

1 **The lone digital tourism entrepreneur: Knowledge acquisition and collaborative**
2 **transfer**

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5 **Highlights**

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7 • Entrepreneurs acquire digital marketing knowledge and develop strategy through peer-
8 sharing.
9 • Entrepreneurs seek digital marketing solutions appropriate to their business model.
10 • Knowledge sharing within peer clusters provides co-creation opportunities.
11 • Combined Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge is most effective for digital marketing
12 knowledge acquisition and transfer.
13 • Technology-in-practice theory is a useful paradigm for studying small business digital
14 marketing adoption and integration.
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18 **Abstract**

19 This paper addresses calls for more detailed studies of small tourism enterprises.
20 Researchers report a lack of adoption and ineffective utilisation of digital technologies
21 in smaller tourism businesses. The study focuses on two university-facilitated projects of
22 digital marketing adoption and utilisation by 53 small and medium sized tourism
23 businesses in the South of England. The framework for this study was driven by Modes
24 of Knowledge Transference and Technology-In-Practice. The findings describe peer-to-
25 peer knowledge acquisition and sharing that take place in university-led projects and
26 suggests that a combination of Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge helps entrepreneurs to
27 advance their digital marketing knowledge. Peer-to-peer clusters are an effective means
28 of placing digital marketing knowledge and technology in the context of small and
29 medium tourism business practice. The paper provides implications for destination
30 marketing organisations and policymakers and suggestions for future avenues of research
31 are offered.
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33 **Key words: digital marketing; entrepreneur; small tourism businesses; knowledge**
34 **acquisition; Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge; technology-in-practice.**
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1. Introduction

This paper contributes to the small business tourism literature by examining digital marketing (DM) knowledge acquisition in small and medium sized tourism businesses (SMTBs). DM is defined as “an adaptive, technology-enabled process by which firms collaborate with customers and partners to jointly create, communicate, deliver, and sustain value for all stakeholders” (Kannan and Li, 2017, p.23). The DM toolbox contains an increasing range of free and paid technologies and platforms which SMTBs can use to reach and engage with customers, including email, online reviews, Google and Bing ads, social media ads, content marketing, and automated marketing, as well as third-party platforms such as destination marketing organization (DMO) websites, Booking.com and Airbnb. However, a recent report from the UK Government (HM Government, 2019, p.10) observes that the 200,000 small and medium sized tourism enterprises in the UK require support in “helping them to go digital”, are lacking a support network, and are essentially suffering from the lone-wolf syndrome, being isolated and operating alone. The pay-per-click Google Ads platform is a salient example of the help that SMTBs need, being prohibitively expensive for smaller firms to fully utilize and its benefits hard to assess, requiring digital analytic capabilities often out of reach for small business owners unfamiliar with digital advances in marketing. Support for SMTBs is essential given that the tourism sector is increasingly reliant on web-based technologies for regional competitiveness (Alford, 2018), in large part driven by consumer adoption of technology. It is estimated that 85 per cent of inbound visitors to the UK book their travel online (HM Government, 2019). “Tourism, like so many other industries, is experiencing a wave of digital disruption that threatens to restructure some traditional business models and make others obsolete” (OECD, 2017, p. 7).

Levels of adoption and use of DM by tourism entrepreneurs remains stubbornly low (Alford and Page, 2015), particularly for rural tourism micro firms (Kelliher, Reinl, Johnson, & Joppe, 2018). This is despite the obvious benefits of understanding customers better, developing closer customer relationships, and building upon small firm flexibility and informality (Sigala, Airey, Jones, & Lockwood, 2004; Simmons, Armstrong, & Durkin, 2011). Burgess et al. (2015, p. 433) make the stark observation that “the smaller the business is, the lower the adoption rate tends to be”. This phenomenon is not limited to the tourism sector but is also common in other sectors where a general lack of adoption of e-business and e-marketing technologies and associated challenges are reported (Fillis, Johansson, & Wagner, 2003; Gilmore, Gallagher, & Henry, 2007; Harrigan, Ramsey, & Ibbotson, 2011). Researchers acknowledge that information and communication technology research in SMEs is commonplace, but there is a gap in knowledge concerning micro enterprise entrepreneurs and adoption (Bharati & Chaudhury, 2006; Fink & Disterer, 2006; Jones, Simmons, Packham, Beynon-Davies, & Pickernell, 2014). On first inspection this is somewhat surprising given that the rate of technological innovation and the “ubiquity of non-proprietary technologies and open-access platforms” that offer small firms comparatively low-cost opportunities to adopt DM (Morgan-Thomas, 2016, p. 1122).

84 However, identifying which technologies to invest in and how to manage them
85 effectively requires a complex knowledge mix, comprising of strategy, technology and
86 analytics across owned, earned and paid-for digital media platforms (Chaffey & Ellis-
87 Chadwick, 2019).

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89 Digital technologies have inexorably altered the marketing environment of small
90 tourism businesses (Elliott & Boshoff, 2007), and while there are case studies of SMTBs
91 that have adopted digital technologies, especially social media and user generated
92 content, in their business models (e.g. Burgess, Sellitto, Cox, & Buultjens, 2015; Sigala
93 & Gretzel, 2017), consumer behaviour online (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010) and online
94 destination marketing (Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2013; Pan & Li, 2011) remain dominant
95 themes in the tourism literature pertaining to DM. A recent paper by Navío-Marco,
96 Ruiz-Gómez, & Sevilla-Sevilla (2018) provides a ten year review of e-tourism research
97 and there is no mention of DM in respect of lone entrepreneurs. References to SMTB
98 marketing tend to be within the wider context of destination marketing. For example,
99 McCabe, Sharples, & Foster (2012, p. 37) refer to suppliers in the destination “having
100 problems with online marketing” and lacking time and IT competence. Cost reduction
101 and market penetration are identified as potential benefits for SMTBs created from
102 collaboration with DMOs, but no details at an individual firm level are given (Wang,
103 Hutchinson, Okumus, & Naipaul, 2013). Referring to the adoption of technology by
104 small tourism businesses, Thomas & Ormerod (2018, p. 248) observe that there is “a
105 small body of empirical work in this area”.

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107 Evidence within the tourism sector, scant though it is, suggests that a top-down, one-
108 size-fits-all, approach to increasing the adoption and use of DM by entrepreneurs is
109 largely ineffective (Mistilis, Buhalis, & Gretzel, 2014). Lashley (2018, p. 339) observes
110 that “management development in small hospitality firms is at a low level, and
111 entrepreneurs in micro firms do not typically give priority to their own development”.
112 Lashley goes on to advise that where agencies are aiming to improve destination
113 competitiveness “by intervening in the development of managers of small hospitality
114 firms’, they should adopt “a much more subtle and targeted approach”. The tourism
115 sector is not alone in this regard; there has been criticism of standard business training
116 programmes that include either finance or marketing training for SMEs, owing to their
117 decidedly mixed results, globally (Giné & Mansuri, 2014). In the UK, the South West
118 Productivity Commission report (2017) concluded that rural micro tourism businesses
119 are hard to reach and do not engage with support. To compound the problem, the
120 budgetary pressures on DMOs will, inevitably, impact on the support they can offer to
121 SMTBs. In the space of just eight years, net current expenditure on tourism by local
122 authorities (the largest overall funders of DMOs) in England has decreased 58 per cent
123 from £142m per annum to £59m (Gov.UK, 2011; 2017). A study of small tourism
124 businesses in Scotland by the Federation of Small Businesses (2014, p. 11) found that
125 “the support landscape” was “overly complex, confusing, poorly communicated and
126 disjointed”. This view is corroborated by McCamley & Gilmore (2017) who report that
127 Northern Ireland DMOs do not engage effectively with SMTBs. Provision of e-learning
128 tool kits has seemingly not resolved any of these issues even with digital government

129 initiatives worldwide, which include creation of online DM resources for entrepreneurs
130 (e.g. the European Commission’s Tourism Business Portal - Digital Toolbox, the
131 Australian Tourism’s Tourism E Kit, and VisitBritain’s Digital Marketing Toolkit).
132 Statistics related to engagement with these resources are not publicly available, however
133 the low levels of adoption of DM by tourism entrepreneurs would suggest that impact
134 is limited.

