Assessing an Online Marketing Application Tool for Curios and Crafts Roadside Vendors Business in Vumba Mountains, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Roadside vendors survive from the traffic of tourists along major tourists' routes in the country selling different wares. The study was stimulated by need to avert product marketing challenges faced by roadside vendors vending curios and crafts. It was also prompted by the need to improve the livelihoods of the roadside vendors who are working from unsuitable environments and to expose their products to a broader pool of potential customers. The study focused on the case of Vumba road from Mutare to Leopard Rock hotel. Data was collected by conducting interviews with roadside vendors along the route and it was analysed qualitatively. The thrust of the paper is to find how online marketing strategies can be harnessed by the roadside vendors to improve their business through capturing more customers. The results showed that the vendors do not use online marketing strategies in their business; they lacked better marketing strategies for their products. The researchers proposed development of an online marketing application that can be used by roadside vendors to improve their business linking them with tourists. The online marketing application is to be launched online for use.

Keywords: online marketing; tourists; vendor; crafts; curios; souvenir

Introduction

Vumba Mountains are at the centre of eastern highlands between Nyanga Mountains and Chimanimani mountains to the north and south respectively running along the border with Mozambique. Vumba Mountains is Zimbabwe's top tourist destination in the eastern highlands (Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA), 2019) providing curios and crafts roadside vendors with an opportunity to sell their products along Vumba road from Mutare city. Vumba road stretches for 32.2 km from Mutare City to Leopard Rock hotel. Vumba Mountains is a best birding destination, with a world class golf course at Leopard Rock hotel, waterfalls, rare wildlife species, hiking trails and beautiful botanical garden. Tourist's traffic along Vumba road provides business opportunity to roadside vendors. Curios and crafts roadside vendors sell products made from soap stones, wood and clothes fabric like wildlife portrays, sun hats, table clothes, wall hangers among others (Mahoney, 2012). After a survey along Vumba road there is evidence that the curios and crafts roadside vendors' business along Vumba road is declining

with a number of vendors market stores having permanently closed, some now operate seasonally and vendors experiencing very low turnover of wares.

Roadside vending or street vending offers marginalised members of society access to employment and entrepreneurship improving livelihoods (Moagi et al., 2021). The research reveals challenges facing the curios and crafts roadside vendors, chiefly poor marketing of the products, lack of finance, poor working environment and lack of government support. The roadside vendors of curios and crafts in Zimbabwe at large make up a portion of small scale enterprises contributing positively to the economy of the country and they need recognition and support for them to survive turbulences and changes in the business environment (Ndiweni & Verhoeven, 2013; Nyawo & Mubangizi, 2015). Musavengana (2018) in his study; Toward Pro-Poor Local Economic Development in Zimbabwe: the role of pro-poor tourism noted the need to enhance economic opportunities for poor people to pursue tourism ventures and obtain a fair livelihood. Assessing an online marketing application tool for curios and crafts roadside vendors business in Vumba Mountains will definitely enhance economic opportunities for poor people to pursue road side vending and obtain a fair livelihood. Futher developing an online marketing application is of paramount importance to revive and advance the business of curios and crafts roadside vendors and recognition by tourists and other potential customers. The application was developed after a survey of challenges faced by roadside vendors along the Vumba road and findings from the vendors were thematically threaded. Vendors' responses also guided the functional development of the application since they were the users of the application. Nowadays use of internet is very advantageous as it connects people anywhere and anytime, it is now a recommendation determinant in the tourism and hospitality industry (Mutsikiwa et al., 2021). With 4.0 industrial revolution which is grounded on Internet of Things (IoT) a number of countries, states and regions around the world are already using integrated marketing in promoting their tourism products including hotels, transport, food and drink, events and others (curios, crafts, souvenirs) (Wicks, 2004; Makhitha, 2016; Nguyen, 2019; Zulaikha & Brereton, 2011). In Zimbabwe research on development of marketing applications in the field of tourism and hospitality focusing on development of curios and crafts segment is scant. A brief literature synthesis on marketing of curios and crafts, roadside vendors, challenges faced by crafts and curios roadside vendors and use of online marketing application in selling curios and crafts, and general tourism products is briefly given under literature review section.

