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ANALYSIS OF MARKETING CAPABILITIES, COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE IN IMPROVING SME PERFORMANCE (SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES)

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ABSTRACT

1 Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) face significant challenges in maintaining performance amidst increasingly tight market competition, especially in utilizing marketing capabilities, competitive advantages, and organizational culture. This study aims to explore the impact of investment in training and technology, participation in industry conferences, and collaboration with technology partners on SME performance. Qualitative research methods were used, including in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, to identify key factors influencing the success of these strategies. The results show that investments in training and technology significantly increase employee competency and technology adoption, while participation in technology conferences and collaborations expands innovation opportunities and market access. The implications of these findings underscore the importance of an integrative approach that combines training, technology and strategic partnerships to enhance the competitiveness and long-term success of SMEs. This research provides new contributions to the SME management literature as well as practical recommendations for industry players and policy makers.

Keywords: SMEs, Marketing Capability, Competitive Advantage, Industrial Collaboration, Innovation.

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INTRODUCTION

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are recognized as the backbone of global and national economies (Adnan and Alarifi 2021; Husriadi 2023; Soomro et al. 2024; Thrassou et al. 2020), playing a vital role in economic growth, employment, and innovation (Ahmed, Chowdhury, and Bin Jabber 2024; Endris 2022). In many countries, especially in developing countries, SMEs contribute more than 90% of total business entities and are significant to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), often reaching more than 50% (Dasaraju and Tambunan 2023; Husriadi and Nurjanah 2024).

SMEs are also major providers of employment, contributing more than 60% to total employment in the formal sector. This makes SMEs vital in maintaining social and economic stability, as well as poverty alleviation efforts and empowering local communities. In the era of globalization and economic liberalization, the role of SMEs is increasingly vital in diversifying economic structures, strengthening local economic resilience, and supporting inclusive and sustainable economic development. However, SMEs are faced with complex challenges in maintaining their performance amidst tight



market competition (Husriadi, M.; Musawir, LOA; Darwin, LOA and Muslimin 2024; Kindström, Carlborg, and Nord 2024) .

Globalization opens up new opportunities for SMEs to access international markets, but also brings competition from multinational companies that have greater resources (Audretsch and Guenther 2023; Buyukbalci, Urfa, and Can 2024; Du, Zhu, and Li 2023; Liñán, Paul, and Fayolle 2020; Pla-Barber, Villar, and Ghauri 2020) . Limited access to financial resources, technology, and markets also become barriers to innovation and growth (Husriadi and Ode Muhammad Sardin 2024; Kreiterling 2023; Tarawneh et al. 2024) . Global economic uncertainty and rapid changes in consumer preferences require SMEs to be more flexible and responsive to market dynamics (Gamage et al. 2020; Sharma et al. 2024) . Therefore, the ability of SMEs to improve their performance depends on their ability to build marketing capabilities, competitive advantages, and an organizational culture that supports adaptation and innovation (Abdul-Halim et al. 2019; Aggarwal, Baker, and Joshi 2024; Fabrizio et al. 2022) .

Marketing capabilities are key to the success of SMEs. The ability to understand consumer needs, manage customer relationships, and use the right marketing strategies differentiates SMEs from competitors and creates added value. Competitive advantage through product differentiation, innovation and operational efficiency is important in maintaining market position. An organizational culture that supports adaptation, learning and innovation strengthens SMEs' internal capabilities and ability to adapt to market and technological changes.

However, there are still challenges in utilizing marketing capabilities to achieve competitive advantage. Limited financial resources, lack of skills and limited access to modern technology hinder SMEs from competing in a competitive market. Organizational culture also influences how well SMEs can leverage their marketing capabilities. A culture that supports innovation, collaboration and continuous learning strengthens SMEs' ability to adapt to market dynamics. Conversely, a culture that is resistant to change or hierarchical can undermine SMEs' ability to innovate and compete in dynamic markets. This can be seen in previous research which tends to focus on marketing capabilities, competitive advantage, or organizational culture separately, ignoring the complexity of the relationships between them.

Therefore, research that integrates these three elements provides a deeper understanding of how their interactions affect the overall performance of SMEs. The holistic approach in research enriches the SME management literature by providing a comprehensive understanding of the interrelationships between marketing capabilities, competitive advantage, and organizational culture.