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136 Given these low levels of adoption and the mixed results of formal training and digital
137 knowledge transfer, urgent questions need to be addressed. How can policy-makers and
138 tourism business support agencies help entrepreneurs in acquiring the knowledge
139 necessary to market effectively in the digital age? And, what theory can we draw upon,
140 and contribute to, that will support the study of SMTBs’ DM knowledge acquisition and
141 transfer? Referring to Thomas, Shaw, & Page (2011), who highlighted the lack of
142 theorisation of small business research in tourism, Thomas and Ormerod (2018, p. 250)
143 acknowledge that while “some progress has been made” ... “it has been sporadic and
144 many of the published studies remain relatively unsophisticated in theoretical terms”.
145 Our multi-disciplinary study addresses this persistent problem by drawing on two
146 theories that we believe will enrich our understanding of tourism entrepreneurs and DM.
147 Firstly, we review the knowledge management literature which will be familiar to
148 tourism scholars (Cooper, 2006; Ruhanen, 2018). We specifically address two types of
149 knowledge, which Ruhanen refers to, as identified by Gibbons, Limoges, Nowotny,
150 Schwartz, Scott, & Throw (2010), namely Mode 1 knowledge (generated by universities
151 and researchers) and Mode 2 knowledge (generated by practitioners and consultants).
152 Our study is concerned with knowledge acquisition and collaborative transfer and
153 therefore developing a better understanding of the types of knowledge that tourism
154 entrepreneurs access enables us to study how that knowledge can be enriched and how
155 its transfer can be improved. From mainstream small business research, we review the
156 technology-in-practice literature (Morgan-Thomas, 2016), which is underpinned by the
157 theory of sociomateriality (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008) and, more widely, by studies of
158 technology in organizational practice (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011; Zammuto et al.,
159 2007). Technology-in-practice literature provides a highly apposite, conceptual position
160 from which to study the adoption of DM by tourism entrepreneurs and will challenge
161 the way in which tourism scholars view SMTB technology adoption and
162 implementation. In turning to the technology-in-practice literature we are also
163 responding to wider calls in tourism for researchers to look to external disciplines
164 relevant to small business research (Shaw & Williams, 2010). We make a further
165 contribution by providing evidence of a useful synergy between the modes of
166 knowledge transfer and technology-in-practice. This synergy is captured in the model
167 which is presented in the discussion section of our paper. More broadly, our study makes
168 a contribution not only to the small business tourism research agenda (Alford & Page,
169 2015; Ateljevic, 2007; El-Gohary, 2012; Komppula, 2014; Thomas et al., 2011;
170 Thomas, 2013) but also informs our understanding of how tourism business support
171 agencies can move effectively to support entrepreneurs in the tourism sector (Ateljevic
172 & Page, 2017; Chang, 2011; McCamley & Gilmore, 2017; Mistilis, Buhalis, & Gretzel,
173 2014; Thomas & Wood, 2015).

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In addressing these questions, we provide evidence from two digital marketing projects: 1) “Digital Destinations: Exchanging Digital Technology Knowledge in Local Tourism Economies”; funded by the Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC); 2) “SME Digital Transformation”; funded by the UK Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF). These projects involved 53 entrepreneurs where the sole business owner is the foci of the study. This focus is important as there are few studies of DM in relation to the sole entrepreneur and, in the absence of a designated marketing resource (employee), the owner will assume responsibility for sales and marketing activity in the firm (Carson, Cromie, McGowan, & Hill, 1995; Moriarty, Jones & Rowley, 2008). Secondly, entrepreneurs are highly influential in the direction and growth focus of the firm, in common with small firms in other industries (Jones and Rowley, 2011; Jones, Morrish, Deacon, & Miles, 2017). Finally, entrepreneurs are acknowledged as being innovative and carrying out entrepreneurial marketing activities to enhance destination competitiveness to meet the gaps in DMO’s service provision (McCamley & Gilmore, 2017).

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Digital marketing and SMTBs

In much the same way that small business marketing is not a small version of larger firm marketing (Hill, 2001), DM should be viewed as a new approach to marketing rather than traditional marketing that is supported by digital means (Järvinen, Tollinen, Karjaluoto, & Jayawardhena, 2012; Liu, Karahanna, & Watson, 2011; Sultan & Rohm, 2004; Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015). There are six particular issues related to small firm adoption of DM: 1) the technical competency of the entrepreneur and the value that he/she attaches to DM; 2) the fit between DM and the firm’s business model; 3) the challenges associated with integrating traditional marketing practices with DM; 4) needing a willingness to test new marketing approaches by advancing beyond website usage (Alford & Page, 2015; Hoffman & Novak, 2011; Kim, Lee, & Lee, 2013); 5) building customer relationships through social media (Felix, Rauschnabel, & Hinsch, 2017; Malthouse, Haenlein, Skiera, Wege, & Zhang, 2013); and 6) being able to meet the challenge of the growing complexity of the marketing landscape (Alford, 2018), requiring greater resources to manage DM.

Entrepreneurs are found to be lacking in awareness of the accrued benefits of DM which creates a barrier to adoption (Harrigan et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2014; Wolcott, Kamal, & Qureshi, 2008). Where tourism entrepreneurs see the benefits, adoption of DM is more likely (Elliott & Boshoff, 2007; Simmons, Armstrong, & Durkin, 2008). More recent studies confirm that these challenges still remain, including the entrepreneur’s lack of competency and knowledge and a constrained view of the benefits of DM (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015). Entrepreneurs also tended to focus on the immediate and attainable impact of technology implementation, rather than the longer-term outcomes (Aldebert, Dang, & Longhi, 2011; Jones et al., 2014).

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While the website remains the focal point for most small firms, partly because that is where the final sale is likely to take place (Jones et al., 2014), effective DM for tourism entrepreneurs involves the holistic management of a mix of owned, earned and paid digital channels (Alford, 2018; Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). It also requires an extension and integration of conventional marketing practices with digital platforms (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2016). Generating customer insight is of critical importance for digital marketers and so we posit that entrepreneurs must now understand and include their target customers' search behaviour if they are to develop a successful search engine optimisation strategy (Berman & Katona, 2013). Paid-for advertising remains a potent part of the marketing mix, but now entrepreneurs and SMTBs require the technical skills to master the intricacies of setting up, managing and monitoring pay per click advertising campaigns (Hutchinson & Quintas, 2008). Furthermore, tourism entrepreneurs have to contend with powerful intermediaries, for example Booking.com, which dominate the customer's online journey, particularly at the point of search.

