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(REVIEW ARTICLE)

Exploring the potential of digital marketing skills development for SMES competitiveness and responsiveness

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Abstract

This study investigates how user-generated and firm-created content could help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) become more competitive and responsive. The study used cross-sectional and survey methods to target SMEs with a digital presence in Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt, and Kano. Cochran's sampling for unknown populations helped estimate the sample size of 385 respondents. These 385 SMEs must be online via Facebook marketing, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok advertisements, or corporate websites. Emails, Google surveys, and physical delivery were used to collect data; Cronbach's alpha coefficient was then used to verify the reliability of the research instrument with values greater than 0.7 for every construct. By allowing SMEs more control over their brand story and more successful interaction with their target market, firm-created content increases their competitiveness. It also helps SMEs quickly adjust to market changes using quick communication and fast changes. User-generated material increases competitiveness by using accurate consumer comments and encouraging additional participation. Real-time feedback helps SMEs immediately meet consumer demands and change their approach as needed, improving responsiveness. The study recommended that SMEs actively support user-generated content and employ analytical tools and efficient monitoring to raise responsiveness and competitiveness. By using these dynamic traits, SMEs could meet market needs, stay flexible, and experience long-term success.

Keywords: Firm-created content; User-generated content; SME competitiveness; SME responsiveness; Dynamic capacities theory

1. Introduction

Small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) form the Nigerian economy's basis and are essential for innovation, job creation, and economic growth (Ojeleye & Ojeleye, 2024). SMEs comprise 90% of all enterprises globally. 50% of all jobs worldwide, and 40% of the global GDP (World Bank, 2020). About 50% of Nigeria's GDP and 90% of its employment come from SMEs, contributing significantly to the nation's GDP (Tagha, 2024). By creating job possibilities and supporting fair economic involvement in various sectors, they significantly help inspire entrepreneurship and lower poverty (Anjum, Anjum, Amoozegar, Anees, & Heidler, 2021).

Furthermore, SMEs support home industry and consumption, boosting the economy's general resilience and reducing dependence on imports (Ansu-Mensah, Kwakwa, & Maku, 2021). They also greatly encourage creativity, often guiding the way new products and services that fit the needs of the Nigerian market are developed (Ojeleye & Mustapha, 2024).

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By encouraging regional development and providing a more balanced income distribution and digitalization, SMEs may further assist in sustainably building Nigeria and preserving socioeconomic stability.

Particularly in today's fast-paced, technologically driven corporate climate, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have both difficulties and chances of maintaining competitiveness and responsiveness (Ocharo & Kinyua, 2021). For SMEs looking for access and contact with a larger audience, market adaptation, and ongoing growth, digital marketing has evolved as a critical instrument (Poi, Fadare, & Idenedo, 2020). Apart from being competitive, SMEs also depend on their staff to possess digital marketing knowledge to respond quickly to changing market circumstances (Tr, Yunus, & Chan, 2022). By adopting digital platforms and solutions, SMEs may enhance their operational agility, customer interaction, and market positioning, thereby creating a constant competitive advantage and more freedom in a business climate that is continually changing (Piabari, Horsfall, Uwhubetine, & Okpalap, 2022).

Digital marketing is the act of advertising goods and services using online marketing techniques like social media marketing search and electronic mail marketing (Piabari et al., 2022). Alubakah and Obuba (2022) defines it as using digital platforms like the Internet and short messaging services to advertise, support, and sell a business's goods and services. Digital marketing is a technological application that allows a firm to inter-link with customers routinely (Eze, Chinedu-Eze, Okike, & Bello, 2020). It has become one of the most important components for a company's success in the marketplace since it serves as a communication tool and as a key to maintaining and building relationships with audiences and prospective customers (Alkharabsheh & Zhe, 2022). Ultimately, digital marketing innovation is crucial as businesses and consumers increasingly rely on digital platforms for communication (Jung & Shegai, 2023).

Digital marketing is thought to have the edge over conventional marketing since it allows businesses to analyze each user's behavior (Mulla, 2022). For example, corporations may measure the quantity of audiences reached by a virtual marketing campaign, helping them better understand what their consumers want and how to satisfy their expectations. Furthermore, the internet is so powerful that it has transformed the world into a miniature village where everyone can interact with anyone using electronic equipment (Alkharabsheh & Zhe, 2022).

