct the research. Permission to interview employees was sought from the organisational authorities. The contact telephone numbers were obtained from the public telephone directory, while a request for personal email addresses for further information was requested upon initial contact. Confidentiality of information, the organisation's name and persons involved, and the study outcomes were comprehensively explained. The researcher emphasised that participation was purely voluntary and the participants may exit should they so wish at the end of the interview. However, should the participants elect to contribute, they may only exit at the end of the interview. Preliminary ethical considerations as highlighted in this document, including ensuring the health and safety of the participants, were explained to both the authorities and/or the participants. Participants signed a consent to participate letter, as attached herein.

### **3.6 Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Qualitative data is generally bulky; thus, the researcher reduced the data through coding and categorisation. Coding, according to Sekaran and Bougie (2013:337), is the analytical process through which the qualitative data gathered are reduced, rearranged and integrated to form a theory. Neuman (2014:201) substantiates that in qualitative studies measurement is not a separate process from data-gathering, as the researcher simultaneously creates new concepts with the process of gathering data. As data availed, suitable methods were selected as outlined by Bryman et al. (2014:336-370) for data interpretation. The researcher used qualitative data analysis methods to write the report and draw conclusions. Where numerical data availed, Microsoft Excel methods of analysing data using descriptive statistics, as detailed by Winston (2014:369), was valuable to this study.

### **3.7 Validity and Reliability**

Trustworthiness as applicable to qualitative research was discussed in addition to credibility, conformability, transferability and dependability (Bryman et al., 2014:44-45). Creswell and Creswell (2018:323-324) explain possible strategies for validity checks. Creswell and Creswell (2018:43) suggest that in qualitative research, validity may be checked using triangulation, member checking, rich thick description of the findings, clarifying the bias, scrutinising negative or discrepant information, or spending further time in the field, among other methods.

#### **3.7.1 External Validity**

The research transferability has been discussed, which is equivalent to external validity seeking in-depth descriptions from participants so that the findings are transferable to other contexts and milieux. Creswell and Creswell (2018:288) highlight three threats to external validity, namely the interaction of selection and treatment, the interaction of setting and treatment and, thirdly, the interaction of history and treatment. The first threat refers to the characteristics of the participants that the researcher cannot generalise to other participants who do not have similar traits; the second refers to the characteristics of the settings of participants that cannot be ascribed to others; and the latter addresses the issue of time-bound experiments whose results cannot be inferred to past or future situations.

### **3.7.2 Internal Validity**

For the credibility of the findings, best practices of research were adhered to, thus ensuring internal validity. Confirmation and verification from the participants for a true representation of findings were sought. Several threats to internal validity are listed by Creswell and Creswell (2018:286), namely *history* – time passes during an experiment; *maturation* – participants mature or change during the experiment; *regression to the mean* – outlier scores will tend to regress towards the mean; *selection* – participants may be selected with characteristics that predispose them to certain outcomes; *mortality or attrition* – participants die or drop out of the experiment; *diffusion of treatment or cross-contamination* – this refers to participants communicating with other control groups; *compensatory or resentful demoralisation* – occurs when one group feels they are being devalued; *testing* – where participants become familiar with the outcome and learn answers for future tests; and finally *instrumentation* – where the instrument changes between pre-test and post-test, thus affecting the outcome.

### **3.7.3 Reliability**

Dependability parallels reliability in quantitative research. In qualitative research, verification is possible by the completeness of records throughout the research process. The research instrument was pilot-tested for reliability and necessary adjustments were made. Kumar (2011:168) discusses the concept of reliability of the research instrument in the context of it being consistent and stable, hence predictable and accurate. The research instrument must produce measurements that are precise with a low degree of error.

## **3.8 Ethical Considerations**

Sekaran and Bougie (2013:13) refer to ethics in research as a code of conduct or expected societal norms of behaviour while conducting research. Four key ethical considerations are highlighted in Bryman et al. (2014:120), namely ensuring that there is no harm to participants, seeking informed consent from participants, avoiding invasion of privacy and desisting from any form of deception. Relevant written permission to embark on the research was sought from all stakeholders. Self-introductory letters and the documentation explaining the purpose of the research were presented to the participating organisations' authorities for approval.

Approved Economic and Management Sciences (EMS) Faculty forms accompanied the research schedule. Prior arrangements to enter organisational premises was requested. The purpose of the research findings was explained to the organisational authorities, assuring them of no harm to the organisation and its employees. The actual names of organisations or those of participants will not be divulged. The research findings will be kept confidential. The participants are private sector organisations; therefore, there is no absolute reason to seek governmental permission, except for the case of COVID-19 movement restrictions. This matter is addressed in the paragraph below. Kumar (2011: 221-222) further warns against unethical practices such as bias, the provision or deprivation of treatment, using inappropriate research methodology, incorrect reporting and inappropriate use of findings.

### **3.9 COVID-19 Considerations During Data Collection**

The researcher recognised the risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and adhered to the precautionary measures as laid down by health institutions and the government to observe social and physical distancing during the interviews or any other forms of interaction. Further, the researcher ensured the sanitisation of the participants, self and the interviewing area. Only one expert participant was engaged in each interview session. The researcher took concerns not to compromise the health and safety of participants in any way, by observing the government stipulated lockdown or state of emergency measures. Alternative interview methods such as Skype, video-calling or Zoom were considered for data collection.

### **3.10 Government Permission to Collect Data During Lockdown**

The researcher did not require government authorisation to travel between places and enter into premises; this statutory requirement was revoked before the start of the data collection. The researcher, therefore, did not apply for a special permit. This complied with the government regulations amid the COVID-19 pandemic. However, copies of other permits are available on the Government of Botswana website, [www.gov.bw](http://www.gov.bw). The site also updates on the current situation and the latest regulations to abide by.

### **3.11 Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the research methodology of the study. The population and sampling strategy were clarified. The data collection instrument and data collection methods were detailed. The research validity and reliability concerns were also highlighted. Matters about ethics and the COVID-19 restrictions were taken into consideration for the safety and welfare of the participants. The following chapter will focus on data analysis and interpretation in detail.

## **4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, empirical research data was collected in the order of the research questions presented in the study. The systematic arrangement facilitated the ease with which the data corpus were analysed and interpreted. Data collection was done through semi-structured interviews, either in person where possible or via Zoom, for the convenience of the participants and observation of the COVID-19 protocols. All interviews and reports were conducted in strict confidence. Reference to the participants' remarks and responses is through monikers, such as Participant A, B, K, and so on. This chapter covers the empirical findings that were essential to the research objectives, the main one being the influence of digital marketing strategies on IT organisations in Botswana. The associated questions to the objectives are discussed sequentially, linking them to the research theoretical models such as the SOSTAC® model, the competing theoretical models in Table 1, on digital marketing strategies and the Technology Acceptance Model in Figure 3. Overall, the theories served the research purpose in assessing the influence of digital marketing on IT organisations. Referencing to the literature review is to link empirical findings to the literature and not to introduce new literature arguments.

#### **4.1.1 Participants' Background**

The participants were drawn from various IT organisations, specifically the marketing departments. The selection was based on the presumption that the marketing experts were relevant to the study and would provide the necessary information. The empirical information was drawn from the experts to maintain focus on the requirements of the study. The participating organisations were selected on a non-probability basis and from an earlier observation that they use digital marketing platforms to formulate strategies. A prior search indicated that the IT organisations serve a homogenous market, making them suitable for a focused study. The selection was also based on the perceived common industry problem highlighted in Chapter 1, which formed the essence of the research.

#### **4.1.2 Response Rate**

The initially identified marketing experts from the IT organisations were 18; however, only 15 consented to participate in the study. The researcher managed to interview 12 of the 15, denoting an 80% response rate. At the point of interviewing eight participants, as an example certain theoretical convergences were emerging. However, the researcher proceeded to obtain four more interviews that confirmed convergent themes. The researcher stopped at the twelfth participant, upon the conviction that no new information would emerge. The researcher does not consider the outcome fatally flawed.