The entrepreneur needs to understand how to generate insights from an abundance of digital data to effectively compete (Arons, van den Driest, & Weed, 2014; Kotler et al., 2016). Successful DM implementation requires an ability to accurately measure its impact, which in turn demands new technical and analytical skills and capabilities of entrepreneurs. The UK government's Department for Business Innovation & Skills (BIS, 2015) reports that, despite there being a positive link between digital skill levels and turnover growth, a quarter of SMEs do not possess basic digital skills. Indeed, Leeflang, Verhoef, Dahlström, & Freundt (2014, p. 4) identify "the talent gap in analytical capabilities" as a particular cause for concern for digital marketers. Entrepreneurs are challenged with managing the data generated through digital channels and turning that data into intelligence (Ateljevic, 2007). This poses a significant existential problem, namely that entrepreneurs are less likely to adopt DM because they lack the skills necessary to evaluate its benefits and relevance to their own business model.

2.2. Modes of knowledge transference

As this study focus concerns university-hosted projects, we are interested in whether and how knowledge transfers via engagement with tourism entrepreneurs. There are systematic failures recorded which relate to knowledge transference from universities providing academic research to tourism businesses (Ruhanen, 2018; Thomas & Ormerod, 2017), and also between DMOs and SMEs (McCamley & Gilmore, 2017). There are two sources of knowledge that can be acquired by businesses: Mode 1 knowledge and Mode 2 knowledge (Gibbons et al., 2010; Tribe, 1997). Mode 1 includes knowledge created within universities, being academic-led and disseminated through scholarly journals, with impact on the practitioner being highly limited. Mode 2 knowledge is generated outside of academia, often by consultants, companies and governments, and is more accessible to practitioners. Mode 2 knowledge, while often

264 'packaged' in business-friendly formats, is described as subject to normative constraints
265 and therefore less conducive to free thinking and ideation (Rip, 2002). In many cases
266 the sources will either lack the methodological rigour associated with academic
267 endeavour or the methodology is not made transparent in the way that is required by
268 peer reviewed journals. Mode 1 knowledge is investigator-led, scientifically rigorous,
269 and has the potential to foster creativity and innovation; the problem being that it is
270 currently largely inaccessible to industry users, in part due to the impenetrable nature
271 of academic writing as viewed by practitioners (Ruhanen, 2018; Thomas & Ormerod,
272 2017). Kannan and Li (2017, p.40) proffer the following solution: "Practitioners can
273 provide the raw material and academics can provide the rigor, and together they can
274 extend our knowledge of the everchanging digital environment."

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276 *2.3. Technology-in-practice*

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278 Caution is advised to avoid making assumptions about small businesses and their
279 relationship with technology for marketing (Thomas et al., 2011). In reflecting on what
280 those assumptions might be and how they might constrain our understanding of tourism
281 entrepreneurs and DM, we have found the technology-in-practice literature to be
282 particularly insightful (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; Leonardi, 2011; Mazmanian,
283 Morgan-Thomas, 2016; Scott & Orlikowski, 2014; Zammuto et al., 2007). A helpful
284 review by Morgan-Thomas (2016: 1129) found that "current SME research on ICT
285 adoption builds on the principle of determinism", underpinned by implicit assumptions
286 that technology is a largely inflexible 'given' and it is the user (e.g. entrepreneur) who
287 must adapt (e.g. learn how to use the technology, shape the business model around the
288 technology, allocate resources to master the technology) if the business is to enjoy the
289 benefits of DM. Technology-in-practice is guided by a different set of ontological
290 assumptions: technologies are intertwined with, and shaped by, the user and are rarely
291 used as intended and ultimately must be seen in the context of practice. The technology-
292 in-practice perspective assumes that the entrepreneur's focus lies with knowledge
293 pertaining to perception of the technology, the purposes it currently serves and could
294 serve in the future, and opportunities for innovation through technology, rather than
295 focusing on how to use the technology. In an earlier study, which pre-dates much of the
296 technology-in-practice literature, but is closely aligned to it, Alford and Clarke (2009,
297 p. 580) posed the question: "how do we ensure that, as technological solutions are
298 implemented within tourism, due consideration is given to human-centred issues?" We
299 argue that these business-centred and human-centred viewpoints are crucial in ensuring
300 a level of critical reflection when studying the adoption of DM by SMTBs, and when
301 designing interventions that support the lone tourism entrepreneur.

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303 **3. Method**

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305 A qualitative research design was adopted using inductive enquiry to offer new insights
306 from a relatively unknown aspect of study using a "discovery orientated approach"
307 (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993, p.1; Morrish & Jones, 2019); that is, data collection carried
308 out using fieldwork that enables and informs theory development. This approach

309 allowed for developing new understandings of a new phenomenon using a case study
310 (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2009). Substantial data were collected from two
311 digital projects based in Dorset, South of England. The overarching framework for the
312 projects involved the SMTBs developing a DM plan to achieve a minimum of two DM
313 objectives, which the entrepreneurs began formulating at the first seminar. This design
314 was chosen to facilitate the transference of Mode 1 knowledge and Mode 2 knowledge.
315 The university-led meetings which took place at the university campus consisted of an
316 introductory presentation based on the project team's research and expertise (Mode 1
317 knowledge), and which would help the SMTBs to develop their DM objectives. For
318 example, in the first meeting, the entrepreneurs were provided with frameworks for DM
319 strategy and in the second meeting at the university they learned how to engage in data-
320 driven marketing, encompassing DM analytics. These presentations were followed by
321 discussion with, and among, the entrepreneurs and, in many cases, by blog posts by the
322 entrepreneurs to the project website where they would reflect on the meeting (Mode 2
323 knowledge). This also allowed the project team to share information with the
324 participants (Mode 1 knowledge). As the project progressed, the entrepreneurs were
325 given more responsibility to self-organise their meetings. This led to entrepreneurs
326 volunteering their business premises (e.g. hotel, restaurant or meeting rooms) for their
327 meetings during which one participant would be nominated as the meeting facilitator
328 and another as a note-taker. A member of the university project team would attend these
329 meetings but mainly in an observer role, keeping participation to a minimum to
330 encourage the creation and transfer of Mode 2 knowledge. The final meeting, held on
331 the university campus, was led by the businesses during which they presented their final
332 DM plan. The plan from the inception of the projects, was for ownership of the process
333 to transfer gradually to the SMTBs and thereby adhere more fully to the principles of
334 technology-in-practice, whereby DM would be seen in the context of the business.

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336 Engaging with entrepreneurs as participants allowed for relationships to develop
337 between the university and the participants, allowing for co-creation of the project
338 activities and co-design of the project to take place, as entrepreneurs could see that this
339 engagement would ultimately benefit them. The adoption of a technology-in-practice
340 approach offers resolutions to reported challenges that SMTBs face, while community-
341 based-projects that are action-research based also serve to reduce the previously
342 reported issue that tourism entrepreneurs tend to be research averse (Cooper, Prideaux,
343 & Ruhanen, 2003; Shaw & Williams, 2010). Our technology-in-practice approach
344 builds on knowledge of integration of community-based activities and participatory
345 action research, prevalent in both mainstream and tourism studies, for example
346 Bertella's (2011) community based Northern Norwegian study on communities-of-
347 practice and Jennings, Scantlebury, & Wolfe's (2009) study on action research cycles,
348 team-based learning and communities-of-practice.

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350 Data were collected from project application forms, university-led seminars, video
351 recorded meetings, project website blog posts, cluster meetings, and end-of-project
352 presentations. These were uploaded to the online project hub, consisting of the project

353 website, blog and SlideShare. Data abstraction included the use of template analysis
 354 (using NVivo) and researcher coding and re-coding clerically to make connections from
 355 the data, the observation material, and to construct connections with the research
 356 findings (Suddaby, 2006).

