Assessing the Impact of Technological Innovation in South African Social Entrepreneurial Start-ups on Community Empowerment and Socio-Economic Equity

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Declaration

1. I understand what plagiarism is and I am aware of the University's policy in this regard.

2. I declare that this (e.g. essay, report, project, assignment, dissertation, thesis, etc.) is my own original work. Where other people's work has been used (either from a printed, source, internet or any other source), this has been properly acknowledged and referenced in accordance with departmental requirements.

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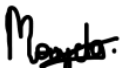
Signature: 

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my late father, **Sekatuba Charles Monyela**, who passed away during my first year of my MBA studies (30 July 1958- 28 August 2023). His memories serve as a constant inspiration, and he was my biggest cheerleader till the end.

I also dedicate this research to my family; whose unwavering support was instrumental to my success. To my mother **Mmakoma Elizabeth Monyela**, thank you for your boundless love and your financial and emotional support throughout this journey. To my siblings **Mmadira, Tumelo and Kagiso** thank you for being my pillar of strength. Your encouragement and belief in me kept me going, and for that, I am forever grateful.

To my MBA besties **Sakshna Sivnarain** and **Lebogang Machethe** thank you for your support and holding my hand during my most challenging moment in the MBA. I would not have made it without your support.

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ABSTRACT

The research explores the impact of technological innovation in South African social entrepreneurial start-ups on community empowerment and socio-economic equity. Social entrepreneurships rely on technology to be able to scale up and expand their reach (Walske et al., 2021). Therefore, this study explores the connection between technological innovations and social entrepreneurship and investigate how start-ups leverage innovations that are available such as mobile apps, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Renewable Energy, Social Media, Internet of Things (IoT) and other digital tools to address pressing socio-economic challenges that the country is experiencing, such as poverty and unemployment which results to inequality within our societies.

A qualitative research approach was used; in depth interviews were conducted with founders, professionals and employees of social entrepreneurships. The findings highlight the potential of technological innovation to empower communities, enhance socio-economic inclusion and support sustainable development.

However, there are challenges that persist such as literacy gaps and limited resources among beneficiaries, as well as scalability issues for founders due to a lack of funding. The research results confirmed these barriers and emphasized the need for better support mechanisms. Therefore, the study recommends the use of simple technology, user-friendly digital tools, fostering partnerships with government and private sector entities, development of supportive policies to reduce barriers to entry. Finally, social entrepreneurs are encouraged to develop new innovations that address people's needs and create a positive, life -changing impact rather than replicating existing models. Such models are more likely to attract sponsors, which can aid in improving the organisation's finances and scalability.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 RESEARCH PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to explore, the impact of technological innovation in South African social entrepreneurial start-ups to understand and identify its influence on community empowerment and socio-economic equity. The methodology that is going to be utilised is a qualitative research method. The method was used because the research aims to explore how social entrepreneurship start-ups can utilise these technologies to improve socio economic condition of communities.

Social entrepreneurship is increasingly recognized as an opportunity to address challenges of economic growth and as an important catalyst in the socioeconomic development of South Africa (Urban, 2013). The importance of small enterprises to economic growth and advancement has been widely recognized (Madondo et.al.,). Globally, studies indicate that technological innovations are essential for small businesses and economic growth (Madondo et.al.,). However, despite the necessity for technological advancement, social entrepreneurship remains neglected in South Africa. This is highlighted by the seeming absence of support for technological adoption, despite the availability of technological advancement worldwide.

Considering South Africa's history and the consequences resulting from apartheid, it is imperative to focus on empowering marginalized populations to establish businesses that will effectively empower communities and drive constructive change for the benefit of South Africa (Treiman, 2005). In many start-ups, utilising technology could be a key factor in driving change and progress. To address the issues that societies face, this may entail developing innovative, creative goods and services or enhancing current procedures (Makwara et al., 2023).

1.2. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

South Africa is confronted with significant socio-economic inequalities. Although social entrepreneurs create sustainable businesses with innovative solutions, they frequently lack the necessary technological knowledge to fully maximise their impact. It is imperative to explore innovative approaches to address the obstacles preventing small businesses from maintaining sustainability and profitability, especially those aiming to contribute positively to communities. Innovations such as Mobile apps and the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) could support social enterprises in reaching broader audiences, providing services more effectively. Within our

communities, there are individuals in need of fundamental necessities such as clean water, adequate sanitation, and other immediate improvements to enhance their living standards. Social entrepreneurs are people who produce creative solutions to society's most urgent social issues. Instead of relying on the government to address societal needs, social entrepreneurs identify challenges and develop innovative solutions by transforming existing system, sharing their solution, to inspire broader societal change (Sivathanu and Bhise,2013). Connecting technology and social entrepreneurship necessitates a strategy with two components. It is essential to provide social entrepreneurs with the necessary skills to make use of technology. Furthermore, it is crucial to create a development environment that includes training, mentorship, and financial support designed specifically for promoting the use of technology in social enterprises. By giving technology to social entrepreneurs, we can enable them to fully address the urgent needs for remedies for South Africa's socio-economic challenges.

1.3. RESEARCH PROBLEM

South Africa faces ongoing socio-economic challenges, particularly unemployment, poverty, and inequality, which stem from the legacy of apartheid (Treiman, 2005; Masipa, 2018). The economic shift in developing countries does not always stem from transitioning from a centrally planned to a free-market economy but can occur in pre-existing economy because of political change as was the case when South Africa ended apartheid (Cameron, 2003).

According to Black et al., (2012, as cited in Masipa, 2018) the Gini coefficient is a widely used indicator of income inequality and the distribution among individuals or between wealthy and less fortunate individuals. If the coefficient is 0, it signifies complete equality with everyone having identical income, while a coefficient of 1 signifies that only one individual has income while the rest have none Black et al., (2012, as cited in Masipa, 2018).

National treasury (2019) reported that the South Africa's economy is unstable, with stagnant economic growth, and persistent unemployment and inequality. According to Statistics South Africa (2024), in the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2023, the number of unemployed individuals in South Africa increased by 46,000 to 7.9 million, while the number of economically inactive individuals increased by 218,000 to 13.4 million. However, the number of discouraged work-seekers decreased by 107,000. This led to a net increase of 111,000 in the economically inactive population (Stats SA, 2024). Consequently, the official unemployment rate increased by 0.2 percentage points to 32.1% in Q4: 2023. The expanded definition of unemployment also decreased slightly to 41.1% (Stats SA, 2024).

As technological transfer advances, cultivating entrepreneurial skills is essential for enhancing innovation. Exploring innovative approaches is crucial for small businesses to overcome obstacles and achieve sustainability, especially those who aim to create an impact in communities (Kruger and Steyn, 2020). There is a significant gap in the literature relating to the technological impact on social entrepreneurship (Grassi and Toschi, 2024). The concept is relatively new and not much has been written about it, its impact is somewhat unknown (Urban, 2011). In addition to this, the potential for technological innovation to strengthen the efficiency of businesses is also a relatively new concept and has not been researched often in the context of small South African ventures, be they for- profit, hybrid or non-profit. However, the literature is available on similar studies around the world.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTION

Main Research Question

- How does technological innovations in South African start-ups impact community empowerment and socio-economic equity?

Sub-Questions

1. In what ways do these technological innovations influence socio-economic equity among different communities in South Africa?
2. What challenges do South African start-ups face in employing technological innovations for community empowerment and socio-economic equity?

1.5. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

I. To determine how technological innovations, empower communities targeted by South African social enterprise start-ups.

II. To identify the technological opportunities that enable social enterprise start-ups in South Africa to achieve sustainable growth and contribute to socio-economic equity.

III. To explore measures social enterprise start-ups in South Africa can adopt to leverage technology for community empowerment and achieving socio-economic equity.

1.7. DELIMITATIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

1.7.1 Delimitations

The geographic area of the study: The research focused specifically on social entrepreneurs that are based in south Africa, which limited the findings to South Africa as it does not cover other countries within different socio-economic context.

Sectoral Focus: with the focus of the study being on social entrepreneurship it is neglecting other types of entrepreneur venture. this limits the analysis to only those ventures with social mission.