#### **4.2 Coding and Theming**

Coding methods suitable for the study to sort, categorise and theme were selected. The purpose of coding is to reduce the data, ensuring the correct representation of the findings from the data that was collected without losing the meaning. Also, this process helps in understanding the phenomena under study and to develop the constructs that established the theme(s). The coding strategies were guided by the research questions for the study. The research questions were predominantly exploratory, comprising ontological and epistemological questions, in an attempt to capture the participants' realities and understanding the phenomena, respectively. Thus, the coding strategies entailed attribute coding, values, In Vivo, narrative, emotion, descriptive and evaluation, leading to the development of themes (Saldana, 2013). Other codes not mentioned herein have been applied; however, the ones listed were the prominent ones to achieve the research objectives. The categories were aligned to the theoretical models mentioned earlier for interpretation and analysis. The various codes from the raw data corpus were reduced to categories that were further attributed to the themes obtained from the interviews. The themes form the basis for interpretation, analysis and the drawing of conclusions and recommendations.

#### **4.3 Findings on the Influence of DM on IT Organisations SOSTAC® Model**

This section discusses the findings on the influence of digital marketing strategies on IT organisations in Botswana. The findings address research Objective 1, to gain insight into the SOSTAC® model as a theoretical planning framework for strategy formulation. The research question required participants to briefly explain the

methods their organisations use to interact with customers. The interview findings provided evidence directed towards the digital platforms which the IT organisations mostly use. The information obtained shows that most of the organisations are on one or more of the following social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. The presence on digital marketing platforms asserts the arguments by Ardley and McIntosh (2019) that absence on digital platforms induces customer despondency and reticence. Facebook dominates the platforms – nine of the 12 participants use this platform. Participant H denounces Facebook, asserting that when an organisation has “*specific clients then e-mailing is best*”, complemented by calling in-person. Only three participants are on Twitter, proving the platform’s unpopularity. Similarly, Instagram and LinkedIn platforms were only validated as secondary platforms by four and two other participants, respectively. Knowledge platforms such as LinkedIn have not gained significant momentum as a digital platform. The researcher found that the latter platforms are not commonly used, contrary to the statistics by Paswan (2018) that show a huge user base for Instagram. Also, peculiar to the findings is that none of the participants subscribe to YouTube or maintain a website, suggesting the lack of content or ability to make relevant content.

### **Other Media**

The researcher probed the use of other media. The findings indicate that WhatsApp is gaining slight momentum as a digital platform. Participants A, G and F interact using this method, including the other prominent platforms. The participants confirmed that the major drawback of WhatsApp is that the organisation must have the correct customer mobile numbers and their consent to receive marketing content. In the absence of one or both, the marketer cannot use this platform. The traditional marketing methods such as print, TV advertising, static billboards and e-mailing and calling in person were also mentioned as marketing platforms. This resonates with Nhedzi (2018), who argues that the traditional methods of marketing are indispensable. The overall theme that emerged from the above findings was that 83% of the organisations is on at least one form of social media or the other. The other 16% prefer a blended presence on both social media and knowledge media such as LinkedIn. Only 1% of the participants fully subscribes to the traditional marketing methods, although e-mailing is also incorporated as a strategic platform.

This latter outcome affirms the migration to digital technologies by organisations as obtained in the literature review. However, the results also confirm that the traditional methods of marketing are not dispensed of. Print, static billboards and sales representatives still find relevance among the competing platforms.

#### **4.3.1 Description of Customer Information Obtained From Digital Marketing**

The second question aimed at addressing research Objective 1 required participants to describe the customer information their respective organisations gain from digital marketing. The measurability of the customer information the participants obtain seemed difficult to extract. Kovala (2017) submits that extracting marketing analytics is cumbersome for marketers. The major themes presented pointed towards examining trends, customer interests, products and services that create demand. Participant J elaborated that observing tastes and preferences gives insight into customer demographics. The demographics are relevant for tailoring customer communication models. The observations from Participant D asserted that statistical and demographic data acquired from customer interaction helps with market segmentation. The researcher notes that the overall theme from this question leads to organisations using information for market segmentation and gaining sales leads. The interview participants believed that comments and likes on Facebook or otherwise give them enough data to tailor the digital information suitable for the specific markets. A marketing campaign can be developed from the information obtained from customer feedback if the marketers fully use the models suggested in this research. The researcher decries the lack of systematic use of any information obtained by the participants. This finding contrasts with Ryan (2014), who maintains that technology and the evolution of marketing are inextricably intertwined.

#### **4.3.2 Digital Marketing for Customer Retention**

The third research question asked the participants in what way digital marketing helps the organisation with customer retention. Participants converge in their responses toward customer interaction as a means of retention. Participant B summed it up with this statement, “... *obtaining more information about services provided and awareness, although it is no guarantee for customer loyalty*”. Similarly, Participant K added that digital marketing requires human interaction; failure in this

aspect results in loss of business. The latter comment supports the theoretical disposition discussed in Table 1, of the competing theoretical models that no digital marketing strategy unilaterally addresses all the aspects of digital marketing strategies. Some aspects are aided by human interaction and applied to specific situations. An examination of all the responses indicates that the organisations merge on the desire for customer retention while competing for markets, although there are no clear-cut customer relationship management programmes. Proficient use of marketing metrics allows marketers to measure a wide array of different customer attributes and be able to engage with them on a more intimate basis. Suggested models such as Hofacker's five stages of information processing and the Ten Cs of Marketing can aid the participants to better their organisations' marketing campaigns and the retention of customers. The researcher found that the retention effort was left to fortuitous breaks among the participating organisations. There was no evidence of concerted efforts to put forward strategic marketing campaigns.

#### **4.3.3 Accessibility of Digital Platforms**

The fourth question sought to assess the accessibility of digital platforms for customers. In response to this question, 75% of the participants claimed that their platforms are conveniently available 24/7, while Participants G, H and J separately submitted that no one attends to the platforms consistently. There were suggestions of inconsistencies regarding customer convenience, despite the admission to 24-hour availability. The presenting evidence showed that the digital platforms were examined mostly during business hours, unless the marketer voluntarily checked for business on a mobile device or personal computer. The common theme, though, was that customers could post requests, feedback or any other issues at any time for the attention of marketers. The marketers' responsiveness to the customers indicated how readily accessible an organisation is for their customers. Turnaround time becomes the measure of convenience rather than the availability of the platforms. This can be considered a strategic differentiating factor among the competing IT organisations. We now live in an era where conventional business hours are becoming blurred, coupled with ever-demanding customers. Customer communications and responsiveness has become a key performance area for organisations. Ryan (2014) emphasises that customer convenience must be a key objective to maximise customer experience. The researcher did not find compelling

evidence pointing towards maximising customer convenience. The customer-turnaround strategies were tepid and without impetus.

#### **4.3.4 The Highlight of Overall Information from Digital Marketing**

In seeking in-depth answers into digital marketing platforms, a further question was posed for the participants to highlight the overall information their organisations gain from digital marketing platforms. The evidence gathered pointed towards marketing intelligence, product development and sales leads. These metrics seem to be obtained indirectly by monitoring what competitors were doing, as a result of shared feedback from customers. All participants seemed to concur that overall digital platforms offer an opportunity for marketing intelligence and obtaining customer feedback. This is considered valuable for tailoring the marketing communications mix. Participant L concisely stated that “... *the general business trends and how our products and services are doing on the market ...*” compelled the organisation to use this vital information for strategy formulation, evaluation of the market position and the overall determination of the marketing mix. The SOSTAC® planning model presents an opportunity for the participants to do a SWOT analysis on their organisations using this information. The researcher alluded to the cliché that “information is power”. IT organisations can, therefore, take advantage of the marketing intelligence to outcompete rivals. Chaffey and Chadwick (2019) suggest the RACE digital planning framework which helps marketers systematically plan their activities in a more structured way. This view is supported by De-Leon (2019), who points out that strategy formulation is no longer a straightforward routine. The application of models has become mandatory.

#### **4.3.5 The Extent to Which Digital Marketing Increases Networking**

The last question to address Objective 1 surveyed to which extent the digital marketing platforms increase the organisations’ networking. The responses were unanimous. The participants’ answers concurred that indeed the digital platforms do increase networking, through interaction and collaboration. Although Participant D cautioned that it is a “*double-edged sword*”. Asked to explain further, the participant expounded that, “*organisations may have lots of following, but it is not easy to translate that to networking. Being liked, say on Facebook, does not give us leverage for networking, although there is potential to grow through digital*

*marketing*". These comments tie in with the critics of digital marketing such as Doran et al. (2015) and Sussan and Acs (2017), who caution about the antecedents of huge followings on digital platforms without in-depth introspection into the meanings of the numbers. The participants alluded to the fact that in the digital era, networking is crucial. Participant F extended that digital platforms enable the organisation to get connected with other service providers and may also help gain leverage through viral marketing. The researcher observed that a key characteristic of digital networks is that there is growing migration in one way or the other, though not at the same pace, resultantly organisations in the same or related industry are likely to be connected. The findings are aligned with De-Leon (2019), who advocates for industry collaborations, yet delineating business controls. Similar industries compete yet need each other for growth. Hough et al. (2011) also substantiates these arguments, pointing out that growing the business and out-competing rivals is the management's key priority in business in the current competitive environment.

