

## The Influence of Data Management on Market Access by SMEs in Trans Nzoia County, Kenya

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### Abstract

Accessing a sustainable market should be a priority for SMEs. It helps to expand their business horizons and get new opportunities and clients. New opportunities promote the urge of SMEs to employ all legally possible means to offer their products and services to the identified markets. As SMEs strive to ensure their products and services reach out to people both locally and internationally, the effective use of ICT, especially handling business data, was a major concern to SMEs in Trans Nzoia County, Kenya. This study aimed to establish the influence of data management on market access by SMEs in Trans Nzoia County. A descriptive research design was used in the study. The target population was 37 SMEs whose respondents were 92 ICT officers, 81 compliance officers, and 77 marketing officers. Data collection was done using interview guides and closed-ended questionnaires. To ensure validity and reliability, pilot-testing of questionnaires was done at Kenya Cooperative Creameries in Elgeiyo Marakwet County. Coded data in SPSS was analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics such as mean, percentage, and standard deviation. The qualitative data were analyzed using the thematic technique. Linear regression was used to test the hypothesis of the study. The study established that the decisions made by the SME management did not originate from reliable sources such as business intelligence systems but rather on personal experiences, emotions, and cheap and available options. Through the authorization of their boards, SMEs should employ staff who have adequate skills and experience in managing and analyzing data to provide direction on why certain decisions should be made.

**Keywords:** *Data Management, Market Access, SMEs, Trans Nzoia County, Kenya*

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### 1.0 Introduction

Each SME wishes to offer its products and services to clients in any market at a minimal cost. However, allowing trade without restrictions causes large firms to take advantage of the market by using their advanced technologies to produce, market, and offer very cheap goods (Cant, 2017). Frank (2020) defines market access as the ability of SMEs to get authorization from relevant authorities to provide their goods and services without biasness in both local and international markets. This has forced SMEs to embrace ICT in their operations and marketing activities (Deng et al., 2019). The advancement and shifts occasioned by ICT have not been a smooth transition among various SMEs globally. Getting approval to access various international markets, has also been a nightmare (Deng et al., 2019).

SMEs in America have been experiencing poor information management practices due to the lack of skills required in operating various ICT trading applications and low capital investment in ICT infrastructure such as servers (Ecommerce Foundation [EF], 2017). In Europe, there have been challenges such as high maintenance charges on internet access tools, poor data mining skills and infrastructure, and poor networking among SMEs offering similar products (European Commission [EU], 2020). In Asia, the challenges experienced relate to unsuccessful marketing of online programs, high tariffs charges, and stiff competition from international SMEs that are more advanced, especially technological aspects (Deng et al., 2019).

In Africa, the lack of funds is blamed for the poor ICT infrastructure in South African SMEs (Mkansi, 2021). In West Africa, studies indicate that SMEs in a nation such as Nigeria have been battling various issues like poor research skills whereby SMEs do not investigate various costs associated with new market access (Awa et al., 2017). In North Africa, SMEs in nations such as Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt face various issues like a monopoly by government and wealthy private agencies in various markets such as in the telecommunications market whereby new firms are required to have costly set-up infrastructure (Molinillo & Japutra, 2017). In East African nations such as Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda have SMEs experience low response rates due to costly online marketing initiatives; and increased online theft of clients' information through hacking of social media platforms. In Kenya, increased competition from international SMEs offering similar products and services online, lack of data mining skills, loss of customers, and ICT applications downtime have been major drawbacks to the growth of local SMEs (Gitonga, 2021), hence, serious difficulties in market access. This is probably because of the costly investment needed in ICT infrastructure such as data management equipment.

Data management is the ability of an SME to store, organize, maintain in its original form, and quickly retrieve information when needed (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTD], 2019). Data management enables an SME to ensure that information is not lost, forgotten, or destroyed in its operations. Managing data is a continuous activity that is ever-changing. In the current era, SMEs have significantly advanced their data management skills through the incorporation of ICT and hence, abandoning the traditional ways of managing data (Yuldinawatia et al., 2018).

### **1.1 Research Problem**

Accessing a sustainable market is a priority for SMEs to expand their business horizons to new opportunities, promoting SMEs' urge to employ all legally possible means to offer their products and services (ITC, 2019). One of the ways is the utilization of ICT towards providing solutions to the new business demands in the markets (Eze et al., 2020). The idea of conducting online research on business opportunities is expected to be an entry ticket to access new markets (British Business Bank [BBB], 2019). In the long run, access to markets ensures longevity which leads to growth of the SMEs. However, SMEs in Kenya are struggling with unsuccessful marketing initiatives (Central Bank of Kenya [CBK], 2018). This has derailed their chances of accessing new markets or establishing their roots further in their current markets (African Development Bank [ADB], 2018). ICT is established as a reliable way of informing clients without strain (Mugo, 2016). However, SMEs are not able to gainfully utilize ICT to increase market share (Mugo 2016). This is probably because many SMEs face the challenge of maintaining and managing data on products and their clientele databases (Gesicho, 2018). The existing studies on SMEs and data management have shown gaps in not articulating well how SMEs could utilize technology to their advantage in data management as a result of constant customers preferences changes.