Technological Innovation: since the focus is on the leveraging technological innovations it is limited to delve in all areas of innovations that are available which could be relevant to improve the impact they can have on social entrepreneurship

Time Constraints: the time frame that was used to conduct the study and write the report was restricting to fully assess the impact of technological innovations on communities and empowerment and socio-economic equity within South African social entrepreneurial start-ups.

1.7.2 Assumptions

Relevance of the findings: The research assumes that the findings regarding the impact of technological innovation on community empowerment and socio-economic equity within south African social entrepreneurial start-ups will have practical implication and applicability for stakeholders in the field and will build on the existing body of knowledge. **Cooperation of Participants:** The study assumes that start-up founders and are going to be willing to participate in interviews and provide truthful insights about their experiences, perceptions, and the impacts of technological innovations in their businesses. **Case Studies:** The research assumes that the selected case studies will adequately represent the diversity of South African social entrepreneurial start-ups and provide insights that are transferable to other similar ventures. **Validity of Data**: the study assumes that the data collected through the qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and relevant case studies will accurately reflect the realities of technological innovations within South African social entrepreneurial start-ups and its impact on community empowerment and socio-economic equity.

1.8. RATIONAL OF THE STUDY

This study is relevant because if we want to build a better South Africa and improve our socio-economic stands. Government on its own cannot address all the challenges that everyone is facing but it needs a collective action and that's were social entrepreneurship comes in.

The increasing levels of economic inequality and continuing youth unemployment, along with the failure of existing approaches to address these issues, have led to the search for new and innovative ways to alleviate poverty and inequality. Entrepreneurs in both the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors have long been recognized as a catalyst for economic growth and development. in a study conducted by (Masango, 2018) he found various SE start-ups that had potential to change the t lives of the targeted communities. **Diepsloot Kasi Hive** developed a Mobile Phone Application (App) that allowed people to register on the app when they want to go to the Clinique so that they don't have to que for long hours. **How2Get2** was developed so that commuters of public transportations can use interlink different modes of transportation that are available in their area, a fire detection device was developed by **Atinov** that could be installed in an informal settlement, linked to emergency services for a quick response time in the event of a fire (Masango, 2018).

1.9. RESEARCH REPORT OUTLINE

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the topic background followed by the problem statement in order to motivate the reasons for conducting the research. the research purpose, objectives and research questions are addressed in this chapters for the purpose of providing an overview of what the study will be concentrated on.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, various literature by various scholars written about similar topics are reviews and discussed to understand what is currently existing in the body of knowledge about the study and the gap.

Chapter 3: Research Design

This chapter outlines how the research was conducted and the method of the research that was used and outlines the entire process undertaken in order to complete this research.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

This chapter is the analysis of what has been gathered during the interviews. The data is gathered, cleaned and analysed to address the research objectives.

Chapter 5: Discussions and Conclusion

This chapter discusses the findings in chapter four and conclusion on the findings recommendations for improving the social entrepreneurship start-up ventures in the country.

Chapter 6: Discussions and Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter will provide recommendations that could be used to improve the status quo of social entrepreneurship in South Africa.

Chapter 6: Appendices: all the supplementary material that was used to compile the report will be.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

The role of technological innovations and social entrepreneurships cannot be overstated in shaping the socio economy of South Africa. Similar to many developing nations, South Africa faced issues of socio-economic inequality and limited access to resources for disadvantaged communities (World Bank, 2023). These organizations hold the potential to economic growth and to foster community empowerment and socio-economic equity (Daru and Gaur, 2013). The process of creating innovative solutions that solve social problems by transforming markets and making them financially sustainable has evolved (Daru and Gaur, 2013). This literature review aims to navigate and explore the impact of technological innovations on community empowerment and socio-economic equity within South African start-ups, offering insights into their challenges, opportunities, and potential pathways for sustainable development and the gaps that exist. By critically analysing these gaps, this review can contribute significant knowledge to gain more insight regarding fostering positive social change through technological innovation in South Africa's entrepreneurial landscape.

2.2. EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

2.2.1 Decoding the definitions: social entrepreneurship verses social enterprises.

Social entrepreneurship (SE) is a concept that integrates entrepreneurial principles with a social focus on social impact (Abu-Saifan, 2012; Visser, 2011). It operates at the intersection between for profit and non-profit organisations, concentrating on tackling social issues through innovations and sustainable business structures (Visser, 2011; Urban, 2008). The primary goal of SE's is to address an unfulfilled social need while making a profit to ensure financial sustainability and continued service to communities (Abu-Saifan, 2012; Visser, 2011).

Despite its growing recognition scholars have not reached an agreement about the definition of social entrepreneurship (SE) due to the confusion with other terms such as social enterprises as they all pursue similar objective (Biggeri et al., 2018; Abu-Saifan, 2012). According to Njogu (2020) a social enterprise refers to a business that is aimed at solving social challenge rather than maximising profit. Although these enterprises monitor financial success they are vested more on solving social issues (Njogu, 2020). However, they are prohibited from receiving external funding such as public donations, government assistance or grants (Njogu, 2020). Whereas a social entrepreneurship involves entrepreneurship activities aiming on creating social good this can involve applying business principles, processes and strategies that

address environmental and social challenges unlike social enterprises they can seek and receive external funding, including public donation, grants and government support Njogu, 2020).

According to Investopedia (2024) social enterprise and social entrepreneurship are two different concepts. Social enterprises are businesses designed to achieve both financial profit and social impact through their commercial operations (Investopedia, 2024). Whereas social entrepreneurship focusses on developing a new innovative solution to social and environmental challenge by applying business strategies (Investopedia, 2024). While social enterprises integrate social responsibilities into their business models, social entrepreneurs drive change by pioneering innovative approaches to address social issues (Investopedia, 2024). Thus, although both aim at addressing societal needs, social enterprises work within established business structure, while social entrepreneurship is more about establishing innovative and impactful initiatives that solve a social challenge.

However, a common definition that was found in many literatures is that a social entrepreneurship refers to someone or organisations were a primary objective is not to make profit but rather uses market relates systems that make provision for social good as their main objective (Biggeri et al., 2018; Urban and Bukula, 2022; Visser, 2011). Ramani et al. (2017) distinguishes the two types of organizations as social enterprises have more of a business mindset as they pursue the organisation goals while social entrepreneurs focus is imbedded in social value creation. Social Entrepreneurs finds opportunities by simply identifying a social problem because their aim is to maximise social impact while social enterprises, they want to earn a profit in what they do (Ramani et al., 2017). To have a clear understanding of the terms first term, social entrepreneur, represents a specific person; the second term, social enterprise, denotes a type of organization; and the third term, social entrepreneurship, describes a procedure (Ramani et al.,2017). This conceptual clarity sets the stage for examining how these definitions and distinctions are understood and applied in different socio-economic context, particularly in the Global South.

The emerging narratives within the south African context as a developing country, differs from the prevailing narratives from more developed areas (Karanda and Toledano, 2012). In South Africa attention is given to the entrepreneur's role as the driving force behind the social entrepreneurship, the unique nature of the business created to achieve the social mission and the impact the entrepreneurship has on the society (Karanda and Toledano, 2012). By recognising these context -specific dynamics, the literature helps frame how South Africa's

socio-economic challenges shape the evolution and interpretation of social entrepreneurship within the country. Scholars such as Littlewood and Holt (2018); Karanda and Toledano (2012) argue that in developing countries such as South Africa, social entrepreneurship often takes hybrid forms that reflects both local development and needs and broader institutional voids. This deeper comprehension adds to the theoretical contrasts highlighted in the global literature by grounding them in local situations.

Although the concept of social entrepreneurship and social enterprise are often used interchangeably. The academic literature delineates clear distinctions between them, primarily based on their intent, organisational structure and funding mechanisms. Understanding these distinctions is crucial for analysing how entrepreneurial models address social challenges in South Africa. This clarity forms the foundation for further exploration of their role in community empowerment and sustainable development within the South African context.