This study not only makes significant theoretical contributions, but also provides practical guidance for SMEs to optimize their potential in an increasingly competitive market. By integrating these three aspects, SMEs can build more effective and sustainable strategies in facing global economic challenges. Through this approach, it is hoped that SMEs can continue to grow and contribute to the national and global economy better in the future.

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METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with an exploratory case study design to explore the interactions between marketing capabilities, competitive advantage, and organizational culture in SMEs. Case studies are chosen for in-depth understanding, not generalization of results. The process begins with secondary data collection through literature review to build a conceptual framework. Then, field research is conducted with several SMEs as case study subjects purposively. Primary data were collected through in-

depth interviews and direct observations with owners, managers and key employees. Data collection also involves internal documents such as financial reports and policy documents. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques to identify key themes from interviews, observations, and documents. The analysis was conducted iteratively to ensure the validity of the findings. This approach allows researchers to uncover complex patterns between marketing capabilities, competitive advantage, and organizational culture in the context of SMEs. All analyses are conducted taking into account the specific context of each case for a rich and in-depth understanding.

RESULT and Figure 3.1 Research Methods DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that marketing capabilities, competitive advantages and organizational culture in improving SME performance significantly contribute to increasing operational efficiency, innovation capacity and competitiveness of SMEs in the competitive global market. Therefore, the results of this study can be seen in the following results and discussions.

1. Marketing Capabilities

1.1 Marketing Capabilities

A deep understanding of customer needs is the main foundation for the success of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in facing increasingly intense market competition. The results of this study indicate that SMEs that proactively identify and understand their customers' needs and preferences are able to adapt their products and marketing strategies more effectively. This has implications for increasing customer loyalty and market share. Empirical evidence supporting this finding can be seen in studies by (Ascarza et al. 2017; Fida et al. 2020), which found that companies that routinely conduct customer surveys and market analysis experience a 20% increase in customer retention compared to companies that do not involve customers in the product development

process. This study confirms that a good understanding of customer needs allows SMEs to develop more relevant products and more targeted marketing strategies. Adapting products and marketing strategies responsive to customer feedback has also proven to be a key factor in maintaining the competitiveness of SMEs.

In this study, it was found that SMEs that were able to quickly adjust their products and strategies based on changes in customer preferences showed significant performance improvements. Research conducted by (Bleier, De Keyser, and Verleye 2018; Liang 2022; Mittal et al. 2023; Yum and Yoo 2023) , showed that flexibility in product adjustments based on customer feedback can increase customer satisfaction by up to 25%, which in turn contributes to increased market share.

These findings indicate that the ability to adapt quickly to changing customer needs is an important competitive advantage for SMEs. Overall, this study confirms that a comprehensive understanding of customer needs, followed by appropriate product and marketing strategy adjustments, is the key to success in improving SME performance. The empirical evidence presented supports the argument that customer-focused strategies not only increase customer satisfaction and loyalty but also provide significant competitive advantage in evolving markets.

1.2 Contribution to Sales and Market Share

Increasing market share is a key indicator of the success of an effective business strategy, especially among small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The results of this study reveal that SMEs that successfully increase their market share typically adopt a focused approach to marketing activities, targeting the right market segments and leveraging customer data to tailor marketing campaigns. Empirical evidence from studies by (Drydakis 2022; Joutsuu-Salo, Viljamaa, and Kangas 2023; Mishrif and Khan 2023; Rialti and Zollo 2023; Saura, Palacios-Marques, and Ribeiro-Soriano 2023) , shows that SMEs that segment their markets and tailor their marketing strategies based on data analysis experience an increase in market share of up to 18% over a two-year period. These findings support the argument that a marketing strategy focused on the specifics of the right market segments can provide significant competitive advantages. Customer retention also plays a critical role in the long-term success of SMEs. This research shows that focused marketing campaigns, designed to retain existing customers, are more effective than efforts to attract new customers. A study by (Alkitbi et al. 2021; Mittal et al. 2023) , found that a 5% increase in customer retention can increase a company's profitability by 5% to 95%, depending on the industry.

This data shows the importance of building long-term relationships with customers through targeted and personalized marketing campaigns. In this context, focused marketing campaigns that leverage data analytics to understand customer behavior and offer customized solutions prove to be an effective strategy. Overall, this study confirms that a focused marketing strategy, both in increasing market share and retaining customers, is the key to success for SMEs. Supporting empirical evidence shows that this approach not only helps SMEs increase their presence in the market but also strengthens relationships with existing customers, which ultimately contributes to more stable business sustainability and growth.

