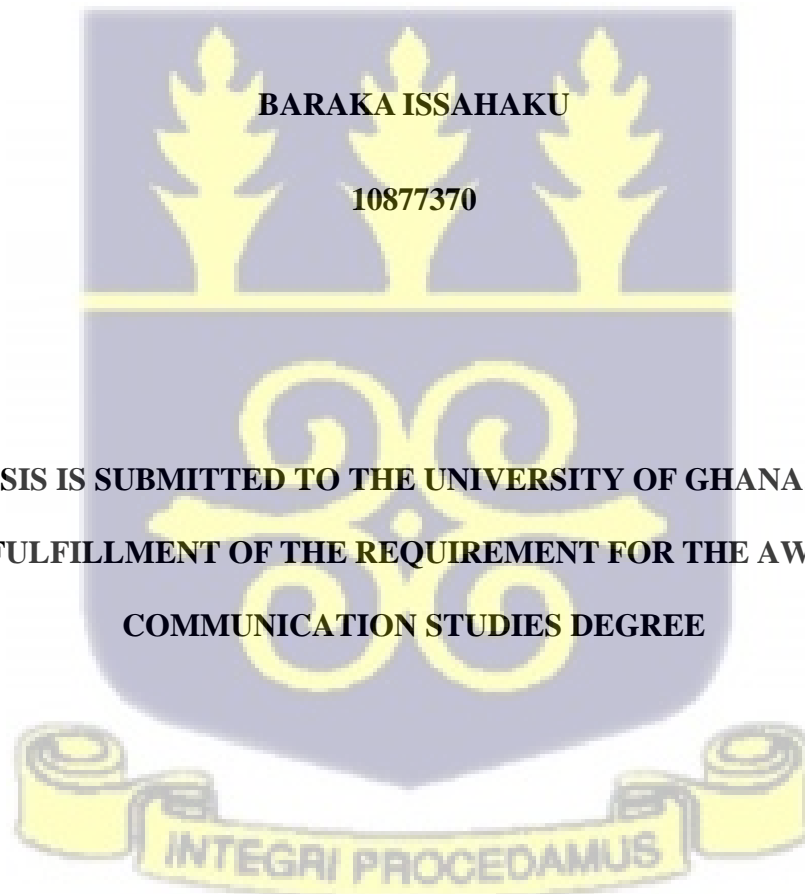


**PROMOTIONAL PRACTICES AMONG MICRO SHEA BUTTER BUSINESSES IN
NORTHERN GHANA**

BY



**THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON IN
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF MA
COMMUNICATION STUDIES DEGREE**

OCTOBER, 2023

DECLARATION

I, Baraka Issahaku, do hereby declare that the work presented in this dissertation is credited to my own research and findings. References used however, have been duly acknowledged under the supervision of Dr. Abena Animwaa Yeboah-Banin.



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Date 13-12-2023



Dr. Abena Animwaa Yeboah-Banin

(Supervisor)

Date: 13-12-23



DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my Rabb, Allah subhana wa ta'ala, whose love, grace and direction has brought me to this height.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I give all the glory to Allah for giving me a sense of direction, and showering me with so much favor and grace. I say Alhamdulillah.

To Dr. Abena Animwaa Yeboah-Banin, my astoundingly supportive supervisor, my sincerest gratitude to you. Your guidance, assistance, and honest and prompt feedback made completing this work possible.

To my parents, Mr. Alhaji Issahaku Ahmed Tahiru and Madam Hajiah Maria Fuseini for their unflinching support and prayers, I say a big thank you. You have always pushed me to be better.

Finally, I extend my sincere gratitude to the entire Department of Communication Studies for the robust and rigorous training given me, it was totally worth my time, energy, and every penny.



ABSTRACT

This study adopts a qualitative research approach and the Technology-Organization-Environment theoretical lens to examine how shea butter micro-businesses in Northern Ghana use marketing communication tools to promote their offerings. The objective was to find out the specific promotion tools they used and to document the benefits and challenges these businesses face in promoting themselves. Using in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion, the study found that micro shea butter businesses use a combination of promotional mix elements. That is to say, these businesses weave in two or more tools of the promotional mix, which are, personal selling, advertising, public relations, and publicity among others in order to reach their target markets. Generally, their tendency is to shun traditional advertising in favor of online advertising.



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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background

Shea butter is a vegetable fat extracted from fruits of the shea tree mostly found in the Northern part of Ghana.

Shea butter holds a paramount status as a vital global resource, playing a critical role in the cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, and food sectors due to its great properties (Naangmenyele et al., 2023). Of particular significance to the cosmetics industry, shea butter offers a myriad of advantages. As affirmed by (Tanzile et al., 2023) unrefined shea butter has demonstrated its efficacy in promoting skin healing and combating issues such as dry skin and rashes.

This all-important material is mostly produced in Africa; which produces about 1,760,000 tons of shea butter annually (Mohammed et al, 2013). According to research conducted by the African Journal of Biochemistry Research (2018) Africa produced an estimated 1, 760,600 tonnes of shea nuts annually. For processed shea butter, however, about 90% of it goes to the food industry (Global Shea Alliance).

The production of shea butter is generally tedious and time-consuming due to the indigenous processes employed in its production. In Northern Ghana, shea butter is predominantly done by women using techniques passed onto them by their ancestors (Banye, 2015). The businesses are usually in cooperatives which helps them gather enough funds for the business as well as a better chance of getting clients to buy their products. Even though they work in cooperatives, the market is fast changing in its dynamics and places on these women an ever-increasing need to imbibe

contemporary business practices. This study seeks to know and understand the promotional practices employed by these micro shea butter businesses.

1.1 Shea Butter Markets

Based on conservative projections in the West African Trade Hub (WATH), local markets account for just over half (55%) of the total shea kernel and shea butter production, while the remaining 45% is destined for export (Tanzile et al, 2023).

For other studies, Africa consumes about 75% of shea butter products produced in the sub-Saharan region. Today, China leads with the most consumed shea butter with an import rate of about 11.51% representing a staggering \$ 454.0m (Tridge Intelligence, 2020).

The domestic marketplace for shea butter is a cluster of urban markets in West Africa such as Accra, Ouagadougou, Abidjan, Abuja, Dakar, Bamako, Lome, Cotonou, Lagos, Ibadan, Kano, Nouakchott, Banjul, Niamey, Conakry and others. However, Ghana, Nigeria and Uganda are the largest shea butter producing countries (CBI, 2021).

According to Asante-Dartey et al (2009), due to the improvement in shea butter production with the help of mechanized systems, there has been an exponential increase in international market sales through exports.

Additionally, recognition from the United States of America's market has influenced the growth of shea butter usage in the cosmetic industry (Loveth, 2004). Shea butter for most high-end brands in the skin and personal care industries is considered a "hot" product (Stathacos, 2004).

Today, the global demand for shea butter has skyrocketed and by 2028, it should exceed \$3.5 billion U.S dollars. (Prosper, Africa, 2021). This, according to analysts, is due to the recent

inclination of the generation Y towards shea butter products such as lip balms, soaps, body lotions and many more (Research Dive, 2021).

1.2 Shea Butter Industry in Ghana

In Ghana, shea butter is primarily produced in the northern belt. The shea tree grows in practically every region of Northern Ghana, spanning approximately 77,670 square kilometers, including Western Dagomba, Southern Mamprusi, Western Gonja, Lawra, Tumu, Wa, and Nanumba, with the densest stands found in Eastern Gonja (Sualihu, 2019). The shea butter industry is a predominantly female economic activity (Tanzile et al., 2023).

According to Alhassan (2020) more than 600,000 women primarily sustain their daily livelihood through sales of shea butter or shea-related enterprises. The numbers keep rising. Today, according to Prosper Africa (2021) we have about 16 million women across 21 African countries that are into the shea butter businesses.

In a study conducted by Alhassan (2020) Ghana was identified as having the potential to produce 90% of the world's shea butter. This gives more opportunity for shea butter businesses to thrive. Considering the fact that shea butter production is the source of livelihood for many women in northern Ghana, it is inherent that they adopt practices that makes them compete for the burgeoning shea butter market. Today, the export rate of shea butter from Ghana is gradually growing as large-scale importers and buyers mainly from Europe discover its high value.

In the last two years, the pandemic, COVID-19 affected every form of business and human activity and the shea butter industry was no exception. According to a report from Radio France

International's article in December, 2021, the industry suffered when demand decreased drastically, mainly because of the strict adherence to COVID-19 protocols.

Recently, however, the market has steadily risen and is doing impressably well, as reported by the UNDP in 2021. Despite the promising future of this industry, it is clearly undeveloped, especially in countries still using indigenous methods in the production process (Adesiji et al, 2015).

The women involved in this business do have a firm understanding of the local market but have little knowledge about the international market, which makes them lose revenue (Bello- Bravo et al, 2015).

1.3 Problem Statement

Shea butter production is one of the most significant traditional industries in Northern Ghana, serving as the largest source of revenue for many women there. This essential product is well sought after in Ghana and beyond for food, cosmetics and many more. They make a substantial contribution to the stability of the Ghanaian economy and the alleviation of poverty in the rural sector, as affirmed by the World Bank (2014).

However, the industry largely maintains traditional practices, which hinders its development. Research by Sualihu (2019) highlighted that despite efforts to advance the shea butter industry, shea processors in the northern region continue to grapple with substantial challenges, primarily stemming from the lack of standardized and effective promotion of shea butter products. Without the right promotion of the product, it would continue to be a challenge in Ghana (Alhassan, 2020).

