

*Assessing the Impact of Empowerment Policies on the South African
Urban Legal Cannabis Market*

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The Asian Conference on the Social Sciences 2023
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Following an international wave of legalizing cannabis for medical, recreational and economic reasons, South African national government have been encouraging entrepreneurs to participate in related cannabis technology and innovation. The gap is in the urban customer perceptions towards the legal cannabis industry to assist in aligning existing policies with the government's cannabis industry goals. The purpose of this study is to assess urban customer perceptions towards the legal cannabis industry to assist in aligning policy with the government's cannabis industry goals. This study follows a pragmatism research design and makes use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches to achieve the purpose of the study. Data is extracted from the Google database and documents. A total of 51 stores were identified on google maps. Google Maps capture provides data regarding customer reviews and store ratings. Data were analysed using Microsoft Excel. Findings show that customers have useful views that would assist policymakers to align new South African cannabis policies with those of successful urban developed countries. It is recommended that policymakers should consider the views of legal cannabis customers when passing policies meant to ignite entrepreneurial innovation needed to meet both customer's needs and the cannabis industry. The contribution of the article is in its use of literature review and Institutional theory to suggest policymaking processes that would benefit both cannabis customers and local communities.

Keywords: Empowerment Policies, Economic Goals, Cannabis, Legalization, Perception, Policymaking Processes, Urban Local Communities

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Introduction

There are different conflicting narratives as to where cannabis came from or who was the first in the world or Africa to use it for medicinal, recreational, economic or as part of the food (Gwala, 2023; Almqvist, 2020; Samuel and Edward, 2015). Nevertheless, following an international wave of legalizing cannabis for medical, recreational and economic reasons, South African national government have been encouraging entrepreneurs to participate in related cannabis technology and innovation (Mashau and Farisani, 2023). Farisani (2023) corroborate and assert that entrepreneurs owning Small Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) are seen by the South African government as agents of job creation, growing the economy and ending the inequality largely seen in South African urban cities. The South African government has also proceeded to start a process to align the country's policies, laws and regulations to allow cannabis products to be manufactured and sold legally by entrepreneurs. The legal move is the 2018 Constitutional Court ruling and the latest being the Cannabis for Private Purposes Bill which has been undergoing the consultation stage led by the national parliament until May 2023.

Ssekitoleko and du Plessis (2021); Mahadea and Kaseeram, (2018) posit that the well-established challenge for the South African government is the implementation of empowerment policies meant for job creation, growing the economy and ending inequality. Farisani (2022) and Mazibuko (2013) concur and argue that nowhere is inequality more visible than in urban cities like eThekweni Municipality where the design of Apartheid laws remains largely intact and disadvantaging certain races while benefitting others. Amongst the citizen empowerment policies that have been and continue to be hard to implement are the National Strategy for the Development and Promotion of Franchising in SA (2000), Black Economic Empowerment, the Industrial Policy Action Plan and the Industrial Policy Action Framework (2007). All these policies have not empowered all entrepreneurs and SMMEs as anticipated by the government i.e. they had not solved the almost two-decade-long challenges of job creation, growing the economy and ending the inequality that is most visible in urban areas.

Just like all other bills in South Africa, Cannabis for Private Purposes Bill is following the same processes used to pass other empowerment policies that have largely failed to empower the intended communities. The objective of this study is to assess urban customer perceptions towards the legal cannabis industry to assist in aligning policy with the government's cannabis industry goals. To achieve this, we draw from the Institutional Theory and the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework. We draw to suggest that attention be given to important aspects (race of local urban dwellers, fear of customers and price of cannabis end products), resources (such as infrastructure/physical, human resources and financial) and partners or stakeholders (local) that would ensure the policies indeed empower the cannabis entrepreneurs and SMMEs.

Literature Review

Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory's three pillars are the regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive pillars (Palthe, 2014; Scott, 2013). For this study, we will unpack how regulative and cultural-cognitive pillars assist in understanding urban citizens' perspectives to inform policies, laws and regulations that could empower them (see Table 1 below). Empower customers,

entrepreneurs and SMMEs alike in line with the South African government’s goal to create jobs, grow the economy and reduce inequality through the Cannabis for Private Purposes Bill. Cultural-cognitive pillar shed light on the culture, beliefs and values of the citizens (Farisani, 2023; Scott, 2008). Through this light, we are then able to understand the race of the local urban cannabis customers, the fear of cannabis customers and the price of cannabis end products customers are willing to pay.

