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# FROM SOCIAL MEDIA TO SALES: LEVERAGING DIGITAL MARKETING FOR SUSTAINABLE SME GROWTH IN HIGHER EDUCATION ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAMMES

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## ABSTRACT

*This conceptual paper investigates the strategic design of digital marketing education within higher education entrepreneurship programmes to enhance the sales performance and sustainability of student-led Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in South Africa. Focusing on the Eastern Cape province, the research addresses a critical gap between digital awareness and measurable sales outcomes in under-resourced contexts. Employing a systematic literature review methodology, this paper synthesises peer-reviewed literature from 2018-2025, analysed through the integrated theoretical lenses of the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) and the Resource-Based View (RBV). Findings reveal that while student entrepreneurs possess high motivation to adopt digital tools (Performance Expectancy), their efforts are significantly impeded by the digital divide and inadequate institutional support (Facilitating Conditions). The study posits that digital marketing competencies, when effectively cultivated, can evolve into valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) capabilities, driving competitive advantage and long-term SME sustainability. However, a salient research gap persists in empirically linking digital marketing training to post-graduation sales revenue in the South African context. The study concludes that a pedagogical shift from theoretical instruction to experiential, data-driven learning, supported by robust mentorship and infrastructure, is imperative. Recommendations provide a framework for educators and policymakers to bridge the theory-practice divide, thereby strengthening entrepreneurship education and contributing to national economic development goals.*

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**KEYWORDS:** Digital Marketing Education, Entrepreneurship Programmes, Sales Performance, SME Sustainability, UTAUT, Resource-Based View, South Africa, Higher Education.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly digital global economy, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are leveraging online platforms not merely as supplementary channels but as core drivers for competition, innovation, and growth. Digital marketing has fundamentally transformed business operations, revolutionising everything from customer engagement and brand building to sales conversion and performance analytics (Chatterjee, Kar & Gupta, 2024). This transformation is not confined to large corporations; it represents a paradigm shift that democratises market access for smaller ventures. Globally, a growing body of evidence confirms that strategic digital marketing directly enhances SME performance by fostering stronger, more personalised customer relationships and driving measurable revenue growth, particularly when underpinned by robust entrepreneurial and technological competencies (Martins, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a potent catalyst for this shift, accelerating the pace of digital adoption and making digitalisation not merely a competitive advantage but a prerequisite for business survival and resilience in a volatile economic landscape (Almansour, 2022).

The imperative for digital integration is even more pronounced in developing economies, where digital marketing is increasingly recognised as a cost-effective lever for market expansion, competitiveness, and financial inclusion. Studies from emerging markets like Nigeria (Otokiti, Adeyemi & Olatunji, 2021) and Ghana (Martins, 2023) demonstrate that the strategic use of social media and other digital tools significantly enhances the growth, visibility, and resilience of SMEs, especially those led by women and young people who often face traditional barriers to entry. These findings underscore the critical importance of integrating practical digital marketing education into entrepreneurship training and support ecosystems to foster inclusive and sustainable economic development.

In the South African context, SMEs are the bedrock of the economy and are pivotal to achieving the objectives of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, serving as primary engines for job creation, innovation, and poverty alleviation. However, the South African SME sector faces a confluence of formidable challenges, including stark socio-economic inequalities, unequal digital access, prohibitively high data costs, and a critical skills deficit in strategic marketing and financial

management (Mokhele & Pinfeld, 2021). Despite various government and private sector initiatives aimed at promoting digital transformation, a significant disconnect persists. Many young, digitally native entrepreneurs, including university students, struggle to translate a vibrant social media presence into sustainable sales and profitability, a challenge largely attributed to a lack of practical, applied training that bridges online activity with commercial outcomes (Madondo & Dhoba, 2025).

