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# Impact of E-Commerce as a Business Tactic on Sales Growth of SMEs in Nairobi

# Fredrick Kariithi Githui & Dr. Jane Wangari Njuru PhD

### Abstract

In recent years, the global business environment has experienced a paradigm shift, with technological advancements influencing consumer behavior and reshaping traditional modes of commerce. E-commerce, encompassing online platforms, electronic payments, and digital marketing, has emerged as a game-changer for businesses, providing them with a dynamic channel to connect with a wider audience. For SMEs in Nairobi, often characterized by resource constraints and intense market competition, adopting E-commerce strategies becomes imperative to navigate the contemporary business terrain. The surge in technological advancements and the widespread adoption of digital platforms have significantly transformed the business landscape, particularly for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in Nairobi. While the integration of e-commerce is often viewed as a strategic business tactic with the potential to enhance sales growth, there remains a gap in understanding the nuanced impact of this approach on SMEs in the Nairobi region. Therefore, there is need to bridge this research gap by conducting a thorough investigation into the impact of e-commerce as a business tactic on the sales growth of SMEs in Nairobi. The theoretical framework for this study draws upon the Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) framework, coupled with elements from the Diffusion of Innovations theory. The research design for this study employed a quantitative research method to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure representation from different sectors. Statistical analysis was employed to examine the relationships between adoption of e-commerce and sales growth using SPSS. The findings reveal a diverse landscape of adoption of ecommerce among SMEs in Nairobi, with notable representation across different industry sectors. The findings resonate with existing literature that emphasizes the positive association between e-commerce adoption and sales growth for SMEs.



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# **1.1 Introduction**

The advent of the digital era has revolutionized business landscapes, providing Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) with unprecedented opportunities to expand their market reach and boost sales through the integration of E-commerce strategies (Kimana, 2020). Nairobi, as a vibrant economic hub, has witnessed a surge in SMEs seeking to harness the power of Ecommerce as a pivotal business tactic (Muthee, 2021). In recent years, the global business environment has experienced a paradigm shift, with technological advancements influencing consumer behavior and reshaping traditional modes of commerce (Mbogori & Senelwa, 2023). E-commerce, encompassing online platforms, electronic payments, and digital marketing, has emerged as a game-changer for businesses, providing them with a dynamic channel to connect with a wider audience. For SMEs in Nairobi, often characterized by resource constraints and intense market competition, adopting E-commerce strategies becomes imperative to navigate the contemporary business terrain (Muathe & Muraguri-Makau, 2020). The significance of this study lies in its focus on the specific dynamics of the Nairobi SME landscape, recognizing the unique challenges and opportunities within the local context (Kabia, 2020). While existing literature acknowledges the transformative potential of E-commerce on sales growth, a gap remains in understanding how SMEs in Nairobi, with their distinct operational challenges, navigate and leverage E-commerce to enhance their sales performance. Several seminal studies, such as those by Githinji (2014) and Ojo & Sadiq (2022), underscore the global impact of E-commerce on business performance, yet the contextual nuances within specific regions, especially in the context of SMEs in Nairobi, warrant specialized investigation. The proliferation of smartphones, increasing internet penetration, and changing consumer preferences make Nairobi an intriguing setting for examining the intricate relationship between E-commerce adoption and sales growth among SMEs (Wairimu, 2020). Therefore, this research seeks to address the research gap by conducting an in-depth analysis of how Ecommerce practices influence the sales growth trajectory of SMEs in Nairobi. By delving into the experiences, challenges, and successes of these enterprises, the study aims to provide nuanced insights that can inform strategic decisions, policy frameworks, and support mechanisms tailored to the unique needs of SMEs in the evolving digital landscape of Nairobi.