Table 1: Comparison between regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive elements of Institutional Theory (adopted from Palthe, 2014)

Elements	Regulative	Normative	Cognitive
Legitimacy	Legal systems	Moral and ethical systems	Cultural systems
Central Rudiments	Policies, legislation, and rules	Work role, habits and norms	Values, beliefs, and assumptions
System Transformation Drivers	Legal obligation	Moral obligation	Transformation values are internalized
System Transformation Sustainers	Fear and coercion	Duty and responsibility	Social identity and personal desire
Behavioural Reasoning	Have to	Ought to	Want to

By knowing the race of the customers, we will be able to understand better their culture and be wiser on how much customers can be made to value the cannabis products they seek. Cannabis products they seek be it medical, recreational or food. El-Khoury et al. (2022) point out that various businesses and countries (such as those in the Arab world) have relaxed certain policies, laws or regulations to attract certain customers. El-Khoury et al. (2022) further elaborate on the significance: “The Arab world has traditionally been conservative when it comes to all drugs-related policies. Cannabis is largely demonized with heavy sentences served to anyone suspected of using, selling, let alone planting cannabis” (p1). Thus, knowing customers' race and culture might assist in understanding their beliefs.

Farisani (2023) assert that the cultural cognitive pillar allows us to understand the urban citizen’s beliefs and therefore their fears concerning cannabis. Fears may drive sales of products up or down. Kavousi et al. (2022) affirm and highlight the role of local urban authorities or Local Government. Kavousi et al. (2022) elaborated in this way “Local governments increasingly are using land use and police power authority, taxation, investment, and programming to shape how their residents engage with cannabis.” Medical products such “shape” knowledge by the local government might have a big impact on the sales and sustainability of SMMEs. Therefore, policies, laws and regulations that assist customers to understand that certain products are safe could assist innovative entrepreneurs with their novice products and urban SMMEs selling legal cannabis products. Thus, local urban government regulations can allay the fears around new products and stabilize the prices of such products.

According to El-Khoury et al. (2022) and Farisani (2023); cultural cognitive culture shed light on what citizens value and how different communities from the same country in different localities may value the same thing differently. If citizens value a product they are willing to pay more. Local regulators can assist the local urban SMMEs by ensuring there are

compelling regulations to keep the city clean and safe for customers to want to hang around the vicinity and pay more for the environment that they value as they enjoy their cannabis product of choice. To understand the resources that urban city managers or Local Government may avail to ensure the Cannabis for Private Purposes Bill is not like other policies meant to empower the citizens but end up being impractical and hard to implement we draw from the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework.

Sustainable Livelihoods Framework

Khomo, Farisani and Mashau (2023) as well as Smyth and Vanclay (2017) posit that Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (see Figure 1) give us insight into what kind of resources are needed and which structures should act to ensure that the empowerment policies impact the urban citizens as intended. Drawing from Sustainable Livelihoods Framework we can understand what resources and which partners are needed to ensure the Cannabis for Private Purposes Bill impact urban entrepreneurs, SMMEs and cannabis customers positively.

A great place to start is in understanding the resources (see Figure 1's livelihood assets/resources) needed so that we are better informed to suggest relevant institutions (see transforming structures and processes in Figure 2) to provide such resources. Five types of resources are listed in Figure 2 human, natural, financial, physical and social.