A plethora of studies, e.g., Nyagadza, 2020; Tr et al., 2022; Yang, Shi, & Wang, 2015; Abdullahi Mustapha, Calvin Ojeleye, & Umar, 2022; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015 have explored diverse dimensions of digital marketing and how they influence firm performance. These include search engines, content, email, and social media marketing. This research will conceptualize digital marketing based on the two sub-dimensions of social media marketing proposed by Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015): firm-created content and user-generated content digital marketing.

Firm-created content is a Web 2.0 technology that enables people to connect online and share digital information to educate themselves about products, people, and issues (Mustapha et al., 2022). It encompasses several types of communication accessible on social media, such as reviews, blogs, videos, photographs, and Q&A sessions that the company develops (Negoro & Alif, 2020). ⌨ It includes all sorts of digital communication that are educational, persuasive, and promotional utilized by the enterprise to increase sales. On the other hand, user-generated content is content developed by the general people rather than marketing specialists, focuses on the customer, and is often delivered online based on content categorization (Mustapha et al., 2022). The public makes user-generated content, not a professional marketer, mainly delivered online, emphasizing the consumer dimension (Negoro & Alif, 2020).

There are still some research gaps in digital marketing literature. Although several studies have reported that digital marketing drives generic organizational performance, more effort needs to be made to national competitiveness and quick responsiveness to customer needs and trends in the market. As such, this current intends to fill this current gap.

For small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the concept of competitiveness is nuanced and has been studied extensively in academic literature. Above all, it addresses SMEs' ability to maintain their market position and profitability through innovation and ongoing development (Lasalewo, Masruroh, Subagyo, Hartono, & Yuniarto, 2016). It covers SMEs' capacity to react quickly to changing customer wants and market conditions, which are important for maintaining a competitive edge (Majeed, 2011). SMEs' competitiveness is defined by their capacity to employ little resources to provide improved performance outcomes efficiently (Hapsari, 2018). It entails carefully developing original value propositions by use of knowledge and abilities (Sinaga & Gallena, 2018). SMEs have to create and keep close relationships with stakeholders to stay competitive and increase business resilience and development (Potjanajaruwit, 2021). The final quality that identifies it is the ability to enter and maintain operations in different markets, expanding its reach and economic impact. These concepts, taken together, highlight the dynamic, creative, and strategic aspects of SMEs' competitiveness in various corporate environments.

One of the key characteristics of SMEs is their responsiveness, which helps them to survive and adapt under different environmental conditions. First of all, it had to do with how fast and effectively SMEs might change their operations and strategies in response to outside events (Ebenuwa, 2022). It lets SMEs see and assess market signals and trends, enabling proactive decision-making (Kumar & Kumar Singh, 2017). SMEs that can reorganise resources and procedures to fit shifting customer requirements and market conditions define their responsiveness (Gallardo-Vazquez & Sanchez-Hernandez, 2012). It addresses the strategic agility of SMEs in rapidly generating new items or services (Fruchter & Wiszniewska-Matyszkiel, 2024). In SMEs, responsiveness is the ability to make real-time decisions and operational efficiency improvement by use of digital technologies and data analytics (Rezvani & Rojas, 2022). At last, it stands out for its organisational culture and leadership that encourage staff members to be proactive and flexible (Ocharo & Kinyua, 2021). These standards highlight the importance of agility, proactivity, and strategic adaptability in equipping SMEs to react to always shifting corporate surroundings.