Literature review

A variety of natural and synthetic materials are used in the manufacture of curios and crafts (Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, 1997). Handicrafts and artisanal products are other terms for curios and crafts. Artisanal products are those created by artisans, either entirely by hand or with the assistance of hand tools or even mechanical means, as long as the artisan's direct manual contribution remains the most significant component of the finished product (Mahoney, 2012). These are made with raw materials derived from renewable resources. Artisanal products are distinguished by distinctive characteristics that can be utilitarian, aesthetic, creative, culturally attached, decorative, functional, religiously and socially symbolic and significant (UNESCO,1997; Yang et al., 2018). They are made from sustainably produced raw materials, and there are no production quantity restrictions. Even when artisans produce large quantities of the same design, no two pieces are ever identical (Makhitha, 2015).

Crafts are one-of-a-kind expressions of a culture or community through local craftsmanship and materials (Nyawo & Mubangizi, 2015). However, as globalisation increases, products become more commoditised, and artisans' products compete with goods from all over

the world and there is a need to enhance the marketing of curios and crafts of the road side vendors. Traditional artisan communities and their products (handicrafts) can no longer be viewed in isolation from global market trends and competition noted Nguyen (2019). Handicrafts are a subset of the home accessory market, which includes handcrafted, semi-handcrafted, and machine-made items (Bhat & Yadav, 2015). Fashion trends, consumer purchasing habits and economic conditions in end markets all have a significant impact on the home accessory market. In many cases, artisans are disconnected from those end markets, which makes exporting their products difficult. Online marketing application can be of importance in taking the handicrafts from the home market to international market after a careful assessment of the curios and crafts roadside vendors business (Makhitha, 2016).

Digital marketing of crafts and curios

Kannan and Li (2017) defined digital marketing as an adaptive, technology-enabled process by which organisations collaborate with customers and partners to jointly create, communicate, deliver, and sustain value for all stakeholders. Marketing in the digital realm is dynamic and adaptive (possibly requiring real-time processing supported by artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning), as opposed to the traditional marketing planning and execution process, which is sequential and stage-by-stage posits Rangaswamy et al., (2020) in the role of digital marketing in digital business platforms. Digital marketing arose as a result of current technological advancements. It is necessary to understand how the crafts and curios industry is segmented and organised in order to comprehend the end market for online digital marketing (Chamboko-Mpotaringa & Tichaawa, 2021). Each artisan-produced handicraft item is made from one or more raw materials and sold in one of the home accessory market segments. Small and medium enterprise marketers may think of marketing as a synonym for advertising or selling (Lekhanya, 2010) but basic marketing concepts like segmentation, targeting, positioning, customer orientation, and seeking competitive advantage apply to either small, medium and large enterprises (Makhitha, 2016).

Digital marketing due to its outstanding advantages such as faster communication and transaction, as well as cost savings, e-marketing has played a significant role in replacing the old business model in recent years (Locket, 2018). It establishes a more efficient and convenient method of trading as well as providing services with unlimited space and time, among other things. Craft and curios businesses face both opportunities and challenges as a result of current international economic trends following online digital developments. The application of digital technology to the development of marketing aspects is done because the marketing aspect of a business is an important aspect of increasing revenue. Digital marketing, according to Singh and Srivastava (2019), is a type of marketing that is carried out through platforms such as websites, email, apps, and social media, all of which are accessible via electronic devices such as computers, tablets, and mobile phones.

Singh and Singh (2017), and Nguyen (2019) discuss marketing digitalisation of the marketing mix concept (product, place, price and promotion) in formulation of value proposition for digital marketing strategy in start-ups. The digital marketing media can be used as a virtual promotion space that displays information about the benefits of the product as well as the price offered. This digital marketing influences consumer preferences, brand promotion, consumer retention, and sales volume. The creation, communication, and delivery of value to consumers and other parties through the use of digital technology facilities is referred to as digital marketing and or online marketing (Kannan & Li, 2017). Use of the internet through social media, websites and other online means is the digital marketing currently developing (van der Bank & van der Bank, 2015). If digital marketing is adopted by road side vendors of curios and crafts it had potential of turning around their business fortunes. Buyers of touristic

products have positive influence to other buyers on social media (Carter, 2020) expressed as a percentage: 76 percent are influenced by photos shared by users who purchased the product or after the service, 56 percent by special holiday photos posted on Facebook, 46 percent by hotel user comments, 40 percent by comments on fun and attractions and 40 percent by comments from those who receive goods and services.