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358 *3.1. The sample*

359 Our purposive sample consists of entrepreneurs from SMTBs (N= 53) as a
 360 heterogeneous sample from both projects (Shaw, 2006). The two datasets that were
 361 merged originated from two DM studies: Digital Destinations (DD) (2012-2014) which
 362 comprised of 53 SMTBs, and Digital Transformation (DT) (2014-2017), which
 363 comprised of 10 re-recruited participants from the original DD project of 53 SMTBs.
 364 The entrepreneurs (Table 1) represent a range of sectors which together comprise the
 365 ‘visitor economy’ in the region and include: hotels, visitor attractions, bed and
 366 breakfast, self-catering, outdoor activities, and museums.

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368 **Table 1**
 369 SMTBs and clusters.

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Case	Business type	Employees	Case	Business type	Employees
Digital Olympians			AppsFab		
1	Education	3	9	Charity	133
2*	Heritage	8	10*	Hotel	40
3	Tour operator	3	11	Self-catering	2
4	Restaurant	30	12	Cycle hire	9
5	Leisure club	10	13*	B&B	1
6	Activities	8	14	Hotel	25
7	Hotel	30	15*	B&B	1
8	B&B	4	16	Attraction	45
			17	Ski centre	45
			18	Tourism office	5
Online Crusaders			AppPrentices		
19	Outdoor activities	1	27	Hotel	100
20	Hotel	40	28*	Self-catering agency	5
21	Power kite training	2	29*	Surf training centre	6
22	Yacht charters	7	30	Conference organiser	2
23	Language school	30	31	Golf club	12
24	Retail	50	32*	Water park	45
25	Holiday letting	20	33	Boat cruises	7

26	Museum	13		34	Adventure sports	25
				35	Arts centre	120
Digital Dragons				Social Maniacs		
36*	Tourist attraction	4		45	Dance venue	17
37	Crafts centre	11		46	Arts agency	10
38	Attraction	25		47	Self-catering	4
39	Hotel	45		48	Visual arts	1
40	B&B	1		49*	Sightseeing agency	30
41	Accom. agency	1		50	Sightseeing agency	1
42	Golf club	30		51	Country estate	47
43*	Self-catering	1		52	Self-catering	9
44	Tourist attraction	100		53	Self-catering	1

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* DT participants

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Through a partnership with the local DMO, SMTBs were invited to attend an information evening regarding the projects. This generated a lot of interest, with over 100 SMTBs completing the application form. On the basis of the information provided on that form, and with input from the local DMO, the research team were able to select 53 SMTBs. In part, participants were chosen on the basis that they were entrepreneur owner-managers who were responsible for carrying out digital marketing and making strategic decisions, including technology investment decisions in the firm. However, as the research team wanted to study how DM knowledge is transferred between the SMTBs, it was important to recruit a mixed group of entrepreneurs in terms of their knowledge and experience of DM, albeit with shared common goals of improving their DM and accessing support that hitherto had been unavailable to them. The level of knowledge of each entrepreneur was established on the basis of information provided on the project application form and also through guidance of the local DMO.

The cohort was divided into 6 clusters in order to provide a smaller group size that was more intimate but would still provide diversity of knowledge, experience and opinion. Each cluster was asked to assign their cluster a name to provide a unique identity and an element of fun and gamification. More importantly, the researchers ensured that each cluster comprised SMTBs from different sectors and with different levels of DM knowledge, in order to encourage richer knowledge exchanges. For example, the AppPrentices cluster comprised of entrepreneurs with different approaches and attitudes to DM. The owner of the surf training centre (Case 29) had a keen interest in DM, was able to make and implement decisions quickly, and had a predominantly young team who were willing to use and experiment with social media. The entrepreneur from the

398 arts centre (Case 35) also had a keen interest in DM but had undertaken less
399 experimentation in social media. The owner from the self-catering agency (Case 28)
400 was older and had relatively little experience of DM. In many ways he lamented the
401 passing of the more traditional approaches to marketing, but he was keen to update his
402 DM knowledge while being able to share his own tacit knowledge.

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404 *3.2. Data collection*

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406 Data was collected at multiple contact points consecutively throughout both projects.
407 This provided a more detailed understanding of the issues for entrepreneurs who were
408 trying to acquire knowledge of DM throughout across these contact points. Mode 1
409 knowledge, including DM planning frameworks, examples of DM campaigns, and the
410 use of DM analytics, was used. DM university students were assigned to each
411 entrepreneur to support their learning and entrepreneurs met regularly with the project
412 leads (the researchers), their cluster ‘peer’ group, and all together on project days.
413 Explicit, technical ‘formal’ knowledge on DM was provided to the entrepreneurs in
414 workshops by the university project leads (Mode 1) and by an independent social media
415 consultant (Mode 2).

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417 *3.3. Data management and analysis*

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419 Due to the amount and complexity of the data, analysis tools were used to support the
420 data coding. Each case study was coded and analysed as an individual data source. Axial
421 codes allowed for analysis across the data sets, identifying reoccurring themes (Bazeley
422 & Jackson, 2013), and supported by the use of Template Analysis (Brooks, McCluskey,
423 Turley, & King, 2015). A number of discrete steps were followed to create, organise
424 and analyse the merged dataset (Fig. 1). First, the two *QSR Nvivo* DD and DT files were
425 merged into one, resulting in a combined substantial dataset consisting of 39 individual
426 data sources from 53 SMTBs over a 3-year period. The 53 firms in the dataset (Table
427 1) comprised of 25 micro firms (1-10 employees), 21 small firms (11-49 employees)
428 and 7 medium firms (50-249 employees). Reliability of data was ensured by viewing
429 data from a multiple range of sources and with two researchers working closely on the
430 projects to capture rich and meaningful data. Content validity was ensured by member
431 checking; that is, going back to probe for further confirmatory answers to elucidate the
432 findings during and following the projects (Carson, Gilmore, Perry, & Gronhaug, 2001).

