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Assessing Marketplaces' Role in Economic Sustainability of South African SMMEs

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Orientation: Research on marketplaces and their role in the economic sustainability of small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) remains sparse and the researchers need to establish the qualities necessary to support SMME viability.

Research purpose: This empirical study proposed, designed and employed a cataloguing field methodology instrument to effectively assess the physical qualities and attributes of informal and formal marketplaces in South Africa.

Motivation for the study: Marketplaces are vital drivers of poverty alleviation and job creation, which inspired this study.

Research design, approach and method: A total of 34 marketplaces in Gauteng, South Africa, were randomly selected and catalogued, based on availability, using the same field-ranking form for both formal and informal marketplaces for comparison purposes.

This study could inform what is needed to make marketplaces more economically sustainable for their SMMEs and achieve a comprehensive national directory of marketplaces in South Africa to ensure the economic sustainability of SMMEs in the country.

Main findings: A new methodology was developed to catalogue marketplaces and SMMEs in Gauteng.

Practical/managerial implications: The functional characteristics of marketplaces are important to owners and operators, and knowledge of these preferences is vital to policy makers and managers.

Contribution/value add: This novel method will effectively assist relevant bodies such as municipal, provincial and national government to effectively capture and catalogue physical marketplaces by their valuable qualities and characteristics.

Keywords: economic sustainability; marketplace; small, medium, and micro enterprise; South Africa.

Introduction

The development of small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) is a key conduit in economic sustainability, and marketplaces may be vital to the economic sustainability of SMMEs (Davis 2020). A marketplace can be defined as an economic platform where the exchanges between the marketplace customers and marketplace vendors take place and where the prices and quantity of products and services are determined (WIEGO 2022b). Marketplaces in this context include the physical gathering of stallholders and shoppers and excludes online marketplaces. In turn, SMMEs include street vendors who sell products and services to the surrounding community in both permanent and temporary manually built stalls, physically grouped together with other similar vendors to create a marketplace (Samuel & Mintah 2013; WIEGO 2022b).

Roundy (2017), supported by Cao and Shi (2020), affirmed the importance of both marketplaces and SMMEs as being entrepreneurial, playing important roles as drivers of poverty alleviation, job creation and local economic development (LED). Marketplaces are unique entrepreneurial ecosystems where interdependent sellers congregate under productive entrepreneurial conditions (Roundy 2017). Grigore and Dragan (2020) noted that SMMEs contribute to the vitality of entrepreneurial ecosystems.

South Africa has no means of assessing the role of marketplaces in economically sustaining SMMEs because of the lack of research on marketplaces (Bushe 2019). Neglecting to recognise the role of

marketplaces may have a negative impact on the economic sustainability of SMMEs, the socio-economic development of local communities and national wealth (World Economic Forum 2023). It is pertinent therefore to focus on both formal and informal marketplaces in South Africa. This study set out to propose, design and employ a cataloguing field methodology instrument to effectively assess the physical qualities and attributes of informal and formal marketplaces in South Africa and developed a methodology that aims to provide an instrument to document marketplaces and develop a database of these marketplaces in Johannesburg Gauteng, predominantly in Soweto and Alexandra townships, and the Johannesburg central business district (CBD). By doing so, it is now possible for users and stakeholders to assess marketplaces by their qualities and characteristics. The researchers also propose that forthwith it will be possible to evaluate the economic sustainability of the SMMEs that operate at these types of marketplaces.

What was needed was a field-ranking methodology instrument that collects data using marketplace characteristics and qualities (Bushe 2019; Muriithi 2017). The rationale for the development of such a cataloguing instrument is discussed in the following section, which reviews literature on current global and local marketplaces and their role in the economic sustainability of SMMEs. This research proposes a way to catalogue the characteristics of a marketplace, which may improve their visibility and therefore attract more customers.

Literature review

Marketplaces are often main centres for commerce, bringing together many SMMEs in one location at frequent intervals. Ha (2014), later supported by Petrovic et al. (2021), noted that physical marketplaces have been observed for over 5000 years as economic places where street vendors who sell and customers who buy come together for the exchange of goods, services and money. This interaction often results in a bargaining process until prices are agreed upon (Ha 2014). Transactions may include direct purchases with money, bartering of services or product-for-product exchanges.

The number of SMMEs in a marketplace influences the variety of products and services available and the number of potential customers that may visit the marketplace (Shazi & Chetty 2021). Marketplaces often operate at a set time and with fixed frequency. The value of the experience of a marketplace is reflected in repeat visitation and consequently the economic sustainability of the SMMEs who operate in that marketplace (Jaleel & Nasir 2015).