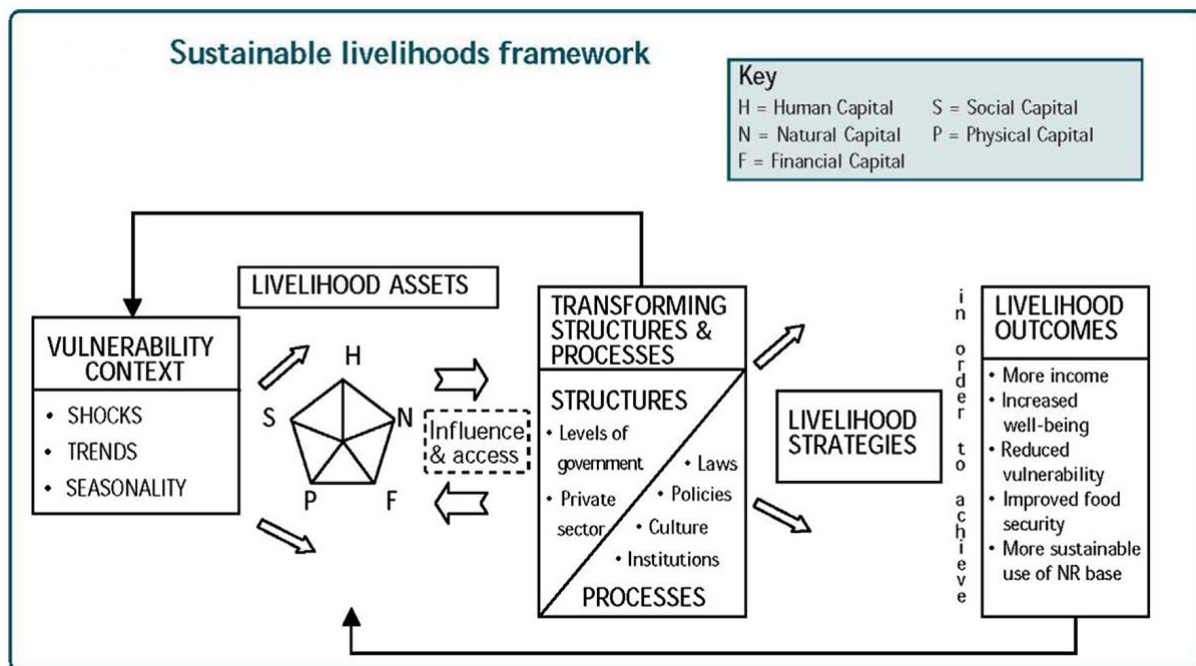


Figure 1: The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework
Source: DFID (1999-2001)

Different groups (i.e. entrepreneurs, SMMEs and customers) of urban dwellers will need different resources or the same resources but with different quantities to successfully benefit from the Cannabis for Private Purposes Bill. Entrepreneurs with innovative ideas without businesses might need the financial resources that established SMMEs need from the same available institutions but in differing quantities. On the other hand, customers might just need social resources (such as product safety assurance from the local municipality or assurance and peace of mind that their favourite cannabis products are not illegal) to benefit from the Cannabis for Private Purposes Bill.

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework educate us that structures or institutions both in government and the private sector could be useful in availing resources that lead to the successful implementation of policies and sustainable local businesses and livelihoods (see Figure 1). Thus, structures such as Local Government (LG), law enforcement agencies, local business groups, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Institutions of higher learning are all responsible. Responsible for ensuring that urban entrepreneurs, SMMEs and cannabis customers are assisted with relevant resources. Relevant resources to benefit from the empowerment policies such as the National Strategy for the Development and Promotion of Franchising in SA (2000), Black Economic Empowerment, the Industrial Policy Action Plan and the Industrial Policy Action Framework (2007) as well as the Cannabis for private Purposes Bill.

Meehan et al. (2020) posit that structures such as Local Government (LG) can assist with resources such as affordable infrastructure for cannabis businesses to rent and for customers to feel safe as they enjoy their chosen cannabis products. Martiroysan (2017) affirm and asserts that LG will need to work with law enforcement agencies such as metropolitan police and national police units operating in the city. On the other hand, Plakias et al (2021) and Fersko et al. (2018) contend that local business groups such as banks can assist by ensuring that entrepreneurs and SMME owners who need financial resources are assisted even though they might have challenges here and there. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are believed by authors such as Bartlett (2021) and Hodgson (2021) to be in a better position to assist with Social Resources by voicing their support for legal cannabis in areas where cannabis legal products are highly stigmatized. The role of Institutions of higher learning to use their human resources knowledge to educate entrepreneurs on the latest technology needed to process the products safely and at affordable prices is advocated by Farisani (2023); Ganjier (2021) and Musakuro and De Klerk (2021).