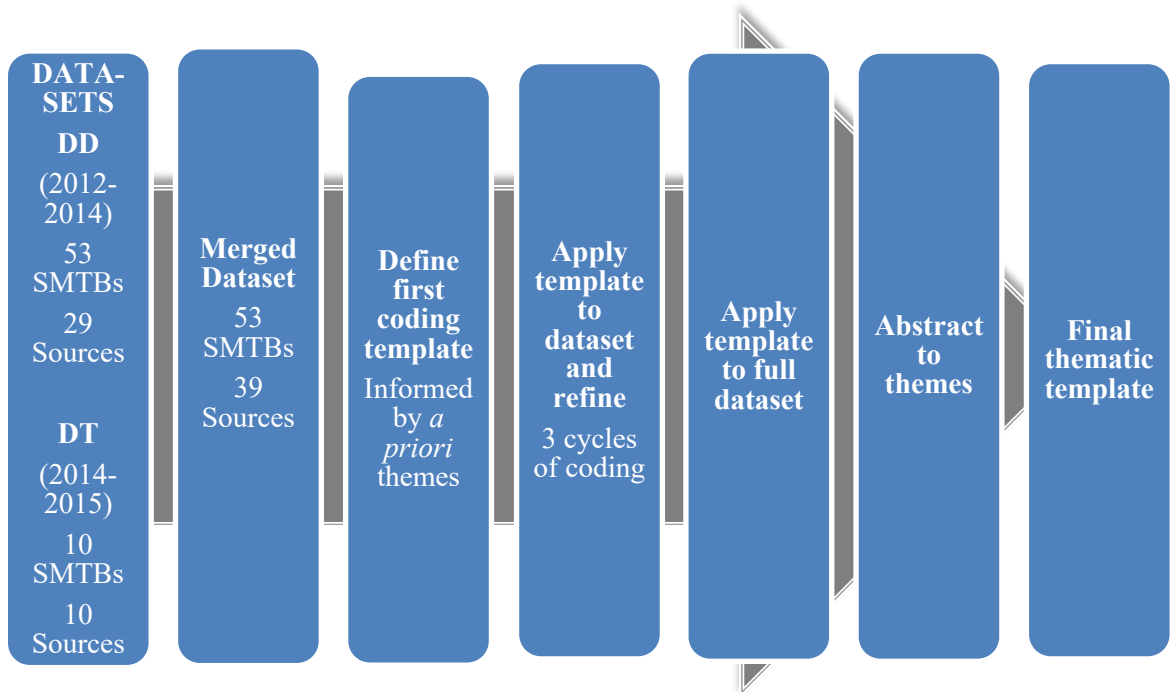
433

434 An initial coding template was created, informed *a priori* by pertinent themes from the
435 literature, with sub nodes subsequently developed to provide a more granular analysis.
436 This deductive approach is in keeping with Template Analysis which “encourages the
437 analyst to develop themes more extensively where the richest data (in relation to the
438 research question) are found” (Brooks et al., 2015, p.203). Business research methods
439 authors note that inductive research may contain aspects of deduction (Saunders,
440 Thornhill, & Lewis, 2015) and, from this epistemological position, the authors referred
441 to priori themes (third column Fig. 1) in the literature to inform their template (including
442 Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge, technology-in-practice perspectives and small firm

443 tourism research), while retaining the flexibility necessary to discover new topics of
444 interest.

445

446 The initial template was applied to a subset of the data, consisting of sources related to
447 two of the clusters; in so doing, the authors considered whether the template could be
448 used to make sense of the data in light of the research question guiding this study.
449 Where that was the case, then the extracts were coded to that theme, helping to
450 substantiate the framework; where this was not the case, then a new theme was created
451 and applied to further data for verification. Identification of key thematic areas was
452 further corroborated through text frequency analysis in Nvivo.



453

454 **Fig. 1.** Template Analysis Process.

455

456 This development and refinement process involved a further two cycles of coding, over
457 the remaining clusters, with both researchers independently reviewing the template and
458 discussing the themes as they emerged. Full use was made of the query and exploration
459 tools within the software, ranging from text searches to cluster analysis to uncover
460 patterns and themes and to study the context in which those themes were discussed. The
461 researchers finalised the template when they were confident that all sections of the dataset
462 that were relevant to the research question had been coded (Brooks et al., 2015). The
463 iterative development of the coding template involves close involvement of the
464 researchers as they try to make sense of the data (Suddaby, 2006) and is a central aspect
465 of the use of template analysis in psychology research. As such, this method is well suited
466 to a relatively unknown topic of study such as this as it allows for beginning the analysis
467 with an informed position from the literature while constructing and developing new
468 theory using empirical data from fieldwork (Eggers & McCabe, 2016; Jaworski & Kohli,
469 1993).

470

471 **4. Findings**

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The technology-in-practice perspective posits that DM adoption by SMTBs will be more effective if we establish a context in which the adoption takes place. The study of the participant entrepreneurs during these projects allowed this to take place. Table 2 below shows the topics of most concern to entrepreneurs. These are listed in order of importance. It is interesting to note that the most significant themes are ‘measurement of DM’ and ‘DM strategy’ in terms of what entrepreneurs want to know, and also, ‘role of peer clusters’ and ‘knowledge acquisition through sharing’ in terms of how entrepreneurs acquired and transferred their knowledge. The results in Table 2 also illustrate that all these aspects are of fairly equal importance to all firms regardless of size, within the SMTB classifications of micro (1-10 employees), small (11-49 employees), medium (50-250 employees).

Table 2
DM themes by firm size.

	1-10 employees (25); 11-49 employees (21); 50-250 employees (7)			
	Number of employees			
Themes	1-10	11-49	50-250	Total
Role of peer clusters in DM learning**	38	32	14	84
Measurement of DM*	36	36	7	79
Knowledge acquisition through knowledge sharing**	35	32	11	78
DM Strategy*	32	30	5	67
Learning-by-example**	17	13	2	32
Test and learn approach to DM*	7	9	0	16
Collaborative marketing*	7	5	2	14

488 *Note: the numbers in the cells denote the number of text references coded to each theme*
489 ** DM topics that were of most concern to the entrepreneurs*
490 *** How DM knowledge was acquired and transferred during the projects*

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492
493
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Section 4.1 describes the DM topics that were of most concern to the entrepreneurs (* Table 2). Section 4.2 examines how knowledge was acquired and transferred during the projects (** Table 2).

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499

4.1 Digital Marketing knowledge
4.1.1. Measurement of DM

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501
502
503

One third of the references coded to ‘measurement’ were contained in the project application form with two thirds occurring throughout the other sources – group discussion, blog, etc. This indicates an awareness of the importance of measurement as

504 a DM concept from the outset and its importance as a growing theme throughout the
505 projects.

506

507 The following extracts from two entrepreneurs illustrate what can be measured:

508

509 “What pages are being looked at, (and whether) should they be enhanced”
510 (Case 13, DT workshop).

511

512 “Working in house, we have the ability to change the website regularly and
513 update social media pages. SEO works well for us with organic click through
514 rates compared to expensive pay-per-click” (Case 36, DT workshop).

515

516 A significant number of the references to measurement concerned the entrepreneurs’ lack
517 of knowledge in that area, and there was clearly a need for them to be more conversant
518 with the techniques and metrics for measuring DM. Additionally, while there is a certain
519 level of knowledge among the entrepreneurs related to measurement, as evidenced in the
520 extracts above, significantly this rarely extended to the ability to be able to measure the
521 user’s journey through to conversion and thereby an inability to measure the true impact
522 of investment in DM.

523

524 Entrepreneurs expressed a lack of previous opportunity to view and benchmark their DM
525 statistics against similar firms. This made certain indicators (for example, website bounce
526 rates) difficult to evaluate when there is no meaningful comparison:

527

528 “It would be quite interesting for us...to have some kind of benchmarks to
529 work with as well, because I don't really know if our website's performing
530 really well or actually not very well at all, whether it needs to be performing
531 better. And that's the trouble with analytics, you're just looking at your own
532 sort of stats, which could be quite meaningless in a vacuum.” (Case 44,
533 Cluster meeting).

534

535 *4.1.2. Digital marketing strategy*

536

537 A central feature of the projects was the requirement of each entrepreneur to set two
538 DM objectives for their business and to devise a DM plan to achieve those over the
539 lifetime of the projects. The entrepreneurs, on the whole, responded positively to this
540 challenge and there was a strong feeling among participants that joining the projects
541 would give them the space and time to focus on DM and either start the process of
542 creating a DM strategy or develop and improve an existing one. In the following extract,
543 taken from a ‘Social Maniac’ cluster meeting, the firm’s owner is referring to a prior
544 cluster meeting facilitated by the university to encourage participants to focus on two
545 DM marketing objectives; it captures the difficulty that entrepreneurs have in setting
546 time aside to focus, while at the same time demonstrating their capacity to focus on a
547 specific task.

548

549 “I just thought it was a great focus session to actually have a chance for a
550 couple of hours to sit down and think rather than all the practicalities of the
551 business that you do, just to actually think in one direction and on one subject,
552 devote what you really want to achieve, because I certainly am still thinking
553 about which direction to go on ...” (Case 50, Social Maniacs cluster meeting).