Admittedly, the majority of marketers are aware and understand that market orientation improves performance when businesses place a strong emphasis on the three core competencies that undergird their businesses: internal focus, competitive focus, and customer focus. Unfortunately, these above-mentioned areas of interest may not be equally crucial for micro and small businesses in rural communities in second world countries, like the shea butter businesses in Northern Ghana (Steel & Andah, 2003).

Furthermore, women engaged in shea butter production in rural areas are primarily responsible for the production and retail trade of shea butter. This is in contrast to middleman suppliers who can more readily leverage regulatory and operational support to participate in wholesale and export trade due to their expertise in promoting the shea butter product (Sikpaam et al., 2019)

A lot of studies have been conducted on the shea butter industry and the several challenges they face in Ghana. Pufaa (2010) in her study discovered challenges such as financial constraints and defiant systems in the shea butter industry in Ghana.

Mensa (2020) found that high borrowing, lack of market, and regulatory policies as some of the hurdles faced by the industry. However, there has been limited exploration into the roles these businesses could play in overcoming these challenges, especially concerning marketing and promotional activities.

As the industry expands, partly due to the efforts of poverty alleviation organizations and the rising interest in the benefits of shea butter, there is increasing demand for the product, placing on these micro businesses the need to adopt more contemporary business practices including pricing, marketing and promotion. However, researchers have questioned the appropriateness of applying marketing techniques used by big businesses in advanced economies to sub-Saharan enterprises, considering the fact that marketing practices, and by extension promotional tools may differ based

on location of the business (Sikpaam et al., 2019).

Regardless of the fact that a considerable number of studies have been conducted on the marketing strategies of micro and small businesses in general, prior research has not explored the promotional practices among micro shea butter businesses in Northern Ghana. As a result, leaving both business people and academics with insufficient evidence of the techniques employed by micro and small business entities or organizations in order to promote their offerings. This presents an opportunity to explore their promotional practices while taking note of the benefits and challenges that come with the practices they employ.

1.4 Objectives of Study

The aim of the study is to explore the promotional practices adopted by micro shea butter businesses in Northern Ghana. The specific objectives are:

1. to document the state of practice of business promotion among micro shea butter businesses in Northern Ghana.
2. to explore the contextual factors that lead micro shea butter businesses in Northern Ghana to promote their business and products.
3. to examine the benefits derived from business promotion as well as the challenges that come with it.

1.5 Research Questions

1. How do shea butter business owners come to adopt business promotional practices?
2. How do micro shea butter businesses in Northern Ghana promote their offerings?
3. What are the benefits derived by micro shea butter business owners in Northern Ghana from business promotion?

4. What are some of the challenges micro shea butter businesses face in trying to promote their businesses?

1.6 Significance of Study

The findings of this study will have an immense contribution to existing literature on promotional activities for micro and small-scale businesses in Ghana. Also, the study will provide relevant insights to business owners, cooperatives and managers in the shea butter industry on how the promotional mix and related activities can be used for the growth and success of their businesses.

1.7 Definition of Terms

1.7.0 Micro Businesses

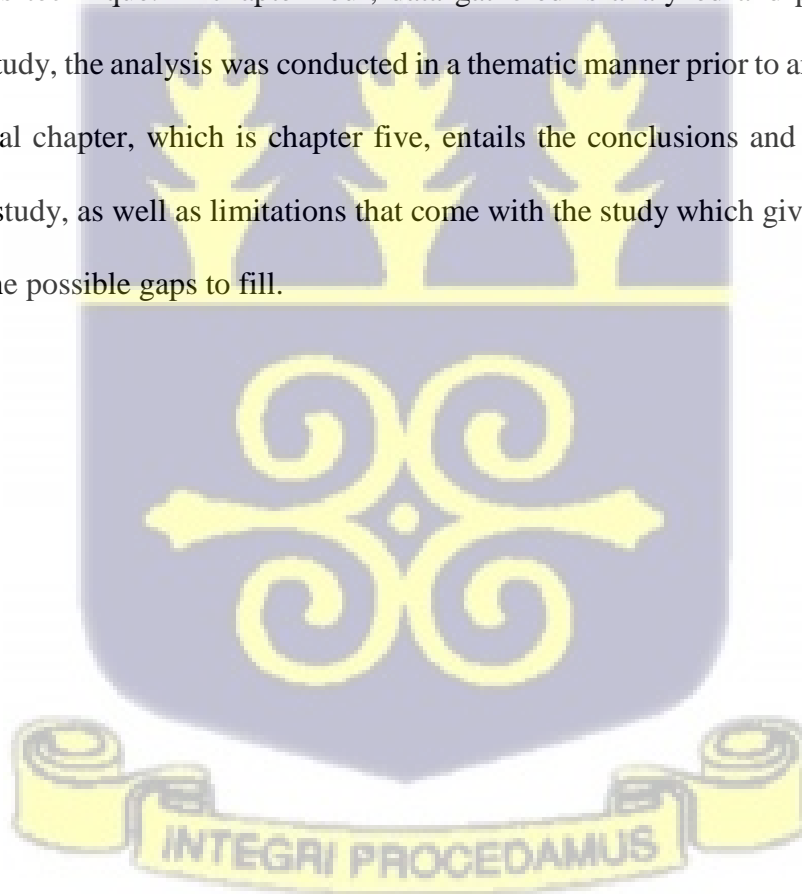
According to the bureau of labour statistics, Business Employment Dynamics, micro businesses refer to business owners that employ less than 10 workers. This definition is adopted in this study given that the businesses in focus are mostly one-woman businesses with family hands serving as support.

1.7.1 Promotional Activities

Promotional activities refer to a set of marketing strategies and tactics designed to enhance the visibility, desirability, and sales of a product, service, or brand. These activities can include advertising, sales promotions, public relations, social media marketing, content marketing, events, and various other techniques aimed at creating awareness, attracting customers, and ultimately driving sales or achieving marketing objectives (Suryani & Syafarudin, 2021) .

1.8 Organization of Study

This research is divided into six chapters. The first chapter presented and set the stage for the research. The problem statement, significance of the study, objectives, as well as research questions were covered in chapter one. Chapter two encompasses two parts. The theoretical framework takes the first part, discussing the theory and related literature which underpins this study. The second part explores related literature on promotional practices, related strategies with SMEs and shea butter marketing. Chapter three contains the methodology the research adopted. It contains the approach, research design, sample and sampling technique, data collection instrument, and data analysis technique. In chapter four, data gathered is analyzed and presented. For the purpose of this study, the analysis was conducted in a thematic manner prior to an inductive coding process. The final chapter, which is chapter five, entails the conclusions and recommendations drawn from the study, as well as limitations that come with the study which gives an idea to other researchers on the possible gaps to fill.



CHAPTER TWO

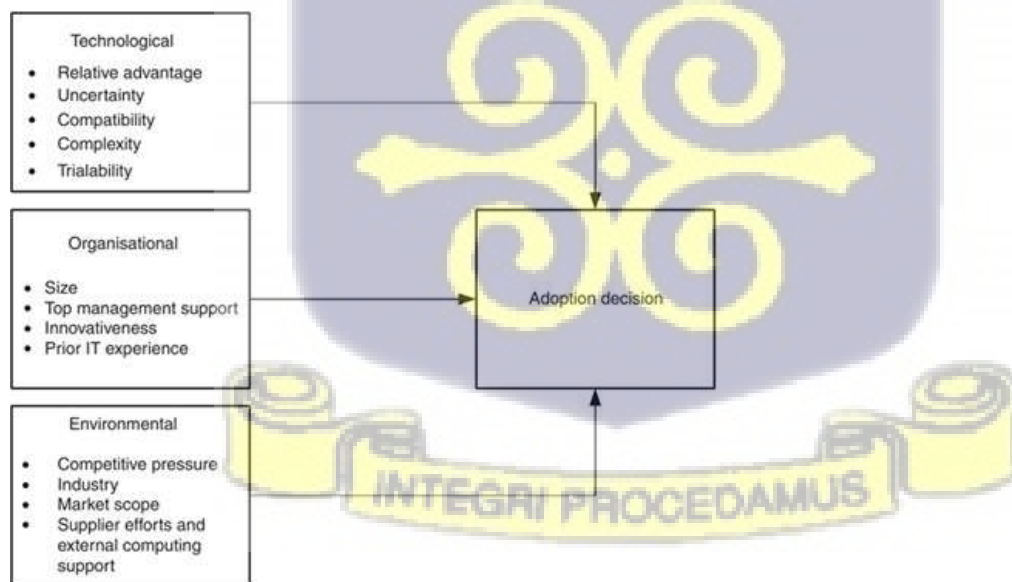
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presented the theory upon which this study is based. The literature was reviewed on promotional activities employed by businesses with particular attention to micro businesses. The study appropriates the logic of the Technology-Organizational- Environmental theory (TOE) to understand the contextual factors shaping the business promotional practices of micro shea butter businesses in Northern Ghana.

The second part of the chapter reviews a significant amount of these studies on promotional tools and practices that are being employed by MSMEs and multinational businesses alike around the world

2.0.1 Technology-Organizational-Environmental Theory



(Tornatzky & Fleisher, 1990)

2.1 Technology-Organization-Environment Framework

The study was based on the Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) framework, originally developed by Tornatzky and Fleisher in 1990. This framework explores factors influencing an organization's choice to adopt a specific technology or activity. TOE comprises three key dimensions: the technological aspect, as detailed by Kaufman and Walden (2001); the organizational aspect, examined by Chatterjee et al. (2002); and the environmental dimension, studied by Kowath and Choon (2001).

