

# UNLEASHING CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY COMMUNICATION FOR SMALL BUSINESSES IN THE DIGITAL ERA

**Businesses are increasingly embracing the dynamics of digital technologies, as they communicate with interested parties about their responsible initiatives through corporate websites, social media platforms and other interactive channels. Therefore, a quantitative study involving 202 owner-managers investigates their attitudes toward stakeholder engagement through digital media. The research methodology involved the integration of previously tried and tested measurement tools from the technological acceptance model, the pace of technological innovation and corporate social responsibility (CSR) items, to better understand the rationale for using digital media to communicate with stakeholders on the organization’s responsible behaviors. The results have indicated that there was a positive and significant relationship between the perceived “ease of use” and “usefulness” of online media. The results also revealed that the younger owner-managers were increasingly using ubiquitous technologies as opposed to their older counterparts. This contribution implies that all businesses, particularly the smaller ones, could improve their relationships with stakeholders if they use digital media to communicate about their responsible behaviors.**

Keywords: Responsible Entrepreneurship, SMEs, CSR, Corporate Social Responsibility, Digital Media, Online CSR reporting, Technology Acceptance Model, Pace of Technological Innovation, CSR measures.

Many corporations are increasingly reporting comprehensive content on their corporate social responsibility (CSR), environmental sustainability and corporate governance issues for the benefit of their stakeholders. Relevant stakeholder theorists, including Clarkson (1995), Donaldson & Preston (1995), and Freeman (1994) among others, argued that through social engagement, a firm is better able to address, balance, coordinate, and prioritize multiple stakeholder demands; all of which help it become more efficient, reputable and successful, in terms of financial performance (Panwar, Nybakk, Hansen & Pinkse, 2017; Orlitzky, Schmidt & Rynes, 2003). Therefore, businesses are encouraged to promote their responsible behaviors and to nurture different stakeholder relationships. This contribution posits that online communication has potential to create a ripple effect that grows as it enables businesses to reach wider audiences. Notwithstanding, relevant content marketing that is targeted at the right stakeholders could also translate into tangible benefits for the company's reputation, brand image, customer loyalty and investor confidence (Camilleri, 2017; Morsing & Schultz, 2006), among other benefits. As a result, it has never been more necessary to turn stakeholders into advocates for both the cause and the company (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010).

Panwar et al. (2017) suggested that the businesses' social engagements are rooted in institutional theory as responsible firms are capable of aligning themselves with their broader context (Brammer, Jackson & Matten, 2012; Matten & Moon, 2008; Jamali & Mirshak, 2007). The communication of responsible behaviors ought to reflect the ethos of the practicing organizations (Camilleri, 2017; Jenkins, 2006). Yet, several empirical studies have indicated that discretionary investments in CSR, whether they are driven from strategic intents or from posturing behaviors, will often result in improved relationships with both internal and external stakeholders (Panwar et al., 2017; Orlitzky et al., 2003; McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). Arguably, those corporate businesses

who behave in a legitimate, transparent, accountable and socially-acceptable way may benefit of a social license to operate in many contexts. Such companies will be capable of preventing third-party pressures through their CSR or sustainability reporting. Their corporate communications may improve their reputation and standing among stakeholders and also lower the criticisms from the general public (Camilleri, 2017). Nevertheless, little is known about the small and medium sized enterprises' (SMEs') responsible practices and on their stakeholder engagement (Panwar et al., 2017; Jamali, Lund-Thomsen and Jeppesen, 2017; Baumann Pauly, Wickert, Spence and Scherer, 2013). Therefore, this paper builds on previous theoretical underpinnings and addresses a knowledge gap in academic literature as it examines the SMEs owner-managers' perceptions on the 'use' and 'ease of use' of online technology for the promotion of their organizations' responsible behaviors among stakeholders and the general public.

A quantitative research integrates the 'pace of technological innovativeness' (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; Grewal, Mehta & Kardes, 2004; Garcia & Calantone, 2002), 'the technological acceptance model' (Rauniar, Rawski, Yang & Johnson, 2014; Davis, 1989; Davis, Bagozzi & Warshaw, 1989), and 'technological anxiety' (Garcia & Calantone, 2002) measures to explore the respondents' attitudes toward online media. In addition, it also uses the CSR measures that relate to commercial, ethical and social responsibility (Vancheswaran & Gautam, 2011; Singh & Del Bosque, 2008; Maignan, Ferrell & Hult, 1999). Therefore, this contribution examines the owner-managers' stance on technological innovation; as well as their perceived "ease of use" and "use" of digital media. At the same time, it extends the results of previous theoretical underpinnings and prior empirical studies on the related subjects appertaining to the use of digital media for stakeholder interaction, including the communication of commercial, ethical information and social responsibility reporting.

## **THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **CSR, Responsible Entrepreneurship and Stakeholder Engagement**

Where SMEs are concerned, there seems to be a problem with the adopted terminology involving corporate social responsibility. SMEs are not corporations. It is unlikely that SMEs would use any recognizable language of CSR, including the acronym itself (Murillo & Lozano, 2006). However, the CSR terminology became the dominant refrain in this subject area among many academics (see Panwar et al., 2017; Perrini, Russo & Tencati, 2007). Although it is worth noting that the phrases; 'responsible business' (Moore & Spence, 2006), 'responsible entrepreneurship' (Fuller & Tian, 2006) and 'social capital' (Russo & Perrini, 2010; Spence & Schmidpeter, 2003) were gaining momentum.

