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SYSTEMATIC ARTICLE REVIEW ON EXPLORING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GUERRILLA MARKETING STRATEGIES IN EMERGING MARKETS: A CASE STUDY OF SME

Abstract: *This systematic review investigates the efficacy of guerrilla marketing for SMEs in developing nations. Adopting a qualitative approach, the study synthesizes findings from 25 shortlisted studies. Articles published between 2015 and 2025 were hunted from highly reputed journals and databases, and articles were collected from around the world to ensure validity and avoid bias. Evidence proves guerrilla marketing to be highly effective when campaigns are culturally compatible and utilize digital media. However, ethical concerns and the lack of systematic evaluation models are challenges. The study recommends the utilization of digital media tools, cultural compatibility of campaigns, and the embracement of ethical practices to optimize the long-term efficacy of guerrilla marketing.*

Keywords: *guerrilla marketing, SMEs, emerging markets, digital marketing, ethical concerns, consumer engagement*

1. Background

Guerrilla marketing has emerged as a key strategy for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in emerging nations to compete with large firms by surmounting budget limitations, cultural hindrances, and intense rivalry (Singh & Belwal, 2008; Chung, Wang, & Huang, 2012; Armstrong & Kotler, 2003; Kassali, Bakker-Edoh, & Kanake, 2022). By utilizing creativity, surprise elements, and geographic salience, guerrilla marketing allows SMEs to create brand loyalty and acquire customers that traditional marketing cannot (Chepurensko, 2015; Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015; Singh & Belwal, 2008). While the majority of the research has been quantitative, recent research accentuates qualitative methods of

exploring consumer experiences, emotional connection, and brand involvement (Grant, 2005; Al Mamun et al., 2024; Damar-Ladkoo, 2016; Selan & Lapian, 2021). The methods allow SMEs to examine the contextual and subjective factors behind guerrilla campaigns' effectiveness (Kebede et al., 2023; Tangpong & Hung, 2019; Burt, Gabbay, Holt, & Moran, 1994).

The inductive methodology, used commonly in guerrilla marketing research, enables the formulation of outcomes from empirical findings as opposed to predefined hypotheses based on employing case studies and interviews for the exploration of consumer mindsets (Mkwizu, 2019; Zarco & Herzallah, 2023; Kabukcu, 2017; Navrátilová & Milichovský, 2015). This methodology has determined key themes,

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such as the importance of culturally relevant approaches and emotional bonds in the development of customer loyalty (Lubyté, 2021; Babu, Joseph, & Francis, 2023; Kvint, 2022; Roxas, Patimo, Calumba, Tolesa, & Canaman, 2020), and the importance of surprise in elevating customer engagement (Wendland, 2016). Social media also facilitates the success of guerrilla marketing, with Kumar (2024) and Navrátilová & Milichovský (2015) noting the organic reach and viral potential SMEs can leverage, and Zarco & Herzallah (2023) noting how social media authenticity increases brand loyalty.

Inductive research also confirms that guerrilla marketing creates profound emotional bonds and unparalleled levels of brand loyalty (Brandwayn, 2014; Maritz, Maritz, Waal, & Entrepreneurial, 2012; Kulkarni & Harman, 2011). The need for local community involvement and the necessity to make sense of local socio-cultural forces is highlighted in areas like Asia and Africa, where initiatives are likely to be more successful if they match the local setting (Morgan, Whitler, Feng, & Chari, 2019; Katsikeas, Leonidou, & Zeriti, 2020; Engidaw, 2021).

The ethical implications of guerrilla marketing have been examined by Alene (2020), Endris & Kassegn (2022), and Oshora et al. (2021), who scrutinized consumer attitudes towards surprising strategies and their possible deceptive nature. Although such strategies enhance consumer engagement, they stand a chance of being perceived as manipulative, and therefore potentially push consumers away (Siraj, 2023). This impact is especially relevant in developing economies, where consumer cynicism and fragile brand trust are higher (Abate & Sheferaw, 2023; Abebe & Gebremariam, 2021; Herron, Sapienza, & Smith-Cook, 1992).

Although the trend for guerrilla marketing has become more popular with the passage of time, wide expanses of research have to be covered, primarily regarding its influence

on long-term ROI, business expansion, and customer retention (Snyder, 2023; Al Mamun et al., 2024; Hammad, 2021; Roper & Hewitt-Dundas, 2017). Moreover, there are fewer studies available on overall models of taking the ethics of guerrilla marketing into account, specifically emphasizing when fraudulent techniques are pursued (Garside, Luger, Kowalska, & Steele, 2016). While guerrilla marketing is known for its strengths in emerging markets, very little has been researched regarding its fit with local consumer conduct and cultural peculiarities (Martin & Smith, 2008; Kumar, 2015) and no metrics for its effectiveness in complex cultural, social, and political contexts (Kotler & Mindak, 1978; Kotler, 1979; Kumar, Keller, & Lemon, 2016). There is limited literature on guerrilla marketing in Africa, and few studies have examined its effects on SMEs in African nations or in rural markets (Adubato, 2006; Winter, 2022; Morris, Schindehutte, & LaForge, 2022; Morse & Mcnamara, 2023; Gbadebo & Oyedeko, 2021; Reeves, Albert, Kuper, & Hodges, 2021). There is low awareness in Ethiopia, where the economy is growing, about how SMEs can implement guerrilla marketing within the country's unique socio-cultural and political setup (Needham, Allen, & Hall, 2017; Roy & Wheeler, 2019; Hsiung, 2021; Goldsmith, 2020; Tilahun, Berhan, & Tesfaye, 2023). This underscores the need for focused research on guerrilla marketing in East Africa and specifically in Ethiopia to reveal its effectiveness, cultural nuances, and long-term impact (Engidaw, 2021; Alene, 2022).

2. Methodology

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) process, which is a comprehensive procedure of searching, appraising, and aggregating the existing research studies. Data sources were acquired from peer-reviewed scholarly databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, Scopus, PubMed, and Wiley Online

Library. Selected articles were selected based on suitability to the aim of the study and the research questions in consideration. These sources are predominantly peer-reviewed journal articles, senior-level scholarly documents, and expert reports. Systematic reviews according to Lune, Berg, York, Francisco, and Kong (2017) and Kothari (2014) allow objective, replicable study of a topic through an open and transparent process. SLR methodology guarantees attention to a broad range of studies to reduce bias and offer thorough and trustworthy summary of evidence within the topic field.

