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Spoiler alert: No. To be fair, not really, but they are doing their best to keep up. This article dives into the promises and pitfalls of these digital tools showing how e-commerce often feels like an overpriced solution that frustrates more than helping.

Meanwhile, we have to say that social media offers a glimmer of hope by letting SMEs tell their stories, build connections and adapt quickly (assuming their internet doesn't cut out in the middle). The conclusion? Without better infrastructure, smarter policies and real support, wishful thinking will not cut it. Fame, fortune and the chance to dazzle on the global stage are promised to Fashion SMEs in emerging economies by e-commerce and social media. Instead, they are left grappling with crumbling infrastructure, unpredictable policies and trust issues so intense they could fill a season of reality TV drama.

So, how do these businesses compete in a system stacked against them? In this article, we unpack the messy reality of globalization, using insights from 12 key studies and some economic theories. The truth? Success takes more than a digital storefront: it takes smarter policies, real support and a whole lot of resilience.

Read now to see what's really going on! #FashionSMEs #Globalization #EcommerceFails #SocialMediaGame

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WEBSITE

Can fashion SMEs in emerging markets survive globalization with just e-commerce, social media and a bit of wishful thinking?

Spoiler alert: No. To be fair, not really, but they are doing their best to keep up. This article dives into the promises and pitfalls of these digital tools showing how e-commerce often feels like an overpriced solution that frustrates more than helping. Meanwhile, we have to say that social media offers a glimmer of hope by letting SMEs tell their stories, build connections and adapt quickly (assuming their internet doesn't cut out in the middle). The conclusion? Without better infrastructure, smarter policies and real support, wishful thinking will not cut it. Fame, fortune and the chance to dazzle on the global stage are promised to Fashion SMEs in emerging economies by e-commerce and social media. Instead, they are left grappling with crumbling infrastructure, unpredictable policies and trust issues so intense they could fill a season of reality TV drama. How do globalization and digital policies shape these businesses' attempts to grow and compete? Let's look at the chaotic world of e-commerce and social media, using insights from 12 key studies and some economic theories to unpack what is really going on.

E-commerce is often marketed as the ultimate solution for SMEs. The pitch sounds simple enough: build an online shop, cut out the middlemen and reach customers all over the world. But the paper *E-commerce for Developing Countries: Expectations and Reality*¹ paints a different picture. Many SMEs in places like Bangladesh and Kenya end up using these platforms more like overpriced messaging systems. Instead of opening new markets, they find themselves stuck just managing existing customer relationships. This is a nightmare for fashion SMEs because they depend heavily on trust and quality control. Imagine pouring your heart into creating a collection only to have potential buyers ghost you because the platform does not offer secure payments or proper verification. It is like planning a runway show where no one even bothers to show up. This reflects a recurring theme in globalization: the promises sound wonderful until they collide with the realities of poor infrastructure and weak systems. Instead of empowering SMEs, platforms that lack reliability and trust only make their challenges worse, proving once again that globalization's tools are often more theory than practice. The Ricardian Model nails it: how can SMEs play to their strengths when the platforms meant to help them just stack the deck further against them? SMEs in developing economies face massive opportunity costs when navigating platforms that are clearly not designed for their needs. When your internet cuts out every time there is a breeze, a shiny online storefront is about as useful as a paper umbrella in the rain. For many businesses, e-commerce becomes another box to check rather than a tool for meaningful growth. The study highlights how e-commerce tools fail to address fundamental inequalities, which are underscored as the systemic barriers to equitable global trade. Without proper adaptation to local contexts, unfortunately to say, these tools only reinforce existing disparities rather than bridging them.

¹ Humphrey, J., Mansell, R., Paré, D., & Schmitz, H. (2004). *E-commerce for developing countries: Expectations and reality*. IDS Bulletin, 35(1), 31-39.

Even when e-commerce does work, it often comes with strings attached. The study *International E-commerce for Fashion Products: What is the Relationship with Performance?*² points out that going global is not cheap or easy. Sure, you can gather customer insights and streamline processes, but without strong branding and smooth logistics profitability is far from guaranteed. The Standard Trade Model cuts to the core: without the resources to scale or stand out, SMEs are stuck competing on price, which is a losing battle for brands built on creativity and uniqueness like fashion ones). SMEs entering global markets devoid of clear advantages, like a recognizable brand or economies of scale, are usually forced to compete on price. This is an unfortunate losing game for fashion SMEs that thrive on creativity and uniqueness. Here we see one of globalization's cruel ironies: instead of leveling the playing field, it makes the divide between resource rich and resource poor businesses even bigger. SMEs that cannot scale up effectively are left scrambling to stay afloat in a global economy that rewards the already established players. Such findings reveal how global trade favours those with resources and economies of scale. Smaller businesses, like SMEs, are left at a disadvantage and sadly trapped in competition that undermines their creative advantages.