Methodology

This study was conducted during the Covid 19 pandemic and therefore, the research design and approach were chosen with not only the objective of the study but the prevailing conditions in mind. Mpofu and Mpofu (2023) corroborate pointing to the difficulties of conducting research during the pandemic. This study takes a pragmatic view towards integrating theoretical knowledge (i.e. literature review) with practical ideas of customers (online reviews) of cannabis products. Pragmatism was chosen for this study. Clark and Ivankova (2015); Creswell, Fetters, Plano-Clark and Morales (2009) are among the researchers that posit the suitability of pragmatism when the researcher intends to use both qualitative and quantitative data. Integrating theoretical knowledge and Google online reviews will avail both qualitative and quantitative insights that will assist to achieve the objective of this study. The objective of this study is to understand the impact of cannabis customer perceptions towards the legal cannabis SMMEs situated in South Africa's eThekweni municipality with the view to contribute to its sustainability. Mpofu and Mpofu (2023); Blaikie (2018); Fetters, Curry and Creswell (2013) are amongst those who assert that pragmatism allows for innovative ways to find solutions to problems such as sustainability.

The data used to study cannabis stores' perceptions is collected from both Google online reviews and literature reviews. Google reviews are accessible through google maps, it allows customers of cannabis stores to review the store by leaving comments that detail their experiences and also rate the service thereafter. The data is reliable as customers participate willingly to assist further customers. This study uses customer reviews and ratings to

determine customers' perception of cannabis stores in the greater area of eThekweni Municipality. A total of 51 stores were identified on google maps, and the researcher was able to verify 30 stores scattered in 20 locations (eThekweni suburbs) by driving to these locations. The 30 verified stores were sampled to be part of the study (all store reviews and ratings are included in this study) i.e. the selected 30 stores in 20 suburbs received 571 reviews (see Table 1, figures 2,3 and 4 for demographics). The data was extracted from Google in July 2022.

Content analysis was chosen to enable both qualitative and quantitative data analysis. Microsoft Soft Excel software was used to categorize qualitative data from all the store reviews into themes which inform the analyses. The quantitative ratings were also captured in Excel. Thus, content analysis's approach to both qualitative and quantitative data was observed during categorization, coding, analysis and presentation, thereby enabling the emergence of useful themes and sub-themes presented in the results and discussion sections (Mubiru, Kombe and Limbumba, 2022).

This study complied with the University of KwaZulu Natal's ethical clearance policy (UKZN Ethics Review application no 00020475) that applies to online data collection. Triangulation was used in this study to ensure reliability and validity i.e. the findings from Google online reviews in this study were checked against the findings presented by other researchers discovered as part of the literature review. The approach of using the findings of one tool against the other to ensure reliability and validity is consistent with Bougie and Sekaran (2009). Lincoln and Guba (1985) corroborate and further magnify the strong and significant relationship between reliability and dependability in that a protest of credibility in research confirms dependability.

Findings and Analysis

The findings and analysis section are presented in line with the research objective and cover the survey conducted online and the information from the literature review. The survey provides key information about the respondents such as race, fear, and their view of legal cannabis price in the eThekweni municipality urban areas to determine policy-making and implementation direction that would benefit all the stakeholders i.e. the prospective entrepreneurs, cannabis SMMEs and customers. Documents such as the eThekweni municipality website and related literature are analysed to further understand the policy implementation challenges and its relationship between race, fear and prices.

Demographics of Participants

Below are key demographics that have important information to assist in understanding the findings better:

The selected 30 stores in 20 suburbs received 571 reviews by the time of data collection from the reviewers of the following gender demographic:

Table 2: Reviewers' gender

Reviewers Gender n=571		
Female	Male	Unknown
30%	50%	20%

Source: Researchers' analysis

Reviews on Google are mostly given by citizens of white ethnic groups, followed by Indians.