According to Ha (2014) and Petrovic et al. (2021), the following are typical characteristics of marketplaces:

- Buyers and sellers interact, and friends and families gather and spend time together;
- Products are diverse, unique and attractive, mostly offered in one location;
- Price of products are negotiable and mostly affordable, also through bargaining deals;

- Environment is mostly interesting, exciting;
- Marketplaces are usually open-air;
- They are often a place for lower- and middle-income portions of the population to shop and set up low cost businesses;
- Most marketplaces are attractive and unique;
- Offers an element of 'treasure-hunting' and new experiences all the time, which also allows for browsing or 'window shopping';
- Diversity of cultures in one location.

Bushe (2019) and WIEGO (2022a) further provided reasons for SMMEs operating in marketplaces, being that the use of public physical spaces permits SMME owners, often street vendors, to generate employment opportunities for themselves at a cost lower than what they could incur in a space provided by a shopping centre.

Bushe (2019) and Muriithi (2017) suggested that there is inadequate research on SMMEs and marketplaces as symbiotic ecosystems as well as their contributions to economic development, as many are informal and undocumented, especially in Africa. Manzoor, Wei and Sahito (2021) affirmed the importance of these eco-systems, noting the role that SMMEs play in poverty alleviation and rural and urban economic development globally. In addition, SMMEs also make a significant contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) of a country, and this could be counted more accurately if it was known (Aldeehani 2020; GEM 2020). A final point to consider is that SMMEs indirectly serve as survival mechanisms for many unemployed people, which can reduce a government's welfare spending (Forkuor, Akuoko & Yeboah 2017; Samuel & Mintah 2013).

However, the direct or indirect extent of SMME contribution to a country's wealth remains difficult to assess and measure, as by nature, many SMMEs belong to the informal sector, and as such, their impact on country wealth creation is considered negligible (Madichie, Gbadamosi & Rwelamila 2021; Nieuwenhuizen 2019). Small, medium and micro enterprises may intentionally operate informally, driven by cumbersome company registration processes, financial constraints, infrastructural limitations and developmental restrictions, with many vendors avoiding taxation (Bushe 2019; Muriithi 2017). Moreover, their contribution to the country's wealth often goes undisclosed.

The World Bank (2022) categorises South Africa as an upper-middle income country, with the second largest GDP on the continent, surpassed by only Nigeria (StatsSA 2021). The South African population was estimated to be 63.1 million as of mid-year 2024 (StatsSA 2024a), with a total labour force participation rate of 60.7% as of March 2024 (StatsSA 2024b). An unemployment rate of 32.9% as of March 2024 is considered high by StatsSA (2024b), which firstly explains the reason for many startups that create self-employment and secondly, cements this study's assertion that SMMEs are vital to the South African economy through their presence at

marketplaces. Knowledge of and recordkeeping about SMME's at marketplaces may inform policies and strategies to eliminate poverty, reduce inequality and achieve other aims such as doubling the South African GDP by 2030 (South African Government 2023) and achieving four of the 17 United Nations (UN's) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNDP 2023). The UN SDGs that may be achieved in this study include the goals contained in Table 1.

The South African government has recognised entrepreneurship through SMMEs as key to the economic sustainability of the country, and by 2030 approximately 90% of employment will come from SMMEs (PwC 2022). Between 2016 and 2018, SMMEs in South Africa created approximately 50% – 60% of employment opportunities and contributed about 35% – 45% to the country's GDP through entrepreneurial activities (GEM 2020; Nieuwenhuizen 2019). The Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA 2021) states that SMMEs created approximately 9.8 million jobs in the first quarter of 2021 in South Africa. The lack of a comprehensive recording system documenting the activities of all SMMEs, and thus their economic contributions raise concerns about the accuracy of these figures, mirroring challenges faced by other statistics related to the informal sector (Nieuwenhuizen 2019).

Small, medium and micro enterprises in Johannesburg

This study was conducted in Johannesburg, South Africa, and its geographical scope includes two of Johannesburg's large townships, being Soweto, southwest of the city and Alexandra, northeast of the city, as well as the its CBD. Soweto is the largest township in Johannesburg and home to many low-income, impoverished families and a portion of the Soweto population uses marketplaces to operate their SMMEs (Kim et al. 2021; Maphela & Cloete 2020). Many formal and informal economical activities also take place in Alexandra township. In both townships, many street vendors collectively operate at marketplaces to earn a living (Edonga 2020; Rogerson 2016).

Developing a comprehensive catalogue that encompasses marketplace characteristics presents an opportunity to establish a field ranking of documented aspects. In addition, it serves as a valuable resource for national governments in terms of policy formulation or enhancement. Moreover, local government bodies can leverage such a catalogue when considering the improvement, expansion or upgrade of marketplaces, aiming to optimise trading opportunities for SMMEs and foster community development. This initiative will contribute to sustaining the economic viability of SMMEs operating in the catalogued marketplaces, thereby benefiting both the SMMEs and the surrounding communities. Petrovic et al. (2021) further emphasised that while few studies have focussed on marketplaces, none have concentrated on their economic sustainability, positioning this study as the pioneering effort of its kind in South Africa.