## 1.2 Purpose of the study

To establish the influence of data management on market access by SMEs in Trans Nzoia County, Kenya.

## 1.3 The hypothesis of the study

H<sub>0</sub>: There was no significant relationship between data management and market access of SMEs in Trans Nzoia County, Kenya.

## 2.0 Theoretical framework

This study is informed by the Administrative Behavior (TAB) theory, which was first introduced by Simon (1947) and later revised in 1955 and 1991. TAB states that making logical and assessable decisions is the core purpose of administration. Therefore, for a firm to perform administration functions effectively, there must be room for scientific analysis on its various operations. In SMEs, the process of managing data and social media platforms is for the sole purpose of making administrative decisions such as when to supply, when to market, and when to improve the goods and services, and the characteristics of the market. An SME can use marketing technology and data analytics systems to map out the areas that have previously generated positive feedback on sales. This information could be used to decide on where to open new branches of the SMEs based on consistent high sales numbers. Moreover, the customer relationship management systems and business intelligence systems may be used by an SME to establish its loyal clients and new customers. This information would help the SME initiate various programs such as offering scholarships to few selected loyal customers to train on a college institution course of their choice.

## 2.1 Empirical review

The adoption of ICT by SMEs has been studied by many scholars globally. For example, Mäki and Toivol (2021) examined how 20 Finnish SMEs had goals of extending their e-commerce to the international markets. The study discovered that prior experience in internal markets was relevant. Other antecedents for success included foreign language incorporation and proper analysis of the new market. Dethine et al. (2020) investigated digitalization implementation in export management by SMEs. The study complained that SMEs struggled a lot when adopting various digitalization in their operations, such as budgetary allocations to the ICT infrastructure, changes of firm's strategies, and incorporation of raw data into the computerized systems.

Baariu et al. (2021) investigated the influence of competitive strategy drivers on the performance of SMEs in the manufacturing sector in Nairobi. This cross-sectional survey was conducted on 334 SMEs in the manufacturing industry. Baariu et al. (2021) unveiled that many SMEs had built brand loyalty on their customers, hence, ensuring that other competing SMEs had a run for their money when trying to access their respective market segments. Therefore, since Baariu et al. (2021) assessed manufacturing-related SMEs, it was necessary to determine how other SMEs such as processing, assembly, and food-related SMEs were stiffly competing with other SMEs to ensure that they protected their markets.

Kawira (2021) evaluated how entrepreneurial marketing affected MSMEs' performance in Tharaka Nithi. The study sampled 368 MSME owners using stratified sampling and simple random methods. According to Kawira (2021), online marketing methods through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, websites, telephone calls, and WhatsApp improved SMEs' performances.

Kawira (2021) concentrated on MSMEs in Tharaka Nithi. Therefore, the current study widened the scope to incorporate SMEs in Trans Nzoia County.

### 3.0 Materials and Methods

A descriptive research design was used in the study. The target population was 37 SMEs from Trans Nzoia County Kenya, whose respondents were 92 ICT officers, 81 compliance officers, and 77 marketing officers. The study sampled the 37 SMEs using a simple random sampling method to obtain 11 SMEs. The respondents were also sampled using a simple random sampling method to get 11 general managers, 28 ICT officers, 24 compliance officers, and 23 marketing officers. Data collection was done using interview guides and closed-ended questionnaires. To ensure validity and reliability, pilot-testing of questionnaires was done at Kenya Cooperative Creameries in Elgeyo Marakwet County. Coded data in SPSS was analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics such as mean, percentage, and standard deviation. The qualitative data were analyzed using the thematic technique. Linear regression was used to test the hypothesis of the study. Tables, graphs, and detailed explanations were used to present the final results of the study.

### 4.0 Results and Discussion

#### 4.1 Response rate

The study issued questionnaires to 75 respondents and interviewed 11 general managers hence a total of 86 respondents. The respondents who answered the questionnaires were 63, while the interviewed general managers were 9. This formed a total of 72(84%) respondents. According to Materko (2015), responses above 75% are highly acceptable and reliable.

#### 4.2 Reliability results

The study conducted a pre-test at Kenya Cooperative Creameries [KCC] at Elgeyo Marakwet County. The results were analyzed and measured using the Cronbach coefficient results as indicated in Table 1.

