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Achieving Growth in SMEs**

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Digital Technology and Marketing Management Capability: Achieving Growth in SMEs

Abstract

Purpose – The intention of this study is to evaluate the relationships between digital technology, tangible/intangible assets and marketing capabilities in order to gain more insight into the factors related to SMEs' growth in the UK. Based on resource-advantage theory, this research addresses the question “*to what extent does digital technology influence marketing capability which leads to companies' growth?*”

Design/methodology/approach – The data was gathered through 21 in-depth interviews with managers from different multinational organizations and 6 focus groups with employees.

Findings – The study identifies the two key components of digital technology as information quality and service convenience. In addition, the relationships between digital technology, tangible/intangible assets, and marketing capabilities perform the significant role of facilitator of a company's growth.

Research limitations/implications – The focus on UK SMEs limits the generalisability of the results. Further study should be collected in other sectors and country settings in order to examine the associations identified in the current study.

Originality/value – This study identifies the main impacts of digital technology on intellectual/physical assets. While managers and employees have specified that marketing capability is significant for organizations, there are a few other areas of concern with regard to consequences related to a company's growth, competence, and core competence, particularly in a SME's setting.

Keywords – Digital Technology, Information Quality, Service Convenience, Design Innovation, Marketing Capabilities, Growth, Competencies, SMEs

Introduction

Core competence has been a useful tool for organizational strategists since it first appeared in the 1960s. It was defined by Andrews (1971) as “what the company can do particularly well” (p. 46) and an earlier paper by Ansoff (1965) called it a ‘common thread’ (p.105). Ansoff (1965) described business competencies as “a relationship between present and future product markets which would enable outsiders to perceive where the firm is heading, and the inside management to give it guidance” (p.105). A significant study of core competence was carried out by Prahalad and Hamel (1990) who characterized it as the core system that “provides nourishment, sustenance, and stability” (p.82).

The experiential study of marketing capabilities is also being given increased attention in the academic literature (Blesa and Ripolles, 2008; Ribeiro et al., 2009; Tsai and Shih, 2004; Vorhies and Morgan, 2005; Weerawardena, 2003). Marketing capabilities employ a substantial and optimistic view of customers' satisfaction, which eventually indicates a superior organizational performance in terms of sales, profit and competence (Santos-Vijande et al., 2012).

The aim of this paper is greater understanding of digital technology and its influence on design innovation management capability which leads to a company's growth. Moreover, this study highlights how information quality and its antecedents (information about integrated promotion, product pricing and transactions) in co-operation with service convenience and its antecedents (integrated information access, order fulfilment, customer service) provide greater understanding of the influence of digital technology on design and innovation. Resource-advantage theory will be adopted to examine the relationship between information quality, service convenience, digital technology, tangible/intangible assets, marketing capability, and core competencies. This research evaluates the relationships between these constructs in order to gain more insight and clarification of the factors related to core competence.

This article contributes to the growing literature on digital technology and devices which provide insight into innovation. As claimed by Dewett (2003), technologies provide workers with access to original information by permitting them to link up with peer repositories and

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3 with information experts. Digital technology contributes to innovation and management
4 capability which leads to the growth of SMEs.

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6 The literature of technology adoption delivers an understanding of how informed government
7 policies could help small and medium size enterprises to achieve both growth and innovation
8 (Blackburn et al., 2008). The SME's ability to learn and acquire knowledge prepares it for
9 further steps of growth, which ultimately determines whether the SME is able to progress to
10 the next stage of development (Blackburn et al., 2008). In particular, this learning aptitude
11 links to knowledge of management capabilities and technology. According to Fruhling and
12 Siau (2007) the human capital accessible within the organization is likely to be a fundamental
13 factor in effective innovation. Consequently, management strengths should be focused on
14 nurturing and exploiting these strategic resources (Wernerfelt, 1984).
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23 This paper is structured as follows. The current study outlines the theoretical background of
24 information quality, service convenience, digital technology, tangible/ intangible assets,
25 marketing capability and core competence and its relationship between the dynamics.
26 Afterwards, the author clarifies research methods. Next, the method is outlined and the results
27 from our analysis are presented. Finally, the research contributions and limitations are
28 summarized along with suggestions for future research.
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34 **Literature review**