2.3. EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

2.3.1 The status of socio economy in South Africa

The ongoing socio-economic inequalities in South Africa provide a favourable environment for social entrepreneurship to thrive, as there is a clear and undeniable use of social entrepreneurship where conventional government efforts fall short of meeting people's needs (Urban, 2013). According to Evoh (2009) Africa and other developing regions around the word have potential to take advantage and exploit opportunities that are brought by Information and communication technology (ICT). However, policy makers, donors, and prospective social entrepreneurs, face the biggest challenge of lack of practical knowledge that is faced by ventures that are in their developmental stages and where the information is available it is incomplete and disorganised (Evoh ,2009).

Even though South Africa has experienced a positive economic growth in the past they are concerns by economist regarding the high unemployment rate due to the lack of job opportunities because of low level of entrepreneurial activities in the country as they play a crucial role in starting and expanding businesses of all sizes, especially small ones (Swanepoel et al., 2010). The GEM 2004 report results show that there is a need in South Africa to increase the number of Start-up businesses and put in measured to grow those businesses beyond the start-up to increase the economy and contribute to job creation (Swanepoel et al., 2010). To aid in these socio-economic challenges South African government recognized SAB KikStart program on its Integrated Strategy on the Promotion of Entrepreneurship and Small Enterprises

as a benchmark program to help business start-ups (Swanepoel et al., 2010). The SAB Foundation offers ongoing assistance to entrepreneurs and social innovators to establish sustainable businesses that promote job growth, address social problems, and strengthen communities (SAB foundation, 2024). During this journey, these people and small enterprises can obtain funding, improve their business skills, receive personalized mentorship, and get help with reaching markets and finance (SAB foundation, 2024).

2.4 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

2.4.1 The national system of innovation and social entrepreneurship in South Africa

Manzini (2012) states that the term National System of Innovation (NSI) is used to describe a country's effort to promote technological innovations. Though various innovation frameworks have been used, NSI has been the most adopted framework by policy makers in South Africa after it appeared in the 1996 White Paper on Science entrepreneurship that values social impact as much as technological progress (Lukhele and Soumonni, 2021). While the current literature on South African social entrepreneurship offers useful insight. There appears to be a gap regarding how social entrepreneurs start-aps can leverage technology effectively. This observation resonates with findings from Lukhele and Soumonni (2021) who emphasized the necessity for policies that align with the National System of Innovation (NSI) to enhance innovation driven economies in developing countries like South Africa.

South Africa has used NSI in two areas which are Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) with the focus being on advancing Research and development (R&D) and another one being Doing, Using, and Interacting (DUI), which involves business strategies knowledge exchange among staff, and interactive education between users and producers (Lukhele and Soumonni, 2021). The benefits of NSI are that it focuses on the interconnected network of elements involved in knowledge flows, such as policies, institutions, businesses, and consumers therefore it can be used by policy makers effectively to address the gaps in economic growth (Lukhele and Soumonni, 2021).

Ramani et al. (2017) states that within the NSI, the roles of social entrepreneurship is to create and promote innovations that cater for the needs that have been underserved some of the challenges being that innovations are not meeting the desires social impact because of defusing theory as companies will priorities project that will bring more profit than those that will have social impact with less profit. for example, a low-cost toilet does not require a robust technology, but most people do not have access to it whereas a cell phone that has more

technology its easily available for most people. A situational analysis of Africa's efforts promoting entrepreneurship, technology commercialization, and innovation and the role of public policies was conducted by (Daniels et al., 2021) which revealed numerous gaps and challenges. The analysis revealed reasons why the initiatives did not produce envisioned results. Among these issues Africa has issues relating to the absence of strategic long-term approaches such as diagnostic analyses, technology watchers and mappings of societal challenges. There are also barriers to effective governance both internally and externally, significant gaps in investments for human capital and knowledge infrastructure and a disconnect between policy and implementation contexts in society.

2.5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.5.1 Social entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship, introduced in the 1970s, aims to tackle social problems sustainably. The term 'social entrepreneur' was coined by Joseph Banks in 1972 to describe using managerial skills to address both social and business challenges. Ashoka was the first organization supporting social entrepreneurs in the 1980s (El Ebrashi, (2013). The function and strategy of social entrepreneurship, there must be a holistic approach regarding value proposition and trade of between "value creation and value capture" (Santos, 2012).

2.5.2 Diffusion of innovation theory

Diffusion theory refers to a process where people embrace innovative ideas, product practices etc. (Kaminski, 2011; Moga et al., 2023). It is a useful change model for facilitating technological innovation by adapting and highlighting the innovation in a manner that caters to the requirements of adopters at every level. It highlights the significance of communication and peer networking in the adoption process as well (Kaminski, 2011).

2.5.3 Triple bottom line theory

Triple bottom line theory (TBL) is a concept that does not only look into companies making profits, but it considers profit, planet and people (Żak, 2015). It argues that companies must have a holistic approach which incorporates social and environmental aspects along with financial performance (Farooq et al.,2021).

2.5.4 Social Capital Theory

Social capital refers to the range of resources and opportunities that individuals can access or draw upon through their social and interpersonal network (Van Bakel and Horak, 2024). Recent

studies have shown that social capital promotes access to information and resources to under resourced institutions and communities (Mbatha & Nkosi, 2020). According to (Urban and Bukula, 2022; Dlamini et al., 2023). South African social entrepreneurships often leverage these opportunities to build trust, encourage cooperation, and enhance the impact of their initiatives.

2.5.5 Social Empowerment theory

Empowerment involves helping individuals, especially at the local or personal level, to strengthen their abilities and realize their potential as members of society. It emphasizes supporting people to actively take part in shaping the conditions and choices that influence their everyday experiences (Herrmann,2012). Empowerment Theory focuses on increasing individual's and communities' capacity to gain control over their lives through access to resources, skills, and decision-making opportunities (Jones and Waller, 2019). Empowerment in social entrepreneurship includes capacity-building, participatory approaches, and using accessible technologies to strengthen local autonomy and socio-economic resilience (Ngcobo and Moyo, 2021; Urban and Bukula, 2022).

2.6 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

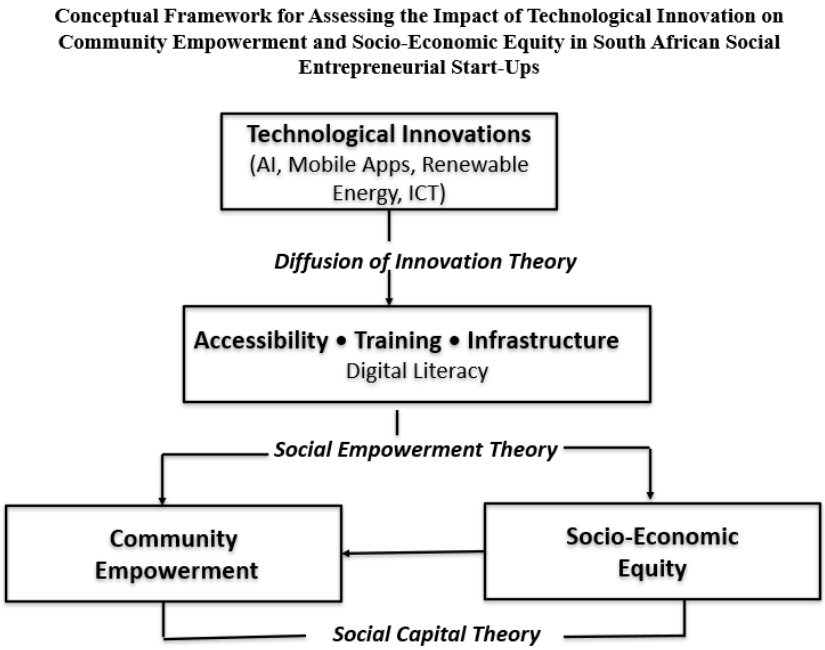

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Diagram

The conceptual framework illustrates the interconnection between social entrepreneurship, technological innovations, and socio-economic developments. Drawing from the Diffusion of Innovation Theory (Kaminski, 2011) and the Triple Bottom Line Framework (Farooq et al., 2021), the framework indicates that the use of innovative technologies (e.g., mobile apps, AI, renewable energy solutions) leads to social outcomes only when moderated by variables such as access, training, and enabling infrastructure and shows the benefits of leveraging opportunities and how the elements can collectively make an impact in communities.