**Table 1: Reliability Results**

Instrument	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Questionnaire	.927	6
Interviews	.884	1

Table 1 indicates that the questionnaires had a Cronbach alpha value of 0.927 while the interview guide had 0.884. Cooper and Schindler (2014) advised that for research instruments to have reliability, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranges should have a minimum of 0.7 and above. This shows that the study's instruments were reliable, and their results could be relied upon to resolve the research problem.

#### 4.3 Descriptive statistics of market access

Market access was the dependent variable. The study asked various questions both from the questionnaire and also in the interview sessions. Market access had various indicators such as tariffs, customs duties, quotas, prices, policies on markets, laws, and regulations. The questionnaire was closed-ended which was answered by ICT officers, compliance officers, and marketing officers. The closed-ended part of the questionnaire had specific questions in the

Ordinal Likert Scale. This scale included options such as 1-Strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-Neither agree nor disagree, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly agree. Table 2 gives the findings.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Market Access**

Statements	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
<b>N=63</b>						
ICT applications use have caused SMEs to gain more access to markets	1(2%)	5(8%)	0(0%)	7(11%)	50(79%)	4.59
Social media management has caused SMEs to gain more access to markets.	2(3%)	12(19%)	0(0%)	28(45%)	21(33%)	3.86
Data management has caused SMEs to gain more access to markets.	3(5%)	5(8%)	0(0%)	9(14%)	46(73%)	4.43
Cybersecurity has caused SMEs to gain more access to markets.	5(8%)	23(36%)	0(0%)	35(56%)	0(0%)	3.03
Maintenance of gained markets through adhering to market regulation	5(8%)	8(13%)	0(0%)	24(38%)	26(41%)	3.92
A team to research on new markets	4(6%)	10(16%)	0(0%)	15(24%)	34(54%)	4.03

The findings from Table 2 indicate that ICT usage had significantly improved the market access of SMEs. Fifty (79%) of the respondents strongly agreed to this on a mean of 4.59. Nevertheless, cyber security had the lowest significance towards the improvement of market access of SMEs. Twenty-three (36%) of the respondents disagreed with this on a mean of 3.03. The findings indicate that loopholes in cyber security had raised concerns hindering SMEs from accessing and maintaining established markets. This further meant that the ICT departments were not performing well in ensuring the security of SMEs data was maintained. This resulted in unsecured payment systems, periodical hacking of the systems, causing the loss of intended product innovations to competitors, and unauthorized access to SMEs' information. Clement (2020) concurred with the findings of this study by identifying abrupt loss of business ideas on product innovation through hacking and unauthorized access as one of the significant challenges of e-commerce.

During the interview sessions, the managers were requested to elaborate on the various strategies that their organizations had introduced to handle SMEs' access to markets. The managers indicated that they have improved trade shows. In addition, SMEs partnered with the government to directly market their goods in national events and promote corporate social responsibilities such as sponsoring needy student's education, providing relief food, and taking part in environmental initiatives. Past studies such as Brandão et al. (2019) viewed foreign market entry as opportunities for SMEs to sell their goods and services. However, the nature

of entry is based on a contact person or institution that is located within the targeted international markets. Therefore, they advise that SMEs should use means such as partnering with their government in international events and social media to clutch this chance.

In this line about interacting with the government, the study asked the managers to highlight some of the market access-related challenges that their SME had endured due to covid-19 lockdown measures put by the government. The managers indicated that SMEs were not allowed to send their goods via air transport due to the grounding of planes; hence shipping their goods took months, leading to massive losses. In addition, the government suspended all social gatherings, which made it almost impossible to set up trade fairs or partner with the government. The loss of touch with potential clients led to low sales and unstable business prospects, limiting market access. The government also directed that people work from home, making it hard for clients to come to the physical location for direct purchasing. This made it hard for the SMEs to have mega sales since most clients who trusted the online platform bought goods in small quantities. This argument is also supported by British Business Bank (2019). According to British Business Bank, SMEs have faced difficulties convincing online clients to purchase more goods and services.

#### 4.4 Descriptive statistics of data management

Data management was the independent variable. The study asked various questions both from the questionnaire and also in the interview. Data management had various indicators such as accounting systems, inventory control systems, marketing technology systems, customer relationship management systems, analytics systems, and business intelligence systems. Table 3 gives the findings.