# **1.2 Problem Statement**

The surge in technological advancements and the widespread adoption of digital platforms have significantly transformed the business landscape, particularly for Small and Mediumsized Enterprises (SMEs) in Nairobi. While the integration of e-commerce is often viewed as a strategic business tactic with the potential to enhance sales growth, there remains a gap in understanding the nuanced impact of this approach on SMEs in the Nairobi region. The existing literature acknowledges the increasing trend of SMEs venturing into e-commerce, but there is a dearth of comprehensive studies that specifically address the distinct implications on sales growth within the unique context of Nairobi. Nairobi's SMEs face a dynamic and competitive market influenced by various factors such as consumer behavior, regulatory frameworks, and technological infrastructure. The complex interplay of these elements, coupled with the evolving nature of e-commerce, raises questions about the effectiveness of e-commerce as a business tactic for driving sales growth among SMEs in Nairobi. Furthermore, the specific challenges and opportunities faced by SMEs in Nairobi, concerning their adoption and implementation of e-commerce, warrant dedicated attention. Therefore, the problem statement revolves around the need to bridge this research gap by conducting a thorough investigation into the impact of e-commerce as a business tactic on the sales growth of SMEs in Nairobi. This study aims to provide valuable insights into the intricacies of e-commerce adoption, its potential benefits, and the challenges that SMEs encounter in the pursuit of leveraging e-commerce for sustainable sales growth. Addressing this gap is essential for both

academia and practitioners to formulate informed strategies that can contribute to the success and resilience of SMEs in the evolving business landscape of Nairobi.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

1. Assess the Current Landscape of E-commerce Adoption among SMEs in Nairobi

2. Examine the Impact of E-commerce on Sales Growth for Nairobi SMEs

# 2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study draws upon the Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) framework, coupled with elements from the Diffusion of Innovations theory.

# 2.1 Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) Framework

The TOE framework provides a comprehensive lens for understanding the adoption and impact of technology in organizations. In the context of this study, it allows for the examination of how technological factors (e-commerce), organizational factors (structure, strategy, resources), and environmental factors (market conditions, competition) collectively influence the adoption and subsequent outcomes of e-commerce in SMEs. Tornatzky and Fleischer (1990) devised a paradigm for organisational adoption that draws upon the principles of Contingency Theory of Organisations. The previous approach proposes that a successful organisation should possess a structure that aligns with its environmental requirements (Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967). The efficacy of an organisation is contingent upon its adaptability to internal and external circumstances, including the environment, size of the organisation, and organisational strategy (Donaldson, 2001). Hence, decision makers must consider environmental, organisational, and technical issues before making a decision. Multiple studies utilize the TOE framework to clarify the implementation of different IT systems, such as e-commerce, Enterprise Resource Planning, e-business, open systems, Electronic Data Interchange, and Knowledge Management Systems. In their study, Attar et al. (2022) examined emerging patterns in E-Commerce research. The findings of the study indicate that advancements in technology have made it easier to transition from market-focused to user-focused commerce, hence promoting the development of E-Commerce. The emergence of technologically enhanced Social-Commerce platforms has facilitated collaborative commerce, giving rise to innovative commerce concepts like sharing commerce. The study conducted by Yu et al. (2022) focused on examining the strategic business mode choices of e-commerce platforms in the presence of brand competition. The study determined that utilising the e-commerce platform as a reseller consistently yields higher profits compared to engaging in direct selling, regardless of the business model employed. The e-commerce platform serves as both an online marketplace for manufacturers and a retailer that resells manufacturers' products directly to consumers. Hence, the e-commerce platform's dual duties also correspond to two options for sales approaches when the platform offers services to manufacturers.

Hussain et al., 2022 conducted a study on E-commerce and SME performance: The moderating influence of entrepreneurial competencies.

# 2.2 Diffusion of Innovations Theory

The Diffusion of Innovations theory, proposed by Everett Rogers, contributes to the theoretical framework by emphasizing the process through which new technologies are adopted and spread within a social system (Rogers, 1995). In the case of SMEs in Nairobi, this theory aids in understanding the stages of e-commerce adoption, the characteristics of adopters, and the factors influencing the rate of adoption (Okadapau, 2016). It considers innovation attributes such as relative advantage, complexity, compatibility, trialability, and observability. As per the

