

Marketing Management Strategies Affecting Performance of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Cote d'Ivoire

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Abstract

This paper explores marketing management strategies adopted by SMEs in Cote d'Ivoire in order to improve their performances. The study adopted an exploratory and descriptive survey research design. The respondents of this study included 50 senior executives, 50 middle-level managers and 100 workers in Abidjan city, purposively selected from SMEs in service and manufacturing industries. The findings of this study revealed that there is a high level of awareness of the significance roles played by marketing management strategies in the performance of SMEs; that adoption of technology in marketing management strategies can be mainstreamed into SMEs development agenda and that marketing management strategy is a veritable tool for sustainable development of SMEs. Out of these findings, the study recommends that leaders of SMEs implement and formulate policies that will enhance the deployment and development of new marketing management strategies with the aim of bridging the gap in the management of SMEs in Cote d'Ivoire.

Keywords: Marketing Management strategies, performance, SMEs, Cote d'Ivoire

1. Introduction

According to Kotler (2014), in Marketing Management, the marketing managers develop the firm's detailed marketing plans and procedures. With the help of subordinates, including product development managers and market research managers, they determine the demand for products and services offered by the firm and its competitors. In addition, they identify potential markets for example, wholesales, public, retails business firms, or government. Parker (2014) observes that marketing managers develop pricing strategy with an eye towards maximizing the firm's share of the market and its profits while ensuring that the customers are satisfied. In collaboration with sales, product development, and other managers, they monitor trends that indicate the need for new products and services and oversee product development. Marketing managers work with advertising and promotion managers to promote the firm's products and services and to attract potential users. Other areas where management is required may be in promotions, public relations, sales, production and all levels of the organization. These levels may not be that distinct in small and medium enterprises.

Since Boulton & Carland (1983), SME is considered to be any organized effort intended to return a profit or economic outcome through the provision of products or services to an outside group. Meredith (2001) observed that the operation of SMEs traditionally requires the investment of time and capital in creating, expanding or improving the operations of a business. The enterprises that are considered to have fewer than 250 employees are generally considered to be SMEs.

Management is an essential activity that helps SMEs pursue or achieve their stated goals Thornton & Kagan (2005). This means that the management measures taken by any organization are very significant to performance of that organization. Hendrick & Singhai (2005) argue that management actions and managers activities are very important in today's business activities. The actions and dealing done by management in SMEs decides whether the enterprise performs effectively. McHugh (2010) has given an example that if a SME is in economic complexity, management ideals of cost cutting may be expected. Thus, the methods used by management to solve problems will largely determine the long-term effectiveness of the SMEs (Balfanz & Koelmel, 2009).

In 2003, Peterman & Kennedy argued that management functions differ in different SMEs. In SMEs geared in profit making, the core business of management is to gratify the owners. This naturally regards creating profits for owners, providing worthwhile employment for employees, and adding value to SMEs product at a realistic cost to customers. Nabi (2003) observes that it is responsibility of management to make SMEs more productive and also create new ideas to make the SMEs more effective. To achieve these goals, SMEs should be geared towards division of management labor.

However, management requires to have innovative ideas that are more constructive (Rosenzweig, 2007). SMEs owners and managers tap scientifically poor management methods which imply poor performance of the enterprises. Indeed, managers sometimes rush to copy management styles borrowed from perceived successful enterprises and these result in conflicting performance of SMEs. Such rush may lead to gross simplification of things and also ignoring regular demands of changes arising from improved technology, changing markets, business environment and even demands from customers.

As for the role of SMEs owners and managers, according to McNamara & Watson (2005), many SMEs owners and managers believe their role is to solve difficulties and problems that arise in management of their businesses. Although this can be taken as true, it is only less significant part of their job. The most significant job of SMEs owner or managers is to prevent difficulties and problems. This comes to a conclusion that if SMEs management does not increase support for an executed transformation, or if they have not provided effective leadership, then this results in wasted energy. If SMEs lose focus of their core service, they eventually suffer. When management of SMEs is negative, employees' morale and the enterprise climate suffer (Fisher, 2011). This means that the management of SMEs should always back up their statement with positive actions. The management of SMEs style and behavior should be geared to help rather than hinder performance of their enterprises. It should be concrete, positive and real. Berger (2013) argues that SMEs, like any other organization form, require owner, and management to perform effectively. The author further states that management has a major influence in SMEs present in every industry, in every country and in all types of economy.