554
555 A word search for ‘strategy’, across the entire dataset, shows that the terms
556 ‘implementing’, ‘building’, ‘developing’ are closely associated with it. The data reveals
557 that there is a strong appetite among the entrepreneurs for developing a formal plan or
558 strategy for their business and that, in many regards, they welcome the structure that such
559 a plan provides. The following extract from the university-mediated first cluster meeting,
560 convened at the university, demonstrates participant interest in developing strategy and
561 also the role that the university can play in facilitating this.

562
563 “... there were a couple of useful slides that we flicked through earlier on,
564 which were talking about implementing, or designing a strategy, I mean, is
565 there a, kind of, is there a strategy tool that we get to use as part of the project,
566 or do we have to, kind of, piece our own together from the tools that’s there?
567 Is there a formal strategy building aspect?” (Case 6, Digital Olympians).

568
569 However, it should also be noted that a number of businesses struggled with setting two
570 specific DM objectives and the extract below highlights the importance of understanding
571 the context in which DM is being adopted.

572
573 “..for me it was really hard to whittle it down to two objectives, because to
574 me it feels it’s almost a step too far already.” (Case 45, Social Maniacs peer-
575 led cluster meeting).

576 577 *4.1.3. Data-informed digital marketing*

578
579 This is a theme that emerged during the cluster discussions and reflects the importance
580 for SMTBs to measure the return on investment (ROI) of their marketing and the
581 problems associated with DM. The extract below illustrates the constantly evolving
582 digital landscape that tourism entrepreneurs operate in, in this case how Facebook have
583 changed their charging model.

584
585 “The other screw ball I found recently is now Facebook are charging you to
586 get engagement and get interest and it’s, like, well, actually, if I’ve not tested
587 it enough to have a strategy, why am I going to pay them money to boost the
588 amount of people that are seeing it?” (Case 6, AppsFab cluster meeting).

589
590 Deciding where to invest is a constant challenge for SMTB entrepreneur who face a fast-
591 moving digital landscape in which powerful channels such as Facebook can appear to
592 hold all the cards. Without careful monitoring, paid online advertising, whether through
593 social media or other platforms such as Google Adwords, can escalate to become a

594 significant cost for small firms. The reference to testing and strategy reaffirms the
595 importance of SMTB marketing adopting more of a data-informed approach as opposed
596 to the more haphazard approach that has traditionally characterised small business
597 marketing (Gilmore, 2011). However, the lone tourism entrepreneur is challenged with
598 keeping pace with the type of changes described in the extract above and is unlikely to
599 have the time or competency to acquire this knowledge solely through their own online
600 research.

601

602 *4.1.4. Collaborative digital marketing*

603

604 While there was a collaborative approach to shared learning (discussed in the next
605 section), what was more surprising was the level of discussion related to how these
606 entrepreneurs could work together to enhance the customer experience through creating
607 new collaborative marketing ideas:

608

609 “My biggest objective is really that our guests that come to stay with us have
610 a good time and love the forest and just hearing other comments here, what
611 Nigel (Case 16) and Sarah (Case 18) were saying is that I think a lot of our
612 guests that come to us of a younger generation, don’t even know about Exbury
613 [a visitor attraction] and what we show them and what we share on our
614 Facebook page for them, we always get people commenting on Exbury and
615 excited about it and the same with the New Forest, everything that we share,
616 it’s the pictures, and everything, you know, there’s so much that we can all
617 work at together.” (Case 13, AppsFab university seminar).

618

619 There was a realisation among participants that, individually, they can only offer a
620 limited number of elements of the customer’s experience, but through collaboration they
621 can create a richer offer. This not only enhances the customer experience but, from a DM
622 perspective, creates keyword-rich online content which plays the dual role of firstly,
623 reaching more customers through a better ranking on Google and secondly, encourages
624 them to stay longer on the website through a richer online experience and embedded
625 calls-to-action (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

626

627 *4.2. Acquiring and transferring knowledge*

628

629 The researchers investigated how the participant entrepreneurs acquired knowledge
630 across the different points of project engagement, including application forms,
631 university-led discussions, peer-led discussions, etc. Knowledge was acquired through
632 unlocking of the entrepreneurs’ knowledge, often by sharing knowledge with their peers,
633 learning by example, and by ‘formal’ Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge transfer from the
634 project team.

635

636

637

638

639 *4.2.1. Role of peer clusters in digital marketing learning*

640
641 It is perhaps not surprising that learning about DM is the strongest generic theme, given
642 the focus of the projects. However, the distribution of coding across the dataset is of
643 interest. Over 90% of the ‘learn about DM’ references are contained in the application
644 form that firms completed when joining the projects, whereas ‘how to measure DM’ is
645 more evenly distributed, with only one third of the references contained in the application
646 form and the remaining two thirds distributed across the cluster meetings. The dynamics
647 of the cluster meetings led to themes being surfaced by the entrepreneurs that they were
648 not sufficiently aware of when they were completing the application form, indicating
649 progressive learning through the projects. The following extract from the ‘Social
650 Maniacs’ cluster meeting illustrates the tacit knowledge that resides in small firms and
651 the role of the cluster meetings in extracting and transferring that knowledge:

652
653 “Just to ask you a question on target audience. Ours is really simple. We’re
654 young professionals, 25 to 35, and active retired, 55 to 70 really, and the
655 market I want to aim at with this is women aged between about 21 and 40.
656 Sorry. You have to be like that don’t you? (Case 52, Social Maniacs cluster
657 meeting).

658
659 Of course you do. I’m impressed that you’re able to target such a narrow
660 sector basically. (Case 50, Social Maniacs cluster meeting).

661
662 But you can with the Facebook you see, because once you’ve got on to
663 Facebook it’s quite easy isn’t it to target just women? Because in the market
664 that I’m in 60 per cent of them make the decision as to whether they’re going
665 to come or not.” (Case 52, Social Maniacs cluster meeting).

666
667 The extract above also illustrates how the exchange serves the important purpose of
668 validating their knowledge and receiving affirmation from their peers. There was a
669 palpable sense throughout the projects that the entrepreneurs enjoyed sharing their
670 insights and that this was, in large part, due to the lack of opportunity for them to do so
671 during their day-to-day operations.

672
673 While the peer-to-peer interactions within the projects provided free-flowing
674 information, there remained a perceived need among the entrepreneurs for structure and
675 external review to provide focus and clarification.

676
677 “There are many areas to develop and have trouble knowing where to focus
678 and in what priority. By external impartial review of our marketing it would
679 help to remove this barrier.” (Case 29, Application form).

684 *4.2.2. Knowledge acquisition through knowledge sharing*

685
686 There was definitely a sense in the projects, among the entrepreneurs, that you have to
687 ‘give a little to get a little’, and while entrepreneurs clearly wanted to acquire knowledge
688 from the projects, there was in fact a significant emphasis on the willingness to share
689 knowledge. Overall the projects were characterised by openness and transparency and,
690 from the outset, entrepreneurs were open and prepared to share, with over 90 % of the
691 references to ‘knowledge-sharing’ occurring in the application form. The following
692 extract is illustrative of that sharing mentality:

693
694 “To gain knowledge & understanding on new ways of promoting our
695 business. The opportunity to share our existing knowledge & discuss ideas
696 with other businesses in the area.” (Case 17, Application form).

697
698 *4.2.3. Learning-by-example*

699
700 The entrepreneurs demonstrated a strong preference for learning through each other’s
701 experiences. A significant barrier to small business adoption of DM lies in an inability
702 of entrepreneurs to understand the benefits and how it will contribute to the profitability
703 of the business. The projects reveal that from the outset a major attraction of the projects
704 for the entrepreneurs was the opportunity to learn by example from the tried and tested
705 experiences of other entrepreneurs.