2. Competitive Advantage

Product innovation has long been recognized as one of the key drivers of the success of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in maintaining competitiveness in dynamic markets. The results of this study indicate that SMEs that consistently develop and

introduce new or updated products tend to be more successful in attracting new customers and retaining existing customers.

An empirical study by (Tidd, Pavitt 2018) supports this finding, showing that SMEs that invest in product innovation experience a 15% higher increase in revenue compared to companies that do not focus on innovation. Product innovation not only allows SMEs to meet the evolving needs of customers, but also gives them a competitive advantage that is difficult for competitors to imitate. Superior customer service was also identified as an important factor in maintaining customer satisfaction and loyalty.

This study found that SMEs that emphasize customer service quality, such as quick response to complaints and personalization of service, successfully create positive customer experiences, which in turn increase customer retention. Empirical evidence from studies by (Alshamsi et al. 2021; Blut et al. 2023; Hussain et al. 2024; Otto, Szymanski, and Varadarajan 2020; Wirtz and Zeithaml 2018), shows that companies that excel in customer service have a 50% higher customer retention rate than companies that provide average service. These findings emphasize the importance of customer service as a strategic tool to improve business performance and build long-term relationships with customers.

Adoption of new technologies has also proven to be a crucial element in strengthening product innovation and improving customer service. The study revealed that SMEs that integrate digital technologies, such as customer relationship management (CRM) systems and e-commerce platforms, show increased operational efficiency and the ability to customize their products and services more quickly and precisely. A study by (Kallmuenzer et al. 2024), found that companies that actively adopt digital technologies experience up to a 20% increase in productivity, which directly contributes to market share growth and customer satisfaction.

These findings underscore the role of technology in accelerating innovation and improving customer service quality. Overall, this study confirms that product innovation, superior customer service, and adoption of new technologies are key pillars supporting SME growth and sustainability. Empirical evidence supports the argument that the combination of these three elements not only improves customer satisfaction but also provides a significant competitive advantage in an increasingly digital and connected marketplace.

3. Organizational culture

1.1 Impact on Decision Making

Cross-departmental collaboration has been shown to be a key strategy in improving organizational performance, especially in the context of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The results of this study indicate that SMEs that encourage collaboration between different departments, such as marketing, production, and research and development, tend to be more successful in identifying innovation opportunities and improving operational efficiency. Empirical evidence from a study by (Wipulanusat, Sunkpho, and Stewart 2021), supports this finding, where they found that organizations that effectively implement cross-departmental collaboration show a 30% increase in productivity.

This collaboration allows different perspectives to come together, resulting in more creative and innovative solutions to complex business challenges. Respect for innovative ideas was also identified as an important factor in creating a culture of innovation within SMEs. This study found that organizations that reward and recognize employees who come up with new ideas tend to be more innovative and adaptive to market changes. Empirical evidence from (Delmas and Pekovic 2018; Hadley 2020; Huang et al. 2022),

shows that companies that actively reward innovative ideas from their employees experience a 25% increase in innovation levels.

This reward not only motivates employees to continue thinking creatively but also strengthens their engagement and commitment to the company's goals. Overall, this study confirms that cross-departmental collaboration and appreciation for innovative ideas are two key elements that contribute significantly to improving SME performance. Cross-departmental collaboration enables a broader exchange of knowledge and ideas, while appreciation for innovative ideas fosters a dynamic and creative work environment. Empirical evidence supports that the combination of these two elements not only accelerates the innovation process but also improves the competitiveness and sustainability of the business in the long term.

1.2 Facilitating Innovation and Collaboration

Cross-departmental brainstorming sessions have proven to be an effective approach in encouraging innovation and creativity within organizations, especially in small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The results of this study indicate that SMEs that regularly hold cross-departmental brainstorming sessions are able to generate new ideas that are more innovative and relevant to market needs.

This is due to the synergy created when different departments with different expertise collaborate, allowing for a richer and more diverse mix of perspectives. Empirical evidence from studies by (Backhouse and Ogunlayi 2020; Giusti et al. 2020) , supports this finding, where they found that organizations that involved multiple departments in brainstorming sessions experienced a 35% increase in idea quality compared to brainstorming sessions conducted solely by departments.

