

## *Original Paper*

# Exploring Marketing Mix Practices of the Tanzanian Manufacturing SMEs and Their Growth Dynamics

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### ***Abstract***

*The objective of the study was to examine how the manufacturing SMEs implement marketing mix strategies and therefore, its importance as a driver of growth potential. The study utilized qualitative, explanatory design adopted through cross-sectional approach. Both primary and secondary data was collected using semi-structured interviews and document analysis techniques respectively to a purposive sample of 12 manufacturing SMEs. Then, the interview transcripts and secondary data were analyzed using a thematic framework through Nvivo software:10. The results confirm that manufacturing SMEs in Dar es Salaam do implement marketing mix strategies but, not so well organized and that, they still perceive product and promotion decisions as most important predictor of their growth. Further, SMEs are aware of the importance of marketing mix decisions but, they make less use of them due to limited financial resources, marketing knowledge, and unfriendly external environment.*

### ***Keywords***

*Marketing mix, SMEs, Manufacturing sector, external environment, and Firms' Growth*

## **1. Introduction**

In the past, most studies on the marketing concepts and practices often focused largely on big size companies possibly because Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) do not have adequate resources, and market muscles as compared to Multinational corporations (Carson, Gilmore, & Rocks, 2004). But, the actual trends, the globalization of markets, and development of technology are among the issues that altogether have enhanced marketing processes which facilitate business opportunities for SMEs (Anderson, 2012). Nowadays, SMEs perception of the marketing concept has increasingly changed and

contends that business achieves success by determining and satisfying needs, wants, and aspiration of target market (Walsh & Lipinski, 2009). Marketing practices may contribute to the growth of business in many aspects like volume of sales, profitability, and mount in return on investment, and hence proper marketing strategies strengthen the competitiveness in SMEs (Ghouri, Khan, & Razzaq, 2011). This view is supported by Ayanda and Adefemi (2012) who confirm that marketing practices are the major determinants of any organization's success in various marketing environment.

Nevertheless, marketing and other variables such as lack of enabling environment, poor access to finance, increased competition, fragmentation of markets, low level of technology, and poor managerial skills (to mention a few) are often said to be some of the problems that SMEs are facing (Mutalemwa, 2009; Anderson, 2017) and have been pointed out as major obstacles for their growth in Tanzania (Isaga, 2012; Nyamanza, 2019). Particularly, because of lack of relevant marketing knowledge and skills, many SMEs find it difficult to match their scarce resources with the marketing strategies needed (Anderson, 2012; Mdasha, Irungu, & Wachira, 2018). Marketing literature (Siu, Fang, & Lin, 2004; Shirazi, 2017) suggest that it has always been difficult for SMEs to anticipate the changes that are likely to occur in the markets during the tenure of a firm's marketing plan. A major problem here is that existing theories and practices cannot be taken for granted as tool for understanding the way in which SMEs acts in order to grow (Gilmore, Carson, & Grant, 2001). Some scholars argue that the conditions in SMEs are so different from conditions in formal and large firms; from which most of our theoretical marketing practices is generated (Ayedun, Oleyede, Oluwunmi, & Oyedele, 2014; Gupta & Batra, 2016).

Simpson, Padmore, Taylor and Frecknall-Hughes (2006) argue that research on SMEs marketing needs to adopt a contingency approach. This is because, the basic principles and practices that apply in one specific environment may not necessarily be relevant in another (Saleh, 2015). This way, marketing mix practices are particularly important in Tanzanian businesses today due to volatility, and highly competitive nature of the Tanzanian environment (Anderson, 2012). Although there has been measures to create a more entrepreneurship-friendly business environment and policy intervention aimed at fostering SMEs development and promote economic growth in Tanzania (Mahemba, 2003; Anderson, 2012) few precautions have been taken to improve the marketing conditions for SMEs in Tanzanian manufacturing sector. Some of the efforts such as availability of credit facilities; establishment of Small Industries Development Organizations (SIDO) in 1973; Development of SMEs policy in 2003; and establishing the department responsible for market exploration for SMEs products have been addressed. Despite these efforts, the potential of many SMEs especially the manufacturing sector is yet to be realized (Nyamanza, 2019); and their growth has not yet changed significantly thus impairing their potential benefits to the economy (Isaga, 2012). This confirms that effective business support systems and marketing strategies are still needed to promote SMEs growth in Tanzania. SMEs must continually analyze their environment and then, develop appropriate market strategies for growth (Anderson, 2012).

In this regard, Siu (2002) indicate that the marketing orientation of SMEs in Taiwan is a critical determinant of their business performance; however, the study adopted the MARKOR scale, which was developed from a sample of large-scale American companies. The applicability of western instruments to African setting particularly in Tanzania is uncertain. Consequently, Shirazi (2017) insists that inconsistencies between the market needs and marketing processes of SMEs caused reduced competitiveness in Tehran. It is on this premise that there has been little consensus among researchers concerning the impact marketing has on both large and small businesses (Nyamanza, 2019; Ghouri et al., 2011). One stream of research has suggested a positive correlation between a firm size and marketing activities while other studies have reported little or no support for such a relationship (Oyedijo, Idris, & Aliu 2012; Shirazi, 2017).

Although marketing practices have been executed in the Tanzanian manufacturing SMEs sector (Mburu, 2008; Mdasha et al., 2018; Anderson, 2011; 2012) we could find no local studies about the effects of marketing mix practices on SMEs growth in relation to the external environment. Based on these circumstances, manufacturing SMEs are needed to have a thorough understanding of the marketing mix strategies that are appropriate in improving their performance; and the findings of the study aim at bridging this research gap. To generate such information, the study envisages to address the following critical empirical question: “What are the marketing mix practices of Tanzanian manufacturing SMEs and how do they affect firms’ performance with respect to external environment?” By analyzing the marketing mix practices and growth dynamics in manufacturing SMEs, the owner/managers are aware of the types of marketing activities that are effective in predicting their business growth.