Diffusion of idea Theory (DIT), the process of communicating an idea occurs gradually through certain communication channels inside a given social system (Rogers, 1995). People are perceived to have varying levels of inclination to embrace new ideas, which is commonly observed. According to Rogers (1995), the rate at which people accept an innovation follows a normal distribution pattern over time, forming an S-shaped curve. The text outlines the five classifications of individual innovativeness, which span from the most early adopters to the laggards, and includes the respective rates at which they embrace innovations. The categories mentioned include innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards, as defined by Rogers (1995). An individual's decision about an innovation is not an abrupt action, but rather a prolonged process that develops over time (Rogers, 1995). This procedure entails a series of actions and decisions. By integrating these two theoretical perspectives, the study aims to explore how the interplay of technological, organizational, and environmental factors, as outlined in the TOE framework, influences the diffusion and impact of e-commerce as a strategic initiative for enhancing sales growth among SMEs in Nairobi. The Diffusion of Innovations theory will provide insights into the patterns and dynamics of e-commerce adoption, contributing to a nuanced understanding of the process within the specific context of SMEs in Nairobi.

### 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

The research design for this study employed a quantitative research method to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. A structured questionnaire was designed to gather quantitative data from a representative sample of SMEs in Nairobi. This questionnaire included questions related to the adoption of e-commerce practices, sales growth, challenges faced, and the perceived impact of e-commerce on overall business performance.

### 3.2 Sampling

SMEs operating in Nairobi engaged in various industries. Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure representation from different sectors.

### 3.3 Data Collection

Questionnaires were administered to selected SMEs through email and online surveys. The participants were selected based on Stratified random sampling and informed consent was obtained.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Statistical analysis was employed to examine the relationships between e-commerce adoption and sales growth using SPSS. Descriptive statistics were utilized to provide an overview of the key variables, and inferential statistics helped draw conclusions and make predictions.

### **3.5 Ethical Considerations**

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. The study adhered to ethical guidelines, and participants were made aware of their rights to withdraw at any point.

#### 4. Findings

### 4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The table below displays the results of the descriptive statistics analysis performed on the research data. In Table 4.1, we can see how the sampled organizations are distributed by sector.

Industry Sector	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Manufacturing	5	26.3
Media & ICT	4	21.1
Agriculture and Food Processing	6	31.5
Hospitality	4	21.1
TOTAL	19	100

Table 4.1 Sample Distribution of SMEs

Table 4.1 provides a breakdown of the sample distribution among various industry sectors in the study. The data is presented in terms of frequency and percentage for each sector. The manufacturing sector constitutes 26.3% of the total sample, with five SMEs representing this category. This indicates a moderate presence of manufacturing businesses participating in the study. Following closely is the agriculture and food processing sector, contributing 31.5% to the sample with six SMEs. This sector shows a relatively higher participation rate compared to manufacturing. The media and information and communication technology (ICT) sector account for 21.1% of the sample, with four SMEs included. This suggests a substantial representation from businesses involved in media and ICT-related activities. Similarly, the hospitality sector also comprises 21.1% of the sample, with four SMEs participating in the study. In summary, the distribution of SMEs across different industry sectors in the sample reflects a diverse representation, encompassing manufacturing, media & ICT, agriculture and food processing, as well as hospitality. The percentages provide insights into the proportional contribution of each sector to the overall sample, highlighting the varied landscape of SMEs engaged in the study on the impact of e-commerce on sales growth in Nairobi.

#### Percentage (%) Adoption Frequency 5 Transaction 26.3 Provision 8 42.1 Integration 6 31.6 19 100 Total

Table 4.2 State of E-commerce adoption

(Author, 2023)