2.7. CONCLUSION

The literature review shows that there are opportunities to be explored and investigate how social entrepreneurship and technological innovation are connected in promoting community empowerment and socio-economic equality. in countries such as South Africa where there is a significant gap of inequality supporting social entrepreneurship business start-ups is vital as they can be used to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor. Though at times it can be challenging it is imperative that policy makers and people of influence use them not only on paper but to implement them for example. The National System of Innovation framework offers a useful perspective for policymakers to address this issue and promote social.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This section provides a detail overview of how the research design was used to gather the required information to assess the impact of technological innovation in South African social entrepreneurial start-ups on community empowerment and socio-economic equity. The chapter outline the methods that were employed to fulfil the research objectives.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

A **qualitative approached** was appropriate for this study as it focuses on how individuals perceive, interpret, and make sense of their experiences to understand their social environment (Mohajan, 2018). It aims to capture the nuanced stories and experiences of social entrepreneurial ventures, a similar approach was used by (Evoh, 2009) to explore the role of social entrepreneurs in deploying ICTs for youth and community development in South Africa. Their rationale aligns with this study as the focus is to explore social phenomenon within its context, rather than generalizing to a broader theoretical population. The advantage lies in its ability to provide a rich, multifaceted view of the subject objectives.

The study is a **cross-sectional** study as the data was collected at single point in time the cross-sectional approach is suitable for exploratory research intended to comprehend the viewpoints and motives of primary stakeholders especially when resources are constrained or when the research topic pertains at single point in time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach allows to study multiple variables simultaneously, offering valuable insights into relationships between stakeholder's roles and their visions for community impact (Bryman, 2016). However, even though the method is unable to show causality, it effectively captures the range of perspectives and experiences present at the time of data collection. The **primary data** was collected using **structured in-depth interviews** with key stakeholders from various social entrepreneurships. The use of structured interview was deemed best for the research to maintain uniformity of questions among the participants as it enables the comparison of responses and the recognition of prevalent themes (Bernard, 2017**.** This method allowed the systematic exploration of pre-determined topics related visions for community impact while allowing the participants opportunities to elaborate on their experiences and their perspectives.

A **non -experimental** questionnaire served as a guide for the structured interview. Since the objective of this research is exploratory in nature the method is deemed suitable as the primary goal was to understand the phenomena rather than to establish a causal relationship (De Vaus,

2014). The questionnaires focused on understanding how the stakeholder's used technology and innovations for community impact to fulfil their visions. This approached allowed a gathering of rich data exploring the nuance of stakeholder's perspectives. The structure of the questionnaire enabled key areas to be covered consistently across interviews, while the open-ended structure allowed flexibility and in-depth exploration of individual experience.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The data was collected by interviews using an open-ended questionnaire. A blended mode of interview was chosen which includes a face-to-face interview and use of video conferencing platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Google meet. The reason for selecting an open-ended questionnaire is that it allows respondents to provide their own answers which can yield more accurate reflection on their choice (Schuman and Presser, 1979). Whereas a close- ended questionnaire will not be a perfect fit as it may fail to provide relevant and meaningful substance to the respondents and the options provided may influence the respondents to only provided option and not what they really want (Schuman and Presser, 1979).

3.4 SAMPLE AND SAMPLING METHOD

This study adopted **non-probability** sampling because a specific population that meets the criteria of the research topic was sampled. To ensure that a targeted sample and reliable data is collected **Purposeful sampling** strategy was used because participants were chosen based on the specific criterial relating to the research question (Lopez and Whitehead, 2013). The participants are individuals with necessary experience and knowledge to provide the information that is needed, which includes social entrepreneurs, managers, employees and community members who are directly involved or affected by the social entrepreneurship. Under the umbrella of purposeful sampling a **quota sampling** was employed. To ensure a good mix and balanced representations from different social entrepreneurships. A total of 43 social entrepreneurial organisations were contacted for participation in this study. Of these, 8 organisations agreed to take part in the research and were interviewed. This purposive, non-homogeneous sample was selected based on the organisations' relevance to the research topic, accessibility, and willingness to participate. The social entrepreneurship sectors that were interviewed were from the following, education, food, technology and health. This ensures a variety of perspectives within the targeted group. key stakeholders were targeted from chosen social entrepreneurships, were founders who developed the start -up and organisations were interviewed to gain understanding and the reasons behind their vision and their use of

technology for community impact, also managers and employees who are work on these social entrepreneurships were interviewed to gain more understanding on what they do.

3.5 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Semi-structured interviews were used as the research instrument; participants completed an open-ended questionnaire. The combination fits well as it offers direction and flow of questions. Open ended questionnaires are good for exploratory as the aim of exploratory research is to generate hypothesis rather than test them (Burck,2005). The questions are divided in 4 sections to address the research objectives **See Appendix C.**

3.6 PROCEDURE FOR DATA COLLECTION

The interviews were conducted by first sampling the social entrepreneur organisation in South Africa. Once the sample respondent was identified and agreed to participate in the interview, a meeting was scheduled for the interview which were conducted face to face and by using online conference platforms for respondents that were in a different city. The interviews were structured interviews with predetermined structure and a set of question ready to be used, and each research subject is asked the same questions, in the same order (Rashidi et al., 2014).

3.6.1 Data cleansing

The transcription was done using Otter AI tool. The data cleaning included removing some punctuation and words, that were not well-transcribed. Furthermore, some of the conversations, which were not part of the questionnaires, were removed so that only relevant information can be transcribed and used in the report.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS STRATEGIES AND INTERPRETATION

3.7.1 Themes

To analyse the data, thematic analysis was performed. **Thematic analysis** is a qualitative approach to analysing data and it is done through identifying, analysing and reporting themes and patterns within a dataset (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It is suitable in analysing data collect to identify recurring themes around empowerment and socio-economic equity. It provides allowance for digging deeper into the experiences of communities and social entrepreneurships to understand how technological innovation is impacting them. The software that was used to analyse the data was **Atlas.ti** as it allows for efficient coding of interviews by identifying themes and visualisation of relationships between them, which enable a more rigorous and systematic analysis, enhancing the credibility of the research findings. Themes in thematic

analysis are symbolic of a verse in a song. Themes are patterns observed in all data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Themes are patterns consistent in most of the dataset, patterns that hold meaning when observed against the overall research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), there are 6 steps within the thematic analysis namely: Familiarization, Generating Initial Codes, Searching for Themes, Reviewing Themes, Defining and Naming Themes and Producing the Report.

3.7.2 Familiarization

Familiarization is the first step to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This step is done so that the data analyst can become familiar with the dataset. To fulfil this step, I read, repeatedly, 8 interview transcripts to ensure I am familiar with the dataset.

3.7.3 Generating Initial Codes

Generating initial codes is the second step to thematic analysis. This step is characterized by generating initial observed patterns within the dataset (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The initial themes are not set in stone and can be adjusted within the third step of Reviewing themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Initial codes do not have to be consistent within the entire dataset, codes can be chosen based on relevance to the research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006).
Initial codes that emerged from the data were 1) Education; 2) Social Issues that inspired the Social Enterprise; 3) Challenges experienced running a Social Enterprise; 4) Use of Technology and Technological Innovation within the Social Enterprise and 5) Training and Education of Community.

3.7.4 Reviewing Themes

This is the fourth step of thematic analysis as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This step is characterized by the additional reviewing of the codes that emerged initially from the dataset. From the initial generation of codes, 5 codes emerged, namely: 1) Education; 2 Social Issues that inspired the Social Enterprise; 3. Challenges experienced running a Social Enterprise; 4. Use of Technology and Technological Innovation within the Social Enterprise and 5. Training and Education of Community. Upon reviewing the dataset another time, a theme that had been missed was then added namely, 6. The Characteristics of Communities that Social Enterprises target.