As markets are changing all the time and it does depend on the type of product the business produces, a business needs to react or lose customers. SMEs often attempt to benchmark competitors or related service industries to improve key business processes. Competition is escalating, both from traditional players and from new entrants, owing to deregulation. Changing consumer needs and behavior, disintermediation, globalization are all the dynamics being faced SMEs. ICT is also having its impact (Chorafas, 2014). Ardjouman (2014) advocates that the increase in innovation adoption is a largely defensive measure against increasingly sophisticated and highly escalating competition, demanding consumers and the necessity to control and reduce rising costs. Even though a number of studies have been done on strategies leading to failure or success of SMEs, none has been geared towards the significant of marketing management strategies in enhancing performance of SMEs in Cote d'ivoire. This study therefore attempted to determine the significant of marketing management strategies affecting the performance of SMEs in Cote d'ivoire by investigating the process through which these strategies lead to failure or success; and also establishing the effects of various marketing management strategies in enhancing performance of SMEs in Cote d'ivoire.

It is hoped that the findings of this study will help SMEs in Cote d'ivoire and others, with an insight into the benefits of using sound marketing management strategies to predict the success or failure of the businesses based on the prevalent orientations and therefore choose what would be the best conduct for their practice as a continuous performance strategy. The policy makers are expected to use the findings of this study for their research to assist in policy formulation and development of a framework for marketing management strategies affecting the performance of SMEs in Cote d'ivoire. The findings may as well attract other researchers to venture into other strategies affecting the performance of SMEs that have not been studied in the African context.

2. Concept of SME Performance and Contextualization of SMEs in Cote d'Ivoire

Generally speaking, performance is simply defined in terms of output such as profitability or quantified objectives. This means that performance of SMEs has to do with both behavior and results. This explanation covers achievements of anticipated levels as well as objective review and setting. When the behavior of management is right, then the anticipated levels of output would be achieved and vice versa for failure. When behaviors of management towards marketing strategies are geared on a right direction, then this positively affect the performance of SMEs.

This concept is particularly complex as there is no clear definition of performance, more so regarding some aspects of terminology issues, conceptual basis for assessment, and analytical levels (Ginsbert & Venkatraman, 2011; Terziovski & Samson, 2010; Reed et al., 2000). Terziovski & Samson (2010) found that there are three different levels of performance within a SME; distinguished as the business performance, organization performance and financial performance. Chu-Hua & Lin (2011) observe that performance is the key interest of every SME owner or manager. The authors argue that the overall performance of the SME will depend on appropriate management styles at all three levels of management, namely lower management, middle management and top management.

In the World Bank's 2012 report, it was stated that the number of SMEs is increasing quickly in Cote d'Ivoire as evidenced by the growth in the small business activities in the country. Every sector or industry has a SME operation. These include manufacturing, textile industry, service sector, finance, transport, security, food and hotels, to mention a few. The business environment is highly unstable characterized by management expertise, like marketing management strategies, Technological management strategies, and success and failure management strategies among others. According to Hartshon & Wheeler (2003), SMEs are more affected in dynamism and turbulence management environment than big organizations because the response to management changes in SMEs is different from that of large organizations. While large organizations can move from one business to another, business of SMEs is limited due to lack of enough resources and strategic management. Therefore, it is necessary to study the marketing management strategies that are in place in the SMEs, that is, investigate individual enterprise adjustment marketing policies in relation to the management policies.

Studies in different countries have shown that there are several factors that contribute to failure or success of SMEs in the world. For example, Ghimire & Abo (2013) reported that of the 900 SMEs surveyed, 61% of independent small firms were still operational in Cote d'Ivoire in 2012, indicating that over 39% of young firms went out of business during the political and economic crisis in the country. A previous research conducted by Bates (1995) concluded that 58.1% of SMEs fail during the first five years, with 11.2% failing per year. However, if the positive aspects of these figures are considered, a large portion of SMEs does succeed rather as opposed to reported failure figures. A study by Dun & Bradstreet (1989) concluded that accurate data concerning failure rates tend to be confusing and possibly overrated, because of factors such as differences in definitions regarding failure and demographics concerning SMEs, as well as methodology used in data collection.