35 *Digital technology*

36 Digital technology is progressively implemented by the firms in order to respond positively
37 to customer needs and, at the same time, improve customer-side operations. It supports the
38 interests of consumers and businesses and, at the same time, helps drive sales and increases
39 efficiencies by reducing costs. Information quality can be transferred through digital
40 technology (Watson et al., 2006). Organizations are strongly focused on the use of digital
41 technology to enhance the quality of information provided to their customers (Foroudi et al.,
42 2016). In general, technological innovation can be understood as the employment of a
43 product with enhanced performance appearances so as to distribute new or enhanced services
44 to the customer (Oh and Teo, 2010; Gorla et al., 2010). High quality information transmitted
45 in an appropriate way has a huge impact on customer behavior and marketing (Oh and Teo,
46 2010). Information quality consists of integrated promotion which includes consistency in
47 branding to support customers; integrated product and pricing information that guarantees
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3 reliability in product images and prices through retail channels; integrated information
4 transaction which is the collection of a customer's on-line transactions held by retailers in
5 order to provide personalized information and services (Oh and Teo, 2010).
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10 Service convenience refers to consumers' interest in conserving time and effort. Bin and Teo
11 (2010) state that "processes of integrated information access, integrated order fulfilment, and
12 integrated customer service" (p.42) play an essential part in achieving service convenience.
13 Integrated information access in on-line stores allows the customer to obtain information
14 related to the product, its availability and locations (Ray et al., 2005; Tallon, 2010).
15 Integrated order fulfillment allows seamless order fulfillment to the customers, by providing
16 product availability, easy and quick purchase, and prompt delivery (Porter, 1980). Integrated
17 customer service provides excellent customer service and support also products purchased
18 on-line can be exchanged or returned to the stores (Banker et al., 2006).
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26 Digital technologies play a significant part in almost every organization (Setia et al., 2013)
27 and have enabled co-operation among firms, information storage and analysis and improved
28 customer service performance (Ray et al., 2005). They have had an enormous impact on
29 customer service performance (Ray et al., 2005) and have enhanced the ability to accomplish
30 service convenience (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000; Pavlou and El Sawy, 2006; Teece et al.,
31 1997).
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38 *Tangible/intangible assets and marketing capability*

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40 Marketing capability requires the use of digital technology (Teece, 2007), as digital
41 technology determines the organizational capability to research customers, competitors, and
42 the broader market environment (Day, 1994). Marketing capability can be implemented by
43 utilising a variety of processes, including sustaining relationships with customers and
44 suppliers as well as participating in professional associations and using best practices. These
45 processes require a high level of use of the tangible/intangible assets of a firm. The assets of a
46 firm itself are defined with a wide variety of meanings. Grant states that "assets are inputs
47 into the production process - they are the basic unit of analysis", where a capability is
48 identified as the capacity for a team of resources to perform some task or activity (Hafeez, et
49 al., 2006). Marketing capability processes generate inputs for the requirements of
50 reconfigured operational capabilities (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000).
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Method and analysis

This paper employs qualitative data collection and analysis to uncover patterns, themes, and categories in order to make judgments about “what is really significant and meaningful in the data” (Patton, 2001, p.406). This study conducted 21 in-depth interviews with top managers in the UK from different SMEs and 6 focus groups with a total of 35 people (21 male and 14 female) (see Table 1). This data helped the author to generate a deeper understanding about the research (Palmer and Gallagher, 2007; Yin, 1984), discover new evidence, reveal new dimensions of the problem and to secure vivid, accurate inclusive accounts that are based on personal experience (Foroudi et al., 2016). A conducive and comfortable environment was provided for each interview (Malhotra and Birks, 2000). On average, an interview lasted one hour and half and all the interviews were recorded by two recorders and transcribed verbatim, which ensured the reliability of the data (Andriopoulos and Lewis, 2009).

The research aim was to understand to what extent digital technology influences marketing capability which leads to development of core competence and the SME’s growth. This study followed Foroudi et al.’s (2014, 2016) recommendation to conduct in-depth interviews using a semi-structured technique by developing a qualitative protocol and designing direct questions to discover essential motivation, beliefs, attitudes and feelings about the topic. The interviews were conducted face-to-face between October 2015 and September 2016.

<<<Table 1 Here>>>

To assess the qualitative results and improve the validity and reliability of the study, triangulation was used in two stages based on Creswell and Miller’s (2000) suggestions. We developed codes by addressing the problem areas, research questions, and key constructs (Palmer and Gallagher, 2007). Then, we used QSR NVivo software for data administration, data storage, and retrieval. NVivo is appropriate software to assist in the interpretation of the text and inter-relationships between codes. In addition, the data was examined to derive the nodes, which influence the inter-relationships of the thematic ideas, the nodes (themes) were reviewed for consistency, and an iterative process was followed throughout the data analysis. Subsequently, the transcripts of the interviews were analyzed. Significant statements which were directly associated with the research question were identified. By identifying a

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3 significant word, the results obtained by means of the open questions were scanned and
4 linked directly to the research question in order to develop a theory.
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8 **Results and discussion**