#### **4.3.6 The SOSTAC® Model Planning Framework**

Although it was not the main focus of this study, the researcher noted that the responses from the participants could be collated and applied to the SOSTAC® theoretical model in a variety of ways. The obtained data metrics can be extrapolated professionally for the benefit of organisations in conducting a situational analysis of the various digital platforms. The situation analysis is likely to return key information on organisational SWOT analysis, customer analysis, competitor analysis, competencies and market trends. This information is pertinent in selecting and building strategic advantages. The observations obtained from the customer information, demographics and statistical data are capable of being deduced for setting objectives. Through iterative methods, the constant feedback from the digital platforms can be manipulated for setting customer satisfaction objectives and defining with better accuracy how the organisational vision can be achieved. Tactical plans and actions are better informed by the data obtained from the digital platforms, customer interaction and the general feedback that finds its way to the marketers. Theoretical models provide the blueprint for organisations to follow for strategy implementation. The responses attained from the participants were devoid of robust or coherent manipulation of these data. There was no evidence of how data were captured for conversion into existing theoretical models

suggested herein. None of the participants narrated a clear digital data capturing method for further assessment. Digital information allows marketers to earn vast knowledge about their customer markets and competitors. The researcher maintains that it remains plausible that digital marketing platforms influence organisations despite the shortcomings of the findings.

#### **4.4 Findings on the Marketers' Analytical Skills**

The essence of interrogating the analytical skills of marketers was to address the second objective. The outcome is envisaged to assert whether or not the marketing decisions are considered from an informed point of view. The participants were interviewed on what they analyse when they obtain data from the digital platforms. The questions allowed the participants to add their thoughts to the extent to which digital marketing influences the organisations' decision-making. Further information was sought on how the marketers think their organisation could use the data for strategy formulation. The extent to which the marketers are trained to meaningfully manipulate the data was probed. Digital marketing is granular; the many pieces must, therefore, be integrated to make coherent sense of the data that is presenting. The matter of digital analytics is not a uniform concept as revealed by the interview answers. The concept is highly dependent on how the obtained data are manipulated into meaningful ideas. The aversion to numbers among the marketing experts corroborates Herman and Bubary (2013), who postulates that marketers believe that figures are the preserve of IT experts or statisticians only; and Chaffey and Chadwick (2016), who submit that marketers must be equipped and skilled to make use of marketing analytics. From these findings, the researcher partially concluded that marketing experts' skills to convert data into usable concepts also play an important role in influencing digital marketing strategies. Therefore, the following discussions detail the findings on the marketing analytics.

##### **4.4.1 Analyses From the Data**

Upon being asked what the participants analyse when they observe the data on their organisations platforms, the major theme exposed was market segmentation. Market segmentation information based on customer preferences, interests and tastes constituted 66.6% of the responses. Participants B, D, F and G were more elaborate, saying they include statistical data analyses (there was no evidence to

this effect) and the critical observation of content on the digital platforms. An analysis of the marketing metrics aligned with the need for comprehensive observation of the data corpus for marketing audit models discussed in Table 1. The participants, however, were not clear on the marketing metrics they were mainly interested in. Through inference, the researcher deduced that participants aggregated likes and dislikes from the Facebook platform, converting positive feedback into sales leads. Participants E, F and K admitted to using the observed data for customer relationship management. This return represents a poorly 25% of the marketers interviewed. Participant L was the only respondent who claimed to use the information for customer retention purposes.

The RACE model highlighted in the literature review, for example, is designed to help marketers' function in a more structured way. Obtainable information can be used to reach, take appropriate action and convert the same for specific needs, including engagement and customer retention. Other models by Hanlon (2016, 2017, 2020) are available for appropriation by marketers towards the organisations' objectives. Interview participants suggested that they observe and analyse customer interests, the systematic application of findings to support the IT organisations in achieving set strategic goals. Continuous measurement of performance is beneficial both tactically and strategically. Effective controls and tactical action plans are beneficial for IT organisations.

#### **4.4.2 The Extent to Which Digital Marketing Influences Decisions**

Sound marketing decisions are based on the available information and how this is used. The marketing communication audit in Table 1 is valuable for effective customer communication. Participants were asked to explain the extent to which digital marketing data influences marketing decisions. The ratings were varied, with Participant G guestimating that probably 30% of the organisation's decisions are influenced by digital data. What remains of the other 70% is contentious. While this singular sentiment may not be generalised, the overall theme that emerged from this question is that the marketers simply focus on serving niche markets. Of the respondents, 75% admitted to using the information for market segmentation, adding that they serve niche markets. The result ties in with the arguments presented earlier that IT organisations serve a niche and homogenous market.

Participant D called the information the “*dipstick test for certain products and services*”. The Hanlon (2016, 2017, 2020) theories, such as the Ten Cs, are advantageous when applied to observable data. The model is considered robust in decision-making due to its holistic nature. The model emphasises customer, corporate culture, convenience, communications, competition, consistency, creative content, customisation coordination and control. The strength of marketing decisions in these areas is of immense importance. Dependence on sheer serendipity does not make comprehensive business sense. Ryan (2014) warns against the false hope that customers will fortuitously stumble on an organisation’s digital platform. Fuertes et al. (2020) advises that in a highly competitive environment, strategic decisions should be rational and guided by information that creates value. The following discussion also aids the researcher’s findings on the importance of data for strategy formulation.

#### **4.4.3 Making Use of Data for Strategy Formulation**

Effective marketing strategies are a vector sum of the use of obtained data for strategic decisions. The researcher investigated how best the organisations make use of the obtained data for strategy formulation. In line with the preceding question, participants tended to concur with the concept of serving the market niche and gaining marketing intelligence. The researcher observed that no ‘one size fits all’ approach exists when it comes to strategy formulation. There was a notion from the interview participants that the accumulation of digital data constitutes informed praxis. Evidence relating to market segmentation, sales leads and trends had become quotidian, among participants. Of the participants interviewed, 83% aligned their responses towards the above themes, except for Participant A and Participant I, who claimed that they analyse what works, with the latter admitting that they were not sure. The granularity of digital data requires in-depth analysis to be applied to the data corpus, to extract meaningful results. The SOSTAC® model and other competing theoretical models are suggested appropriate models for strategy formulation. The responses did not give conclusive evidence of what guides strategic decision-making. The evidence extracted from the digital platforms by the participants seemed fragmented for the researcher to attribute the data towards any substantive strategy formulation. The literature arguments by Chaffey and Chadwick (2016) and Kovala (2017) conclude that the digital analytical skills possessed by

marketers augment the transformation of information into digital marketing strategies. The researcher found that the participants lacked these analytical skills. Therefore, the potential of the obtained data is not fully used. The forthcoming discussions clarify the extent to which the lack of skills by the participants has a bearing on the digital marketing decisions.

#### **4.4.4 The Extent of Training in Using Digital Marketing Systems**

The extent of training in using digital marketing systems set the tone for Objective 3, while at the same time exposing the level of the analytical abilities the participants have in data manipulation. Most of the participants (75%) admitted to being self-taught or having prior learning, gained over the years through the work environment. The marketers are exposed to the dictates of technology, suggesting that they are limited to the familiar. Only Participant C, K and L confirmed having some form of formal training in digital marketing systems. The Technology Acceptance Model, Figure 3, discusses the potential constraints that are associated with limited knowledge of the prevailing technologies in any area. The overall indications are that the participants have limited analytical abilities regarding marketing metrics. The findings expose the concept discussed in the literature review that marketing metrics are a preserve of statisticians and/or IT personnel. The impact of this limitation is not the main subject of this research, but it is reasonable to infer that the decision-making processes are affected by the quality of the data-processing. The above findings mean that the suggestions by Brown (2011) and Hough et al. (2011) to skill and equip personnel are valid, further supported by Noe et al. (2006) advocating that skills diffuse into concentration strategies for market niches. The following findings expose how technology has an impact on the decision information.