According to Gaskill et al. (1993), conclusions from various studies are mixed up, leading to difficulties in understanding precise causes since strategies cited for failure also appear as strategies touching on success. The missing link is the process through which these strategies lead to either failure or success. Another gap in previous studies is that a variety of these strategies were studied in isolation. No attempt has been exhibited in exploring the consequences of the various strategies. Moreover, most of these studies were done in developed economies and the methodology employed has not been used in developing country like Cote d'Ivoire. Hence, Cote d'Ivoire SMEs owners cannot rely on these results to make precise prediction of their business performance. Furthermore, most of these researches were conducted more than a decade ago, meaning that the current situation needs to be explored.

3. Literature Review

The marketing management strategies that influence SMEs performance can be classified into interpersonal strategies, Gender issues, technological strategies, policy and regulation strategies, macro-economic strategies, incentive policies strategies, institutional policies strategies and infrastructure strategies.

3.1 Interpersonal Strategies

Literally speaking, Interpersonal skills are the life skills we use every day to communicate and interact with other people, both individually and in groups. People who have worked on developing strong interpersonal skills are usually more successful in both their professional and personal lives.

In marketing management strategy, there is social capital that essentially exists in social relations and networks. This social capital (or networking) determines the marketing management strategy a business's enterprise adopts (John, 2010). This involves relationships of the social context like trusting relationship, social interaction and value systems. This relationship built within SMEs, represents pool of good will and acceptance of services and product of an enterprise.

According to Parker (2014), investing in social interaction has advantage of managing the new products or services introduced in the market. The SME owner network includes diversity of people who contribute in marketing of his/her services or products. Birley & Westhead (1994) argue that SMEs owners' ties which are robustly entrenched can be seen as their social core which they often submit to and frequently reflect on when making decisions. These ties are at a personal level and are seen to be strengthened by the passage of time and shared experiences. Nohria (2012) confirmed that by using marketing management strategy of social nature, like use of family members, close friends and workplace colleagues can push business to higher place. It can be established that from a network perspective, the role SMEs owners can designate family members, close friends and colleagues in terms marketing management, could influence the performance of the SME.

3.2 Gender Issues Strategies

There are various gender issues which are essential for the performance of SMEs. Women SMEs owners, for example, have different goals and utilize different strategies to those of male SMEs owners. According to Marlow & Carter (2003), the goal of women SMEs owners is largely to provide for and educate their children while men SMEs owners usually assume business risks in search of profits. In regard to Cote d'Ivoire, Thiam (2009) observes that conflicts arising from different roles women SMEs owners have to engage in households, including the time tired at the SME site, have been indicated as constituting a key impediment to the steadiness and growth of women-owned SMEs and their development in Cote d'ivoire.

Nutt (2008) claims that decision-making has largely remained the privilege of men and the household influence model is such that the wife has to ask for consent from the husband before undertaking any profitable venture. According to Spilling (2000), the lack of credit for women SME owners has been connected with lack of security and sometimes a negative approach that perceives women SMES owners as creditworthy.

Further, Ronge (2002) kept saying that the gender differences in society have permeated the credit market to favor the male SME owners. This has direct influence on marketing management strategies the women SMEs owners adopts.

3.3 Technological Strategies

Technology is considered by Namusonge (2014) to be one of the answers to most difficulties and/or limitations in business. It can help SMEs emerge from the past and penetrate to more efficient, brighter future. There are several and a range of technologies that can affect the marketing management strategies of SMEs. In most of developing countries like Cote d'Ivoire, industrial technology is yet to take off; hence most of SMEs have not adopted and used ICT effectively. The challenge facing most of SMEs is how to install and use technology in their business. According to Aduda (2009), technology can effectively affect the performance of SMEs, through advertising and marketing of its products and services. However, there are serious shortcomings in technological management, as Ardjouman (2014) found in a study titled 'Factors Influencing Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Adoption and Use of Technology in Cote d'Ivoire'. There are no clear systems for information exchange and promoting of goods innovations among SMEs and other stakeholders in the sector in Cote d'ivoire. One way the technology can effectively influence performance of SMEs in Cote d'ivoire is through inter-firm linkages.

Cost and lack of awareness are also significant elements in the universal adoption and use of technology for SMEs; cost is mostly related to technological factors such as, maintenance cost, training, software and information systems (Mingaine, 2013).