**Table 3: Descriptive statistics of data management**

Statements	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
<b>N=63</b>						
Implementation of digitalization in export management	0(0%)	2(3%)	0(0%)	9(14%)	52(83%)	4.76
Use of customer relationship management system	0(0%)	7(11%)	0(0%)	34(54%)	22(35%)	4.13
There is entrepreneurial marketing to improve performance	0(0%)	10(16%)	0(0%)	32(51%)	21(33%)	4.02
Inventory control systems have enabled the distribution of goods.	0(0%)	1(2%)	0(0%)	33(52%)	29(46%)	4.43
The business intelligence system has enabled management to make informed decisions and not from personal experiences, emotions, and available options.	34(54%)	29(46%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	2.11
Liaising with other firms to provide current market technology	0(0%)	3(5%)	0(0%)	11(17%)	49(78%)	4.68

According to the findings in Table 3, SMEs had implemented digitalization in export management. The respondents agreed on a mean of 4.76 on the implementation of digitalization in export management. However, the respondents disagreed (mean = 2.11) that using a business intelligence system had enabled SME management to make informed decisions based on the

current market situations. This illustrated that the decisions made by the SME did not originate from reliable sources such as business intelligence systems but rather from personal experiences, emotions, and cheap and available options. This is why SMEs' marketing initiatives were not working as required. In agreement, Asgary et al. (2020) also stated that SMEs in Turkey were exposed to global risks due to a lack of factual foundation when making and implementing decisions. Therefore, it was clear that there were weak policies that did not help improve the current marketing initiatives SMEs had.

The study requested the managers to describe the various data management measures put into place by their SMEs as it expanded its e-commerce to global perspectives. The managers indicated that they used short books; an accounting system, perpetual and periodic inventory system; predictive and prescriptive systems; and perfect competition marketing systems. The study required managers to highlight how digitalization on market technological systems enabled their SMEs to acquire a competitive advantage in local and global markets. The managers indicated that the SMEs had a database of current and potential clients; they could map out the location where there was high demand for their goods and services. The study by Eze et al. (2020) had also found that the ability of SMEs to adopt digital marketing devices was pegged on their ability to offer creative methods of marketing and as well as cost-effective solutions.

#### 4.5 Relationship between data management and market access

Having obtained descriptive information as discussed above, it was necessary to test the underlying hypothesis. The null hypothesis stated that there was no significant relationship between data management and market access of SMEs in Trans Nzoia County, Kenya. Tables 4, 5, and 6 give the findings generated from a linear regression.

**Table 4: Model summary of data management and market access**

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	21.531	1	21.531	2.235
	Residual	674.344	71	9.633	
	Total	695.875	72		

a. Predictors: (Constant), Data Management

b. Dependent Variable: Market Access

The findings in Table 4 indicate that data management had an R-value of 0.788, which shows a positive correlation between ICT applications and market access. The results further show that data management had an R-square value of 0.622, which meant that ICT applications accounted for 62.2 % of variations in the SMEs' market access. The Durbin-Watson value was 1.300, which is above 1. This shows that there was no autocorrelation between the variables; hence, the model was reliable. The study further examined the model validity by conducting an ANOVA analysis. Results are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5: ANOVA results on data management and market access**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
	.788 <sup>a</sup>	.622	.617	3.10379	1.300

a. Predictors: (Constant), Data Management

b. Dependent Variable: Market Access

Table 5 indicates that the F-statistic was 2.235, and the level of significance value was 0.039, which was less than 0.05 hence rejected the null hypothesis. The results show that ICT applications play a crucial role in enabling SMEs to access various markets. The study finally assessed the regression weight of ICT applications in the model. The result on regression weight is presented in Table 6.

**Table 6: Regression coefficient on data management and market access**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	9.311	2.719		4.874	.022
Data management	.179	.175	.063	.619	.039

a. Dependent Variable: Market Access

According to Table 6, data management had a  $\beta = 0.179$  with a p-value of 0.39. The study had a general model which was;  $\text{Market Access} = C + \beta X_1 + \epsilon$  where C was constant-coefficient,  $\beta$  was slope coefficient of independent variables,  $X_1$  was data management, and  $\epsilon$  was error term.

When equated with the coefficients, the general model was  $\text{Market Access} = 9.311C + 0.179X_1 + 2.719e$ . The results showed that when added one unit of  $X_1$ , market access increased by  $9.311 + 0.179$ .

## 5.0 Conclusion

The study concluded that the decisions made by the SME management did not originate from reliable sources such as business intelligence systems but rather from personal experiences, emotions, and available options. This is why SMEs' marketing initiatives were not working as required, resulting in a lack of consideration for client demands, leading to losses. In addition, SMEs. It was clear that there were weak policies that did not help improve the current marketing initiatives SMEs had.

## 6.0 Recommendation

The SMEs managers should introduce data management policies such as always providing supporting data evidence on each decision made. The SMEs management should set aside a budget for purchasing various data management infrastructure. These include accounting systems, inventory control systems, marketing technology systems, customer relationship management systems, analytics systems, and business intelligence systems. Further on, through the authorization of their boards, these SMEs should employ staff who have adequate skills and experience in managing and analyzing data to provide direction on why certain decisions should be made.

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