TABLE 1: United Nations Sustainable Development Goals addressed by this study.

Goal 1	No poverty
Goal 2	Zero hunger
Goal 8	Decent work and economic growth
Goal 10	Reduced inequalities

Source: UNDP, 2024, *What are sustainable development goals?*, United Nations Development Programme, viewed n.d., from https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals

Methodology

This study involved developing a field instrument to aid marketplaces at all municipal levels in South Africa in systematically capturing and cataloguing physical marketplaces based on their characteristics and attributes. The cataloguing instrument is designed to help identify the essential features required by these marketplaces to enhance their economic sustainability for the SMMEs utilising them and to ensure their continued operation. Consequently, this cataloguing instrument could prove valuable in establishing a comprehensive repository of marketplaces in South Africa.

A total of 34 marketplaces in the Gauteng province were randomly selected and catalogued, based on availability, using the same field-ranking form for both formal and informal marketplaces for comparison purposes. The development of this survey instrument to catalogue marketplace characteristics involved reviewing nine studies on marketplaces and existing methodologies used to assess the characteristics and attributes of specific physical locations. Relevant research focussing on the physical characteristics and attributes is summarised in Table 2.

Using guidelines and recommendations from the studies summarised in Table 2, the researchers developed a field-ranking cataloguing sheet. The form gathered demographic data concerning the marketplace, including the types of products offered and the level of facilities and operations within the marketplace. The demographics section of the field instrument was open ended, enabling the researchers to provide detailed descriptions for each of the marketplaces. The second part of the form used a Likert scale to assess each of the variables generated for the field-ranking cataloguing instrument. Before the fieldwork trial, the instrument was discussed with the market owners and managers, and street vendors who operate in these marketplaces.

The Likert scale assisted in determining the most important characteristics and attributes of marketplaces by adding the final score of each item of specific variables together, then calculating the mean score of each item. This study ranked marketplaces according to the following categories:

- cleanliness, sanitation and attractiveness;
- infrastructure (including storage and transportation equipment of products);
- safety and security (including legislation);
- economic sustainability (including number of customers, noise levels, customer–market-vendor relationship);

TABLE 2: Existing methodological cataloguing studies with relevance to the present study.

Author(s)	Application and relevance to the current study
Moultrie, Clarkson and Probert (2006)	This study proposed a methodological instrument that effectively assesses the quality of the products and services in a location such as marketplaces.
Lima, Brilha and Salamuni (2010)	This study assessed the strengths and weaknesses of each of the marketplaces using its characteristics or attributes on a cataloguing form. This included aspects such as the diversity and quality of the marketplace's exposure, products and services, logistics, accessibility, social setting and availability of recreational facilities.
Fuertes-Gutierrez and Fernandez-Martinez (2012)	This study applied a catalogue field-ranking form to assess the management of each location based on characteristics/attributes.
United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2015)	This study prioritised marketplaces by proposing criteria and a methodology for the assessment of marketplaces with reference to how they make a critical contribution to the economic sustainability of SMMEs.
Brilha (2016)	This study included gathering GPS coordinates for each location for a GIS-generated map that could also assess aspects such as accessibility, fragility and vulnerability, safety and security, scenery (visual beauty and attractiveness) and logistics (the existence of facilities such as toilets, food and density of population) on a Likert-type scale to measure each marketplace's characteristics/attributes.
Randrianaly et al. (2016)	This study included aspects such as the specific marketplace location using its coordinates, photographs, a map of the marketplace and description of its accessibility and usability.
Ginting and Febriand (2018)	This study assessed and measured commerce locations by accessibility, management (uniqueness, attractiveness, price, conservation/sustainability), supporting facilities (toilets, information centres and restaurants/eating areas) and increase to the local economy (income generator) to develop critical results useful for the development and role of marketplaces in the economic sustainability of SMMEs.
Matshusa, Thomas and Leonard (2021)	This study proposed a field-ranking methodology through the assessment of each of the aspects of by collecting the location positioning using GPS coordinates, photographs, marketplace type, accessibility and condition of the marketplace.

SMMEs, small, medium and micro enterprises; GPS, global positioning system; GIS, geographical information system.

- location and accessibility;
- products and operational efficiency (regarding pricing, payment methods and delivery of goods);
- proportion of SMME marketplace vendors by gender.

The items were ranked on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *agree* and 5 = *strongly agree*.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval to conduct this study was obtained from the University of Johannesburg, College of Business and Economics (CBE) Research Ethics Committee (No. 20SOM38).

Results and discussion

The eight categories from three sections of the survey are explained next in terms of their contribution to the role of marketplaces in the economic sustainability of SMMEs.