While e-commerce struggles to fulfil its promises, social media steps in as the scrappy underdog. Unlike e-commerce, which feels daunting and expensive, social media is affordable, accessible and intuitive. The analysis made in *Social Media Use Among Small and Medium Enterprises: A Case of Fashion Industry Growth*³ shows how Kenyan fashion SMEs use platforms like Instagram and Facebook to build their brands and engage directly with customers. Social media allows these businesses to tell their stories, showcase their work and foster loyalty, which is critical in the fashion world. This shows that, unlike other tools of globalization, social media offers SMEs a fighting chance. By skipping over traditional barriers like expensive advertising or rigid logistics they can reach their audience directly and on their own terms. This also ties into the External Economies of Scale theory, which explains how businesses can benefit from shared resources and collective growth. Social media is not just about individual businesses promoting themselves. It creates a space where communities of businesses can thrive together by sharing knowledge and amplifying each other's visibility. The research highlights social media's ability to bypass traditional gatekeepers in globalized markets. It allows SMEs to create direct and stable connections with consumers, giving them rare autonomy in a system otherwise stacked against them.

Take the case of Maxhosa Africa⁴, for example. This South African brand has turned Instagram into its own runway, showcasing vibrant, culturally rich knitwear that radiates individuality. But it's not just about posting pretty pictures. It's about creating a global community of loyal customers who see more than just fashion. They see stories, heritage and identity stitched into every piece. Maxhosa shows us that even in a world where unreliable infrastructure and sky high shipping costs seem determined to hold them back, social media offers a glimmer of hope. It's far from a perfect fix, but it's a real opportunity for fashion SMEs in emerging markets to step into the global spotlight. It gives fashion SMEs in emerging markets a shot at a global stage they'd otherwise never reach. If nothing else, it proves that a

² Macchion, L., Moretto, A. M., Caniato, F., Caridi, M., Danese, P., & Vinelli, A. (2017). *International e-commerce for fashion products: What is the relationship with performance?* International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management, 45(9), 1011-1031.

³ Gekombe, C., Tumsifu, E., & Jani, D. (2019). *Social media use among small and medium enterprises: A case of fashion industry growth.* University of Dar es Salaam Library Journal, 14(2), 3-18.

⁴ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-03-09-the-making-of-a-global-african-brand-10-years-of-maxhosa-africa/>

a little creativity, paired with the right tools, can make magic happen even when the Wi-Fi is acting up.

Beyond the pretty posts and creative campaigns, social media also helps businesses stay flexible in a fast-changing world. For example, the paper *Social Media Adoption in SMEs Sustainability: Evidence from an Emerging Economy*⁵ highlights how platforms like Instagram and TikTok let businesses gather real time feedback and adjust their strategies accordingly. Whether it is launching a new design based on customer comments or tweaking an existing product, this ability to pivot quickly is a game changer. The Heckscher-Ohlin Theorem makes sense of this dynamic: labor intensive industries like fashion benefit greatly from tools that allow for quick and cost-effective innovation. This proves that social media is not just about visibility but is about adaptability. In a global market that moves at lightning speed, being able to react quickly can make or break a business. Such findings focus on adaptability as a key to surviving globalization, remarking the way social media offers SMEs the flexibility to innovate and stay competitive without heavy capital investments.

With that being said it is necessary to mark that social media is not a cure to all problems. The study of *Social Media Integration: An Opportunity for SMEs Sustainability*⁶ points out that many SMEs treat social media like a hobby instead of a strategic tool. Sporadic posts and half-baked campaigns might get you a few likes but will not build a sustainable brand. To succeed, social media needs to be woven into the fabric of the business. The Stolper-Samuelson Theorem highlights why this matters: businesses that allocate their resources effectively are the ones that thrive. Henceforth, this paper underscores a tough truth about globalization. Success is not just about access, but it is about how you use what you have. Social media is no exception. It requires planning, consistency and effort to deliver results. This paper analysis put a lot of emphasis on resource allocation, where access to tools like social media is only effective when paired with strategic integration into business operations.