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10 The literature review revealed that concepts of core competence and its dynamics are not
11 clearly defined. In order to address the gap, a conceptual framework was developed that
12 includes the key research constructs (Figure 1) based on the literature and qualitative study.
13 Generating an employee's-level conceptual framework developed from resource advantage
14 theory demonstrates that: (1) there are relationships between information quality, service
15 convenience, digital technology, tangible/ intangible assets, marketing capability, and
16 company growth; and that (2) there are connections between other theoretically
17 acknowledged variables. One research question is addressed "to what extent does digital
18 technology influence marketing capability which leads to a company's growth?"
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27 The findings, from the study suggest that tangible/intangible assets and digital technology
28 influenced marketing capabilities, and that marketing capabilities influenced the SMEs'
29 growth and development of their core competencies. Every entrepreneur had a unique
30 perception but the majority claimed that the SME was an increasingly important
31 phenomenon. Innovations and knowledge may lead to the utilisation of new or improved
32 products or processes. The managers of these SMEs have confirmed that to be successful in
33 meeting adversity one should possess a good knowledge of all the business functions. The
34 manager who masters these elements can be successful in future developments.
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42 This paper evaluates the relationships between the constructs in order to gain more insight
43 and clarification of the factors related to core competence in UK SMEs. Nevertheless, this
44 study is one of the first to empirically confirm the assumption made by researchers (Mahoney
45 and Pandian, 1992) that it is an understanding of digital technology, tangible/intangible assets
46 and its influence on marketing capability which leads to core competence. This would result
47 in insights that might make a substantial addition to present knowledge and support to future
48 research in this field (Hafeez et al., 2016). To identify the core competencies of a firm, it is
49 essential to examine the features of its components (Dierickx and Cool, 1989).
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57 Moreover, this paper highlights how information quality and its antecedents (information
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3 concerning integrated promotion and product pricing and transactions) in conjunction with
4 service convenience and its antecedents (integrated information access, order fulfilment,
5 customer service) provides greater understanding of digital technology which influences
6 tangible/intangible assets, marketing capability and competence. Employing data from
7 interviews in UK SMEs, this paper attempts to scrutinise the relationship between
8 information quality, service convenience, tangible/intangible assets, digital technology,
9 marketing capability, competence and core competencies.
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16 Business concept was defined by interviewees as a perception of how to manage and carry
17 out an economic activity; it involves assumptions and behavioural rules. A business concept
18 innovation reconceives or breaks with widely accepted ideas and behaviors about how a
19 business should be, changing the perception of how to run the business. To answer the
20 question 'how did you action your business concept into reality?' the following comments
21 illustrate the managers' assessments:
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26 *There it was the X on gum tree. I made some notes at home about*
27 *what I will be discussing and then I straight away talk to owner of*
28 *business, and I manage to complete deal but the business concept*
29 *did not finish there.*
30

31
32 *I was working in catering industry for 10 years. After gaining so*
33 *much experience and being passionate about the products and*
34 *customer service I have decide to open my own business. I put all my*
35 *heart into it and always give 100%. My customers are my guests and*
36 *I treat everyone as a special.*
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39 Innovation gives rise to a new or significantly improved mental model relating to a business,
40 which leads to substantial modifications in a firm's methods and general knowledge. This, in
41 turn, makes it possible for catering companies, for example, to develop their own innovations
42 where knowledge and technologies are applied in a new way. Moreover, business concepts
43 help SMEs to achieve competitiveness. Likewise, service and product characteristics will
44 differ among firms with different business concepts. The managers should try to invent a new
45 business concept which will help them devise ways to grow their company.
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52 Competitive advantage is fulfilling an unmet consumer need in a market segment
53 (Hinterhuber, 2013). Burns (2011) believes that innovation and opportunity are key to
54 gaining competitive advantage. A business needs to innovate with its products and services in
55 order to gain competitive advantage in the market. Innovation can maintain and improve
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3 competitive advantage and also extend the business's life. Managers must first identify their
4 competencies that give them competitive advantage over other similar companies in the same
5 market place. Moreover, managers stated that sources of advantage were *quality good*
6 *product and high quality product and the best customer service.*
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11 If a company does not develop new technologies or new scientific knowledge, then where
12 can their innovations come from? The answer to this question requires recognising the
13 existence of non-technological knowledge. In SMEs this knowledge is specific to the
14 company. In other words, it is knowledge accumulated from the learning process of each
15 business process. Every firm, in every industry, gains specific knowledge from its activities
16 (Aldebert et al., 2011), which comes from the firm's market, organization, production and
17 delivery process and so on. Such innovation changes dramatically as business and products
18 are conceived, creating a pattern about how and what knowledge, or other firm resources,
19 must be used (Gupta et al., 2016). For example, a catering SME could introduce a side-line of
20 delivery options for local businesses and organizations. Furthermore, these catering SMEs
21 could host a small special event in their premises such as art days or cultural music nights.
22 Bringing cultural themes into their businesses could be good way to attract new customers
23 given that they have small marketing budgets.
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34 Digital marketing leveraging social media channels provides SMEs with a new innovative
35 way to interact with customers, providing an alternative, cost effective, and attractive
36 proposition. The competitive environment reflects how businesses compete and function
37 within an environment. In a place where there is a demand for a particular product, it is likely
38 there will be more sellers with similar products. Interviews included the question, 'do you
39 think your products are competitive taking the current demand into consideration?' The
40 following quotations reflect the answers:
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46 *Maybe some people will be attracted. But if it's different, and you*
47 *don't want that sort of customer really, in general, who get attracted*
48 *with the price. That is foolish doing that anyway.*
49