3.8 LIMITATIONS

The sample size of eight participants could result in an inadequate representation to capture broader impact of social entrepreneurships in South Africa as it is a small sample. This could lead to overlooking perspectives that are less accessible through this method. Additionally, respondents may potentially overstate the impact of their organization on the community to present themselves as significant contributors, thereby potentially inflating the perceived level of impact of these organizations.

3.9 QUALITY ASSURANCE

3.9.1 Reliability

A pilot study will be conducted as previously described by (Dassah, and Ngatse-Ipangui, 2019) to pre-test the questionnaires to see whether reliable results could be achieved. The interviews using the questionnaire will be conducted on three (3) social entrepreneurships to test the method.

3.9.2 Transferability

Purposeful sampling was used to select a broader range of social entrepreneurs. Generalization of results is not supported with qualitative research; therefore, the study will assure that the findings can be applicable to similar studies through transparent assumptions and contextual interpretation of the research environment and participants (Dissertation Centre, 2024).

3.9.3 Credibility

The quality assurance focused on ensuring the trustworthiness and credibility of the methods achieved through rigorous and well-documented research design, data collection, and analysis processes. To achieve this the data underwent a vigorous investigation, participant validation of the information and member check as was done by (Dissertation Centre, 2024).

3.9.4 Confirmability

Confirmability of qualitative data is ensured by checking and rechecking data during data collection and analysis to ensure that results may be replicated by others (Dissertation Centre, 2024). To ensure this there will be a clear coding of scheme that indicates codes and patterns found in the analysis and data check was conducted before the analysis, which made the results dependable.

3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics approval: Prior to the commencement of the research, the research went through a review by the ethics committee at the university of the Witwatersrand and approval was granted to conduct the research. **Ethics protocol number: WBS/BA1510480/621**

Informed consent: All participants in the study were given an informed concern to sign and an explanation regarding the research purpose, data collection methods and how their information will be used and stored were explained to them before the interview was conducted.

Privacy and confidentiality: the data was compiled in a way that the report does not link the information directly to the respondent. This ensures the privacy and confidentiality of the respondents.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Social entrepreneurs have historically depended on social capital, financial resources, and visionary leadership as essential assets for the creation and advancement of social companies. In this regard, technology serves as a crucial resource capable of converting conceptual ideas into functional enterprises (Urban and Bukula, 2022). The analysis looks at how technology facilitates the establishment of social enterprises that may have previously encountered constraints in scalability or viability due to the lack of technology resources. This analysis utilizes Technology Diffusion theory to illustrate various case studies that exemplify how technology can be a crucial asset for social entrepreneurs. The analysis will furthermore cover the impact that occur when utilizing and incorporating existing technical advancements, and how social entrepreneurships can broaden their scope, improve operational efficiency, and realize sustainable growth.

4.2. DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS

A total of 10 participants (*n*=10) representing 8 organizations were interviewed,[1] representing a diverse range of backgrounds in terms of gender, race, role, type of social entrepreneurship, location and experience. The gender distribution consists of five males (50%) and five females (50%). Racially, the participants comprise of six African (60%) three whites (30%) and one coloured (10%) which reflects a diverse mix or racial backgrounds. Geographically, the participants were distributed as follows Limpopo (n=3, 30%), Western Cape (n=2, 20%), Mpumalanga (n=1, 10%), Eastern Cape (n=1, 10%), and Johannesburg, Gauteng (n=3, 30%), with Johannesburg having a higher representation due to multiple respondents from the same organization. In terms of roles, three participants were founders, two were partners and three from the same organisation held executive positions and 2 were employees. The social entrepreneurships that the respondents operated in were diverse which include agriculture, health, renewable energy, business development and journalism, with two organisations that are involved with uplifting young learners and all of them are involved in training

[1] Although we are using n=10 for total number of respondents, we are using n=8 respondents for the analysis and discussions. This is because three individuals from the same organisation provided interchangeable responses, as they were all in the same meeting, with one elaborating further when the other fell short.

Table 1: Demographics and organization profile of respondents

Participant	Gender	Race	Role	Type of Social Entrepreneurship	Location	Experience
1	Male	White	Founder	Agriculture	Mpumalanga	Professional
2	2 Females 1 Male	African and White	CEO, Executive operations and service manager Operations manager	Business empowerment and development company	Gauteng	Professional
3	Male	White	Founder	Website, education	Eastern Cape	Professional
4	Male	African	Partner	Renewable energy (solar)	Limpopo	5 years
5	Female	African	Partner	Agriculture	Limpopo	5 years
6	Female	Coloured	Founder	Health	Western Cape	Professional 37-years
7	Male	African	Employee Coordinator	Health	Western Cape	Professional
8	Female	African	Employee	Health, Information and Technology	Limpopo	Professional

4.3 EMERGENT THEMATIC ANALYSIS THEMES OBSERVED IN PARTICIPANTS

The data was collected through structured interviews. The codes that emerged were six with underlying themes that were rooted in the research question. The first emergent theme is **Socioeconomic Factors** which compromises the codes: Education; Challenges experienced running a Social Enterprise and The Characteristics of Communities that Social Enterprises target. The second emergent **theme is Community Empowerment** which comprises Training and Education of the Community and the Characteristics of the Communities that Social Entrepreneurs target. The third emergent theme is **Technological Innovation,** and this theme comprises the codes: 1. Use of Technology and Technological Innovation within the Social Enterprise and 2. The Characteristics of Communities that Social Enterprises target.

Table 2: Defining and naming of themes

CODE	DATA EXTRACT
Education	All participants were educated obtaining at least a Diploma.
Social Issues that Social Enterprises address	Food insecurity; Renewable energy insecurity; Unemployment/ Job creation; Education and Healthcare Services.
Challenges experienced running social Enterprises	Services are inaccessible to intended users due to ingenuity gap, knowledge barriers; unfamiliarity with technology; location (poor reception; far from services); language barriers; financial constraints; compete for funding; resistance to technology/ services
Training, Employment and Education	Capacity building; trainings; accreditation; transferable skills; community building;
Perceptions and use of technology and technological Innovations	Technology is expensive; innovation limited by access to technology and familiarity with technology; technology must be locally manufactured; products must be tested out locally to ensure they are user friendly
Characteristics of Communities that Social Enterprises target	Geographically far places with poor reception and resources characterized by poverty, food insecurity, poor infrastructure, low levels of education, poor health outcomes and unemployment

4.4 EDUCATION

Three founders, 2 partners and five employees working for social entrepreneurships were interviews. The participants were experts in their respective fields, with more than 5 years' work experience within their industries. Seven of the participants elaborated on their education and majority of the participants hold at least a diploma[2]. The level of education of the participant and industry experience plays an important role in shaping their career. Participant 2 were 3 representatives from an organisation who holds the following positions CEO, Executive operations and service manager, and operations manager they did not elaborate on their education however we can infer they are experts within their fields as they work in industries that require prior training to operate. Participant 2 supports small black owned businesses

4.5 SOCIAL ISSUE THE ENTERPRISE ADDRESSES

The stakeholders interviewed elaborated on the social issues that their respective organisations seek to address. According to Participant 1, unemployment and food insecurity are the cornerstone of his organization. He developed self-watering units for indoor use and sells these products to the Department of Agriculture. Similarly, Participant 5 founded her organization to address food insecurity in the country through the promotion of backyard gardens *"...Then we thought of creating backyard gardens to assist the community in getting fresh vegetables that they wouldn't spend money on, and that we needed to start somewhere because ourselves also we didn't have money"*. Participant 2 also addresses unemployment specifically as Participant 2's organization supports small black owned businesses and through this support, job creation is encouraged, within the communities they service *"... we have our enterprise*

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[2] Participant 1"*In terms of education, I have got a degree in a BCom degree with economics and marketing as a major. And then I did BSc degree majoring in hydrology and geology. And then did my honours in hydrology."*

Participant 4"I have a national diploma and btech in surveying engineering and masters in Town and regional planning"

Participant 5 *"Studied agriculture, 2003. I was one of the dropouts there. I couldn't complete my N6. I did my four and five in agriculture, and then I moved and then I came back. Then I ventured into the tourism industry, where I did my diploma in events coordination, and also did my diploma again, in game range management."*

Participant 6 *"I am a professional nurse. That's my profession. I have been a nurse for 37 years now."*

Participant 7 *"We are based in Cape Town and currently studying master's in public health at the University of the Western Cape and am a holder of a postgrad diploma in Public Health as well."*

Participant 8 *"Oh I hold a BSc in IT."*

and supply development program, and that is aimed at assisting small, black owned businesses to grow and thrive".