706
707 “Sharing working solutions with like-minded people within the industry.”
708 (Case 36, Application form).

709
710 “I believe that as groups within the project we can disseminate and learn from
711 best practice, and it will be very interesting from a professional perspective
712 to engage not only with students but industry peers who share some of my
713 own concerns and problems.” (Case 16, Application form).

714
715 Frequently entrepreneurs would share the specifics of DM campaigns they had
716 undertaken during cluster meetings, for example Google Adwords or email marketing
717 campaigns, sharing technical and marketing insights from their own perspective and as
718 relevant to their business model. The importance of this is highlighted in the following
719 extract from one of the cluster meetings where the participants reflected on the examples
720 used by the social media consultant in the first university-mediated seminar.

721
722 “Some of the content, whilst being fun, seemed more geared towards larger,
723 corporate organisations and I would appreciate more time spent in examining
724 the possibilities available to smaller, family-run businesses.” (Case 46, Social
725 Maniacs peer-led cluster meeting).

726
727 The participant was referring to an example used by the consultant to the projects of an
728 online campaign by a major confectionary brand, designed to show how social media

729 could be an effective means of securing promotional reach. However, there was general
730 agreement in this cluster meeting that the example used, while interesting, was beyond
731 the reach of SMTBs in terms of their resources.

732 733 **5.0 Discussion**

734
735 Despite being time constrained due to the demands of running their own business, the
736 majority of the participant entrepreneurs enthusiastically engaged with both projects with
737 high levels of attendance. In total 50 out of 53 SMTBs stayed with the first project and
738 all of the 10 SMTBs with the second project through to conclusion. Thus, there was an
739 appetite for acquiring and applying new DM knowledge. Entrepreneurs were able to
740 leverage a number of resources during the time of the projects which they otherwise
741 would not have had access to. These included 1) the acquisition and reciprocal sharing
742 of knowledge, 2) access to learning from shared experience and practical examples of
743 DM from their peers, which created knowledge that has contextual relevance for the
744 owner of the firm, 3) interaction with their peers which enabled entrepreneurs to
745 benchmark their performance, confirm current practice, and to ideate in a collaborative
746 space, within a structure provided by the university as mediator and 4), suggestions and
747 expressions of interest to co-create future customer experiences through collaborative
748 marketing with other businesses in the visitor economy.

749
750 The combination of Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge provided an effective way for
751 entrepreneurs to acquire knowledge of particular relevance to their business. The cluster
752 meetings allowed peer sharing and feedback of ideas related to information delivery from
753 Mode 1, which allowed the entrepreneurs to decide how best to apply the concepts (for
754 example, integrating DM into the business, and more effectively measuring marketing
755 via digital means). The DM concepts delivered in university-led seminars (Mode 1), for
756 example a template for DM strategy, provided a structure and information stream of
757 applied research. It provided direction and prevented Mode 2 peer sharing of knowledge
758 (in this study, via cluster meetings) becoming an informal ‘talking shop’. Importantly,
759 the entrepreneurs responded positively to this structure and did not regard it as
760 unnecessarily restrictive. This suggests that in a DM context, SMTBs require a formal
761 plan, contrary to earlier non-digital small business marketing studies which found that
762 entrepreneurs tend to be “disjointed and haphazard” in their marketing practice
763 (Blankson & Stokes, 2002; Gilmore, 2011, p.141). The findings reveal a strong appetite
764 among entrepreneurs for formalising their DM, formulating measurable objectives, and
765 proposing a DM strategy that would help achieve them.

766
767 A key outcome of the projects was that it enabled the entrepreneurs to assimilate the DM
768 knowledge from the projects from Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge acquisition and
769 knowledge transference through their own interpretation of events during the projects.
770 For example, cluster group work and peer sharing of knowledge, along with the
771 entrepreneur’s own articulation and application to their own business model (as each
772 small business is inherently unique). The technology-in-practice approach to knowledge
773 acquisition, most strongly advocated by Morgan-Thomas (2016) and manifested in this

774 study through the way in which the entrepreneurs learned through practical examples,
775 highlighted how DM could be adopted at an achievable level. This approach is less likely
776 to create cognitive dissonance and disillusionment arising from the gap between
777 unrealistic expectations from DM technology and failed delivery.

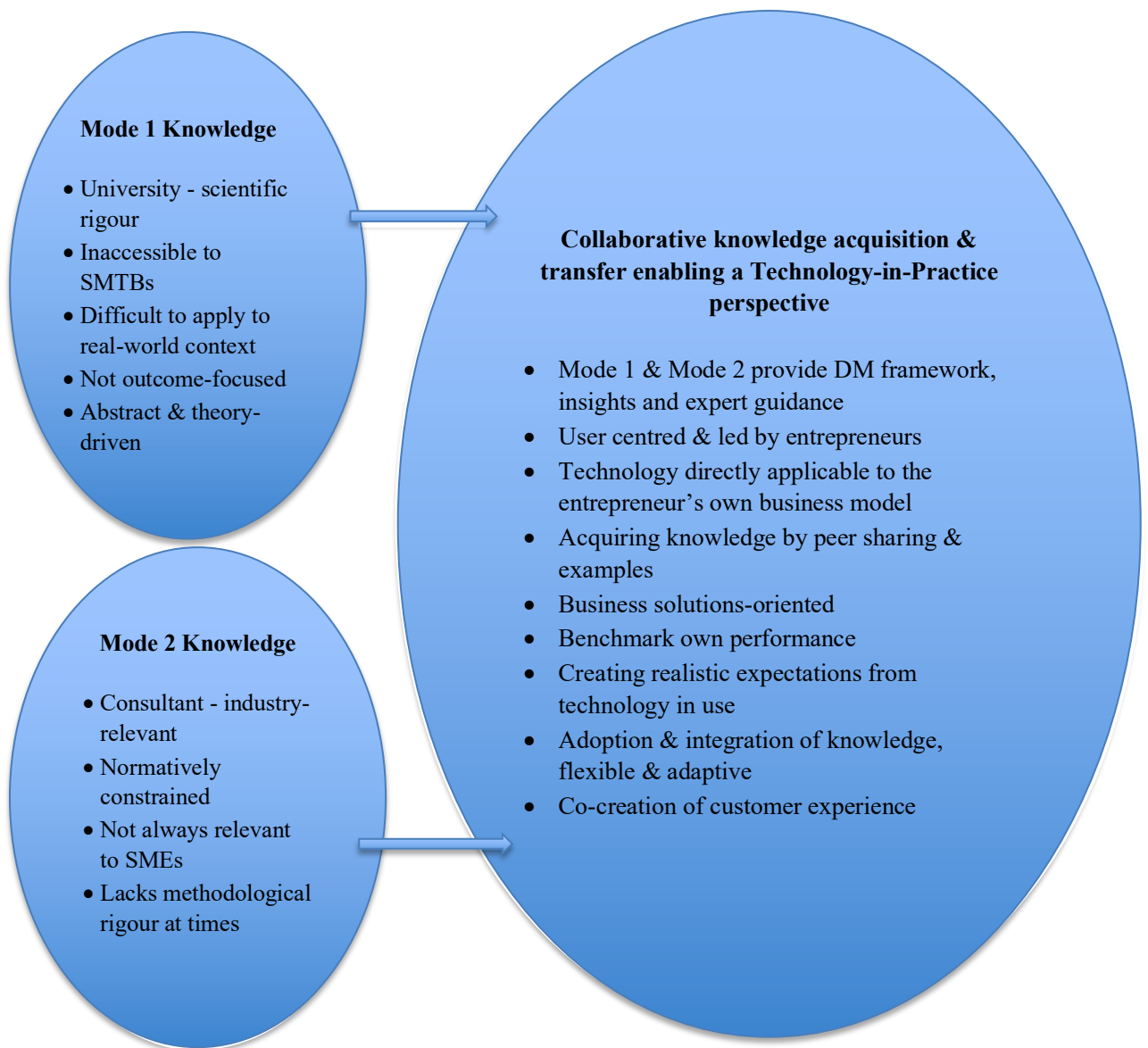
778
779 The opportunity to share knowledge and working solutions with other businesses offers
780 a strong motivator for entrepreneurs to join a peer cluster project. The propensity to share
781 knowledge with openness as observed in these projects, is converse to Cooper's (2006,
782 p.52) assertion, "that individuals hold tacit knowledge as the basis of their competitive
783 advantage explains their reluctance to share or communicate it". The surfacing of DM
784 knowledge in the peer-facilitated cluster meetings and, in certain cases, being shared on
785 the projects' blog and social media, is an example of tacit knowledge being made explicit
786 and then shared and transferred (Cooper, 2006). In acquiring knowledge on how to use
787 the technology, entrepreneurs were more focused on sharing and acquiring knowledge
788 on how the technology could solve their business problems. Within the projects the
789 entrepreneurs were able to view technology as an enabler of more effective DM, rather
790 than as an end in itself, addressing criticisms of the deterministic approach to IT
791 implementation, levelled by Alford and Clarke (2009) and Morgan-Thomas (2016), that
792 technology becomes isolated from business practice. This helps entrepreneurs to avoid
793 the costly pitfalls associated with a knee-jerk reaction to keep ahead of the technology
794 race, with no clear business case for the investment. According to Hjalager (2002) small
795 businesses tend to follow innovation only after they have assured themselves that the
796 investments or changes are feasible, which is unsurprising given their lack of resources.
797 The sharing of DM solutions among the entrepreneurs allowed, to a certain extent, for
798 feasibility to be assessed.

