

SMOLLAN

How technology is unlocking informal sector growth in Africa and India

THE NEW INFORMAL

Insights Report from Smollan in partnership with Trade Intelligence



A GIANT AWAKENS

Around the developing world, informal retail continues to be a powerful social force, employing millions of people who might otherwise not have jobs, driving economic activity in spaces that formal business has not penetrated, and providing essential goods and services for the under-served.

According to Euromonitor International (Tawi, 2022), informal retailing involves trade conducted by unregistered or unlicensed retailers, who typically do not report their revenue to tax authorities. These retailers may operate as street hawkers, open market stalls, or informal shops, with trading space that ranges from as little as 1m² to 30m², depending on the setting. These retailers are generally located close to consumers, near transport routes and hubs, or in local communities.

This gives them a deep knowledge of their market, enabling them to stock customers' preferred brands and products, and even to offer credit to loyal customers.

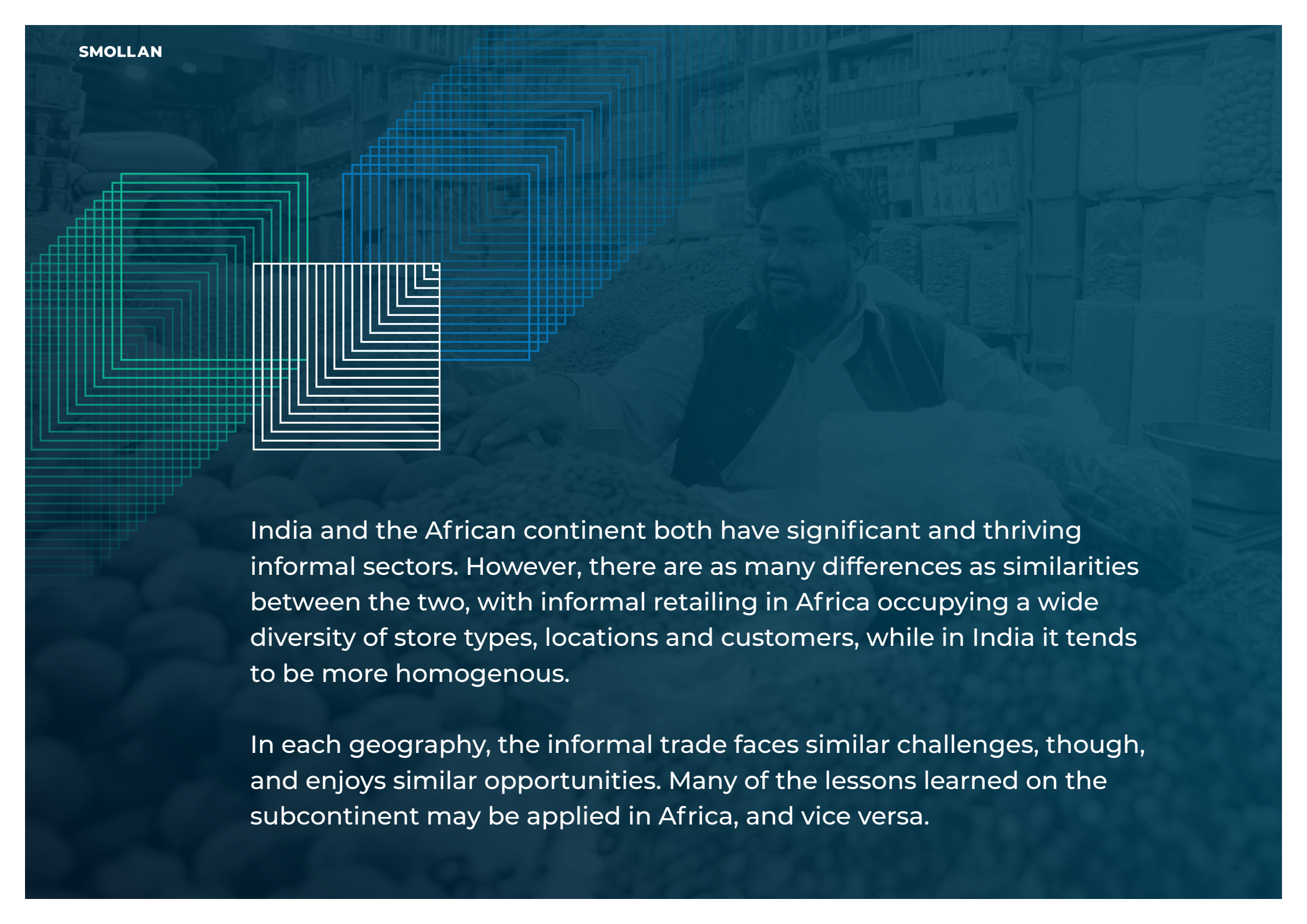
Why does Informal Retail continue to thrive?

In emerging markets, the informal sector has shown itself to be remarkably resilient, surviving economic disruption, the incursion of formal retail into its traditional markets, and more recently a global pandemic.

One of the reasons for this is the adaptability and resilience of informal retail, stemming from the challenging conditions in which it has evolved. Another is its ability to innovate by adopting new tools and new ways of doing business – so it is proving with mobile internet and other technologies: informal retailers around the world are finding uses for these to reach their customers more effectively, while suppliers and wholesalers are using them to sell more effectively to the informal trade.