This challenge is particularly acute in provinces like the Eastern Cape, which is characterised by some of the highest rates of unemployment and poverty in the country, as well as limited business infrastructure and pervasive digital exclusion. Research by Tlapana and Dike (2020) in East London confirms that while SME owners widely use platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp for visibility and basic communication, very few possess the advanced skills to strategically convert online engagement into profitable sales outcomes or to utilise data analytics for customer insight. This indicates a critical chasm between basic digital literacy and effective commercial application—a chasm that stifles entrepreneurial potential.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are uniquely positioned to bear a significant responsibility in addressing this gap through their entrepreneurship programmes. These programmes are designed to equip students with the requisite knowledge, skills, and mindset to launch and sustain viable ventures. Yet, as noted by Bastian, Devasia and Botha (2023) and Devasia (2023), many of these curricula remain overly theoretical and siloed, failing to explicitly and systematically link digital marketing education to tangible sales performance metrics and long-term business sustainability. This pedagogical shortcoming limits the potential of student-led enterprises to thrive in an intensely competitive digital marketplace, ultimately undermining HEIs' contribution to national economic development.

Therefore, this conceptual paper addresses a critical and underexplored question: How can digital marketing education within higher education entrepreneurship programmes be strategically designed and implemented to enhance the sales performance and sustainability of student-led SMEs in South Africa? By systematically synthesising existing research and applying a dual theoretical framework that examines both technology adoption and strategic advantage, this study seeks to provide nuanced insights and a practical, actionable framework for curriculum enhancement and policy

intervention, ultimately contributing to the development of more robust, resilient, and sustainable student entrepreneurship.

## 2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

SMEs are universally acknowledged as vital catalysts for South Africa's economic growth, innovation, and job creation, particularly amid the staggeringly high youth unemployment rate. Despite the globally demonstrated potential of digital marketing to enhance business performance, a significant and troubling disconnect persists within the South African higher education ecosystem. This disconnect lies between the digital marketing skills and theories taught in university classrooms and the practical ability of student-led SMEs to convert social media engagement and online presence into sustained sales growth and business viability (Madondo & Dhoba, 2025).

In economically marginalised regions such as the Eastern Cape, this problem is severely exacerbated by the digital divide. This divide is characterised by poor and unreliable digital infrastructure, some of the highest data costs on the continent, and severely limited access to practical, ongoing mentorship from industry practitioners (Bontsa, Mushunje & Ngarava, 2023; Fosu & Ntonzima, 2025). Although higher education entrepreneurship programmes are ostensibly designed to foster both business acumen and digital skills, their curricula often remain abstract and decontextualised, lacking a direct, experiential link between digital marketing education and measurable business outcomes such as revenue growth, customer lifetime value, and profit margins (Botha & Amaral, 2025; Mugunzva, 2024).

Consequently, a common trajectory emerges that student entrepreneurs frequently graduate with theoretical digital knowledge but without the practical, strategic capability to deploy it effectively for sales conversion and competitive advantage. They understand how to use a platform, but not why certain strategies lead to sales or how to measure and optimise for return on investment. This theory-practice gap not only undermines the effectiveness and relevance of entrepreneurship education but also directly constrains the growth, competitiveness, and long-term sustainability of student-led ventures, thereby stifling their potential contribution to the South African economy.

## 3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

To address the identified problem, this study is

guided by the following primary and secondary objectives, along with corresponding research questions.

### 3.1 Primary Objective

To examine how digital marketing education within higher education entrepreneurship programmes can be strategically designed and implemented to enhance the sales performance and sustainability of student-led SMEs.

### 3.2 Secondary Objectives

- i. To assess the nature of the relationship between student entrepreneurs who acquired digital marketing competencies and their venture's actual sales performance.
- ii. To investigate the mechanisms through which the effective adoption and application of digital marketing contributes to the long-term sustainability and competitive advantage of SMEs.
- iii. To identify the key barriers and facilitators (e.g., institutional, infrastructural, pedagogical) that influence the successful integration of digital marketing into student venture operations.