799
800 The entrepreneurs also revealed an interest in going beyond acquiring tacit knowledge
801 which Ruhanen, (2018, p. 358) describes as the "practical knowledge needed to perform
802 a task" to more strategic objectives, including marketing collaborations across different
803 sectors within tourism (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009). The motivations for
804 entrepreneurs joining the projects affirm Cooper's (2006) observation that, for successful
805 knowledge transfer to take place, entrepreneurs need to see the relevance to their
806 business, and in this regard peer networks have been found to be more valuable than
807 traditional training (Lionberger & Gwin, 1991).

808
809 The following Model (Fig. 2) illustrates the combined approach to Mode 1 and Mode 2
810 knowledge acquisition and collaboration. The authors' intention is to provide a model
811 that captures the benefits of combining Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge with
812 entrepreneur-generated knowledge, and which can be used by tourism support agencies.
813 Both tourism and other industry sectors highlight the need for further government support
814 for smaller businesses to enable them to engage with DM (for example, Alford & Page,
815 2015; Beckinsale, Levy, & Powell, 2006; Beckinsale, Ram, & Theodorakopoulos, 2011;
816 Taiminen & Karjaluo, 2015).

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(Mode 1 and Mode 2 informed by Cooper, 2006; Gibbons et al., 2010; Rip, 2002; Ruhanen, 2018. Technology-in-practice informed by Morgan-Thomas, 2016).

Fig. 2. DM knowledge acquisition and collaborative transfer: An SMTB model.

The reduction of budgets for DMOs and local government business support agencies has exacerbated the marketing capabilities gap (Day, 2018) and widened the digital divide between what SMTBs can offer and what the digitally and social media-engaged consumer expects. While there is wide acknowledgment of the barriers facing entrepreneurs in adopting digitalization in its various forms, there are no solutions offered by researchers in the small business tourism domain. One of the main barriers identified by this study is that SMTBs are usually unable to access Mode 1 knowledge unless there is a specific project provided for them and are therefore reliant on Mode 2 knowledge. While Mode 2 knowledge is useful it is often bounded by the nature of the

864 locality and constrained by the normative position of the training or knowledge
865 provider. Mode 2 also lacks the opportunity that Mode 1 can provide, as evidenced here,
866 through ‘knowledge spaces’ where creativity and innovation are likely to occur when
867 entrepreneurs are given the time and space to learn and ideate. Universities, that are
868 successful in attracting project funding, are in a unique position to offer SMTBs the
869 opportunity to meet and ideate over a prolonged period of time and in settings conducive
870 to creating and sharing knowledge.

871
872 In applying empirically informed theory from outside the tourism sector, we have been
873 able to address the isolation issues facing ‘lone-wolf’ tourism entrepreneurs while trying
874 to adopt DM. By utilising modes of knowledge acquisition theory (Cooper, 2006;
875 Ruhanen, 2018) and a technology-in-practice perspective (Morgan-Thomas, 2016) we
876 have been able to extrapolate critical insights, which further inform research in the
877 adoption of DM by entrepreneurs, thereby contributing to the wider study of tourism
878 SMTBs (Khalilzadeh & Wang, 2018; Pavlovich, 2014).

6. Conclusion

Our paper addresses two questions: how can tourism business support agencies support entrepreneurs in acquiring the knowledge necessary to market effectively in the digital age? And, what theory can we draw upon, and contribute to, that will support the study of SMTBs’ DM knowledge acquisition? To answer these questions, our study provides new insights and some principal resolutions to barriers associated with DM knowledge acquisition by SMTB entrepreneurs. Assumptions in prior studies imply that entrepreneurs are largely unwilling to adopt DM practices and that DMOs do not, or are unable to, provide sufficient support (McCamley & Gilmore, 2017). Our study finds that knowledge transference and adoption of complex new technologies for non-technology entrepreneurs requires a different type of engagement than simply training or mentorship programs. We argue that both Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge acquisition is equally necessary for successful knowledge acquisition and transfer to take place. Our study found that a ‘one-size-fits’ all approach to DM knowledge acquisition is highly inappropriate with SMTBs. This is because participant entrepreneurs have developed unique business models distinct to their own business ethos. Small business marketing and Mode 1 and Mode 2 theories assimilate well with technology-in-practice thinking, whereby relevance to the business is paramount to absorption, adaptation and embeddedness of that new knowledge (Morgan-Thomas, 2016). The findings here reveal the type of useful knowledge acquired and how it is acquired ‘peer to peer’ and within university-facilitated collaborative projects.

Our study contributes to the field of DM and tourism and builds on earlier studies in the small business and tourism sectors in developed economies (Alford & Page, 2015; Komppula, 2014; Thomas, et al., 2011), and also elucidates methods for encouraging entrepreneurs to be more effectively engaged with DM in emerging economies (Elliott & Boshoff, 2007; Koens & Thomas, 2015). Our study carries important implications and opportunities for further research, which can inform SMTB policies to ensure that they effectively support the lone entrepreneur.

7. Future research

Entrepreneurs in these projects have shown their capacity for acquiring and sharing DM knowledge within university-facilitated projects combining Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge and a technology-in-practice approach. Future research will explore how Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge can be more effectively transferred given the likely different entrepreneurial learning styles. Technology-in-practice theory provides a useful paradigm for future researchers who are studying the acquisition and sharing of digital marketing knowledge by tourism entrepreneurs and SMTBs.

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