2.1.1 Technology

The technological aspect of the theory mainly looks at the internal and external criteria of an activity before adoption and implementation of the idea or innovation.

By applying the TOE framework, businesses can make more informed decisions about adopting new technologies, which can lead to improved competitiveness, efficiency, and strategic positioning in a dynamic business landscape. This framework continues to be a valuable tool in understanding the complexities of technology adoption and its impact on organizations (Chittipaka et al., 2023).

With promotional activities in mind, a business's choice of promotional tool among the mix will depend largely on their knowledge about the technology that may be needed and the business's readiness to handle the related requirement with the adoption of the desired activity (Malik et al., 2022).

Most micro and small businesses believe promotion is all about advertising and others refer to the two distinct phenomena as one and thus choose to run from it believing it is reserved for giant companies mainly because of its technological and financial demands. (Milano, 2019) For instance

the introduction of social media advertising and promotions requires a fair understanding of the technology which seems to be a problem of most small and micro businesses. It is no surprise, since lack of knowledge of a technology may influence whether or not a business will employ it.

That being said, the antecedents to consider in the technological aspect of the model will be the expertise, infrastructure and know-how of the business as emphasized by (Chittipaka et al., 2023)

2.1.2 Organizational

In the organizational context, key factors include the size of the business, its scope, and its overall preparedness to embrace specific innovations or actions, such as promotional activities. As previously mentioned, many MSMEs are hesitant to engage in business promotion, primarily due to a lack of knowledge and financial resources (Al Hadwer et al., 2021).

However, despite this phenomenon, some micro and small businesses still show willingness to adopt promotions as part of their business. In a study conducted by Todorova and Zhelyazkov (2021), they stressed that the communication mix elements are a vital tool for every company and thus every organization should evaluate how to use and benefit from them in the greatest way possible for the company. Most importantly, it is crucial for manufacturers and merchants in terms of sales success, creating awareness of their products, and retaining customers (Nguyen, 2019). That is to say, the use of a particular promotional activity is therefore not the end-user's decision, rather that of the organization and its surrounding pressures.

2.1.3 Environmental

The theory posits that, on the aspect of environment, there are external antecedents such as consumer readiness, competitive pressure and government policies which influences the adoption of a promotional activity (Noor et al, 2013). Companies are motivated by competition to find new

ways to inform their clients, not just to acquire market share, but also to maintain what they currently have. Companies get a competitive advantage and improve their efficiency by investing in promotional activities such as advertising, public relations, sales promotion, personal sales, and direct marketing (Todorova & Zhelyazkov, 2021).

Today, a lot of businesses have moved from conventional to digital based marketing (Ndekwa & Katunzi, 2016). That notwithstanding, government support is an environmental factor that plays a significant role in the adoption of innovations. Policies and regulations can motivate or discourage firms from embracing some promotional activities (Seethamraju, 2015).

Additionally, the issue of environmental uncertainties can facilitate or impede the use of technologies (Chong & Olesen, 2017). For instance, the current spike in the use of social media for e-businesses is the factor of COVID-19 pandemic, which fits into the environmental context. The norm of personal selling and word of mouth has reduced drastically and given way to electronic word of mouth and marketing (Nguyen, 2019). This means, these small and micro businesses will lag behind in business success if they do not adopt the latest technologies for their businesses and continue to use the traditional word of mouth (Seshadrinathan & Chandra, 2021).

2.2 Related Studies

2.2.1 SMEs and Promotion Strategies

Promotion is a way of communicating information between a business and a potential buyer in order to influence a desired behavior (Shekhar & Tilmo, 2017). Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) often face unique challenges when it comes to promotion strategies (Osano, 2019). These businesses, due to their limited budgets and resources, must be creative and strategic in their marketing efforts. SMEs may rely on digital marketing, social media, local advertising, and word-of-mouth to reach their target audience (Hossain et al., 2022; Osano, 2019). Furthermore,

they often prioritize building strong customer relationships and emphasizing the quality and uniqueness of their products or services. The ability of SMEs to adapt and tailor promotion strategies to their specific needs is a crucial factor in their success in the competitive business landscape (Hossain et al., 2022; Osano, 2019).

Moreover, SMEs benefit from their agility and ability to quickly respond to market changes and trends. This flexibility allows them to fine-tune their promotion strategies swiftly to remain relevant and competitive (Saura, 2021).

In today's digital age, SMEs can harness online platforms, e-commerce, and social media to extend their reach and engage with a wider audience. Cost-effective and highly targeted online advertising, content marketing, and email campaigns can be pivotal in promoting their offerings.

SMEs must also consider the local and regional context in which they operate (Malca et al., 2020). Tailoring promotion strategies to suit the preferences and demographics of their immediate market can be a key driver of success.

SMEs face unique challenges and opportunities in the realm of promotion strategies. Their nimbleness, adaptability, and creative approaches are essential for effectively reaching their audience and carving out a niche in the business world (Malca et al., 2020; Saura, 2021).

As technology continues to evolve, SMEs should stay informed about the latest marketing tools and trends. This includes the use of data analytics to better understand customer behavior and preferences, allowing for more precise targeting and personalized marketing strategies. Implementing customer relationship management (CRM) systems can help SMEs manage and nurture their customer base effectively (Pertuz & Pérez, 2021).

Customer reviews and testimonials play a vital role in promoting SMEs, as they build trust and credibility. Encouraging satisfied customers to share their experiences online can be a powerful,

low-cost promotion strategy (Malca et al., 2020; Pertuz & Pérez, 2021).

SMEs should not underestimate the importance of employee engagement and advocacy. When employees are passionate about their work and the company they represent, they can become valuable brand ambassadors, amplifying the reach of promotional efforts (Burhan et al., 2021; Pertuz & Pérez, 2021).

SMEs can thrive in the competitive business landscape by employing a combination of traditional and digital promotion strategies, fostering strong brand identity, leveraging community ties, and adapting to emerging technologies. Continuous learning and flexibility are key factors in their marketing success (Malca et al., 2020).

2.2.2 The Promotional Mix

The promotional mix (marketing communications) entails generally marketing communication tools such as advertising, public relations, sales promotion, personal selling, direct marketing and others. (Jasmani & Sunarsi, 2020) however argues that, the traditional promotion mix is but four only and they are advertising, sales promotion, personal selling and publicity. (Farantika et al., 2019) defines marketing communications as the strategies, tactics and activities employed to achieve a desired marketing goal. That is sending the right message to the targeted audience through the right medium or channel. The combination therefore of two or more of these marketing communication tools is called integrated marketing communication. According to (Jasmani & Sunarsi, 2020), integrated marketing communication, a process which is widely employed by most micro businesses, where there is an integration of the promotion mix to achieve business goals. However, (Farantika et al., 2019)opined that MSMEs use the concept of integrated marketing communications quite differently as compared to larger business entities, particularly due to their entrepreneurial skills. That notwithstanding, the promotion mix can be used to their fullest extent

as individual marketing communication tools.

Esposito (2013) opined that, managers and facilitators of micro businesses and other dimensions of enterprises tend to adapt the combination of marketing communication tools such as advertising and exhibitions in order to grasp market opportunities. Given the introduction of the web 2.0 as a platform for promotion, Rejonen and Laukanen (2010) assert that it is an efficient and effective tool for marketing communications.

Other promotional or marketing communication practices such as personal selling, internet presence were observed to have active engagements by these small businesses (Centeno & Hart, 2012). According to Hogarth-Scott et al (1996), one of the commonly used marketing communication practices is Word-of Mouth (WOM). Considering the bottlenecks micro businesses face, the WOM suits their situation just well. The managers of these micro and small businesses depend on their personal contacts. However, this form of promotion can be self-limiting (Stokes, 2000).

This finding was corroborated by Gabrielli and Balboni (2010) which showed that indeed, Small and Micro businesses rely on interpersonal and intra-personal relationships in order to promote their business.

The promotional mix is an integral part of a company's marketing strategy, encompassing various tools and techniques used to effectively engage the target audience (Jasmani & Sunarsi, 2020). These tools include advertising, which involves paid communication through media channels to raise awareness and interest in products or services, sales promotion through short-term tactics like discounts and contests, public relations activities to build a positive image and reputation, personal selling, direct marketing reaching out to customers directly through channels like email and online advertising, and digital marketing that utilizes online platforms like social media, content

marketing, and SEO to connect with the audience in the digital space (Jasmani & Sunarsi, 2020; Suryani & Syafarudin, 2021). The selection of elements in the promotional mix depends on factors such as the nature of the product, the target audience, the budget, and specific marketing objectives. Often, an integrated approach is used, combining multiple elements to create a cohesive promotional strategy that resonates with the audience and helps achieve the desired marketing goals (Jasmani & Sunarsi, 2020) .

The success of a promotional mix is measured by its ability to effectively reach and influence the target audience, while also contributing to the company's overall success in the market (Farantika et al., 2019). It's a dynamic aspect of marketing that evolves with changes in consumer behavior and technology, requiring businesses to remain agile and adapt their promotional mix to stay competitive in the ever-changing marketplace. By carefully selecting and integrating the right promotional elements, businesses can maximize their marketing efforts and achieve their desired outcomes (Farantika et al., 2019; Suryani & Syafarudin, 2021).