Bacon, Ackers, Storey and Coates, (1996:83) noticed that small firms were experimenting with new management initiatives, such as; "culture change, devolved management, team working, flexibility and quality task forces". Sound empirical evidence has shown that SMEs were taking up best practice ideas which were adopted by the larger firms (Simpson, Taylor & Barker, 2004; Wilkinson, 1999). Eventually, Storey, Emberson, Godsell and Harrison (2006) presumed that a significant factor for the SMEs' engagement in responsible behaviors was that good practices were becoming embedded in their supply chain relationships. In addition, there was mounting pressure from third parties which demanded that SMEs should also follow online and offline networking behaviors of their larger counterparts (see Harris, Rae & Misner, 2012). However, SMEs possess distinctive characteristics of informality (Russo & Perrini, 2010), the processes which are used to trigger employee involvement in such enterprises may need to be identified against other factors

which may be relevant to particular organizational contexts. For instance, the nature of their small social setting can provide them with an opportunity for enhanced flows of communication, more face-to-face involvement and flexibility in managing human resources (Bordonaba-Juste & Cambra Fierro, 2009). The smaller firms and their practices are usually portrayed contextually, subjectively and/or in interpretational ways (Camilleri, 2015).

The small business entrepreneurs may have reservations about the responsible behavioural methods of the larger businesses (Fassin, 2008). As the larger corporations are supporting the philosophy behind CSR, the small business practitioners tend to express their doubts about the sincerity of their larger counterparts (Jenkins, 2006). Notwithstanding, the smaller firms may be opposed to the extra administrative burdens in their daily routines. Baumann Pauly et al. (2013) maintained that the consistent handling of CSR in MNCs required them to draft formal CSR policies and procedures. However, embedding CSR policies and procedures globally and in all daily operations is an enormous task for MNCs. Hence, rolling out a CSR policy takes time and resources. Hence, the reality is that CSR is different for SMEs than it is for the larger firms, for the very same reason that sets their operations apart (Russo & Perrini, 2010). Although, the large firms are more likely to address environmental management, employment, local communities and controlling and reporting strategies (Camilleri, 2017), SMEs often demonstrate a genuine commitment towards the community and society, at large (Perrini et al., 2007). The enterprises' owners-managers may conduct their business activities with a conscience, as they are truly concerned of responsible and sustainable behaviors (Jenkins, 2006). They frequently do this without referring to the CSR concept at all, and without communicating what they do (Nielsen & Thomsen, 2009; Fassin, 2008).

Russo and Tencati (2008) have evidenced the small firms' aptitude toward CSR initiatives. The authors revealed how the firms' strategies were making a significant impact on their bottom line. They noted that there was a genuine commitment for eco-efficiency (i.e. reduction of consumption and pollution reduction strategies). Moreover, they have shown how micro firms supported initiatives which encouraged stakeholder engagement. This issue exemplifies the responsible enterprises' attempt to secure a social license to operate in their respective communities. This research perspective suggests that SMEs are subject to a number of distinctive and intrinsic characteristics that set them apart from the larger firms. These characteristics contribute to affect the content, nature and extent of their social and environmental responsibility activities.

Spence (2007) has gathered a considerable amount of academic work about European SMEs. While these factors are probably not limited to Europe, a wide array of other literature (Coppa & Sriramesh, 2013; Baumann Pauly et al., 2011; Morsing & Perrini, 2009; Perrini et al., 2007; Fuller, 2006) have also recommended further research on the responsible behavior of SMEs. Moreover, contemporary research is increasingly focusing on the issues of CSR reporting (Jamali & Thomsen, 2017; Camilleri, 2015; Nielsen and Thomsen, 2009), and stakeholder dialogue (e.g. O'Riordan & Fairbrass, 2008; Andriof, Waddock, Husted & Rahman, 2017; Tantalo & Priem, 2016). Recent studies have indicated that communication of social responsibility practices among SMEs is generally unsystematic and handled in an ad-hoc manner (Nielsen & Thomsen, 2009). Yet, it may be presumptuous to generalise that all SMEs are not communicating their responsible behaviors in an effective way. Arguably, SMEs may enhance their reputation and standing if they disclose their good practices to stakeholders. There are opportunities for them to create good publicity, as they can also raise awareness of their brand and products. Therefore, there is scope for SMEs to improve

on stakeholders' relations through the application of appropriate social and environmental reporting (Fassin, 2008).

Moreover, recent developments have led CSR into an evolution towards a logic of compliance and standardization, which is ultimately intended for external analysts rather than as an internal tool for management (Fassin et al., 2011; Lund- Thomsen & Khalid Nadvi, 2010). It may go without saying that there may be differences between CSR that is auditable through reporting mechanisms (such as the Global Reporting Initiatives, Integrated Reporting Framework, Social Accountability, et cetera) and the original notion of CSR, which was exclusively based on ethical concerns (Camilleri, 2015). Some commentators have raised their concern about the issues of communicating CSR. The bone of contention lies with SMEs' formalization of their responsible entrepreneurship (Jamali & Thomsen, 2017; Fassin, 2008). As SMEs might not always report their responsible entrepreneurship and stakeholder engagement, one might erroneously conclude that it is non-existent. However, relevant literature suggests that the social and environmental disclosures are a necessary requirement in this day and age. Perhaps, the obligation of online reporting encourages reflection, as it helps to awaken the organization, to make its responsible actions visible to stakeholders and to a certain extent measurable (Nielsen & Thomsen, 2009; Perrini et al., 2007). Of course, the administrative burden for CSR or responsible entrepreneurship can be weighted against a cost-benefit analysis (McWilliams et al., 2001; Orlitzky et al., 2011). In this context, the SMEs with their scarce resources may be restrained in terms of financial and human resources capabilities to formalize their social and environmental disclosures through digital media (Penwar et al., 2017; Fassin et al., 2011).

## **The Technological Innovation, Perceived Use and Ease of Use of Digital Media**

Digital media has reshaped communication at different levels (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). It has enabled the emergence of a new participatory public sphere where everybody could dialogically and publicly interact and collaborate in the creation of content (Colleoni, 2013; Durkin, McGowan & McKeown, 2013). The engagement between the public and the organization is one of the main characteristics of the internet. The general public is continuously being presented with the companies' content marketing as the global diffusion of social software like blogs, RSS feeds, wikis, electronic fora, webinars and social media networks have facilitated the organizations' engagement with stakeholders (Camilleri, 2017).