### 3.3 Research Questions

- i. To what extent does the current structure of digital marketing education in Higher Education entrepreneurship programmes demonstrably improve the sales performance of student-led SMEs?
- ii. What is the nature of the correlation between student entrepreneurs' digital marketing competencies (e.g., in analytics, content strategy, SEO) and their venture's sales success and customer acquisition metrics?
- iii. How does strategic digital marketing adoption contribute to the long-term sustainability and competitive advantage of university-supported SMEs, from a resource-based perspective?
- iv. What specific pedagogical and institutional interventions are most effective in bridging the gap between digital marketing theory and sales performance practice in the South African context?

## 4. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is anchored by two complementary theoretical frameworks: the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) and the Resource-Based View (RBV). Together, they provide a comprehensive, multi-level lens to analyse both the initial adoption of digital marketing tools (the "how" and "why" of use) and their subsequent strategic value for SME growth and sustainability (the "so what").

## 4.1 Theoretical Frameworks

### 4.1.1 The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT)

According to Venkatesh, Morris, Davis and Davis (2003), the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) explains user behavioural intention and actual usage behaviour through four core constructs: "Performance Expectancy" (the degree to which an individual believes that using the system will help them attain gains in job performance), "Effort Expectancy" (the degree of ease associated with the use of the system), "Social Influence" (the degree to which an individual perceives that important others believe they should use the new system), and "Facilitating Conditions" (the degree to which an individual believes that an organisational and technical infrastructure exists to support use of the system).

These constructs are highly relevant to the context of student entrepreneurship. For instance, a student's decision to use Instagram for business is directly influenced by their belief that it will increase sales and brand recognition (Performance Expectancy) and is contingent upon the availability of university-provided wifi, access to graphic design software, and relevant training (Facilitating Conditions) (Venkatesh et al., 2003; Mugunzva, 2024). Similarly, encouragement from mentors and successful peers (Social Influence) can significantly lower the perceived barriers to adoption (Effort Expectancy). The UTAUT model, therefore, provides a robust framework for diagnosing points of failure in the adoption process in university environments.

### 4.1.2 Resource-Based View (RBV)

While UTAUT effectively explains the initial adoption phase, the Resource-Based View (RBV) explains the subsequent strategic impact and the pathway to sustained competitive advantage. As established in the foundational work of Barney (1991), a firm's sustained competitive advantage stems from its internal resources and capabilities that are Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, and Non-substitutable (VRIN).

In the context of the modern digital economy, digital marketing skills and the resulting capabilities, such as data analytics for customer insight, search engine optimisation (SEO) for organic visibility, and sophisticated social media advertising for targeted acquisition, can be transformed into such strategic VRIN resources (Martins, 2023; Manigandan & Raghuram, 2024). For

example, when a student venture develops a unique competency in using data analytics to identify and serve a specific, underserved niche market, that data-driven capability becomes a valuable, rare, and difficult-to-imitate resource that rivals cannot easily replicate. This process of building unique, digitally driven capabilities is a key mechanism for driving long-term sustainability, insulating the SME from pure price competition, and creating a defensible market position, a finding increasingly supported by empirical research on SMEs in emerging economies (Martins, 2023). The RBV thus shifts the focus from merely using digital tools to building with them.

## 4.2 Synthesis of Current Literature

### 4.2.1 Global Perspectives on Digitalisation and SME Capabilities

Recent empirical studies globally underscore the critical role of digitalisation in developing dynamic capabilities. Martins (2023), in a study of SMEs, found that dynamic capabilities, specifically the ability to sense market opportunities, seize them through strategic decision-making, and transform the business model, accordingly, are significantly enhanced by digitalisation, leading to superior SME performance, particularly in turbulent times. This aligns perfectly with the RBV, positioning digital tools not as passive resources but as active enablers of valuable, adaptive, and transformative capabilities. Similarly, Manigandan and Raghuram (2024) demonstrated in the Indian SME context that the adoption of advanced digital technologies directly boosts firm performance, a relationship that is strengthened by entrepreneurial marketing (a proactive, opportunity-driven approach) and mediated by social value creation. This suggests that the mindset with which digital tools are used is as important as the tools themselves.