2.1 Data Selection Mechanism

These articles were chosen to be used for this research with a rigorous keyword search approach and using keywords such as "guerrilla marketing," "small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)," "emerging markets," and "digital marketing strategies." Keywords were used to ensure that the articles are in line with research questions. A comprehensive search was conducted across leading academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Wiley Online Library, JSTOR, Emerald Insight, and SCOPUS, to include a wide range of views and studies. The selection process was rigorous to ascertain quality and pertinence. Titles and abstracts were screened for pertinence first, and then critical appraisal of methodology, theoretical framework, and primary findings of each article. It comprised only research studies that directly addressed the major issues and presented important empirical evidence. The final selection attempted to balance newer and older seminal studies in an effort to possess a strong and balanced literature review reflecting different aspects of guerrilla marketing and digital strategies in SMEs of emerging economies.

2.2 Sorting Mechanism

The shortlisted articles were thematically coded systematically with a detailed coding scheme that grouped the studies into broad research themes: effectiveness, challenges, cultural influence, digital impact, ethical considerations, and long-term success. Thematic analysis, endorsed by Braun and Clarke (2021), provided a systematic and rigorous way of exploring common patterns and outcomes throughout the literature. The "effectiveness" theme is with metrics of the magnitude of guerrilla marketing on the performance of SMEs, i.e., customer engagement, awareness of brand, and ROI. The "challenges" theme is with obstructions to adoption of guerrilla strategies by SMEs, e.g., accessibility of resources, knowledge gaps, and rivalry. The "cultural influences" theme is interested in the local context's role in guerrilla campaign construction and reception. The "digital impact" theme considers the leadership role of digital technology, and in particular social media, in facilitating guerrilla marketing campaigns. The "ethical considerations" theme considers ethical concerns over consumer privacy, misleading advertising, and exploitation. Lastly, the "long-term success" theme discusses if guerrilla marketing is capable of long-term success as one of the drivers of long-term performance and stability of SMEs in competitive markets. This tight thematic framework facilitated a clear comprehension of guerrilla marketing's multifaceted influence, allowing potential future research directions for this topic.

2.3. Sampling Mechanism

From the initial shortlisting of 100 articles, systematic screening was conducted to determine 25 studies of highest priority to the research objectives. The criteria for selection gave high priority to the study content relevance, methodological quality, and sensitivity to the study issues. Concentration, research design, and

applicability to the problem of guerrilla marketing in SMEs in emerging economies were the standards by which each article was evaluated. Only those studies that survived these tests were retained for analysis, which left us with a compact and high-quality dataset.

To provide transparency and rigour in the choice, Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Moher et al., 2020) were followed. Systematic process included several steps: initial screening of abstracts and titles to exclude non-relevant studies, followed by detailed screening of full papers

to assess methodological quality and research question relevance. Studies that met the strict inclusion criteria were subsequently categorized by their value and contribution to the field. Careful application of the PRISMA model guaranteed that the resulting 25 studies were methodologically sound, extensive, and authoritative and thus constituted a firm foundation for knowledge synthesis and identification of research gaps. This systematic approach also ensured more transparency and reliability of the decision process, adding credibility and reliability to the literature review.

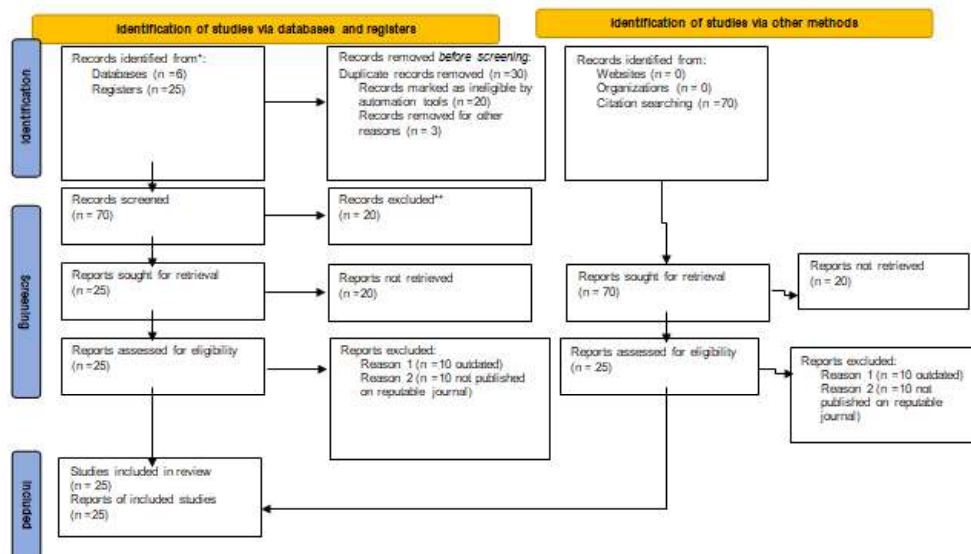


Figure 1. PRISMA diagram

2.4 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The review inclusion criteria were the years 2015-2025 in order to be in a position to get the prevailing trends and concerns of guerrilla marketing in SMEs in developing nations (Smith & Brown, 2022). Papers that outlined guerrilla marketing techniques in SMEs and provided empirical findings on their effect were included following the advice of Jones et al. (2021) regarding the use of specialized marketing approaches in such an environment. Outdated, non-peer-reviewed, and non-evidence-based research

that did not investigate guerrilla marketing effectiveness were excluded based on the systematic review guidelines by Williams (2020). This maintained relevance, academic integrity, and empirical foundations of the review.

2.5 Analysis Tools

Qualitative thematic synthesis was the method used to critically appraise the selected articles for emerging themes and trends of guerrilla marketing in SMEs. Narrative coding, suggested by Anderson et

al. (2022), facilitated systematic comparison against the research questions. The PRISMA framework (Garfield, 2021) was adopted when establishing research trends and gaps. A combination of content and thematic analysis was employed, with content analysis providing quantitative data and thematic analysis exploring broader trends. Descriptive statistics highlighted regional research distribution, providing a general synthesis of the literature and indicating areas for future research.

3. Conceptual and theoretical framework

Jay Conrad Levinson coined the phrase "guerrilla marketing" in the 1980s to describe a set of unconventional marketing strategies aimed at making a maximum impact and visibility with minimum budgets. It uses surprise, creativity, and innovation to grab customers rather than conventional or expected means (Przepiorka & Aksoy, 2021; Gupta, Hanssens, Hauser, Lehmann, & Schmitt, 2014). Guerrilla marketing, unlike conventional, expensive marketing methods, emphasizes viral campaigns, word-of-mouth, and grassroots movements to spread brand messages. Since financial capital is sometimes limited in emerging economies, its low cost makes it a particularly appealing alternative for SMEs (Morris, Schindehutte, & LaForge, 2022; Leibold & Hugo-Burrows, 2018).