Eight categories contributing to marketplaces' role in sustainability of SMMEs

Location and accessibility

This category gathered data on marketplace accessibility (see Table 3), assessing factors such as transportation availability, road conditions, the number of entrances and whether the marketplace is fenced or gated, using a Likert-type scale. Baraklianos, Bouzouina and Bonnel (2018) highlighted the importance of key location and accessibility features in determining business success. While studies have explored the location choices of economic establishments, especially SMMEs, and analyse their behavioural patterns based on sectoral divisions, limited attention has been given to accessibility as a multidimensional concept encompassing functional characteristics (Baraklianos et al. 2018). This study contributes insights to this concept, revealing how the functional characteristics of marketplaces influence the preferences of marketplace owners and managers and SMMEs regarding business accessibility.

Products and operational efficiency

This category assessed marketplace operational efficiency (see Table 4), utilising checkbox-type questions and a Likert-type scale to evaluate factors such as product types (both perishable and non-perishable), offered services, accepted payment methods and goods delivery frequency. A diverse product range is known to boost demand and contribute to increased sales, serving as a valuable metric for organisational performance (Santos et al. 2020). Incorporating a category focussing on product pricing was crucial, given its significant impact on customer purchasing decisions (Shazi & Chetty 2021). The study also considered strategies employed by street vendors, such as vocalising prices and distributing pamphlets, to attract customers to their stalls (Shazi & Chetty 2021).

Infrastructure

This category gauges the current infrastructure of catalogued marketplaces, encompassing product storage and transportation equipment. It includes considerations such as stall availability, weather protection, electricity provision and adequate storage and transport facilities. Infrastructure developments such as electricity, water, toilets and shelter contribute significantly to the economic growth of marketplaces (Diné Policy Institute 2018). However, funding, a scarce resource for informal marketplaces, is required for such improvements. Therefore, assessing each marketplace's infrastructure is crucial in understanding their role in economically supporting SMMEs and identifying necessary improvements for sustainable economic development (Table 5).

Cleanliness, sanitation and attractiveness

This category assessed market attractiveness, cleanliness sanitation (including clean tap water and toilets) and the presence of proper waste management systems such as trash bins in the marketplaces (see Table 6). Customers seek clean and attractive product displays along with accessible ablution facilities when visiting a marketplace (Shazi & Chetty 2021). In turn, Kinyanjui (2019) noted that toilet facilities in areas where street vendors operate often lack running water are poorly maintained and exhibit low sanitation levels, a common characteristic of informal marketplaces in South Africa (Chivivi, Moyo & Mapuwei 2014).

TABLE 3: Average mean scores of items measuring location and accessibility of informal and formal marketplaces in Johannesburg.

T5: Location and accessibility of informal versus formal marketplaces in Johannesburg					
Item	Description of item	Combined mean score of informal marketplaces	Combined mean score of formal marketplaces	Implication of mean scores	Supporting references
9	There is sufficient transportation mechanisms to get to the marketplace	$M = 4.6$	$M = 4.7$	The findings support strong agreement that there is sufficient transportation mechanisms to get to the informal and formal marketplaces.	Gauteng Province Economic Development (2014); Paulo (2019)
11	The marketplace is easily accessible via roads	$M = 4.8$	$M = 4.7$	The findings support strong agreement that both informal and formal marketplaces are easily accessible via roads.	Leke and Signe (2019)

Source: Researcher's compilation, 2024

TABLE 4: Average mean scores of items measuring products, operation efficiency and delivery of goods of informal and formal marketplaces in Johannesburg.

T6: Products, operation efficiency in terms of pricing, payments methods and delivery of goods in informal versus formal marketplaces in Johannesburg					
Item	Description of item	Combined mean score of informal marketplaces	Combined mean score of formal marketplaces	Implication of mean scores	Supporting references
15	Prices are visible on the products sold at the marketplace; there are advertisement boards	$M = 2$	$M = 4.6$	The findings support disagreement that prices are visible on products sold at informal marketplaces and that there are no advertisement boards around but support strong agreement that the formal marketplaces do have prices that are visible next to their≈products, as they also have advertisement boards around.	Saastamoinen (2017)
16	The marketplace accepts both cash and card payments	$M = 1.5$	$M = 5$	The findings support disagreement that informal marketplaces accept both cash and card payments but support strong agreement that the formal marketplaces do.	Ha (2014); Bailey (2019)
21	There is constant delivery of goods at this marketplace	$M = 2.7$	$M = 4$	The findings support disagreement that there is constant delivery of goods at informal marketplaces but supports agreement that there are constant delivery of goods at formal marketplaces.	Sivakumar and Prasath (2019)

Source: Researcher's compilation 2024

TABLE 5: Average mean scores of items measuring infrastructure of informal and formal marketplaces in Johannesburg.