Lack of know how about the technology contains numerous factors, which includes lack of guidance, uncertainty of technology benefits and unfamiliarity of technologies (Vilaseca, 2013). According to Alila and Ove (2011), lack of technological environment including unavailability of ideal technology, e-business infrastructure, lack of critical mass use are main external limitations obstructing technology use and adoption by SMEs. Iacovou et al. (2009), argue that bulk of external difficulties come from business related barriers. Muraya (2006), observes that there are three barriers in use and adoption of technology by SMEs. These are: organizational readiness, external pressures (competitiveness from other players and requirements by trading partners), and perceived benefits of the technology. These perceived benefits form main reason why many SMEs continue to use and adopt the technology (Mingaine, 2013c).

3.4 Policy and Regulation Strategies

Ardjouman in “Factors Influencing Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Adoption and Use of Technology in Cote d’Ivoire” (2014), has formulated that main regulations for SMEs owners include government actions relating to the following, property rights, including intellectual property, contract enforcement, taxation and financial reporting, trading standards, corporate governance, consumer rights, employment and health and safety, environmental protection, premises and planning rules, transport and data protection. However rules apply to particular types of SMEs. For instance, employment rights are only relevant to those employing, or considering employing. Other regulations, though general in their scope, vary in their impact across SMEs. These regulations affect marketing management strategies of SMEs in different ways.

3.5 Macro-Economic Strategies

According to Mingaine (2013d), economic liberalization proposed in 1990s was aimed at reducing distortions in the economy, this resulted to deregulation of markets which had adverse impact on SMEs. The effects include current account deficits, policy uncertainty and increased macro-economic instability characterized by high inflation rate to SMEs. Though the effects have been experienced by all private businesses, the SMEs have been mainly affected given their small size, due to less option they have to ride over instabilities. These macro-economic policies have direct effect on marketing management strategies adopted by SMEs.

3.6 Incentive Policies Strategies

Business policies seem to be the most important incentives policies since they provide link to a market for SME outputs, opportunities to produce within an international production chain and a source of inputs. Ardjouman (2014) observes that since the use and adoption of an open trade policy in Cote d’Ivoire, SMEs have progressively been involved in the global market. Imports and exchange of goods have largely increased and this has meant bigger competition for goods in the local market. Trade liberalization has enlarged competition at home and this is seen as disadvantageous to SMEs in Cote d’Ivoire, especially those in manufacturing industries. The indication for Cote d’Ivoire is that even though incentive reforms are required, they may not be adequate to promote the growth of SMEs.

As Namusonge (2014) argued, incentives should be geared towards promoting competitiveness in world markets, but as long as some protection for local SMEs is ensured. Capacity building should be enhanced through technological effort, education and training in which donors and government should play a bigger role because many skill and information markets suffer from market failure. It can clearly be seen that the incentive policies adopted by government will have direct effects on marketing management strategies adopted by SMEs.

3.7 Institutional Policies Strategies

According to Monolova et al. (2010), the tendency of SMEs owners to set their base in the overcrowded cities and dense markets makes them victims of city authorities in. Furthermore, setting businesses in same place increase competition. However, marketing of products and services from a central place can be save time and money. Policies that provide a central location where SMEs share facilities are entirely missing in Cote d’Ivoire. Such policies should involve creating programs of orderly urban development that accommodate the needs of SMEs and discourages scattering to remote areas, as this will retard the growth of SMEs. The policies that institutions or business entities adopt will affect the market management strategies and performance of that entity.

3.8 Infrastructure Strategies

Infrastructure relates to provision of adequate power, access roads, telecommunication, sewage, and water. Infrastructure has been a main restraint in the development of SMEs (Dondo & Mutiso, 2007). The government has failed to provide infrastructural framework, which is necessary for development and growth of a competitive SMEs. According to Ardjouman (2014), frequent water shortages, power rationing and the high cost of electricity experienced in Cote d’Ivoire, have hindered growth for SMEs given that most modern processes are electrical. The availability of proper infrastructure will have positive effects to marketing manage strategies that can influence performance of SMEs.

4. Conceptual Framework

Conceptual framework refers to how a researcher conceptualizes relationship between variables in a study and shows them graphically or diagrammatically.

It shows independent variables and dependent variables and how they are related or influences one another (Mugenda, 2003). This study adopted a conceptual framework vital in identifying marketing management strategies affecting performance of SMEs their businesses. The framework identifies marketing management strategies as interpersonal, gender issues, technological, policy and regulation, macro-economic, incentive policies, institutional policies and infrastructure marketing management strategies as shown by figure.