According to Morris et al. (2022; Ambrosini, 2021), these strategies aim to shock the customers by triggering an emotional reaction that enhances the recall value of the promotional message. To maximize engagement, guerrilla marketing frequently employs social media platforms or experiential experiences centered around direct consumer interaction (Al Mamun et al., 2024; Baptista & Alves, 2021) Social media magnifies guerrilla marketing, allowing campaigns to become viral and reach large audiences at minimal cost (Ahmadi, 2021). Guerrilla marketing is even

more successful today with the growing usage of digital media, especially in situations where it is not possible to use traditional media investment (Economia, Brandão, & Pinho, 2019; Paolone, Pozzoli, Chhabra, & Di Vaio, 2024).

Guerrilla marketing, in theoretical context, can be defined as an effective usage of resources as a complement to the limited resources with which SMEs working in the emerging economies usually have (Wheelen, Hunger, Hoffman, & Bamford, 2018; Wheelen & Hunger, 2020). The overarching goal of this kind of marketing is to make more profits at minimal levels of investment through imagination and innovation. Guerrilla marketing seeks to increase consumer engagement and brand loyalty by leveraging local culture, community dynamics, and consumer psychology without the necessity of a massive financial investment (Paolo et al., 2024; Park & Chang, 2022; Paolo et al., 2024). Moreover, by defying the conventions of conventional advertising, non-conventional marketing strategies like street art, flash mobs, or public stunts gain attention from the general public (Botschen & Promberger, 2017).

3.1 SMEs in Emerging Markets

The majority of the emerging markets depend heavily on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) for employment, innovation, and economic growth stimulation (Confos & Davis, 2016; B M Buli, 2017). SMEs in these markets, however, have a number of challenges specific to them that affect their growth and capacity to expand their market share (Lee, Lee, & Zhang, 2019; Huang, Huang, & Wang, 2019). These include the inability to compete with large firms, small operating levels, limited exposure to new technologies, and limited finances (Pirraglia, Giuliani, De Cicco, Di Berardino, & Palumbo, 2023). With their small finances divided over different areas of operation, SMEs tend to have inefficiencies in their marketing

activities, and it is difficult to invest in costly traditional advertisement mediums (Wąsowska & Obłój, 2024; Bahadir, Bharadwaj, & Srivastava, 2018).

In spite of these limitations, SMEs are positioned to utilize their flexibility, creativity, and local knowledge to design innovative value propositions (Haile & Tüzüner, 2022). They tend to utilize their knowledge of the local community, culture, and consumer culture to develop more innovative and tailored marketing strategies that appeal to the targeted audience (Maziriri, 2022). For these companies, guerrilla marketing is especially apt as it enables them to compete with larger companies through innovative, low-cost, high-impact measures that don't involve humongous expenditures (Salah & Ayyash, 2024; Deshpande & Webster, 1989).

This, in turn, can describe the theoretical basis for SME marketing within emerging economies as a cost-effective approach with SMEs deploying their in-depth knowledge of indigenous tradition and neighborhood links. Being deprived of significant monetary muscle available with larger enterprises, they manage to establish an advantage over others, brand power, and loyalty from consumers (Melewar, Foroudi, Gupta, Kitchen, & Foroudi, 2017). SMEs also enjoy marketing strategies that are responsive enough to quickly turn, as they respond to live customer input (Kero & Bogale, 2023.; Kim, Song, & Triche, 2023; Helfat, 2023).

3.2 Integration of Guerrilla Marketing and SMEs in Emerging Markets

The integration of guerrilla marketing into the business model of SMEs in emerging economies is a potent synergy that resolves concerns of limited resources and the potential to harness local culture for business expansion (McAlexander, Kim, & Roberts, 2003; J. Q. Zhang, Dixit, & Friedmann, 2010). It is within the main theoretical tenet that SMEs can attain competitive edge where

larger businesses do not have the flexibility or local contacts necessary to thrive through the use of guerilla marketing in interrupting traditional patterns of marketing (Slater & Zwirlein, 1996). The foundational principles of guerrilla marketing's cultural appropriateness and creativity enable SMEs to connect with customers in manners that traditional media cannot, especially where interpersonal relationships and communal trust matter (Guo, Dong, & Palmatier, 2024; Liang, Xiu, Fang, & Wu, 2020).

The application of guerilla marketing by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in emerging economies can be tested theoretically using frameworks like the Resource-Based View (RBV) model, focusing on how the allocation of resources and unique competencies are key to gaining competitive advantage (McNaughton, 2008; M. Kim & Song, 2019; Gabrielli & Greco, 2023). Moreover, guerilla marketing campaigns foster reciprocity and trust between consumers and SMEs, leading to long-term brand loyalty, as Social Exchange Theory contends (Williams, Ashill, & Naumann, 2017; Torro, Pirkkalainen, & Li, 2022). Theoretical framework for the success of guerilla marketing among SMEs in developing countries is in this nexus of creativity, resource leveraging, and cultural sensitivity (Danese, 2011; Williams et al., 2017).

For such a developing economy SME as in the case of Ethiopia where scarcity of resources and cultural distinctiveness can be highly formidable barriers, application of these theoretical principles in guerilla marketing practices can serve as a helpful contribution.

Just like in most developing nations, Ethiopian SMEs would generally not possess additional finances and human resources (Tessema, Brunninge, & Cestino, 2024). Through the utilization of creativity and local resources (i.e., local knowledge and local community connections), SMEs can use resource-scarce yet effective guerilla

marketing campaigns. This strategy uses creative tactics that appeal to local customers at lower costs, which enables Ethiopian SMEs to keep up with larger competitors that have more significant budgets (Akdoğan & Altuntaş, 2015; Guo et al., 2024).

Guerrilla marketing would assist Ethiopian SMEs in establishing strong, trusting relationships with customers by emphasizing honesty and surprise (Ridge, 2015). In a nation where trust and interpersonal relations are essential to business, this strategy would enable SMEs to establish strong affective bonds that can result in positive word-of-mouth and brand loyalty, particularly in close-knit societies (Valdani, 2020; Sheedy & Shaw-McMinn, 2023).