T2: Infrastructure (inclusive of storage and transportation, equipment of the products) of informal versus formal marketplaces in Johannesburg					
Item	Description of item	Combined mean score of informal marketplaces	Combined mean score of formal marketplaces	Implication of mean scores	Supporting references
1	The marketplace has space for more stalls	$M = 4.2$	$M = 4.4$	The findings support agreement that there is more space for stalls in informal marketplaces as well as formal marketplaces.	Varnai (2018)
2	The stalls are protected from bad weather	$M = 2.5$	$M = 4.7$	The findings support disagreement that the stalls in informal marketplaces are protected from bad weather but support strong agreement that the stalls in formal marketplaces are.	Varnai (2018:81); Paulo (2019)
5	There are proper sanitation facilities at the marketplace (i.e., toilets)	$M = 2$	$M = 4.7$	The findings support disagreement that informal marketplaces have proper sanitation facilities such as toilets but support strong agreement that the formal marketplaces do have proper sanitation facilities.	Bushe (2019)
7	There are other support structures around the market	$M = 1.5$	$M = 4.8$	The findings support disagreement that there are support structures around informal marketplaces but support strong agreement that the formal marketplaces do have support structures around them.	Muriithi (2017); Groupe Societe General (2020)
8	There is sufficient storage space at the marketplace	$M = 1.8$	$M = 4.8$	The findings support disagreement that that there is enough storage space in informal marketplaces but support strong agreement that the formal marketplaces do have sufficient storage spaces.	Asongu, Nwachukwu and Orim (2018)
10	There is proper equipment for the SMME marketplace vendors to carry their products around	$M = 3.2$	$M = 4.8$	The findings are neutral about whether informal marketplaces have proper equipment for SMME marketplace vendors to carry their equipment but support strong agreement that the formal marketplaces do have proper equipment that SMME marketplace vendors can use to carry and move their products around.	Bailey (2019)
12	The marketplace has more than one entrance	$M = 4.8$	$M = 4.2$	The findings support strong agreement and agreement that both informal and formal marketplaces have more than one entrance, respectively.	
13	The marketplace is fenced/gated	$M = 2$	$M = 5$	The findings support disagreement that informal marketplaces are fenced and gated but support strong agreement that the formal marketplaces are fenced and gated.	Broccardo and Truant (2016)
22	Customers can manoeuvre freely around the marketplace	$M = 2.4$	$M = 4.7$	The findings support disagreement that the marketplace customers in informal marketplaces can manoeuvre and move around freely but support strong agreement that the marketplace customers in formal marketplaces can move around freely in the marketplaces.	Signe (2018)

Source: Researcher's compilation, 2024
SMMEs, small, medium and micro enterprises.

Safety and security (including legislation)

This category evaluated safety and security levels (see Table 7), including the regulatory environment, at each marketplace, measuring aspects such as the adequacy of security measures and government or police visits on a Likert-type scale. Monitoring these factors is crucial for assessing the perceived safety of street vendors and customers during trade. Moagi's (2021) study on arts-and-crafts street vendors in Soweto identified safety and security, regulatory non-compliance and the lack of government support as primary challenges, despite attempts by the City of Johannesburg (CoJ) municipality to address them with limited success. Participants indicated that the situation was not unique to Soweto but a widespread experience among vendors nationwide.

Economic sustainability

This category (see Table 8) analysed the economic development needs of marketplaces, including customer

TABLE 6: Average mean scores of items measuring the cleanliness, sanitation and attractiveness of informal and formal marketplaces in Johannesburg.

Item	Description of item	Combined mean score of informal marketplaces	Combined mean score of formal marketplaces	Implication of mean scores	Supporting references
T1: Cleanliness, sanitation and attractiveness of informal versus formal marketplaces in Johannesburg					
3	The marketplace is clean	$M = 2$	$M = 4.8$	The findings support disagreement that the informal marketplaces are clean but support strong agreement that the formal marketplaces are clean.	Signe (2018); ShowMe (2020)
6	There is a proper waste-management system at the marketplace (i.e., trash bin)	$M = 2.2$	$M = 4.9$	The findings support disagreement that the informal marketplaces have proper waste-management systems but supports strong agreement that the formal marketplaces do have proper waste-management systems.	Bushe (2019)
25	The marketplace is attractive	$M = 1.7$	$M = 4.8$	The findings support disagreement that the informal marketplaces are attractive but support strong agreement that the formal marketplaces are attractive.	Hazlan, Ismail and Jaafar (2019)

Source: Researcher's compilation, 2024

TABLE 7: Average mean scores of items measuring safety and security of informal and formal marketplaces in Johannesburg.