Businesses must also continuously evaluate the effectiveness of their promotional mix to ensure it aligns with their evolving marketing objectives. This evaluation includes tracking key performance indicators, monitoring customer responses, and analyzing market trends (Amankwah & Asare, 2019). As consumer behaviors change and new technologies emerge, it's essential for companies to remain flexible and adjust their promotional strategies accordingly to maintain their competitiveness and reach their target audience. In this way, the promotional mix remains a dynamic and integral part of marketing efforts, playing a significant role in a company's overall success in the marketplace (Amankwah & Asare, 2019; Jasmani & Sunarsi, 2020).

2.3 Research Gaps

In Ghana's shea butter business, there exists a noticeable research gap that presents both challenges and opportunities (Mensa, 2022; Sikpaam et al., 2019). Despite the prominence of the shea butter

industry in Ghana, limited comprehensive research has been conducted in various critical areas.

Value Chain Analysis: While there is a growing awareness of the importance of the shea butter value chain, in-depth studies on the entire value chain from production to export are relatively scarce (Naangmenyele et al., 2023; Sualihu, 2019). Research gaps exist in understanding the nuances of each stage, identifying inefficiencies, and exploring ways to improve value chain integration and efficiency (Alhassan, 2020; Mensa, 2022).

Market Development: There is room for more research on exploring new market opportunities and expanding the global reach of Ghana's shea butter (Mensa, 2022; Tanzile et al., 2023). Understanding consumer preferences, market trends, and export potential in different regions could help Ghanaian shea butter producers tap into emerging markets.

Market linkages in the shea butter industry play a crucial role in connecting producers to consumers and expanding the reach of shea butter products (Abdullahi & Baba, 2020). These linkages involve various intermediaries, stakeholders, and marketing channels that facilitate the flow of shea butter from its source to end-users. Market linkages provide several key benefits:

Access to Wider Markets: Market linkages enable shea butter producers to access regional, national, and even international markets, expanding their customer base and increasing sales opportunities (Abdullahi & Baba, 2020; Opoku–Mensah, 2023).

Quality Assurance: Intermediaries and organizations involved in market linkages often provide training and resources to ensure shea butter products meet quality standards and customer expectations (Abidemi & Hamilton-Amachree, 2021).

Price Stabilization: Market linkages can help stabilize shea butter prices by connecting producers with buyers and creating a more competitive marketplace (Abidemi & Hamilton-Amachree, 2021;

Oso et al., 2022).

Information Exchange: Producers can benefit from market information, such as market trends, pricing, and consumer preferences, which helps them make informed decisions about production and marketing strategies (Opoku–Mensah, 2023; Oso et al., 2022).

Sustainability: Market linkages can encourage sustainable shea butter production practices by promoting environmental conservation and responsible sourcing (Abidemi & Hamilton-Amachree, 2021; Oso et al., 2022).

Market linkages are a vital component of the shea butter industry, fostering economic growth, promoting sustainable practices, and improving the livelihoods of those involved in the value chain. These linkages help bridge the gap between producers and consumers, facilitating a more efficient and profitable shea butter industry (Abidemi & Hamilton-Amachree, 2021; Oso et al., 2022).

Sustainability and Environmental Impact: Shea trees are integral to the industry, and research gaps exist in sustainable harvesting practices and environmental impact assessment (Mensa, 2022; Sikpaam et al., 2019; Tanzile et al., 2023). There is an opportunity to conduct more research on how to ensure the long-term viability of shea trees and minimize environmental degradation.

Quality Standards and Certification: Research on quality standards, certification processes, and compliance with international regulations for shea butter is essential for market access (Sikpaam et al., 2019; Tanzile et al., 2023). There is room to explore how Ghana's shea producers can meet global quality requirements and differentiate their products in international markets.

Also, most of the previous studies allow only mechanistic understanding of business promotion by MSMEs. Lots of research regarding promotion of business have focused on various products but little or no concern has been shown to Micro-Shea Butter especially one that is produced in the

northern part of Ghana where Shea Butter is produced the most. Few researches have carefully dwelled into promotional practices adopted by Northern Businesses who are into the Shea Butter Business.



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

The study is essentially an exploratory research and sought to examine the promotional practices among shea butter businesses in Northern Ghana. This chapter covers the methodology and strategies utilized to carry out the study to its logical conclusion (Rajasekar et al, 2006). It entails the sampling technique and size, data collection method and instrument, population, the unit of analysis and techniques of data analysis.

3.1 Empirical Setting

The study was specifically within the Tamale, Bolgatanga, Zebilla and Anateem areas within the Northern zone. Northern Ghana was chosen because the subject under study, which is shea butter business, is mainly operated within the rural areas of Northern Ghana due to its savannah ecological zone which is suitable for growth of the shea trees (UNDP, 2021).

3.2 Research Design

For this research, the qualitative research approach was adopted. Qualitative research is defined as “an interpretative approach, which attempts to gain insight into the specific meanings and behaviors experienced in a certain social phenomenon through the subjective experiences of the participants” (Cathryne & Amanda, 2006. P. 16). This implies the subjectivist or social constructivist paradigm as opined by Guba and Lincoln (1994). This is to say, the approach gives an opportunity to acquire in-depth knowledge, which is very intricate in exploratory researches like this, which cannot be gained by the alternative approach (Cropely, 2021). Additionally,

Johnson and Christine (2012) affirm that data gathered from qualitative research is best for factual and descriptive information. (p. 29-32). Since the unit of analysis for this study is the micro shea butter businesses, this approach was best to unify the purpose of the study and the participants' contribution (Lichtman, 2013. P.4).

3.3 Population

The study focused on micro shea butter business owners located in Ghana's Northern Region and Upper East Region. These two regions were selected because they are endowed with lots of shea trees and it shares boundaries with other regions like savannah Region and North East regions to the Northern Region and Upper West Region to Upper East Region within the zone which allows for inflow of shea products like nuts. The unit of analysis for this study is the micro shea butter business.

3.4 Sampling

This study employed the purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique. According to Babbie (2014), purposive sampling is a technique in which the units to be observed are selected on the basis of the researcher's judgment about which ones will be the most useful or representative" (p. 200). This sampling technique is also known as the judgmental or selective sampling (Sharma, 2017). In order to fulfill the needs of the study, this technique was adopted due to the knowledge or expertise the participants of the study are required to possess (Thornhill, Saunders & Lewis, 2009). The use of the purposive sampling technique was to help the researcher make the most out of the small population of interest as well as cut on cost and save time.

Additionally, by virtue of the knowledge, experience and location of the informants, who are shea butter business owners in Northern Ghana, the purposive sampling technique was the best technique for the study (Lewis & Sheppard, 2006).

Ten (10) micro shea butter businesses were sampled. They were; Hope Givers Enterprise, ABM, Titiaka Bosum Shea Centre, Maltiti Enterprise, Anateem Shea butter women group, Suglo Mboribuni Women's Group, Sabruka Shea Village, ZLB Enterprise, Mushada Shea Business and Hajia Saffy Enterprise. Participation was limited to businesses considered micro businesses, directly into the production and sales of the shea butter and also located within the northern sector of Ghana. This was ensured by using the screening questions to prove they were the right fit of participants for the research (Brace, 2008).

3.5 Data Collection Instrument

Data was collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions are both qualitative data collection tools. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide. This choice of data gathering tool is to allow follow-up questions when new issues emerge (Newing et al, 2011). The instruments comprised questions exploring the participants' thoughts about business promotion, their current business promotion activities. As well as the organizational, technological and environmental factors that drive their use of such activities.

3.6 Data Collection Procedure

Data was collected via in-person and phone calls. Prior to the interview and discussion however, there were preparatory visits to schedule for the day and time of their choosing for the interview and or discussion.

To avoid data contamination and or sampling bias, respondents and participants were screened using the screening questions before advancing into the interview and discussion. The main criterion for partaking in the interview or focus group discussion, was to be a shea butter businesses

owner or part of a group of shea butter business operators respectively in the Northern part of Ghana. With consent from research participants, all interviews that were conducted with the ten participants were recorded and later transcribed. Additionally, hand notes were taken to support the recordings. The interviews were conducted in both English, Dagbani and Gurune. The ones in Dagbani and Gurune were first translated and then transcribed.

3.7 Data Analysis

A thematic analysis technique was adopted. Thematic analysis is “a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insights into, patterns of meaning (themes) across a dataset” (Braun & Clark, 2012, p. 2). The transcripts were coded using the inductive coding style where codes are specifically derived from responses of participants. This means, all codes came directly from the research content (Braun & Clark, 2012).

A six-step procedure as adopted by Terry (2016) was used in the analytical process. The process commenced by familiarizing with the data gathered. The next step was to read the transcript, develop initial codes and identify themes through patterns that may emerge. The identified themes were then labeled and categorized. After which, the report was written. Findings were discussed bearing in mind the research questions, theory which underpins the study and other related studies that were reviewed.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

The study was guided by ethical considerations such as consent, anonymity, confidentiality and voluntariness and respects of the participants’ right to withdraw at any time. The purpose for the study was explained to the participants. They were further assured about the interview being used strictly for academic purposes.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

The research sought to explore the promotional practices employed by micro shea butter businesses in Northern Ghana. This chapter presents the findings from the study. The study adopted the qualitative research approach. The data collected was through in-depth interviews granted by ten (10) shea butter businesses and women groups and presented in themes which emanated from the analysis.