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51 *My customers are mainly local people. They love the products and the*
52 *atmosphere in the place. Also we adapt our menu to customer's needs*
53 *related to allergies, special products intolerance and level of spices.*
54 *In my culture we tend to eat very spice, but of course not everyone can*
55 *take it the same level, so we have to take this also into our*
56 *considerations.*
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3 SMEs have direct and indirect competitors. They are surrounded by many competitors who
4 sell similar products at lower prices. In turn, they offer different kinds of benefits to their
5 customers. For example, a restaurant offers discounts to students while another does not
6 charge corkage so their customers can bring their own alcohol without incurring an extra
7 charge. Indirect competitors like local supermarkets offer a substitute by selling ready meals.
8 However, the food is the best quality since it is not only tasty but also healthy and their meals
9 are unique. In order to gain new customers and keep existing customers happy, one of the
10 shops offers on-line take-out ordering through its website. Because of the locations the
11 demand for their product is always very high. The owners should concentrate on an
12 individual product to ensure they are being competitive all the time and improve growth.
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21 Growth and development can be summarised as business owners wanting to increase their
22 market share by expanding the business. This can be in the form of increasing floor space,
23 marketing initiatives, and employing further employees to build on current successes and
24 exploit opportunities. To understand the entrepreneurs' growth and development to date,
25 interviewees stated:
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30 *I invested fifteen thousand pounds into my business, I broke even at*
31 *the end of my 6 months.*
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34 *I opened my retail outlet 24 years ago, due to my hard work and my*
35 *passion my business is making more money every year.*
36

37 Currently one of the business owners is an example of an entrepreneur bringing his idea
38 forward and implementing it which resulted in employment opportunities for local residents.
39 Although the business has been running for only 6-8 months it is estimated to be worth four
40 times more than its purchase price. Taking into consideration such a short period of time and
41 current value of the business it can be assumed that the value of this business by the end of its
42 financial year will increase, even though they face so many challenges in managing the
43 business.
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50 According to Daft and Marcic (2004) challenge management reflects difficulties and
51 problems managers and owners can face in running and managing their business on a daily
52 basis. SME owners face many challenges in globalized markets. However, the greatest
53 problem is how to effectively manage the all encompassing functions of a business without
54 causing conflicts within these functions. One question was, 'what do you consider to be the
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3 most challenging aspect about being a manager in business today?' which elicited responses
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5 such as:

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7 *I believe losing interest in business, would be a challenge. So, I have*
8 *to keep working very hard and then doing lots of money and success.*
9 *So that might keep me focused. If I lost money, you've got to focus. If*
10 *you did not, you lost interest. You just think you are just wasting your*
11 *time or just. That's dangerous.*

12
13 *I have to keep control on staff at all the times, they are very important*
14 *part of my business but I have to ensure that they work as hard as I*
15 *do, so finding the right people it is very difficult.*

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18 Owners of small businesses confront many challenges in managing their business. These
19 involve understanding financial responsibilities, creating products which suit customers, and
20 recruiting employees with the appropriate skills set. However, the biggest challenge that they
21 face is business regulations and taxes. Therefore, they need to understand the content of
22 regulation for the industry, and how it impacts their businesses. They need to develop the
23 skills necessary to deal with it. In our sample, two companies also experienced difficulty in
24 finding appropriate staff who understood and supported their business objectives. For small
25 businesses, it is personalities and skills which matter. To be successful in meeting adversity,
26 the owners of SMEs should possess a conceptual knowledge of all business functions by
27 designing strategies for future growth and development.
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36 Strategies for future growth and development involve developing a structural model, which
37 contains all the required tools. This model prepares a business to grow and develop. Strategy
38 contains elements such as product, timing, methods, economic and business case and
39 differentiation. Strategic planning is the process of guidance for development. Strategy must
40 be consistent, measurable and flexible. Strategic objectives are the key for future growth and
41 development for SMEs. However, in order to achieve success the owners must be committed
42 to the business, value employees, promote the business, have plans to expand and be skilled
43 in all the aspects of the organization. This study was concerned with what the business owner
44 can do which will make a difference to the future growth and development of the business.
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51 This can be explained by the comment of managers:

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53 *Lisa is my employee. But I consider her as my colleague. We must*
54 *concentrate there, and as long as the business is getting bigger and*
55 *bigger. She needs to be into it and then, looking forward to do it for a*
56 *long time. If she just stood there, I say, no, she's wasting her time.*
57 *You know, she's getting some profit. But whenever she's ready, we*
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3 *can open another coffee shop for her. For example, we are moving*
4 *across the road which is three times bigger when this is settled down.*
5 *Yeah, after Christmas, we will just operate it from there.*
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8 *It is nothing more than hard work, you have to stay focused and be*
9 *passionate about what you do. I am very happy with my current size of*
10 *the business and I am not planning to expand it, but I have only one*
11 *wish, I would like to keep this in my family and I am hoping that my*
12 *daughter will be able to take over the business.*
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15 There are different strategies which can lead to the growth and development of a business.
16 The owners have strategies to expand the business and ensure long term success. They
17 understand and value their employees, as they believe they are key for future growth and
18 development. After all, they possess great understanding of all business functions but they are
19 not focused on expanding the business. The majority of interviewees were satisfied with the
20 current size of the business. Their strategy was based on hard work in order to keep their
21 customers happy so they will be repeat customers. They focus on their products and services
22 to provide the highest standard at all times. The majority have a lot of experience in their
23 industry which helps them to build effective strategy. Three owners are planning to move
24 their businesses nearby to premises which are three times bigger than the present ones.
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32 33 *Antecedents of digital technology* 34

35 This study supports the assertion that information quality and service convenience are linked
36 to digital technology. In relation to information quality, interviewees observe that information
37 quality including integrated promotion information, integrated product and pricing
38 information and integrated information transaction are linked to digital technology. In
39 addition, the data analysis suggest that service convenience, including integrated information
40 access, integrated order fulfillment, and integrated customer service are linked to digital
41 technology. A director of one of the SME accountancy firms explained that:
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47 *Digital technology is a key enabler in the way our firm interacts with*
48 *clients and communicates about competitive advantage. Technology*
49 *aspects have been embedded in the work environment in order to*
50 *enhance the internal quality and methodology. For example, the firm*
51 *uses an integrated global ERP system to manage and support a*
52 *paperless working environment, with analytical capability which*
53 *provides visualization of big data, using the volume of financial*
54 *information gathered during projects. All this integrates seamlessly, to*
55 *enhance the overall quality of service provided to our clients.*
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3 Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the UK, can be defined in terms of
4 employment, asset value and sales (Rostamkalaei and Freel, 2016). However, Jasra et al.'s
5 (2011) definition of SMEs is made more specific by determining what they represent in terms
6 of numbers of employees, and their capability.
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11 *Digital technology and marketing capability*

