

Cultural Influence On The Diffusion And Adoption Of Social Media Technologies By Entrepreneurs In Rural South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how culture influences the diffusion and adoption of social media technologies in rural businesses. The cultural factors influencing the diffusion and adoption of social media technologies among the rural communities in South Africa are still not clear. The study aimed to determine cultural factors influencing diffusion and adoption of social media technologies by rural businesses in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). Data was collected from five rural areas in KZN. The sample consisted of 175 business owners/managers, selected using quota sampling, with respondents completing a questionnaire with the assistance of an interviewer. A mixed approach of qualitative and quantitative techniques was used. Results of the survey reveal that the majority of respondents indicate that they do consider their cultural values as most important when diffusing and adopting new social media technologies such as Facebook, Twitter, and MXit. Further research should aim to develop training programmes that will provide community entrepreneurial skills and encourage an entrepreneurial spirit and use of new social media technologies among rural dwellers particularly in KZN.

Keywords: Cultural; Diffusion; Adoption; Social Media; Community Entrepreneurial Skills; Spirit

INTRODUCTION

The development of science and technology obstacles does not depend only on the form of the innovation itself, but socio-cultural aspects play a fundamental role in the diffusion and the adoption of innovation (Deligiannaki & Ali, 2011). Cultural factors, such as individualism and uncertainty, should be considered in order to optimize the efforts and maximize innovation diffusion (Tolba & Mourad, 2013). According to Straub (1994) cultural effects seem to play an important role in the predisposition towards the selection of electronic communications. Diffusion processes of new products and services have become increasingly complex and multifaceted in recent years. Consumers today are exposed to a wide range of influences that include word-of-mouth communications, network externalities and social signals (Peres, Muller & Mahajan, 2010). Literature further indicates that Technology adoption climates in developing countries are, by nature, problematic, characterized by poor business and governance conditions, low educational levels, and inappropriate infrastructure (Irura & Munjiru, 2013).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Much research has been done on social media technologies. Although social media technologies are used internationally, no research has yet been done to evaluate how culture influences the diffusion and adoption of social media technologies in rural businesses. Literature suggests that rural businesses tend to have weaker technology adoption than those located in urban settings (Rcino, Frew and Saez, 2013). According to Irura & Munjiru (2013), culture tends to affect the extent to which small and medium enterprises (SMEs) adopt the use of technology. Al-Jabri and Sohail (2012) support the premise that not many studies investigate the cultural factors that may assist rural business communities to decide on a strategic approach suitable for diffusion and adoptable by rural communities.

AIM AND OBJECTIVE

Aim

This paper aims to describe and discuss various cultural factors which influence the rate of diffusion and the rate of adoption of social media technologies in rural businesses.

Objectives

- To determine cultural factors influencing diffusion and adoption of social media technologies in rural businesses;
- To examine the diffusion and adoption rate of social media technologies in rural businesses; and
- To recommend strategies that can assist in improving the diffusion and adoption rate of social media technologies in rural businesses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Networking (SN) Technologies

Social networking (SN) technologies are applications that enable the process of connecting people, based on social ties and bonds (Veltri and Elagarah, 2009). Boyd & Ellison (2007) define social networks sites as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi – public profile within a bounded system, articulate the list of other users with whom they share a connections, as well as view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. On the other hand, according to Veltri & Elagarah (2009), social networking (SN) technologies are applications that enable the process of connecting people based on social ties and bonds. Thus, people are connected with the cultural values, norms and beliefs. This means that Social networking technologies should take account into the people's values, norms, beliefs and Religion. Awolusi (2012) support the premise that social networking websites could heavily influence organizational productivity outcomes, in terms of effective collaboration, across geographical and hierarchical works structures, through the marketing of its products, place and its visibility in the increasingly crowded world of online commerce. If cultural values are not full considered marketing of businesses through social networking websites will have big problems. Literature indicates that national culture is likely to play a role in information technology product adoption such as social media and social networks. Recent study shows studies indicate that Facebook has become a major online venue among the younger Arabic young generation; however, the understanding of its adoption as well as, and the cultural influence thereof, remains in its infancy (Shakir and Shen, 2009).