The overarching objective of the study was to explore the promotional practices adopted by micro shea butter businesses in Northern Ghana and to explore the benefits they may pose to the growth of the sector. To that effect, talking to people who are directly involved in the running of shea butter micro enterprises in Northern Ghana was of the essence. The selected interviewees were individual shea butter business owners, women groups and cooperatives who deal with the production and of shea butter and its related value-added products.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Participants of the focus group discussion were labeled as P1 (Participant 1), P2 (Participant 2), P3 (Participant 3) and P4 (Participant 4) and the interviews were labeled as R1 (Respondent 1), R2 (Respondent 2), R3 (Respondent 3), R4 (Respondent 4), R5 (Respondents 5), R6 (Respondent 6), R7 (Respondent 7), R8 (Respondent 8) and R9 (Respondent 9). This was done to ensure anonymity.

4.1. Motivations for adopting business promotion

In this section, the respondents' answers provided were about their motivations for promoting their businesses. As any business would, there is a defined roadmap or aspiration that leads the business

to take some decisions and these micro shea butter businesses owners in Northern Ghana were quick to share what their goals and motivations are. According to the data, a drive to reach a larger market, impact society, brand themselves as well as operate within standard measures is the key factor that motivates the shea micro businesses to promote their offerings.

4.1.1. Reaching larger markets

The study found that, primarily, the business owners deploy business promotion as a means to expand their markets. As explained by R9, she promotes her business to ensure that the money she is “investing is coming back bigger and our customers are increasing”. The targets for this expanded market reach is not limited to the local Ghanaian market however as expressed by R1 and R6 below, who appear to be guided in their business promotion practices by a quest to expand their markets:

For now, we have moved far. But we are still trying to be able to climb higher than where we have gotten to... But still with that we need to errh, our goals we are still thinking of reaching the other countries. (R1, Interviewed on 27th January, 2022)

And also get customers outside the country. You know these whites like our shea butter. So, I am still working on getting the necessary knowledge on exporting and all that. (R6, Interviewed on 8th February, 2022)

It appeared that the micro shea business owners are highly conscious of the prospects of business promotion as regards expanding their businesses. This, they view as a means to increase their incomes as well.

4.1.2. Standardized Operations

Linked to the desire for market expansion, business owners have recognized that their promotional activities encourage them to standardize their offerings, aiming to increase their appeal. These micro shea butter business owners identified obtaining certification, adhering to quality standards, and meeting customer demands as their primary motivations for self-promotion

According to R2, after almost 18 years of shea butter business operations, she is still looking to meet international standards and become a leading brand. She explains that *“we are positioning ourselves to the point where we can meet the international quality standards. The major goal is that we want to be the leading quality shea butter producer in Africa.”* (R2, Interviewed on 3rd February, 2022)

R1 explained that, *“we want to be able to get all the necessary certificates to enable us to serve all types of customers from different parts of the world.”* (R1, Interviewed on 27th January, 2022)

4.1.3. Social Impact

Another motivation for the use of promotional tools appears to be the opportunity to affect lives. The quest for empowerment, job creation and reduction in female migration are all factors that motivate the business practices. For R7, the motivation for promoting the business was to ensure the young girls within her community stopped migrating to bigger cities for non-existent jobs. She said:

I started it as a tool to fight against female migration from our communities to the southern part of the country. You know they think there are better opportunities for them there and today we are proud to say that today we can boast of about a 1000 of them earning a decent living. (R7, Interviewed on 8th February, 2022)

Also, R6 stated that *“by the end of this year I want to be able to add more women groups in the*

shea butter making process". This was re-echoed by R5 who explains his motivation for seeking to grow his business through promotion as:

The aim is to give our women, the women of Doba, a better living condition. You know, these women have been making this nice shea butter for ages but don't enjoy the real impact. Meanwhile, shea butter is gold. Yes. It's gold and we need to bring these women close to the wealth their hands generate. (R5, Interviewed on 5th February, 2022).

4.1.4. Business Competition

Interviewees highlighted that they face competition from other shea butter businesses and must adapt to the tools and trends prevalent within a specific period

R7 for instance said:

... As a business woman, I definitely observe what happens around me, trends, what other businesses are doing that are working or failing, and then, you know, guide myself. Sometimes they backfire other times they work. So, it is quite difficult identifying what competitor to draw ideas from when using the promotional activities. (R7, Interviewed on 8th February, 2022).

Besides, R6 also indicated that as a business-oriented person, moving with the trend is a necessity to stay in business. She had this to say:

Maybe other businesses and how they operate sometimes pushes me. No, not sometimes. It has pushed already. Deciding to do this recent social media paid advert had environmental influence too. See if you don't do it, your customers can shift to your competitors. So, yhh. It is quite a challenge to us. (R6, Interviewed on 8th February, 2022).

4.1.5 Business Size

Generally, larger businesses are seen to easily adopt promotional tools as compared to smaller ones. For some of the interviewees, the size of their dependents and employees and customers plays an important role in deciding the promotional tools to be employed. As indicated by one of the interviewees, the number of women groups in her business influences her to employ tools that bring her wider reach and better results which is increased sales. This, according to her, will enable them to get paid.

Furthermore, during the focus group discussion, a participant explained that their selection of promotional tools is tailored to their specific market, which is located in Anateem

Explaining that, upon financial and resource increase, they may employ other promotional tools like advertising.

Right now we don't have a shop where we will sit and do the shea butter. We don't have the money to make a lot of shea butter so we don't want to rush and use social media because we cannot supply big orders. uhuh! Maybe when we are able to get more money to increase, we will use the advertising and the social media things. (P4, Discussed on 21st January, 2022)

4.1.6 Level of Expertise

Knowledge is essential to properly operate in any line of activity or business. In fact, the shea butter making process itself is one that needs constructive and comprehensive know-how as has been transferred from several generations.

Hence, it is not surprising that some study participants mentioned avoiding certain promotional tools, like advertising, due to their lack of familiarity. Micro shea butter businesses tend to gravitate toward tools they are comfortable using, which also tend to be less troublesome. For instance, R1

stated, *'Using exhibitions and word-of-mouth to promote my business is easier and more cost-effective than dealing with media services, as I lack the expertise.'* (Interview conducted on 3rd February 2022)

For some micro shea butter businesses, the need to personally operate these tools is unnecessary, as they have individuals with the requisite knowledge and skills to manage this aspect of their business. As one participant, R2, explained:

'I'm not proficient in English. My primary role is to ensure timely production and sales of the shea butter. My husband and son are responsible for promotional activities, particularly my son, who is adept at online marketing and photography. So, I'm not concerned about it.' (R2, Interviewed on 3rd February 2022).

4.2 Promotional practices employed by micro scale shea butter businesses in Northern Ghana?

All the components of the promotional mix play distinct roles, each with its own set of advantages and disadvantages. Some businesses successfully strike a balance and engage in integrated marketing communications, utilizing multiple tools. According to the Chartered Institute of Marketing (2004), a single promotional tool often lacks effectiveness in isolation. Therefore, it's no surprise that all the respondents in this study employed a combination of promotional tools

In this section, we present the data collected from micro-scale shea butter business owners on their actual promotional strategies.

Four primary promotional tools emerged as being used in combination: Advertising, Public Relations/Publicity, Personal Selling, and Word-of-Mouth Promotion. Notably, all respondents mentioned social media as one of the channels they use in their promotional activities."

4.2.1. Advertising

Advertising especially, social media using Facebook and Instagram was the most used channel. For instance, businesses such as R1 and R6 engaged mainly in online advertisement. When R6 was asked what she does to promote her business, she said “...*I run paid adverts on Instagram.*”

Also, R1 indicated that:

...we advertise our business. As I said, through the media, Facebook, WhatsApp, and some of our friends outside the country tell their friends too about the business and advertise us on their pages.

(R1, 27th February, 2022)

While there's a lot of excitement around social media advertising, some businesses still prefer traditional advertising. Studies suggest that traditional advertising can be highly effective in building brand awareness and recognition (American Marketing Association, 2018).

Interestingly, some respondents aim to leverage the strengths of both traditional and online advertising, leading to the concept of integrated marketing communications (IMC). This approach was endorsed by R2 and R3, who opted to use both traditional and social media for their advertising efforts

In explaining what tools, she uses, R2 said:

So, we do advertise through radio, through television, and oflate we're now using social media to also advertise the products. Like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and Instagram. Advertising our things has really helped our business. (R2, Interviewed on 3rd February, 2022).

In addition, R3 also confirmed that “*apart from social media, we did some advert, when we started, we did some radio advertisement.*” (R3, Interviewed on 3rd February, 2022)

Conversely, R8 exclusively relies on social media advertising. He emphasized that traditional advertising isn't a primary promotional tool for his business He said,

“Advertising de, I don't use it like that. Who has that kind of money? It needs lots of money so if I want to advertise, I give money for them to do it on our Facebook page. It's better than the TV and the radio, you see” (R8, Interviewed on 10th February, 2022)

Apart from these, for some respondents, the purpose of employing advertising is to be able to build a brand for themselves. According to these micro shea butter business owners, brand recognition, brand growth, sustainability and product extension is how they came to adopt the promotional tools. They believe it gets their businesses and brands to be unique and recognized. As explained by R8, *“at this point we just want to sustain our customers buying from us and maintain our image and make more profit.”*

Furthermore, R7 shared the goal of being a recognized brand. She said:

We are also looking forward to being able to be recognized the world as the destination for premium shea butter. So, we are targeting the international market, countries like France, Canada and Switzerland. (R7, Interviewed on 8th February, 2022)

R5 explained that advertising helps elevate their brand competitiveness. He said that,

...we want to be able to get ourselves known as one of the best producers of quality butter in the Upper East Region and also to get a market base for our women and rub shoulders with the Northern butter. (R5, Interviewed on 5th February, 2022).