While technology is indeed disrupting the industry, this disruption is generally positive, providing more opportunities than challenges, and allowing informal retailers to realise some of the benefits of the modern trade on their own terms. This report explores the various new technologies at play in two of the world's great informal economies – India and Africa – and how they are transforming the business practices of retailers and the lives of the communities in which they operate.



India and the African continent both have significant and thriving informal sectors. However, there are as many differences as similarities between the two, with informal retailing in Africa occupying a wide diversity of store types, locations and customers, while in India it tends to be more homogenous.

In each geography, the informal trade faces similar challenges, though, and enjoys similar opportunities. Many of the lessons learned on the subcontinent may be applied in Africa, and vice versa.

Informal Retail in India: The Transformation of an Iconic Format

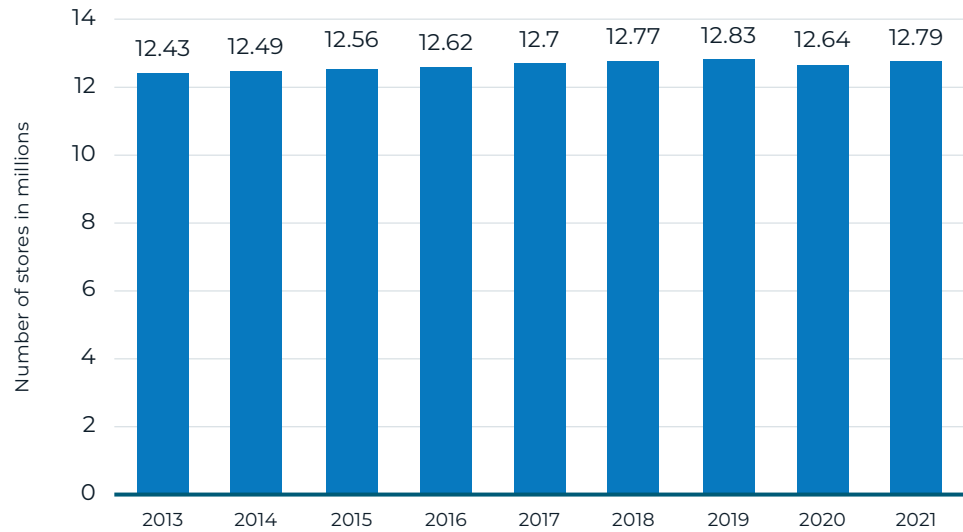
Informal retail in India is dominated by kiranas – small, local, privately-owned grocery stores selling everything from produce to branded household products and general merchandise.

12.8 million
stores

Estimated
\$700+ billion
turnover

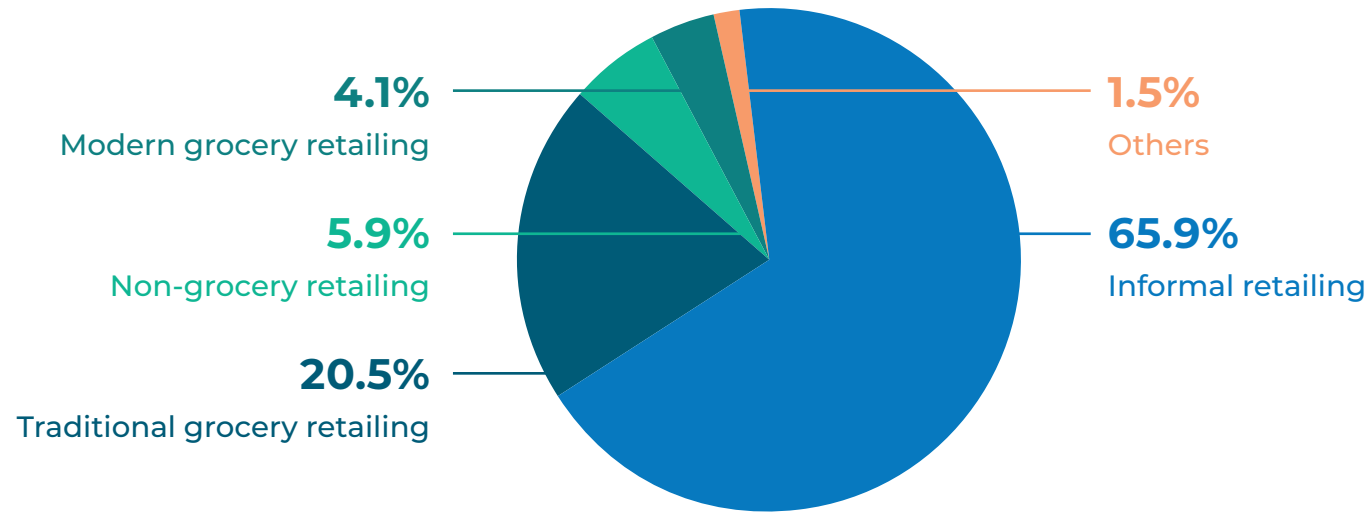
Mom and pop
'kirana'
format dominates

The sector is a highly complex and multi-tiered system undergoing rapid and fundamental change, with over 12 million grocery retail outlets (McKinsey, 2022. GAIN; Euromonitor, 2021) supported by wholesalers and distributors. It is a sector ripe for modernisation: many proprietors still track inventory and sales manually, so it is challenging to gain insights on sales performance or shopper behaviour. Over the past decade, the arrival of modern trade, the entry of cash and carry, the e-commerce revolution and the rise of B2B providers have begun to transform this ecosystem. Kiranas have started to formalise, with some becoming 'mini-marts', and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, have started to offer localised home delivery.