Item	Description of item	Combined mean score of informal marketplaces	Combined mean score of formal marketplaces	Implication of mean scores	Supporting references
T3: Safety and security of informal versus formal marketplaces in Johannesburg					
4	The marketplace has sufficient security/it is safe	$M = 2.1$	$M = 4.9$	The findings suggest disagreement that the informal marketplaces have sufficient security but suggest agreement that the formal marketplaces do.	Muriithi (2017); Expat Explore (2019)
17	There are government representatives/police that visit the marketplace	$M = 1.6$	$M = 2$	The findings suggest disagreement that there are government representatives/police officers that visit both the informal and formal marketplaces.	Forkuor et al. (2017)

Source: Researcher's compilation, 2024

TABLE 8: Average mean scores of items measuring the economic sustainability of informal and formal marketplaces in Johannesburg.

Item	Description of item	Combined mean score of informal marketplaces	Combined mean score of formal marketplaces	Implication of mean scores	Supporting references
T4: Economic sustainability of informal versus formal marketplaces in Johannesburg					
18	The marketplace requires development	$M = 4.1$	$M = 1.4$	The findings support agreement that the informal marketplaces require development but support disagreement that the formal marketplaces need further development.	Asongu and Odhiambo (2019)
19	There are a lot of customers that support this marketplace	$M = 4.4$	$M = 4.9$	The findings support agreement and strong agreement that there are many marketplace customers in informal and formal marketplaces, respectively.	Bushe (2019)
20	There are a lot of products sold at this marketplace	$M = 4.5$	$M = 4.9$	The findings support strong agreement that there are many products sold at informal and formal marketplaces.	Druion (2020)
23	The marketplace is noisy	$M = 4.5$	$M = 3.3$	The findings support strong agreement that informal marketplaces are noisy, but the findings support neutrality regarding the noise levels at formal marketplaces and whether they are noisy as well.	Expat Explore (2019)
24	The marketplace is busy	$M = 4.5$	$M = 4.8$	The findings support strong agreement that both informal and formal marketplaces are busy.	Paulo (2019)
26	The marketplace looks sustainable	$M = 2.2$	$M = 5.0$	The findings support disagreement that informal marketplaces look economically sustainable but suggest strong agreement that the formal marketplaces do look economically sustainable.	Muriithi (2017); Asongu and Odhiambo (2019)
27	The marketplace owner/manager is present at all times	$M = 1.5$	$M = 5.0$	The findings support disagreement that there is an owner/manager present at informal marketplaces but suggest strong agreement that the formal marketplaces do have an owner or manager who is forever present when the marketplaces operate.	Muriithi (2017)
28	There is good communication between SMME marketplace vendors and customers	$M = 2.7$	$M = 4.7$	The findings support disagreement that there is good communication between SMME marketplace vendors and marketplace customers in informal marketplaces, as opposed to formal marketplaces that the findings suggest strong agreement that there is good relations between SMME marketplace vendors and marketplace customers.	Ramya (2019)

Source: Researcher's compilation, 2024
SMMEs, small, medium and micro enterprises.

numbers, noise levels and the customer-market-vendor relationship. Assessing the status of city marketplaces is crucial for understanding steps needed to develop and ensure economic sustainability for SMMEs. This involves determining marketplace viability, assessing customer footfall and evaluating customer-vendor relationships.

Recent research (ILO 2022; Magidi 2021) recognise the importance of informal vending in community development and economic sustainability, aligning with the South African government's goal of job creation and economic stimulation through the SMME sector (South African Government 2021).

Despite limited success in implementing this plan, this study aims to contribute to improving outcomes. Bushe (2019) expressed scepticism about the current rate of SMME creation and economic sustainability as a solution for national economic development, emphasising the study's importance and the urgent need for the government to adopt the proposed methodology.

Proportion of SMME marketplace vendors by gender

This category measures the gender distribution of street vendors in Johannesburg marketplaces to assess reliance on these spaces for income and indicates a balanced

representation of male and female vendors (Table 9). This aligned with Prinsloo's (2016) findings on the gender ratio of vendors and customers in South Africa. Our results also support Chivivi et al. (2014) who observed gender neutrality among street vendors in a Zimbabwean marketplace, suggesting equal economic empowerment through marketplace ownership for both genders.

Eight categories: contribution to the role of marketplaces in the economic sustainability of SMMEs - Final remarks results

From the findings of Table 3–9, it is evident that formal marketplaces are more accessible, affordable, well-equipped, cleaner, and safer than informal ones. Both lack government support, are busy, and sell high-demand products, but formal marketplaces accept more payment methods and foster better relationships.

Inferential data testing of the questionnaire

Normality tests determine whether data or variables significantly deviate from a normal distribution (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2012:510). Parametric tests assume sample data come from normally distributed populations, unlike non-parametric tests (Saunders et al. 2012:510).