Participant 3's approach to addressing social issues was through education Participant 3 explained that he supports underprivileged learner's education *"...I do a lot of work in under-resourced schools with the singular mission of making them more functionalist places of learning."*

Participant 8's organization developed a healthcare system to help track and monitor patients in the healthcare system *"They have implemented a system, and the name of the system is sync, which is synchronized, national communication and health"*. Participant 6 founded her organization to address primary healthcare issues "*under projects, you will find wellness, and you will find training, and actually, everything that has to do with health within the communities".* She elaborated that she deals with training in all aspects of community healthcare including family planning and safe sex tools such as condoms. Participant 7 also explained that his organization focuses on raising awareness regarding social determinants of health, educating people on health issues that affect them *"the social issues that we address is the issue around the social determinants of health, these are the things that causes people to get sick or to get well. We're talking of things like access to clean water, access to housing, access to education and so forth*".

Participant 4 organisation deals with energy insecurity were by they install solar systems to mainly rural areas *"the company focuses on providing sustainable energy solution; by supplying and installing solar system, we address the social issue of energy insecurity. Looking at the crisis in our country".*

4.6 CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED RUNNING A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Participants elaborated on the challenges that arise in their social enterprises. Reaching the individuals who require services the most is frequently difficult because of their location, according to Participant 1, who also mentioned that traveling is frequently difficult. Furthermore, participants reported that income insecurity frequently prevents community members from accessing the programs they offer "… *we say we want to help people, but to scale, we cannot meet the people on the ground. What happens if someone wants the product in Western Cape Limpopo, we can't be everywhere. So that is why we specifically designed our technology to be of interest to organizations that have a mandate to do a social outreach."*

Participant 6 explained that she provides training for members of her community through in person and social media, often her biggest challenge is getting people to access the training as they are often without internet access due to financial challenges as data can be expensive to a person who is unemployed.

Participant 2 went on to explain that because their business is an incubator that supports start-ups, they have observed that simple tasks frequently take a long time because of a lack of access to technology education, which delays the impact of the services the companies offer. According to participants:[3] Participants 5 and 7 both mentioned that organizations lack access to newer technologies and people's unwillingness to utilize new technologies may be the reasons why the communities they serve are reluctant to use technology. participant 5 explained, *"So the biggest challenge for us is being able to get the innovative systems technologies and then being able to implement them, I mean, to convince the community to implement them. So those are the biggest challenges that we are facing as organizations".*

4.7 PERCEPTIONS OF TECHNOLOGY, THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY AND TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION

4.7.1 Perception

According to the dataset, the participants were for utilising technology as it saves time and improves on access especially in places that may be hard to reach or very expensive in person. Participant 1 state "…*the integration potentially with the chat GPT, where it can be voice activated, and you can speak in any language. It's going to be a game changer".* However, they also stated the negative side that affect both their organisation and communities they serve. Participants perceived technology to be expensive and other participants insisted that "we ought to move forward with technology" participant 3 talked about technology in terms of its use on social media *"I think people are becoming more cautious about the way social media gets used in amongst the youth"* he elaborated that as the access of technology is becoming easily accessible young stars are staring to approach it with caution.

[3] "*As we deal with businesses, one of the things that we notice that there's a lot of either misunderstandings or lack of access to knowledge, especially about around technology, just to answer an example, and this specifically regards to the efficiency of business, where we send out a contract, sometimes we find that people don't know that you can download Adobe free on your laptop, and that'll help you to at least partially edit PDFs allow you to sign documents easily,*

4.7.3 Technological innovations

From our dataset, two participants developed and implemented innovative technology. Inspired by food insecurity and ancient civilizations such as the Aztecs, Participant 1 developed a self-watering unit called SFG BOX with the use of recycled plastic and a mobile phone application called SFG BOX Participant 1 explains that the self-watering unit uses simple technology and that the company is expanding to incorporate newer products that include indoor self-watering units *"Yes, it's a simple technology. It's a self- watering is the process, the physical process, which is used for irrigation. Yes, self- watering units were used hundreds of years ago by the Aztecs"*. Participant 8 works for an organization that has implemented a healthcare system that assists with Central Chronic Dispensing and Distribution (CCMDD) she stated that *"the purpose of this system was to assist with Central Chronic Dispensing and Distribution program. That is currently running in the Primary Health care facilities. So, this is a program was running on paper based the program assist with that from being on paper to now prescribing medication electronically*.

Participant 3 spoke about some of the innovations that he witnessed that will assist the country in future *"I was at Rhode University just recently, and some students there have developed an AI platform that helps you deal with labour disputes, so you literally put in what's caused the dispute. You don't need chairman, you don't need to go to the* Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration *(CCMA) the AI will help you get through it".*

4.7.4 The use of technology

Other participants did not develop new technology however they did explain that they use already existing technologies such as social media and search engines to scale up the impact of their services. Participant 5 explained her organization makes use of technology systems to monitor and track attendance for their trainers. Participant 5 explained her organization makes use of technology to monitor and track attendance for their trainers. She made use of search engines such as Google to gain insight on how to mitigate challenges they were experiencing with the implementation of their services she said, *"when working with a lot of people, you need to be innovative of how to monitor the people that working with. So, we came up with a system that we use on our phone, which is on to app, whereby it assists us in terms of clocking in and clocking out our participants. We can walk out and be able to see how many participants have worked and who was not at work".* Participant 6 explained that her organization makes use of social media platforms such as WhatsApp to provide training to members of the community.

Sentiments around technology being inaccessible were consistent with the dataset. When asked to elaborate on how they leverage technology within their enterprise participant 2 explains that technology is not accessible and even likens access to technology to a privilege *"when you have access to technology from a young age, which is part of a privileged set of South Africans. You develop an ingenuity with regards to technology… even when you get access to technology, it might be a little bit of a stumbling block or take you longer to figure things out because of that lack of awareness".* Speaking in terms of making technology accessible to South Africans they suggested that *"as a country, as a whole, maybe even starting at grassroots level in terms of growing up with this basic understanding of certain things, how they get to an age they want to start their own businesses."* Participant 3 alludes to the same sentiments that technology is accessible only to a few. He said, *"So I think in South Africa, in particular, in an all developing country, in developed countries, there are groups of people who kind of really understand social media and social technology, and lots of people who don't, you know, I'm not sure how that gap is going to close, whether it's going to widen."*

Similarly, participant 5 explained that technological innovations are not accessible to their intended users, specifically it is not accessible to the organizations that provide services to communities as well as inaccessible to the community members due to lack of familiarity. Participant 4 explained that technology is inaccessible to the poor, and he encourages South Africa to develop our own technologies. He stated that *"what is more important is developing the user-friendly apps. Now we have the AI, we need to incorporate AI to create the energy there is a need in creating financial platform to make the solar system more accessible to low income".* Participant 7 expressed that we must familiarize ourselves with technology as it seems to be the future. Participant 2 expressed similar sentiments, speaking in terms of making technology accessible to South Africans, *"that technology must be introduced to all South Africa at grassroots level".*

4.8 TRAINING AND EDUCATION

All enterprises supported the communities they provide services to with training and education. Participants elaborated that they directly train members of the community to gain skills they can apply elsewhere and that the implementation of their innovative solutions to South African communities requires many and therefore many people gain skills and qualifications through these social enterprises. Participant 5 specifically stated that they offer accredited and non-accredited agricultural courses within their organization specifically. While participant 6 organization deals primarily with training. Her organization focuses on wellness training and addressing environmental health risks. The SE teaches in under privileged areas where there are high teenage pregnancy rates, mental health challenges, and unemployment by offering caregiving and HIV counselling training, which doesn't require a grade 12 qualification. The certificate acquired can be used to look for jobs and to be able to apply the knowledge learned on their daily lives to improve their own well- being and others.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction

This section discusses the findings on the impact of technological innovation on South African Social Entrepreneurial start-ups, to understand and identify its influence on community empowerment and socio-economic equity.