Table 4.2 presents the state of e-commerce adoption among the sampled SMEs in the study. The data is categorized based on different levels of e-commerce adoption, with frequencies and percentages outlined. Among the SMEs, 26.3% have adopted e-commerce for transactions, indicating that a quarter of the sample engages in online transactions as part of their business activities. This suggests a notable but not predominant presence of SMEs utilizing e-commerce in the context of transactional processes. A larger proportion of SMEs, constituting 42.1% of the sample, have adopted e-commerce for provision. This implies that a significant portion of the surveyed businesses is involved in providing goods or services through e-commerce platforms, showcasing a substantial level of adoption in the aspect of provision. Furthermore, 31.6% of SMEs have integrated e-commerce into their business operations. This integration level indicates that nearly one-third of the sample has embraced a more comprehensive approach, utilizing e-commerce as an integral part of their overall business strategy. In summary, the results reveal varying degrees of e-commerce adoption among the SMEs in Nairobi, with a significant emphasis on provision and integration. The percentages provide insights into the prevalence of each adoption level within the sample, contributing valuable information to the understanding of e-commerce practices among SMEs in the region.

E-commerce Applications	In Use	Percentage	
Sales Order Processing Online	4	21.1	
Procurement Coordinating Online	3	15.8	
Credit Processing Online	5	26.2	
Incoming and Outgoing goods Tracking	3	15.8	
Customer Feedback Handling	4	21.1	
Total	19	100	

Table 4.3 Impact of E-commerce on Sales Growth

(Author, 2023)

Table 4.3 outlines the impact of e-commerce on sales growth by presenting the distribution of e-commerce applications in use among the sampled SMEs in the study. The data illustrates the percentage of SMEs utilizing specific e-commerce applications. Sales Order Processing Online is employed by 21.1% of the SMEs, indicating that a fifth of the sample utilizes e-commerce platforms for handling sales orders. This suggests a notable presence of e-commerce in facilitating the processing of sales transactions, potentially streamlining and automating this aspect of their business operations. Procurement Coordinating Online is utilized by 15.8% of SMEs, showcasing that a portion of the businesses engages in online coordination for procurement activities. This level of adoption suggests that SMEs in Nairobi are leveraging ecommerce for managing their procurement processes. Credit Processing Online is a notable application in use, with 26.2% of SMEs employing this e-commerce function. This implies that more than a quarter of the sample utilizes online platforms for credit processing, indicating a significant reliance on e-commerce for managing credit-related aspects of their business. Incoming and Outgoing Goods Tracking is utilized by 15.8% of SMEs, suggesting that a proportion of the sampled businesses incorporates e-commerce for tracking the movement of goods, both incoming and outgoing. This reflects a specific application of e-commerce in enhancing logistical aspects of their operations. Customer Feedback Handling is an ecommerce application used by 21.1% of SMEs, indicating that a substantial portion of the sample employs online platforms for managing customer feedback. This highlights the role of e-commerce in facilitating customer engagement and feedback handling. In summary, the results illustrate a diverse utilization of e-commerce applications among SMEs in Nairobi, with a notable emphasis on sales order processing, credit processing, and customer feedback handling. The percentages provide insights into the specific e-commerce functionalities that contribute to the impact on sales growth within the sampled businesses.

Table 4.4 Regression Analysis			
	Beta	p-value	
E-commerce Adoption	0.21	<0.001	
Sales growth	0.17	<0.012	
(Author 2022)			

(Author, 2023)

The results of the regression analysis indicate a statistically significant relationship between Ecommerce adoption and sales growth among SMEs in Nairobi. The beta coefficient for Ecommerce adoption is 0.21, with a p-value less than 0.001. This suggests a positive and significant association between the extent of E-commerce adoption by SMEs and their sales growth. Furthermore, the beta coefficient for sales growth is 0.17, with a p-value of less than 0.012. This result indicates that sales growth is positively and significantly influenced by the implementation of E-commerce tactics by SMEs in Nairobi. In summary, both variables, Ecommerce adoption, and sales growth, demonstrate a statistically significant relationship, implying that SMEs in Nairobi that embrace E-commerce strategies are likely to experience higher levels of sales growth. These findings align with existing literature on the impact of E- commerce as a business tactic on the performance of SMEs, reinforcing the notion that leveraging E-commerce positively contributes to sales expansion in the business context.

# **5** Discussions

The research aimed to assess the current landscape of e-commerce adoption among SMEs in Nairobi and examine the impact of e-commerce on sales growth. The results shed light on the state of e-commerce adoption, providing insights into the types of applications in use and their implications for sales growth.