12 In relation to digital technology, this study found that the use of digital technology was
13 positively related to tangible/intangible assets and their results show that the frequent
14 engagement of tangible/intangible assets is positively linked to customer-relationship
15 capabilities. Furthermore, the relationship between tangible/intangible assets and corporate
16 brand identity capabilities shows that frequent engagement of tangible/intangible assets is
17 positively linked to corporate brand identity capabilities which support the hypotheses. In
18 addition, frequent engagement of tangible/intangible assets is positively linked to customer-
19 relationship capabilities as well as to social media/communication capabilities. The results
20 indicate a strong relationship between marketing capabilities and competence from the
21 employees' viewpoint of an organization's core competence. The data demonstrate that the
22 employee's view of information quality, service convenience, digital technology and
23 tangible/ intangible assets and marketing capabilities facilitates the relationship between
24 competence and organizational core competence. Accordingly, the relationship between the
25 employee's view of information quality and digital technology; service convenience and
26 digital technology; digital technology and tangible/intangible assets; tangible/intangible
27 assets and marketing capabilities were related.
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41 The outcomes suggest that all dynamics including information quality, service convenience,
42 digital technology, tangible/intangible assets, marketing capabilities perform a significant
43 role as facilitator between the competence and core competence. This illustrates the concept
44 of employees-based core competence, defined as as organizational routines manifested in
45 business activities and processes that bring assets together and enable them to be deployed
46 advantageously (Hamel and Parahalad, 1990; Drejer, 2000).
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53 Irrespective of the nature of the business they are in, or the competition they face,
54 management should consistently observe the efficiency and appropriateness of the
55 competence in respect to the organizational core competence. A global firms' core
56 competence was conceptualized as consisting of both internal and competitive dimensions.
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3 The competences perceived by the employees are encouragingly linked to organizational core
4 competences.
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8 Constructed upon the examination of the gap acknowledged by academics and practitioners
9 (Hafeez et al., 2002) this study has conducted a systematic investigation of the factors which
10 influence organizational core competence. The results show that core competence in relation
11 to the research model comprises six factors: information quality, service convenience, digital
12 technology, tangible/intangible assets, marketing capabilities and competence. Information
13 quality is abstracted in relation to its dynamics involving integrated promotion information,
14 integrated product and pricing information and integrated information transaction which
15 deliver stability in branding to support customers and distinguish the firm from its
16 competitors (Oh and Teo, 2010). Service convenience including its components “processes of
17 integrated information access, integrated order fulfilment, and integrated customer service”
18 (Oh and Teo, 2010 p. 42) compose consumer perceptions of the services offered by the
19 organization and its benefits.
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30 Digital technology adopted by the organization enhances the ability to respond positively to
31 customer needs and, at the same time, improves customer-side operations. Digital technology
32 focuses on the consumers and businesses and, at the same time, helps drive sales and
33 increases efficiencies by reducing costs. Assets are resource endowments that a firm has
34 accrued over time, and that can be deployed for forming a competitive advantage (Amit and
35 Schoemaker, 1993; Day, 1994; Fahy, 2000; Grant, 1991). Marketing capabilities successfully
36 deployed build greater customer value and enhance the ability to deliver a competitive
37 advantage (Fahy, 2000; Kay, 1993; Williams, 1992).
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45 Digital technology enhances learning and it is one of the most critical elements of design
46 innovation. Innovation design focuses on developing new products and market segments, it
47 plays an important role in the marketing department where constant interaction and exchange
48 of information with customers is fed back to the design department. In the product design
49 department management capability strongly focuses on developing new products and market
50 segments, by monitoring market trends and seeking market opportunities (Foroudi et al.,
51 2016).
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3 According to scholars (Gupta and Wilemon, 1990; Foroudi et al., 2016), the effective
4 relationships amongst design activities and marketing can generate product innovation. In
5 addition, innovation is of crucial importance for fast growing SMEs (Coad and Rao, 2008).
6 SMEs that carry out product innovations will achieve greater growth rates than those that do
7 not (Gupta et al., 2016). Firms with better internal management capability will be able to
8 innovate, relative to firms with lesser internal capability.
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13 14 15 *Marketing capability, company's growth, and competencies*