Table 10 shows the Shapiro-Wilk test p-values for marketplaces, with each sample being less than 30 (10 formal and 10 busiest and popular informal marketplaces). A p-value below 0.05 indicates a statistically significant difference (Saunders et al. 2012:510). The table reveals significant differences between informal and formal marketplaces in economic sustainability, infrastructure, cleanliness, attractiveness, safety and products, except for 'location and accessibility', where no significant difference was found (Saunders et al. 2012:510).

Mann-Whitney tests assess differences between two independent groups (Pallant 2011:227; Saunders et al. 2012:509). They compare two groups, in this case, the 10 informal and 10 formal marketplaces, on continuous variables such as economic sustainability and infrastructure. Results are shown in Table 11.

Table 11 shows p-values below 0.05, indicating significant differences between informal and formal marketplaces in economic sustainability, infrastructure, cleanliness,

attractiveness, safety and products. However, there is no significant difference in location and accessibility, as the p-value is above 0.05. Table 12 illustrates the non-parametric results of correlating variables with one another.

For this quantitative analysis, non-parametric tests were used, as shown in Table 12. The table reveals links between variables, indicated by asterisks (*). Positive values suggest a stronger relationship, with correlations close to 1 for infrastructure (0.878**), cleanliness (0.909**), safety and security (0.863**) and products (0.794), indicating strong relationships. However, location and accessibility have a low correlation coefficient of 0.091 and lack significant p-values and asterisks, showing no correlation, as confirmed by the scatter matrix.

Conclusion

This study devised a standardised instrument for cataloguing marketplaces, informed by a literature review covering international and local market-related aspects and case studies. This approach aims to boost visibility and economic sustainability prospects for SMMEs through marketplaces. In addition, it introduces an organised, systematic methodology

TABLE 10: Test of normality for the themes in informal and formal marketplaces.

Type	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Sustainability						
Informal	0.144	10	0.200*	0.940	10	0.549
Formal	0.224	10	0.167	0.871	10	0.103
Infrastructure						
Informal	0.147	10	0.200*	0.946	10	0.618
Formal	0.154	10	0.200*	0.947	10	0.632
Cleanliness						
Informal	0.226	10	0.160	0.845	10	0.051
Formal	0.360	10	0.001	0.731	10	0.002
Safety and security						
Informal	0.234	10	0.127	0.845	10	0.050
Formal	0.524	10	0.000	0.366	10	0.000
Accessibility						
Informal	0.317	10	0.005	0.713	10	0.001
Formal	0.433	10	0.000	0.594	10	0.000
Products						
Informal	0.255	10	0.065	0.900	10	0.218
Formal	0.324	10	0.004	0.849	10	0.056

Source: Statistical Consultation Services (STATKON), 2020, *Statistical Consultation Services*, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg

*, This is a lower bound of the true significance.

[a], Lilliefors significance correction.

TABLE 9: Average mean scores of items measuring the proportion/ratio of small, medium and micro enterprises marketplace vendors by gender at informal and formal marketplaces in Johannesburg.

T7: Ratio of male versus female SMME marketplace vendors and number of customers; noise levels; marketplace customer-SMME marketplace vendors relationships in informal versus formal marketplaces in Johannesburg

Item	Description of item	Combined mean score of informal marketplaces	Combined mean score of formal marketplaces	Implication of mean scores	Supporting references
14	There are more male vendors than female vendors at the marketplace	$M = 3$	$M = 3.3$	The findings support neutrality regarding whether there are more male vendors than female SMME marketplace vendors at informal and formal marketplaces. The researcher, therefore, observed that there are the same number of male and female SMME marketplace vendors at informal and formal marketplaces.	Druion (2020)

Source: Researcher's compilation, 2024

SMME, small, medium and micro enterprises.

TABLE 11: The Mann-Whitney test for the themes between informal and formal marketplaces.

Variables[a]	Sustainability	Infrastructure	Cleanliness	Safety and security	Accessibility	Products
Mann-Whitney U	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.000	41.500	1.500
Wilcoxon W	55.000	55.000	55.000	56.000	96.500	56.500
Z	-3.797	-3.790	-3.845	-3.908	-0.745	-3.704
Asymp. Sig. (two tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.456	0.000
Exact sig. [2*(one tailed sig.)]	0.000[b]	0.000[b]	0.000[b]	0.000[b]	0.529[b]	0.000[b]

Source: Statistical Consultation Services (STATKON), 2020, *Statistical Consultation Services*, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg

[a], Grouping variable: Type.

[b], Not corrected for ties.

TABLE 12: The non-parametric results of correlating variables with one another.