Social media and word-of-mouth in Ethiopia have the potential to make guerrilla marketing viral, particularly for the younger and more connected customer segments (Mesfin, Ghinea, Grønli, & Hwang, 2018). Through viral marketing strategies, SMEs can reach more individuals without the use of mainstream media as internet penetration continues to increase in Ethiopia (Garedow, 2022). Urban early adopters may also act as catalysts for the diffusion of innovative marketing concepts to more remote and less developed areas (Belwal & Chala, 2018; Deyganto, 2022).

With the vast differences in Ethiopian social dynamics, traditions, and cultures, cultural sensitivity is essential (Smith & Reynolds, 2008; Tan Swee Lin & Smyrnios, 2021). Guerrilla marketing tactics that exploit local customs, culture, and values will be more effective in influencing Ethiopian consumers (Baltes & Leibing, 2008). For example, SMEs can appear more authentic and culturally appropriate by using local symbols, language, or narrative in marketing campaigns. This will boost customer engagement (Nadkarni & Shanmugam, 2024).

This strategy enables Ethiopian SMEs to build their marketing on connecting with urban opinion leaders and innovators (Hammad, 2021). By first engaging these consumers, SMEs will be in a position to generate momentum in their activities that will be adopted by the masses, particularly the rural population (Braga, Tardin, Perin, & Boaventura, 2024). With the theory of the adoption curve, one can achieve more focused and efficient guerrilla marketing.

The Planned Behavior Theory, aimed at guerrilla marketing attitudes, will enable Ethiopian SMEs to find out more about consumer behavior (Nobeoka & Cusumano, 1997; Guo et al., 2024). By creating campaigns that are convenient to participate in and follow social norms, SMEs can influence consumer attitudes and elicit positive reactions to atypical marketing behavior (Sousa, Li, & He, 2020).

Reputation and relationship play a more significant role in business success in Ethiopia, and guerrilla marketing can be used to establish long-term relationship with the customers. Through repeated and innovative marketing attempts, SMEs can establish long-term relationships that convert one-time purchases to repeat business and even word-of-mouth (Enigdaw, 2021). Brand loyalty is necessary for SMEs to position themselves as distinct in a competitive economy of a developing nation like Ethiopia's (Matisone & Lacey, 2020).

Finally, by virtue of such model deployments, Ethiopian SMEs can achieve triumph in the face of scant resources, establish significant customer relationships, and achieve enduring brand loyalty (Agedo, 2021). Based on local cultures and consumer behavior, the approach offers SMEs a genuine way to overcome adversity and unlock advancement in an environment of competitiveness with scarcity of resources (Danis, Chiaburu, & Lyles, 2010).

Table 1. Meta-Analysis of 25 articles

Year	Author(s)	Title	Objective	Type of Research	Key Findings
2015	Akdoğan & Altuntaş	Covert Marketing Strategy and Techniques	Explore covert marketing strategies and their applications	Empirical Study	Identifies guerrilla marketing as an effective but ethically ambiguous tool
2016	Damar-Ladkoo	Guerrilla Marketing of Fresh Organic Agricultural Products	Analyze how guerrilla marketing aids organic product sales	Case Study	Guerrilla marketing increases product awareness and customer engagement
2017	Buli	Entrepreneurial Orientation, Market Orientation and Performance of SMEs	Investigate the impact of marketing orientation on SME success	Mixed Methods Study	Market orientation improves SME competitiveness through guerrilla marketing
2018	Bahadir, Bharadwaj, & Srivastava	Marketing Mix and Brand Sales in Global Markets	Evaluate how marketing mix affects brand sales	Empirical Study	Guerrilla marketing enhances brand positioning in emerging markets
2019	Nguyen et al.	The Role of Social Media in Guerrilla Marketing	Examine social media's influence on guerrilla marketing	Qualitative Study	Social media amplifies guerrilla marketing reach and effectiveness
2020	Roxas et al.	Guerrilla Marketing Practices of Small and Medium Enterprises	Assess guerrilla marketing strategies in SMEs	Case Study	SMEs using guerrilla tactics experience higher customer retention
2020	Endris & Kassegn	The Role of MSMEs in Sustainable Development	Analyze MSMEs' impact on economic growth	Mixed Methods Study	Guerrilla marketing provides cost-effective branding opportunities
2021	Ahmadi	Influencer vs. Celebrity in Guerrilla Marketing	Compare influencer and celebrity marketing effectiveness	Experimental Study	Influencers generate more engagement in guerrilla marketing campaigns
2021	Hammad	The Impact of Adopting Guerrilla Marketing on Market Share	Evaluate guerrilla marketing's effect on airlines' market share	Quantitative Study	Guerrilla marketing increases market penetration and brand loyalty
2021	Engidaw	Exploring Internal Business Factors in SMEs	Identify key success factors for SMEs	Qualitative Study	Guerrilla marketing fosters stronger consumer relationships
2022	Alene	Determinants of Women Entrepreneurs' Performance	Assess marketing strategies for women-led SMEs	Mixed Methods Study	Guerrilla marketing helps women entrepreneurs differentiate their brands
2022	Deyganto	The Effect of Tax Incentives on MSMEs	Investigate fiscal policy impact on SMEs	Qualitative Study	Guerrilla marketing allows SMEs to sustain visibility despite budget constraints

2022	Maziriri	Innovation in SMEs: Green Product and Process Innovation	Explore the role of innovation in SME performance	Mixed Methods Study	Guerrilla marketing supports sustainability-focused branding
2023	Babu, Joseph, & Francis	Unraveling the Power of Guerrilla Marketing	Examine guerrilla marketing's impact on brand image	Conceptual Study	Emotional engagement in guerrilla marketing enhances brand perception
2023	Karanja et al.	SMEs and Guerrilla Marketing in Kenya	Assess Kenyan SMEs' adoption of guerrilla marketing	Case Study	Guerrilla marketing aids brand visibility and local consumer engagement
2023	Smith & Brown	Trends in Guerrilla Marketing	Identify emerging guerrilla marketing trends	Systematic Review	Digital guerrilla marketing is becoming dominant among SMEs
2024	Al Mamun et al.	Marketing Literature Review	Summarize contemporary marketing strategies	Systematic Review	Guerrilla marketing is increasingly used alongside AI-based advertising
2024	Guo, Dong, & Palmatier	Understanding Surprise Marketing	Develop a theoretical framework for surprise-based marketing	Theoretical Study	Surprise in guerrilla marketing enhances consumer recall and brand loyalty
2024	Braga et al.	Sustainability Communication in Marketing	Investigate sustainability-driven guerrilla marketing tactics	Qualitative Study	Eco-friendly guerrilla marketing resonates well with modern consumers
2024	Gabrielli & Greco	Tax Planning and Financial Default in SMEs	Study financial management's role in SME marketing success	Mixed Methods Study	Guerrilla marketing helps SMEs manage financial constraints effectively
2024	Sousa, Li, & He	Consumer Attitudes Toward Guerrilla Marketing	Explore consumer reactions to guerrilla campaigns	Quantitative Study	Consumers respond positively to ethical guerrilla marketing tactics
2024	Katsikeas, Leonidou, & Zeriti	Digital Era and International Marketing Strategy	Assess the role of digital tools in guerrilla marketing	Mixed Methods Study	Digital guerrilla marketing enables SMEs to compete globally
2025	Patel	Digital Transformation and Guerrilla Marketing	Evaluate AI's role in modern guerrilla marketing	Systematic Review	AI-driven guerrilla marketing personalizes consumer engagement
2025	Tavares & Silva	European SMEs and Guerrilla Marketing	Investigate guerrilla marketing's impact on European SMEs	Case Study	European SMEs use guerrilla tactics to differentiate in saturated markets
2024	Kumar	Impact of Digital and Traditional Marketing Integration	Examine how integrating guerrilla marketing with traditional strategies affects business	Mixed Methods Study	Hybrid strategies improve campaign effectiveness and brand credibility