And then there are the more advanced tools like digital marketing and CRM systems. The research on *Digital Marketing and Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises' Business Performance: The Role of Digital Marketing Tools and Social Customer Relationship Management Competence in Emerging Markets*⁷ shows how these tools can drive customer engagement and boost sales. However, we need to keep in mind that not all the SMEs have the digital literacy to take advantage of them. Without proper training even the most powerful tools are useless. This highlights one of globalization's most frustrating quirks: the tools are there but they are often out of reach for those who need them most. Hence education and training are not optional, they are essential. It revealed the role of education in bridging global divides and the scary fact that without training the gap between resource rich businesses and SMEs will only grow wider.

⁵ Amoah, J., Bruce, E., Shurong, Z., Egala, S. B., & Kwarteng, K. (2021). *Social media adoption in SMEs sustainability: Evidence from an emerging economy*. Taylor & Francis Online.

⁶ Amoah, J., Bruce, E., Shurong, Z., Egala, S. B., & Kwarteng, K. (2022). *Social media integration: An opportunity for SMEs sustainability*. Taylor & Francis Online.

⁷ Deku, A., Osei, E. K., & Mensah, J. K. (2021). *Digital marketing and small and medium-sized enterprises' business performance: The role of digital marketing tools and social customer relationship management competence in emerging markets*.

Infrastructure remains one of the biggest roadblocks for SMEs. The paper *Social Media and SMEs' Performance in Developing Countries: Effects of Technological, Organizational, Environmental Factors and Social Media Usage*⁸ reveals how poor internet access, unreliable electricity and outdated devices prevent businesses from making the most of digital tools. How do you upload your latest collection when the Wi-Fi cuts out every five minutes? This is a harsh reminder that all the promises of globalization mean nothing without basic infrastructure. It is not just about creating tools, it is about ensuring businesses have the foundation to use them. The findings expose how systemic weaknesses, like inadequate infrastructure, perpetuate inequalities in global markets. It is then claimed how without these foundations SMEs are left harshly struggling to compete on a level playing field.

Governments need to step in here. Take the case on the *Adoption of Social Media Marketing for Sustainable Business Growth of SMEs in Emerging Economies: The Moderating Role of Leadership Support*⁹, that argues that policies promoting affordable internet, digital literacy and leadership training could transform what SMEs can achieve. The Ricardian Model backs this up, showing how reducing opportunity costs can help businesses grow. This connects to a broader theme in globalization studies: the importance of state intervention. Without supportive policies, SMEs are left fighting an uphill battle against forces they cannot control. The research appoints a critical role to state intervention for addressing structural barriers. Unluckily is exposed how without constant targeted support SMEs are unable to overcome the systemic challenges globalization imposes.

Many SMEs were, out of necessity, forced by the COVID-19 pandemic to embrace digital tools. The paper about *Fashion Industry SMEs Look to New Strategies to Overcome Pandemic Impacts*¹⁰ shows how e-commerce and social media became lifelines when physical markets shut down. These platforms helped SMEs maintain visibility and keep sales alive during the crisis. The Standard Trade Model explains how diversification of trade channels can help businesses stay resilient during disruptions: this stresses out how globalization's digital tools when used creatively can offer a lifeline in times of crisis. SMEs that adapted quickly showed that survival often comes down to flexibility and resourcefulness. The study clears out how global crises expose the vulnerabilities of underprepared SMEs. Those with access to digital tools showed greater resilience reinforcing the importance of digital equity in a globalized world.

Strategy and execution often make the difference. *SME Fashion Brands and Social Media Marketing: From Strategies to Actions*¹¹ analysis shows how many SMEs have great ideas but struggle to turn them into reality. Without accessible tools and realistic plans even, the best strategies fall flat. This ties directly into theories that stress the importance of aligning resources with goals, like Heckscher-Ohlin and Stolper-Samuelson, which basically say that globalization favours those who already have their act together. For SMEs, this means the lack of resources

⁸ Alraja, M., Farooque, A., & Khashab, M. (2021). *Social media and SMEs' performance in developing countries: Effects of technological, organizational, environmental factors and social media usage*.