Variables	Sustainability	Infrastructure	Cleanliness	Safety and security	Accessibility	Products
Spearman's rho						
Sustainability						
Correlation coefficient	1.000	0.878**	0.909**	0.863**	0.091	0.794**
Sig. (two tailed)	-	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.702	0.000
N	20.000	20.000	20.000	20.000	20.000	20.000
Infrastructure						
Correlation coefficient	0.878**	1.000	0.920**	0.823**	0.166	0.860**
Sig. (two tailed)	0.000	-	0.000	0.000	0.485	0.000
N	20.000	20.000	20.000	20.000	20.000	20.000
Cleanliness						
Correlation coefficient	0.909**	0.920**	1.000	0.903**	0.098	0.814**
Sig. (two tailed)	0.000	0.000	-	0.000	0.681	0.000
N	20.000	20.000	20.000	20.000	20.000	20.000
Safety and security						
Correlation coefficient	0.863**	0.823**	0.903**	1.000	0.143	0.864**
Sig. (two tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	-	0.547	0.000
N	20.000	20.000	20.000	20.000	20.000	20.000
Accessibility						
Correlation coefficient	0.091	0.166	0.098	0.143	1.000	0.063
Sig. (two tailed)	0.702	0.485	0.681	0.547	-	0.792
N	20.000	20.000	20.000	20.000	20.000	20.000
Products						
Correlation coefficient	0.794**	0.860**	0.814**	0.864**	0.063	1.000
Sig. (two tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.792	-
N	20.000	20.000	20.000	20.000	20.000	20.000

Source: STATKON (2020)

applicable to SMME and marketplace economic sustainability in Gauteng and beyond. The developed methodology can serve as a standard guideline and prescribed procedure for future international and South African studies on marketplaces.

The newly developed, context-specific methodology in this research informs and facilitates measures to enhance the economic viability of marketplaces and the SMMEs within them. Anticipating the pivotal role of municipal and government organisations, this study envisions them as catalysts in securing support for implementing necessary measures, policies and decision-making processes contributing to the economic sustainability of SMMEs through marketplaces. Our research plays a stimulating, accelerating and advocating role in fostering recognition of the role of marketplaces in sustaining SMMEs economically, especially in countries where such recognition is lacking. The contextual methodology design ensures that unique qualities and characteristics acknowledged by stakeholders contribute to effective planning for the economic sustainability of SMMEs within the marketplaces. This exercise highlights aspects attractive to customers, ensuring the development and economic

sustainability of marketplaces, a significant achievement given the previous absence of cataloguing and documentation for informal marketplaces around Johannesburg.

Moagi (2021), Nemaungani (2017) and Vermaak (2017) identified common challenges faced by informal street vendors and marketplaces, including inadequate infrastructure, policies, education, skills, sanitation and governmental support – challenges affirmed by this study. Globally and in the South African context, marketplaces encounter developmental hurdles, as many informal and some formal marketplaces remain undocumented, hindering municipal planning and support organisations' awareness of their challenges, value and benefits in sustaining SMMEs. Documenting these challenges is crucial for poverty alleviation, job creation and improving overall quality of life. This research addresses a gap by providing an effective catalogue of marketplaces, contributing to the development and economic sustainability of these spaces. While numerous studies focus on SMMEs, few examine the specific roles marketplaces play in SMMEs' economic sustainability and the benefits they offer to street vendors and surrounding community members.

The methodology proposed in this study can enhance customer satisfaction levels at marketplaces, aligning with research that establishes a positive link between customer experience and loyalty. Understanding marketplace operations and challenges is crucial for devising effective scientific solutions, and this study introduces such a solution, using a unique South African approach to documenting and cataloguing marketplaces, preserving their qualities for development and economic sustainability. As South Africa's unemployment rate rises, marketplaces become more crucial for ensuring sustainable livelihoods, benefiting not only unemployed entrepreneurs that are dependent on them but also local community members seeking affordable products and services. Implementing marketplace cataloguing through the proposed methodology is projected to contribute significantly to the economic sustainability of SMMEs operating within them.

The researchers have highlighted the significance of creating a cataloguing methodology for marketplaces, essential for their recognition, development and economic sustainability. Cooperation from all stakeholders, including marketplace owners, managers, vendors, customers (mostly local community members), researchers, municipal authorities, relevant departments, national government and supporting organisations, is critical for the economic sustainability of marketplaces and their SMMEs. This study and catalogue are essential for evaluating government and municipality efforts to enhance and oversee informal marketplaces in public spaces in Johannesburg. The developed methodology will undoubtedly assist the government and local municipalities in more effectively assessing marketplaces in the city and countrywide. In conclusion, the methodology proposed will uncover new opportunities for the economic sustainability of marketplaces and the SMMEs within them.

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Authors' contributions

T.J.M. contributed to literature review. P.T. contribute to conceptualisation, methodology, writing and formal analysis. C.C.M. contribute to literature review, conceptualisation and project administration.

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Data availability

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

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