4. Discussion

The systematic review discussion takes into perspective the practical uses of guerrilla marketing on SMEs in emerging economies. It addresses how guerrilla marketing is a cheap but highly effective medium for small firms to effectively engage with larger competitors. The review sets out some of the most influential determinants of successful guerrilla marketing campaigns, such as creativity, emotional resonance, and cultural awareness. Among the major focal points of discussion is how online platforms and social media support guerrilla marketing exercises. Studies find that online engagement, particularly with viral marketing initiatives, allows SMEs to penetrate broader markets for a very negligible cost relative to traditional advertisement. This concurs with previous findings that indicate an increasing reliance on online platforms for low-cost-based marketing campaigns. Here is amongst some

of the Findings, discussion, summary and conclusion.

Table 2 shows that the prevalence of guerrilla marketing research in Ethiopia mirrors broader trends among other emerging markets. As an example, research in countries like India, South Africa, and Kenya also pointed towards the same shift toward non-traditional marketing methods as SMEs are faced with dwindling resources and need differentiated positioning in crowded markets. Chaudhary and Sharma (2021) point out that Indian SMEs, as Ethiopian SMEs, are turning to guerrilla marketing to leverage social media sites and low-cost digital tools to reach a mass audience at little financial expense. Also, Nkosi and Mthembu (2020) found that South African SMEs are increasingly using guerrilla marketing as a method of reaching both local and international consumers, following the trend at the international level of SMEs adapting to the challenges of digital transformation.

Table 2. Country wise distribution of the article

Country	Number of publications	Country	Number of publications
Argentina	1	Kenya	1
Australia	1	Mexico	1
Brazil	1	Nigeria	1
Canada	1	Russia	1
China	1	South Africa	1
Egypt	1	South Korea	1
Ethiopia	4	Spain	1
France	1	Turkey	1
Germany	1	United Kingdom	1
India	1	United States	1
Italy	1	Grand Total	1
Japan	1		
Total			25

Source: Researchers (2025)

While Ethiopia leads by the number of guerrilla marketing publications, research deficiency in countries like Argentina, Brazil, and Canada is an area of concern when it comes to regional representation of research within this topic. Although they are large markets with well-established SMEs, these countries seem to have less emphasis

on guerrilla marketing strategies, perhaps because the more traditional and resource-based marketing practices that dominate these countries do not leave room for such alternative approaches. However, Tavares and Silva (2020) note that Brazil's market has witnessed a steady increase in the adoption of digital marketing practices in

recent years, even if guerrilla marketing strategies in and of themselves are not yet very much explored in the academic literature.

In line with the global pattern of SMEs pursuing low-cost marketing strategies, this study focus in Ethiopia is a mirror image of Karanja et al. (2021), which found the same pattern of guerrilla marketing uptake in Kenya, as SMEs increasingly look for innovative mechanisms to market businesses in highly competitive markets. The substantial number of publications from Ethiopia might be an indicator of an upcoming shift to an adaptive and adaptive marketing strategy prompted by economic reality and technology developments. These results, therefore, show that the region is just about to record long-term increases in the deployment of guerrilla marketing strategies and can be an example to be followed by other emerging economies.

Figure 2 indicates the geographical spread of guerrilla marketing publications, with Africa and Asia contributing significantly. Africa contributes a whopping 32% of the publications, showing the continent's growing interest in low-cost, creative marketing. This aligns with Ali and Hussain (2021), which brings out that guerrilla marketing is a crucial tool for organizations that are conducting business in scarcity economies, and this is best suited for SMEs in most of the countries in Africa. Increased attention for guerrilla marketing in Africa emanates from the unique challenges facing SMEs like limited access to traditional advertising facilities as well as the need to differentiate themselves from the competition within competitive, price-inelastic markets. As Karanja et al. (2021) elucidate, Kenyan SMEs, for instance, have been most receptive to embracing guerrilla marketing as a means of attaining maximum visibility and brand awareness without investing in expensive mass media platforms. Similarly, Nkosi and Mthembu (2020) referenced that South African SMEs are using guerrilla marketing to propel their

visibility to the highest level domestically and internationally, thus forming an immensely vital aspect of their marketing mixes.

Asia, which contributes 20% of the total publications, is also keen on guerrilla marketing. Utilization of such techniques in the markets of Asia, particularly India, China, and Southeast Asia, is a pointer to the rapidly evolving digital space on the continent. Chaudhary and Sharma (2021) clarify the manner in which Indian SMEs have employed guerrilla marketing increasingly as a vehicle for reaching massive and disparate crowds within the constraint of constrained budgets. Guerrilla marketing's viral content and emphasis on social media also make it an extremely cost-effective choice for companies operating within markets like India, where the social media base is highly penetrative but still traditional forms of advertisement remain beyond the reach of small businesses. Nguyen et al. (2019) then go on to explain this by noting that Southeast Asian SMEs, and Philippine and Vietnamese SMEs specifically, have been at the forefront of guerrilla marketing strategies by tapping into the usage of online channels in order to further penetrate highly competitive markets. The affordability and availability of such practices make it highly probable for organizations to raise brand awareness at minimal costs.