⁹ Sharma, S. K., Singh, A. K., & Agrawal, P. K. (2022). *Adoption of social media marketing for sustainable business growth of SMEs in emerging economies: The moderating role of leadership support*.

¹⁰ Asia Pathways. (2021). *Fashion industry SMEs look to new strategies to overcome pandemic impacts*. Asia Pathways.

¹¹ Politecnico di Milano. (2021). *SME fashion brands and social media marketing: From strategies to actions*. Republic Polimi.

and infrastructure isn't just a hurdle: it's a trap that makes competing in global markets feel like running a race with your shoelaces tied. The analysis affirms the strategic importance of resource alignment in global markets and the fact that without accessible and practical tools SMEs remain sidelined in a competition designed for resource rich players.

The study on *SMEs as catalysts for economic development: Navigating challenges and leveraging opportunities in emerging markets*¹² makes a big deal about how SMEs, especially in fashion, are supposed to be the backbone of economic growth. Sounds nice, right? But calling them catalysts without giving them proper tools or support feels like telling someone to cook a five-star meal with a can opener and a wish. These businesses are bursting with potential but constantly tripping over weak policies, lack of funding and a system that seems designed to keep them in survival mode. This study screams out that without meaningful state intervention SMEs will always be stuck playing catch up in a global game rigged for the big players. If systemic barriers aren't addressed these businesses will keep being the underdogs who can't quite win.

*SME fashion brands and social media marketing: From strategies to actions*¹³ research dives into how small fashion brands are trying to make waves on social media. Instagram campaigns, TikTok trends, influencer collabs... it all sounds fabulous until you realize most of these brands are flying blind. They've got creativity but lack the resources, training and, honestly, time to make it all work. Imagine crafting the most stunning runway collection only to show up and find the runway missing. This research vibes by stressing the importance of aligning flashy strategies with the actual resources these brands have. Otherwise, they're just spinning their wheels in a market that demands polished execution from day one.

For SMEs, ambition is great, but execution is everything. Looking at how globalization and digital policies shape fashion SMEs, one thing is obvious: the promise of e-commerce and social media is more complicated than it looks. E-commerce is supposed to be the gateway to global success, but for many SMEs it feels more like a poorly planned outfit. It sounds great in theory but once you try to put it on nothing fits quite right. Instead of opening new markets it often becomes a clunky tool for maintaining existing relationships. The lack of reliable infrastructure, secure payment systems and trust means SMEs are stuck dealing with more problems than they started with. Sure, e-commerce has its perks, but without proper support it is a struggle to make it work. Social media, by the way, feels a bit more like the reliable go to in the closet. It is affordable, easy to use and allows fashion SMEs to show off their creativity and connect directly with customers. For a fashion business, where visuals and storytelling are everything, social media makes sense. Platforms like Instagram and Facebook give these brands the chance to shine, build loyal communities and adapt quickly when trends or challenges pop up. It does what e-commerce often fails to do, bringing the business closer to its audience in a way that feels real. But social media is not perfect either. Plenty of SMEs treat it like an afterthought, tossing up posts here and there without any real strategy. Success on these platforms takes consistency and leadership that knows how to make it part of the bigger picture. And let's not ignore the fact that none of this works without basic infrastructure. If

12 GSC Advanced Research and Reviews. (2022). *SMEs as catalysts for economic development: Navigating challenges and leveraging opportunities in emerging markets*. GSC Online Press.

13 Amoah, J., Bruce, E., Shurong, Z., Egala, S. B., & Kwarteng, K. (2021). *Entrepreneurial orientation and performance of SMEs: The roles of social media and digital marketing capabilities in emerging markets*

your internet is slow, or your electricity cuts out it is hard to keep up, no matter how creative you are.

So where does that leave us? Globalization and digital policies play a huge role in how fashion SMEs use these tools, but the reality is far from glamorous. These businesses need more than just access to e-commerce and social media platforms. They need affordable internet, better training and policies that help them compete on a global scale. Governments have to step in with meaningful support. It is not just about making these tools available; it is about making them usable. Despite all the challenges, fashion SMEs in emerging economies are nothing if not resourceful. They are hustling, adapting and proving that even with bad Wi-Fi and unreliable policies they can still find ways to thrive. These businesses are not just surviving globalization. They are showing that with a little creativity even the most challenging systems can be turned into an opportunity. Now if only they could get some reliable electricity while they are at it...

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