### 4.2.2 The Progress Amidst Structural Barriers in South Africa

In the South African context, the literature reveals a landscape of both promising progress and persistent, deep-seated barriers. Mugunzva (2024) documented the positive impact of digital technologies on entrepreneurship education itself, noting that digital transformation within HEIs can foster greater student innovation, collaboration, and business preparedness. However, this potential is often unrealised at the venture level. Studies by Bontsa, Mushunje and Ngarava (2023) in the Eastern Cape and Fosu and Ntonzima (2025) in rural municipalities consistently highlight that the digital

divide, comprising inadequate infrastructure, affordability issues, and low digital literacy, severely limits the adoption and effective use of these technologies. This points directly to a critical failure in "Facilitating Conditions" as per the UTAUT model, creating a chasm between the university's teaching and the student's practical operating environment.

Furthermore, research by Makhoba (2024) and Matsheke (2022) confirms that entrepreneurship education can effectively shape positive entrepreneurial intentions and self-reported competencies. However, these studies also hint at a salient missing link in the literature: a predominant focus on measuring intentions, perceptions, and skills acquisition, rather than on tracking tangible business outcomes, such as actual sales growth, profit margins, customer retention rates, and, crucially, post-graduation business survival rates. This outcome gap represents a significant shortfall in evaluating the true efficacy of entrepreneurship education.

#### 4.2.3 Identifying the Conceptual Gap

This integrated review confirms the utility of combining UTAUT and RBV. UTAUT helps diagnose why adoption fails at the individual and institutional levels (e.g., poor Facilitating Conditions, low Social Influence), while RBV articulates what is lost when adoption fails: the opportunity to develop the unique VRIN capabilities that underpin competitive advantage and sustainability. The existing literature, therefore, convincingly sets the stage for the core conceptual argument of this paper: that bridging the digital adoption gap in HEIs is not merely an educational objective but an economic imperative, as it is essential to unlocking the resource-based advantages necessary for sustainable SME growth in South Africa. The gap in the literature is the lack of an explicit connection between this theoretical logic and a practical pedagogical model for digital marketing education focused on sales outcomes.

## 5. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) to construct a coherent, evidence-based conceptual argument. The SLR approach was selected for its rigour, reproducibility, transparency, and capacity to integrate findings from a diverse body of studies into a novel theoretical synthesis, which is a prerequisite for conceptual paper development (Xiao & Watson, 2019). The process was guided by a structured, predefined protocol to

ensure comprehensive coverage of the relevant literature while minimising selection bias.

### 5.1 Search Strategy and Selection Criteria

A systematic, iterative search was conducted across major online academic databases, including Google Scholar, ProQuest, Emerald Insight, JSTOR, and ScienceDirect. The search strategy employed a combination of keywords and Boolean operators to capture the multifaceted nature of the research topic. The core search string was: ("digital marketing" OR "social media marketing" OR "e-commerce") AND ("entrepreneurship education" OR "higher education" OR "university") AND ("SME" OR "small business" OR "start-up") AND ("sales performance" OR "business growth" OR "revenue" OR "sustainability") AND ("South Africa" OR "developing economies" OR "Sub-Saharan Africa").

The inclusion criteria for literature selection were strictly applied as follows:

Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and academic theses/dissertations. Publications dated from 2018 to 2025, ensuring the review's relevance to the rapidly evolving digital marketing landscape and the post-COVID-19 business environment. Studies that explicitly addressed the intersection of at least two of the following: digital marketing/technology, entrepreneurship education, and/or SME performance/sustainability.

Literature focusing on, or with clear implications for, the context of developing economies, with a specific emphasis on South Africa, where available. The initial search yielded over 250 publications. After removing duplicates and screening titles and abstracts against the inclusion criteria, 68 publications were selected for full-text review. A final corpus of 45 documents was deemed directly relevant and formed the basis for the in-depth analysis and synthesis.

