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Driving Business Success: The Influence of Technological Capability, Marketing Strategies and Customer Orientation on Firm Performance

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Abstract

Many small and medium enterprises (SMEs) still experience not consistent company performance despite increased investment in competence in technology, marketing techniques, and customer-centred activities. This is due to the weak implementation of strategic skills and limited understanding of the synergy between these skills and their impact on business. This study uses the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory to examine how technological competence, marketing strategies, and customer orientation affect SMEs' performance in Malaysia. A quantitative research method was used with a standardized questionnaire that received 400 valid responses from SME participants in the Klang Valley, Malaysia, from each SME. The statistical data analysis technique used was the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program, and the reliability evaluation analysis technique was used, as well as regression analysis. Notably, all three factors presented strong positive correlations with company performance as revealed by the data. Overall, the findings suggest that integration of technology, marketing strategies, and customer-oriented activities to improve organizational competitiveness is very important. Furthermore, this study contributes to the RBV literature by providing empirical evidence of the strategic capabilities which are related to SME performance. The results revealed that the owners/managers of SMEs need to adopt a holistic mode of operation that includes technology competence, marketing effectiveness, and customer management to ensure the performance of the enterprise and maintenance of its viability.

Keywords: Technological Capability, Marketing Strategies, Customer Orientation, Firm Performance, Resource-Based View

Introduction

Today, with digital markets, the success of businesses is more and more hinged on their ability to combine technical skills, marketing flexibility, and customer-oriented abilities. Recent

studies reveal that the key areas that affect the performance of firms are their digital marketing capabilities, market sensing, customer orientation, innovation routines, and personalization, as these aspects help the firm to enhance customer acquisition, retention, agility, and revenue growth (Sharafuddin & Janarthanam, 2025). This is also supported by the findings of SMEs and entrepreneurial companies, which indicate that digital transformation, marketing strategy, and business innovation positively affect the performance of the company, and innovation can be a means of transforming company activities from strategy and technology into performance gains (Safitri et al., 2026; Kowsar, 2026; Ainosa & Hussain, 2026). This perspective is supported by research, which indicates that innovation capacity is a better determinant of the performance of the companies than the mere adoption of technology, suggesting that the difference in performance is not because of the technology itself, but rather because of the strategic use of technology that the companies have made (Kowsar, 2026; Haldorai, 2026).

Recent literature also suggests that marketing is no longer a function of promotion, but has become an integrated business capability which integrates customer information and analytics, customer engagement, and value creation. Companies that can use creative marketing techniques will have a better competitive position, operational efficiency, and customer value, especially if the marketing activities are appropriate to the company's strengths and market conditions (Mulyono, 2026). Data-driven marketing technologies boost customer satisfaction, market effectiveness, and profitability while enabling enterprises to comprehend customer needs and react quickly, including Customer Relationship Management (CRM), analytics, AI, and personalization systems (Pașcalău et al., 2024; Ijomah et al., 2024). Meanwhile, client focus remains a top driver of performance. Some benefits of customer-centric strategies may appear slowly rather than immediately (Sharabati et al., 2024; Ta & Chang, 2026). Despite this, market orientation, customer relationship orientation, customer participation, andcustomer obsession have an influence on firms' adaptation of products, enhancement of service, and construction of long-term loyalty.

Prior studies have demonstrated that many organisations are investing in digital technologies, analytics, social media, and consumer interaction activities. However, they are often in fragmented manners that do not build integrated innovation systems or coherent capability-development paths (Kowsar, 2026; Shafiai et al., 2026). In addition, the literature indicates that the effect of these factors on firm performance is often indirect, working through mediators such as business innovation, business model innovation, digital transformation, or marketing capabilities (Arif et al., 2026; Chen et al., 2024; Huddin et al., 2025). Evidence also highlights that innovation and service quality expenditures may hurt short-term financial performance since they need significant organizational resources before any benefits are realized (Ta & Chang, 2026; Sumardi et al 2026). At the same time, the contradictions suggest that a more integrated description of the way the primary drivers of company success interact to determine performance outcomes is required. Furthermore, there is evidence that innovation and service quality expenditures may hurt short-term financial performance since they need significant organizational resources before any benefits are realized (Ta & Chang, 2026). The contradictions suggest that a more integrated description of the way the primary drivers of company success interact to determine performance outcomes is required.

Despite this growing body of work, a critical review of prior studies reveals a clear research gap. Most studies examine technological capability, marketing strategies or customer orientation in isolation. For example, Bharadwaj (2000) focuses on technology alone, Morgan et al. (2009) on marketing capabilities, and Abrokwah-Larbi (2023) on customer focus, while even Aziz et al. (2021), who studied Malaysian SMEs, left out technological capability. This is at odds with the RBV, which argues that superior performance comes from bundling complementary resources rather than from any single resource (Barney, 1991; Sirmon et al., 2007). The findings are also inconsistent, as the strength of these relationships varies across industries and settings (Kirca et al., 2005; Oduro et al., 2023), and some investments even lower short-term financial performance (Ta & Chang, 2026). In addition, the evidence comes mainly from large firms in developed economies or from SMEs in other emerging economies, and these three capabilities have not yet been examined together among SMEs in the Klang Valley. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by examining technological capability, marketing strategies and customer orientation together within a single RBV-based framework among SMEs in the Klang Valley, Malaysia.

Literature Review & Hypotheses

Resource Based View Theory (RBV)

RBV provides an explanation of firm performance in terms of the possession and management of valuable, unique, inimitable and non-replaceable resources and capabilities, including intangible resources like market knowledge, customer information, brand-related resources, and organizational capabilities (Mailani et al., 2024; Abrokwah-Larbi, 2023; Uyanık, 2023). A marketing scenario is where the RBV helps to emphasize market-based assets, including customer data assets, analytical skills, consumer insights, and marketing skills. This is due to the fact that these resources impact operations, strategy, and competitive edge (Varadarajan, 2020; Uyanık, 2023; Varadarajan, 2024).

Technological capability

In this literature, technical competence is equated with the innovative and strategic utilisation of developing technology to achieve improved marketing effectiveness, consumer interaction, and overall organisational performance (Sharafuddin & Janarthanam, 2025; Sasikumar & Tham, 2026). This includes the use of tools such as AI, chatbots, content production platforms, analytics systems, and scheduling technology that help organisations to automate processes, personalise encounters, and respond more quickly to market change (Sharafuddin & Janarthanam, 2025). Technological capability is also mentioned as a larger organizational capability that relates to digital exploration, digital exploitation, digitalization strategy, and digital transformation, not just to the ownership of technology (Chen et al., 2024).

It is assumed that technological capability has a direct and positive relationship with business performance; companies that build digital capability, technology processes, and the uptake of innovation are more efficient, responsive to markets and value creators. Overall, meta-analytic evidence suggests that digital technologies have a favorable, moderate effect on business performance, with especially high benefits on innovation and operational outcomes (Oduro et al., 2023). Similarly, firm-level studies find beneficial impacts of technological capabilities on performance, including when compared to SMEs and banking (Chege et al., 2019; Ananga et al., 2024). Other digital skills, such as basic, operational, and integration capabilities, can have a substantial impact on enterprise performance (Wang et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, the strength of this association varies by industry, firm age, and implementation context, suggesting that direct effects may differ across contexts (Oduro et al., 2023; Chae et al., 2017).

H1: Technological capability has a positive and significant direct relationship with firm performance.

Marketing Strategies

Typically, a marketing strategy involves a series of logical decisions and activities that tie together the marketing mix with customer preferences and competitive factors to generate a competitive advantage and enhance business results (Megersa, 2026; Aluba et al., 2025; Saif-Ur-Rehman & Barson, 2024). This concept has been expanded in recent studies to include digital marketing, brand building, social media, consumer engagement, and agile market-facing competencies, particularly in the context of a disrupted and online environment (Kowsar, 2026; Wijaya, 2024; Wijaya & Moko, 2026; Lewar, 2024). The impact of better marketing strategies on business or marketing performance is apparent; however, this impact varies depending on context and levels of implementation (Megersa, 2026; Risal, 2025; Saidu & Nasir, 2026).

It is believed that marketing strategies have a positive direct relationship with firm performance, as coordinated marketing strategies enable firms to manage scarce resources, differentiate offers, and match marketing responses to business goals. The review and empirical studies show that there is a strong positive correlation between strategic marketing activities and corporate performance (Megersa, 2026). Strategic marketing seems to create broad advantages in customer, financial, and operational performance. Technology-enabled and capability-based marketing also increases financial and innovation outcomes (Miranda et al., 2026). Further studies on SMEs have shown that product, price, place, and promotion techniques positively affect performance (Amin, 2021; Prinka et al., 2019). Direct positive effects are also reported for specific forms such as green marketing strategy (Demessie & Shukla, 2023).

H2: Marketing strategies have a positive and significant direct relationship with firm performance.

Customer Orientation

Customer orientation, also referred to as customer focus, is defined as an outside-in orientation that starts from customer needs, customer value, and customer evaluation rather than from internal capabilities alone (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Yrjölä, 2020; Wang & Lo, 2003). It is commonly treated as overlapping with market orientation and includes behaviors such as understanding customer needs, coordinating functions around those needs, and building profitable long-term relationships (Abrokwah-Larbi, 2023; Setiyaji & Wijaya, 2023; Brady & Cronin, 2001). The evidence typically shows that customer orientation increases performance, including financial, customer, internal-process, learning, loyalty, and service outcomes; however, the road is often indirect through satisfaction, value, or operational performance (Abrokwah-Larbi, 2023; Mittal & Jung, 2024; Brady & Cronin, 2001; Setiyaji & Wijaya, 2023).

Firms that engage in customer requirements, customer insight, and relationship building are predicted to have a direct positive association with company performance, as they tend to

have stronger financial, operational, and customer outcomes. Evidence from SMEs reveals that customer orientation greatly enhances financial performance, customer performance, internal process performance and learning, and growth performance (Abrokwah-Larbi, 2023). Broader evidence also views customer happiness as a strategic asset associated with variances in profitability across industries and organizations (Sharma et al., 2024). At the same time, the customer-oriented effects are not always uniform: they are higher when combined with innovativeness, opportunity focus, and supportive leadership and some customer characteristics do not translate immediately into financial performance (Brockman et al., 2012; Feng et al., 2019; Setiyaji & Wijaya, 2023).

H3: Customer orientation has a positive and significant direct relationship with firm performance.

Conceptual Model

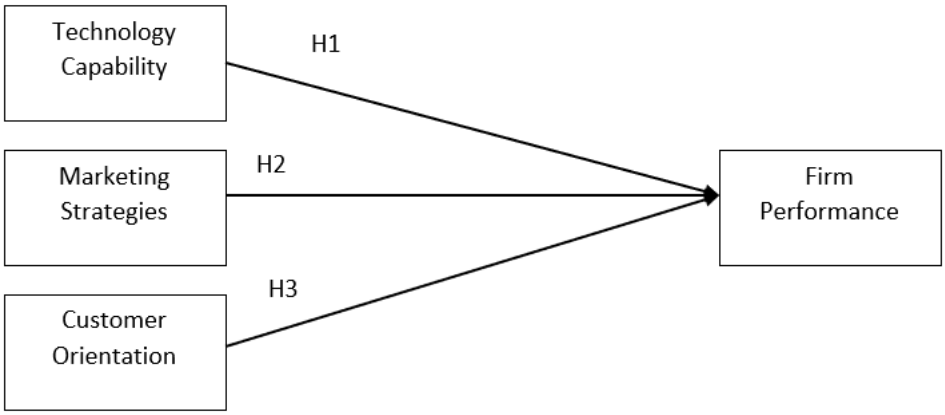

Figure 1. Conceptual Model

Methodological

The target population of this study is SMEs operating in Malaysia, and the accessible population is SMEs based in Klang Valley. The unit of analysis is the SME business. A sound sampling design should identify the population of interest, target population, sample, and unit of analysis prior to data collection (Hossan et al., 2023; Subhaktiyasa, 2024; Ringle et al., 2023). Due to the impracticality of accessing the entire SME community, this research employs a non-probability sampling methodology, typically utilized when accessibility, expense, and feasibility hinder random sampling (Rivera, 2019; Tyrer & Heyman, 2016; , 2025).

The sampling method used is convenience sampling, in which the participants are selected based on their accessibility, closeness, availability, and willingness to participate in the study (Etikan et al., 2016; Andrade, 2020; Isaac, 2023; Zrineh, 2026). This approach is suitable for studies at SMEs in Klang Valley since it helps to reach the owner-managers and decision-makers effectively using the existing sampling frame, but has limitations regarding external generalizability as it can only reach the reachable subpopulation (Hossan et al., 2023; Andrade, 2020; Rivera, 2019; Zickar & Keith, 2022). Data collection was done using a systematic questionnaire, and a total of 407 valid answers were obtained, which is adequate for multivariate analysis and also increases the stability of the estimates as sample size increases as the number of respondents grows (Amatan et al., 2025; Ringle et al., 2023; Etikan et al., 2016). Before hypothesis testing, data were screened, and the reliability of the questionnaire

items was assessed using SPSS. The survey instruments need to be examined for internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of > 0.70 (Al-Zwainy & Al-Marsomi, 2023; Li & Lay, 2024; Dash & Paul, 2021).