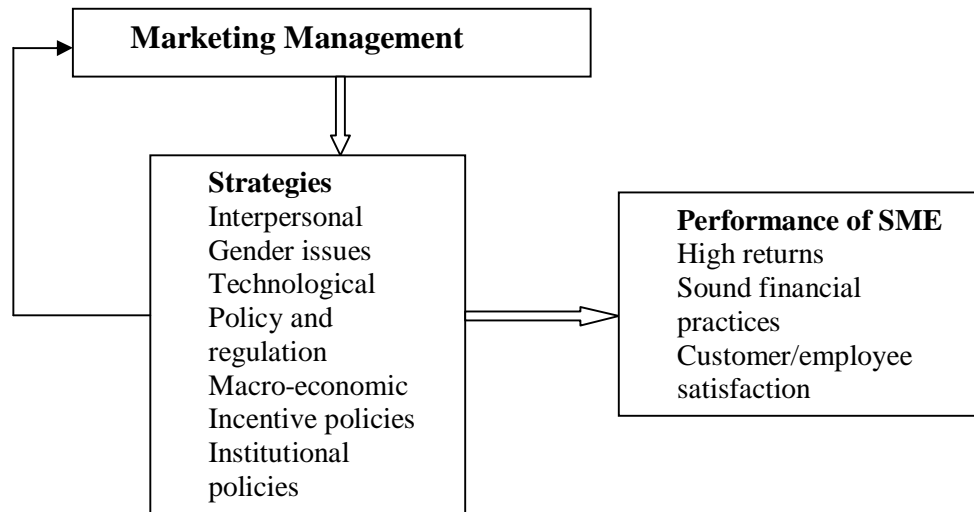


Fig. 1: Marketing Management Strategies Affecting SMEs Performance

5. Methodology of Study

This study used descriptive and explorative research design where responses and perceptions held by the respondents were studied. Descriptive and explorative research is used to investigate populations by selecting samples to discover and analyze occurrences at a particular point in time. Orodho (2008) argues that this form of research design provides quantitative descriptions of some part of the population.

This study was carried out among SMEs operating in Abidjan city of Cote d'Ivoire. The study involved 50 executive managers, 50 middle managers and 100 workers of SMEs found within the city. These SMEs were from varied background since the Abidjan city is occupied by people of different ethnic groups, different cultures, different origins, and their business are varied (communication, retail, community, wholesale, communication, storage social, personal service activities, construction, transport, real estate, hotel and restaurants). The selection of the sample was done through use of stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Stratified sampling technique was used to ensure that the different sub-groups of SMEs were proportionally represented and their characteristics were accounted for.

The study used structured questionnaires for collecting data, which were designed to capture participants' perception and knowledge of adoption and use of technology in SMEs in Abidjan city. According to Koul (2012), questionnaires are used to offer considerable advantage in administration and present a better stimulus for a larger number of populations simultaneously and provide researchers with an easy way of gathering data.

As Gay (2003) advocates, face and content validity of questionnaires was established by a panel of experts in the field of study. This study relied on expert judgment of the members of the School of Management, Shanghai University and the supervisor on the validity of questionnaires. For establishing reliability of the research instruments, piloting was done in two SMEs which did not form part of this research. Assurance of confidentiality and written background on the research objectives was provided to the participants before commencement of the study.

6. Data Analysis and Discussions

6.1 Demography of Respondents

The data on age of respondents shows that majority of respondents were between 31-40 years, 83 (41.5%), followed by 41-50 years at 52 (26.0%), over 50 years were 38 (19%) and less than 30 years were 27 (13.5%). This data revealed most of age groups were represented in this study. On the gender of respondents, data collected showed that majority 125 (62.5%) were males while females were 75 (37.5%). These findings indicated that most of SMEs workers in Cote d'Ivoire were males. Most of respondents had attained primary education, as shown in table 1.

Table1: Demographics of Respondents

Variable	Category	No.	%
Gender	Males	125	62.5
	Females	75	37.5
Age	Less than 30	27	13.5
	31-40	83	41.5
	41-50	52	26.0
	Over 50	38	19.0
Level of education	No schooling	21	10.5
	Primary	97	48.5
	Secondary	69	34.5
	University	13	6.5

6.2 The marketing Management Strategies and Management Functions

The researcher sought to establish whether there was a difference between the applications of the marketing management strategies within the SMEs from management functions. The results indicate that there was no significant difference between the application of marketing strategies and management functions in SMEs, as shown in table 2.

Table 2: Marketing Management Strategies and Management Functions

Marketing management strategy	No.	Mean	SD
Planning	200	3.76	1.16
Organizing	200	3.97	1.07
Staffing	200	4.16	1.01
Directing	200	3.16	1.57
Financial control	200	2.96	2.17

6.3 Marketing Management Strategy in Relation to Planning

Each marketing management strategy was explored further with relation to management functions. Several indicators were given and the respondents asked to pick from a likert-scale ranging from 'no extent' to a 'very large extent'. The functions explored in relation to marketing management strategies were organizing, planning, Staffing, directing and controlling. The results are given in table 3.

Table 3: Marketing Management Planning Strategy

Strategies in planning	No.	Mean	SD
The SME prepares a sequence of actions step by step to achieve its goals	200	3.67	1.04
SME affective planning reduces time and resources in achieving goals	200	3.51	1.05
SME adjust easily the business plans to avoid crisis	200	3.42	1.13
Planning in SME business occurs in different stages	200	4.01	1.72
Planning business of SME gives the procedures to be achieved	200	2.98	0.97
Planning in SME is done by the owners	200	4.89	1.35
Management in SMEs develops strategies for achieving goals	200	3.17	1.02
Planning in SMEs helps in coordination of marketing management	200	3.79	1.27

The table 3 shows that the respondents were in agreement that proper planning in marketing management strategies helps to achieve effective performance of SMEs. These findings were in agreements with findings of Dondo & Mutiso (2007) who found out that in marketing management proper planning is paramount in achieving the intended goals of SMEs.

6.4 Technological Strategies in SMEs

The respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which technological strategies had contributed to the performance of SMEs in Cote d'ivoire, and the results are in the table 4.

Table4. Technological Strategies

Technological strategy	No.	Mean	SD
SME has set money aside for technological expansion	200	2.33	1.21
SME uses technology to solve problems it experiences	200	1.79	1.17
SME is interested in using technology in its everyday dealings	200	2.13	0.98
Use of technology by SMEs is widespread	200	1.79	1.02
SME has fully integrated technology	200	1.86	1.17
Competition has forced SME to adopt and use technology	200	2.72	1.36
The SME recognizes the need for expanding use of technology	200	3.78	1.42
The managers are willing to use technology	200	1.79	1.07

From the table, technological strategies that have contributed to the performance of SMEs in Cote d'ivoire were found to be: setting money aside for technological expansion; use of technology to solve problems; integrating technology in daily dealings; competition between businesses and forced them adopt and use technology; and most of managers are willing to use technology to solve daily difficulties.

6.5 Macro-Economic Strategies in SMEs

The respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which macroeconomic strategies had contributed to the performance of SMEs in Cote d'ivoire, and the results are in the table 5.

Table 5: Macro-Economic strategies

Macro-economic	No.	Mean	SD
Effect of deregulation of markets	200	3.17	1.02
Increasing macroeconomic instability characterized by high inflation rate	200	3.67	1.72
Account deficits and policy uncertainty	200	2.98	1.03
Fewer options to ride over instabilities	200	3.19	1.09
Lack of proper infrastructure for the business	200	3.54	1.78

As shown in table 5, the macro-economic mean ranges from 2.98 to 3.67. Overall performance within SMEs seems to be affected by macro-economic policies adopted by the government.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

This research has identified the marketing management strategies prevalent in the SMEs in Cote d'ivoire. It has further identified the different impacts each of the strategies under study has in SMEs. It has been noted that the globalization factors and other strategies external to the SMEs such as incentives, regulation and policy issues, and infrastructure had very high effects on the marketing management strategies and structures of SMEs.

The study established that the planning function is well applied. Nonetheless, the managers reported that resources would be required in order to implement the strategies. The organizing function was established in the majority of businesses ascertained by the presence of organization charts.

The management should be sensitized to the use of modeling that could help them predict the outcome of their practices given the resources that they have. This implies that firms can predict success or failure and take corrective action well in advance. SMEs must maintain the right mix of practices in the areas of marketing management strategies, strategic management, human resources, and others. There ought to be a policy to train SMEs owners. Whereas such training is available in colleges and universities, it should be noted that those avenues are very expensive. A way of getting the business skills required scanning environment, getting market for goods, keeping proper records and produce standard products that compete globally should be established. Some of the major issues obtained from the results of the study were government issues dealing with interventions. Issues to do with incentives, regulation and policy are the domain of the government. An enabling environment should be created so as to allow the SMEs to grow and perform.

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