#### **4.5 Findings on the Technology Acceptance Model**

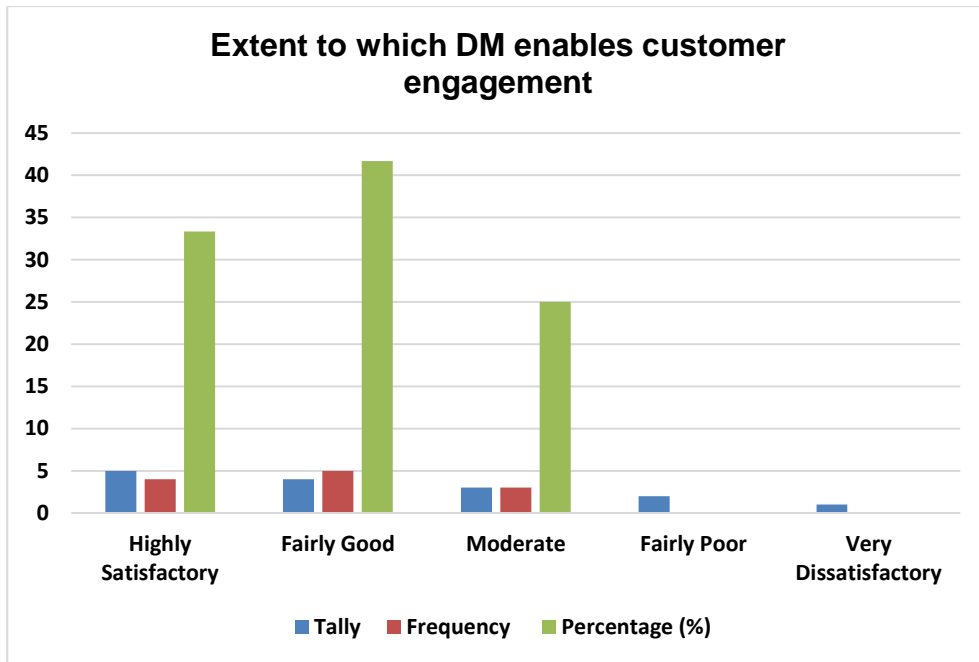
The Technology Acceptance Model (1996) exposes the antecedents of perceived ease of use, development and test of a system. This model highlights the general parameters of system characteristics, training and ease of use, user involvement in the design and implementation of a system. The researcher records that the model is considered parsimonious yet rigorous for the exploration of why organisations use technology in the first place. The third objective of this study seeks to expose the participants' abilities and skills in the use of technology regarding digital marketing.

It has been established that the marketing experts' analytical abilities have a bearing on the quality of the decisions within the organisation. The decisions are directly inferable towards the organisations' strategic intent.

The participants were questioned on four parameters and their responses were recorded on a Likert scale with a score of 1 indicating very dissatisfactory and a score of 5 being highly satisfactory. The scores in between were assessed relative to the proximity towards the extreme cases. A score of 3 was considered moderate. Several participants mentioned that they have used digital information for various purposes. Regardless of how digital data are used, the result influences digital marketing strategies. Previous evidence emanating from the participants' responses has been established that digital analytics presents new possibilities. Paradoxically, as demonstrated by the interview responses, there are no obvious methods in which data are comprehensively converted to make meaningful strategic sense. The following tables and figures summarise the responses obtained from the participants upon being asked about the various aspects of technology application. Therefore, Objective 3 of the research is discussed and the findings are equated with the other research objectives.

**Table 2: Extent to which DM enables customer engagement**

|                             | <i>Tally</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage (%)</i> |
|-----------------------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Highly Satisfactory</i>  | 5            | 4                | 33.33                 |
| <i>Fairly Good</i>          | 4            | 5                | 41.67                 |
| <i>Moderate</i>             | 3            | 3                | 25                    |
| <i>Fairly Poor</i>          | 2            | –                | –                     |
| <i>Very Dissatisfactory</i> | 1            | –                | –                     |

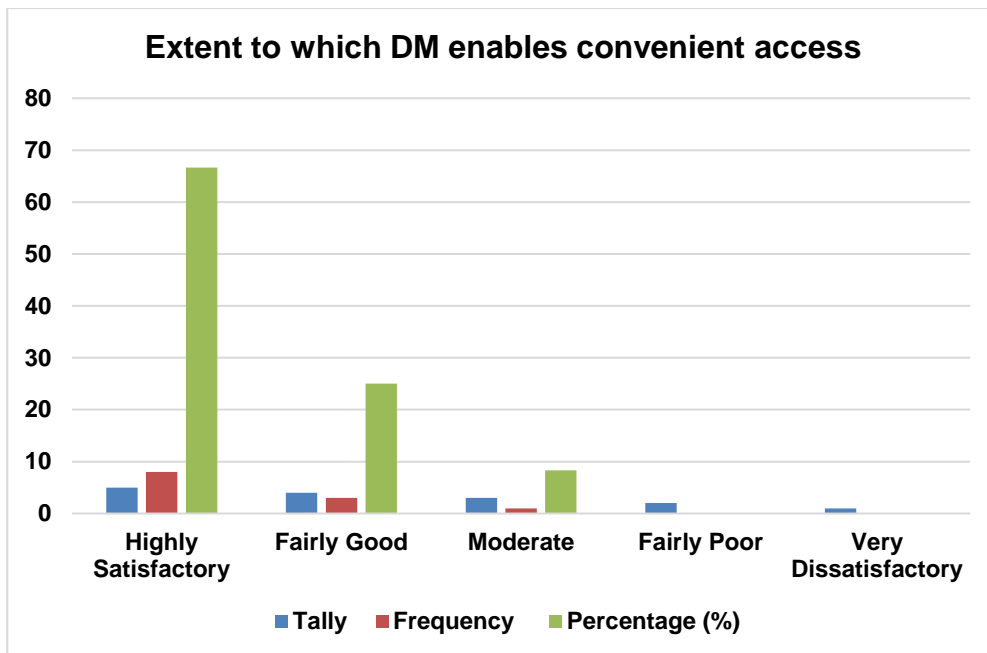


**Figure 4.1: Extent to which DM enables customer engagement**

The aspect of how digital marketing enables customer engagement is a measure that can be equated to the customer information obtained from digital marketing data, the convenience measure and accessibility observation discussed earlier. The portion of participants who rated this aspect as highly satisfactory were 33.33%, while 41.67% considered customer engagement as fairly good. The other 25% rated the aspect as moderate. None of the participants thought otherwise. The researcher maintains that the degree to which this measure is valid is dependent on how the data are manipulated. Limitations will have associated effects on digital strategy.

**Table 3: Extent to which DM enables convenient access for your customers**

|                             | <i>Tally</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage (%)</i> |
|-----------------------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Highly Satisfactory</i>  | 5            | 8                | 66.67                 |
| <i>Fairly Good</i>          | 4            | 3                | 25                    |
| <i>Moderate</i>             | 3            | 1                | 8.33                  |
| <i>Fairly Poor</i>          | 2            | –                | –                     |
| <i>Very Dissatisfactory</i> | 1            | –                | –                     |