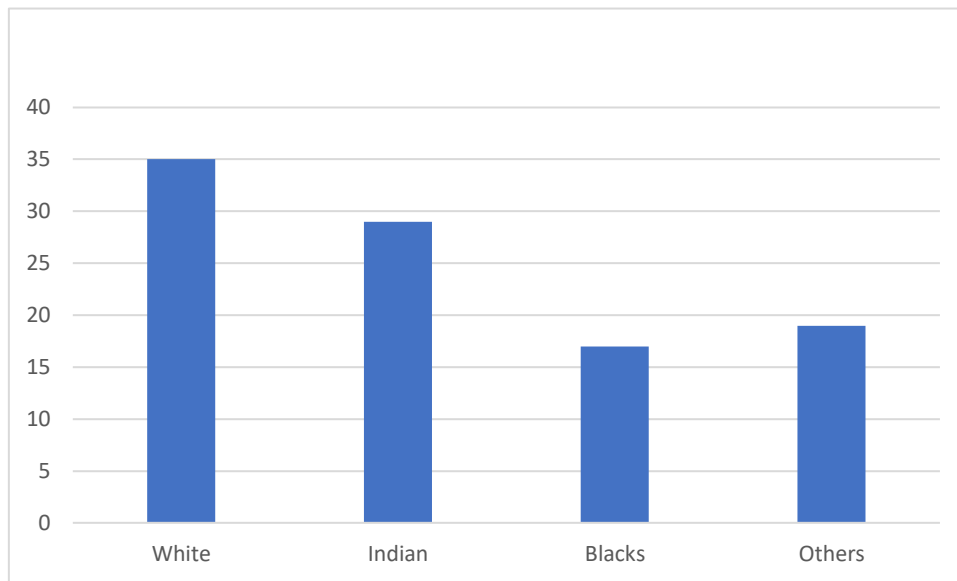


Figure 2: Racial groups
Source: Researchers' analysis

35% of the reviewers are whites and the Indians make up 29% of the reviewers. Blacks comprise the largest eThekweni municipality population; however, only 17% of the reviewers are identified as blacks. These findings show that Cannabis is primarily stigmatized amongst black people in South Africa.

The diagram below shows the concentration of sampled cannabis stores in eThekweni, South Africa.

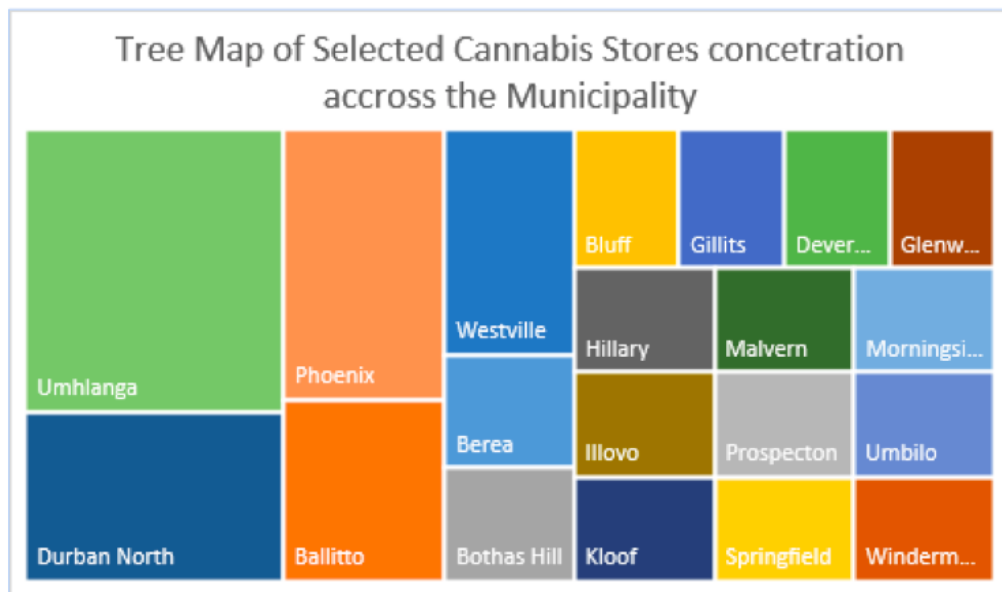


Figure 3: Treemap of sampled cannabis stores in eThekweni, South Africa
Source: Researchers' analysis

Cannabis stores in the year 2022 are largely concentrated in the northern part of the municipality. The above diagram shows that most stores are located in Umhlanga, followed

by Durban North. It is also important to note that the cannabis stores are spread across all sides of the municipality, as indicated in the diagram above. The results also show that most cannabis stores are in white and Indian-dominated Umhlanga suburbs.

The diagram below shows the mode of sales for cannabis stores in Durban.