The choice of manufacturing SMEs as the focus of this study rests on the fact that manufacturing is one of the growing industries in Tanzania (Kiyabo & Isaga, 2019) and form a significant share of the industrial sector such that their contributions to the economy warrant on-going research (Mahemba, 2003; Buli, 2017). Likewise, SMEs are vital part of the local and world economy (Oyedijo et al., 2012; Resnick, Cheng, Simpson, & Lourenco, 2016); and their performance will likely have a sporadic impact on the industrialization process of Tanzania (Anderson, 2012). Arguably, findings from this study contributes to putting in place measures, guidelines and implication for policy design. To achieve all these, the study is organized as follows: the literature review is provided first, followed by the methodology, research findings, conclusion and recommendations. Finally, the study highlights on the avenues for further studies and acknowledgement.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 SMEs’ Marketing*

Marketing is defined differently in the literature and such definitions reflect different perspectives (Adewale, Adesola, & Oyewale, 2013). According to Kotler, Wong, Saunders and Armstrong (2008) marketing is defined as a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging products and value with others. Marketing consists

of the performance of business activities that directs the flow of goods and services from the producer and/ or seller to the consumer or users (Blythe, 2006). Apparently, the concept of marketing has changed over the years, from transactional concepts like pricing, promotion and distribution to relationship concepts such as the importance of customer trust, risk, and commitment. Implicitly in these definitions is the obvious nature of marketing to continuously and consistently scan the environment with a view to discovering unsatisfied needs, which an entity can exploit given such entity's stock of capabilities and competencies. However, this requires delicate permutation and combination of risk bearing, innovation, and proactive behavior as the marketing firm balances the opportunities and threats offered by the operating environment (Nkamnebe, 2004).

To date, marketing theories and concepts have been largely exemplified by larger organizations and it could be argued that these theories and models, which are developed based on studies of large organizations may not apply to the context of SMEs (Siu, 2002). Evidently, SMEs do not manage their businesses in a text book or functional way (Carson et al., 2004; Adewale et al., 2013; Ghouri et al., 2011). They are more likely to take decisions in a haphazard and chaotic way as opposed to any orderly, and structured fashion (Gilmore et al., 2001; Kotler et al., 2008). The skills and dexterity with which these functions are coordinated determine the results accruable to the firm (Nyamanza, 2019). Clearly, larger firms achieve better performance than smaller firms as they have greater resources and superior marketing capabilities (Mahemba, 2003; Sahoo & Yadav, 2017). Therefore, SMEs should maintain strong marketing orientation and practices for effective competition and growth (Al Mamun, Mohiuddin, Fazal, & Ahmad, 2018).

## *2.2 Marketing Mix Activities*

Marketing mix activities are the set of marketing organizations that a sales manager uses to achieve its marketing objectives (Kotler & Keller, 2006). By performing a variety of marketing mix tasks, these activities play a significant role in transferring products from producers to customers and in generating profits (Fu, 2011). Further, Ghouri et al. (2011) suggest that entrepreneurs and managers should apply marketing tactics to grow their business.

For the company to satisfy the consumer's needs and wants, sound and effective marketing programs and strategies, which constitute sets of products as well as communication channels and pricing policies that would satisfy the consumers' needs and wants should be developed (Ebitu, 2016; Walsh & Lipinski, 2009). It is evident that, in a competitive business environment, knowing which marketing strategy to use is critical for the survival of the firm. Consequently, some SMEs employ available marketing strategies to ensure that they retain their customers (Brooksbank, Garland, & Taylor, 2008; Aziz & Yassin, 2010; Anderson, 2017). However, the consensus is that marketing mix strategy provides the avenue for utilizing the resources of an organization effectively.

While there is a wide range of marketing activities that SMEs can draw upon, the key marketing activities cited in Western marketing textbooks and articles are those that encompass planning and delivering marketing mix activities (see Fu, 2011; Kotler et al., 2008; Oyedijo et al., 2012). Particularly, the

marketing mix strategies commonly used by firms to satisfy target markets, and then improve their performance in terms of profitability and sales include: distribution, pricing decisions, product decision (branding, packaging, customer services, product design); and promotion activities (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010; Anderson, 2012).

Though many SMEs must manage all of their marketing mix activities; which SMEs managers are emphasizing which of the marketing mix elements is unclear and the performance of any of these important functions can affect business growth (Nyamanza, 2019). Of course, for the company to satisfy customer's needs, effective marketing strategies which fit the environment, and behavior of consumers should be developed (Ebitu, 2016). This way, SMEs that emphasize on marketing mix decisions with proper understanding of its external environment are likely to perform more effectively and grow than those without such marketing strategies (Ayanda & Adefemi, 2012; Anderson, 2017).

### 2.3 SMEs Defined

SMEs are defined differently in different countries depending on the level of development; and most of definitions focus on the purpose and goals of the research in hand. This is because SMEs in USA may be large enterprise in India, and possibly a very large enterprise in Tanzania (Isaga, 2012; Anderson, 2017). However, the commonly used measures in all definitions are number of employees, capital invested, total assets, sales, and production capability. In Tanzania, most studies that have been undertaken use the number of employees as the basis of a definition. For example; the definitions used by Nyiti (2001) defines an SME based on the number of employees, with micro (1 to 4), small (5 to 49), medium (50 to 99), and large firms with more than 100. This study however, opts for the definition given by the United Republic of Tanzania (URT, 2003) through the Ministry of Industry and Trade; under which its SMEs Development policy was announced. In this policy, the definition of SMEs consists of micro, small and medium enterprises. It was established that the definition of SMEs must include the number of employees, capital invested and turn-over as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Categories of SMEs in Tanzania**

<b>Category of enterprises</b>	<b>Number of employees</b>	<b>Capital invested (Tshs) in millions</b>	<b>Turnover (Tshs) in millions</b>
<b>Micro</b>	1- 4	Up to 5.0	<b>12.0</b>
<b>Small</b>	5-50	5.1-200.0	<b>150.0</b>
<b>Medium</b>	51-100	201-800.0	<b>300.0</b>
<b>Large</b>	<b>101&amp; above</b>	<b>Above 800.0</b>	<b>Above 300.0</b>

*Source:* URT (2003); 1US\$ is equivalent to 2,300 Tanzanian Shillings in 2020.

In this context, the number of employees include the working business owner/managers; and when an enterprise falls under more than one category, i.e., one employee but capital investment is greater than 5 million Tanzanian shillings; then the level of capital investment is the deciding factor in determining

the size category.