Cross-departmental collaboration in brainstorming allows for an environment where innovation can thrive more effectively. Rewards for innovative contributions also play an important role in creating a culture of innovation within SMEs. This study reveals that recognizing and rewarding employees who make innovative contributions not only increases individual motivation but also fosters an organizational culture that supports experimentation and risk-taking.

An empirical study by (Inam et al. 2021) , shows that companies that actively reward their employees' innovative contributions experience an increase in innovation productivity of up to 28%. This reward serves as a strong incentive for employees to continue to find new, more efficient and effective ways to carry out their duties, and contribute to business sustainability and growth. Overall, the findings of this study confirm the importance of cross-departmental brainstorming sessions and rewards for innovative contributions in improving SME performance.

Cross-departmental brainstorming sessions create space for fresh and innovative ideas that have the potential to improve the competitiveness of the company, while rewards for innovative contributions ensure that these efforts are recognized and maintained as part of the organizational culture. Supporting empirical evidence suggests that the combination of these two elements not only encourages the creation of innovative ideas but also strengthens employee commitment to achieving organizational goals.

1.3 Influence on Market Response

Product adjustments based on customer feedback are one of the key strategies used by small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to stay relevant and competitive in an ever-evolving market. The results of this study show that SMEs that actively collect and analyze customer feedback, and adjust their products based on this information, tend to experience increased customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Customer feedback¹⁴ provides valuable insights into market needs and preferences, enabling SMEs to thrive. The results of this study are supported by research (Hohenberg and Taylor 2020; Otto, Szymanski, and Varadarajan 2020), showing that companies that systematically adjust products based on customer¹⁷ feedback recorded a sales increase of up to 25% within a year. This product adjustment not only strengthens the relationship between the company and its customers but also increases the company's ability to compete in a dynamic market. In addition, a cohesive marketing campaign is an important element in strengthening brand image and attracting consumer attention.

This study found that SMEs that design and implement cohesive marketing campaigns where marketing messages are delivered consistently across multiple channels are able to significantly increase their marketing effectiveness. A cohesive campaign ensures that consumers receive the same, integrated message, which in turn increases brand recognition and strengthens market position (Keller 2020; Oh et al. 2020) support this finding, where they found that a cohesive marketing campaign can increase brand recognition by up to 30% and expand market share by up to 20%.

Cohesion in marketing campaigns enables SMEs to build a strong brand narrative and increase competitiveness in an increasingly fragmented market. Overall, the findings of this study emphasize the importance of product adjustments based on feedback and cohesive marketing campaigns in improving SME performance. Product customization allows companies to stay relevant to consumer needs, while cohesive marketing campaigns ensure that the company's message is effectively conveyed to the right audience. Empirical evidence supports that the combination of these two strategies can significantly improve the competitiveness and sustainability of SMEs in the global market.

4. Interaction of Marketing Capabilities and Organizational Culture

4.1 Synergy to Support Business Goals

Cross-departmental communication and collaboration⁴⁰ plays a crucial role in creating a collaborative and innovative work environment, especially in the context of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). This study revealed that SMEs that implement effective communication and inter-departmental collaboration tend to be more successful in achieving organizational goals. Cross-departmental interaction allows for faster and more accurate information exchange, which ultimately improves the effectiveness of decision-making. Empirical evidence from a study conducted by (Wang et al. 2022) shows that companies that encourage cross-departmental communication and collaboration experience up to 22% more productivity and up to 18% more product innovation. This cross-departmental collaboration also serves as a catalyst in integrating different perspectives, thus facilitating the development of more comprehensive and creative solutions to business challenges. In addition, regular workshops and evaluations are also important elements in ensuring the sustainability of the learning process and performance improvement in SMEs.

This study found that SMEs that regularly hold workshops and conduct regular evaluations are able to maintain the relevance of their business strategies to changing market dynamics. Workshops provide a platform for employees to share knowledge, improve skills, and collaborate in creating new innovations. Periodic evaluation, on the other hand, allows companies to assess the effectiveness of the implemented strategy and make necessary adjustments.

Empirical evidence supporting this finding comes from a study by (Garvin, Edmondson, and Gino 2008), which showed that companies that conducted periodic evaluations and held workshops regularly recorded an increase in business performance

of up to 27%. This approach not only helps in identifying areas of improvement but also strengthens an organizational culture oriented towards continuous learning and development. Overall, the findings of this study emphasize the importance of cross-departmental communication and collaboration as well as regular workshops and evaluations in improving SME performance.