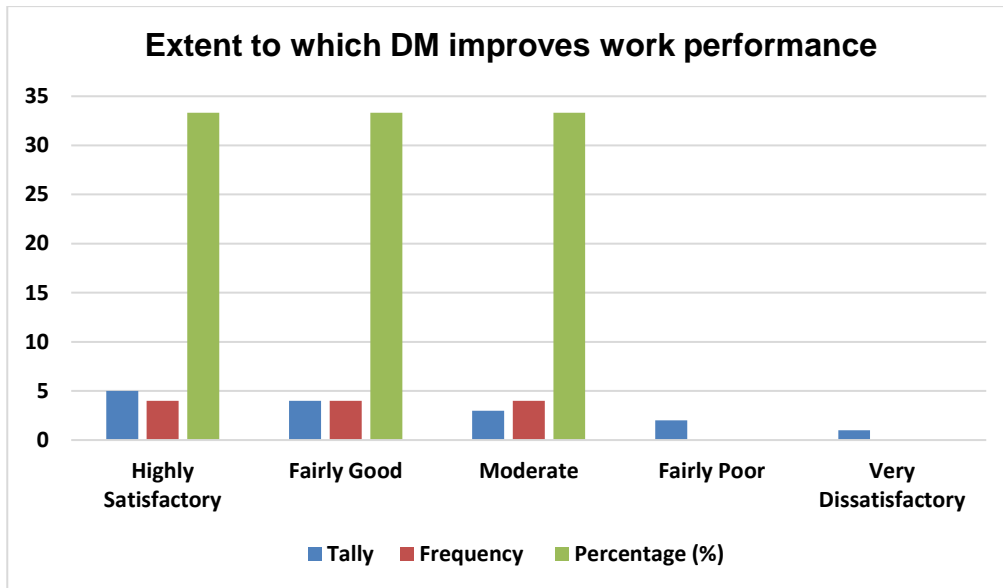


**Figure 4.2: Extent to which DM enables convenient access**

The responses were unanimous at 66.67% to this measure. The researcher invariably argues that the earlier responses established from the participants that the digital platforms are available 24/7 are consistent with these results. This is despite the admission by participants that they mostly revert to customer queries within business hours. Consistently, with this assertion, 25% of the marketers were convinced that the digital platforms' availability is fairly good. These measures afford the researcher some form of numerical analysis of what the participants meant when they affirmed the availability of platforms. Verbal answers are abstract and do not give away much meaning to certain inquiries. This measure gives the research some numerical indication that can be interpolated into meaningful results.

**Table 4: Extent to which DM improves work performance**

|                             | <i>Tally</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage (%)</i> |
|-----------------------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Highly Satisfactory</i>  | 5            | 4                | 33.33                 |
| <i>Fairly Good</i>          | 4            | 4                | 33.33                 |
| <i>Moderate</i>             | 3            | 4                | 33.33                 |
| <i>Fairly Poor</i>          | 2            | –                | –                     |
| <i>Very Dissatisfactory</i> | 1            | –                | –                     |

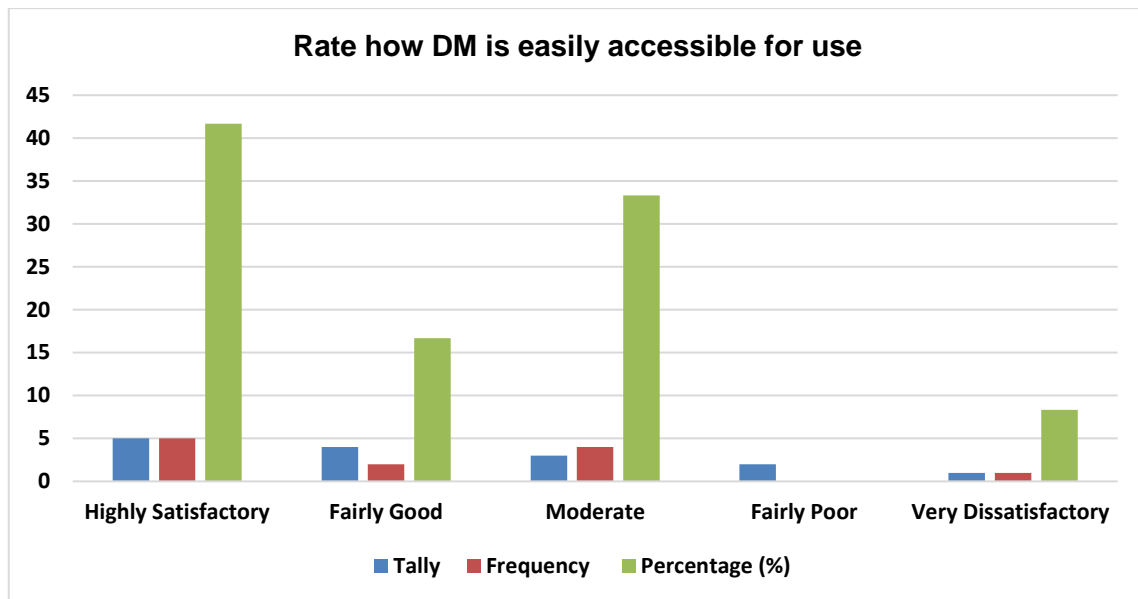


**Figure 4.3: Extent to which DM improves work performance**

The verbal responses to this question relating to work performance were also abstract in nature. The researcher devised a way of quantifying the responses. The participants returned a distributed quotient, to this question. The graphs indicate an even distribution of 33.33% across the scale ratings. None negatively rated their work performance, which is expected. The researcher submits that this result could be a fair representation of the situation, considering that 75% of the marketers admitted to no formal training in digital marketing systems. Therefore, this distribution is considered plausible, taking into account that data manipulation is an arduous and demanding process.

**Table 5: Perspective on how DM is easily accessible for use**

|                             | <i>Tally</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage (%)</i> |
|-----------------------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Highly Satisfactory</i>  | 5            | 5                | 41.67                 |
| <i>Fairly Good</i>          | 4            | 2                | 16.67                 |
| <i>Moderate</i>             | 3            | 4                | 33.33                 |
| <i>Fairly Poor</i>          | 2            | –                | –                     |
| <i>Very Dissatisfactory</i> | 1            | 1                | 8.33                  |



**Figure 4.4: Perspective on how DM is easily accessible for use**

To further test how technology influences digital marketing, the participants' answers showed significant discrepancies. The participants were asked to rate their perspective on how easily accessible digital marketing is for use. The presentations showed that 8.33% considered accessibility as highly dissatisfactory, 33.33% rated this parameter moderately, 16.67% rated it as fairly good, while 41.67% regarded accessibility as highly satisfactory. This distribution was consistent with the varying levels of the perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness that drives behavioural intention and the actual use as narrated in Figure 3. The researcher considered the importance of participants' involvement with the design and implementation of any system. The interview participants admitted to being self-taught or having informal learning regarding digital systems. These submissions validated the researcher's assertions that the marketing experts are limited to the familiar when using digital platforms. Thus, the levels of using marketing metrics are also curtailed, affecting the strategy-making process.

#### **4.6 Auxiliary Information for the Study**

The final research question did not necessarily address a particular objective or was meant to introduce new theoretical expositions, but to obtain any other information that may have been missed from the interviews. The participants were given a chance to express any other comments regarding the use of digital marketing within their organisations. Half of the participants had nothing else to add, while the other

50% added various comments; a few are summarised herein. Participant D added that, *“Digital marketing is not the entire marketing. Just because we are on digital platforms does not translate to returns, we still have to embark on traditional marketing”*; while Participant G pointed to the generality that, *“... people have access to information, although admittedly there are some limitations”*. The same sentiments were shared by Participant B, who specified that their customers found Facebook to be convenient and easily accessible. Participant A was adamant that there is no way of doing business without digital platforms. Participant K cautioned on the drawbacks of digital marketing, insisting that human interaction remains vital. The full extent to which digital marketing is used is vital for business, as observed by Participant J.

#### **4.7 Peculiar Findings from the Research**

The major findings were in line with the initial perceptions of the researcher. However, there were a few peculiar outcomes that suggested areas for further research.

- Very few of the participating organisations subscribe to the knowledge platforms such as LinkedIn, while none subscribe to shared media such as YouTube. There were no convictions by the marketers to migrate to these platforms. The common preference is for the IT organisations to be on the owned media platforms with the hope to gain leverage from earned media or viral social media. The researcher admits that this may work for the good; however, the opposite is also true. Damaging information goes viral even faster. The tightness of expenditure suggests the cost-cutting measures, as indicated in the introduction to this research, confirming the decline in general advertising and marketing expenditures.
- The researcher did not find evidence of buy-in when it comes to digital transformation. While this seems commonplace, indirect implications originate from the lack of skills and the participants being fully equipped for the dictates of the digital era. The participants confessed to being self-taught when it comes to digital marketing skills. This denotes a *“sink or swim”* type of scenario for organisations. Therefore, no clear-cut strategic plans could be derived from the participating organisations. This is unlike corporate

governance guidelines, leaving the thought of whether the consequences of robust strategy formulation are taken seriously or not.

- Two of the participants seemed to outrightly dismiss the gains from digital marketing, preferring traditional marketing methods. Digital platforms were viewed as complementary to the traditional methods of marketing. Statements such as that digital marketing is a “*double-edged sword*” and “*just because we are on digital platforms does not translate to returns, we still have to embark on traditional marketing*” summed up the sentiments on digital marketing strategy by organisations.

#### **4.8 Conclusion on Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Most interview participants saw the digital platforms as a means of observing and measuring what the organisations’ customers prefer in terms of products and services. The interview data substantiates that digital marketing platforms can be used both tactically and strategically. This is evidenced by the fact that 83% of the participants acknowledged their organisations being on social media platforms, with a few on knowledge platforms and a growing trend with e-mail marketing. The evident theme is that digital platforms are more of “social listening” platforms for IT organisations. This is not wrong per se, except that the IT organisations can extract more from the digital marketing information for strategy formulation. The influence of digital marketing strategies on IT organisations is valuable when the granular parameters evident with this kind of data are integrated systematically. The marketing experts’ responses suggest the former are poorly equipped for digital data manipulation and have curtailed skills in data manipulation. There is an indication of an over-reliance on reactive action instead of proactive planning.

An understanding of the suggested theoretical models for strategy formulation, given raw data, is beneficial for IT organisations. No indications point towards the systematic development of digital marketing strategies. The participants’ identities have been concealed and reference is only made to their responses through pseudonyms. The names of the participating organisations have been retained; however, there is no evidence linking the respondents to the IT organisation.

The following chapter discusses the conclusions and recommendations for IT organisations, guided by the suggested theoretical frameworks and the empirical findings. The gaps in the influence of digital marketing strategies on IT organisations are exposed. Suggestions for performance improvement and possibilities are made. The contributions from the field study to the body of knowledge are highlighted, together with indications of areas for further study.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The findings of the study contribute to the extant literature on the influence of digital marketing strategies on IT organisations. The study is pioneer research in Botswana. The research exposed the influence of digital marketing platforms on strategic decisions for IT organisations; however, the results are inferable to other industry sectors. The empirical findings were benchmarked with rigorous theoretical models such as the SOSTAC® model, as a means to assess the degree to which the IT organisations implement the digital information.

The research also investigated the implications of the marketing analytical skills of the participants. The analytical skills have considerable influence on the decisions taken. The Technology Acceptance Model aids in discussing the implications of technology on decisions, among other parameters. Several competing theoretical models were highlighted in an attempt to interpret the responses of the participants to the models. The influence of technology on digital marketing strategy has been analysed in seeking explanations for the perceived usefulness, user intention and the actual use of technology in strategic decision-making.

The following discussion concludes the study and summarises the implications of how organisations can manipulate digital marketing strategies for competitive advantage. The limitations of this study are explained. Areas for further research are highlighted.

### **5.2 Influence of Digital Marketing Strategies on Organisations**

The research findings confirm that digital marketing strategies have an impact on organisational strategies. The migration to digital marketing is confirmed by the research findings, albeit in a slow manner. The most common digital platforms are revealed, namely Facebook and Twitter; these are social media platforms, with the WhatsApp and Instagram platforms yet to gain significance. Knowledge platforms and shared media platforms such as LinkedIn and YouTube, respectively, are yet to make a significant impact. The researcher found no substantive evidence that corresponds to the extensive use of these platforms for strategy formulation.

Traditional marketing methods are seen to be vital complementing platforms by some participants. The findings reveal that billboards (static and electronic), TV and radio advertising still complement digital platforms. Human interaction for strategic advantage has also been considered relevant, with some participants acknowledging in-person calling and interaction through digital platforms.

Evidence shows that the organisations cannot ignore the impact of a digital presence. The dictates of migration to digital marketing are not enforced by the industry competition only, but by the customers who are simultaneously using technology. The participants' responses indicate that most of the marketing intelligence is gained from the various digital platforms.

- **Managerial Implications:** The researcher suggests that management ought to take serious consideration when selecting the digital media strategy that optimises the objectives. Peer pressure decision-making may not necessarily prove effective for the individual organisation. This is irrespective of the fact that the organisations serve homogenous markets. Similar media platforms have not been proven to work the same for the individual organisation.
- **New Possibilities:** The researcher observes that there are new possibilities for organisations when captured data are purposefully integrated into the corporate strategy formulations. The empirical findings reveal that the data are mostly capable of marketing intelligence, market segmentation, creating digital content, customer relationship management and retention among other key factors. All these granular pieces of data can be consolidated for the crafting of organisational strategy.
- **Human Skills and Resourcing:** The human resource skills and financial resourcing for digital marketing have been found wanting for the participating organisations. More concerted efforts are recommended to overcome human skills shortcomings. The researcher concedes that the current strategies are limited to what the marketing experts know regarding digital information. The issue of marketing metrics is considered alien, posing possible impediments to the growth of the organisations. The next paragraph details the problem of this limitation.

### **5.3 Impact of Analytical Skills**

The researcher found that there are serious inadequacies when the participants are probed on marketing analytical skills. The execution of digital data is erratic. Most participants admit to a lack of training. This study outcome validates the arguments that the field of marketing metrics is still novel in most organisations. The conceptualisation of digital marketing knowledge is crucial for organisational tactical plans, actions, evaluation-monitoring and controls. The researcher suggests that consistency in data analyses is the bedrock upon which monitoring and evaluation of the strategy take place, among other internal and external parameters to the organisation.

The limitations in analytical skills have exposed how digital marketing strategies can falter the organisation's strategic intent. The potential to explore and pursue new possibilities are curtailed. The researcher notes that the participants concede to observing similar and familiar parameters from the platforms. There is no evidence of comprehensive data exploitation for advantageous positioning. The interview participants are caught in a cul de sac of observing and commenting on the same monotonous parameters. The participants are occupied with observing trends, preferences, Facebook likes and/or dislikes and so on. While these are important, the researcher advocates for data assimilation to models for scientific decision-making. IT organisations can, therefore, possibly expand the markets within and beyond their borders. The researcher posits that scientific modelling with the use of the suggested models provides a solid basis for digital strategy formulation.

### **5.4 Impact of Technology**

The third objective examines the impact of technology on strategic decision-making. The findings indicate that this aspect has considerable influence on digital strategy, read in tandem with the foregoing arguments. The researcher discovered that the major drawback lies with implementation as argued earlier. The effective use of technology in assessing data is hampered by the limited skills. The researcher finds it sensible to argue that the participants cannot even look for what they do not know or comprehend. The interview results show that marketing experts use highly limited technological applications for digital marketing. Overall, the long-term implications are likely to be limitations in strategic performances.

### **The researcher's observations**

The researcher substantiates that technologically enabled performance analysis, attribution modelling, digital consumer research and trend forecasting, for example, are not made possible without comprehensive systems. The IT organisations must invest in this area, realising that the area of IT systems is the forte of the participating organisations. The lack of such investments is peculiar to the study, yet validates the decline in advertising expenditure over the years as highlighted when introducing this study. The study findings suggest that senior management in the participating organisations must re-think the commitment to digital marketing strategies for business growth. Investing in appropriate technologies that go beyond digital platforms and equipping the marketing personnel with the relevant skills can have positive contributions to the IT organisations.

### **5.5 Limitations of the Study**

Qualitative research such as this one are seen as lacking the basis for scientific generalisation. Indeed, drawing generalisations from a single study would be precarious. However, despite this study being pioneer research on IT organisations in Botswana, it illuminates the research on organisations outside the borders including other industries other than those in IT. Therefore, it makes academic prudence to duplicate the research settings of this study to test if further research will yield similar results.

The researcher alludes to the fact that time and financial constraints did not allow the investigations to be re-contextualised using similar frameworks and purposes. It was also practically impossible for the researcher to conduct multiple studies to draw similarities and differences in how the organisations subscribe in their context to the influence of digital marketing strategies.

Further, this study has been confined to the IT organisations in Gaborone, Botswana only, limiting the scope of the responses. The researcher, however, submits that the participants are considered most relevant to the research and, secondly, that the IT organisations are headquartered in Gaborone. The interview participants are, therefore, considered adequate despite these limitations.

## **5.6 Areas for Further Research**

The research exposes areas for possible further research, particularly the application of models in the formulation of digital marketing strategy. The models discussed in this study require an in-depth analysis of the impact they have on organisations.

Secondly, the study exposes the need to explore the effects of marketing metrics and analyses for organisations. The area presents itself as a novel idea in this region. New findings can be beneficial to a wide range of industries other than IT.

Finally, the need to study technology applications in various areas of organisations brings in new impetus for business and a renewed focus on the relevance of technology.

## **5.7 Recommendations and Conclusion**

The researcher recommends more purpose-driven investment into digital marketing platforms that specifically suit the organisation. The researcher has established that digital marketing platforms indeed influence strategy formulation. The mantra by organisations to migrate to digital marketing platforms is ever-increasing, driven by competition as well as customers who are technology savvy. The conceptualisation of digital marketing strategies has become relevant across various industries, with myriad benefits associated with the comprehensive implementation of the platforms. Therefore, the managerial implications associated with the 'regard or otherwise' of digital marketing are enormous. The research findings substantiate the literature arguments posited by the proponents and critics alike of digital marketing strategies. Digital marketing is seen to extend organisational flexibility and establish new possibilities. The preference for owned media, which is more affordable than paid media, suggests the reasons for the decline in digital marketing expenditures highlighted in the introduction.

Further, the research findings also expose the need to apply a more committed use of the available theoretical models as templates for analytics, monitoring and evaluation of strategies. The data corpus provides much raw information that overwhelms the marketing experts. Therefore, the researcher recommends that the

marketing experts acquiesce themselves with the models and the marketing analytics for organisational performance improvement. The appropriation of business models such as those highlighted in the literature review guide organisations in making scientifically informed decisions. Referencing is made easy when structured methods of doing business are applied.

The researcher concludes that the purpose of this study has been achieved. The performance gaps of digital platforms have been exposed. The influence of digital platforms on marketing strategies has been established to be multi-faceted. The researcher also concludes that the analytical skills and the Technology Acceptance Model influence digital marketing strategies positively if relevant applications are in place. In line with the literature arguments, the outcomes also reveal that competing theoretical digital marketing strategies cannot singularly address all the digital marketing strategies. There is a need for comprehensive auditing of the digital marketing models, to select a suitable marketing campaign. These recommendations and conclusions notwithstanding, the limitations of the research are deemed to be beneficial for the IT organisations. Further areas of possible future studies have been suggested.

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## **APPENDIX A: LETTER OF PERMISSION**

### **REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

Dear [ Organisations' Name]

*I am Siphelumusa Kuwali; I am doing research and would like to request permission to conduct my research at [institution/organisation's/company's name].*

#### **DATE**

*11 July 2020*

#### **TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT**

*The Influence of Digital Marketing Strategies on IT Organisations in Botswana.*

#### **PRINCIPLE INVESTIGATOR/RESEARCHER(S) NAME(S) AND CONTACT NUMBER(S):**

| <i>Name of student/researcher</i> | <i>Student number</i> | <i>Contact number</i> |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Siphelumusa Kuwali</b>         | <b>2019281290</b>     | <b>+267 71397194</b>  |

#### **FACULTY AND DEPARTMENT:**

|                           |                                         |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| <i>Name of Faculty</i>    | <i>Economic and Management Sciences</i> |
| <i>Name of Department</i> | <i>Business School</i>                  |

#### **STUDY LEADER(S) NAME AND CONTACT NUMBER:**

|                             |                           |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>Name of Study Leader</i> | <i>Mr. Mark J. Peters</i> |
| <i>Contact number</i>       | <i>+27 82 311 9118</i>    |

#### **WHAT IS THE AIM / PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?**

*The primary objective of the study is to determine the influence of digital marketing strategies on IT organisations in Botswana. The aim is to establish how marketing experts use digital data in strategy formulation and how they use data analytics in decision-making, using the available technologies.*

## **WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?**

*My name is Siphelumusa Kuwali. I work for CLS Systems (Pty) Ltd Botswana. I am conducting this research as partial fulfilment of the MBA project with the University of the Free State. The findings will benefit organisations with digital marketing strategy formulation and will also add to the body of knowledge in the marketing discipline and other areas.*

## **HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICAL APPROVAL?**

*This study has received approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the UFS. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher.*

**Approval number:** UFS-HSD2020/0903/2107

## **WHY IS YOUR INSTITUTION/ORGANISATION/COMPANY INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT?**

*You have been selected to participate in this study because your organisation is in the IT sector, and implements a digital marketing strategy. The researcher requires your expertise in digital marketing for the completion of this study. I have gone through the Botswana telephone directory to select the relevant organisations to this research and yours meets the criteria. The selection has been based on all the active IT organisations in Botswana registered with the Botswana Telecommunications and Regulatory Authority (BOCRA). Your organisation is among the 18 participants who meet the above criteria and are active on the market. Your contact details have been obtained in the telephone directory and/or website.*

## **WHAT IS THE NATURE OF PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?**

*As the marketing expert, you will be required to participate in a semi-structured interview, responding to the questions regarding the digital marketing strategy and other related questions. The study involves semi-structured interviews, a copy of which is attached to this application. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes at the participant's convenient time and place. The participants will be adults of legal age of consent. No children will participate in this study.*

## **WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

*The study is a pioneer research on digital marketing strategies on IT organisations in Botswana. The findings will assist the wider industry in implementing digital marketing strategies. Furthermore, the findings are envisaged to improve data analytics by marketing experts and for better decision-making processes. Marketing experts who take part in this study will demystify the notion that strategy formulation is left for senior management only and data analytics are the preserve of IT experts. Participation will edify the experts' work performance and better the strategic decision-making process, adding to the body of knowledge within the marketing discipline. All the information given by the participants will be kept confidential, but information about the participant will be given to the study sponsor, without prejudice to the former.*

## **WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

*To complete this study, I request that you participate in an interview with me, which will take approximately 30 minutes. Your verbal input will be required, that I request to record in writing. The study may inconvenience your workflow for about 30 minutes and will also require that COVID-19 precautions are adhered to. The researcher will ensure that the time for the interview is minimal and the interview areas are sanitised. The researcher and participant will wear protective masks and social distancing will be observed. The researcher will comply with the participating organisation's COVID-19 regulations such as temperature readings, personal protective equipment and sanitisation of all research equipment. Contact tracing details for COVID-19 testing purposes may be a factor that may affect the participant should the need arise. The foreseeable risks that may come from others identifying you as the participant taking part in the research are envy and curiosity. Therefore, the researcher proposes that the interview be confined to the participant in the most discreet manner. All the responses will be kept confidential. The researcher pledges legal compensation to the participant, as far as any proven damages (physical or emotional) may occur to the participant as a result of this study. However, every precaution will be taken to ensure the well-being of the participant. The researcher is insured for third party damages, subject to the insurer and legal assessments. In the event of a dispute as a result of the study, the laws of Botswana shall prevail in resolving the matter.*

## **WILL THE INFORMATION BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?**

*The data collected will be kept confidential and anonymous and no identification questions will be asked. Your name will not be recorded anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give. Instead, recordings will be labelled as Participant A, B, C and so on, these fictitious code alphabet letters or pseudonyms will be referred to in this way in the data, in any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings. The researcher will have access to the data for transcribing and coding with strict confidentiality. The data will be kept on a password-protected laptop, accessible only to the researcher. The written transcripts will be stored in a lockable cabinet, at a premise only accessible by the researcher. Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the transcriber, external coder and members of the Research Ethics Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you permit for other people to see the records. Your responses may be used anonymously for other purposes; for example, research reports, journal articles, conference presentations, quotations and other academic or non-academic work. No direct reference will be made to you in person or your organisation. Monikers will be used to avoid direct implications for you or your organisation, should the results be used in any publication of the information. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report. Where focus groups are used as a data collection method, it may be difficult to guarantee confidentiality and anonymity. However, this study will not entail the use of focus groups. Participation in this study is purely voluntary, you are free to withdraw your participation at the end of this study should you chose to take part. There are no penalties for withdrawing from this study.*

## **HOW WILL THE INFORMATION BE STORED AND ULTIMATELY DESTROYED?**

*Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet, kept at the researcher's offices in Broadhurst, Gaborone for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password-protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. Manuscripts will be destroyed in a paper shredder and disposed of. The participant will be*