### 5.2 Data Analysis and Synthesis

The selected literature was analysed using a structured thematic analysis approach, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This process involved several distinct phases:

- i. Immersing in the data through repeated reading of the selected texts to gain a deep understanding and note down initial ideas.
- ii. Systematically generating initial codes from the data that identified meaningful units relevant to the research questions. Examples of initial codes included: "infrastructure as barrier," "data analytics as VRIN capability," "mentorship as

- Social Influence," "theory-practice pedagogy gap."
- iii. Collating the initial codes into potential overarching themes. This involved sorting the codes into potential themes and gathering all relevant data for each theme. For instance, codes related to "high data costs," "poor internet," and "lack of software access" were collated under the theme "The Facilitating Conditions Deficit."
  - iv. Checking if the themes worked in relation to the coded extracts and the entire dataset. This stage involved a recursive process of refining the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells.
  - v. The final and crucial phase involved defining, naming, and refining the final themes through the explicit and consistent application of the UTAUT and RBV theoretical frameworks. This ensured the analysis moved beyond a descriptive summary of the literature to an explanatory synthesis that clarifies the relationships between adoption behaviour, strategic capability development, and ultimate business outcomes.

This rigorous method allowed for the systematic identification of patterns, contradictions, and critical gaps in the existing literature, thereby facilitating the development of a robust conceptual model that logically links digital marketing education to sustainable SME growth.

## 6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The synthesis of literature through the integrated UTAUT-RBV lens yields several interconnected findings that form a coherent narrative, tracing the journey from a student's intention to use digital tools to achieving a sustainable competitive advantage for their venture.

### 6.1 *The Adoption Hurdle: UTAUT in the South African Higher Education*

The findings strongly corroborate the UTAUT model's predictive power among South African student entrepreneurs. There is consistent evidence that student entrepreneurs exhibit high Performance Expectancy; they are keenly aware of the potential of digital tools to drive sales, enhance brand awareness, and reduce marketing costs (Mugunzva, 2024; Matsheke, 2022). This high motivation is a significant asset.

However, this positive intention is consistently and severely thwarted by critically low Facilitating Conditions. In provinces like the Eastern Cape and other under-resourced regions, the digital divide manifests as a triple threat: poor and unreliable

digital infrastructure (both on- and off-campus), some of the highest data costs relative to income in the world, and a pronounced lack of integrated, practical institutional support systems. This includes limited access to digital marketing software (e.g., for SEO, analytics, design), a shortage of dedicated digital labs, and the absence of structured, continuous technical support (Bontsa, Mushunje & Ngarava, 2023; Fosu & Ntonzima, 2025). This deficiency in Facilitating Conditions is the primary explanation for the observed gap between high entrepreneurial intention and the successful creation and operation of digitally enabled ventures.

Furthermore, Social Influence emerges as a powerful moderating factor. The literature indicates that mentorship from academics with industry experience, as well as from successful alumni entrepreneurs, significantly boosts students' confidence, practical knowledge, and resilience. Peer support networks, where students can share successes and troubleshoot challenges, also play a vital role in sustaining motivation (Makhoba, 2024). The absence of such vibrant, embedded entrepreneurial ecosystems within many South African HEIs further widens the theory-practice gap and isolates student entrepreneurs.

### 6.2 *From Adoption to Advantage: Cultivating VRIN Capabilities*

The literature provides compelling evidence that for those SMEs that successfully overcome the initial adoption hurdles, significant strategic value is unlocked. Studies by Martins (2023) and Manigandan and Raghuram (2024) demonstrate that SMEs that strategically integrated digital marketing during the disruptive COVID-19 pandemic displayed markedly greater resilience and financial performance than their non-digital or passively digital peers.

From an RBV perspective, these successful firms were not merely using digital tools; they were actively building valuable and rare capabilities. For instance, the ability to rapidly pivot sales and customer engagement to online channels became a valuable and rare capability during lockdowns. The competence to use customer data analytics for hyper-personalised marketing and product development created an inimitable understanding of a specific customer segment that competitors relying on gut feeling or traditional methods could not easily replicate. A masterfully integrated cross-channel digital strategy can become a non-substitutable core competency that underpins the business model.