16 This study also reveals certain characteristics of the core competence by showing how the
17 organizational core competence is developed, measured and managed. Strategies to construct
18 organizational core competence are reviewed in relation to both company tangible/intangible
19 assets and marketing capabilities. The view of organizational core competence of employees-
20 based outlooks is reviewed by demonstrating the effects of a digital technology on marketing
21 capabilities and tangible/intangible assets with the aim of building organizational core
22 competence.
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29 The results show mediation and direct effect between the firm's tangible/ intangible assets
30 and its marketing capabilities. An optimistic approach toward market-sensing, corporate
31 brand identity, customer relationship and social media/ communication capabilities are
32 evidence of earlier proficiencies and notes from the consultancy firm about organizational
33 core competence facilitate the relationship between tangible/ intangible assets and marketing
34 capabilities. The findings indicate that the four dynamics (market-sensing, corporate brand
35 identity, customer relationship and social media / communication capabilities) can be driven
36 by the tangible/ intangible assets. One consultancy, accountancy based firm that underscores
37 the significance of marketing capabilities adapted by tangible/ intangible assets in developing
38 the competence which leads to core competence stated that:
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46 *With the rapid advancement in technology, the firm's capabilities to*
47 *promote its services have significantly changed. In addition, to use*
48 *the tradition marketing methods such as personal brochures, articles,*
49 *we now use a variety of on-line methods to promote thought*
50 *leadership, new innovative ideas and concepts. For example, the*
51 *social media in the form of tweets, blogging is used frequently to*
52 *promote the recent trends in the market. The firm is using apps to*
53 *target specific customers, engaging and collating valuable*
54 *information, which provides valuable information in developing our*
55 *future marketing capabilities.*
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3 In addition, one participant added:
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5 *The of customer relationship management (CRM) technology helps*
6 *us gather and share all data relating to customer services, product,*
7 *offerings and pricing. The global database is accessed by all*
8 *professionals across the network firm; this provides detailed*
9 *analysis and information on customer behaviors, key relationships*
10 *and sale management process.*
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13 This quotation demonstrates the effect on employees' outlooks of core competence and its
14 dynamic marketing capabilities and company tangible/intangible assets which mark an
15 enormous impact on organizational core competence. Furthermore, Hunt and Morgan (1995)
16 emphasize that “a comparative advantage in assets can transform into a competitive
17 advantage in the marketplace and superior financial performance...” (p.7). These statements
18 indicate that throughout the development and leveraging of firm assets the firm determines a
19 set of capabilities including marketing capabilities that allow the organization to accomplish
20 greater levels of firm performance. An effective marketing capability positively influences
21 firm performance consistently across functional environments (Hunt and Morgan, 1995). It is
22 generally accepted that firms utilise their marketing capabilities through their assets to
23 communicate on behalf of the firm and boost the firm’s performance and competence.
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33 Design innovation can be defined as an implementation of new ideas or behavior within an
34 organization (Helfat et al., 2007). Design innovation in association with management
35 capabilities enables SMEs to grow. Management capabilities highlight the importance of the
36 learning process that are an essential part of innovation (Pittaway and Rose, 2006). Specific
37 managerial activities or skills optimize the design process. The growth of SMEs has attracted
38 notable attention from organizations and entrepreneurship research. This attention is essential
39 in entrepreneurship studies as well as managers and policy makers. Growth is vital to small
40 and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). When deciding their growth strategy, SMEs face big
41 decisions on how to expand and improve their product markets through innovation.
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49 Interviewees defined corporate brand identity as ‘the set of meanings by which a company
50 allows itself to be known and through which it allows people to describe, remember and
51 relate to it’ which is consistent with the views by previous studies (Topalian, 1984; Olins,
52 1989; Markwick and Fill, 1997). Corporate brand identity encompasses several qualities of a
53 company such as business strategy, corporate culture, behavior and corporate design, all of
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3 which cooperate with each other and result in differentiating one firm from another.
4 Corporate brand identity allows assets to be more equitably valued and facilitates the
5 company's access to capital markets (Beatty and Ritter, 1986).
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10 In addition, customer-relationship capabilities were highlighted by participants as a
11 significant element in order to attain superior performance. Bowersox et al. (1999) defined
12 customer-relationship capability as “the competency of building lasting distinctiveness with
13 customers of choice” (p.42) which includes “identifying the long-term requirements,
14 expectations, and preferences of current and/or potential customers and markets, and focusing
15 on creating customer value” (p.31). Four capabilities must occur in order to accomplish
16 customer relationship capabilities: segmental focus, relevancy, responsiveness, and flexibility
17 (Bowersox et al., 1999).
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25 Marketing capabilities should influence competence. Equally, the greater number of
26 respondents in this sample suggested that marketing capabilities deliver enormous effect on a
27 company's competence which leads to organizational core competence. In line with Hunt and
28 Morgan (1995), marketing capabilities are a resultant from the assets a firm possesses and are
29 a dominant driver of firm performance and competence. Consequently, marketing capabilities
30 assist as a facilitator between tangible/intangible assets and firm performance and assets will
31 also influence directly firm performance or competence. Therefore, marketing capabilities
32 fully facilitate the impact of assets on firm performance and competence. The entire sample
33 agreed that information quality and service convenience influenced digital technology, that
34 digital technology is positively linked to tangible/ intangible assets and that marketing
35 capabilities in association with the firm's assets influenced competence. This result suggests
36 that effectively utilised digital technology influences the marketing capabilities which, in
37 turn, influence competence. Likewise, digital technology has an enormous impact on
38 marketing capabilities which lead to core competence. This assessment is clarified by the
39 following statement from a Director of a Consultancy and Accountancy Firm:
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50 *Every aspect of a marketing campaign within the firm is used to*
51 *collate valuable information about our customer's issues, challenges*
52 *etc. These campaigns act as useful tools to inform the leadership of*
53 *the gaps in the core competency within the firm and areas which*
54 *require more investment. For example, over the last 10 years the firm*
55 *has significantly invested in developing the cyber capabilities, this is*
56 *as a direct result of market trends, challenges/issues faced by our*
57 *clients, the need for which was established through various marketing*
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8 **Conclusion**

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10 The aim of this research is to address the gaps in previous studies regarding (1) the
11 relationships between information quality, service convenience, digital technology, tangible/
12 intangible assets, marketing capability, competence and core competences; and (2) the
13 relationships between other theoretically acknowledged variables. The results demonstrated
14 a strong relationship between the variables. Digital technology has an enormous impact on
15 marketing capabilities which leads to the development of core competences in UK firms.
16 Moreover, it suggests further avenues of theoretical and managerial research to boost the
17 understanding and supervision of core competences in UK firms.
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25 The advantages of innovation in terms of growth have been recognised for SMEs.
26 Information quality combined with service convenience is related to improved performance.
27 Digital technology is an effective way to transform information in order to innovate. Greater
28 management capabilities and technological developments offer opportunities to SMEs in
29 order to achieve growth and innovation which can be delivered through greater resources and
30 help SMEs to attract and retain more customers (Gupta et al., 2016).
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37 Innovation policies in a developed country, such as the UK, promote the adoption of
38 technologies and good practices by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Although
39 policy makers should try to increase innovation performance in SMEs by providing relevant
40 training in the use of technology and better access to higher education, which enables
41 entrepreneurs to gain knowledge of design innovation. Such informed policies could lead to
42 the growth of SMEs given that this kind of firm represents a big part of the economy.
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46 Based on the review of the related literature and qualitative analysis, the research framework
47 is presented in Figure 1.
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55 *Research implications*