Many corporate websites already possess a high degree of interactivity; including their ability to disseminate information and to generate relationships between the different publics and the organization (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007). In this case, the use of the Internet is unidirectional; as its essential objective is to diffuse information and to try to improve the corporate image of the SMEs. However, in social media platforms, the degree of interactivity is high, and the Internet is used to facilitate bidirectional communication and to nurture relationships by allowing dialogue and interaction between the organization and its stakeholders (Andriof, Waddock, Husted & Rahman, 2017). These platforms have facilitated symmetric two-way communication between participants without formal hierarchies (Castelló et al., 2013). In addition, there is a lack of gatekeeping in social media (Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Vorvoreanu, 2009). For this reason, interactive communication is changing the social dynamics (Harrigan & Miles, 2014; Fieseler & Fleck, 2013). Web-based co-operation and data exchanges have empowered the communication between businesses and their stakeholders (Franco, de Fátima Santos, Ramalho & Nunes, 2014;



Fieseler, Fleck & Meckel, 2010). It enables them to engage with online users and to take advantage of positive publicity arising from real-time word-of-mouth marketing (Camilleri, 2017).

Communication through social media is dynamic in relation to traditional media (Fieseler et al., 2010). Social media have the technological potential to speed up communication processes (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) and to increase direct interaction, dialogue and participation across organizations and various audiences (Colleoni, 2013; Schultz, Utz & Göritz, 2011). Such interactive communications are referred to as “viral” because ideas and opinions spread like epidemic diseases through the network via word-of-mouth. These channels are perceived as highly trustworthy sources (Schultz & Wehmeier, 2010). Hence, when SMEs share information with online communities on their responsible entrepreneurship and stakeholder engagement, they may find out that their followers (or friends) could also share their passion for good causes. However, there are many plausible reasons why the communicative features that are enabled by digital media may not be employed as efficiently by the businesses’ marketers (Tiago & Veríssimo 2014; Berger & Milkman, 2012; Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). For this reason, SME owner-managers are encouraged to acquaint themselves with the use of online media in order to increase their impact of their communications. There is an opportunity for them to use digital media to increase the impact of their messages (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The SME executives are in a position to amplify the effectiveness of their responsible entrepreneurship efforts through digital media. They ought to decide what to communicate (i.e. message content) and where to communicate (i.e. message channel) to reach out to different stakeholders.

In sum, the web is currently advancing at an unprecedented pace of technology. Its online communities have already transformed the internet through innovative, highly scalable social media networks and product recommender systems. The emergence of user-generated content in

fora, newsgroups, social media and crowd-sourcing have offered endless opportunities to both researchers and practitioners to “listen” attentively to stakeholders, including; customers, employees, suppliers, investors, regulatory authorities and the media, among others. The premise is that digital media improves the efficiency of the engagements between the firms and their publics. Yet, recent contributions suggest that the implementation of the businesses’ online engagement is neither automatic nor easy (Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014; Fieseler et al., 2010; Besiou, Hunter & Van Wassenhove, 2013; Etter, 2013). The dialogic features that are enabled by web pages, blogs, and other social media may prove difficult to apply (Etter, 2013; Moreno & Capriotti, 2009). Although recent research has discussed about the dialogic level of online stakeholder engagement (Nielsen & Thomsen 2009; Moreno & Capriotti, 2009), little empirical research has measured the enterprises owner-managers’ stance on responsible entrepreneurship and CSR communication through digital technologies.

### **THE FORMULATION OF HYPOTHESES**

This study has investigated the owner-managers’ attitudes toward “technology acceptance” for marketing communications (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; Grewal et al., 2004; Garcia & Calantone, 2002). The respondents were expected to indicate their behavioural intention on the “use” and “ease of use” of digital media, including the Internet and social media (Kim, Lee & Law, 2008; Ajzen, 1991; Davis et al., 1989; Davis, 1989). This study has adapted “the pace of technological innovativeness” measure as its items provided an opportunity to examine the respondents’ engagement with ubiquitous technologies, including emerging innovations. This measure explored how practitioners keep themselves up to date with the latest digital media (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009) in order to interact with stakeholders and to promote their responsible entrepreneurial activities. This argumentation leads to the first two hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1. There is a positive relationship between 'the pace of technological innovation' and 'the technological acceptance' of digital media.*

*Hypothesis 2. There is a positive relationship between the pace of technological innovation of digital media and the owner-managers' stakeholder engagement through online reporting of CSR (or responsible entrepreneurial practices).*

The technology acceptance model (TAM) has often explained the users' adoption behaviors of technology (Rauniar et al., 2014; Kim, Lee & Law, 2008). It suggests that there is a causal relationship between the users' internal beliefs, attitudes, intentions and their use of technology. In the past, TAM sought to explain why people accept or reject a particular technological innovation (Davis, 1989). In this light, this model has been purposely chosen to determine why SMEs were accepting or rejecting the use of digital media for stakeholder engagement and CSR disclosures. The perceived usefulness (variable) of digital media is the degree to which a person believes that using this technology would enhance his or her job performance in marketing communications (Davis, 1989; Davis et al., 1989). From the outset, the researcher presumed that the owner-managers would perceive the usefulness and the ease of use of digital media (to communicate their CSR credentials to stakeholders). The technology acceptance model also comprises the perceived ease of use variable, which is the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system (including websites, search engine optimization, social media, blogs et cetera) would be free of effort. The usage of such online technologies is influenced by the perceived ease of use (Davis, 1989). Therefore, the researcher has investigated the owner-managers' digital skills. Hence, this study hypothesized;

*Hypothesis 3. There is a positive relationship between perceived usefulness and the perceived ease of use of digital media for CSR reporting (or responsible entrepreneurial practices).*