Social Networks in the South Africa Context

According to UNICEF New York (2012), South Africa is the leading innovator, in Africa, in social networking, micro blogging, and content creation. This does not indicate if rural areas of South Africa are also included. Therefore, this might not be the case in the rural areas of KZN. Van Rijswijck (2013) maintains that social media has gone mainstream in South Africa, with both individuals and businesses embracing the available platforms and, with the average age of users steadily increasing as more people become connected and networks mature. This claim supported by the latest statistics from research house World Wide Worx, 7.9 million of South Africa's 8.5 million internet users go online using their cell phones. It was found that 2.48 million users only use a cell phone, and estimated that smartphone users would increase to 11 million plus in 2012, from a previous estimate of 8.5 million (Clark, 2012). Boris urban (2011) indicates that social networks are assets for small business owners/managers struggling to survive in a competitive market. However, Björn-Sören Gigler (2011) argues that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) lead to improvements in people's lives only when informational capabilities are transformed into expanded human and social capabilities in the economic, political, social, organizational and cultural dimensions of their lives (Gigler, 2011).

Diffusion and Adoption

Diffusion is a macro process concerned with the spread of a new product from its source to the consuming public, in construct. In theory, adoption is a micro process that focuses on the stage through which an individual consumer passes, when deciding to accept or reject a new product (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010). Dearing (2009) describes diffusion as the process that includes presentation of the new culture elements of cultural elements to the society, acceptance of these elements by society and the integration of the accepted element or elements into the existing culture. It has been indicated that norms and values play a critical part in determining the diffusion and adoption rates of an innovation (Dubois, 1972). The complexity of new technologies' services was found to be the most influentially factor affecting the adoption of social media networks (Al-Ghaith, Sanzogni &, and Sandhu, 2010). According to Hutto, Trehitt & Briscoe (2011) stipulates that the adoption of new technology depends on many factors such as the type of technology, the context or culture in which the technology is introduced, and the individual decisions by people within that culture.

Culture and Diffusion of Technology Adoption

Culture is one of the most critical elements that allow people to develop and launch innovative ideas (Fauscette, 2010). Resistance to new ideas, fuelled by fear, lack of knowledge, religious and cultural beliefs and traditional practices, has often been strong and thus knowledge and information accumulated slowly (Naimi and Mark, 2010). According to Herbi & Dunphy (1998), cultural conditions determine the way in which innovations are adopted. This indicates that cultures which value creativity, technological ability and higher education, are more successful at adopting innovations. In the case of small, rural communities, where word-of-mouth, social stigma and peer pressures from other community members exist, it may play a remarkable role on the innovation diffusions because the location is associated with different risk dimensions (Piccioni, 2010). The cultural environment is of utmost importance for countries to be innovative (Ferreira, 2010). This means that culture is considered to be the general expression of humanity, and the expression of its creativity. Thus indicates that culture is, while also linked to denoting knowledge, talents, industries, civilisation and values. The objective of the study is to gain a better understanding of cultural influence on creativity can enhance easy, which is seen as a vehicle for economic and social media innovation (K A – European Affairs, 2009). It is important to explore the factors such as cultural values that predict user's acceptance and usage of these technologies to better understand the ability and management of these technologies (Cho et al., in Shanab and Ghaleb, 2010). Diffusion has been identified as one of the major of cultural change and, in turn, geographic and can also be the determinants of technology adoption, such as social networking utility (Aldeman, 2012).