4.2.2. Public Relations/Publicity

Public relations as defined by the Institute of Public Relations is “the deliberate and planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization and its

public” Publicity on the other hand, is about new ideas or editorial comments about a business or product (American Marketing Association). There is a thin line between these two concepts that can sometimes get blurry for business owners. This is yet another important category identified in the responses from the interviewees. The use of social media posts, trade fairs and exhibitions, brochures and customer feedback emerged. For example, R9 stated that she engages in trade fairs and exhibitions. Since trade fairs are fairly cheaper or even sometimes free, micro businesses such as these shea butter businesses take advantage. As R4 said:

Yes. We do promote it. We always do exhibitions and Facebook. The exhibition is our best. Even some are always free. The Global Shea Alliance team usually organizes these exhibitions and so we just pay something small to register. Even the last time some NGOs organized some exhibition that was free kraa. (R4, Interviewed on 5th February, 2022).

Also, R5 spoke about using social media to publicize themselves alongside exhibitions. He said:

Right now as we speak, you can check our Facebook page and see for yourself. We post about what we do here and I also share some of our activities and products on my WhatsApp. But sometimes we go for exhibitions and they interview us and we say something small about ourselves. (R5, Interviewed on 5th February, 2022)

Along with, R2 said that:

We follow-up with the customers to really find out how they use the products. Based on that we're able to improve to meet their needs. (R2, Interviewed on 3rd February, 2022)

Some businesses employ brochures and business pitching as part of their promotional efforts. R7, for example, mentioned, 'We use advertising, distribute brochures at exhibits, and engage in publicity.'

As for R5, he shared, 'I am also involved in politics, so I occasionally pitch the business to influential

figures. You know, the high-ranking individuals. This way, they might invest, and when they or their associates require shea butter, they know we're here.' (R5, Interviewed on 5th February 2022)"

4.2.3. Personal Selling

Personal selling plays a critical role in establishing profitable relationships and ensuring post-purchase satisfaction (Mbogo, 2013). It became evident that personal selling is the predominant promotional tool among the sampled businesses. They consider it a traditional yet effective way of conducting business. Notably, some of the practices identified within this category include 'Roaming' and 'Shelving'

According to interviewees, they do personal selling every other day and it yields them great results. For other respondents, it is the only known way to sell their products. This face-to-face tactic is done by moving from one place to the other. i.e., offices, homes, events and others. For instance, R9 said: "...Also, we go round offices and NGOs to tell them what we offer." To cement the point, P3 explained that *"even sometimes, we can go to funeral occasions to inform them about our business and offer to supply them with the shea butter."*

Additionally, P4 said that,

We roam with the shea butter from house to house and sometimes go to the market with it. If we don't do that then the shea butter won't sell fast. (P4, Discussed on 21 January, 2022)

To conclude the discussion on the personal selling promotional tool, it is realized that other businesses choose to do a stationary form of personal selling by shelving their products and introducing it to customers as they walk in. *"We normally package some and take them to the market. We have some shops that we supply and they sell it for us."* R1 said.

4.2.4. Word-of-Mouth

A few of the businesses interviewed mentioned word-of-mouth as one of their practices adopted to promote their businesses and products. Business recommendations, reviews and referrals can affect the competitiveness of a business (Özgener & Iraz, 2006). Satisfied customers tend to show more loyalty, become returning customers and also very generous in spreading word-of-mouth (Sim et al, 2006). This is a strategy some of the sampled businesses ride on. They confirmed that feedback from customers encouraged more purchases. As stated by P3. *“Even when they come to the house to buy and next time another person wants shea butter, the one who bought from us will show them.”* (P3, Discussed on 21 January, 2022).

It was emphasized by R8 that: *“So our customers also tell others about us. Even my friends do that for me.”* R4 also said that satisfied customers will always bring you more customers and that has been part of her strategy in running her shea butter business.

Additionally, responses from the interviewees show that this word-of-mouth stretches into online as well. The electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) is basically done electronically via SMS, social media and others. Under the scope of E-WOM, a respondent said that:

“...we tell our customers to leave us reviews on our social media handles. So, we use them to post again and it convinces people to buy from us. At times kraa, we can receive orders from customers that were referred to us by our existing customers.” (R2, Interviewed on 3rd February, 2022).

Almost all the business owners employ word of mouth as a marketing strategy in order to promote their business and this is in line with (Farantika et al., 2019) when he asserted that most MSMEs employ networking, word-of-mouth and partnership development to promote and market their businesses

4.3 Benefits derived by micro shea butter business owners in Northern Ghana from business promotions

Promotional tools have been described by many researchers as essential for businesses. Some researchers believe promotion has a relationship with the performance of the business (Francis & Collins-Dodd, 2004) while others see it giving businesses a competitive edge (Van Scheers & Radipere 2008). The data gathered from these micro shea butter business owners from Northern Ghana indicated their positive understanding for the use of promotional tools as well as the related benefits they can derive from it. Themes such as Branding, Increased sales and demand, expansion of customer base and business development emerged as the perceived benefits of employing these promotional tools by these micro shea butter businesses.

4.3.1 Branding

Researchers such as Keller (2008) have pointed to brand awareness as being the basic knowledge of customers recalling or recognizing a brand. Branding plays an important role in several aspects of marketing. Brands are a force to reckon with in harnessing sustainable and profitable relationships with customers as compared to unbranded businesses. (De Chernatony, & Vallaster, 2005). Interviewees shared their point of view on promotions and how beneficial the practice is to their businesses. P3 of the focus group discussions explained benefits of promotion by stating that “*we get more buyers and business will expand*”. Another respondent established a similar point on how beneficial promotional activities are by saying:

“Yes. We do promote it. We have benefitted paa from these promotion things. See errh, first I started with Facebook and all, I wasn’t concentrating on Facebook like that. I was just telling my friends about my new business. But when I started adding effort to my Facebook posts and the exhibitions, ooh! I started seeing positive results.” (R4, Interviewed on 5th February, 2022).

For other businesses, promoting themselves has helped attain brand trust and recognition. R5 said that:

Promoting our business has really helped us. Now our name is known all around Doba, Bolga and most parts of the Upper East Region. Also, we are able to sell ourselves to customers around the world through our online presence. Because of it, people trust in us and always believe when they buy from us, they buy quality shea butter, which will also get to them wherever they are. And you know, all this has brought us more income. (R5, Interviewed on 5th February, 2022)

4.3.2. Increased sales & Demand

Selling is unarguably a core aspect of most businesses. In fact, it is a part of the promotional mix. Promotional activities are focused on the consumer to influence their purchasing behavior (Jasmani & Sunarsi, 2020). The themes identified in their responses were profit, high sales, and increased customer base/size. It emerged that promotional activities bring about increased sales and demand for products. Especially for R1 and R3 who started their businesses in 2017 and 2016 respectively, the use of promotional tools such as social media like Facebook and Instagram brings about an increase in the number of orders or purchases made.

The other respondents also pointed out an increase in customer base/size. When R7 was asked if she promoted her business and what benefits she gains from it, she said:

oh yes! Very important activity in my business. As we all know, if you start a business, you want people to buy. So, when we promote our business, we also get more people coming to buy because they have seen it. Promotion is benefitting us. (R7, Interviewed on 8th February, 2022)

For R9, promotion of her business brought in high sales and more customers. She said:

I do! I do promote my business. The business gets known by the people and eventually you get

more people talking about you. Also, with the going to offices like this, sometimes you will make so much sales in a day, you can't believe it. (R9, Interviewed on 13th February, 2022)

4.3.3. Business Development

This category encompasses the themes that represent the advantages of business promotion. Some of themes were business expansion, networking, attraction of investors, among others. For instance, R4 said:

So, I mean, promoting the business basically leads you to I mean, other organizations. For instance, I get people and NGOs will call me to and say "madam, I want you to come and do training for them" For some, I applied for it because of my expertise and skills. I did for MDS, entrepreneurial trainings and others. So, the connection is helpful. (R4, Interviewed on 5th February, 2022)

R7 also said that:

Oh, business promotion, I mean it brings us investors, sometimes people will call you, "arrh madam, there's this agribusiness competition here, there is this opportunity here, there is this here" so we go in for it. So apart from the daily market, there are other opportunities. There are trainings, we see, somebody sent me a flyer for a competition. We picked it up, we applied and fortunately there are giving us, after training, some two weeks training, they are giving us lots of equipment. So, I mean, those are the opportunities. (R7, Interviewed on 8th February, 2022)

4.4 Challenges micro shea butter businesses face in trying to promote their businesses

All businesses, especially growing ones, face numerous challenges and these micro shea butter businesses are not exempted. This section seeks to unravel the hurdles they face and how they deal with them in their quest to promote their businesses. From the data gathered, financial constraints/ resources, high cost of media space and competition, emerged as themes. However, all the

participants except R8 argued that they haven't experienced any failed promotional activity.

4.4.2. Resource Limitation/Financial Constraints

Micro businesses tend to face a lot of challenges in their operations. As an organizational factor, it certainly does have an effect on the choices being made in all aspects of the business including promotional tools. It has been asserted that micro and small businesses shun promotions due to lack of skills or resources (Verhee & Muhlenberg, 2004) As stated by R3:

We are a very small social enterprise and so we try to use only the tools that we can afford, but also, trying to use a bit of everything within our capability. You know, nowadays, one thing is not enough oooh. We pray we get bigger so we can use suitable tools. (R3, Interviewed on 3rd February, 2022).