Although potential users may believe that a given innovation is useful; they may, at the same time be wary of digital media. The owner-managers may not be proficient enough, or may not possess adequate digital skills and competencies. They may perceive that online technologies may be too hard to use and that the performance benefits of usage are outweighed by the effort of using such applications (Meuter, Bitner, Ostrom & Brown, 2005). Alternatively, they could not dedicate sufficient time and resources to use web technologies. As a result, companies may not always report enough information on their social, ethical and environment-related activities (Singh & Del Bosque, 2008; Carroll, 1999). The literature review suggested that there is scope for the companies of all sizes to engage in continuous online communication with stakeholders including suppliers and consumers (Tantalo & Priem, 2016; Du et al., 2010; Perrini et al., 2009; Nielsen & Thomsen 2009; Jenkins, 2006). Well-known brands are usually visible online and they even communicate about their CSR engagement. Yet, there are still a number of companies' that are not reaching out to their target audiences through digital media (Singh & Del Bosque, 2008). This leads to the fourth hypothesis that aims to identify the possible antecedents (by using a stepwise regression analysis) of CSR reporting on digital media.

The pace of technological innovation, the owner-managers' perceived usefulness and ease of use of digital media, and their ethos on responsible entrepreneurial behaviors are the antecedents for their businesses' stakeholder engagement through digital media.

This research has adopted the digital media measures of technological innovation, technology acceptance, technological anxiety as well as CSR items that examined the owner-managers' attitudes toward commercial, ethical and social responsibility.

## METHODOLOGY

The survey questionnaires were distributed by email to business owner-managers who were members in a trade union representing SMEs in the retail industry. The respondents' informed consent was obtained after they were informed in writing about the surveys' content, uses of the data, voluntary nature of participation, and confidentiality of identifiable survey information. The total gross response rate of 51% ( $n = 202$ ). from all the targeted enterprises in Malta, the smallest European Union country. The rationale behind the selection of the designated profile of owner-managers was to gain a good insight into their ability to make evaluative judgements in taking decisions regarding online communications and on their responsible entrepreneurship. Table 1 presents the socio-demographic profile of the sample:

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### **The Measures for Digital Media**

The researcher has adapted six items from the 'pace of technological innovation' that were intended to measure the practitioners' attitude toward technological change in marketing. Originally, this scale reported a construct reliability of 0.97 (Grewal et al., 2004) and had used

confirmatory factor analysis to provide evidence to support the scales' convergent and discriminant validities. This study has also used the technology acceptance model to explore the respondents' attitudes on web technologies (Davis, 1989; Davis et al., 1989). This model has become a popular means by which to evaluate the users' attitudes on their perceived 'ease of use' and 'usefulness' toward technological innovations as well as their behavioural intention (Ajzen, 1991; Davis, 1989). Originally, the perceived 'use' six-item scale attained a construct reliability of 0.97, while the perceived 'ease of use' six-item scale achieved a reliability of 0.91 (Davis, 1989). These scales were considered acceptable as the factor loadings were reported to be significant and the evidence of discriminant validity were provided for each construct. Four items relating to 'technological anxiety' were used to measure the degree to which an owner-manager could (or could not) be apprehensive about the usage of digital media (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016; Meuter et al. 2005; Fieseler et al., 2010). The original measure reported an alpha of 0.93 (Meuter et al., 2005). This measure was acceptable as the factor loadings were reported to be significant. There was evidence of discriminant validity for each construct using different tests (the confidence interval as well as the variance were extracted).

### **The Measures for Corporate Social Responsibility**

Many businesses are increasingly engaging in responsible behaviours (Panwar et al., 2017; Spence, 2007). They may also describe their responsible and sustainable activities to stakeholders (Maignan et al., 1999). Very often, they are even disclosing their environmental, social and governance information on their web pages (Russo & Perrini, 2010). Therefore, this study has adapted Singh and Del Bosque's 'commercial', 'ethical', 'social' and 'support' dimensions that consisted of 16 items. With respect to scale reliability, the Cronbach alpha and composite reliability

coefficients were in all cases, above the minimum acceptance value of 0.7. Moreover, all standardized lambda values were statistically significant and above 0.5.

The ‘commercial’ dimension measured the owner-managers’ perceptions about their economic strategy. The ‘ethical’ dimension featured items on ethics and regulatory matters as it explored the respondents’ attitudes about honesty, integrity and moral principles. The ‘social’ dimension referred to environmental protection and to discretionary investments in the community at large. The ‘support’ dimension sought to discover how the respondents perceived corporate communications on commercial, ethical and social issues (Singh & Del Bosque, 2008; Carroll, 1999).

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Firstly, the descriptive statistics illustrate the means, standard deviations for all variables. Secondly, a principal component analysis (PCA) has been chosen to obtain a factor solution of a smaller set of salient variables. Thirdly, a multivariate regression analysis has investigated the hypothesized associations by using the stepwise method.

### **Descriptive Statistics**

All responses were coded using a five-point Likert scaling mechanism. The values ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) whereas 3 signaled an indecision. The scale items that were used in this study included; ‘the pace of technological innovativeness’, ‘perceived ease of use’, ‘perceived usefulness’, ‘technological anxiety’ ‘commercial responsibility’, ‘ethical responsibility’ and ‘social responsibility’ are presented in Table 2.

This study is consistent with the extant literature on the 'technology acceptance model' (Davis, 1989, Meuter et al., 2005). As a matter of fact, there were high mean scores of near 4, which reflected the respondents' stance on the use of digital media. Moreover, the survey participants have indicated their strong agreement with the 'pace of technological innovativeness' (Grewal et al., 2004). The owner-managers suggested that digital media is continuously changing; the mean score was of 4.03 and there was a standard deviation of 0.87. They also suggested that integrated marketing communications relies on technological innovation (in the negatively worded item). More importantly, these research participants were not apprehensive toward digital technology (Meuter et al., 2005). They indicated that they do not hesitate to use most forms of technology for fear of making mistakes; the mean was 1.9, and the standard deviation was 0.29.

The participants strongly agreed with the statements pertaining to the commercial responsibility of their business. The mean scores were all higher than 4. This finding suggests that the owner-managers felt that they were providing a high-quality service to their customers. They also indicated that they were acting fairly and honestly with stakeholders, where the mean was 4.07, and the standard deviation was 1.19. The survey participants were committed to fulfil their legal obligations. The results suggest that they respected the human rights and ethical norms. Apparently, this respect had priority over achieving superior economic performance, where the mean was 3.94, and the standard deviation was 1.22. Moreover, these owner-managers were also concerned on social issues (mean was 3.34 and standard deviation was 1.24) and environmental responsibility (mean was 3.46, standard deviation was 1.64). Yet there were low attitudinal scores on philanthropy and stewardship towards disadvantaged groups and individuals (mean was 2.43 and standard deviation was 0.47). The results also indicated that the owner-managers were not so committed to financing social and cultural activities (mean was 2.56 and the standard deviation



was 0.94). The survey respondents indicated that they would try to support responsible suppliers. However, they were not willing to pay more to buy products from ethical and socially responsible companies (where the mean was 2.12, and the standard deviation was 0.87).

This study investigated how ‘gender’ and ‘age’ could influence the frequency of use of digital media. The results suggested that gender did not influence this choice as there was no statistically significant difference between the groups’ means as determined by the Chi square tests. This study indicated that 83 males and 113 females (there were six missing values) used digital media on a daily basis. Pearson’s Chi-Square  $\chi^2$ : was 1.150, Df 2.  $p = 0.563$ . This finding suggested that gender did not significantly influence the frequency of use of digital media. There were no statistically significant differences between different age groups and the frequency of use of digital technology. However, the results showed that the survey participants who were between 30 to 39 years of age (where  $n=57$ ), who were followed by those who were between 20 to 29 years old (where  $n=47$ ) were more likely to use their digital media than other groups. Pearson’s Chi-Square  $\chi^2$  was 3.803, Df 6 and  $p = 0.703$ . Surprisingly, there were also a few owner-managers who have never used digital media in the past ( $n=5$ ).

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Insert Table 2 about here

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## **Data Reduction**

Bartlett’s test of sphericity also revealed sufficient correlation in the dataset to run a principal component analysis (PCA) since  $p < 0.001$ . PCA has identified the patterns within the data and

expressed it by highlighting the relevant similarities (and differences) in each and every component. In the process, the data has been compressed as it was reduced in a number of dimensions without much loss of information. PCA has produced a table which illustrated the amount of variance in the original variables (with their respective initial eigenvalues) which were accounted for by each component. A varimax rotation method was used to spread variability more evenly amongst the constructs. There was a percentage of variance column which indicated the expressed ratio as a percentage of the variance (accounted for by each component in all of the variables). Only principal components with eigenvalues greater than 1 were extracted. Table 3 illustrates the number of extracted components from the original number of variables and presents the resulting cumulative percentage of variance for the group of variables (and also reports the related 'loss of information').

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Insert Table 3 about here  
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All constructs were analyzed for internal consistency by using Cronbach's alpha. There were excellent measures that exceeded the recommended reliability estimates. The value of the Kaiser Meyer Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was also very acceptable at 0.8. The factors accounted for more than 62% variance before rotation for the digital media variables. Whereas, there was 74% of the variance explained before rotation for the CSR measure. There were ten extracted components from the original thirty-nine variables for the digital media and CSR variables. A brief description of the extracted factor components, together with their eigenvalue and their respective percentage of variance is provided hereunder in Tables 4 and 5.

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Insert Table 4 and 5 about here  
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The factor components were labelled following a cross-examination of the variables with the higher loadings. Typically, the variables with the highest correlation scores had mostly contributed towards the make-up of the respective component. The underlying scope of combining the variables by using component analysis was to reduce the data and to make it more adaptable for the regression analysis.

### **Regression Analysis**

This section examines the four hypothetical relationships by using multivariate regression analysis. A stepwise procedure was chosen to select the most significant predictive variables in the regression equations. Therefore, the *p*-value was less than the 0.05 benchmark. This also resulted in adequate F-ratios, implying that only the significant amounts of variation in regression were accounted for. More importantly, in the stepwise procedure the insignificant variables were excluded without appreciably increasing the residual sum of squares. The regression models produced the regression coefficients which represented the strength and the significance of the relationships. Moreover, the socio-demographic control variables were also entered into the regression equations.

H1: The first hypothesis indicated that there was a relationship between ‘the pace of technological innovation’ and ‘technological acceptance’ on the use of digital media. The results indicated that there was a positive and significant relationship between perceived usefulness of

digital media and the pace of technological innovation where Spearman's rho, adj r2 = 0.173. This relationship was significant at ( $p < 0.05$ ). It transpired that the 'perceived usefulness' was dependent on the pace of technological innovation (t-value = 4.457).

H2: The second hypothesis explored the correlation between the "technological innovation of digital media" with the factor component; namely, "online reporting of responsible entrepreneurship". The results indicated that there were positive and very significant relationships ( $p < 0.01$ ); where Spearman's rho, adj r2 = 0.296. It transpired that small businesses' online disclosures on their social engagement were correlated with the technological innovation of digital media (t-value = 2.53) and also with firm size (t-value = 1.87).

H3: The third hypothesis explored the correlation between the owner-managers' perceived "use" with their "ease of use" of digital media. The results indicated that there were positive and very significant relationships ( $p < 0.01$ ); where Spearman's rho, adj r2 = 0.296. It transpired that the owner-managers were using interactive technology to communicate with their stakeholders, and they were proficient in it (t-value = 2.53). The findings also from the stepwise regression analysis also suggested that the larger firms were more likely to utilize digital media than their smaller counterparts (t-value = 1.87).

H4: The last hypothesis investigated whether the technology acceptance of digital media and the companies' ethos on responsible behaviors would have an effect on their stakeholder engagement. Therefore, the perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, the pace of technological innovation and technological anxiety; as well as commercial responsibility, ethical responsibility and social responsibility variables were all considered as plausible independent variables in the regression equation. The factor component, 'online reporting of responsible entrepreneurship' was

inserted as the outcome variable. There was a positive and significant relationship where Spearman's rho, adj r2 was 0.230. The regression equation indicated that the small businesses' online engagement was dependent on the easy interaction with digital media (Perceived Ease of Use) where  $t = 6.501$ ; the users' digital skills (Pace of Technological Innovativeness) where  $t = 4.022$ ; stakeholder relationships (Commercial Responsibility) where  $t = 1.855$ ; firm size, where  $t = 0.877$ ; apprehension of digital media (Technological Anxiety) where  $t = -0.126$  and age, where  $t = -0.114$ .

## **DISCUSSION**

The above results are in line with other studies which argue that the firms' societal engagement is a response to the institutional and legitimate pressures (Panwar et al., 2017; Baumann Pauly et al., 2013). However, this empirical paper and its theoretical underpinnings contribute to an improved understanding as to why today's SMEs are expected to communicate with stakeholders through digital media. This contribution provides a snapshot of the investigated SME owner-managers' attitudes toward digital media. At the same time, it raises awareness of responsible entrepreneurial initiatives that could be promoted through corporate websites, and other digital channels including social media and blogs. An empirical study has addressed its research objectives and its implicit hypotheses by using quantitative techniques. It has applied valid and reliable measures from the 'pace of technological innovativeness' (Grewal et al., 2004), 'technology acceptance' (Davis, 1989; Meuter et al., 2005) and 'technology anxiety' as well as previously tried and tested CSR dimensions (Singh & Del Bosque, 2008). The quantitative results have clearly indicated that the survey participants recognized that digital media could help them promote their social and environmental behaviors. Evidently, owner-managers are already communicating about their responsible entrepreneurship initiatives through digital media. This research reported that the

owner-managers perceived the usefulness of digital media, as this technological innovation has helped them to better engage with stakeholders. Previous literature pointed out that SMEs prefer to learn through networking and from their peers. (Harris, Rae & Misner, 2012; Jenkins, 2006). Yet, the nature of SME CSR activities are usually integrated into the company culture, often implicitly in habits and routines that are inspired by highly motivated owner-managers, rather than explicitly in job descriptions or formalized procedures (Jenkins, 2006). This study has clearly revealed the owner-managers' positive stance toward CSR practices in their daily business operations. The majority of them have indicated a very strong engagement on their commercial and ethical responsibilities, as evidenced in the descriptive statistics.

The owner-managers of the larger businesses were more capable of using digital media to interact with stakeholders, when compared with their smaller counterparts. This finding resonates with Baumann Pauly et al.'s (2013) study as they suggested that the larger businesses were more effective in their CSR communications than the SMEs. In a similar vein, Penwar et al. (2017) contended that the SME owner -managers' perceptions on social engagement did not appear to hold the same virility when compared to the context of multinational organizations. They argued that the tangible benefits of CSR engagement had no effect on SMEs. These results are in line with other contributions (Spence & Perrini, 2011; Perrini et al., 2007) that have theoretically or anecdotally challenged the explanatory power of the business case perspective for a firm's societal engagement (Penwar et al., 2017; Baden & Harwood 2013; Brammer et al. 2012). Another finding has indicated that the younger owner-managers were more proficient in their use of innovative technologies. Therefore, this paper suggests that the owner-managers or their members of staff need to acquire digital skills and competences to communicate with interested stakeholders. Likewise, Baumann Pauly et al., (2013) also posited that the managers must be trained, incentive

systems must be aligned, grievance procedures must be drafted, and CSR activities must be evaluated.

Arguably, the use of digital media is facilitated when the business owner-managers will perceive its usefulness and its ease of use (Kim et al., 2008; Davis, 1989). In fact, the findings from this research have specified that the owner-managers' intention was to use online media to communicate about their responsible entrepreneurship, and this was dependent on their acceptance of technology, as well as on their desire to use technological innovation. This study has shown that most owner-managers were aware that it is in their businesses' interest to make a positive impact with stakeholders through their corporate sites or social media platforms. Very often, the stakeholders' first point of interaction with the business happens online (Camilleri, 2017; Berger & Milkman, 2012). Hence, it is in their interest to make a positive impact through their web site or social media presence. In the main, this study suggests that most owner-managers were already using the web, in a way or another, and they even perceived its usefulness. This was also demonstrated from the high scores that were recorded in the descriptive statistics. Yet there were a few participants who were still apprehensive toward this technological innovation. These respondents will have to realize that over time, engaging with the people who matter most (i.e. the stakeholders) will pay off in terms of corporate reputation, customer loyalty and market standing (Tantalo & Priem, 2016; Du et al, 2010).

Moreover, the principal component analysis revealed that the businesses' online communications were primarily directed at marketplace stakeholders, including; consumers, suppliers and other businesses. However, their communications on their businesses' social responsibility and environmentally-sound practices also served to engage with other interested groups; including human resources, shareholders and investors, among others. This finding mirrors

Baumann Pauly's et al.'s (2013) argumentation. The authors remarked that each business decision on economic, social, and environmental aspects must take into account all stakeholders. The businesses and their marketers need to possess relevant stakeholder-specific information as this will impact on the effectiveness of their CSR communication (Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Vorvoreanu, 2009). This can only be achieved when SMEs respond to the challenges of communicating CSR more explicitly to external stakeholders (Nielsen & Thomsen, 2009). The value of their communications lies in their ability to open up lines of dialogue through stories and ideas that reflect their stakeholders' interests (Fieseler & Fleck, 2013; Moreno & Capriotti, 2009; Whelan et al., 2013; Schultz et al., 2013). For these reasons, companies cannot afford to overstate or misrepresent their CSR communications that could ultimately foster positive behaviours or compel remedial action:

The regression analysis has identified and analyzed the determinants which explain the rationale behind the utilization of digital media for stakeholder engagement CSR communication. This research indicated that there were positive and significant relationships between 'the pace of technological innovation' and the perceived usefulness of digital media for the communication of responsible entrepreneurship. This contribution reported that the SME owner-managers' technology acceptance depended on their perceived "use" and "ease of use" of digital media; on their skills, and on their willingness to foster stakeholder relationships, online.

### **Implications and Conclusions**

SME managers and executives are in a position to enhance the effectiveness of their businesses' communication efforts. This study has identified and analyzed the SME owner-managers' attitudes toward the- utilization of digital media for CSR reporting and stakeholder



engagement. Previous academic research has paid limited attention to the engagement of digital media among small businesses, albeit a few exceptions (Coppa & Sriramesh, 2013; Nielsen & Thomsen, 2009; Williamson, Lynch-Wood & Ramsay, 2006; Taylor & Murphy, 2004). In this case, the research findings suggest that digital technologies and applications were perceived as useful by the SME owner-managers for the promotion of their businesses' social engagement and sustainable activities. This implies that the use of digital media can be viewed as a critical success factor that may lead to an increased engagement with stakeholders.

In the past, CSR practices have provided a good opportunity for SMEs to raise their profile in the communities around them. Very often, businesses have communicated their motives and rationales behind their CSR programs in conventional media. Today, companies have additional media outlets at their disposal. Savvy businesses are already promoting their responsible entrepreneurship initiatives as they are featured in different media outlets (e.g., The Guardian Sustainability Blog, CSRwire, Triple Pundit and The CSR Blog in Forbes among others). In addition, there are instances where consumers themselves, out of their own volition are becoming ambassadors of trustworthy businesses (Du et al., 2010). On the other hand, there are stakeholders who are becoming skeptical on certain posturing behaviours and greenwashing practices (Camilleri, 2017; Vorvoreanu, 2009).

Generally, digital communications and traditional media will help to improve the corporate image and reputation of firms (Berger & Milkman, 2012). Moreover, a through literature review suggested that positive publicity may lead to forging long lasting relationships with stakeholders. Hence, corporate web sites with user-centered designs that enable interactive information-sharing possibilities including widgets and plugins will help to promote the businesses' CSR credentials (Berger-Douce & Deschamps, 2012). Inter-operability and collaboration across different social

media may help SMEs to (re)connect with all stakeholders (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Indeed, there is potential for entrepreneurs and small businesses to engage with their prospects and web visitors in real-time. These days, marketing is all about keeping and maintaining a two-way relationship with stakeholders (Camilleri, 2017; Hanna et al., 2011). Successful companies are balancing stakeholder needs and involving them in decision-making (Camilleri, 2017; Baumann Pauly et al., 2013). Businesses are joining online conversations as they value their stakeholders' attitudes, opinions and perceptions. As a matter of fact, ubiquitous social media networks are being used by millions of users every day. In a sense, it may appear that digital media has reinforced the role of public relations (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). These contemporary marketing communications tactics complement well with CSR communication and sustainability reporting. Therefore, in conclusion, this contribution encourages SMEs to use digital channels to raise awareness of their societal engagement, environmentally sustainable practices and governance procedures among their stakeholders.

### **Limitations of Study and Future Research Avenues**

Recently, there have been a few studies that have explored the entrepreneurial attitudes on CSR reporting (Berger-Douce & Deschamps, 2012; Nielsen & Thomsen, 2009; Fassin, 2008; Murillo & Lozano, 2006). Previous studies have considered different sampling frames, research designs, methodologies and analyses which have produced different outcomes. In a nutshell, this research has investigated the SME owner-managers' perceptions on CSR reporting through digital media. Although the number of survey participants were sufficient in drawing conclusions about their attitudes; this study is not amenable in drawing general conclusions in other contexts. Future studies can complement and improve this work in a number of ways. For instance, other research could include both small and large firms in order to examine whether the effect of CSR

communication is different between the two categories. Moreover, the researcher believes that there is scope in undertaking qualitative studies to explore the participants' in-depth opinions and perceptions on the subject. The CSR engagement does not necessarily depend on organizational size or resources, but rather on the industry, personal motivation of SME owner-managers, and the integration in global supply chains (Panwar et al., 2017; Baumann et al., 2013). The businesses' overall vision is to a large extent driven by its owner-managers and then trickled down to the mind-sets of the employees (Jenkins, 2006).

Therefore, the implementation of CSR is not directly a function of company size. While firm size does not by definition determine the CSR implementation approach, size implies a range of organizational characteristics, some of which are more, others less advantageous for implementing CSR. Therefore, further research is necessary to identify the organizational aspects that facilitate or hinder the organizational implementation of CSR-practices and its communication. Knowledge about these aspects could inform and guide practitioners in both large and small firms. A longitudinal study in this area of research could possibly investigate the opportunities and threats of consistent disclosures of social and environmental behaviours through digital media, and to establish its reputational effects in the long run. Perhaps, further research can specifically investigate the quality and relevance of interactive content and the online conversations with stakeholders.

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<b>Table 1. The socio demographic profile of the survey participants</b>			
<b>Age</b>		<b>Gender</b>	
Less than 19 years	2	Male	87
Between 20 to 29 years	47	Female	115
Between 30 to 39 years	57	<i>(n=202)</i>	
Between 40 to 49 years	43	<b>Firm Size</b>	
Between 50 to 59 years	27	1 to 10 Employees	71
Between 60 to 69 years	17	11-50 Employees	92
Over 70 years	8	51-250 Employees	39
<i>mean:</i>	<i>37.1 years</i>	<i>(n=202)</i>	
<i>(n=201)</i>			
<b>Education</b>			
Secondary	13		
Post-Secondary / Vocational	123		
Undergraduate	45		
Post Graduate	18		
<i>(n=199)</i>			

**Table 2: A complete list of measures and their descriptive statistics**

<b>Pace of Technological Innovativeness</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std Dev.</b>
Grewal, Mehta and Kardes (2004)	Digital Media is changing at a very fast pace.	4.03	0.53
	Compared to other integrated marketing communication, digital media is changing fast.	3.42	0.46
	I have consistently seen new digital media technologies for some time.	3.95	3.37
	Innovations in digital media are frequent.	3.68	3.53
	The pace of technological innovations in digital media is high.	3.2	0.47

	Technological innovations and integrated marketing communications don't go hand in hand.	2.19	0.71
<b>Perceived Ease of Use</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std Dev.</b>
Davis (1989); Meuter, Bitner, Ostrom and Brown (2005)	Learning to operate digital media would be easy for me.	3.82	0.58
	I would find it easy to use digital media for corporate communication.	3.21	0.53
	My interaction with the digital media would be clear and understandable for my stakeholders.	3.86	0.34
	I would find digital media to be flexible to interact with.	3.81	0.4
	It would be easy for me to become skilful at using digital media.	3.86	0.53
	I would find digital media resources easy to use.	3.95	0.39
<b>Perceived Usefulness</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std Dev.</b>
Davis (1989); Meuter, Bitner, Ostrom and Brown (2005)	Using digital media would enable me to accomplish corporate communication tasks more quickly.	3.78	0.41
	Using digital media would improve my communication.	3.96	0.38
	Using digital media would enhance my effectiveness in integrated marketing communication.	3.91	0.28
	Using digital media would make it easier to do my corporate communications.	3.99	1.25
	I would find digital media resources useful in my job.	3.95	0.34
	Learning to operate digital media resources would be easy for me.	3.78	1.41
<b>Technological Anxiety</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std Dev.</b>
Meuter, Bitner, Ostrom and Brown (2005)	I feel apprehensive about using digital media.	2.71	0.45
	Technical terms sound like confusing jargon to me.	2.88	0.44
	I have avoided digital media because it is unfamiliar to me.	2.34	0.53
	I hesitate to use most forms of technology for fear of making mistakes I cannot correct.	1.9	0.29

<b>Measure</b>			
<b>Commercial Responsibility</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std Dev.</b>
(Singh and Del Bosque, 2008)	My company is an innovator and continuously launches new products (or service) into the market.	4.23	0.87
	My company's products (or service) always maintain good quality	4.65	1.77

	My company informs its stakeholders in a correct and truthful way about the characteristics / properties of its products (or services)	4.46	0.58
	My company behaves ethically / honestly with its customers	4.07	1.19
<b>Ethical responsibility</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std Dev.</b>
(Singh and Del Bosque, 2008)	My company is concerned to fulfil its obligations vis-a-vis its shareholders, suppliers, distributors and other agents with whom it deals	4.12	0.88
	My company is concerned to respect the human rights when carrying out its activities	4.02	1.13
	My company always respects the norms defined in the law when carrying out its activities,	4.25	1.15
	My company's respects ethical principles in its stakeholder relationships, this respect has priority over achieving superior economic performance	3.94	1.22
<b>Social responsibility</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std Dev.</b>
(Singh and Del Bosque, 2008)	My company is concerned about protecting its natural environment	3.46	1.64
	My company directs part of its budget to donations and social works favouring the disadvantaged individuals and groups	2.43	0.47
	My company supports the development of the society financing social and/or cultural activities	2.56	0.94
	My company is concerned to improve general well-being of the society	3.34	1.24
<b>Support</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std Dev.</b>
(Singh and Del Bosque, 2008)	I avoid buying products from suppliers that don't have an ethical and socially responsible behaviour	3.37	0.95
	If the price and quality of two products are the same, I would buy from a firm that has an ethical and socially responsible reputation	4.02	0.45
	I would pay more to buy products from an ethical and socially responsible company	2.12	0.87
	I consider the ethical reputation of businesses when I buy	2.54	1.21
	I consider the social activities of businesses when I buy	3.21	0.65

**Table 3 Data Reduction through Principal Component Analysis**

Original Number of Variables		Cumulative Percentage of Variance %	Loss of Information %	Components Extracted
Digital Media	22	62	38	6
Responsible Entrepreneurship and Stakeholder Engagement	12	74	26	4

**Table 4 The Extracted Factor Components from the Digital Media Variables**

Use of Digital Media		Initial Eigenvalues	
		Total	% of Variance
1	Perceived Usefulness of Digital Media	5.533	25.152
2	Pace of Technological Innovation	2.378	10.809
3	Technological Anxiety	1.846	8.391
4	Easy Interaction with Digital Media	1.662	7.553
5	Perceived Ease of Use of Digital Media	1.192	5.418
6	Effective Digital Media	1.119	5.085

Extraction Method: PCA

Alpha = 0.802; KMO = 0.792; Sig:000

**Table 5 The Extracted Factor Components from the Responsible Entrepreneurship and Stakeholder Engagement Variables**

	CSR Reporting	Initial Eigenvalues	
		Total	% of Variance
1	Engagement with Marketplace Stakeholders	8.874	35.024
2	Valuing Online Reporting of Responsible Entrepreneurship	4.654	20.119
3	Valuing Online Environmental Sustainability Reporting	1.846	13.454
4	Engagement with Human Resources	1.162	5.403

Extraction Method: PCA

Alpha = 0.845; KMO = 0.812; Sig: .000