As a consequence, this study takes an in-depth evaluation of the influence of firm-created content and user-generated marking on organisational competitiveness and responsiveness with particular emphasises on SMEs in Nigeria. Thus, this study hypothesised that:

- H1: Firm-created content has significant effect on SMEs competitiveness in Nigeria

- H2: User-generated content has significant effect on SMEs competitiveness in Nigeria

- H3: Firm-created content has significant effect on SMEs responsiveness in Nigeria

- H4: User-generated content has significant effect on SMEs responsiveness in Nigeria

2. Dynamic Capabilities Theory

Dynamic Capabilities Theory holds that a firm's capacity to quickly alter its environment and evolve, connect, and restructure its internal and external resources and capabilities determines whether it can acquire and maintain a competitive edge (Chen, Liu, & Zhou, 2021). Dynamic capabilities help companies to always grow and change with consumer trends, technical developments, and market situations (Nedzinskas, Pundziene, Buožiute-Rafanavičiene, & Pilkiene, 2013). On the other hand, stationary resources could provide early benefits but are readily replicated or become obsolete (Samsudin & Ismail, 2019). This idea emphasises the need of having major resources and also the need of knowing how to properly distribute and organise them over time (Bleady, Ali, & Ibrahim, 2018). Dynamic skills are especially important for SMEs as they negotiate challenges of competitiveness and seek to seize new prospects (Yi, Oh, & Amenuvor, 2023). By means of developing and using dynamic abilities like responsive customer service, agile content development, and flexible marketing techniques, SMEs may improve their long-term performance, competitiveness, and resilience in dynamic business settings (Nedzinskas et al., 2013).

Understanding how SMEs may employ firm-created and user-generated content to enhance their competitive advantage using the dynamic capabilities theory allows them to grasp how content may affect their responsiveness and competitiveness. As SMEs constantly generate and modify updates, marketing materials, and promotional content to establish their brand identity and connect with their audience, firm-created content has dynamic capacity. This skill improves SMEs' agility and market reactivity by letting them quickly adjust to changes in customer expectations and market conditions. User-generated content is another dynamic factor SMEs might use to enhance their marketing strategies, products, and services. It achieves this using real-time customer feedback and insights. Active management and merging of many content resources helps SMEs to remain competitive in continually changing business environments and support innovation and strategic reevaluation. Content management is strategically significant and a required competence for SMEs striving to grow in spite of changing market conditions based on the Dynamic Capabilities Theory.

2.1. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework shows pictorially the relationship between the independent variables i.e., firm- created content & user-created content and dependent variables i.e., SMEs competitiveness and responsiveness. Figure 1 below depicts the conceptual framework.
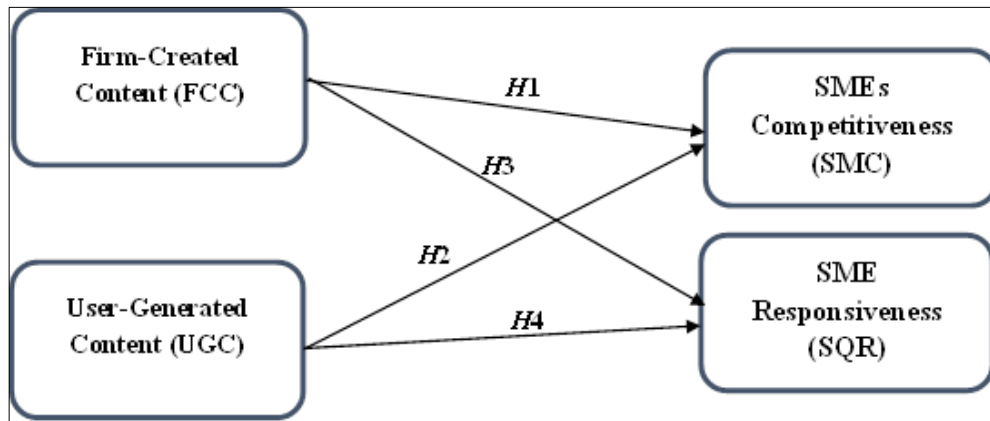
Figure 1 Conceptual Frame work

3. Methodology

The study included both survey and cross-sectional research methods. A total of 385 questionnaires were delivered to SMEs in Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt, and Kano having an online presence via Facebook marketing, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok commercials, as well as individual SMEs' corporate websites. The sample size of 385 respondents was determined using Cochran's sample size for an unknown population. The study, on the other hand, is a cross-sectional study since the respondents are owners/managers who were approached at a single moment in time by e-mail, Google questionnaire, and physical delivery. In other words, the data was collected once via a questionnaire and then analysed. Meanwhile, content validity testing was performed to guarantee that the research instrument was suitable for the study. Five academic and professional specialists were given the questionnaire to review and make necessary corrections. The experts contributed significantly to the scale by ensuring that the study items were simple and unambiguous. Furthermore, a pilot study was done to assess the reliability of the research instrument using Cronbach's alpha. Sekaran and Bourgie (2016) proposed a reliability threshold of > 0.7 for constructs. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all constructs are larger than 0.7. As a result, for the purposes of this research, they are deemed consistent.

3.1. Instruments

Scales from previous studies were adapted to suit the study's objectives. Digital marketing was measured using two dimensional construct of Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) social media scale comprising of firm-created digital content and user-generated digital content. Firm created digital media content sub-scale comprised of 4-items with reported Cronbach's alpha of ranging from 0.87 to 0.93. Sample of item is "The company's digital media communications for brand are very attractive". User-generated digital media content consists of 4-item with reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.834. Example of research item is "I am satisfied with the content generated on social media sites by other users about". To measure SMEs competitiveness Spillan and Parnell (2006) 4-item coordination scale with reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.764. Spillan and Parnell (2006) defined coordination as the integration of various functional areas in an organization to satisfy customer's needs and oversee competitive actions focused at gaining market share and advancing a firm's level of performance. Sample of item is "When one department finds out something important about our competitors, it is quick to alert other unit". In the same vein, quick responsiveness was measured using Spillan and Parnell (2006) 4-item quick responsiveness with reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.777 depicting that it is appropriate for this study. Sample of item is "We are quick to respond to significant changes in our competitors' pricing structures". All the scale were assessed on 4-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree 1to 4 strongly agree.

4. Data Analysis

The data analysis was in twofold. First, preliminary analysis was undertaken to clean and make the data appropriate for the study were conducted. Preliminary analysis such test of outlier, multicollinearity, normality and common method bias were evaluated. In addition, Structural equation model particularly, Smart-PLS was employed to ascertain the main study's validity, reliability, predictive relevance, effect size and coefficient of determination under two models; measurement and structural models.

4.1. Measurement Model

The measurement model is often used to evaluate the outer loadings of the individual construct. Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt, (2014) recommended retention of outer loadings of 0.7 and above and deletion of any loading less than this threshold. However, owing to the practicality of an item loading below 0.7 in social science research, Hulland (1999) and Ojeleye, Abdullahi, & Salami (2023) recommended retention of outer loadings of 0.5 and above. As a consequence, this study retained loadings of 0.5 and above and eliminated those below from the study. As a result, outer loading SQR3 was removed owing to loading below 0.5 (*See:* Table 1). Meanwhile, the reliability of the instrument was also checked. Sekaran and Bougie (2016) recommended reliability coefficient value of 0.7 and above to consider a scale as consistent and appropriate. Looking at Table 1 all the values of Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability are greater than 0.7 threshold suggesting that the research instrument is reliable.
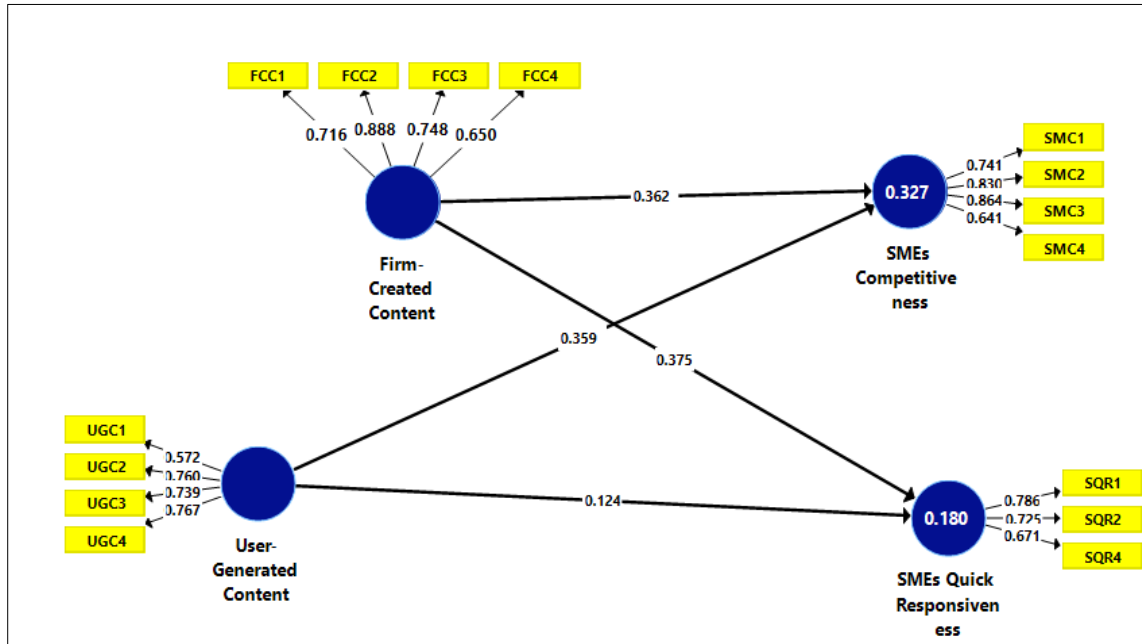