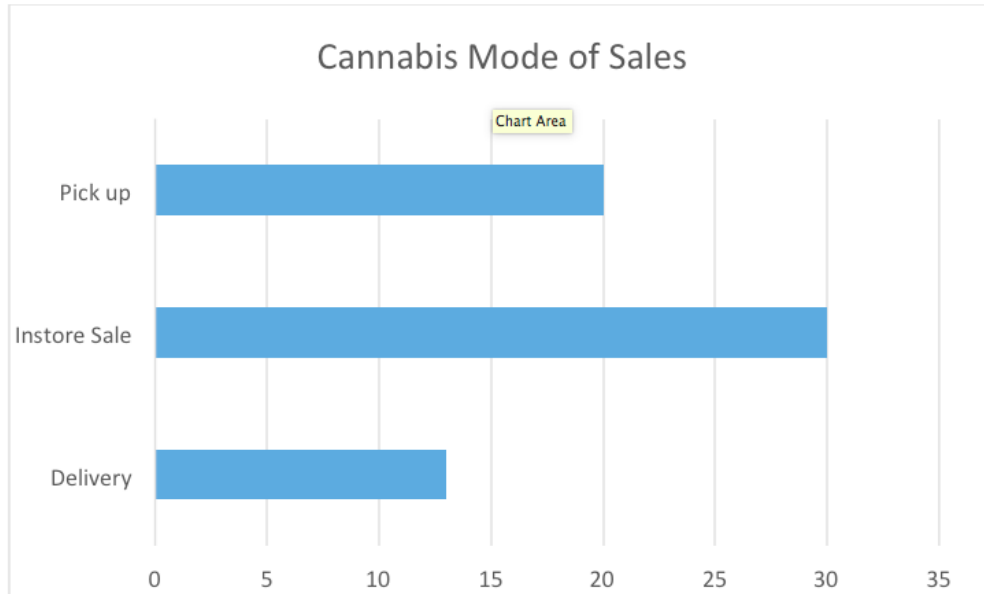


Figure 4: Cannabis mode of sales
Source: Researchers' analysis

All cannabis stores in Durban offer in-store purchasing options, with 13 of 30 sampled stores open for delivery and 20 of 30 stores open to purchase and pick-up services (all cannabis stores cited in this study have cannabis-only licenses and hence sell cannabis-related products only). The findings reveal that the coronavirus pandemic accelerated none contact mode of buying and most stores across sectors offered delivery options. Below are the key findings in line with the aim of the research starting with the perceptions of cannabis product quality.

Summary of the Findings and Analysis Between Perceptions and Policymaking

Table 3 below provides a summary of the findings and analysis of the links between eThekweni customers' perceptions and the impact on the cannabis policymaking process. The summary presents responses from the three biggest races at eThekweni targeted areas and did not include other minority groups to ensure results are focused. The summary presents the customers' perceptions and the impact of such impact on policymaking by linking the cultural systems to the actions of customers in terms of support in the form of resources. Resources customers are willing to commit to supporting the cannabis industry.

Table 3: Summary of the findings and analysis on the links between eThekweni customers' perceptions and the impact on the cannabis policymaking process

Race	Cultural Systems: Assumptions, Belief and Value	Action and Resource Support	Impact on the Cannabis Bill
Black	Assumptions: The cannabis industry is dirty. Little knowledge of the diversity of products Belief: Cannabis products are illegal Value: Cannabis products bring no tangible value	Weak financial and social resources support	Negative
White	Assumptions: The cannabis industry is diverse with useful clean products. Belief: Cannabis products are legal. Value: Cannabis products are valuable to individuals and society	Strong financial, social, human and physical resource support	Positive
Indian	Assumptions: The cannabis industry is new and interesting. Belief: Cannabis products are legal. Value: Cannabis products are valuable to individuals and society	Average financial, social, human and physical resource support	Positive

Discussion of the Findings and Analysis

The discussion of the findings and analysis starts with the Cultural Systems: Assumptions, Beliefs and Values; then to Action and Resource Support; and finally the Impact of Institutions and their resources on the Cannabis Bill.