Effective communication and cross-departmental collaboration accelerates decision-making and drives innovation, while regular workshops and evaluations ensure that SMEs remain adaptive and responsive to market changes. Supporting empirical evidence suggests that a combination of these two strategies can significantly improve the competitiveness and sustainability of SMEs in the global market.

1.2 Adaptation to Technological and Market Changes

Investment in training and technology is a key factor in determining the success of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in competing in a dynamic global market. The study found that SMEs that proactively invest in employee skills development and adoption of the latest technologies are able to significantly improve operational efficiency and product innovation.

Continuous training not only improves employee competency but also encourages the adoption of new technologies relevant to business needs. Empirical evidence from studies conducted by (de Mattos et al. 2024; Mishrif and Khan 2023), shows that SMEs that invest substantially in training and technology experience productivity increases of up to 25% and operational cost reductions of up to 15%. These investments enable SMEs to remain competitive and responsive to market changes and maximize the potential of available technology. Additionally, participation in industry conferences also plays an important role in strengthening professional networks and gaining the latest insights into industry trends.

This research shows that SMEs that actively participate in industry conferences can take advantage of the opportunity to learn from industry leaders and adopt best practices that can be applied in their business. The conference also serves as a platform to showcase innovations and forge strategic partnerships with other industry players. Empirical evidence from studies conducted by (Adam and Alarifi 2021; Apa et al. 2021; Vepo do Nascimento Welter, Oneide Sausen, and Rossetto 2020; Zamani 2022), supports this finding, with results showing that active participation in industry conferences can increase SMEs' innovation capacity by up to 20% and significantly expand their business networks. Collaboration with technology partners is another strategy that has proven effective in driving SME growth.

The study found that SMEs that build partnerships with technology companies can leverage resources and expertise that they do not have internally, thereby accelerating the innovation process and improving product quality. Empirical evidence supporting this comes from studies by (Carrasco-Carvajal, Castillo-Vergara, and García-Pérez-de-Lema 2023; Giardino, Cristofaro, and Marullo 2023; Roux et al. 2023), which show that SMEs that partner with large technology companies experience up to a 30% increase in competitiveness and market access.

This collaboration allows SMEs to access advanced technologies, obtain technical support, and innovate more cost-efficiently. Overall, the findings of this study confirm the importance of investing in training and technology, participating in industry conferences, and collaborating with technology partners as key strategies for improving SME performance. The empirical evidence presented shows that this approach not only improves operational efficiency and innovation capacity but also expands growth opportunities and competitiveness of SMEs in the global market.

CONCLUSION

This research has explored the relationship between investment in training and technology, participation in industry conferences, and collaboration with technology partners, and their impact on the performance of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

The main findings show that all three strategies significantly contribute to improving operational efficiency, innovation capacity and competitiveness of SMEs in the competitive global market. Investments in training and technology have been shown to improve employee competency and enable the adoption of relevant technologies, while participation in industry conferences provides opportunities for SMEs to learn from industry leaders and expand business networks.

Collaboration with technology partners also plays a critical role in accelerating innovation and increasing access to wider markets. Based on the empirical evidence presented, this study confirms that an integrative approach combining training, technology, industry engagement and strategic partnerships is a key factor in driving SME success. These conclusions make an important contribution to the SME management literature, expanding the understanding of how these strategies can be implemented effectively to achieve optimal outcomes in an evolving business context. Recommendations based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be proposed for SMEs, policy makers, and future researchers: For SMEs: SMEs should proactively allocate resources for continuous training and adoption of new technologies. Given the significant positive impact of these strategies on business performance, SME management should consider making investment in technology and human resource development a strategic priority.

For Policy Makers: The government and SME support institutions need to strengthen programs that facilitate SMEs' access to advanced technologies and high-quality training. In addition, support in the form of incentives for SMEs' participation in industry conferences and the development of strategic partnerships with technology companies should also be expanded. For Future Researchers: Further research is needed to further explore the dynamics of collaboration between SMEs and technology partners, as well as to identify additional factors that may influence the successful implementation of these strategies. A more holistic and longitudinal research approach could provide deeper insights into the long-term impact of the strategies discussed in this study.

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