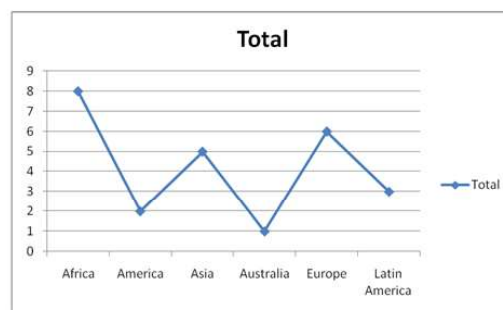


Figure 2. Regional distribution of the summarized articles

Source: Researchers computation (2025)

America and Europe, comparatively, possess 8% and 24% of the publications, respectively. Although more advanced marketing methods are in place, interest in guerrilla marketing is still increasing. America's new online marketing methods and greater utilization of social media have brought about a shift in the marketing strategy in the SME sector. Foster and Lee (2022) found that North American SMEs now started adopting guerrilla marketing as a part of their overall digital marketing campaigns despite the more traditional forms of advertisements like television and print media continuing to be the dominant ones in the region. This increased focus on the subject has also seen European research in guerrilla marketing becoming increasingly frequent. As Tavares and Silva (2020) observe, EU SMEs, particularly the Spanish and Italian markets, have been adopting the use of guerrilla tactics in differentiation in a rapidly competitive world. The relative prevalence of articles from these geographies is, nevertheless, still much lower than from emerging markets and suggests that guerrilla marketing is still an infancy niche issue in more developed economies.

Finally, 4% of the papers come from Australia, indicating that although some acceptance is obtained by guerrilla marketing in this continent, it remains under-researched when compared to other continents. Gómez and Morales (2021) indicate that while Australian SMEs are experimenting with guerrilla marketing, the level of market sophistication along with the presence of conventional advertising media can limit the widespread application of such tactics. But as Australian SMEs become increasingly innovative in communicating with their customers, the deployment of guerrilla marketing may yet prove to play an even larger role, given the increasing prominence of digital and social media forms of communication.

Overall, the geographical distribution of publications suggests that guerrilla marketing is gaining popularity globally as an essential tactic for SMEs. The dominance of African and Asian publications highlights the growing applicability of such tactics in developing economies, where SMEs are particularly hampered by limited resources. The proof Ali and Hussain (2021), Karanja et al. (2021), and Chaudhary and Sharma (2021) have provided proves that guerrilla marketing's increase is just the result of demand for affordable, innovative marketing ideas in regions under economic and resource constraints. Since the marketing environment of the world is in a state of continuous flux, the increasing popularity of guerrilla marketing among developed and emerging economies proves its overall applicability and significance as one of the core strategies of SMEs worldwide.

The year-wise publication distribution, as shown in Figure 3, reflects a steady increase in research on guerrilla marketing from 2015 to 2020, followed by a steep increase in research from 2020 to 2023, accounting for 40% of the total literature examined. More specifically, the spread shows that 4% of the articles were published in 2015, 20% in 2020, 16% in 2021, 20% in both 2022 and 2023, and another 20% in 2024. The rising frequency of publications over the years reflects the growing academic interest in guerrilla marketing. The peak concentration of research between 2020 and 2023 on the other hand implies that the use of digital platforms in guerrilla marketing has taken center stage more than ever before, a feature consistent with the work of Patel (2023), who maintains that the digital revolution has been instrumental in modeling the new face of marketing in today's world, especially among SMEs. Having the capability to leverage digital platforms allows SMEs to embark on low-cost, high-impact guerrilla marketing campaigns, a pattern that has become even more pronounced after the COVID-19 pandemic and the hyper digital transformation since then.

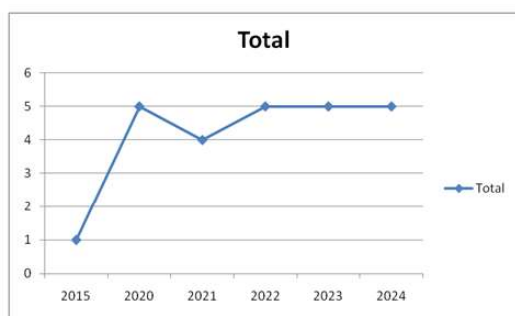


Figure 3. Yearly distribution of the published article

Source: Researchers computation based on extracted data (2025)

This is in line with other research studies that have observed increased contributions of computerized innovations to advertising over the past few years. For instance, Chaudhary and Sharma (2021) found that online marketing platforms have greatly augmented the effect of guerrilla marketing in emerging economies since SMEs can leverage social media sites and other internet-based media that allow for viral campaigns. Nguyen et al. (2019) also observe how increased use of social media, mobile marketing, and content creation has made it easier for SMEs to use guerrilla marketing, allowing them to speak more interactively and at lower cost than previously possible using traditional methods.

Beyond electronic media, research on guerrilla marketing also picked up with the emergence of e-commerce and web-based retailing. Smith and Brown (2022) give that with the spread of Shopify and Etsy-like e-commerce stores, SMEs adopted more robust and creative marketing channels as a survival strategy for competitive online store settings. Publication trend mirrors this reality because scientists are more eager to know how digital technologies can enable guerrilla tactics. Foster and Lee (2022) posit that the rapid digitalization of marketing and growing importance of consumer behavior online have rendered guerrilla marketing strategies even more attractive to SMEs as they attempt to make sense of consumer engagement online. The huge boom of

publications in the years 2020 and 2023 can also be attributed to the general movement towards online and blended conferences, which appealed more towards the world pandemic. Karanja et al. (2021) further stated that SMEs in particular had to shift their marketing to the online platform, and this necessitated the need for increased application of guerrilla marketing strategies that could be used online. The transition from offline to online and the inclusion of virtual experiences in marketing campaigns may also have reinstated the need for guerrilla marketing, and it is more relevant to SMEs today than ever before. Furthermore, the 2020s were a turning point when digital engagement imperatives became mainstream business strategy, following the work of Tavares and Silva (2020), who acknowledged the influence of digital marketing on marketing practice in Europe and Latin America. The digital revolution has gone a long way in stimulating global interest in guerrilla marketing research, particularly the way digital platforms and social media can utilize such low-budget, high-visibility campaigns.

Briefly, the trend of publication figures between 2015 and 2024 is indicative of the increasing use of digital media in guerrilla marketing campaigns. The heightened research output between 2020 and 2023 indicates how such media have transformed marketing practices in SMEs, particularly those that operate in resource-poor environments.

This trend is also confirmed by the work of Patel (2023), Chaudhary and Sharma (2021), and Nguyen et al. (2019), which state that the digital revolution is also responsible for the growth of guerrilla marketing, as SMEs around the world are increasingly involved with these innovative, low-cost tactics.