5.2 Interpretation of results

From our literature review we identified that a social entrepreneur is an individual that identifies a social problem and seeks to solve with innovative ways. Social Entrepreneurs start organizations to solve social problems. Social entrepreneurs value impact over financial gain. Social entrepreneurs run social enterprises. A social enterprise is a business or organization that has a social aspect to it; however, the focus of the enterprises is to solve a social challenge while simultaneously make a profit from the service or product (Biggeri et al., 2018; Urban and Bukula, 2022; Visser, 2011). All the organizations the participants founded and or work in, were established based on a social need such as food insecurity, unemployment, primary healthcare and education and renewable energy. The founders are social entrepreneurs while the employees work for social enterprises. The stakeholders interviewed elaborated on the social issues that their respective organisations seek to address. South Africa is a developing country with a high unemployment rate. Due to the country's poor labour force, people are often left with unemployment and food insecurity (Swanepoel et al., 2010).

Socioeconomic inequalities were observed in the participants interviewed. Two out of three founders were white educated men and only one woman, a coloured woman was the third founder. The remaining five of the total participants were of African descent and were partners and employees to said organizations. Although our sample was too small for generalization, our dataset is representative of the country's socioeconomic inequalities, specifically economic inequality. Although Black Africans are the majority, the majority wealth of the country is owned by white men (Soudien et al, 2019).

Our participants elaborated that their organizations address socio economic challenges such as food insecurity, unemployment, primary healthcare, healthcare education and healthcare systems accessible, education and renewable energy. Socioeconomic inequalities were revealed by the characteristics of the communities in which these social enterprises serve.

Participants described the communities, as communities that are far from services and limited in terms of infrastructure. Participant 1 explained that the communities that they service are often hard to reach due to distance Participant 4 elaborated on the characteristics of the communities that his business services. He described them as rural and limited in terms of understanding the service as well as limited infrastructure to implement his renewable energy services. The abovementioned social factors contributed significantly to the social enterprise's ability to implement their services and address the issues they specifically target.

The social entrepreneurs interviewed empower the communities they service by equipping them with education and transferrable skills. The skills and education that these communities were provided with, are skills that empower them to change the reality of their communities rather than make them dependent on these services. Participant 5 explained that her organization empowered community members through teaching them how to make their own backyard gardens. Skills like this, for example, are transferable, these members will be able to use these skills in the future. Participant 5 also explained that they have accredited and non-accredited courses that they provide for free to community members. Other participants empowered their communities through job creation. To implement innovative technologies as well as services to the communities, many had to be trained on how to render these services. Participant 4 and 8 explained that for the community to access the services their organizations render, they had to first train others on how to implement the technology. Other participants expanded on that they provide community members with opportunities to practice their skills as well as gain experience to become attractive to future employers. Participant 3 expanded on this specifically, explaining that he supports the community by allowing students to gain work experience These are skills that these members can use to seek other opportunities. Other participants explained that they equip community members with health education so they can take better care of their health in the future.

Our findings are consistent with literature that the socio-economic context in South Africa hinders the advancement of technological innovation. Due to South Africa's socio-economic inequities inherited from the past and due to limited funding for, social entrepreneurial start-ups struggle to integrate technological innovation in the communities they service. Community Empowerment is embedded in social entrepreneurship as the goal of both concepts is to equip the community with services that promote their wellbeing. Our findings reveal that organizations practice community empowerment through education and training. Our participant's organizations all included capacity building by equipping the communities they

service with transferable skills and knowledge to make informed decisions. Specifically, on the relationship of community empowerment and technological innovation. The participants leveraged technologies such as social media to train and empower community members. There needs to be additional research conducted on how to make technological innovation accessible to South Africans, creating familiarity with technology and locally manufacturing technologies to make acquiring it cheaper and easier. Participant 4 explained, sharing similar sentiments, participant 7 explained that we need to evolve with technology and we can do so by making it available to people at grassroots level

The findings of the study highlight the significant role of technological innovations in south African social entrepreneurship start-ups in fostering community and enhancing socio-economic equity. We found that social entrepreneurs leverage simple technologies that are available such as mobile phone applications such as the **EDUvelopment** which is an online platform committed to empowering youth by providing necessary skills and tailored topic and career assistance to help them realize their full potential. Participant 3 explained that the platform provides materials for personal development, professional preparedness, and life skills training, encompassing areas such as exam preparation, confidence enhancement, financial literacy, emotional intelligence, and goal formulation. EDUvelopment equips young individuals with compelling information and a network of mentors and experts, providing the necessary tools and support to combat challenges and the **SFG BOX App** which is a tool that is aimed to simplify and improve the process of growing food. It is highly user-friendly and intuitive overall. Planting seasons, optimal plant density per square metre, suitable companion plants, and plants that may compete for resources are some of the fundamental agricultural factors are available on the app. In addition to this, the application provides information regarding the anticipated crop yields, the monetary value of crops, and the nutritional advantages of crops. The app gives users the capacity to enhance efficiency and sustainability in food production by leveraging its novel features, which include crop-specific information, grow plans, and general advice. Regardless of whether the users are small-scale farmers, community gardeners, or individuals with home gardens. However, the study also revealed persistence barriers in both communities that they serve and their organizations regarding the implementation of technology which include financial constraints, digital illiteracy and lack of infrastructures which limit the full potential of these innovations. These findings align with our literature review emphasising the importance of technology in addressing inequalities (Evoh,

2009; Kruger & Steyn, 2020), while also exposing the challenges that hinder its widespread adoption in marginalized communities.

A critical insight from the research is inequality and ingenuity gap, whereby others get early exposures to technology while others are not, and they later struggle with late adoption when they are older. Numerous community members were either oblivious of free online resources or were unfamiliar with basic tools. This restricts their capacity to completely capitalize on technological advancements as they must be taught first and or awareness created first before the technology can be used. This point is illustrated by the example given by Participant 2 of individuals who are oblivious of free or easily accessible tools such as digital signatures and PDF editing. This dearth of awareness results in inefficient practices, including the wastage of valuable time and resources through the printing, signing, and scanning of documents which can be easily done in few minutes and submitted electronically. This supports the diffusion of innovation theory (Kaminski, 2011), which suggest that's that accessibility and familiarity determines the success of technological integration. Moreover, whereas the literature emphasizes the role of social entrepreneurship in bridging socio economic inequalities (Urban, 2013; Ramani et al., 2017). The study found that financial and policy related barrier often hinder start-ups from scaling their impact and it also confirms the triple bottom line theory (Farooq et al., 2021), as many social enterprises strive to balance financial sustainability with social and environmental impact.

When conducting the interviews, the researcher gave the respondents opportunity to provide additional comments or insights regarding the impact of technological innovation in South African social entrepreneurship.

The respondent acknowledges the fast-changing technological world and expresses uncertainty about its future trajectory. While recognizing technology's ability to empower communities, they acknowledged the growing understanding of technologies such as social media's unintended consequences, such as misinformation and bad societal implications. This emphasizes the importance of being cautious and responsible when using technology in platforms that are assessable by a vast number of people that can lead to negative implication caused by the narrative shared.

Another responded gave a caution that there has to be a Minimization on dependency on Cutting-Edge Technologies that the technology needs not to be considered as a as a panacea ("silver bullet"). Rather, the emphasis should be on ease of use and accessibility, guaranteeing

that even communities with low levels of digital literacy and infrastructure can adopt technology.

South Africa is like developed countries in many ways, especially when it comes to technological developments in a variety of sectors. For example, students from Rhodes University, have developed an innovative AI platform designed to address labour disputes. This platform allows users to input the cause of a dispute and receive guidance without the need for a chairman or intervention from the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation, and Arbitration (CCMA). Developments such as this, reflect the rapid growth of technological progress in the country.