Also, R4 had this to say when asked about her challenges. She said:

...You see erh, if our business was bigger, we would have done radio and TV promotions oo. You know, the adverts these big big companies do. But now, we are not there yet so we do what we can like the social media and exhibitions. Also, I just randomly tell my colleagues to tell their friends too. So sometimes people come and say, oh this my friend said you sell shea butter and I want to buy some. Even though the knowledge can influence, not like the business size. You can have enough knowledge about something but can't do it. Especially in business. (R4, Interviewed on 5th February, 2022).

Furthermore, some respondents explained that the issue of finance is a grave challenge in choosing their promotional tools. They added that, when a business chooses promotional tools, they consider their finances as well and not only the effectiveness of the tool. Their responses showed codes such as poverty and financial challenges. As said by one of the participants of the focus group discussion, P2 said:

You see, we could even use TV or radio station to announce about our business oo. Hmm. But the money. The money to do it or even meet demands that may arise after the announcement is not there. (P2, Discussed on 21st January, 2022)

R8 explained that the issue of finances has made him inclined towards exhibitions and trade fairs which has yielded results, considering that, *“Nowadays, everything is money. Sometimes even the exhibition, you will pay registration fee or pay for them to give you a stall to showcase your shea butter products but it’s still better than the advertising things. With this one, [exhibition] when you pay, you know you will get something more for sure. People will always come. Especially the white men and the big companies.”* (R8, Interviewed on 10th February, 2022).

More to the point, participants expressed worry on how these financial and resource hurdles not only affect their choice to promote but also their capacity to produce to suit the possible increase in demand that comes with the business or product promotion. P1 said that,

To be honest, all these things you have said, it affects the business and our choice of promotional mix. See, we are small and we are poor. The best we can produce as a group is 2 basins of shea butter, which is shared amongst the four of us. What can we do with two basins of shea butter aside selling to our neighbors and at the marketplace? Even now, I am the only one who uses a WhatsApp phone. We can snap our shea butter and put it on WhatsApp. If people see, especially these foreigners, they will order for plenty, but we don’t have the money to supply high demands. So, we don’t want to even use that WhatsApp thing.” (P1, Discussed on 21st January, 2022)

The responses from participants therefore proves the extent to which the factor of finances and resources affects their choice of promotional activities, hence *“...because of financial constraints we cannot do all the promotions we want to do,”* said R1.

Another significant obstacle noted in the adoption of promotional tools, particularly due to limited

resources, is the high cost associated with media airtime and advertising spaces. Respondents highlighted that the expense involved in can be a barrier preventing some businesses from promoting themselves. Notably, promotional tools such as advertising, interviewees specifically mentioned the high costs associated with television advertising

They therefore employ other affordable and cost-effective promotional channels like social media and exhibitions. A respondent said that,

So, because of financial constraints we cannot do all the promotions we want to do. There was a time like this, we wanted to advertise our products on Joy TV and the amount they were billing was too much. That is why we have stuck to our exhibitions and social media.

(R1, Interviewed on 27th February, 2022),

R6 had this to say:

I mean as a little business like mine, you cannot get up and start thinking of television adverts and all that. But I do think of it, I'm just not there yet. It's just too expensive for my business at this stage. (R6, Interviewed on 8th February, 2022)

4.4.2 Difficulty of Use

The success of businesses, whether large or small, is closely tied to their marketing strategies and, by extension, the effectiveness of their promotional tools. Micro and small businesses, in particular, can struggle with growth due to a lack of marketing expertise, a challenge faced by some micro shea butter businesses in northern Ghana. The findings revealed that micro shea butter businesses, at times, encounter difficulties in using certain promotional tools because of their perceived complexity. As one respondent, who fulfills multiple roles including business owner and marketer,

pointed out, this juggling act can be exhausting, making it challenging to utilize some of the promotional tools due to their intricacies. she said:

Content creation is not easy oo. and you know the way advertising on facebook, instagram and the rest can be. You have to learn the times to post, and even choosing between pictures and videos. Even though I have extensive knowledge in marketing, and promoting your business on social media, its not a joke. i tell you, it is difficult. especially for one man show like mine, where aside the women who produce the butter, I act as the business owner, the person to attend to calls and requests, and now come and promote it. But the trends are going there and i have to be there too.

(R6, Interviewed on 8th February, 2022)



CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

The goal of this study was to explore the promotional practices employed by micro shea butter businesses in Northern Ghana. The first objective was to document the state of practice of business promotion among micro shea butter businesses in Northern Ghana. Secondly, the study sought to explore the contextual factors that lead micro shea butter businesses in Northern Ghana to promote their business and finally to examine the benefits derived from business promotion as well as the challenges that come with it.

This chapter therefore presents a discussion of the findings of the study organized around the study objectives, literature review and theoretical underpinnings of the study. This was done to ensure the significance of the findings. The latter part of the chapter offers conclusions, recommendations based on the study's outcomes, and identifies areas for future research.

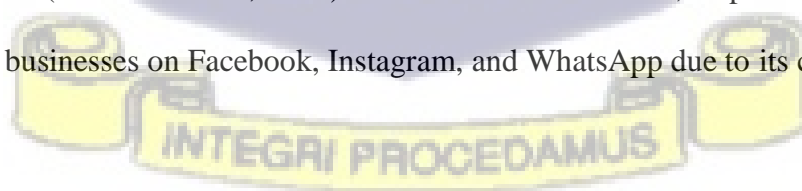
The state of practice of business promotion among micro shea butter businesses in Northern Ghana. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2016) promotional practices entail the combination of all business activities undertaken to inform a target market about a business' products influence potential customers to purchase their products and also create awareness regarding their businesses. The findings demonstrate that micro shea butter businesses are conscious of business promotional practices and thus incorporate them into their businesses in one way or the other. Per the findings of the study, a significant majority of the respondents knew what promotional practices are. However, some believed promotional practices were only about advertising and thus

were quick to use advertising and promotion interchangeably. This result is consistent with the findings from Milano (2019) which showed that smallest and micro businesses lump up advertising and promotion together.

Whereas studies conducted by Adegbuyi (2011) and Tsikirayi et al. (2013) illustrated that MSMEs do not pay attention to promotional practices, responses from the in-depth interviews showed that micro shea butter businesses tend to use four main promotional tools i.e., Personal Selling, Advertising, Public Relations and Word-of-Mouth. All these have been cited by other studies as promotional practices adopted by MSMEs. For instance, Esposito (2013) discovered that managers and facilitators of micro businesses tend to adapt the combination of promotional tools such as advertising and exhibitions in order to grasp market opportunities. Thus, they employ integrated marketing communications as indicated by Polyorat (2014), a process which is widely employed by most micro businesses. However, the findings partially negate that of Adegbuyi (2011) and Tsikirayi et al. (2013) considering a significant majority of the respondents are conscious of promotional tools and their benefits as well actively engaged in their use.

Besides these main promotional tools, some respondents mentioned the use of social media as the main channel for promotion of their businesses.

Social media has been acknowledged as an effective tool for promoting businesses, particularly small and micro businesses (Farantika et al., 2019) From the interviews held, respondents confirmed that they promote their businesses on Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp due to its cost efficiency.



5.2. Contextual Factors driving micro shea butter businesses in Northern Ghana to promote their business and products

Beyond documenting the state of practice of business promotion among micro shea butter businesses in Northern Ghana, the study sought to explore the contextual factors that lead micro shea butter businesses in Northern Ghana to promote their business. As suggested by the TOE model, there are three main factors with corresponding antecedents that plays a role in the choice of tools employed. I.e., Technological, Organizational and Environmental factors. By analyzing the responses gathered from the in-depth interviews, the responses have been categorized under the above-mentioned factors taking into consideration their respective antecedents.

5.3.1 Technology

In the context of technology, several interviewees have demonstrated a significant understanding of the promotional tools they use and the associated technological requirements. As emphasized by Noor et al. (2016), expertise, infrastructure, and business know-how are key factors influencing the technological dimension. Nonetheless, some of the interviewees showed that they are not particularly concerned about the expertise needed to use a chosen promotional tool as much as they are concerned about the resources needed to enable them to enjoy the benefits of the tool. However, other respondents referred to the level of expertise they have as a motivation to choosing or shunning a particular promotional tool and others mentioned the perceived difficulty of use of the tools as one of the challenges.

This is consistent with the findings of Chong and Olesen (2017) which asserted that, the relative advantage of a promotional tool influences its adoption as well as corroborated by the contribution of Noor (2016) which asserts that expertise, know-how and infrastructure are the three antecedents

of the technological factor. In fact, some respondents, do not undertake the promotion themselves. Especially with regard to social media, they employ the services of others.

5.3.2 Organization

Based on the findings from the study, it was realized that, micro shea butter businesses in northern Ghana consider the size of their businesses and market scope, the readiness of the business and other organizational related matters. From the interviews conducted, it was observed that certain micro shea butter businesses avoid specific promotional tools because they, as organizations, are not prepared to meet the demands associated with using tools like radio and television advertising, or even WhatsApp

Others embraced the tools because they gave them the needed platform to reach their target market. A participant said social media advertising reaches the clients she needs considering she doesn't operate a physical shop where her clients can shop from. This partially negates the assertion of Todorova and Zhelyazkov (2021) who think that the choice of innovation is not the end user's decision but that of the organization and its surrounding pressures. It is evident that micro shea butter businesses actually consider the end user, who in their case is the buyer of the shea butter, when adopting a promotional tool.