Figure 2 Measurement Model

The convergent validity which measures the extent to which all the item come together to explain a particular construct was measured using Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Fornell and Larcker, (1981) and Ojeleye, Bakare, Umar and Ojeleye (2021) recommended the AVE value of 0.5 and above to confirm convergent validity. Table 1 below showed that the AVE values are all greater than 0.5 threshold.

Table 1 Outer loadings, Reliability and Convergent validity

Constructs	Indicators	Outer Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Firm-Created Content	FCC1	0.716	0.745	0.840	0.571
	FCC2	0.888			
	FCC3	0.748			
	FCC4	0.650			
SMEs Competitiveness	SMC1	0.741	0.778	0.855	0.599
	SMC2	0.830			
	SMC3	0.864			
	SMC4	0.641			
SMEs Quick Responsiveness	SQR1	0.786	0.721	0.772	0.532

	SQR2	0.725			
	SQR4	0.671			
User-Generated Content	UGC1	0.572	0.737	0.804	0.510
	UGC2	0.760			
	UGC3	0.739			
	UGC4	0.767			

The Discriminant validity was measured using Fornell and Larcker criterion (1981). Fornell and Larcker criterion posited that to confirm discriminant validity the value of the intercorrelations within construct must be greater of the ratio of intercorrelations with other constructs. The value of the intercorrelation within construct is the square root of each construct's AVE. Table 2 below showed these values bolded and are greater than the values of the intercorrelation with other construct.

Table 2 Fornell-Larcker Criterion Discriminant Validity

Constructs	FCC	SMC	SQR	UGC
Firm-Created Content	0.755			
SMEs Competitiveness	0.455	0.774		
SMEs Quick Responsiveness	0.407	0.403	0.729	
User-Generated Content	0.260	0.453	0.222	0.714

4.2. Structural Model

The model was employed to assess the hypothesized relationship between the constructs. In addition, effect size (f^2), co-efficient of determination (R^2) and predictive relevance (Q^2). Table 1 and Figure 3 showed outcome of the hypothesised.
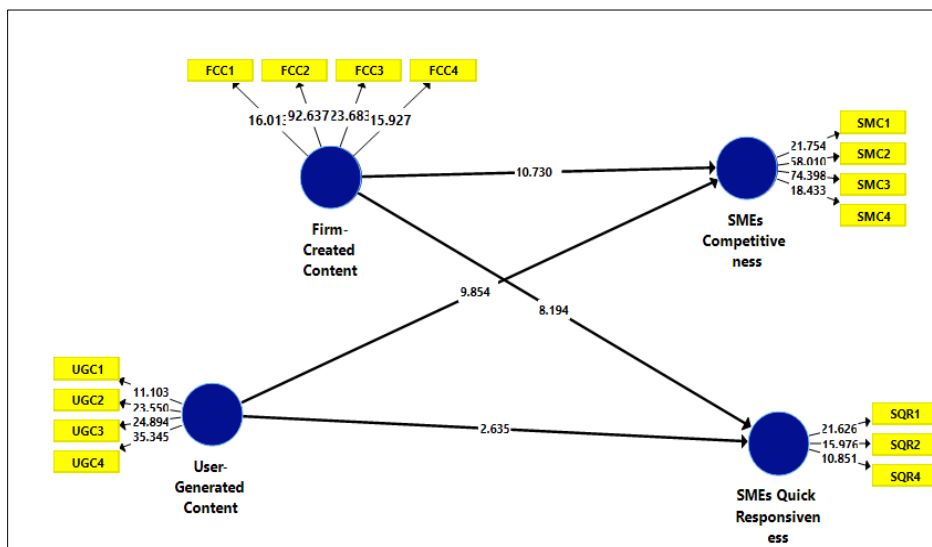