5.2.1 Assessment of the level of impact of technological innovations

The findings of the study indicate a moderate to high level of impact from technological innovation within South African social entrepreneurial start-ups, particularly in areas such as healthcare systems, digital learning in education, and agricultural sector. Technologies such as mobile applications, healthcare systems, and AI-driven platforms were shown to contribute meaningfully to community empowerment and socio-economic development. these ventures actively empower communities by providing education and transferable skills, fostering economic growth, and creating job opportunities through innovative solutions and capacity-building initiatives.

However, the full realization of this impact is consistently hindered by substantial challenges such as digital illiteracy, lack of infrastructure, and limited funding. These challenges hinder scalability of the organisations and accessibility for the communities they intend to serve, particularly in under-resourced rural areas. Therefore, while the use of technology demonstrates strong potential to advance social outcomes, its full transformative ability is yet to be realized. Addressing these constraints is essential to enhance the depth and breadth of impact across more communities.

5.3 CONCLUSION

In conclusion the study revealed the transformative potential of technological innovation in in South African social entrepreneurial start up for fostering community empowerment and socio-economic equity. The impact that the study revealed was that when technology is applied properly it can bridge the gaps in resource access, enhance educational opportunities and stimulate economic growth in marginalised communities. For example, digital platforms facilitated remote learning, healthcare monitoring and monitoring workers, while agriculture technology enhanced food security.

However, the report revealed persistent challenges that hinders a widespread adoption of technology these challenges include lack of financial support, digital illiteracy and lack of infrastructure. These findings align with existing literature Evoh (2009) who acknowledges that technology is a tool that can be used to address inequalities, but the obstacles is the adoption of it in marginalized communities.

The study alluded the necessities of social entrepreneurs to have comprehension of the local context and strategies of utilising simple technologies, fostering collaborations, provide training in those communities that need training on the technologies being implemented, create support structure. Manage finances these elements will assist in making the intended community empowerment initiative.

The research found that there was an ingenuity gap, which posits that individuals who have had consistent access to technology from a young age develop a more intuitive comprehension of its functionality. Even when individuals from underprivileged backgrounds acquire access to technology later in life, this lack of early exposure can result in a learning curve. This emphasizes the necessity of personalized training and assistance that not only targets the technical aspects of operating software or equipment but also fosters the acquisition of fundamental digital literacy skills. These obstacles emphasize the necessity for a multi-stakeholder strategy that includes governments, the corporate sector and non-profit organisations to facilitate transformative sustainability in communities

CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings in chapter for, these are the proposed recommendations that could be implemented to enhance the impact that social entrepreneurs make for community empowerment and to promote socio economic equity.

I. The use of simple technology

To optimise the effective of technology in social entrepreneurships, it is very important to consider variables such as bridging the digital gap by guaranteeing the selected technologies are accessible to the areas that the SE want to implement. To do it is recommended that SE's use the technologies such as mobile phones and utilise apps as they are being used by many people around the country. The use of mobile applications can be a good strategy as there is almost an app for anything that one can think of.

It is important that SE to create apps and social media accounts for their se so that they can kill two birds in one stone such as social media to create awareness and the app for the ease of use of the systems by developing a mobile application and maintaining an active social media presence, SE'S can achieve multiple objectives simultaneously. Whereby they can raise awareness about their initiatives and use the mobile apps to enhance the user engagement with the service provided by the SE.

II. Strengthen collaboration

As it was alluded in the findings that SE's struggle with funding due to many investors wanting to invest in for profit ventures as they are looking for return on investment. It is still important for SEs to look for partners who are in line with their purpose to bridge the funding gabs. For example, creating partnerships with government in the provision of infrastructure, and investments and innovative technology from private sectors will have the potential to considerably increase the reach of social entrepreneurship ventures and contribute to their overall effectiveness

III. Develop a Supportive funding and policy

Although there are organisations that aid entrepreneurship, they are not enough as there is still evidence of inequality and south Africa is deemed as the most unequal country in the world. Providing financial assistance to SE''s is crucial. Tax benefits, grants and other supporting mechanism can assist in reducing financial pressures from start-ups. In addition, create policies that addresses barriers such as affordable internet and resources to create a conductive environment for technological innovations.

IV. Emphasize impactful solution

The primary objective of social entrepreneurship is to find a solution to a problem. Entrepreneurs should also concentrate on finding solutions to urgent problems and should also consider what does not currently exist but is still a social problem. This will allow them to potentially gain finance.

By implementing the recommendations presented in this research, stakeholders can enhance the beneficial effects of social entrepreneurial initiatives and progress towards a future in which every South African has the opportunity to prosper.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Faculty of Commerce, ***Law*** and ***Management***

2 St Davids Pl &, St Andrew Rd, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2193

Dear sir/madam

My name is Motsatsi Millicent Monyela, and I am a researcher pursuing a Master of Business Administration (MBA) in my second year at the University of the Witwatersrand. My supervisor is Dr. Roselyne Cheruiyot My research focuses on the **impact of technological innovation in South African social entrepreneurial start-ups on community empowerment and socio-economic equity.**

I am inviting you today to request your participation in my research project. Your organization was selected as a case study because of its innovative use of technology to address social issues to empower communities.

Your participation in this study would involve participating in an interview, which will be conducted either face-to-face or via video conferencing platform (Microsoft Teams or Zoom). With your permission I would like to record the session using the cell phone and or an online conferencing platform. This data will be stored in a folder in my private laptop; it will be only accessed by me and relevant authority at the university of the Witwatersrand. The recordings will be deleted upon the university's permission to delete. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and all your responses will be kept confidential.

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life, if some of the questions asked makes you feel sad or upset. If this happens, I will stop the interview, and it will be resumed when you are comfortable.

This research study will be written up as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za

Yours sincerely,

Researcher: Monyela MM

Email 1510480@students.ac.za

cell no: 073 406 5335

Supervisor: Roselyne Cheruiyot

Email: roselyne.koech@wits.ac.za

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Faculty of Commerce, ***Law*** and ***Management***

2 St Davids Pl &, St Andrew Rd, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2193

CONSENT FORM

Research title: Assessing the Impact of Technological Innovation in South African Social Entrepreneurial Start-ups on Community Empowerment and Socio-Economic Equity

Researcher: Monyela Motsatsi Millicent

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded.	YES	NO
I agree that direct quotations from my interview may be used by the researcher in their research report.	YES	NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name or other identifying data will not be used by the researcher in their report	YES	NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name or other identifying data will not be used by the researcher in their report	YES	NO
	YES	NO

I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on

Signature……...	Signature……...
Name of participant……...	Name of Researcher……...
Date……	Date……

I…… agree to participate in this research project.

APPENDIX C: RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Thank you for taking your time to avail yourself to take part in this questionnaire. the aim of the research is to assess the Impact of Technological Innovation in South African Social Entrepreneurial Start-ups on Community Empowerment and Socio-Economic Equity.

SECTION A DEMOGRAPHICS

Name:

Gender: _____

Contact details: _____

Name of the organization: _____

Educational background: _____

Location: _____ (Province, City)

SECTION B: SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP INVOLVEMENT

1. In what capacity are you involved with social entrepreneurship in South Africa (e.g., founder, employee, community member)?

_____

2. Briefly describe the social enterprise you are involved with and what social issue(s) does it address?

_____

3. Has this social entrepreneurship implemented any technological innovations on the work that they do? If so, please elaborate on the technology used and its purpose.

_____

4. Has the technological innovation created new opportunities within the social entrepreneurship?

_____

SECTION C: IMPACT ON COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

5. What benefit has the community gained from the services rendered?

_____

6. In addition to the product or service offered has the organization facilitated any skills development or training initiatives within the community?

SECTION D: LESSONS, CHALLENGES AND FUTURE EXPLOITS

7. How can social entrepreneurs be more effective in leveraging technology to promote community empowerment and socio-economic equity?

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8. What challenges do social entrepreneurial start-ups encounter when incorporating technological advancements for community empowerment and socio-economic equality in South Africa?

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9. Do you have any additional comments or insights regarding the impact of technological innovation in South African social entrepreneurship?