Cultural Systems: Assumptions, Belief and Value

The findings section reveal that South African eThekweni urban areas have three dominant races i.e. Blacks (majority), White and Indian. Figure 2 shows suburban areas where data was collected and the analysis presented in the racial composition of the cannabis customers there shows that the majority of the citizens and therefore customers remain to be whites. Analyses of the racial composition of the urban citizens in the identified suburban areas show that these

three races still largely live in line with the race separation policies of the Apartheid system with few exceptions. The status quo has remained due to financial challenges that remain today amongst different races in South African urban areas (Mazibuko, 2013; Mahadea and Kaseeram, 2018) i.e blacks still find it hard to own suburban houses because they remain poor even in the new democratic dispensation. Farisani (2022); Ssekitoleko and du Plessis (2021) corroborate and point out that poverty and financial difficulties have an impact on their education, employability and social life. The results presented in Table 3 further show that the difference in cannabis assumptions, beliefs and values amongst eThekweni citizens reflect that. Whites and Indians who are better off economically and educationally seem to have well-informed cannabis-related assumptions, and beliefs and understand the economic and social value of cannabis products. The understanding of economic and social value has a direct impact on the resources support of the cannabis stores and the cannabis bill. The findings are consistent with Institutional Theory's cultural cognitive element and Scott's (2013) arguments that customers will only support products that align with their assumptions, beliefs or where they derive value.

Action and Resource Support

The findings and analysis of the support by race to the cannabis stores show that the black majority of eThekweni is not only staying away from those stores socially but they are not providing their financial resources i.e. they are not buying the cannabis products. The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework provide insight into how a lack of social and financial resources from key groups or structures can have an impact on the sustainability of the product and stores that depend on such resource support. Smyth and Vanclay (2017) affirm and argue that for sustainability to be achieved, the asset base (i.e. the resource base that includes the financial, social, physical, human and natural aspects) has to be vibrant. Vibrant in the sense that resources that are needed are supplied by relevant structures or groups to ensure the sustainability of products and the relevant industry. Khomo, Farisani and Mashau (2023) echo Smyth and Vanclay (2017) and went on to link financial resources to the successful implementation of policies. Farisani (2022) and Palthe (2014) point out that the implementation of policies relies on the entire cycle of policymaking and policy implementation i.e. from policy situational analysis, policy planning, policy implementation, policy monitoring and policy evaluation.

Impact of Institutions and Their Resources on the Cannabis Bill

The findings presented in Table 3 show that indeed resources have a direct impact on the cannabis bill policymaking and implementation. Where the key resources such as financial, social or physical have not been provided by key structures or racial groups the impact is negative. Meehan et al. (2020) affirm and argue that structures such as Local Government (LG) can assist with resources to ensure both cannabis stores and local urban citizens benefit. Plakias et al (2021) and Fersko et al (2018) affirm and further assert that all local structures with relevant resources are responsible for successful policy planning, and implementation in one way or another. Farisani (2022) echoes Plakias et al (2021) and points out that while different structures, institutions or stakeholders are needed more than others in various stages of policymaking and implementation, all stakeholders should remain engaged and informed throughout the process. The variation of the need for the presence of institutions, structures or stakeholders is necessitated by the four different stages that are otherwise connected. The stages are policy situational analysis, policy planning, policy monitoring and policy evaluation. i.e. while various local urban community groups and structures might be needed

to physically contribute in most stages of the policy-making, they might not all possess the qualifications to physically monitor or evaluate the policy implementation of various technical processes. Thus, relevant structures that can provide necessary human resources should be tasked with such specific monitoring and evaluation aspects of policy making and implementation. The positive impact of the Cannabis Bill will therefore be dependent on the proper allocation of resources by relevant institutions, structures and stakeholders in urban areas. The positive impact of the Cannabis Bill in South Africa is what is needed by the South African government to enable them to reach their urban goals. Their urban goals are to create jobs, reduce inequality and grow local economies.

Conclusions

The objective of this study was to assess urban customer perceptions towards the legal cannabis industry to assist in aligning policy with the government's cannabis industry goals. To achieve the objective of the study, the discussion of the collected online data and literature review were evaluated with the assistance of Institutional theory and SLF. Such was done to suggest policymaking processes that would benefit both cannabis customers and local communities.

The findings show that different racial groups hold different perspectives that are closely associated with their race. The findings further show that existing and potential customers from all urban racial groups have useful views that would assist policymakers to align new South African cannabis policies with those of successful urban developed countries. It is recommended that the policymakers should take the views of all (i.e. all races including urban blacks who have shown little support so far) urban legal cannabis customers into consideration when passing policies meant to ignite entrepreneurial innovation needed to meet both customer's needs and the cannabis industry. The contribution of the article is in its use of literature review and Institutional theory to suggest policymaking processes that would benefit both cannabis customers and local communities.

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