Within the incubator environment of South African HEIs, the deliberate development of these capabilities is still nascent. Mugunzva (2024) correctly notes that digital competence enhances employability and business readiness. This study extends that argument by positing that entrepreneurship education is the crucial incubator where basic digital literacy must be consciously nurtured and challenged to evolve into the sophisticated VRIN resources that underpin long-term SME sustainability and competitive differentiation. The curriculum must therefore be designed not just to teach tools, but to foster the development of these strategic capabilities.

### 6.3 The Salient Research Gap

A consistent and critical finding across the reviewed literature is the scarcity of longitudinal and empirical studies that track the direct, causal

impact of digital marketing education on specific, measurable SME outcomes in the South African context. While numerous studies measure "entrepreneurial intentions," "self-efficacy," and "perceived competencies," the ultimate proof of educational effectiveness, actual post-graduation sales revenue, profit margins, job creation, and three-to-five-year business survival rates, remains largely unquantified in the local research. This gap makes it difficult for HEIs and policymakers to justify and target investments in digital entrepreneurship education effectively, as the return on investment in terms of tangible business success is not clearly evidenced.

### 7. PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the synthesis of findings, this paper proposes a conceptual framework (Figure 1) that illustrates the pathway from educational inputs to sustainable SME outcomes.

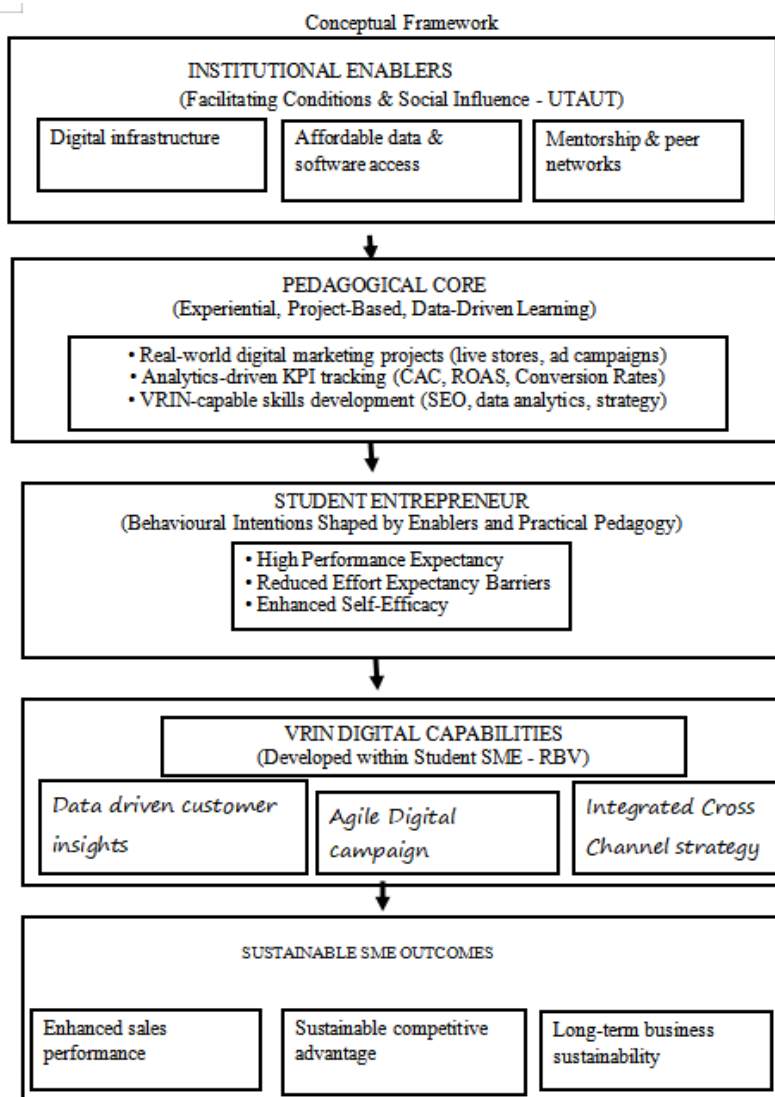


Figure 1: From Social Media to Sales: A Conceptual Framework for Digital Marketing Education in HEIs.