Road side buyers of curios and crafts

Buyers of curios and crafts are mainly tourists; the tourists buy the touristic products from roadside vendors, market stalls and from retailers (Zhou, 2017). Research has also shown that women tend to purchase curios and crafts more frequently than men, with curios and crafts being more psychologically important to many women tourists (Wilkins, 2011). Formal traders bought them directly from producers using bargaining power at wholesale prices that are exploitative to the producers (Makhitha, 2015). Craft sellers go through a long process when purchasing crafts. The buyers of crafts select suppliers using product quality, product attractiveness and sensation, product design and styling and product uniqueness. Crafts buyers' information sources on roadside vendors are through reference from friends and relatives, internet sources and previous experiences (Makhitha, 2015). Crafts retailers' further use sales records, salesperson experience and buyers experience in selling crafts.

Challenges faced by vendors of crafts and curios

Lack of infrastructure

Roadside vendors and curios typically operate on open space and may employ the temporary use of flimsy, unstable tents. Their roadside stalls are unable to withstand inclement weather, causing their smooth operation to be hampered. The vendors operate alongside roads; they lack ablution facilities, sanitation, electricity, storage facilities, and a product transport mechanism (Mitullah, 2003). Vendors' products are easily damaged by weather, poor working conditions which have a negative impact on people's health (Brown et al., 2017).

Not being incorporated into government plans and/or not regulated

Street vendors are marginalised or excluded from government plans, and governments do not incorporate the needs of street vendors into their decision-making processes (Makhitha, 2016; Zhou, 2017). As a result, the majority of street vendors in African cities operate in unofficial locations that are not regulated or controlled.

Harassment by municipal authorities and the police

As cited by Zhou (2017), street vendors are viewed as a threat to an area's image. Kenya, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Zimbabwe, and Uganda are among the countries reviewed by Mitullah (2003) in determining concerns raised by vendors in Africa and harassment of vendors by authorities was also noted. Street vendors are harassed or frequently chased away from locations, resulting in bribery and 'informal' daily taxes paid to municipal authorities and police officers. This had a negative impact on the profitability of roadside curios and crafts vendors.

Low value products and lack of access to funding

All roadside vendors agree that government funding is insufficient. This could be because the entire population of arts and crafts vendors in Zimbabwe operates informally because they are not registered for business or individual income tax (PWC, 2020). Street vendors work longer hours in order to earn more money, but they still make very little. They lack funds because they are unable to provide collateral security for bank loans (Moagi et al., 2021)