### 2.3.1 Characteristics of SMEs in Tanzania

SMEs have characteristics that differentiate them from large organization (Carson et al., 2004; Shirazi, 2017). These differences include but not restricted to advantages such as greater flexibility, innovation, and lower overhead costs. In terms of disadvantages, SMEs are limited by their market power, capital, and managerial resources (Mahemba, 2003; Al Mamun et al., 2018). They seem also to have small share in the market as they rely on simple technology (Mbamba, 2004; Buli, 2017). Intuitively, SMEs in Tanzania are confronted with limited manpower in relation to their larger counterparts (Isaga, 2012; Mdasha et al., 2018). Olomi (2006) calls this lack of management expertise.

Furthermore, SMEs in Tanzania have simple structures and are small (Olomi, 2006). Due to their smallness, they are said to have limited access to financial resources. Poor internal capabilities to make effective entrepreneurial transition is also a feature for Tanzanian SMEs (Anderson, 2017). These differences raise the concern whether the marketing functions in SMEs enjoy the same influence found in larger firms (Dragnić, 2009; Brooksbank et al., 2008). SMEs lack adequate resources to compete with their larger counterparts and hence cannot practice traditional marketing effectively (Ebitu, 2016) and because of this, some scholars have been questioning if SMEs do perform marketing activities or not (Gilmore et al., 2001; Dragnić, 2009).

### 2.4 Growth of SMEs and External Environment

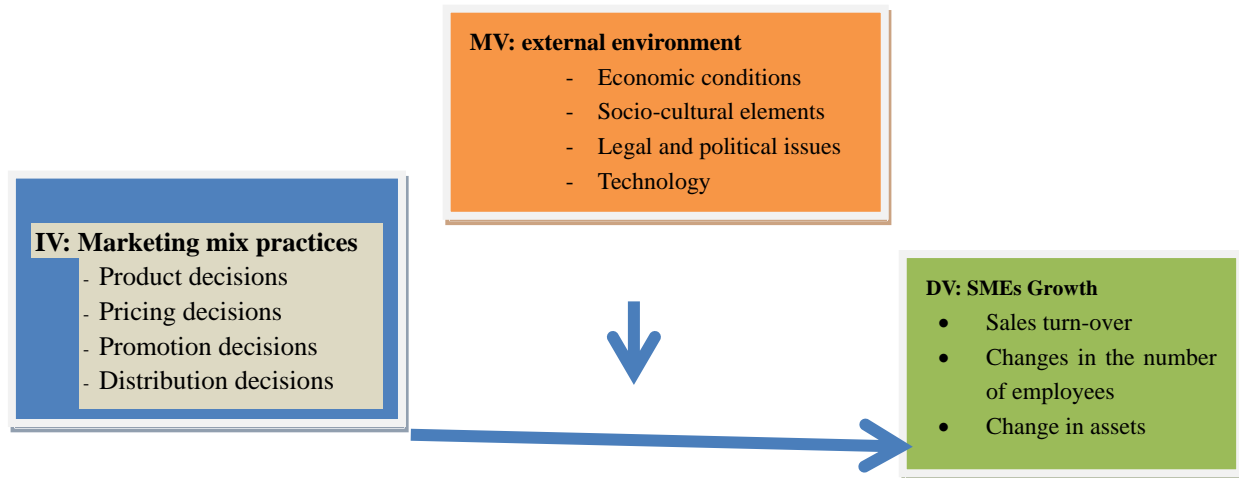
Various studies (Brooksbank et al., 2008; Isaga, 2012; Nyamanza, 2019) indicate that sales turn over, capital employed, and employment growth are common measures of SMEs growth. Nevertheless, there are difficulties in applying some of these measurements in SMEs and it is suggested that their growth depends on a set of multiple factors, that is, the measurement must combine multiple criteria (Mahemba, 2003). In the Tanzanian context, certain capabilities are critically important determinants of growth (Mbura, 2008); and marketing capability is perceived as one of important performance determinants (Anderson, 2017). Consequently, Nyamanza (2019) advocates that SMEs growth depends on their ability to continuously create new and bring about competitive products to the market; which essentially depends on the level of innovation, marketing capabilities, and external environment of a firm. Certainly, SMEs marketing mix activities are associated with growth in outputs, turnover, and employment (Siu et al., 2004; Carson & Gilmore 2015). In that line, SMEs' growth can be measured quantitatively and qualitatively. The qualitative growth can be achieved through its subjective attributes such as improving the quality of the output, or portraying a positive image (Anderson, 2017). The quantitative viewpoint is indicated by changes observed in the measurable indicators, such as change in the number of human resources, sales revenues, profitability, and assets (Nyamanza, 2019). This study articulates three factors of growth namely: sales volume; change in the number of employees; and changes in assets. When compared to alternative indicators such as change in market shares, these measures are favoured because they are most easily and accurately remembered by SMEs and they do not need to be deflated (Buli, 2017).

Indeed, the extent of external environment affects the way firms perform their activities in various settings (Buli, 2017); and plays a significant role in shaping managerial and organizational perspectives; which ultimately determines the ability of SMEs to grow (Sahoo & Yadav, 2017). Likewise, these factors may affect the internal functions and possibly the entire objectives of the firm (Gilmore, McAuley, Gallagher, Massiera, & Gamble, 2013). Naturally, the SMEs growth are affected by external environment over which they have no control (Mbura, 2008; Anderson, 2017); and this suggests that effectiveness in the SMEs marketing process depends on what is taking place in the external environment (Kotler, 2011). Apparently, this has received a considerable attention in the literature as it can cause success or failure of SMEs in three different ways: First, it makes demand on the organizations in terms of customer requirements; second, it provides opportunities; and third, it poses constraints on organizations (Aziz & Yassin, 2010; Anderson, 2017).

Notably, SMEs consider the unfavorable external environment particularly legal, tax laws, institutional frame works, bureaucracy, and financial difficulties as the most inhibitors of their growth (Olomi et al., 2008; Mdasha et al., 2018). Similarly, the study by Oyedijo et al. (2013) confirm that Nigerian SMEs didn't perform creditably well due to high interest rates, lack of collateral, poor infrastructure, and red tapes. For external environment to be well articulated, this study adopts the use of the most famous acronym-PESTLE. It is one of the easiest frameworks which is used to assess the external environmental factors which influence the Tanzanian manufacturing SMEs (Mbura, 2008). PESTLE stands for the Political, Economic, Social-cultural, Technology, Legal and Ecological environments (Kotler & Keller, 2009); and they conform to the Global Competitiveness Index of the World Economic Forum which considers competitiveness as the set of institutions, policies and factors that determine the level of productivity of a country (World Economic Forum, 2012).