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57 The current commentary builds on the growing body of research on the subject of core
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3 competence. With deeper engagement in competence issues, firms exploit digital technology
4 more frequently by utilising company assets and enhancing the ability to attain core
5 competence. The authors suggest a combined conceptualization that combines digital
6 technology and marketing capability at the center of the firm's strategy to generate
7 competence and core competence.
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12 The greatest contribution of the present research is to increase comprehension by
13 investigating employees' valuations of the impact of digital technology and marketing
14 capabilities on firms' financial competence. Numerous academics indicate that digital
15 technology, tangible/ intangible assets and marketing capabilities are associated with core
16 competence; however they have not investigated this correlation. Nevertheless, the present
17 study offers a corroborated framework which shows the relationships among the dynamics of
18 a core competence. It discusses the gaps in current knowledge and answers earlier demands
19 for research from the viewpoint of marketers (Foroudi et al., 2014). The creation of a unique
20 model for core competence is a fundamental requirement of the current investigation. The
21 major task is, in this view, the conduct of (multi-disciplinary) studies into interactions, which
22 can be transformed into outcomes with practical applicability (Palmer and Bejou, 2006). This
23 study aims to clarify, with a more holistic method, the relationships between information
24 quality, service convenience, digital technology, tangible/intangible assets, marketing
25 capabilities, competence and core competence in the judgement of employees within the
26 financial sector.
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39 The results of this study deliver assistance for strategic 'decision-makers' who demand to
40 comprehend the broad connections between a core competence and features of its
41 components (i.e., information quality, service convenience, digital technology,
42 tangible/intangible assets, marketing capabilities, competence) from the employee's
43 perspective, and its effect on an organizational competence.
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49 Additional potential contributions can be discerned since this investigation related to the
50 managers' and decision-makers' approaches (Sedera and Gable, 2010). A firm requires
51 lifecycle-wide knowledge for devising strategy. The innovative uses made of firms'
52 tangible/intangible assets have naturally sought to increase the exploration of digital
53 technology and exploitation of marketing capabilities (Levinthal and March, 1993). The
54 present study establishes the significance of all the dynamics of competence with each
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3 component delivering a distinct and significant contribution to organizational core
4 competence. It is hoped that this research will aid managers to successfully and efficiently
5 develop their organizational related competence, thus improving levels of competitive
6 advantage and firm success (Sedera and Gable, 2010).
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11 We propose that, to attain a competitive advantage, firms must possess a full understanding
12 of what establishes a core competence, which is influenced by three central features,
13 specifically: digital technology, tangible/intangible assets and marketing capabilities. These
14 findings acknowledge the relative weighting of the dynamic hypotheses that influence core
15 competence. Consequently, the present study has substantial implications for managers and
16 strategic decision-makers when forming or adjusting core competence.
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22 *Limitations and future research directions*

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24 The present analysis amounts to a preliminary analysis of the concept of core competence,
25 addressed to the problems of creating competitive advantage and firms' success. Nonetheless,
26 these outcomes must be interpreted in the light of this study's limitations associated with the
27 method of sampling/analysis used, as well as its measurement (Foroudi et al., 2014). The
28 present study was undertaken in a particular background and location while in another
29 location and another industry segment, the outcomes could have been different. Though, the
30 authors have based their findings on qualitative research and earlier studies of different
31 samples, the individual characteristics of core competence that we have identified might
32 prove to be different. Hence, it is suggested that a further study is conducted to confirm these
33 findings in different sectors so as to assess the generalizability of the result.
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43 Additional limitations of the present study includes the number and type of employees and
44 using a larger sample would improve the reliability of the results (Churchill, 1999). Future
45 studies must repeat this investigation with more sectors and a larger number of employees.
46 Furthermore, in relation to the exploration strategy, the qualitative investigation was aimed at
47 managers as well as academics, though managers' and academic' outlooks are not identical.
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53 This study examined the relationships between information quality, service convenience,
54 digital technology, tangible/intangible assets, marketing capabilities, competence and core
55 competence, as observed by employees. Possibly a future analysis might generate dissimilar
56 outcomes from the similar research scales and hypotheses. