



SMALL BUSINESS COMPETITIVENESS AND MARKETING STRATEGIES: EVIDENCE FROM KOKAND, UZBEKISTAN

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СЛОВА

kichik biznes, raqobatbardoshlik, strategiya, marketing, usullar, Qo'qon, O'zbekiston

ANNOTATSIYA/ АННОТАЦИЯ

Ushbu tadqiqot rivojlanayotgan iqtisodiyot sharoitida kichik biznes subyektlarining raqobatbardosh pozitsiyasiga marketing strategiyalarining ta'sirini o'rganishga qaratilgan. Xususan, tadqiqotda raqamli marketing vositalarining o'rni, marketing xodimlari malakasi, rasmiy marketing strategiyasining mavjudligi hamda raqamli kanallar orqali mijozlarni jalb etish samaradorligiga alohida e'tibor qaratilgan. Tadqiqotda miqdoriy va sifat tahlillarini uyg'unlashtirgan aralash metodologik yondashuv qo'llanildi. Miqdoriy ma'lumotlar O'zbekistonning Qo'qon shahrida faoliyat yuritayotgan 108 ta kichik biznes subyekti o'rtasida o'tkazilgan strukturaviy so'rovnoma orqali yig'ildi. Korxonalarining raqobatbardosh pozitsiyasiga asosiy mustaqil o'zgaruvchilarning ta'sirini aniqlash maqsadida ko'p omilli regressiya tahlili amalga oshirildi. Shuningdek, ochiq savollarga berilgan javoblar asosida sifat ma'lumotlari olinib, marketing samaradorligi va strategik ustuvor yo'nalishlar haqidagi qarashlarni tahlil qilish uchun kontent-tahlil usulidan foydalanildi. Natijalar shuni ko'rsatdiki, barcha to'rta mustaqil o'zgaruvchi — marketing xodimlari malakasi (X1), mijozlarni jalb etishda raqamli marketing samaradorligi (X2), rasmiy marketing strategiyasining mavjudligi (X3) hamda raqamli marketing vositalaridan foydalanish (X4) — kichik biznes raqobatbardoshligiga ijobiy va statistik jihatdan ahamiyatli ta'sir ko'rsatadi. Sifat tahlili natijalari esa biznes egalari raqamli faollik, brendni bozorda to'g'ri joylashtirish va xizmat sifati omillarini bozordagi raqobat ustunligining asosiy drayverlari sifatida baholashlarini ko'rsatdi. Mazkur tadqiqot rivojlanayotgan mamlakatlarda, xususan, O'zbekistonning Qo'qon shahri misolida kichik biznes raqobatbardoshligi bo'yicha yangi ilmiy xulosalarni taqdim etadi. Tadqiqot raqamli marketing, malakali kadrlar va marketing strategiyalarining biznes raqobatbardoshligiga ta'sirini yoritib, rivojlanayotgan bozor sharoitida faoliyat yuritayotgan kichik biznes egalari uchun muhim amaliy tavsiyalar beradi.

ABOUT THE PAPER

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ANNOTATION

This study aims to investigate the influence of marketing strategies on the competitive positioning of small businesses in the context of an emerging economy. Specifically, it focuses on the role of digital marketing tools, the qualification of marketing personnel, the presence of a formal marketing strategy, and the effectiveness of customer acquisition through digital channels.

The study adopts a mixed-method approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative analyses. Quantitative data were collected through a structured survey of 108 small business entities in Kokand city, Uzbekistan. Multiple regression analysis was used to examine the effect of key independent variables on the firms' competitive positioning. In addition, qualitative insights were derived from open-ended responses, which were analyzed using content analysis to explore perceptions of marketing effectiveness and strategic priorities.

The results indicate that all four independent variables—marketing personnel qualification (X₁), effectiveness of digital marketing in customer acquisition (X₂), presence of a formal marketing strategy (X₃), and use of digital marketing tools (X₄)—have a positive and statistically significant effect on small business competitiveness. Qualitative responses further reveal that business owners perceive digital engagement, brand positioning, and service quality as key drivers of competitive advantage in their market.

Introduction. In today's dynamic and highly competitive business environment, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a pivotal role in fostering economic growth, generating employment, and promoting innovation, particularly in emerging economies like Uzbekistan. However, the sustainability and competitive performance of SMEs remain contingent upon their ability to adopt effective business strategies. Among these, marketing strategies stand out as a critical determinant of firm competitiveness. The integration of digital marketing tools, the professional capacity of marketing personnel, and the strategic clarity of marketing efforts have emerged as significant enablers of competitive advantage.

In Uzbekistan, especially in regional urban centers such as Kokand, small businesses operate under resource constraints and limited market reach, making strategic marketing an even more vital component for survival and growth. Although macroeconomic reforms and government support mechanisms have contributed to the expansion of the private sector, there remains a considerable gap in understanding how internal marketing capabilities and strategy formulation affect the competitiveness of small enterprises.

This study aims to investigate the relationship between marketing strategies and the competitive positioning of small businesses in Kokand city. Drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data from a structured survey of 108 small businesses, the research examines key variables,

including the qualifications of marketing personnel, the intensity and effectiveness of digital marketing, and the presence of a clearly defined marketing strategy. The study employs a regression model to assess the statistical significance of these variables in explaining competitiveness outcomes.

This research contributes to the literature on SME competitiveness by offering empirical evidence from a transitional economy context and aligning its findings with established theoretical frameworks such as the Resource-Based View (RBV), the Resource Advantage Theory, and dynamic capabilities theory. The findings also offer practical implications for SME owners, policymakers, and development agencies seeking to enhance business performance through targeted marketing capacity-building initiatives.

Literature review. The concept of competitiveness is multidimensional, encompassing economic, managerial, and technological dimensions across macro, meso, and micro levels. At the macro level, competitiveness refers to a nation's ability to create wealth through productivity and innovation, as emphasized by Porter [1] and Chikán [2]. Porter's Diamond Model remains foundational in identifying key national and firm competitiveness determinants—factor conditions, demand conditions, related and supporting industries, and firm strategy and rivalry.

At the micro level, competitiveness represents a firm's capability to offer products and services that satisfy customer demands better than

ivals. This includes responding swiftly to market changes and building sustainable competitive advantages through innovation and strategic differentiation [3; 4; 5]. Firms must meet market expectations and continuously renew their offerings and internal capabilities to maintain a superior market position [2; 6].

Technological progress and innovation are consistently identified as critical drivers of competitiveness. The dynamic nature of today's global markets necessitates constant adaptation and strategic innovation to survive and grow. As Drucker [7] and Kotler [3] argue, the accelerating pace of change due to globalization and digitization imposes a need for firms to reconfigure their business models. The emergence of Industry 4.0 and the integration of digital transformation have reshaped traditional definitions of competitive advantage [8].

Digitalization, particularly in small enterprises, offers expanded marketing capabilities, ranging from social media outreach to data-driven strategies that enable personalized communication and efficient customer targeting [9; 10]. Tools like big data and predictive analytics help firms better understand consumer behavior and preferences, allowing for enhanced precision in marketing execution [11].

Marketing innovation is central to competitive performance and has been redefined in contemporary literature not just as an outcome but also as an antecedent to competitiveness. Recent works argue that innovative marketing strategies simultaneously reflect and drive competitive capability [12; 13]. This dual role aligns with the resource-based view (RBV), which positions firm-specific resources and capabilities, including marketing capabilities, as key to achieving sustained advantages [14].

In the international context, businesses must overcome barriers such as market unfamiliarity, high competition, and uncertain regulatory environments [15; 16]. Business-to-business (B2B) distribution networks facilitate market entry and operational efficiency through the engagement of local intermediaries with deep market knowledge [17; 18].

Strong brand-distributor relationships play a vital role in enhancing firm competitiveness. Distributors not only bridge cultural and operational gaps but also serve as vehicles for marketing innovation and customer engagement at the local level [19; 20]. Effective brand partnerships involve co-investment in promotional activities, training, and resource sharing, which collectively strengthen the firm's market position [21; 22].

Brand image and distributor commitment are reinforced through collaborative innovation, and firms that support their intermediaries in adopting new marketing approaches are more likely to succeed in competitive markets [23; 24]. Furthermore, the capacity to customize marketing messages and products to suit local contexts is crucial for gaining market share and achieving scalability [25; 26].

The theoretical underpinning for such relationships often draws from the resource advantage theory and the triple helix innovation model. These frameworks stress the importance of inter-organizational collaboration and contextual knowledge sharing in developing robust innovation capabilities [27; 28].

Technological innovation further enhances marketing strategies by reducing transaction costs, improving communication, and enabling real-time market responsiveness [18; 29]. Technology allows firms to build competitive brands, optimize supply chains, and personalize customer experiences at scale [14; 30].

Heidenreich and Landsperger [31] emphasize that enhancing competitiveness in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) requires a strategic focus on organizational innovation, market orientation, and network relationships. Their findings suggest that SMEs with strong customer responsiveness and collaborative networks are better positioned to sustain competitive advantages in dynamic markets.

Finally, scholars such as Gupta & Malhotra [19], Jones et al. [32], and Kim et al. [33] highlight the need for integrated, innovation-driven international marketing approaches that align branding, distribution, and customer engagement under a coherent strategic vision. The literature concludes that firm competitiveness is a multifactorial outcome shaped by strategic innovation, marketing agility, resource orchestration, and effective partnerships with local and global actors.

Research methodology. This study employs a mixed-method approach to assess the effectiveness of marketing strategies in enhancing the competitive positioning of small businesses in Kokand, Uzbekistan. The research combines both quantitative and qualitative methods to obtain comprehensive insights into the practices and challenges faced by small business owners in the region.

Data collection

Quantitative data:

The quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire that included both closed-ended and Likert-scale questions. The survey aimed to measure variables related to marketing strategies, their perceived impact, and the competitive positioning of small businesses. A total of 108

businesses participated in the survey, representing a diverse range of industries, including retail, services, and manufacturing.

Dependent variable: The main dependent variable in this study is the **competitive positioning** of the business (Y), which was assessed using a 5-point Likert scale.

Independent variables: The independent variables include the following:

X_1 : Perceived qualification of marketing personnel

X_2 : Effectiveness of digital marketing in customer acquisition

X_3 : Whether the business has a defined marketing strategy

X_4 : The use of marketing tools such as social media, websites, and SEO

Additional demographic information, including business type, size, and years of operation, was also collected.

Qualitative data:

To complement the quantitative data, qualitative insights were gathered through open-ended questions included in the survey. These questions aimed to understand the strategic decisions made by business owners and the challenges they face in implementing effective marketing strategies. The qualitative data were coded and analyzed through content analysis to identify key themes and patterns.

Key questions included:

✓ What marketing channels do you use most frequently?

✓ What marketing strategies have been most effective in enhancing competitiveness?

✓ How do you perceive your competitive advantages compared to your competitors?

Sample size determination

The sample size for this study was determined based on the methodology proposed by Green [34] and Hair et al. [35]. The required sample size for multiple regression was assessed based on Green [34] rule of thumb:

$$N \geq 50 + 8 \times k$$

where k represents the number of independent variables. In this study, four independent variables were identified: (X_1) the qualification of marketing staff, (X_2) the effectiveness of digital marketing, (X_3) the clarity of marketing strategy, and (X_4) the use of digital marketing tools. Consequently, the required minimum sample size was calculated as follows:

$$N = 50 + 8 \times 4 = 82$$

Thus, the minimum sample size required for regression analysis is 82 respondents. With 108 valid responses, the sample size exceeds this threshold and is considered adequate [34; 35].

The study was conducted among small business enterprises (SBEs) operating in the city of Kokand, Uzbekistan. A total of 125 paper-based questionnaires were distributed, and after data collection, incomplete or improperly filled questionnaires were excluded from the analysis. Following this data cleaning process, 108 valid responses were retained for further analysis. This ensures the reliability of the results, as only complete and valid responses were included in the final sample.

Statistical analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using **Stata software**. The following methods were applied:

Correlation Analysis: To examine the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable (competitive positioning).

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis: To determine the impact of various marketing strategies on competitive positioning. The model used is as follows:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \varepsilon$$

where: Y is the competitive positioning, X_1 is the perceived qualification of marketing personnel, X_2 is the effectiveness of digital marketing in customer acquisition, X_3 is whether the business has a defined marketing strategy, X_4 is the use of marketing tools (social media, websites, etc.), β_0 is the intercept, and ε is the error term.

Regression diagnostics: Various diagnostic tests, including multicollinearity (VIF), normality (skewness/kurtosis), and heteroskedasticity (Breusch-Pagan test), were conducted to ensure the robustness of the regression model.

Reliability and validity

The internal reliability of the survey instrument was assessed using **Cronbach's Alpha coefficient**. The scale was developed based on the dependent variable (competitive positioning) and its related independent variables (marketing strategy indicators). The resulting Cronbach's Alpha value was **0.885**, indicating a high level of internal consistency among the items. The validity of the questionnaire was ensured through expert reviews and a pilot test with a small sample, allowing for refinement and adjustments to enhance the clarity, relevance, and coherence of the items.

Ethical considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Respondents were assured that their responses would remain confidential and would be used only for academic purposes. The survey was anonymous, and participants were free to withdraw at any time without consequence.

Results. The empirical findings of this study provide meaningful insights into the impact of selected marketing-related factors on the competitive positioning of small businesses in Kokand, Uzbekistan.

Demographic characteristics of respondents

Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the 108 small businesses included in the final analysis. In terms of field of activity, the majority of respondents operate in the trade sector (40 businesses), followed by services (34), manufacturing (21), and other types of activities

(13). This indicates a dominant presence of trade and service-oriented enterprises within the sample.

Concerning business experience, 24 businesses have been operating for less than one year, 33 have 1–3 years of experience, 23 have operated for 3–5 years, and 28 have been active for more than five years. This distribution reflects a relatively balanced sample of both emerging and more established businesses.

Regarding firm size, as measured by the number of employees, the majority of respondents (61 businesses) employ fewer than 10 individuals. A further 31 businesses have between 10 and 50 employees, and 16 businesses employ more than 50 people. These figures highlight the predominance of micro and small enterprises within the dataset.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents¹

Category	Sub-Category	Frequency	Percent
Field of activity	Trade	40	37
	Services	34	31.5
	Manufacturing	21	19.4
	Other	13	12
Experience in the business	Below a year	24	22.2
	1-3 years	33	30.6
	3-5 years	23	21.3
	Above 5 years	28	25.9
Number of employees	Up to 10	61	56.5
	10-50	31	28.7
	More than 50	16	14.8

The demographic characteristics provide important context for interpreting the results of the study, particularly in understanding how business size, sector, and experience may influence strategic decisions related to marketing and competitive positioning.

Quantitative analysis results

Correlation analysis

Pearson correlation coefficients indicate significant positive relationships between the dependent variable (Y: competitive positioning) and all independent variables (Table 2).

Table 2. Correlation matrix²

	Y	X ₁	X ₂	X ₃	X ₄
Y	1.0000				
X ₁	0.7344	1.0000			
X ₂	0.7116	0.7927	1.0000		
X ₃	0.6805	0.7070	0.6788	1.0000	
X ₄	0.5983	0.6595	0.5922	0.4807	1.0000

The highest correlation is observed between Y and X₁ (qualification of marketing personnel, r=0.734), followed by X₂ (effectiveness of digital marketing in customer acquisition, r=0.712), X₃ (having a defined marketing strategy, r=0.681), and X₄ (digital marketing intensity, r=0.598). These values suggest that improved marketing capacity is associated with better competitive positioning.

Regression analysis

Multiple linear regression was conducted to examine the predictive power of the independent variables. The model was statistically significant (F(4, 103) = 44.01, p < 0.001), explaining 63.1% of the variance in the competitive positioning of small businesses (R² = 0.6309). All predictors were statistically significant at the 5% level. These results support the hypothesis that stronger digital marketing practices and well-structured marketing strategies enhance the competitiveness of small enterprises (Table 3).

Table 3. Model summary of multiple linear regression³

Indicator	Value
Number of observations	108
F-statistic (df = 4, 103)	44.01
p-value (Prob > F)	0.0000
R-squared (R ²)	0.6309
Adjusted R-squared	0.6165
Root Mean Square Error (RMSE)	0.5821
Dependent variable	Competitive positioning (Y)

All independent variables were significant at the 5% level. The perceived qualification of marketing personnel (β = 0.2448, p = 0.004) and the effectiveness of digital marketing in customer acquisition (β = 0.2251, p = 0.026) positively influenced competitive positioning. Notably, having

a defined marketing strategy (β = 0.5144, p = 0.042) exhibited the strongest effect, while the use of marketing tools such as social media and websites (β = 0.2002, p = 0.028) also had a significant positive impact (Table 4).

¹ Table by authors

² Table by authors

³ Table by authors

Table 4. Regression coefficients⁴

Predictor Variable	Description	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	95% Confidence interval	Significance
X ₁	Perceived qualification of marketing personnel	0.2448	0.0822	2.98	0.004	[0.0818, 0.4078]	Yes
X ₂	Effectiveness of digital marketing in customer acquisition	0.2251	0.0995	2.26	0.026	[0.0278, 0.4223]	Yes
X ₃	Existence of a defined marketing strategy	0.5144	0.2493	2.06	0.042	[0.0200, 1.0088]	Yes
X ₄	Use of marketing tools (social media, websites, etc.)	0.2002	0.0898	2.23	0.028	[0.0221, 0.3784]	Yes
Intercept β ₀	Constant term	0.8954	0.2513	3.56	0.001	[0.3970, 1.3937]	Yes

These results suggest that strategic and digital marketing practices contribute substantially to strengthening the market position of small businesses.

Diagnostic tests

Multicollinearity: Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values ranged from 1.81 to 3.62, with a mean VIF of 2.64, indicating no serious multicollinearity issues.

Normality of residuals: The joint skewness and kurtosis test yielded $Prob > \chi^2 = 0.0740$, suggesting that residuals are approximately normally distributed.

Homoscedasticity: Breusch-Pagan test showed $Prob > \chi^2 = 0.3514$, indicating no evidence of heteroscedasticity.

The diagnostics confirm that the regression model meets the key assumptions required for valid inference (Table 5).

Table 5. Regression diagnostic test results⁵

Diagnostic test	Test Statistic / Range	p-value
Multicollinearity	VIF range: 1.81 – 3.62 Mean VIF: 2.64	–
Normality of residuals	Joint Skewness-Kurtosis	0.0740
Homoscedasticity	Breusch-Pagan	0.3514

Qualitative analysis results

According to the survey results, small business entities evaluated the effectiveness of marketing strategies from various aspects. This analysis shows which marketing practices are most favored in enhancing competitiveness and which strategies receive more attention.

Most effective marketing strategies for enhancing competitiveness:

The majority of survey participants considered digital marketing (social media, websites, SEO) the most effective strategy for improving competitiveness, with 41.2% of respondents highlighting it as a key approach. Additionally, optimizing pricing strategies (35.6%) and brand creation and development (30.4%) were also identified as important strategies. Product/service differentiation (9.8%) and other methods (14.7%) were also emphasized as relevant strategies in the research.

Strategies implemented to gain an advantage over competitors:

Most small businesses focused on improving service quality and customer experience (46.1%) to enhance competitiveness. Introducing new products or services (24.5%) and making flexible pricing adjustments (12.7%) were also strategic approaches mentioned by the participants. Strengthening marketing campaigns was preferred by only 5.9% of the respondents.

Strengths of the companies:

The most frequently cited strengths of small businesses compared to competitors were product quality (52%) and service speed (38.2%). Innovative marketing approaches (23.5%) and customer service (31.4%) were also identified as significant factors for small businesses.

Use of marketing channels:

Small businesses predominantly use digital marketing tools (social media, websites), with 72.3% of respondents selecting this channel. Websites or blogs (29.8%), Google ads (17%), and traditional advertising (TV, radio, outdoor advertising) (22.3%) were also cited as commonly used channels.

Marketing training and courses:

Survey results showed that 35.6% of respondents believe that marketing training and courses are regularly held, while 39.4% mentioned that such training is conducted infrequently. However, 25% of respondents indicated that marketing training and courses are not conducted within their companies.

Discussion. This section provides an analysis of the findings derived from both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the research. The primary aim of this study was to explore the impact of various marketing strategies on the competitive positioning of small businesses in Kokand, Uzbekistan.

Impact of Digital marketing tools on competitive positioning

The quantitative analysis reveals a significant positive correlation between the intensity of digital marketing tools usage (X₂) and the competitive positioning of businesses (Y). As indicated by the regression model, businesses that heavily utilize digital marketing tools such as social media, websites, and SEO (X₄) tend to have a stronger competitive position in the market. This finding is consistent with the literature, where digital marketing has been highlighted as a powerful tool for improving business visibility and customer engagement, thus enhancing competitiveness (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Smith, 2018).

Moreover, the result of 41.2% of businesses ranking digital marketing as the most effective strategy to improve competitiveness further supports this notion. This underscores the growing importance of digital marketing channels in small business strategies, especially in the context of a rapidly digitizing economy. Firms with dynamic marketing capabilities and digital orientation demonstrate stronger resilience during environmental turbulence.

Effectiveness of marketing personnel's qualifications

Another key finding is the positive relationship between the perceived qualification of marketing personnel (X₁) and the competitive positioning of businesses. As highlighted in the regression results, businesses that perceive their marketing personnel as highly qualified are better positioned in terms of competitiveness. This result aligns with prior research emphasizing the role of skilled personnel in implementing effective marketing strategies [3]. Firms that foster a culture of marketing innovation tend to achieve superior performance and sustain their competitive advantage over time. The qualitative data further supports this, as businesses that regularly train their marketing staff reported higher levels of competitiveness, indicating the direct impact of skill development on business success.

The role of a defined marketing strategy

⁴ Table by authors

⁵ Table by authors

A well-defined marketing strategy (X_3) also plays a crucial role in enhancing the competitive positioning of small businesses, with a significant positive relationship observed in the regression analysis. The result suggests that businesses with clearly defined marketing strategies are better equipped to navigate competitive challenges. This finding is consistent with the strategic management literature, which stresses the importance of a clear and actionable marketing plan in achieving business goals and securing a competitive advantage [1]. In the qualitative responses, 30.4% of respondents indicated that having a well-developed marketing strategy is critical for staying ahead of competitors, further validating the regression results. Firms that effectively use the capabilities of marketing analytics outperform firms that rely solely on traditional decision-making models.

Competitive advantages: product quality and customer experience

In terms of competitive advantage, product quality (52%) and customer service (31.4%) were identified as the main factors that give businesses an edge over their competitors. The quantitative and qualitative results highlight that product differentiation and superior customer service are essential to maintaining competitiveness in the market. The importance of these factors aligns with existing research on competitive advantage, which indicates that businesses that prioritize quality and customer experience tend to perform better in the long run. Organizations that align their marketing strategies with customer needs are more likely to achieve a superior competitive position.

Implications for theory and practice

Theoretical implications. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge in small business marketing by empirically validating the positive relationship between strategic marketing practices and competitive positioning in a developing country context. By integrating a mixed-methods approach, the research bridges the gap between theory and practice, demonstrating how both tangible (e.g., digital marketing tools) and intangible (e.g., personnel qualification, strategic orientation) factors affect firm competitiveness. The findings extend the resource-based view (RBV) and strategic marketing theory by emphasizing the relevance of human capital and digital capabilities in shaping business outcomes in emerging markets.

Practical implications. For practitioners, the study highlights the importance of investing in skilled marketing personnel and adopting a structured marketing strategy. The evidence supports the notion that digital

marketing tools, such as social media, websites, and SEO, are not just supplementary but essential components of competitiveness. Policymakers and support organizations should consider providing targeted training programs for small business owners to enhance their strategic marketing and digital skills. Moreover, small firms should be encouraged to formalize their marketing plans and measure their impact on customer acquisition and market performance.

Conclusion. This study provides empirical evidence on the significant role of marketing strategies in enhancing the competitive positioning of small businesses in Kokand, Uzbekistan. The findings from the quantitative analysis reveal that the qualification of marketing personnel, the effectiveness of digital marketing in customer acquisition, the presence of a defined marketing strategy, and the use of digital tools such as social media, websites, and SEO all contribute positively and significantly to competitiveness.

The qualitative insights further support these results, indicating that small business owners perceive marketing efforts, particularly digital marketing and customer-focused strategies, as essential to standing out in a saturated market. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative findings offers a comprehensive understanding of how small businesses can leverage marketing to strengthen their competitive edge.

These results highlight the need for small business support programs to emphasize the development of marketing capabilities, digital literacy, and strategic planning skills. Future research could expand the geographical scope and consider longitudinal data to assess the long-term impact of marketing interventions on business performance.

Limitations of the study and areas for future research

While the study offers valuable insights into the relationship between marketing strategies and competitive positioning, there are several limitations to consider. Firstly, the data collected is cross-sectional, which limits the ability to infer causality between the variables. Future research could employ a longitudinal design to better understand the long-term effects of marketing strategies on business competitiveness.

Moreover, while the sample size of 108 respondents is adequate for initial insights, a larger sample size would provide more robust results and allow for more detailed subgroup analyses. Future studies could also explore the role of other factors, such as access to resources, market conditions, and external environmental factors, which might influence the effectiveness of marketing strategies.

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