Figure 3 Structural model

Table 3 Test of Hypothesized Relationship

Hypotheses	Relationship	Beta	STDEV	T Statistics	P Values	Decision
*H*1	Firm-Created Content -> SMEs Competitiveness	0.362	0.034	10.730	0.000	Supported
*H*2	User-Generated Content -> SMEs Competitiveness	0.359	0.036	9.854	0.000	Supported
*H*3	Firm-Created Content -> SMEs Quick Responsiveness	0.375	0.046	8.194	0.000	Supported
*H*4	User-Generated Content -> SMEs Quick Responsiveness	0.124	0.047	2.635	0.009	Supported
	Model 1 R² =0.327 & Model 2 R² =0.180			*Mode 1 Q² =0.178 & Model 2 Q² = 0.091*		

The table 3 displays the findings of a hypothesis test conducted to look at the connection between the competitiveness and quick responsiveness of SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) and the two categories of content (user-generated and firm-created). T statistics, P values, standard deviations (STDEV), and beta coefficients are used to quantify the correlations. Because every hypothesis examined in the research has a statistically significant P value (all < 0.05), all of the hypotheses are validated. According to Hypothesis 1 (H1), SMEs' competitiveness is favourably impacted by content produced by their firms. The significant positive association shown by the beta value of 0.362 suggests that the competitiveness of SMEs increases in tandem with the amount and quality of content provided by the firms. This conclusion is further supported by the high T statistic of 10.730 and the P value of 0.000, which validate the relevance and dependability of this association. The impact of user-generated content on SMEs' competitiveness is examined in Hypothesis 2 (H2). The beta value of 0.359 indicates a significant positive effect of user-generated on SMEs competitiveness. A P value of 0.000 and a T statistic of 9.854 provide strong support for this link. Through the provision of insightful consumer data and engagement, user-generated content such as reviews and social media interactions seems to greatly improve the competitiveness of SMEs.

The impact of firm-created communication on SMEs' prompt response is investigated in Hypothesis 3 (H3). The association is favourable and somewhat greater than that of H1, with a beta value of 0.375. This hypothesis has significant statistical support, as shown by the T statistic of 8.194 and the P value of 0.000. This implies that SMEs which produce their own content are more adaptable and sensitive to changes in the market and demands of their clientele. The impact of user-generated content on SMEs' quick responsiveness is evaluated in Hypothesis 4 (H4). Despite being lower than the other hypotheses, the beta value of 0.124 still points to a favourable association. Even though this link is weaker, its importance is confirmed by the T statistic of 2.635 and the P value of 0.009. This implies that while material contributed by users does help SMEs be more responsive, the effect is not as great as content developed by businesses.

Model 1, which incorporates user-generated and firm-created content that affects SMEs' competitiveness, explains 32.7% of the variation, according to the models' R-squared (R2) values while the remaining 67.3% is attributed to variables not included in the study. Model 2, which is ostensibly concerned with SMEs quick responsiveness, accounts for 18.0% of the variation. The remaining 82% is attributed to other variables exempted from the study. These numbers show that while the models are important, other variables also affect how responsive and competitive SMEs are Predictive relevance is shown by the Q-squared (*Q²*) values of 0.091 for Model 2 and 0.178 for Model 1, with Model 1 demonstrating greater relevance. This supports the idea that, when it comes to rapid response, the variables in Model 1 have a better predictive potential for SMEs' competitiveness than the elements in Model 2.