Methodology

Vumba road was the study area and case study approach was implemented for the study. Saunders et al., (2012) observed case studies are suitable for testing the validility of models, concepts and theories in the existent world and this led to the use case study design in the study. The data was collected using interviews and observations. There were 21 vendors operating at different point along the Vumba road. Only nine road side vendors of curios and crafts were interviewed along Vumba road and the researchers noted observations of interest on the vending sites. The nine vendors were purposively selected as they were on their vending sites during data collection and also had agreed to afford the researchers time for interviews. Other vendors outrightly refused to participate in the study as they were busy with their chores. Interviews were used to collect data inorder to understand what the vendors real experience in marketing their product. Observation was also used to collect the data since state of the vendors operating environment can be understood by merely observing the state of the surroundings. The data collection method enabled collection of detailed information about curios and crafts road vendors. The data was analysed thematicaly using conventional qualitative content analysis (Margaret, 2019), coding themes were obtained directly and inductively from the unprocessed data. The vendors were coded using V in analysing the data (V1 representing interviewed vendor 1, V1-V9). The study design permitted the researchers to interlink 'iterate' data analysis and the research participants in development of the online marketing application.
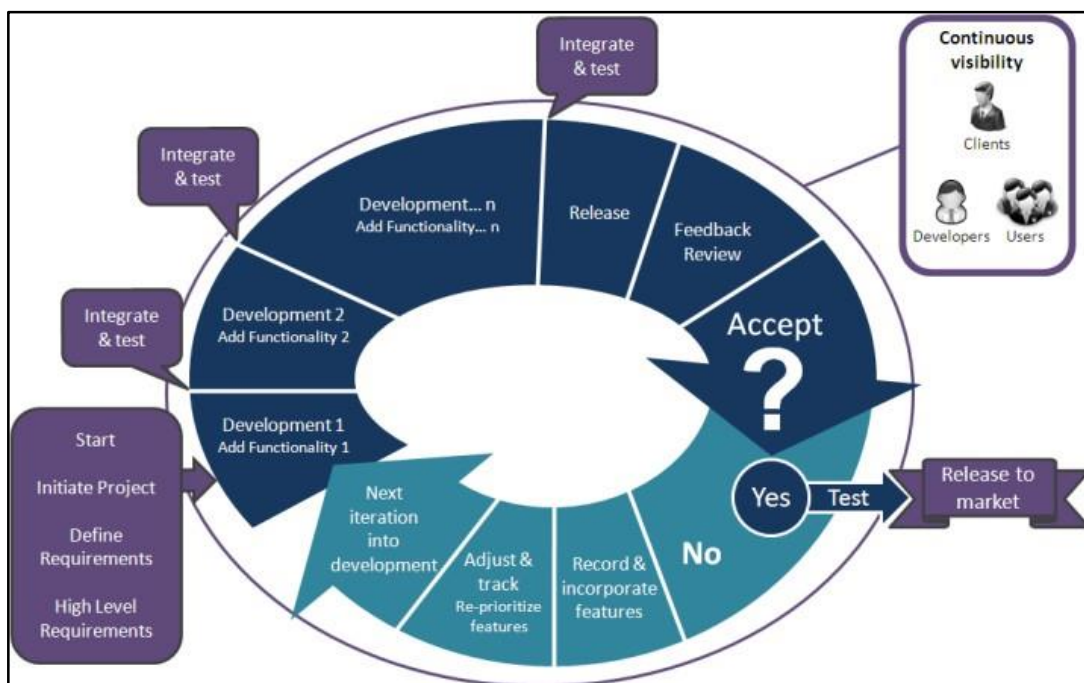

Figure 1: Agile development methodology
Source: Mezquita (2020)

The application was developed using Flutter an Android development Software Development Kit (SDK). The programming languages Java/Kotlin and DART were used, the languages are the official programming languages for cross-platform development with flutter (Ayusch, 2018). Google's Flutter is an open-source User Interface (UI) software development kit. It is used to create cross-platform applications from a single codebase for Android, iOS, Linux, macOS, Windows, Google Fuchsia and the web. The application's database was built using Firebase Storage. The agile software development methodology was used, in which each

project is divided into several 'iterations' that should all be of the same length. A working product should be delivered at the end of each iteration. In layman's terms, the Agile approach will divide the project into ten releases (assuming each iteration is set to last 4 weeks). Rather than spending 1.5 months gathering requirements, the team in Agile software development will determine the basic core features that are required in the product and which of these features can be developed in the first iteration. Any remaining features that cannot be delivered in the first iteration will be addressed in the subsequent iteration or iterations, depending on priority. The team delivered a working software with the features that were finalised for that iteration at the end of the first iterations. There were ten iterations, with the customer (vendor) receiving working software that has been incrementally enhanced and updated with the features that were shortlisted for that iteration at the end of each iteration. The Agile development methodology is depicted in Figure 1 above.

Brief description of Vumba tourist route

Vumba Mountains is in the central part of eastern highlands near Mutare city. Vumba Mountains 'Mist Mountains' draw tourists with its spectacular opulent forests, unusual bird kinds and the monkey (ZTA, 2019). In the Vumba Mountains that is where Leopard Rock Hotel is located, the hotel is one of the best mountain resort hotels in Southern Africa with world's finest championship golf courses in the top seven lists. There is magnificent indigenous and exotic plant lives preserved in the stunning Vumba Botanical Gardens (ZPWMA, 2019). Mountain sports activities like biking, trekking and water sports are done in the mountains and there are also magnificent waterfalls. The mountains can be described as a hot pot of tourism activities with upmarket accommodation facilities. The tourists' passage to Vumba Mountains is Mutare Vumba road leading to the furthest point of the mountains that is to Leopard Rock Hotel. The vendors operate along different points along the route others on Lower Vumba and others on Upper Vumba. Most the vendors that operate on lower Vumba trade on stone and wood crafts shown in Figure 3 and those trading on the Upper Vumba mainly trade on paintworks, embroidery - table cloths, sun hats, rape overs and bamboo products.

Results and discussion

The study reveals how online marketing strategies can be harnessed by roadside vendors of curios and crafts to improve their business. The participants exposes their use of online marketing platforms in doing their business, their levels of income, types of customers and an array of challenges they face in doing their businesses. The researchers made some observations of significance during the survey that have an impact to roadside vendors of curios and crafts.

Participants' profiles

The researchers found that there are 21 road side vendors of curios and crafts operating along Vumba road. Only 9 vendors were interviewed, since they were the ones found on the vending sites during the survey. The demographics of the vendors are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Demographics of the vendors

Vendors	Age	Gender	Level of Education	Vending site
V1	20-24 years	Male	Ordinary level	Lower Vumba
V2	40-44 years	Female	Ordinary level	Upper Vumba

V3	35-39 years	Male	Primary level	Lower Vumba
V4	40-44 years	Male	Ordinary level	Lower Vumba
V5	25-29 years	Male	Ordinary level	Lower Vumba
V6	55+ years	Female	Primary level	Upper Vumba
V7	30-34 years	Male	Ordinary level	Upper Vumba
V8	55+ years	Female	Primary level	Upper Vumba
V9	50-54 years	Female	Primary level	Upper Vumba

Both males and females do curios and crafts vending along Vumba road. Female vendors all of them operate in the Upper Vumba and 80% of male vendors operate in the Lower Vumba. The female vendors are all above 40 years of age with 75% of them having only obtained primary level education. The results corroborate to UNESCO (1997) report on International Symposium on Crafts which highlighted that majority of participants in the crafts industry are aged and called for the need to induct the young generation to start doing crafts inorder to preserve culture and heritage. The curios of crafts and vendors along Vumba road are not highly educated and again UNESCO (1997) reported the need to introduce crafts education at higher levels inorder to empower the society.

Types of crafts and curios

The vendors indicated that they produce and sell handmade curios and crafts from wood and soap stone. Vendor V5 remarked 'I make different types of wild animals and birds and visual artistic designs of different sizes telling different totems, wildlife experiences and people life experiences. I have zebra, lion, cheetah, guinea fowl and others. Some I produce as per order but I rarely get special orders.'

V1 responded noting, 'Most of my products are made from stones, I now produce very few products from wood as the buyers require certificate from Ministry of Agriculture when taking it outside the country and also EMA inspect our products if we are not destroying trees.'

V2 mentioned 'I sale table cloth, rape overs, hats and mats using java clothes that is specially painted and embroidered. I only design these clothes by hand knitting. Some of the products like hats, rape overs and table cloths I buy them as finished products from Harare for resale. I weave and knit the mats from here and when at home with the help of my family.'

The results indicated that the roadside vendors' produce and sale products from either wood, stone, bamboo and clothes. The curios and crafts produced by the roadside vendors are not standardised are bought and sold for reasons among others aesthetic, cultural, utilitarian, functional, decorative, social symbol and religious significant which corresponds to arts products as defined by UNESCO (1997). The vendor production of curios and crafts is not limited as the researchers observed that the vendors had abundant stock on display. The curios and crafts along Vumba road are not unique to the community only and they can be viewed from national, regional and global market developments and competition as previously noted by Moagi et al. (2021). Mainly males trade in stone and wood curios and crafts while females trade in clothes and bamboo products.

Online marketing

The vendors where probed if they use any online marketing platform to market their products. The results revealed that 89% of the vendors did not use any kind of online marketing platform to push sales of their curios and crafts. Vendor V8 indicated 'Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp are strange to me. I can read and write but using these things I can't. I don't have a phone that is compatible to internet. My phone is just for calling and writing short messages. I met my customers here when they pass by.'

V9 responded similarly to V8. V4 argued that 'I am on Facebook and WhatsApp but I haven't thought of selling my products on the platforms.'

Only vendor V5 agreed that he used online platforms to market his product. He remarked 'I get some of my customers online on Facebook. I have few guys that buy some of my products in bulk for resale; I have never mate them physically. They get to know of my crafts via my Facebook posts and they just send money via Mukuru and I send them the crafts by buses as far as Bulawayo and Beitbridge. My WhatsApp account, now is business account with catalogue of my crafts. My brother also posts my products on his facebook page and I got some leads from him.'

The vendors do not use online marketing platform, this can be attributed to their low levels of education as revealed from their demographics and general lack of knowledge. The vendors only possessed mobile phones out of the three electronic devices highlighted by Singh and Srivastava (2019) that are compatible to websites, emails, apps and social media for carrying out online marketing. Researchers observed that on the Upper Vumba there is poor mobile phone network connectivity which might attribute to lack of adoption of online marketing by vendors. The vendors that used online marketing had better sales than others and this was also noted from literature by Lekhanya (2010) that small businesses adopting online marketing tend to perform better.

Types of customers
The results showed that curios and crafts road side vendors' customers are tourists that visit the Vumba Mountains. The customers just stop by the vending sites for scenic viewing and end up checking their products and after describing the curios or crafts to the tourists that is when a sale can be concluded. Vendor V3 noted 'The tourists stop here for scenic views. Here you can see Machipanda City in Mozambique and have a clear vision of movements going on at Forbes Border post. The tourists come to check on our products and we convince them to buy our products after explaining the meaning and value attached to our art works. Most of the tourists that buy are from other places and not from Mutare. These days most of tourists are domestic tourists very few foreigners we encounter going in the Vumba Mountains.'

The customers of curios and crafts along Vumba road are tourists visiting Vumba Mountains and this showed that locals do not buy curios and crafts that much. Similarly in Victoria Fall Zhou (2017) observed that curio sector depended heavily on tourists than locals. Researchers observed that customers also requested for toilets from the vendors and they were directed into the bush. The vending sites do not have proper waste disposal facilities and travellers rest rooms, these vendor's challenges are not unique from other street vendors' challenges observed by Mitullah (2003) in African cities.

Level of income
The results revealed that the vendors were realising very low incomes from their business. Table 2 below shows average incomes realised by vendors per month and annually.

Table 2: Vendors incomes

Vendors	Monthly	Yearly
V1	300	3600
V2	500	6000
V3	720	8640
V4	650	7800
V5	290	3480
V6	450	5400
V7	600	7200
V8	350	4200

| V9 | 400 | 4800 |

The income realised by vendors is very small considering that the incomes shown in Table 2 are gross incomes without considering costs of doing the business. Use of digital business platforms has the potential to increase traders' incomes as noted by Rangaswamy et al. (2020) in this case adoption of online marketing application in vending of curios and crafts. Curios and crafts vending has the potential to change lives of the poor in Zimbabwe as noted by Musavengana (2018) in pro-poor tourism development in Zimbabwe. Those trading in clothes curios they buy some wares for sale, transport and other associated costs for the business is high. The researchers observed that the vendors were not well dressed and at all the vending sites not even one vender was selling wares from a car boot. Ultimately low incomes received by vendors in Vumba might probably mean low contribution of curios and crafts to tourism GDP at national level. In South Africa curios and crafts contributions to GDP is very insignificant as the status of vendors in Soweto has remained low despite a number of people living from vending (Makhitha, 2016) .

Challenges faced by vendors
Operating under harsh weather conditions, dwindling customers, lack of finance are some of the challenges gripping road side vendors along Vumba road. Table 3 shows a summary of the challenges faced by vendors.

Table 3: Challenges faced by vendors

Vendors	Challenges faced by vendors				
	Operating under harsh weather	Reduced customers	Lack of online business knowledge	Poor telephone network	Lack of finance
V1	✓	✓			
V2	✓	✓		✓	✓
V3	✓	✓	✓		
V4	✓	✓			
V5	✓	✓			
V6	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
V7	✓	✓		✓	✓
V8	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
V9	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

The vendors operate on open spaces and they are exposed to harsh weather. When it's raining they are forced to desert from their operating spaces. The researchers observed in the Upper Vumba that the vendors trading in curios made from clothes had some of their wares changing colour and getting to tear while on display due to direct sun heat. All the vendors indicated that they are receiving very low customers this might be attributed to COVID-19 and under marketing of Vumba Mountains as a tourist destination. The low business among roadside vendors is not being experienced along Vumba route alone it is being experienced at other key tourist attraction even in countries with stable economies as noted by Moagi et al., (2021) and Makhitha (2016). There is poor telephone network in the upper Vumba which affect the vendors from receiving payment using mobile money platforms. The vendors cited lack of finance to buy raw materials to use in making their products correspondingly the ones producing painting and clothes products such as table clothes, mats and hats. Lack of finance is a common challenge to small business in Africa (Mitullah, 2003) which requires government action to empower the vendors so that they grow their businesses.

Results implications in development of curios and crafts online marketing platforms
The online marketing application dashboard interfaces are shown in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Curios and crafts online marketing application dashboard interfaces
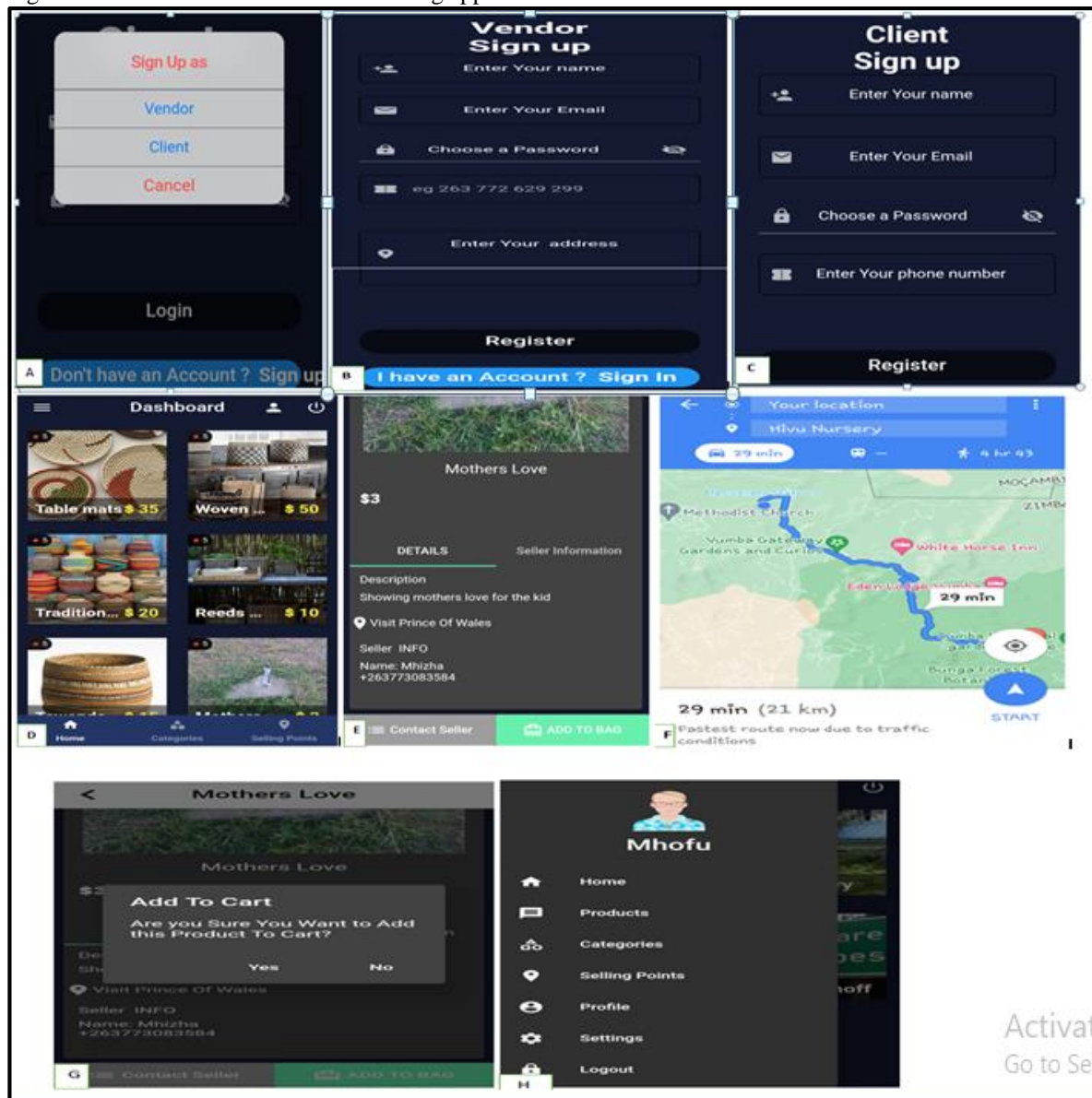
Key

A. The screen displayed by the application for first time users without accounts to create their user accounts, **B.** The screen for Vendor user account creation, **C**. The screen for Client user account creation **D.** The dashboard screen shown when successful login by user, displaying products uploaded by various Vendors on various sites **E**. Screen showing Client viewing 'Mothers Love' craft, can also choose to contact the Seller or purchase via selecting displayed buttons. **F.** Screen displaying directions and possible travel duration to Hivu Nursery by a logged in Client. **G.** Client opted to purchase the chosen product. **H.** Screen displaying menu for a logged user; in this case it's a Vendor by the name Mhofu

The curios and crafts are bought and sold for reasons among others aesthetic, cultural, utilitarian, functional, decorative, social symbol and religious significant thus the developed online marketing platform stores, captures and uploads retrievable high definition images which improves vendors market reach. The application can be linked to social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for continuation of already existing online marketing efforts employed by some vendors as the future of tourism marketing points ton integration of tourism digital marketing tools as also observed by Chamboko-Mpotaringa and Tichaawa (2021). Most of the buyers of the curios and crafts are tourists hence the developed application can be linked on major travel blogs, websites and tourists products marketing portals like hotel

bookings.com. The roadside vendors are not highly educated thus the application is user friendly with simple and self-directing interfaces and a user tutorial will be inserted. The marketing language used in the application is low line level that can be understood by the sellers and buyers of the products. The developed application will enable the vendors to sale their products universally without limits of road bound and this is probably going to increase their incomes (Musavengana, 2018). The vendors will be able to prepare products as per orders and go to the roadside vendors' sites as per appointment thus circumventing harsh weather scenarios.

Conclusion

Curios and crafts roadside vendors' business are facing many challenges from financing to marketing which saw most of the vendors struggling to improve their livelihoods. In quest to enhance the curios and crafts roadside vendors business in Vumba Mountains the research resulted in understanding the nature of the vendors and the challenges they face. Eventually an online marketing application for curios and crafts for use by vendors was developed. The roadside vendors are not tertiary educated and they produce the curios and crafts from wood, stones and clothes. Different types of products including wild animals, birds and artistic designs are produced from stone and wood. Clothes and bamboo is used to produce rape overs, table covers, mats and hats. Livelihoods of the vendors is only supported by vending of curios and crafts only, they are not engaged in any other income generating activities. The vendors operate under harsh weather conditions on open spaces, they lack finance to boost their business and poor telephone network in the Upper Vumba affect their business drastically. There is need for government and authorities to consider incorporating roadside vendors in development plans so that they can set up shades for vendors to operate from. Government should consider models to finance the businesses of the curios and crafts roadside vendors by giving them access to cheap bank loans and or guiding them to start cooperatives and form associations. The vendors need to embrace the developed online marketing application as it averts most of the dire challenges the vendors face and poses potential to revive their business. With the adoption of the online marketing application the market for the roadside vendors' products is extended from road traffickers to the globe. The roadside vendors need to embrace the use of the online marketing application; they need to be trained regarding online marketing from developmental perspective. A holistic approach towards enhancing curios and crafts vending has a potential to transform livelihoods and contribute immensely to development of gross domestic product.

Directions for future research

The concept of online marketing to roadside vendors is relatively new and bringing with it disruptive innovations to roadside vendors of curios and crafts in Zimbabwe to some extent leading to closure of road side stalls. In future there is need to train the roadside vendors on how to use online marketing applications together with other online platforms and if possible source for funding from development agencies to equip the vendors with the appropriate gadgets that are compatible to internet like smart phones. This kind of curios and crafts online application is first to be produced in Zimbabwe, it would be prudent to focus on popularising it among road side vendors and travellers changing their assertiveness towards it. There is need to evaluate how it will perform regarding enhancing the business of roadside vendors in Vumba for starters, the nation, region and internationally at large. The online marketing application was produced from the perspective of the vendors mainly and there is need to further improve it incorporating tourists' views. Future studies can incorporate use of quantitative data analysis and use a big sample size to improve validity and reliability of the results.

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