5.3.3 Environment

In the context of environmental factors, the study's respondents identified various elements that served as antecedents in this category, Except for the participants of the focus group discussion, all the nine other interviewees mentioned using social media because of the mass interest in the use of the said medium by almost everyone. This means that they need to be on the platform where their competitors and potential customers are.

A participant shared that, being absent from social media means you will be missing out on a lot of opportunities as a business person. The finding is consistent with Ndekwa and Katunzi (2016) who reported that most businesses have moved onto the digital space. The internet space is now the go-to option.

Additionally, most of the micro shea butter businesses used public relations and publicity tools through exhibition platforms opportunities created by initiatives such as The Global Shea Alliance (GSA) and other International organizations.

5.3 Benefits and Challenges of Business Promotion

The benefits of promotional tools are based on how well it affects specific parts of the business and thus, a crucial component in communicating the advantages of a business's product or service to customers or clients is promotion. The adoption of effective promotion plans comes with relative business success and these micro shea butter businesses in northern Ghana shared exactly what they stand to gain, having employed these promotional tools.

To start with, all respondents in the study reported that promotional practices bring significant benefits to their businesses. The findings of the study indicated micro shea butter business owners are indeed conscious of the benefits of promotional practices such as expansion of customer base and business, creation of awareness and increased sales and market orders as well as boosting client relationships. This is supported by the findings of Gabrielli and Balboni (2010) which showed that tools with the phenomenon of promotional practices are essential for MSMEs as they come with numerous benefits. Promotion of business by women in the north is mainly to ensure that the invested money is retrieved and to retain and grow their

customer base. This is consistent with Todorova and Zhelyazkov (2021) in whose finding stated that the use of promotional tools is to boost the business by increasing sales and retaining clients.

However, no matter how significant the benefits are, adoption is useless to the business if the proportionate benefits cannot be achieved because of lack of funding. Cost, especially in the case of advertising, is a significant obstacle for many businesses when it comes to initiating advertising and other promotional activities, and micro shea butter businesses are no exception. Respondents perceive advertising as costly and often requiring skilled personnel to manage the tool. This sentiment aligns with Milano's (2019) assertion that people tend to associate advertisements with large corporations.

Ogechuku and Latinwo (2010) also asserted that most small businesses believe advertising is reserved for the bigger companies. This therefore has made these micro shea butter businesses shy away from using advertising to promote their business. Additionally, they considered some promotional tools difficult to adopt and this posed a challenge to them and their businesses.

5.4 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the promotional practices of micro shea butter businesses in Northern Ghana as well as their motivations and challenges in the adoption of these practices. The results of this study demonstrate that micro shea butter businesses in northern Ghana do practice promotional activities since all the businesses represented in the study employ two or more of the promotion mix.

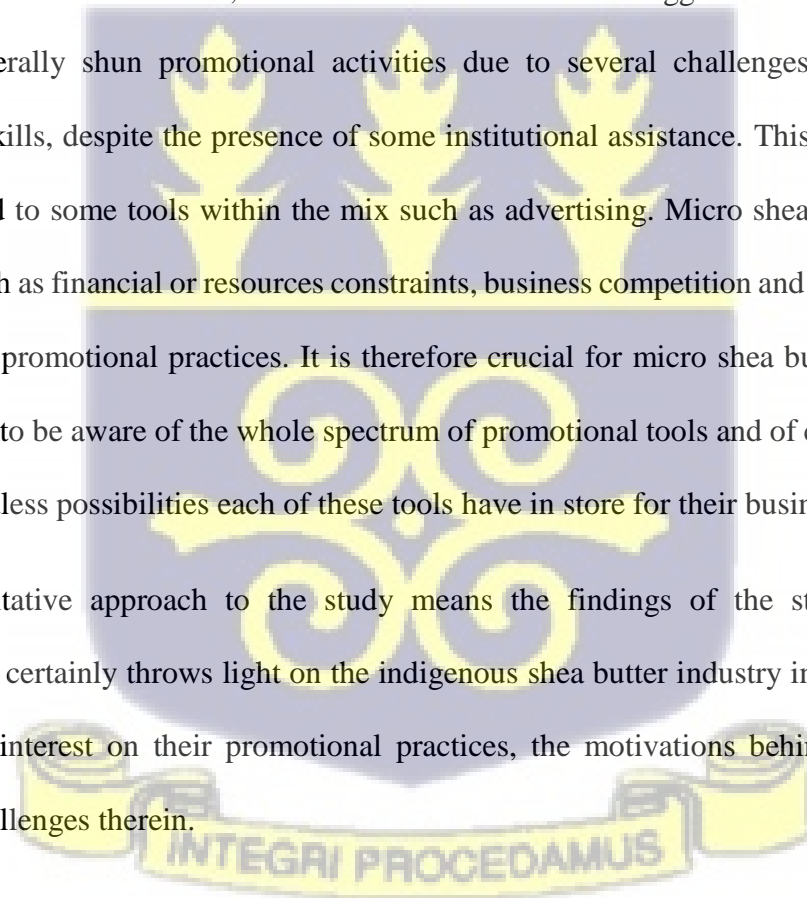
Aside from that, the findings show that, these businesses adopt promotion tools like personal selling, public relations and publicity, word-of-mouth and advertising. The results show that micro shea butter businesses in Northern Ghana adopt some form of Integrated Marketing

Communication (IMC) by employing more than one promotional tool at a time. This they believe gives them a better shot at achieving their goals than sticking to one tool or type of message.

Regarding the findings for research question three, it was revealed that micro shea butter businesses in Northern Ghana recognize and enjoy various benefits of promotional tools when incorporating integrated marketing communications (IMC). These benefits include branding, increased sales, and business development.

Lastly, although it appears micro shea butter businesses in Northern Ghana are aware of the importance of promotional tools and using them to the best of their ability, there are still challenges with the implementation. In fact, literature on related studies suggests that micro and small enterprises generally shun promotional activities due to several challenges such as lack of resources and skills, despite the presence of some institutional assistance. This appears to be the case with regard to some tools within the mix such as advertising. Micro shea butter businesses face hurdles such as financial or resources constraints, business competition and expertise in trying to imbibe these promotional practices. It is therefore crucial for micro shea butter businesses in northern Ghana to be aware of the whole spectrum of promotional tools and of course to carefully examine the endless possibilities each of these tools have in store for their businesses.

while the qualitative approach to the study means the findings of the study may not be generalizable, it certainly throws light on the indigenous shea butter industry in Northern Ghana, with particular interest on their promotional practices, the motivations behind as well as the benefits and challenges therein.



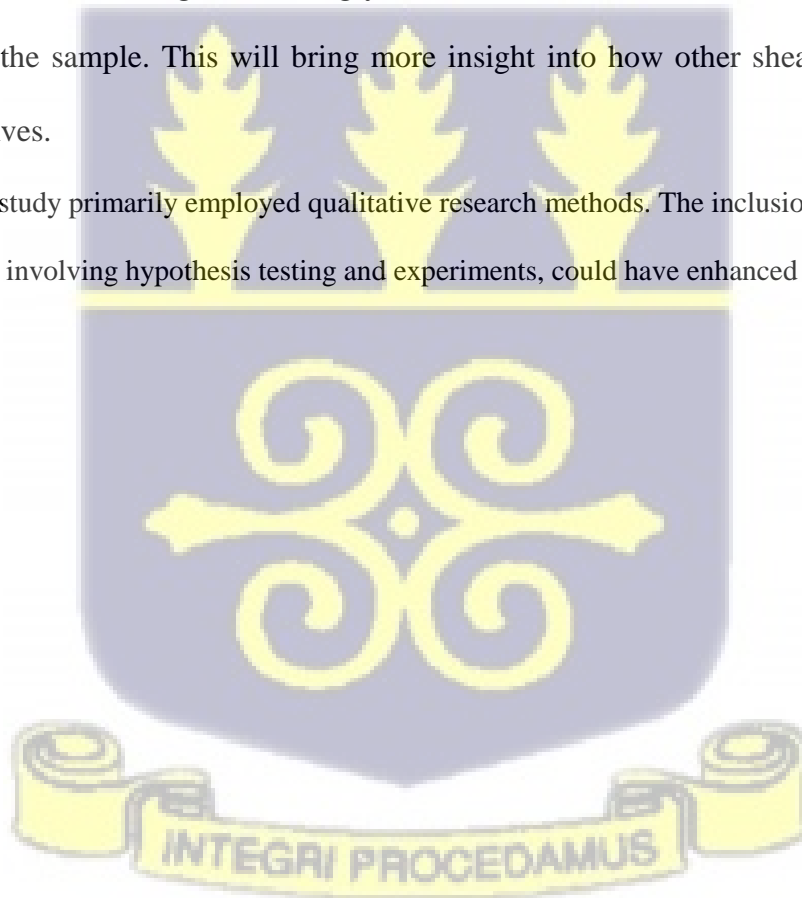
5.5 Limitations of study and recommendations for future studies

A number of limitations were faced in conducting this study. The first limitation was the issue of time.

The research was constrained by a limited time frame, which prevented an in-depth exploration of other businesses within the empirical setting. Although micro shea butter businesses from various regions of northern Ghana were part of the study, the sample size was relatively small due to time limitations.

The study focused on just 10 micro shea butter businesses in Northern Ghana, hence, making it impossible to generalize findings. Accordingly, it is recommended therefore, that future researchers should increase the sample. This will bring more insight into how other shea butter businesses promote themselves.

Furthermore, this study primarily employed qualitative research methods. The inclusion of quantitative research methods, involving hypothesis testing and experiments, could have enhanced the findings



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