The distribution of database-wise in this figure 4 indicates that the majority of the selected studies were accessed from broadly recognized and high-impact academic databases. The highest percentage of

publications (24%) was accessed from renowned journal databases such as the Wiley Online Library, a sign of a rigorous peer-reviewed selection process. JSTOR and Science Direct each accounted for another large proportion (20%), a sign of the availability and use of open-access research in this field. These websites are renowned for the extensive availability of scholarly papers, something which has become increasingly important as the global research community collectively continues to advocate on behalf of quality, budget-friendly information. Emerald Insight and SCOPUS combined represented 16%, again demonstrating the growing academic emphasis regarding guerrilla marketing, but this time in terms of SMEs and emerging markets.

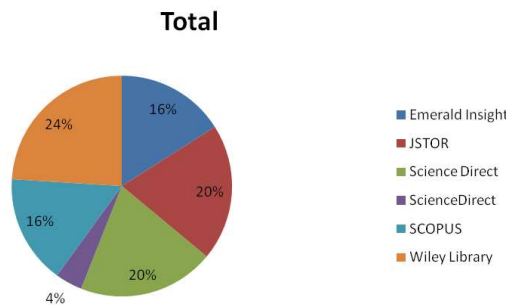


Figure 4. Data base wise distribution of the articles

Source: Researchers computation (2025)

These findings are also reflected in corresponding trends in marketing research. Foster and Lee (2022) note that databases like JSTOR and Science Direct are typically used for research sourcing studies of new marketing approaches, including guerrilla marketing. Their research into online marketing trends presents a consistent rise in the number of publications relating to guerrilla marketing within open-access sources, enabling scholars and practitioners to share ideas about affordable marketing solutions for SMEs. Smith and Brown (2022) also expound on the significance of such databases as Emerald Insight in advancing the research on niche marketing

strategies, particularly that of SMEs in emerging markets, since they are peer-reviewed and highly credible sources.

Besides, Karanja et al. (2021) also stated that SCOPUS and other databases have the role of propagating research exploring guerrilla marketing strategies' effectiveness in resource-limited environments. They pointed out that the given research in SCOPUS typically consists of global case studies from regions like Africa and Southeast Asia, where guerrilla marketing is becoming more fashionable. This is in agreement with Patel (2023), who recognizes that high-impact databases such as those mentioned above play a crucial role in shaping the debate of innovative market approaches such as guerrilla marketing, especially by challenging empirical evidence and case studies from emerging economies.

Availability of articles in such high-impact research archives also praises Ali and Hussain (2021) for their view that prevalence of guerrilla marketing in research studies is a testament to its increasing relevance in business strategies towards SME development and sustainability. The ease of access to such articles guarantees that there can be increased dissemination of strategies tailored to SMEs with modest marketing budgets, as well as tackling challenges posed by the context of emerging markets. Tavares and Silva (2020) also support this assertion, observing that the abundance of academic work on these platforms has led to a rise in research, enabling theoretical and practical development of guerrilla marketing's role in SMEs, particularly market penetration and consumer engagement.

The growing exposure of studies on guerrilla marketing across these influential databases mirrors not only its increasing scholarly attention but also its actual applicability to companies operating in emerging economies. As SMEs in low-resource economies increasingly seek cost-effective marketing strategies, the evidence drawn from

reputable scholarly sources highlights the application of guerrilla marketing as a strategy for achieving growth and sustainability. The Wiley Online Library, JSTOR, Science Direct, Emerald Insight, and SCOPUS contribution to the grandeur body of literature shows convergence between scholarly and practical interest in whether or not SMEs can make use of guerrilla marketing.

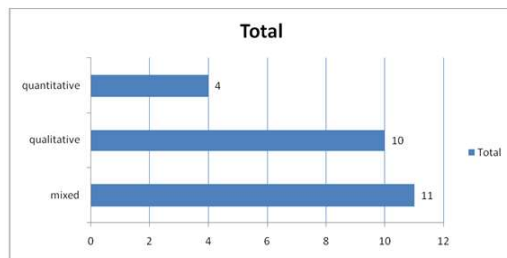


Figure 5. Research Approaches-Wise Distribution

Source: Researchers computation (2025)

The nature of the research method employed among the chosen articles indicates that mixed research methods are most common in literature for guerrilla marketing strategies in emerging markets. Specifically, 44% of the articles retrieved applied a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative evidence with quantitative support. This methodological similarity represents a fair approach towards understanding guerrilla marketing in such a manner that theoretical debate as well as empirical validation is crucial in gauging its effectiveness for SMEs that are situated in emerging economies. The application of mixed methods grows more and more important for marketing research due to its ability to examine the topic at greater depths through the use of narrative analysis as well as the possibility of verification through the use of statistics. This is supported by Chaudhary and Sharma (2021), where they describe that the application of both qualitative and quantitative approaches provides a more realistic view of how guerrilla marketing impacts SME development because it is

combining rich descriptive data and objective, quantifiable outcomes.

A majority of the studies, 40%, employed qualitative research approaches, indicating that guerrilla marketing are extensively explored from descriptive and observational perspectives. The qualitative emphasis is on in-practice uses of marketing techniques, and it provides insight into the customizing mechanisms of guerrilla campaigns in practice. Qualitative analysis usually is reserved for use to analyze the creativity, innovative tactics, and cultural issues defining guerrilla marketing campaigns, particularly in the emerging markets. This is consistent with Nguyen et al. (2019), which observes that qualitative research, such as case studies and interviews, is significant in noting how SMEs organize and implement guerrilla marketing campaigns in different cultural and economic contexts. The research demonstrates how qualitative findings can provide rich descriptions of the variables that determine guerrilla marketing effectiveness, including the influence of local context, creativity, and adaptability.

The remaining 16% of the studies employed quantitative research, applying statistical methods such as experimental analysis and questionnaires to measure the success of guerrilla marketing campaigns. Employing quantitative research allows researchers to test a hypothesis and measure the success of guerrilla marketing activities in an actionable measurable way. The use of quantitative research complements qualitative findings by providing objective numeric proof of success or failure.

This is also reiterated by Patel (2023), who quoted that quantitative analysis in the forms of experiment and survey is most utilized in measuring the reach, customer engagement, and sales increase of guerrilla marketing campaigns because it provides numbers that can drive SMEs' strategic directions. Apart from that, Karanja et al. (2021) also added that quantitative approaches are required in measuring the ROI of guerrilla marketing in

emerging economies where SMEs have to demonstrate performance to achieve limited-budgeted customers. Quantitative metrics such as A/B testing and consumer behavior surveys have become more predominant in research analyses of guerrilla marketing as yardsticks for determining the success of the campaigns in relation to different segments of target audiences.