### *2.5 Theoretical Model*

Based on the literature review, this study proposes a model for the effects of marketing mix practices on the performance of manufacturing SMEs in Tanzania (Figure 1). The model has 3 major components namely: marketing mix practices, SMEs growth, and the external environment of a firm.



**Figure 1. A Theoretical Model of the Impact of Marketing Mix Practices on Manufacturing SMEs Growth**

*Source:* Researcher's theoretical lens, 2020.

The model considers the influence of the external environment on the relationship between marketing mix practices and SMEs performance. Obviously, the external factors shape the marketing practices too. Since marketing mix activities have to do with looking outward and inward, to meet the customers' needs (Fu, 2011); organisations should consider what is happening within the firm and in the real world. Practically, effective practices of marketing strategies require alignment with operational context (Anderson, 2017).

### 3. Methodology and Designs

The study used a qualitative method in which an explanatory design was used with the view to examining participants' interpretations given the research context (Saunders, Lewis, & Thorn-Hill, 2003). This is because qualitative research enables the researcher to gain a detailed understanding of the complex phenomena in order to build theory and is often regarded as more effective when researching marketing phenomena within SMEs as it gives a room to listen to the interviewees and allow engagement in a dialogue (Hill & Wright, 2001).

#### 3.1 Data Collection, Sample Profile and Analysis Techniques

A combination of semi-structured interviews and document analysis techniques were adopted as methods of data collection. Both the interviews and document analysis were face-to-face administered on a purposive sample of 12 manufacturing SMEs based in Dar es Salaam because interviews and documents supplement each other (Blumberg, Cooper, & Schindler, 2011). Further, a deductive approach was employed because before data collection, a theoretical framework was built based on the existing theories and was used as a basis in the analysis stage. This agrees with the work of Saunders et al. (2003) who reveal that there are two approaches to collect and analyse qualitative data. They insist that a researcher can either follow a deductive perspective by starting to search theory to shape the



approach or an inductive perspective by first gathering and exploring data without any predetermined theoretical framework.

To this end, Dar es Salaam was chosen as the study area due to its long history with respect to manufacturing activities in the country (Isaga, 2012); and is Tanzania's commercial capital where most SMEs activities are concentrated (Nyamanza, 2019; URT, 2012). Besides, Dar es Salaam city enjoys high purchasing power as compared to other regions and is strategically located for trade and commerce in the region (Mbura, 2008).

In this regard, interviewees were selected using the criteria of being the owners/managers of SME (O'Dwyer, Gilmore, & Carson, 2009). Table 2 provides brief details of the participants. Bryman and Bell (2011) support this notion and insist that each type of interview has a different purpose. Specifically, semi-structured interviews were used with the view to exploring and providing explanations on both pre-set and emergent themes obtained before and after we have worked with the data (à priori and empirical codes) through Nvivo software:10. Also, the use of documents provides additional information which focused on the non-routine decisions, highlighting the marketing strategies of each firm (Blumberg et al., 2011).

Prior to full-scale interviews, a convenience sampling method was used to select 3 SMEs for the pilot study based on geographic proximity. Therefore, a semi-structured personal interviews with the SMEs owner/managers based in Kinondoni municipality was done with the view to validate the interview guide. It was then out of the observations noticed that enhanced the amendments of some questions in the interview guide so as to cover the research objective(s).

For the sake of maintaining external validity (Blumberg et al., 2011) the interview guide was initially crafted in English and then translated into Swahili dialect so that some few SMEs which preferred to be interviewed in Swahili could clearly understand all the questions without misconceptions. The translation exercise was done and approved by the National Council for Kiswahili (BAKITA). Consequently, the selection of SMEs for interview was on the basis that they satisfied an operational definition of SMEs; and the interviews took place at SMEs' office premises while preserving owner/managers anonymity. Each interview lasted between 45 to 60 minutes, and no incentives were offered for participation in the interview.

**Table 2. Demographic Data of the Sample**

Name of SMEs	Age Group	Education level	Experience	Form of business ownership	Sex	Industry	Location	Number of staff
ALUTECH (T) LTD	20-30	Diploma	5-10 years	Partnership	M	Aluminium & Glass	Kinondoni	10-20 employees
BETTY FURNITURE CENTRE	40-50	O-Level	5-10 years	Sole proprietorship	M	Wood	Temeke	10-20 employees
CEBA BUILDING CONTRACTORS	40-50	MBA	5-10 years	Sole proprietorship	M	Blocks	Kinondoni	Below 10 employees
DECOSTONE CONTRACTORS LTD	40-50	A-Level	Below 5 years	Incorporated company	M	Concrete materials	Kinondoni	Above 20 employees
EFA PRODUCT SOLUTIONS	40-50	O-Level	Below 5 years	Sole proprietorship	M	Chemical products	Ilala	10-20 employees
EKOL AFRICA LTD	40-50	University degree	5-10 years	Incorporated company	M	Concrete materials	Kinondoni	10-20 employees
KANYAMBO BLOCKS & BUILDING MATERIALS	30-40	A-Level	5-10 years	Sole proprietorship	M	Blocks	Kinondoni	10-20 employees
LABUKO LTD	20-30	University degree	Above 15 years	Sole proprietorship	M	Wood	Kinondoni	Below 10 employees
MFUNDI MINERAL WATER & CO.LTD	20-30	CPA (T)	Below 5 years	Incorporated company	M	Beverages	Kinondoni	10-20 employees
SUPERMEALS LTD	30-40	Diploma	Above 15 years	Sole proprietorship	M	Beverages	Kinondoni	Above 20 employees
TEMIC & Co. LTD	40-50	Advanced Diploma	Below 5 years	Sole proprietorship	F	Wood	Ilala	Below 10 employees
TEMISO ENGINEERING & CO.LTD	30-40	University degree	Above 15 years	Incorporated company	M	Fabricated metal products	Ilala	10-20 employees

*Source:* Research findings, 2020.

The SMEs owner/manager(s) were targeted because they were perceived to possess the required knowledge and experience in the SMEs' activities; as such they were responsible in day-to-day management of SMEs. Subsequently, follow-up questions were emphasized to allow them raise issues, which they felt were relevant. Topics covered in the interviews include:

- Definition and general understanding of marketing activities
- Execution of marketing mix activities within SMEs
- Types of marketing mix activities emphasised within SMEs
- Organisation of marketing mix activities

- External environmental factors affecting SMEs marketing activities
- SMEs performance
- Demographic information of SME

The interviewing process, audio recordings, and transcriptions of the proceedings were done by the researcher. For non-English speakers, the transcriptions were translated back into English language by an independent translator from National Kiswahili Council to ensure consistency and preserve validity. Upon completion of data transcription and translation, all the interviews were reviewed and the key themes were listed. The highlighted themes were again scrutinised, patterns identified, and preliminary conclusions drawn regarding the influence of marketing mix processes on the performance of manufacturing SMEs.

Through non-automated qualitative thematic analysis technique, both the data that we searched for from documents and interviewee responses were organized and examined so as to identify consistencies and differences. The information gathered was grouped into coherent categories and coded accordingly as depicted in Table 3. The use of Nvivo qualitative analysis software:10 facilitated efficient data management such as cataloguing and recouping data, illustrating relations between data, enabling text searches, word frequencies, and highlighted the links within the data (Woods & Robert, 2000).

**Table 3. Codes Summary and Corresponding Key Themes Identified**

Codes	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Importance of marketing</li> <li>• Criteria for marketing mix activities</li> <li>• Meaning of Marketing</li> <li>• Organisation of marketing mix activities</li> <li>• Implementation of marketing processes</li> <li>• Marketing mix used: Product development, Pricing decisions, Promotion activities, Distribution efforts.</li> <li>• Challenges and opportunities in SMEs activities</li> <li>• Business environment of manufacturing SMEs</li> <li>• Business performance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Definition and general views of marketing concept</li> <li>• Organisation of marketing activities</li> <li>• Importance of marketing mix activities</li> <li>• Marketing mix activities emphasised at SMEs</li> <li>• The impacts of external factors on SMEs marketing and performance</li> <li>• SMEs growth</li> </ul>

*Source:* Research findings, 2020.

### 3.2 Data Analysis

The analytical framework was developed before the analysis using broad themes relating to the research question(s) as well as those arising from a review of the literature and initial interview data. The analysis progressed through a succession of steps, starting with open codes which were derived

from the data, and finally forming the foundations of theory with the final set of conceptual and theoretical codes (Carson et al., 2004). This way, coding was crucial in identifying emerging concepts from the data that were employed in the analysis of the phenomenon, and deemed to be core in theory building or explanation of the roles of marketing within manufacturing SMEs context (Blumberg et al., 2011). In short, codes were evaluated and re-evaluated for their interrelationships, by engaging in a continual and systematic search for similarities and differences in data categories and issues and concepts identified from the literature review (Nyamanza, 2019). Further, the analysis involved the repeated re-examining of interview data in the light of emerging themes and ideas; and the findings were interpreted in the light of the literature and interview data so as to answer the research problem.

### 3.2.1 Ethical Issues

Although descriptive categorical data about the participants (Table 2) were entered into an attribute table within Nvivo; their information such as gender, level of education, experience, age, etc. was not used as a unit of analysis due to the smallness of the sample. But, it was used to inform the analysis and interpretations of the interview, and is detailed in the findings where it was felt to be useful. In lieu of this, the interviewees have been anonymized and are referred to with their respective organization names (Blumberg et al., 2011).

## 4. Results and Discussions

The results are presented under several emerging and priori themes following the analysis of interview transcripts and documents altogether with illustrative comments.

### 4.1 Organization and General Understanding of Marketing

Findings reveal that SMEs owner/managers understood marketing as a general concept that has no single and common definition but perceived it as involving focusing on customers through product awareness, quality, market survey, promotion, distribution, pricing decisions and reaching customers electronically so as to maximise profits. Gilmore et al. (2013) support this notion.

*“... It is about ensuring that customers understand our products, looking for new markets, and increasing knowledge relating to effective demand” [Deco stone Contractors Ltd.].*

Other definitions of marketing centred around the importance of networking. In particular, marketing was defined as *“... a broad concept, which is core to business operations and without which the survival of the business becomes endangered.” [TEMIC Co. Limited]*. This confirms the notion that there is no universal set of strategic choices that is optimal for all businesses regardless of their resources or business environment in which they operate (Fu, 2011).

Although customer satisfaction has been emphasized in the marketing literature (Blythe, 2006; Kotler, 2008); clearly, most manufacturing SMEs had different opinions as they relate marketing to either searching the markets for their finished products; carrying out promotional activities; developing and improving quality products; or communicating with customers through social media about the company's products. In their own definition they tell very little on what the organization's objectives

and how those objectives are to be achieved. Few of them recognize and relate marketing concept with marketing planning and realise the importance of satisfying customers' needs.

For example; "... marketing is basically about looking for customers who are in need of your products" [DECOSTONE Contractors Ltd]. In this context, marketing becomes day-to-day customer interactions rather than a set of pre-planned communication techniques.

"... We don't do all of the classic marketing but all I know is that marketing is the central point of business without which your business cannot survive. So, it is basically more of how we promote and deliver our products to the market" [EKOL AFRICA Ltd.]. In lieu of this, marketing as a function is mostly understood as selling and promoting the products (Carson and Gilmore, 2015). Broadly, their context of marketing implies that any firm trying to consummate exchange and make products available in the market may be doing marketing.

#### 4.2 Organisation and Importance of Marketing Activities

Evidently, most of the SMEs owner/managers had some awareness of the importance of marketing activities though they did not perceive marketing variables to be an explicit focus of marketing processes to drive the success of their business; viewing them as incidental or basic "hygiene factors" (see also O'Dwyer et al., 2009).

"...The majority of us do not have the required competencies to perform proper marketing activities. We are also lacking both financial and quality human resources to execute the marketing tasks effectively" [DECOSTONE Contractors Limited].

Succinctly, the key marketing mix activities cited in this study are those that encompass pricing decisions, promotion, product design, with little attention being paid on distribution activities. Table 4 below provides a summary of the owner/managers' perceptions on the marketing mix activities performed in manufacturing firms as per framework matrix analysis (Nvivo:10)

**Table 4. Perceptions on the Importance and Organisation of Marketing Activities within SMEs**

Themes	Example of statement(s)	Case nodes
<b>Organisation and importance of marketing activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"If you are taking the issue of marketing seriously, you employ people to do it just as we do it here, and then promotion becomes your tool to make products known and expand your market".</li> </ul>	DECOSTONE Contractors Limited.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Right here, all departments are mixed but, I wish to have a department for marketing research to monitor all the requirements from customers' perspectives".</li> </ul>	EKOL AFRICA Limited
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"We have a person whose duty is marketing. He does sales activities, distribute brochures, and update our website".</li> </ul>	TEMIC & Co. Limited

Source: Field findings, 2020.

When asked if SMEs need to perform a variety of marketing mix activities, they reported: *“...SMEs need to perform marketing activities because the business environment was challenging. They have to recruit marketing experts, use electronic devices and apply marketing mix elements as a sign of seriousness in business.*

Others reported that: *“... Much more is required apart from focusing on product(s) alone. They insisted that, ... in this era of technology, SMEs have to use various platforms to display their products like the social media, and magazines in order to remain successful”.*

Notably, a market focus was evident from the empirical findings with five (5) case companies stressing the significance of clear goals, profits, and market centeredness to their success.

*“... We can no longer rely on traditional sources of business to grow. We must analyse how best to change our strategies because we have been trained to do effective marketing. Therefore, our analysis considers not only products but also promotion, and pricing strategies to compete in the market”* [SUPERMEALS LTD].

This observation is in line with Adewale et al. (2013) who confirm that marketing function is central to the growth of SMEs. Nevertheless, the marketing activities of Tanzanian manufacturing SMEs are said to be not so well organised, and the overall marketing tasks are championed by non-marketers. Only few SMEs confirmed to have a separate department in which marketing activities are coordinated.

*“... To do marketing sometimes requires expertise; and a person who knows well. I am doing marketing but it's not my field”* [TEMISO ENGINEERING & Co. Limited].

In contrast, O'Dwyer et al. (2009) identified SMEs owner/managers' perceptions of the elements of marketing to include proactive approach to market demand, the formation of strategic alliances with key suppliers, customers, distributors, competitors, and a marketing function which is integrated throughout the organisation.

#### 4.3 Marketing Mix Activities Emphasized by SMEs

SMEs were asked to identify the marketing mix activities which influence their performance and a word frequency was run through Nvivo:10 to determine the emerging concepts and then added to the list of themes as reflected in Figure 2 below. The outputs indicate that product development is perceived as the most important predictor of growth before adjusting to pricing decisions and awareness creation.

##### 4.3.1 Product Development and Design

Product development was considered to be the key to success for SMEs because of the perceived level of competition, which forces most manufacturers to differentiate their offers. Also, product quality was noted by the majority of SMEs as a fundamental pre-requisite of their marketing processes. *“... We have been creating and improving our products so that they look different from those of competitors. We try to be serious on this because failure to create quality products attracts few customers and low sales”* [CEBA BUILDING CONTRACTORS].

Accordingly, EFA PRODUCTS SOLUTIONS said that: *“... While we are developing new products, and*

forging into new markets, we must also continue to maintain our existing markets and market share”. This statement acknowledges the dichotomy between generating new items and maintaining existing products. Similar experience was noted in the empirical study held in Northern Ireland by O’Dwyer et al. (2009) in which, an interpretivist methodology was adopted using convergent interviewing and observation techniques to help build up a picture of SMEs’ perceptions of the nature and scope of their marketing practices. In their analysis, they deduced that development of the marketing mix and continuous alterations to the traditional marketing offerings were implemented in SMEs so that they could achieve competitive advantage.

#### 4.3.2 Pricing Techniques

The majority of SMEs interviewed strongly emphasized the importance of setting attractive prices. For example; EFA Products solutions acknowledged that: “...it is a reasonable price that features an image of the organisation and once the image of the firm has been established, customers obviously knock at the door”. Also, TEMSO ENGINEERING & CO. LTD mentioned that: “...promotional pricing is important, ... you do have to create an impression that you are in business though you may end up getting small profit”.



**Figure 2. Word Frequency Results**

Source: Nvivo query results from the interviews, 2020.

#### 4.3.3 Promotion Decisions

The use of promo-tools was perceived to be of paramount significances in implementing marketing mix decisions. But, TV advertising was used by 3 out of 12 SMEs due to a perception that it was expensive and unnecessary. Particularly, SUPERMEALS Limited stated that:

*“... We believe in giving sales discounts as it attracts more revenues into our business and then we do communicate about our new prices through social media and billboards”.*

Pervasively, advertising and personal selling were not perceived to contribute more to SMEs success due to costs involved. But, free offers, sales discounts, direct marketing and publicity (through

billboards, brochures) were altogether considered useful.

*“... Brochures, magazines, and simple billboards are very useful to us because it is easier for someone to understand and recall our products and to know more about the business” [DECOSTONE CONTRACTORS LTD].* In this regard, the personal impact of the SMEs owner/managers, which could be termed as self-marketing and the use of attractive brand name were considered to be key to business performance of some manufacturing SMEs.

In addition, the majority of the interviewee had misconceptions about advertising and personal selling and revealed that, fear of cost escalation and lack of adequate budget were the reasons for not putting emphasis on such operating expenses.

*“... We don't design complicated promotion strategies instead, we rely heavily on social media and brochures which are distributed to our clients as they visit our offices to enhance awareness” [TEMIC & CO. LTD].*

Generally, the question of promotion has been emphasised differently at SMEs depending on the budget set for it. This is supported by Sindhu (2011) who emphasizes that promotion is needed to influence the attitude and behaviour of buyers and is at the heart of underpinning both the relationship marketing theory and contingency approach (Anderson, 2017).

#### 4.3.4 Distribution Decisions

Although some literature has confirmed on the importance of distribution efforts in business operations (Dragnić, 2009; O'Dwyer et al., 2009) this study found that it was not articulated as a key marketing activity for manufacturing SMEs in Tanzania because they do not own large stores, or even operate outside of their main branches. Distribution decisions are perceived as a role that customers must play on their own. *“... You know, according to the nature of our business, we don't need too much distribution efforts” [EKOL AFRICA LTD].*

Table 5 provides a summary of owner/managers' ideas about the distribution activities as extracted through framework matrix analysis.

**Table 5. Owner/Manager's Opinions for Distribution Activities Performed**

Themes	Example of statement(s)	Case nodes
<b>Distribution efforts</b>	“We do supply our products on a small scale but in different parts of Dar es Salaam”.	SUPERMEALS Ltd.
	“Our distribution activities are concerned with the delivery of products to the selling point where customers meet them”.	CEBA Building Contractors
	“Distribution is well handled as we are set to respond to customers' calls and deliver the consignment(s) on time”.	EFA Products Solutions
	“We do distribution and make sure our products reach the customers' premises on time and safely”.	KANYAMBO Blocks and Building Materials

Source: Field findings, 2020.



Apparently, most SMEs noted that the budget for distribution were not sufficient; and indicated that certain discounts are allowed to customers who own their means of transport. Other interviewees claimed that having more operating capital would help them be effective in handling distribution logistics. “... *Depending on the nature and size of our business, we don't need too much distribution. We prefer to deliver our products to those who only buy from our company premises because we lack the necessary facilities to handle additional supply [EKOL AFRICA Limited]*”. Adewale et al. (2013) support this observation by arguing that as long as distribution processes range from production to final delivery of goods, only few SMEs can afford to deliver goods to all possible customers, and so opts to rely on other parties for assistance.

#### 4.4 The External Environmental Factors and SMEs Performance

The environmental factors that affect marketing practice was examined because literature has confirmed that the success of SMEs can be affected by factors outside the owner's control (Anderson, 2017); and must respond to them as they may not be able to avoid their influence (Shirazi 2017). Therefore, the respondents were asked how they perceive the external environment as may affect growth of manufacturing SMEs. Four attributes were used to assess this variable: the regulatory framework and political issues (*bureaucracy of government authorities, awareness of the institutions offering support to SMEs, relationship with local authorities, awareness of SME's development policy*); economic conditions (*multiple levies and taxes, price levels, and availability of capital*); technology (*quality of products, degree of competition in the market*); and social-cultural elements (*corruption and consumption levels*).

In response, owner/managers demonstrated their perception of the significance of external environment to their business performance by engaging in market-driven activities. This perception is reinforced by the awareness they had that, in Tanzania, some policies and regulatory framework have been established to achieve private sector promotion; and is explained explicitly in the “Sustainable Industrial Development Policy (SIDP, 1996) as well as SMEs Development policy (2003) which embrace the principles of a market-led economy and competitiveness respectively.

For the moment, Tanzanian manufacturing SMEs are not in a position to compete effectively in foreign markets, and foreign products are seen as a threat in their own local market due to challenges posed by technological advancement globally. “...*Due to a lack of technological information, our firm still relies on old technology which contributes to the problem of being uncompetitive*” [TEMPO ENGINEERING & CO. LTD]. These results agree with the work of Anderson (2011) who indicate that, limited formal professional management training of SMEs owner/managers might be the cause for not clearly recognising their needs in terms of skills, technology, and even marketing competencies.

Likewise, a weak relationship between SMEs and the government has been noted. This might be the results of ineffectiveness of SMEs development policy to bring together and guide all the stakeholders of small businesses so that they can share their views on, for instance, challenges and dynamics of marketing practices. “... *I think we need very friendly government systems that support our business*

*activities. Once SMEs are supported, development will also come because we are the engine of economic development” [EKOL AFRICA Limited].*

On the other note, the respondents pointed at economic condition as one of the critical challenges for their businesses. They claimed that unfavourable economic condition coupled with corruption and numerous taxes accounted for many SMEs to remain stagnant and underperformance.

*“... Taxes are charged to a new product even before it is produced, and this applies also to a new establishment” [DECOSTONE CONTRACTORS LTD].*

Similar observations were reported by Mdasha et al. (2018) who maintain that a weak relationship exists between the government and Tanzanian manufacturing SMEs because of unfavourable tax actions. In connection to this, the economy which has a spill-over effects from the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 also experienced poor performance of the financial systems; which affects demand for the manufactured goods and most SMEs recorded a slowdown in sales (Nyamanza & Mulihano, 2016). Equally, findings continue to suggest that a bank loan was not a realistic solution to SMEs financial problems because the interest rates charged are high up to 26% and in some cases up to 28%, and cannot be afforded by most of SMEs. Also, Anderson (2017) confirms that most requirements to qualify for a loan are prohibitive and not accommodative; and the time spent for loan processing is also tremendous largely due to bureaucracy. With regard to this, the solution could be for the government to review and improve the SMEs Credit Guarantee Scheme which was established in 2005 by providing very low interest loans to SMEs and operate as a partner in the SMEs business by owning the collateral pledged.

Other interviewee raised the question of unreliable power supply as the critical issue for business success. They lament that SMEs had experienced frequent power breakdowns and therefore, were partly forced to either stop operations for a while or incur additional fixed costs by purchasing standby generator(s) to supply electricity in case of such pathetic situation. This lowers economies of scale and negatively affects their performance since the manufacturing sector requires stable electricity. *“... Power cut-offs is one of the pathetic situations affecting our businesses” [DECOSTONE CONTRACTORS LTD].* Ogundele et al. (2013) had similar view when they posit that in the absence of functional infrastructure such as steady supply of power, water, good access roads, and telecommunication networks, the chances of SMEs exploiting their growth potential are very limited.

#### *4.5 The Growth Performance of Manufacturing SMEs*

In identifying the SMEs owner/managers perceptions of growth, it is apparent that the most noticeable indicators include sales volumes, increase in the number of employees and assets (Mahemba, 2003; Isaga, 2012). Admittedly, Anderson (2017) contend that the number of employees, and increase in output levels are among the determinants of firm's growth. When performance measurements are examined from this end, the findings suggest that performance for most manufacturing SMEs in Tanzania were on average good.

*“... In general, our business performance is good, and we are trying to do all that we can to improve*

*further” [MUFINDI MINERAL WATER & Co. Ltd].*

*“... Definitely the business is improving in terms of employees as well as capital employed by far for the past three to four years” [KANYAMBO BLOCKS & BUILDING MATERIALS].*

*“... We are doing better though there are challenges here and there, still our business is growing in terms of employees, and sales turnover” [EFA PRODUCTS SOLUTIONS].*

*“... We are definitely growing because our business assets are increasing. We used to have 15 trucks, but as of now there are about 25 trucks” [SUPERMEALS ltd].*

These observations compare well with the work of other researchers (Dragnić, 2009; Buli, 2017; Ayanda and Adefemi, 2012; Al Mamun et al., 2018; Anderson, 2011; 2017) who report that there is a relationship between firms' growth and marketing efforts.

## 5. Conclusion

The objective of this study was to explore the types of marketing mix activities that would influence SMEs growth of the Tanzanian manufacturing sector given the prevailing external marketing environment. In this case, findings indicate that the majority of the SMEs interviewed emphasized the importance of pricing strategies, product design and quality management, and some investment in promo-tools particularly sales promotion and publicity. The distribution decisions were not articulated to a large extent possibly because SMEs do not operate outside of their main branches or even own large stores. These decisions were perceived as a peripheral to entire marketing mix decisions and sometimes as a role that customers must play on their own.

Accordingly, the study suggests that differing practices of marketing have had differing impacts on SMEs growth. In reality, SMEs are practicing marketing but, in their own unique style reflecting their ability to offer products that exactly suit their customers. This compels with the existing literature which suggests that the characteristics of SMEs marketing are different from those practiced in large organisations (Aziz & Yassin, 2010; Ayedun et al., 2014; Buli, 2017). In addition, this study confirms that the majority of Tanzanian SMEs achieve their targets by employing certain marketing processes but, some owner/managers were not sure whether marketing was worth the efforts in terms of time/expenditure. The analysis concludes that development of the marketing mix and continuous alterations to the traditional marketing offerings were implemented in the context of SMEs' customers. Notably, the idea that SMEs owner-managers were unable to define the term marketing in terms of their own business led to an analysis of what owner-managers said they actually did. In the interviews, the term 'marketing' emerged as a continuum of activities ranging from nothing to the whole business process but there was a recurring dialogue around engagement with the customer, the generation of sales, information search, and networking:

*“...As far as marketing activities are concerned; you have to understand your products and do research on how other competitors are doing and then set attractive prices that reflect the value of the products in the eyes of your customers” (SUPERMEALS ltd).*

These themes are well documented in the literature (Gilmore et al., 2001) and underpin a fundamental marketing theory around the focus on customer needs and orientation. Nevertheless, they tell very little about the distribution decisions to be accomplished. This resonates with the existing literature that throws up a number of different approaches to marketing in a small business context (Shirazi, 2017; Adewale et al., 2013; Anderson, 2017). Further, it is suggested that the growth of a firm depends among other things on the presence of external environmental information (Buli, 2017; Mbura, 2008; Anderson, 2012). In short, unfriendly external environment implies much less chance of success for an SME than an attractive one.

## 6. Recommendations

Growth performance was identified and reported through practices of marketing mix activities across the majority of the investigated manufacturing SMEs though in varying proportions. The findings have established that a relationship exists between growth of manufacturing SMEs and certain types of marketing mix activities particularly those that encompass product quality, pricing decisions, and promotional activities (billboards, brochures, sales promotion, and direct marketing). This finding is in line with other scholars who revealed that marketing mix has a direct relationship with performance of small businesses (Al Mamun et al., 2018; Ayanda & Adefemi, 2012; Nyamanza, 2019). It also corresponds with the market orientation theory, which holds that the key to achieving organisational goals is being more effective than competitors in integrating marketing activities to determine the needs of target markets.

Furthermore, the marketing mix activities of most manufacturing SMEs are seen as being generally loose and informal, which lacks proper organisations. These findings support the contingency theory, which acknowledges that various factors affect the small firms' marketing performance and that there is no universal set of strategic choices that is optimal for all businesses regardless of their resources or business environment in which they operate. The other theoretical contribution is that growth in the manufacturing SMEs can be determined by analysing the impacts of marketing within SMEs that undertakes marketing practices. This way, the nature of the markets and demands were found to be an impetus for the types of marketing activities executed. Likewise, findings have practical implications for both owners/managers of SMEs and policy design. Notably, certain capabilities are critically important determinants of performance; and depending upon the situation, an emphasis on certain capabilities may have an effect on growth.

In pursuit of marketing mix activities, SMEs must establish business linkages with other organisations to supplement some of their deficiencies in resources. Empirical evidence revealed that forming linkages with suppliers, financial institutions, customers, and other larger firms enables SMEs to access valuable information on technology, markets/marketing resources, finance and innovation (Shirazi, 2017; Mahemba, 2003). Regardless of how best a producer's product is, if those goods cannot get to the market then all their efforts are meaningless. Essentially, accessibility to capital is seen as the

solution for SMEs which failed to secure capital from other sources.

Further, SMEs should employ several combinations of marketing strategies to survive in the external environment that is seen as hostile and challenging. Accordingly, a conducive business environment needs to be in place if SMEs were to grow. All the same, Ogundele et al. (2013) indicate that Nigerian SMEs employed several combinations of marketing practices to survive in the external environment that was described as unfriendly. While some initiatives and government efforts have been successful in promoting the growth of SMEs, others have failed to meet the intended objectives (Anderson, 2017). The lack of transparency in their operations and unawareness among the SMEs about either their existence or their roles can be some of the challenges. Some of the initiatives include the establishment of SIDO which is responsible for developing the small industry sector in the country, VETA which guides the vocational education and training system, and TANTRADE which is instrumental for the promotion of exports (to mention a few). Of course, this study has established that the low level of understanding of some of the external environmental variables is a major drawback for manufacturing SMEs in Tanzania. This suggests that SMEs need to be sensitive of their external environment; and therefore, knowledge is essential for business growth. The innovative marketing qualities must be cultivated in combination with commitment to grow among SMEs.

Accordingly, the importance of the implementation of SMEs Development Policy (2003), and Tanzania Sustainable Industries Development Policy (1996) to their full potential cannot be understated given the contribution of SMEs to economic development (Nyamanza, 2019). For the efficacy of the underlying national policies, the formation of Business steering instruments is suggested.

#### *6.1 Areas for Future Research*

In this study, issues such as networking, innovative marketing, strategic marketing planning, services marketing, and marketing research were not explored. For this reason, the need to have a much more focused study in order to uncover insights is critical. Also, due to the cross-sectoral heterogeneity prevailing in SMEs, marketing practices across sectors need further research before any generalisation can be made. For the same reason, a different research design to provide a deeper understanding of the factors that prevail and enhance marketing activities of SMEs is needed.

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There is no potential conflict of interests reported by the author in this study.

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