Finding

Demographic Outcome

The demographic profile of the 407 valid respondents shows a well-balanced sample with 51.1% male and 48.9% female, suggesting that the findings are unlikely to be shaped by a strong gender imbalance. The age distribution is also relatively even across 18–28 years (23.1%), 29–38 years (26.5%), 39–48 years (26.3%), and above 49 years (24.1%), indicating representation from younger, middle-aged, and older SME respondents. In terms of education, most respondents held Diploma (32.4%), Degree (31.4%), or Master's (29.5%) qualifications, while smaller shares reported SPM (4.2%) and PhD (2.5%). This profile suggests the study captured views from respondents with varied demographic backgrounds and a generally strong educational base, which is useful because SME survey research commonly relies on owner-managers and decision-makers responding through structured questionnaires (Abrokwah-Larbi, 2023; Deku et al., 2024; Mamun et al., 2022).

Reliability Results

The Cronbach's alpha results indicate that all study constructs achieved acceptable internal consistency reliability. Firm Performance recorded 0.817, Technological Capability 0.800, Marketing Strategies 0.826, and Customer Orientation 0.833, and all values exceed the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70 for reliable measurement. This indicates that the questionnaire items used to measure each construct were consistent and suitable for further analysis. The emphasis on internal consistency, together with convergent validity indicators such as factor loadings, AVE, and composite reliability, is standard in SME survey research and is widely used to evaluate measurement quality before testing structural relationships (Mamun et al., 2022; Abrokwah-Larbi, 2023; Aziz et al., 2021).

Regression Findings

The regression results show that all three independent variables have significant positive relationships with firm performance, with Technological Capability producing the strongest explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.809$), followed by Marketing Strategies ($R^2 = 0.721$) and Customer Orientation ($R^2 = 0.695$). The very strong result for technological capability is consistent with studies showing that technological innovation improves SME performance, operational efficiency, competitiveness, and continuity (Li et al., 2023; Sudirman et al., 2022). The strong marketing result also aligns with evidence that marketing strategy and marketing innovation significantly improve SME performance and contribute substantial predictive power (Safitri et al., 2026; Cuevas-Vargas et al., 2021; Aziz et al., 2021). The strong customer orientation result is likewise supported by research showing that customer-focus, customer orientation, and CRM-related capabilities improve SME performance directly and through stronger innovation and customer value creation (Abrokwah-Larbi, 2023; Bekata & Kero, 2024; Fahmi et al., 2025).

Discussion & Conclusion

The results indicate that technological capability, marketing tactics, and customer orientation are all important factors affecting the success of SMEs, with technological capability having the highest impact in this study. This implies that, by utilizing online materials, SMEs in Klang Valley will benefit from a range of advantages when it comes to improving their business and utilizing technology for quicker adaptation to market trends. Performance is also influenced by the firms' ability to position and promote their offerings and adjust them to customer requirements, which further indicates the importance of marketing tactics. Likewise, client orientation is vital, which implies that organisations that know their customers' needs, create ties, and respond to their needs have a higher opportunity to sustain competitiveness and improve their performance. Taken together, the results provide some support for the premise that SME company performance is multidimensional and that it is contingent on the interplay between internal strengths and market responsiveness. Overall, the study presented a considerable positive correlation between technology skills, marketing techniques, customer orientation, and corporate performance among SMEs in Klang Valley. Among these characteristics, technological capability was deemed the most influential predictor, followed by marketing strategies and customer orientation. Accordingly, SME owners and managers must focus on digital adoption, creative business practices, and customer-centric management for better performance and long-term viability. Although the results provide helpful evidence, they only reflect SMEs in Klang Valley and were based on a cross-sectional questionnaire survey. As such, future studies should expand the scope of the study to include diverse regions and industries in Malaysia and explore other mediating or moderating factors to gain a more thorough knowledge of SME success.

Implication & Future Research

These findings show that SME firm success depends on combining technology capability, adaptive marketing, and customer-centered management rather than relying on simply one strategic lever. Technology aids SME in enhancing efficiency, distinctiveness, and competitiveness, particularly in rapidly evolving contexts. Marketing techniques are still crucial since new sales, promotion, price, and digital-platform strategies often increase performance as well as competitive advantage. Customer orientation is also relevant because SMEs with a good understanding of customer needs, acquisition of customer data, and handling of customer relationships tend to have high innovation and long-term performance. Such findings also underscore the need to explore these relationships in other industries and regions. This is mainly due to the fact that the factors affecting SME performance, such as the drivers, vary across industries, market conditions, and country contexts. Mediators and moderators (innovation capability, customer loyalty, environmental dynamism, and business continuity) can be examined in future research to understand how and when they affect performance (Fatmawati & Adibi, 2026; Fahmi et al., 2025). However, cross-sectional questionnaire research tends to overestimate direct effects, constraining causal inferences, particularly when relying on just one respondent source (Pramono et al., 2025). In response, larger and more varied samples, longitudinal designs, and industry-specific models should be used in future research using these frameworks to produce robust and generalizable evidence of technological competence, marketing strategies, customer orientation, and business success.

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