Cultural Influence

According to Strite and Karahana (2006), differences in cultures may explain differences in perceptions, of the adoption and diffusion of information technologies. People are influenced by others within their societies/communities when considering the use of new technologies and this also shapes their attitude towards the usage of new systems (Du., Whinston, Lu and Liu, 2010; Al-Somali, Gholami and Clegg, 2009). This can be interpreted to mean that peoples' decision to adopt a technology includes the external impressions, such as cultural values and norms that people are subject to. Cultural values and norms determine consumers' perception of whether other people believe they should engage in certain behaviour (Pai & Tu, 2011). Individual persons consider people who are close to him/her, such as family, friends and relatives to him/her, when thinking of using new technology (Cho et al., in Shanab & Ghaleb, 2010). Literature review indicates that the social/cultural influence is a critical element in understanding innovation diffusion (Venkatesh, Morris, Davis & Davis, 2003). According to Di Pietro et al. (2012), word-of-mouth is influenced by reference groups and it includes friends, superiors, and IT experts, which in turn play a major role in the adoption of communication technologies. Cultural factors are therefore found to limit the adoption of electronic commerce (Kenneth, Rebecca & Eunice, 2012). The influence that culture has on the social construction of phenomena such as meanings and practices causes learning to be a fundamentally cultural endeavour (Cheng & Wong, 1996). Thus, shows that the role of social learning in promoting growth and technology diffusion has been featured in the endogenous growth literature (Romer, 1986). The influence that culture has on the social construction of phenomena, such as meanings and practices, causes learning to be a fundamentally cultural endeavour (Cheng & Wong, 1996).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A survey was conducted to collect data from small business owners operating in rural areas of the KwaZulu–Natal Province, in South Africa. Primary data was collected from 175 owners/managers of small businesses in rural KZN. A literature review was used as the source of information from which to formulate the questionnaire, which consisted of both closed–ended and open–ended questions. Space was provided at the end of each question to facilitate the inclusion of any additional open-ended questions, in order to acquire relevant information. A non–probability sampling method, in the form of quota sampling, was used to obtain the desired sample. Quota sampling was used due to time and financial constraints. The final usable sample is shown in Table 1 in terms of quota control characteristics. A mixed approach of qualitative and quantitative techniques was used to collect primary data. In order to standardize the conditions under which the questionnaires were completed, research assistants from local villages in the selected areas were recruited and trained as fieldworkers. Questionnaires were hand delivered to the 175 small business owners/managers, with interviews conducted in the areas of Empangeni, Ulundi, Nquthu, Escourt and Kwa–Nongoma. The respondents’ ability to answer the questionnaire was increased by the provision of a number of instructions throughout the questionnaire, which was personally administered. The sample quotas were based on three categories of area of the business, number of employees and turnover per year. The profile of the final usable sample was as show in Table 1:

Table 1: Profile of Usable Sample as per Quota Characteristics

Geographic Area		
Area	Frequency	Percent
Empangeni	38	22
Ulundi	44	25
Nquthu	32	18
Escourt	36	21
Kwa-Nongoma	25	14
Total	175	100
Business Size		
Turnover per Annum (Turnover per year)	Frequency	Percent
R0-5000	12	7
R5001-10000	32	18
R10001-15000	24	14
Over R15001	96	55
Don't know	11	6

Table 1: Respondents were asked to indicate area of their businesses and their turnover per year. In this regard turnover is their sales revenue per year.

Questionnaire was used as measuring instrument for this survey. The main questions are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of Key Questions

Research Area	Question
Type of Business	Type of Business in Which Respondents are Involved? Response Alternatives: Agriculture; Mining and Quarrying; Manufacturing; Construction; Retail and Motor Trade Repair Services; Wholesale Trade Commercial Agents and Allied Services; Catering, Accommodation and Others, Transport, Storage and Communications; Finance and Business Services; Community, Social and Person Services
Years of Existence	Number of Year of the Business Existence? Response Alternatives: Less than 1 year; 1-2 years; 3-5 years; 6-8 years; more than 10 years
How Business Owned	How Respondents Owned their Business? Response Alternatives: Jointly Owned; Manager of the Business and Sole Owned; Manager of the Business and Jointly Owned
Do respondents consider their value, norms and beliefs	Do Respondents Consider Their Value, Norms and Beliefs Before Using New Social Media Networks Technologies? Response Alternatives: Strongly Agree; Agree; Neutral; Disagree; Strongly Disagree

Table 2 cont.

Do respondents perceive their cultural values important	Do Respondents Perceive Their Cultural Values Important Than Using New Social Media Technologies? Response Alternatives: Very Important; Important; Somehow Important; Somehow Less Important; Not Important
Attitudes towards Trust	Attitude Towards Trust of New Social Media Networks with Regard to Their Cultural Beliefs? Response Alternatives: Strongly Agree; Agree; Neutral; Disagree; Strongly Disagree
Familiarity of new social media networks technologies	Respondents' Familiarity with New Social Media Networks Technologies? Response Alternatives: Yes; No

RESEARCH FINDINGS

A comprehensive literature review was done, (presented in the previous section), on problems experienced by rural entrepreneurs, with regard to the cultural factors influencing the diffusion and adoption of new social network technologies in rural KZN. Completed questionnaires were received from 175 owner/managers in rural KZN (n = 175) and the key findings of this research reveal the following results:

Table 3: Type of Business in Which Respondents are Involved

Sector	No. of Businesses	Percentage: No. of Businesses
Agriculture	23	13%
Mining and Quarrying	3	2%
Manufacturing	1	0.6%
Construction	34	19%
Retail and Motor Trade Repair Services	21	12%
Wholesale Trade, Commercial Agents and Allied Services	32	18%
Catering, Accommodation and Other	15	9%
Transport, Storage and Communications	41	23%
Finance and Business Services	3	2%
Community, Social and Personal Services	2	1%

Table 3 shows that the sectors in which respondents operate are widespread across industries. However, the bulk of respondents' businesses fall in Transport, Storage and Communications at 41(23%), with the number of respondents in Construction being 34 (19 percent), Wholesale Trade Commercial Agents and Allied Services measured 32 (18 percent), while Agriculture and Retail and Motor Trade Repair Services totalled 23 (13 percent) respectively.

Table 4: Number of Years of the Business' Existence

No of Years in Existence	No of Businesses in Existence	Percentage for Years of Existence
Less than 1 year	26	15%
1-2 years	32	18%
3-5 years	50	29%
6-8 years	35	20%
More than 10 years	32	18%

Table 4 indicates that the sample consists of a large portion of well-established businesses, numbering 50 (29 percent) for those in operation from three to five years, and 35 (20 percent) having been operational from six to eight years. While only 26 (15 percent) businesses were very new and had only been in existence for less than one year, there is a good spread of both newer and older businesses, with each of these totalling 32 (18 percent), at one to two years, and more than 10 years.

Table 5: How Respondents Own Their Business

How Business Owned	No of Businesses	Percentage
Jointly Owned	40	23%
Manager of the Business and Sole Owned	78	45%
Manager of the Business and Jointly Owned	57	33%

Table 5 indicates that a majority of 78 (45 percent), of selected small businesses in rural KZN are Sole Owned, followed by Manager of the Business and Jointly Owned businesses totalling 57 (33 percent), while less than half are Jointly Owned, measuring 40 (23 percent).

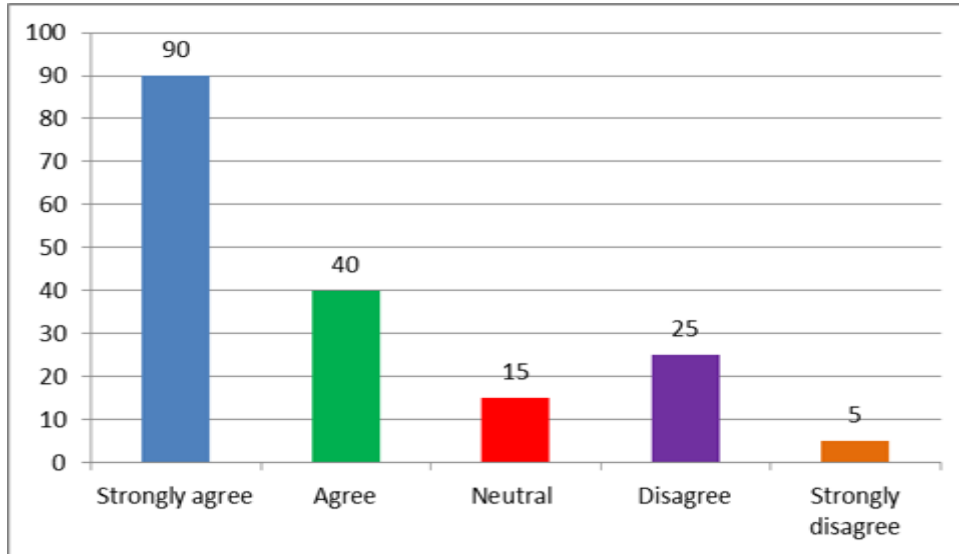


Figure 1: Number of Respondents Who Regard Their Values, Norms and Beliefs as Very Important When Deciding To Use New Social Network Technologies

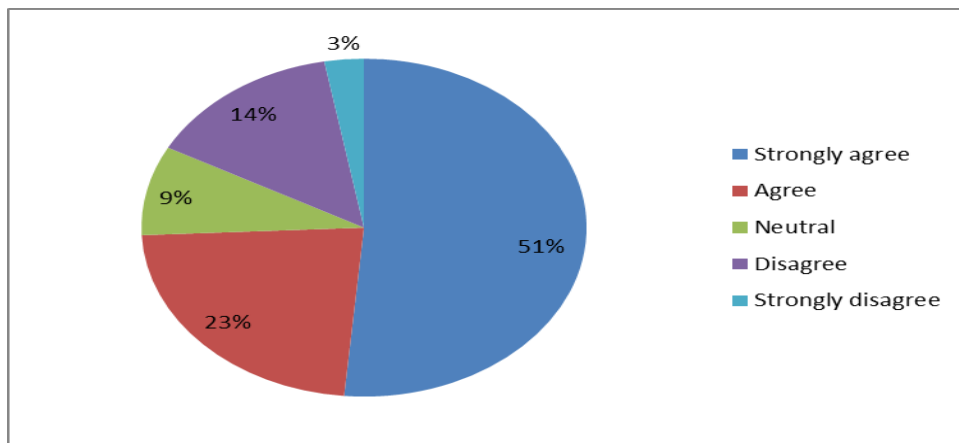


Figure 2: Percentage of Respondents Who Regard Their Values, Norms and Beliefs As Very Important When Deciding To Use New Social Network Technologies

Table 1 and Figure 2 show that on the question of how important values, norms and beliefs are when deciding to use new social media network technologies, in the form of a 5-item Likert scale. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they strongly agree (1), agree (2), are neutral (3), disagree (4) and strongly disagree (5) with the statement. The majority of respondents, across industries, regard their values, norms and beliefs as very important when deciding to use new social network technologies, with 90 (51 percent) strongly agreeing and 40 (23 percent) agreeing with the statement. There are also 15 (nine percent). Respondents who are not sure whether their cultural values are very important when it comes to the use of new social media networks technologies. While very few of the respondents, 25 (14 percent), disagree that culture is important when deciding to use new social media technologies, five (three percent) strongly disagreed with the statement. Based on the statements made, it is clear that culture has an impact on the diffusion and adoption of new social media technologies in rural KZN.

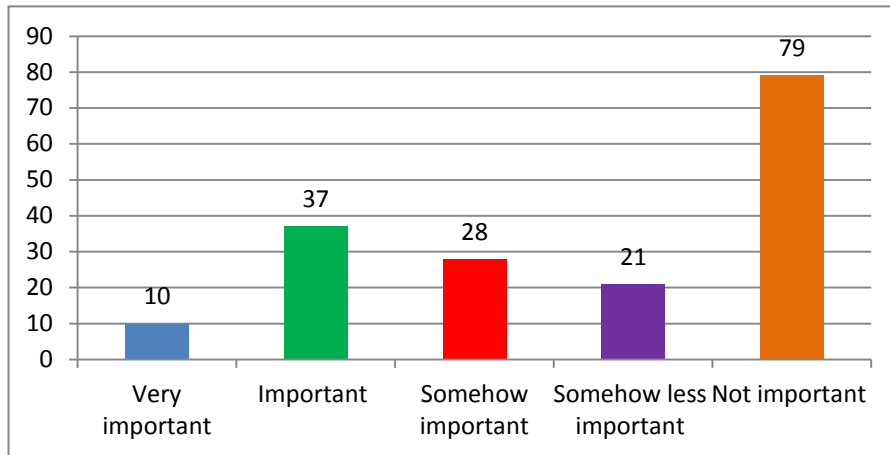


Figure 3: Number of Respondents Who Respect Their Culture in the Use of New Social Media Technologies

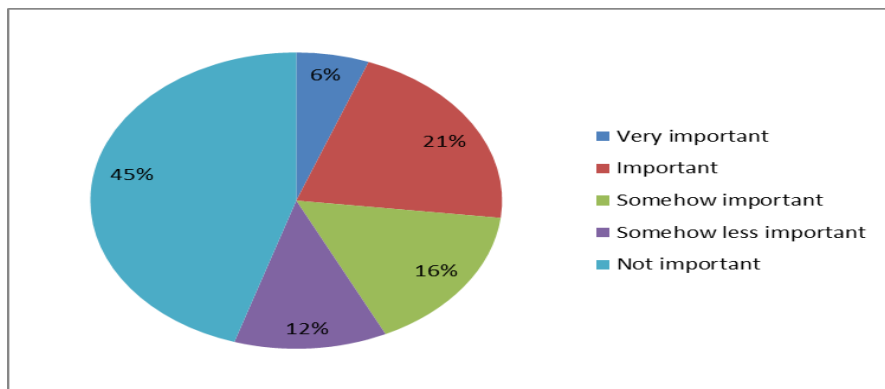


Figure 4: Percentage of Respondents Who Perceived New Social Media Technologies

Figure 3 and Figure 4 illustrate most respondents, 79 (45 percent), do not believe users of social media networking technologies consider their culture as important. However, a small number of 10 (six percent) and 37 (21 percent) believe that social media users do respect their culture and regard it as very important. This indicates that respondents have a perception that social media network users do not regard their culture as an important aspect of social media adoption. The number of respondents who indicated that social media networks users regard their culture as being somehow important and somehow less important, were respectively 28 (16 percent) and 21 (12 percent).

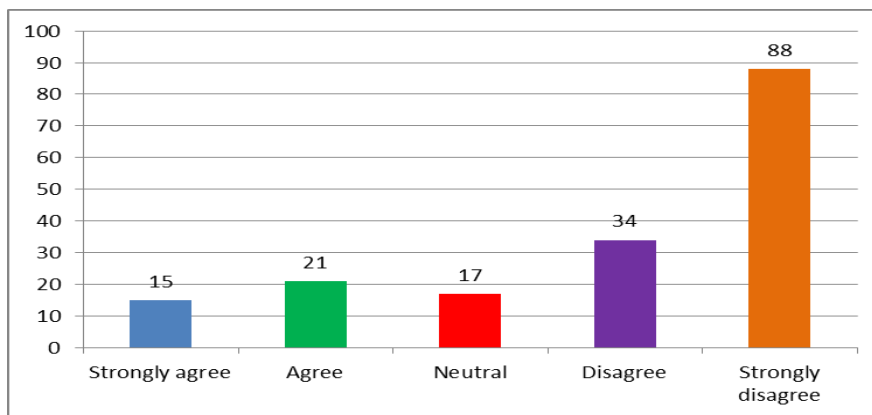


Figure 5: Number of Respondents Attitude towards Trust of New Social Media Networks with Regard To Their Cultural Beliefs

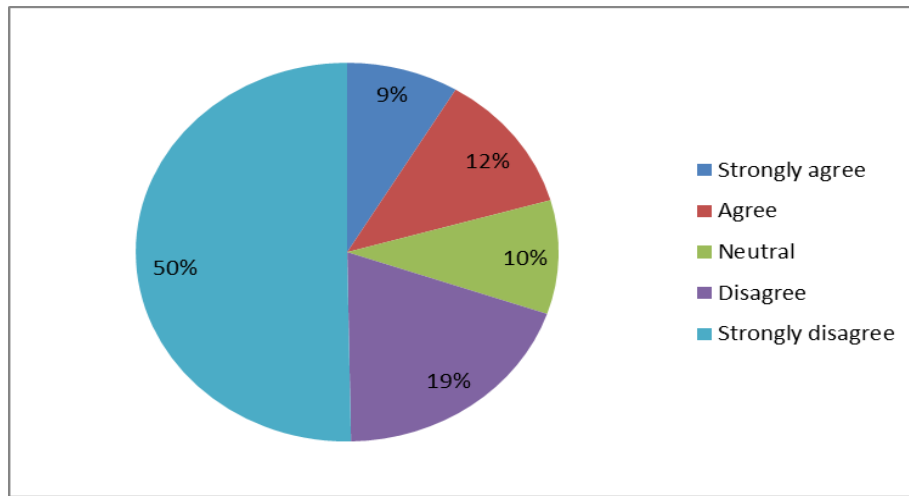


Figure 6: Percentage of Respondents' Attitude towards Trust of New Social Media Networks with Regard To Their Cultural Beliefs

Figure 5 and Figure 6 indicate that the majority of the respondents 88 (50%) and 34 (19%) disagree that new social networks technologies are trustworthy, with regard to their cultural values, norms and beliefs. From the statements that were asked, it is clear that respondents do not trust social media networks when it comes to their cultural beliefs. Less than half of respondents 15 (9%) and 21 (12%) agree that social media networks can be trusted with regard to the cultural value, norms and beliefs. While very few respondents remain neutral 17 (10%).

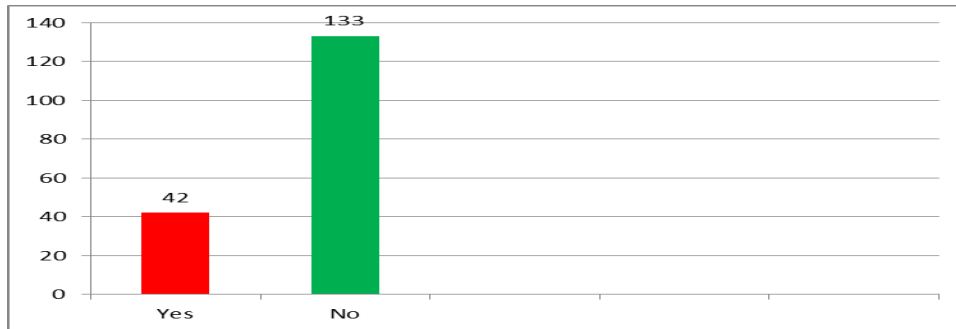


Figure 7: Number of Respondents' Familiarity with New Social Media Networks Technologies

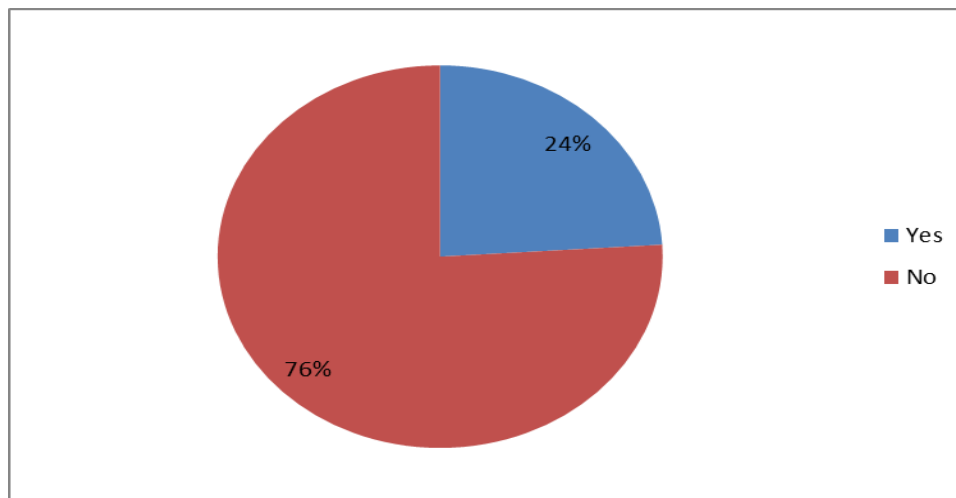


Figure 8: Percentage of Respondents' Familiarity with New Social Media Networks Technologies

Figure 7 and Figure 8 show that 133 (76%) of the respondents are not familiar and knowledgeable with new social media network technologies, while only 42 (24%) of the respondents indicate that they are familiar and knowledgeable with new social media technologies. From this statement, there is a clear indication that the diffusion and adoption of new social media network technologies is not good.

LIMITATIONS

This survey did not consider other provinces in South Africa and was confined to rural KZN. Therefore, the results of the study cannot be generalized to the South African population. Due to the complexity of South African geographical profiles, social attributes and economic conditions of rural communities, further research needs to include informal businesses in rural businesses because this survey did not cover this area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is evident from the findings that cultural factors do influence diffusion and adoption of new social media network technologies in the rural areas of KZN. Therefore, this study recommends that training programmes and workshops, targeting small business owners/managers, need to be conducted in order to build awareness and knowledge about the benefit of using social media network technologies as a business tool. Community entrepreneurial training, which focuses on the innovation and use of ICT, should be encouraged in the South African rural areas, including KZN.

CONCLUSIONS

The understanding of various cultural factors, that influence diffusion and adoption of new social media network technologies, is a major problem facing rural entrepreneurs in KZN. The use of social media networking is rapidly growing in both the business and social sectors of South Africa. Owners/managers in rural KZN should, therefore be made aware of and knowledgeable about cultural factors, which might affect the value of social media and social networking technologies, in promoting their businesses. A lack of understanding and knowledge of the use and importance of social media and social networks among rural entrepreneurial communities have a negative impact, with regard to the diffusion and adoption of new social network technologies, in rural KZN. On the other hand, the lack of awareness, limited knowledge and a lack of broadband accessibility in some areas in rural KZN are the main contributing factors for the poor adoption of these new social technologies.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

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NOTES