The framework is built on the foundation of Institutional Enablers (Facilitating Conditions & Social Influence), which include Robust Digital Infrastructure, Affordable Data Access, Practical Software, and Mentorship Networks. These enablers directly support the Pedagogical Core.

The Pedagogical Core is an experiential, project-based learning model that moves beyond theory. It involves embedding real-world digital marketing projects (e.g., running a live online store, managing a social media ad campaign) into the curriculum and teaching students to use analytics to track KPIs such as Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC), Conversion Rate, and Return on Ad Spend (ROAS), focusing pedagogy on developing specific VRIN-capable skills like SEO, data analytics, and content strategy. This core directly influences the Student Entrepreneur, whose Behavioural Intentions (performance and effort expectancy) are positively shaped by the enablers and the practical pedagogy.

The outcome of this process is the development of VRIN Digital Capabilities within the student's SME, including data-driven customer insight and agile digital campaign management. These capabilities finally lead to the Sustainable SME Outcomes: Enhanced Sales Performance, Sustainable Competitive Advantage, and Long-Term Business Sustainability.

The framework posits that without the strong foundation of Institutional Enablers and the transformative Pedagogical Core, the development of VRIN capabilities is unlikely, and the journey from "social media" to "sales" will be interrupted.

## 8. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This conceptual study has argued that the path from social media activity to sustained sales for student-led SMEs is a complex journey navigated through the intertwined processes of technology adoption and strategic capability development. The integrated UTAUT-RBV framework provides a powerful and holistic lens for understanding this journey, from the initial motivators and barriers to the ultimate source of long-term advantage. The conclusion is unequivocal: the high motivation observed among student entrepreneurs is a necessary but insufficient condition for success. Without the enabling institutional environment and a strategically guided pedagogical process to convert basic digital skills into unique, defensible capabilities, the potential of these future business leaders will remain largely untapped.

### 8.1 Theoretical and Practical Implications

#### *Theoretical Implications*

This study makes a primary theoretical contribution by demonstrating the synergistic value of combining UTAUT, a micro-level behavioural model of technology adoption, with RBV, a macro-level strategic theory of the firm. This integration provides a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon, seamlessly connecting the initial decision to use a digital tool to its long-term impact on the firm's strategic position and sustainability. It provides a theoretical blueprint for understanding how educational inputs can translate into real-world competitive advantages.

#### **Practical Implications**

The findings have direct and urgent implications for higher education institutions, policymakers, and curriculum developers:

##### **For HEIs (A Pedagogical Shift)**

A fundamental pedagogical shift is required from traditional, theoretical lectures to experiential, project-based, and data-driven learning. Curricula must be redesigned to integrate "living labs" where students launch and manage real digital marketing campaigns for their own ventures. Assessment should be based on real-world metrics, such as sales conversion rates, customer engagement scores, and ROI, rather than relying solely on theoretical essays and exams.

##### **For HEIs and Policymakers (Investing in Enablers)**

Concerted and collaborative investment in digital infrastructure is non-negotiable. This includes ensuring campus-wide high-speed internet, providing subsidised data bundles for students, and securing institutional licenses for key marketing software. Furthermore, HEIs must proactively build robust mentorship ecosystems that formally link students with industry experts, alumni, and venture capitalists to provide the crucial Social Influence and real-world guidance.

##### **For Future Research**

Researchers must prioritise longitudinal and mixed-methods studies that track the sales performance and survival rates of graduate-led SMEs over time. Such empirical evidence is crucial for validating the proposed framework, refining pedagogical approaches, and providing a compelling evidence base for increased investment

in practical entrepreneurship education.

Through the committed implementation of these recommendations, South African universities can transform their entrepreneurship programmes from theoretical exercises into powerful incubators that

do not just teach about digital marketing, but which actively forge the resilient, sales-capable, and strategically astute entrepreneurs who are essential for driving inclusive growth and achieving the country's national economic development goals.

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