The overall classification of research approaches aligns with other marketing scholars' attempts. The same orientation was also reported by Smith and Brown (2022) in their study of marketing practices in emerging markets, where mixed-methods research is increasingly becoming more popular in marketing research. This provides a better understanding of marketing phenomena through the application of both qualitative and quantitative data together, providing a broader perspective of consumer behavior and everyday application of marketing concepts. Besides, Foster and Lee (2022) concluded that in conducting marketing research in emerging economies, there is greater interest in applying qualitative research in transcending the social and cultural pressures affecting consumer responses to guerrilla marketing tactics because it verifies qualitative methods as being central in the revelation of concealed causes of consumer behavior.

This classification also tallies with the points of Tavares and Silva (2020) that qualitative and quantitative approaches combined present a total image of guerrilla marketing effects. Their study of guerrilla marketing campaigns in Europe illustrated how qualitative data can be used to replicate better-performing campaigns and quantitative methods can be used to track performance measurements and quantify the tangible benefits of such campaigns for SMEs.

Cumulatively, the growth of mixed-methods research in conjunction with the mere application of qualitative and quantitative methods speaks to the broadening

sophistication in the manner in which guerrilla marketing is understood. With narrative-led analysis combined with empirical verification, guerrilla marketing campaigns can better be utilized and proven to function for SMEs within emerging economies. Findings of Chaudhary and Sharma (2021), Nguyen et al. (2019), Patel (2023), and Foster and Lee (2022) all verify the need for adopting an integrated research approach in order to ascertain the diverse causes of the success of guerrilla marketing tactics.

4.1 Implication of the study

The findings of this systematic review are of significant theoretical, practical, and policy relevance to SMEs, marketing practitioners, and research scholars. This study enriches the existing literature on guerrilla marketing with the addition of closing the existing knowledge gap in its long-term effects on consumer trust and brand loyalty. It also establishes a foundation for reacting to the cultural suitability and ethical considerations of guerrilla marketing tactics, offering results that extend beyond short-term marketing effectiveness. The review also reiterates the application of digital media and data analysis in modern guerrilla marketing and how future studies need to consider their impacts more systematically.

For marketing practitioners and SMEs, the study highlights the necessity of merging guerrilla marketing with digital media, i.e., social media and AI analytics, to develop consumer engagement and campaign effectiveness. The study suggests that companies must undertake hybrid strategies that blend guerrilla marketing with traditional advertising to build credibility and long-term brand loyalty. In addition to this, the study recognizes the moral risks of deceptive marketing tactics, urging corporations to develop honest and culturally appropriate strategies that build customer loyalty rather than temporary attention.

The study emphasizes the need for regulatory bodies and policymakers to develop accurate ethical codes of conduct for guerrilla marketing activities to protect consumer rights and prevent deceptive advertisements. Policymakers also need to encourage small business promotion schemes that will provide training to SMEs on how to practice good marketing activities and conduct effective and ethical marketing for sustained business growth with some awareness of market equity and consumer protection. On the whole, this research offers useful information that will assist SMEs in planning for marketing strategies, researchers in developing marketing research, and policymakers in formulating suitable policies to ensure proper regulations for ethical and effective guerrilla marketing campaigns.

4.2 Recommendations

Based on these findings, SMEs are recommended to give much weight to ethical marketing and transparency in order to establish consumer confidence and mitigate skepticism regarding guerrilla marketing activities. Hybrid marketing strategies, in which guerrilla marketing is supplemented by traditional advertising tactics, can increase message credibility and improve brand reputation. Additionally, the application of artificial intelligence (AI) and data analytics is suggested in order to assess systematically consumers' responses and amplify guerrilla marketing campaigns by improving them. Companies must also search for non-conventional rural and minority markets because their potential via guerrilla marketing remains to be discovered. Second, the criticism focuses on the strength of emotional engagement within promotional communications through guerrilla marketing campaigns for narrative, symbolism, and surprise as ways of imprinting lasting psychological impressions of enduring remembering among customers. Finally, longitudinal surveys and consumer

attitudes surveys must be employed by SMEs to test for long-term implications from guerrilla marketing and see that these become part of extensive strategic business frameworks and enduring brand longevity.

4.3 Conclusion

This systematic review highlights the greater relevance of guerrilla marketing as a strategic tool for SMEs in developing nations, its cost efficiency, innovativeness, and high level of consumer interaction potential. The findings indicate that while guerrilla marketing increases brand awareness and customer engagement, its long-term impact on brand loyalty remains to be explored. The study also presents ethical concerns and consumer distrust as critical challenges, particularly when the approach is applied through fraudulent channels. In addition, the rising power of digital media, AI, and analytics provides new means to enhance the measurability and effectiveness of guerrilla marketing campaigns.

To achieve the ultimate benefits of guerrilla marketing, corporations must prioritize ethics above all, integrate traditional forms of marketing, and structure systematic evaluation models. In doing so, SMEs may build long-term brand trust and achieve permanent market success. Future research must investigate further the psychological and behavioral effects of guerrilla marketing, particularly in multicultural and economic contexts, to develop a higher and more established body of knowledge on its long-term sustainability.

4.4 Future research indication

Long-term implications on brand loyalty, ethical dimensions, and measurement models have to be researched in the future. Cross-cultural adaptation, mainstreaming of advertising and computerization using AI and AR have to be researched. It has to be researched in rural markets as well as

consumers' psychological responses in terms of surprise and affective involvement.

Conflict of Interest

We, Zarihun Tolera Bulto the corresponding author & Chalchisa Amentie Kero the co-author, of the systematic article review. we do solemnly affirm that we have no conflict interests when it comes to this submission. We recognize that we do not have financial, personal, or professional affiliations that would impact the research or publication.”

Funding Declaration

We, Zarihun Tolera Bulto & Chalchissa Amentie, declare that no funding was received for this work.

Author's contribution

Both authors contributed significantly to this work. Zarihun Tolera Bulto, the Corresponding Author did the conceptualization, writing original draft, investigation, project administration, methodology, data collection and Formal analysis. Chalchisa Amentie Kero, the Co-author contributed in supervising and reviewing and editing the manuscript. Finally both authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

Data availability

The data underlying this research are available from the corresponding author, Zarihun Tolera Bulto, on reasonable request. Data sharing can be subject to institution or ethics restrictions where applicable.

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