# 5.1 Assessment of the Current Landscape of E-commerce Adoption

The findings reveal a diverse landscape of adoption of e-commerce among SMEs in Nairobi, with notable representation across different industry sectors. The highest frequency of ecommerce adoption was observed in the Agriculture and Food processing sector (31.5%), followed by Manufacturing (26.3%), Media & ICT (21.1%), and Hospitality (21.1%). These variations in adoption rates align with existing literature emphasizing the sector-specific nature of e-commerce adoption (Laudon & Traver, 2016). The regional context and industryspecific characteristics play a crucial role in shaping SMEs' decisions to adopt e-commerce practices (Apau, Koranteng, & Gyamfi, 2019). For instance, the Agriculture and Food processing sector's higher adoption rate may be attributed to the growing emphasis on online platforms for agricultural product marketing and supply chain management (Chao, 2022). Media & ICT businesses, known for their digital nature, exhibit a substantial presence in e-commerce adoption, aligning with the technological orientation of the sector (Zou & Cheshmehzangi, 2022). The literature underscores the significance of understanding the contextual factors influencing e-commerce adoption (Chong et al., 2018). In this context, the results align with prior research by highlighting the influence of industry-specific factors on the extent of ecommerce integration among SMEs in Nairobi.

# 5.2 Examination of the Impact of E-commerce on Sales Growth

The results pertaining to the impact of e-commerce applications on sales growth provide valuable insights into specific functionalities leveraged by SMEs. Sales Order Processing Online, Procurement Coordinating Online, Credit Processing Online, Incoming and Outgoing Goods Tracking, and Customer Feedback Handling emerged as key e-commerce applications in use. The adoption of Sales Order Processing Online by 21.1% of SMEs underscores the role of ecommerce in streamlining sales transactions. This finding aligns with literature emphasizing the positive correlation between e-commerce adoption and improved sales processes, leading to increased efficiency and customer satisfaction (Wangari, 2019). Credit Processing Online, used by 26.2% of SMEs, suggests a significant reliance on e-commerce platforms for managing credit-related aspects. The literature supports this, highlighting how e-commerce facilitates credit processing, contributing to enhanced financial transactions and customer relationships (Wirdiyanti et al., 2022). The application of Customer Feedback Handling by 21.1% of SMEs emphasizes the role of e-commerce in fostering customer engagement. Previous studies emphasize the impact of customer feedback mechanisms on building trust and loyalty, ultimately influencing sales growth (Duan, Gu, & Whinston, 2008). The findings resonate with existing literature that emphasizes the positive association between e-commerce adoption and sales growth for SMEs (Wanzu, Turyakira, & Katumba, 2019). The literature underscores the role of e-commerce in improving business processes, expanding market reach, and enhancing customer interactions, all of which contribute to increased sales (Mutua, Oteyo, & Njeru, 2013). In the Nairobi context, the sector-specific variations in e-commerce adoption align with the literature's recognition of industry-specific factors influencing adoption decisions (Kiplangat, Shisia, & Asienga, 2015; Chepngeno, 2017). The Agriculture and Food processing sector's

higher adoption rate corresponds to the literature's acknowledgment of the agribusiness sector's increasing reliance on e-commerce for marketing and distribution (Li et al., 2020; Khomah, Rahayu, & Handayani, 2021; Reardon et al., 2021). Moreover, the identified e-commerce applications align with literature highlighting the diverse functionalities contributing to sales growth. The integration of Sales Order Processing, Credit Processing, and Customer Feedback Handling corresponds with prior research emphasizing the importance of these functionalities in enhancing operational efficiency and customer satisfaction (Nyagwencha, 2018).

#### 5.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, the results provide valuable insights into the current landscape of e-commerce adoption among SMEs in Nairobi and its impact on sales growth. The findings align with existing literature, emphasizing the sector-specific nature of e-commerce adoption and the diverse functionalities contributing to sales growth. The research contributes to the understanding of how SMEs in Nairobi leverage e-commerce as a business tactic to enhance their sales growth prospects.

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