Note(s): India; 2013 to 2021. Number of traditional retail grocery outlets across India from 2013 to 2021 (in millions)
Source(s): GAIN; Euromonitor

Informal Retail in Africa: A resilient sector with universal appeal



Informal retail makes up **68%** of the total retail market across Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa

Wide range of formats, including open air markets in Nigeria and Angola, **dukas** in Kenya, **street hawkers and spazas** in South Africa, and **kiosks** in Cameroon

85% of Africa's labour force is composed of informal employment

Informal retail is estimated to make up around 68% of the total retail market in Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa, although this figure is skewed by South Africa's relatively mature retail market. (Euromonitor, 2019) Individually, the informal sector accounts for as much as **96% of total retail sales in Ghana, 98% in Nigeria and 70% in Kenya.**

In South Africa, the informal economy contributes between 5 and 6% of the country's GDP, and employs at least 2,647,000 informal workers nationwide, although this could be a conservative estimate (Stats SA, 2021). In the fastmoving consumer goods space, which is dominated by a few formal grocery chains, informal retail sales are estimated at \$12 billion annually. Outside of South Africa, industry sources estimate that informal channels on the continent account for between 40% and 90% of total food sales, depending on the country. Across the continent, the informal channel caters to consumers of all income levels due to its convenience, credit-based payment flexibility and fresh foods.

Informal retailers serve as **distribution points for essential financial services** such as payments and remittances

Increasingly, informal retailers serve as distribution points for essential financial services such as payments and remittances, driven by a recent proliferation in products and services aimed at this market. MarketForce360, a start-up founded in December 2018 in Kenya and available across East Africa by Q3 2022, is facilitating trade among informal merchants and leading consumer brands, with a transaction value of up to \$500 million. (Njanja, 2022)

Technology will continue to drive the transformation of informal retail

Technology is proving a game changer in almost every area of human activity, and informal retail is no exception.

Technology helps informal retailers improve their connection with their shoppers, enables them to purchase from suppliers more efficiently and cost-effectively, and even facilitates access to credit.

Not all technologies are created equal however – these are the five technology themes that will drive sector transformation now and in the near future:

01

Point of sale technology facilitates payments and provides shopper data

02

Mobile technology drives efficiencies in purchasing and increases sales

03

Rising internet penetration enables greater adoption of enabling technologies

04

The proliferation and use of inclusive **social media applications as business platforms**

05

Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technology advancements such as artificial intelligence unlocks **shopper data**

01

Point of Sale (POS) technology facilitates payments and provides shopper data



Shoppers are choosing the **convenience and safety** of cashless payments

In sub-Saharan Africa, where according to the World Bank around 65% of adults lack a bank account, **approximately 90% of household retail transactions are conducted in cash**, with retail payments expected to exceed \$2.1 trillion

Strides are being made in both regions to reduce the ranks of the unbanked, and as a result, more and more shoppers are choosing the convenience and safety of cashless payments for everyday goods and services. This has been made possible, in part, by the rise of affordable payment hardware and software platforms, collectively known as point-of-sale or POS systems. These systems offer the additional benefit of providing shop owners with better sales data for procurement and stock management.

In South Africa, POS systems like iKhoka, Yoco and A2Pay, which offer these services, have started to transform the way informal traders do business.

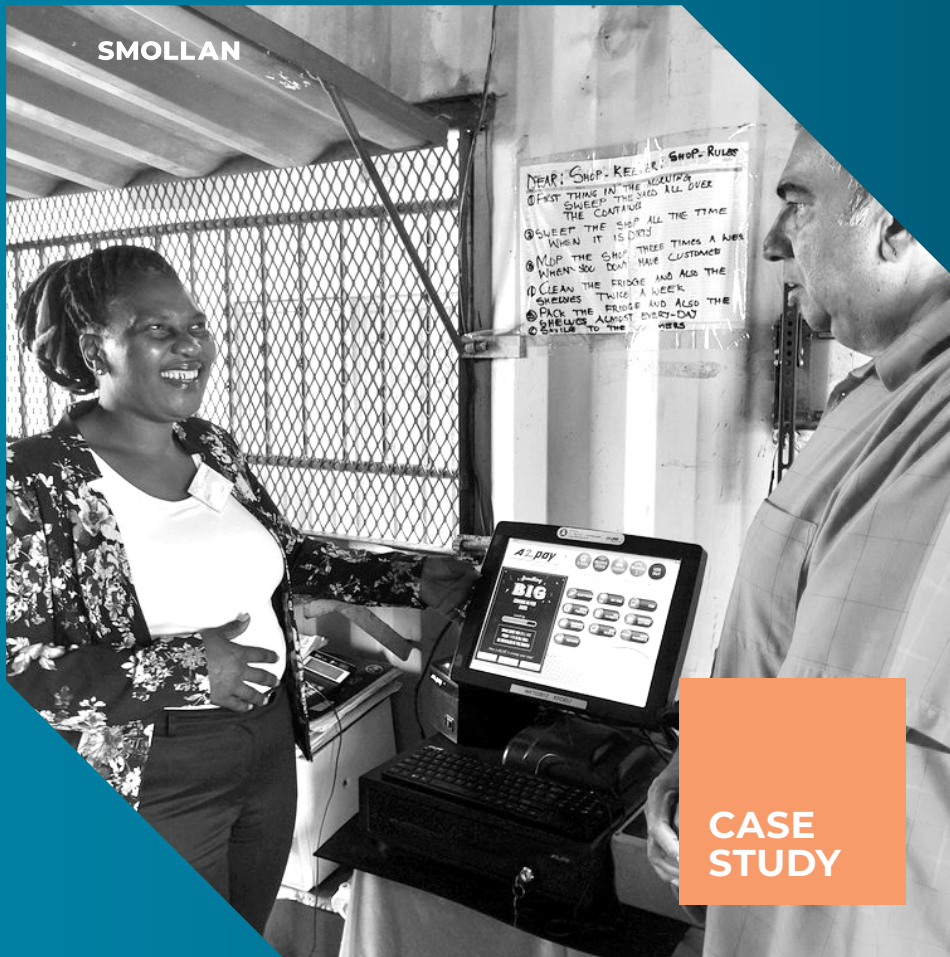
01

In India, 80% of people had bank accounts in 2020 (Forrest, 2020), although **half of these were inactive at the time.**

India's economy, though largely still built on cash, has also begun to adopt digital banking and mobile payments, especially during COVID-19; as a result, more businesses are embracing POS software in India. Such systems also collect shopper and sales data, which may be used by brands and distributors to serve the trade more effectively, and by informal retailers to get to know their customers and their own sales patterns better. Some have even begun to help traders access capital, with the sales data providing a measure of security to lenders.



India's economy, though largely still built on cash, has also begun to adopt **digital banking and mobile payments**



A2Pay was established in 2009 as a provider of **affordable POS systems for informal retailers in South Africa.**

South Africa's A2Pay makes the leap from POS hardware to financial service

A2Pay was established in 2009 as a provider of affordable POS systems for informal retailers in South Africa. It has since evolved into a fully-fledged fintech operation and a credit provider for a sector where credit is notoriously difficult to come by. In 2020, A2Pay provided 10,000 spaza shop owners with cash tills that quantify stock electronically and help finance loans, in partnership with small business fund investment hub, the South Africa SME Fund, which invested \$1.5 million in A2Pay.

Through the programme, business owners can borrow up to \$3,100, purchase stock items, trade and pay back the initial loan when the stock has been sold, loading their payments onto A2Pay's in-store terminals, and building a credit history at the same time.

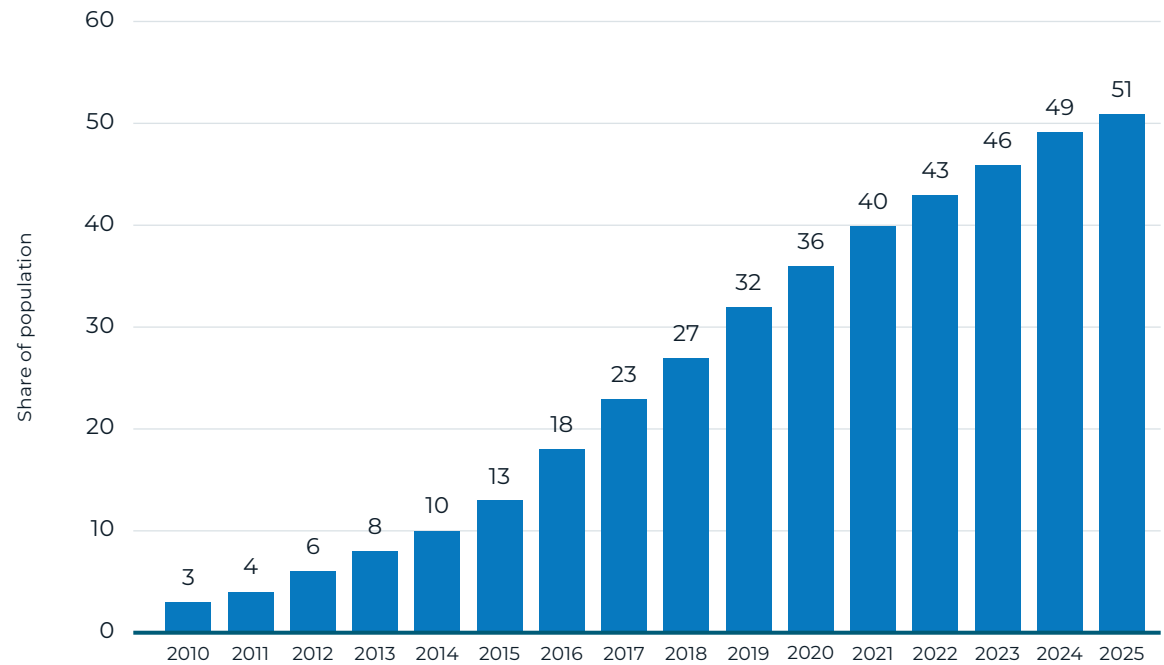
02

Mobile technology drives efficiencies in purchasing and increases sales

In 2021, estimated mobile internet penetration in Africa reached 40%, and is projected to reach 51% in 2025 (Statista, 2021). This penetration is far from uniform, with some countries leading the charge.

Mobile internet penetration projected to reach 51% in 2025

In 2020, Kenya had an internet penetration of approximately 85.2%; in Nigeria, 75% of web traffic was generated via smartphones. In South Africa, 60.71% of the population accessed the internet via mobile device in 2021. This share is projected to grow to 67.48% by 2026.



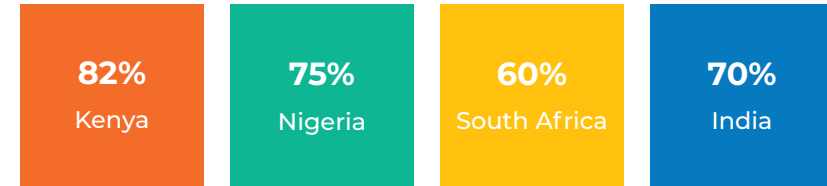
Note(s): Forecast of the mobile internet penetration in Africa from 2010 to 2025
 Source(s): Statista

According to Statista(Datareportal), the internet penetration rate in India went up to nearly around 47 percent in 2021, from just about four percent in 2007. Although these figures may seem relatively low, it meant that nearly half of Indias large population had access to the internet that year, ranking the country as second in the world in terms of active internet users.

According to ITU(the UN specialized agency for ICT's), in 2020, Kenya's mobile broadband penetration was 47(per 100 inhabitants), and 42 in Nigeria. South Africa had the most mobile broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants when compared with other African countries, with approximately 110.65 inhabitants. This means that there are more mobile broadband subscribers in South Africa than there are inhabitants.

In 2020, the number of mobile broadband connections per 100 inhabitants in India amounted to **approximately 52.5, and projected to reach 72.70 connections per 100 inhabitants by 2025.**

Web traffic generated via smartphones



Out of a population of 1.38 billion, India had 1.2 billion mobile subscribers in 2021, of whom about 750 million were smartphone users. It is anticipated to have one billion smartphone users in 2026. It is fair to say that mobile internet use is relatively mature in both markets, with major implications for how informal retailers do business.

India has a large and growing base of WhatsApp and Facebook users, who access these platforms mainly through their mobile phones. Social media, particularly WhatsApp, is already used to make sales more efficient in the informal economy, and enables shoppers to order goods in advance from informal retailers. There are already some moves towards using social media to better integrate supply chains between formal and informal business owners.

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Launched in Kenya in 2009,
Vodafone's M-PESA is
**Africa's most successful
mobile money service**

M-PESA reinvents informal retail in sub-Saharan Africa

Launched in Kenya in 2009, Vodafone's M-PESA is Africa's most successful mobile money service and the region's largest fintech platform, allowing both banked and unbanked users to make payments across the continent.

It also provides financial services to millions of people who have mobile phones, but do not have bank accounts, or only have limited access to banking services. Now M-PESA provides more than 51 million customers across seven countries in Africa with a safe, secure and affordable way to send and receive money, top up airtime, make bill payments, receive salaries, get short-term loans and much more. M-PESA businesses can receive payments for goods and services through their M-PESA business accounts, either via unique six-digit till numbers, a QR code, point-of-sale devices or digital invoices. M-PESA has not just changed the way the sector does business – it has catalysed some fundamental and potentially seismic changes. For example, a study has found that approximately 185,000 Kenyan women have moved from agriculture to small-scale retail as a result of access to M-PESA.



Entrepreneurship is an important part of the economic landscape (Dutot & Horne, 2015) and **digital technologies have accelerated the pace of entrepreneurial innovation.**

Smollan Financial Services helps clients grow in the Informal Sector

In the current African economic environment, institutions need to stay ahead of the competition to make inroads into new markets through innovation (Wentzel, Diatha, & Yadavalli, 2013). The African financial services sector – particularly the insurance industry – requires digital innovation to stay ahead of the competition. This has led to the rise of the digital entrepreneur (DE).

A key differentiator in digital technologies in the financial services sector are fintech solutions. Financial services are a leading economic sector in both Africa and India: South Africa's financial services sector contributes around 20% of GDP (Stats SA, 2016). With this in mind, Smollan Financial Services plays a key role in bringing financial services to entrepreneurs in Africa and India and is well positioned to assist clients and partners in a compliant manner.

Smollan Financial Services assists clients by providing sales, brokerage and business optimisation services. It assists them in reaching their customers by advising and educating consumers on the most suitable financial services products, supporting clients in creating a quality sales and service experience for their customers, ensuring commercial viability by delivering ROI across the value chain.

Rising internet penetration enables greater adoption of enabling technologies

Use of the internet and information and communication technologies (ICTs) in Africa's informal economy is **constrained but growing**. Primarily, the internet is **accessed for use in business through cell phones**, with computer use remaining negligible.

The use of the internet for businesses purpose in Africa is as low as 7% on average. South Africa has the highest internet usage by informal enterprises at 24%, followed by Senegal (20%). With Ghana, Mozambique and Nigeria at around 8%, 7% for Kenya and 4% in Uganda. (Mothobi et al., 2019) For the most part, not least due to customer demographics, ICT use typically revolves around communication with and purchase from suppliers: internet use allows for quick and easy price comparisons to be made by informal retailers when considering the purchase of stock from suppliers.



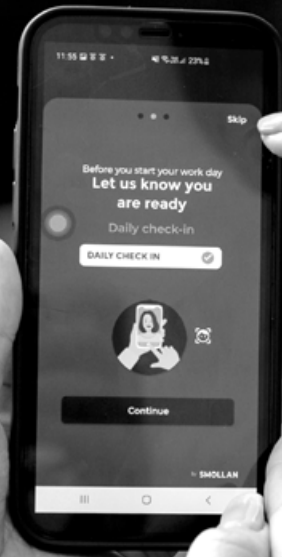


There is some evidence that as online banking becomes normalised, the internet allows for safer purchasing through EFTs (although associated costs challenge the viability of this). The relative lack of penetration of the internet and ICTs into lower-income populations means that use of the internet to sell goods in the informal economy is still in the developing stages, although this is changing rapidly. Nigeria's Wigmore Wholesalers, for example, like many of its competitors, runs a fully-fledged e-commerce site that sells everything from groceries to electronics to both traders and smaller wholesalers, taking minimum orders of \$2,000.

In India, as kiranas move towards being 'mini-marts', they rely more on internet use to **source and buy goods, mounting a challenge to the long-standing interpersonal relationships** that continue to dominate the trading relationships between business owners, their distributors, and suppliers.

Informal suppliers have also benefited from internet use: farmers and fishermen are going online to find markets and negotiate prices for their goods with greater ease, maximising sales into the trade. In a country which emphasises the value of education, the internet is a source of 'upskilling' through online learning that is critical in developing the capacity of informal retailers and boosting the growth of the sector.

SMOLLAN



CASE
STUDY

Leading retail sales and execution software tool for managing, scheduling and monitoring field team activities in real time.

Smollan SMART App

For all the opportunities it represents to brands, the informal retail sector remains a challenging place to work. Beset by economic uncertainty, widely distributed in often difficult-to-reach geographies, the sector requires a tech and data enabled approach to sales and distribution. With this in mind, Smollan has developed a set of solutions to optimise field team performance in all environments. SMART is Smollan's leading retail sales and execution software tool for managing, scheduling and monitoring field team activities in real time. It has been designed as a single, truly global system. Efficiently facilitating the exchange of data and insights between field and management teams.

The system has both online and offline capability and provides internet of things (IoT) integration functions across a range of platforms. In remote areas, poor network signal is real and a common occurrence. It is imperative for field teams who are dependent on mobile devices to get their job done, to still have access to their scheduled tasks without being reliant on connecting to a network. Offline capability removes this barrier and minimizes the disruption to business operations. SMART enables data-led stock management, sales order and return management, geo-tagging, and call and route optimisation.

Stock availability and visibility of the right product mix is significant for brands to win in the informal retail sector as consumers tend to easily switch to alternatives for their immediate need.

04

The proliferation and use of inclusive social media applications as business platforms

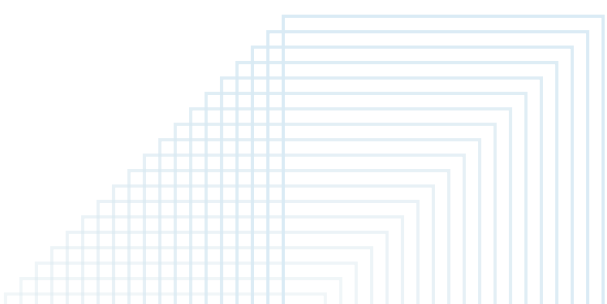
Research suggests that social media use is the “first step” for informal business owners in digitally transforming or even formalising their business models. Social media also provides an opportunity for larger suppliers to reach potential informal retailer customers through advertising and engagement.

In Africa, the continuing growth in use of social media, especially WhatsApp, provides an efficient avenue for communication between informal retailers and potential customers. While this may happen through the WhatsApp Business platform (specifically designed for use by small businesses) on occasion, the relative or perceived complexity of such platforms means that most informal retail B2B action happens more informally through personal WhatsApp chats.

Facebook is still widely in use in South Africa and offers reach into informal economic activity that may otherwise slip under the radar.

Facebook Marketplace provides a space for the marketing of products to informal retailers with minimal cost and effort from the seller.

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Kirana King maximises messaging opportunities

Founded in 2017, Kirana King is a franchise business that aspires to become India's largest offline marketplace for grocery retail through standardisation, centralisation and digitisation, and through standardised branding for member stores.

It currently has a modest network of just over 3,000 stores, 300 of which are branded franchise stores. It uses various social platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter, to communicate with existing and prospective members, with content ranging from motivational videos and holiday greetings to company news and specific offers on merchandise from the company's growing private label offering.

The case of Kirana King demonstrates the opportunity for businesses hoping to achieve scale in this market to use relatively low-cost platforms to communicate and eventually transact with their stakeholders.



CASE
STUDY

Founded in 2017, Kirana King is a franchise business that aspires to become **India's largest offline marketplace**

05

Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technology advancements such as ai unlocks shopper data

Fourth industrial revolution technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning and blockchain are receiving much coverage for their ability to harness the power of big data to transform commerce, education, government and almost every other area of human endeavour – and while it is early days, they are already making their mark on informal retail too.

The scale and complexity of the informal trade generates vast quantities of data, some of which may assist businesses that serve the trade; through mobile internet, this data is becoming available for use through machine learning. This is particularly the case in India, which has become a global IT leader over the past two decades, and where mobile internet has achieved greater penetration than in Africa.

The scale and complexity of the informal trade generates **vast quantities of data**, some of which may assist businesses that serve the trade.



CASE STUDY

In India, Jumbotail utilises AI and machine learning to improve the efficiency and profitability of kirana stores

Jumbotail has connected approximately 2,000 FMCG and food staple brands and sellers to nearly 1,50,000 kirana stores across 38 cities and towns in India through its warehousing, logistics supply chain network and B2B e-commerce platform. The system drives real-time decision-making using machine learning and AI. The result is a platform for supply chain optimisation systems, recommendation engines, pricing and merchandising systems, credit scoring, and fraud detection. The business has raised \$125 million in financing since launching in 2015, and almost quadrupled in scale in 2021.

Twiga uses AI and blockchain to provide financial services to traders in Kenya

In Kenya, Twiga Foods – a B2B logistics platform for kiosks and food stalls – addresses the challenge that few of the targeted vendors have credit scores. In partnership with IBM, Twiga analyses sales data from mobile transactions using AI to predict their creditworthiness. This enables Twiga to extend its offering to providing working capital for its customers in the informal trade.

“Once the credit score is determined, we used a blockchain to manage the entire lending process, from application to receiving offers to accepting the terms to repayment,”

says IBM’s Isaac Markus.

Twiga provides a range of distribution services to a network of 140,000 stores across the Kenya – around 25% of the total market, their trucks cover 12,000km every day, handling over 2 million kgs of assorted products.



For all of technology's intended benefits, there are still important considerations to the adoption of technology in informal sectors.

These include:

- Access to broadband internet
- High data costs in emerging markets
- Formalisation through technology
- Penetration into traditional markets by formal retail through technology

Access to broadband internet

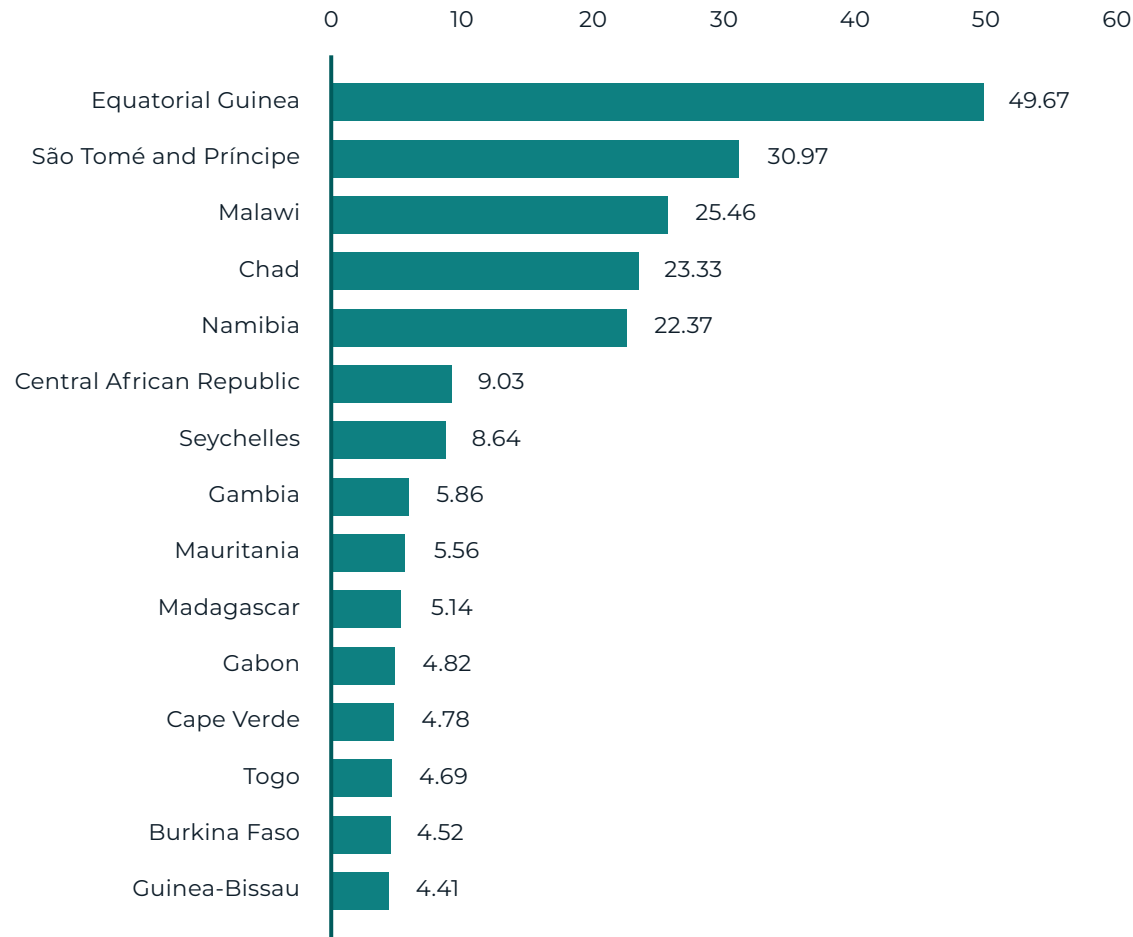
In 2021, only 0.6% of Africa's population subscribed to a fixed broadband internet service. By comparison, 40.7% enjoyed a mobile internet connection (Mabidilala, 2022). In 2020, around 53% of Indians had mobile broadband, a number that is rapidly growing (Keelery, 2021).

For informal retailers utilising technology to reach shoppers and trading partners, these numbers are promising but do not provide for the consistent or uniform use of technology to improve efficiencies and service delivery.



In 2021, only 0.6% of Africa's population subscribed to a fixed broadband internet service.

High data costs in emerging markets



According to a Worldwide Mobile Data Pricing report, **sub-Saharan Africa still has the most expensive data prices in the world.** Six out of ten of the most expensive countries for a 1GB of mobile data are in Africa.

This is a key consideration when developing technology solutions for underserved markets where disposable incomes are constrained. India, on the other hand, has among the lowest data costs in the world due to intense market competition, with some Indian telecom companies offering 1GB of mobile data for as low as \$0.09 – this compared to the median cost of 1GB of data in Africa at \$5. Countries such as Equatorial Guinea and Malawi have average 1GB mobile data costs as high as \$49 and \$25, respectively (Cable UK, 2021).

Note(s): Africa; January 26 to February 15, 2021. Average price for 1GB of mobile data in Africa as of 2021, by country (in U.S. dollars). Source(s): Cable.co.uk;



Most informal retailers
are **resistant to change**

Formalisation through technology

It is widely assumed that the informal sector would benefit from a greater degree of formalisation, which most of the technologies mentioned in this paper promise to bring. However, the regulatory and financial burdens placed on small businesses in most economies, as well as the lack of immediate benefits such as access to credit, mean that most informal retailers are resistant to change in this direction.

Penetration into traditional markets by formal retail through technology

While technology can be a great 'leveller' for informal businesses, giving them greater access to both suppliers and shoppers, it also enables larger businesses – like retailers, businesses, and even suppliers – to directly and cost-effectively reach the markets traditionally served by the informal sector.

Optimise your engagement with the informal retail sector through tech

Informal markets remain a thriving and dynamic retail environment with abundant opportunities for suppliers. As these markets continue to evolve, so too should strategies for penetrating and winning in this sector. **Four principles underpin the foundations of a technology-enabled engagement strategy with the informal sector, namely:**

1. Build technology with the informal sector in mind

When it comes to developing technology for the informal sector, it is advisable to develop these solutions with and for the informal sector to ensure what is built is relevant, usable and effective. An example of solutions that are developed with underserved markets in mind is South Africa's Moya App by DataFree, a local WhatsApp competitor that enables users to communicate without incurring data costs. Considering the barrier that the cost of data causes to technology adoption, initiatives like this are integral to success.

Develop these solutions with and for the informal sector to ensure what is built is **relevant, usable and effective**

2. Use technology to supplement relationship building

The presence of technology will not remove the need to build strong interpersonal relationships with the informal trade. Working through established partners who have intimate knowledge of the sector, having people on the ground and building strong relationships remains a requirement for playing to win within the informal trade. However, technology can supplement these established relationships by making regular communication possible when appropriate.



The presence of technology **will not remove the need to build strong interpersonal relationships** with the informal trade

3. Adopt gig economy and digital market research platforms to gather intelligence on informal markets

A key element to operating in the informal economy is to understand it, the operations, how business is done and what traders require. Across emerging markets, there are a number of technology-enabled research solutions that make it possible to gather important intelligence on the informal market. Native (Native.io) is another global technology platform that enables organisations with market research questions to task a fleet of local data collectors to capture data that provides the answers they need, on demand, including in informal markets.

4. Leverage the technology ecosystem

The innovation in this sector is occurring at a rapid pace, with new solutions being announced regularly in both Africa and India, addressing specific pain points to unlock growth. The technology-enabled informal sector ecosystem is expanding, representing exciting opportunities for organisations that are able to leverage this ecosystem of payments, supply chain solutions, communications channels and financial services in order to succeed in the informal sector.

A key element to operating in the informal economy is to **understand it, the operations, how business is done and what traders require.**

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GRAPHS

Sales value share of retail channels in South Africa, Nigeria, and Kenya in 2019. Source: Euromonitor

Forecast of the mobile internet penetration in Africa from 2010 to 2025. Source: Statista

Average price for 1GB of mobile data in Africa as of 2021, by country. Source: Cable UK

Number of traditional retail grocery outlets across India from 2013 to 2021 (in millions). Sources: GAIN, Euromonitor



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