*inconvenienced in terms of loss of working time or lunch breaks being cut short. Also, in-depth explanations, may be required during the interview process. The anticipated possible or reasonably foreseeable risks of harm or side-effects to potential participants other than the afore-mentioned COVID-19 pandemic, are that the participants will risk loss of employment should they divulge sensitive organisational information. The participants may risk the envy and curiosity of co-workers who may identify the person's participation in the research. The researcher will propose to interview the participants discreetly to mitigate possible harmful consequences. The researcher is insured for third party damages subject to legal and the insurer's assessments. However, the researcher indemnifies himself from any damages or losses that may occur as a result of force majeure and/or the participant's lack of confidentiality, divulging, disseminating and/or publishing the contents of the interview by whatever means to non-concerned parties. Should any injury or harm attributable to the study occurs, the researcher will institute a thorough assessment with the aid of the legal representatives and all concerned parties, to determine a fair resolution and/or possible compensation.*

### **WILL THERE BE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?**

*There will be no monetary reward or any form of incentive for taking part in this study. There will be no costs incurred by the participants, other than the minimal deprivation of working time and other minor inconveniences during the interview. In-depth explanations may be sought, which may cause discomfort for the participant. Further possible risks to the participant include the COVID-19 risk, discomfort in speaking behind a face mask, possible quarantine should the need arise. Also, the participant may risk dismissal should they divulge confidential organisational information. However, mitigating factors will be put in place for the COVID-19 precautions and information confidentiality. The researcher will not request for privileged organisational information during the interviews. The participant is at liberty to refuse to answer sensitive questions. The participant risks the envy and curiosity of co-workers identifying them as interviewees. The researcher, therefore, proposes that the interview will take place most discreetly. The researcher is third-party insured, should the participants claim for damages or injury, subject to an assessment to determine the extent of the damage/injury before settling. The*

*researcher indemnifies himself from injuries (physical or emotional) as a result of force majeure or any other circumstance that is not as a direct result of this study.*

## **HOW WILL THE INSTITUTION/ORGANISATION/COMPANY BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE STUDY?**

*If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Mr. Siphelumusa Kuwali on +267 71397194 or the following email address, kuwalimusa@yahoo.com. The findings are accessible for five years. Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact the above-mentioned person on the provided contacts. Should you have concerns about how the research has been conducted, you may contact the supervisor of this study, Mr. Mark J. Peters on +27 82 311 9118 or email mark@markjpeters.co.za. The participants may risk the envy and curiosity of co-workers who may identify the person's participation in the research. The researcher will propose to interview the participants discreetly to mitigate possible harmful consequences. The researcher is insured for third party damages subject to legal and the insurer's assessments. However, the researcher indemnifies himself from any damages or losses that may occur as a result of the participant's lack of confidentiality, divulging, disseminating and/or publishing the contents of the interview by whatever means to non-concerned parties. Should any injury or harm attributable to the study occur, the researcher will institute a thorough assessment with the aid of the legal representatives and all concerned parties, to determine a fair resolution and/or possible compensation. The other risk to both parties may be the COVID-19 pandemic, however, strict adherence to the health and safety precautions will be observed during the interviews. Alternative interviewing techniques such as Zoom or Skype meetings will be considered should the participant(s) not feel comfortable with physical meetings.*

Yours sincerely

*Siphelumusa Kuwali*

## APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE/RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

### Objective 1

Briefly explain which digital methods your organisation uses to interact with customers.

.....  
.....  
.....

Describe the customer information your organisation gains from digital marketing.

.....  
.....  
.....

In what way does digital marketing help your organisation with customer retention?

.....  
.....  
.....

Are your digital platforms conveniently available 24/7?

.....

What overall market information does your organisation gain from digital marketing platforms?

.....  
.....

To what extent do you think digital marketing platforms increase your organisation's networking?

.....  
.....  
.....

**Objective 2**

Explain what you analyse when you observe data on your organisation’s digital platform(s).

.....  
.....  
.....

To what extent do you think digital marketing data influence your organisation’s marketing decisions?

.....  
.....  
.....

How best do you think your organisation can make use of the obtained data for marketing strategies?

.....  
.....  
.....

To what extent are you trained in using digital marketing systems within your organisation?

.....  
.....  
.....

**Objective 3**

Rate the following questions on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very dissatisfactory and 5 highly satisfactory score.

| <b>1 – Very Dissatisfactory and 5 – Highly Satisfactory (Tick)</b>                            | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| To what extent does digital marketing enable customer engagement                              |          |          |          |          |          |
| To what extent do you believe digital marketing enables convenient access for your customers? |          |          |          |          |          |
| To what extent do you believe digital marketing has improved your work performance?           |          |          |          |          |          |
| From your perspective, rate how digital marketing is easily accessible for use?               |          |          |          |          |          |

**Objective 4**

What other comments would you like to add regarding the use of digital marketing in organisations?

.....

.....

.....

***Thank you for your participation and valuable time***

## APPENDIX C: RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

| <b>Name of Organisation</b>                        | <b>Address in Gaborone</b>                                           | <b>Department</b>                               |
|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Omni Africa Botswana (Pty) Ltd</i>              | <i>Plot 85 Unit 5 GICP,<br/>Gaborone</i>                             | <i>Marketing and Sales</i>                      |
| <i>Kudu Communications</i>                         | <i>14468 Kamushongo Road<br/>P.O. Box 1464 G-West</i>                | <i>Technical Sales</i>                          |
| <i>Radio Solutions (Pty) Ltd</i>                   | <i>Unit 1 Commerce Park Plot<br/>168 Gaborone</i>                    | <i>Technical Support</i>                        |
| <i>Apex Holdings (Pty) Ltd</i>                     | <i>Plot 168 Unit 4B GICP<br/>P.O. Box AD47 AAF, Gabs</i>             | <i>Marketing</i>                                |
| <i>Tronica (Pty) Ltd</i>                           | <i>Plot 296403 Block 3<br/>Industrial, Box 403501</i>                | <i>Marketing</i>                                |
| <i>NTR Technologies (Pty) Ltd</i>                  | <i>Plot 20646 Santawane Rd<br/>Block 3 Industrial</i>                | <i>Marketing</i>                                |
| <i>GDS Botswana (Pty) Ltd</i>                      | <i>53 Unit B Moreton Place<br/>CBD Gaborone</i>                      | <i>Technical Sales</i>                          |
| <i>Multi Comms Services</i>                        | <i>P.O. Box 402604 Gaborone<br/>Block 3 Broadhurst Industrial</i>    | <i>Sales &amp; Distribution</i>                 |
| <i>Paratus Telecommunications</i>                  | <i>491 AAH Gaborone</i>                                              | <i>No response</i>                              |
| <i>Radio Active Botswana</i>                       | <i>170 Unit 12 GICP</i>                                              | <i>No response</i>                              |
| <i>Space wave Communications</i>                   | <i>Unit 13 Gaborone West</i>                                         | <i>Declined to participate</i>                  |
| <i>ZS Botswana</i>                                 | <i>10227 Moporoporo Road,<br/>Block 3, Plot 10227<br/>Broadhurst</i> | <i>Technical Sales Support</i>                  |
| <i>RH Engineering (Pty) Ltd</i>                    | <i>Unit 4 Kgale Court, Plot 128<br/>Gaborone Finance Park</i>        | <i>Marketing &amp; Sales</i>                    |
| <i>ICT Dynamix</i>                                 | <i>Tech Park Block 5, Box<br/>201330, Gaborone</i>                   | <i>IT &amp; Marketing</i>                       |
| <i>Makotech Engineering</i>                        | <i>Unit 25 Lakeview Park, Plot<br/>145 GIFP, Gaborone</i>            | <i>IT, Sales &amp; Business<br/>Development</i> |
| <i>Desktop Holdings T/A<br/>Com-Link (Pty) Ltd</i> | <i>Plot 22017 Unit 6 G-West<br/>Industrial, Gaborone</i>             | <i>IT Marketing &amp; Support</i>               |

|                              |                                                                    |                                    |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <i>ConceroTel (Pty) Ltd</i>  | <i>Commerce Park unit 17,<br/>Commerce Park, Gaborone</i>          | IT Marketing &<br>Customer Support |
| <i>CENE- Media (Pty) Ltd</i> | <i>Prime Plaza CBD, Acacia<br/>House, Plot 74358,<br/>Gaborone</i> | Marketing & Technical<br>Sales     |

**Source: The Botswana Telecommunications Business Directory (2019)**

## APPENDIX D: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable). I am aware that the findings of this study will be anonymously processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings.

I agree to the recording of the *insert specific data collection method*. I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Full Name of Participant:

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Full Name(s) of Researcher(s):

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_