5. Discussions

Studies indicate that firm-created content particularly and notably greatly increases the competitiveness of SMEs. This relationship suggests that SMEs significantly increase their competitive advantage when they create their own resources, including marketing materials, blog entries, and promotional programmes (Mustapha, et al., 2022). SMEs may demonstrate their expertise, properly control their brand story, and include their target market by using firm-created material (Gontur et al., 2023). Constant production of innovative and relevant content will help SMEs stand out from rivals, strengthen ties with clients, and at last provide a competitive edge (Gekombe et al., 2019). The statistical

robustness of this outcome emphasises the necessity of firm-generated content in boosting competitiveness in the SMEs sector.

The research indicates that the competitiveness of SMEs is much and favourably influenced by user-generated content. This relationship implies that SMEs' ability for competitiveness is much improved by user-generated material including social media interactions, reviews, and testimonies. With possible clients, user-generated material offers actual and varied points of view that help to establish trust and confidence (Mustapha et al., 2022). It also provides perceptive analysis of customer preferences and experiences, thus helping SMEs to expand their goods and services using accurate knowledge. Small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) might increase their competitiveness by using user-generated content to improve customer connection, strengthen their reputation, and set themselves apart in the market (Bai & Yan, 2020). For small and medium-sized companies (SMEs), user-generated content is a strategic instrument of tremendous value given its obvious and large influence.

The study highlights how much and positively firm-generated knowledge influences SMEs' capacity for swift response. Thanks to firm-created content like announcements, updates, and instructive pieces, SMEs may react fast to changes in the market and customer needs. By actively managing and distributing their own material, SMEs can quickly communicate fresh developments, answer customer questions, and respond to increasingly difficult problems (Sulalastri et al., 2024). This proactive approach helps them to be more flexible and able to change in a busy office. Moreover, by producing intentional and consistent material, SMEs may maintain their audience informed and engaged as well as a continuous flow of knowledge. Their ability to adapt fast to shifting customer expectations and market conditions considerably improves their entire responsiveness and operational efficiency.

The study shows that user-generated content favourably and significantly influences SMEs' quick response. By leveraging this sort of material which includes feedback, social media comments, and customer evaluations SMEs may have quick insights into the attitudes and needs of their clients. Small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) could quickly identify and fix issues, change their strategies, and improve their products in response to customer feedback by means of the monitoring and analysis of user-generated data. Having rapid access to consumer opinions helps SMEs answer market demands and raise customer satisfaction, thereby enabling their more flexible and adaptable nature. By using the responsiveness that user-generated content offers, SMEs may stay competitive and relevant in a fast-changing corporate environment.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Emphasising the vital part content—user-generated as well as firm-created—plays in boosting the responsiveness and competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), this research closes with by helping SMEs to develop their brand identity and interact meaningfully with their audience, firm-created content increases their competitiveness. In a similar vein, as it offers real information and encourages consumer interaction, user-generated content is essential for raising competitiveness. Moreover, both kinds of material help SMEs to make quick changes by allowing them to react quickly to client feedback and industry advances. These results emphasise the requirement of a methodical approach for content management and creation for SMEs aiming at success in challenging environments. By properly merging firm-created and user-generated information, SMEs may strengthen their market position, raise customer happiness, and accomplish long-term development in the changing corporate environment of today.

Given the positive and clear effects of user-generated and corporate-created content on SMEs' competitiveness and fast reaction speed, the following recommendations might be made:

- SMEs that want to consistently produce exceptional firm-created content should make professional content development team or resource investments a necessity. This might increase their competitiveness by ensuring they maintain control of their brand narrative and engage their target market correctly.
- Strong content plans allowing for fast updates and communication should be included in SMEs. This would allow fast response to changes in the market and customer demands, therefore assisting them to maintain their operational agility.
- By means of channels for social media interactions, customer evaluations, and testimonials, SMEs should actively promote and aid user-generated content. Using the honest and varied points of view of customers can help SMEs to become more competitive.

- For user-generated content, SMEs should utilise good monitoring and analytical instruments. By responding quickly to consumer feedback and adjusting their plans as necessary, SMEs may boost their responsiveness, thereby meeting consumer expectations and staying relevant in a dynamic market setting

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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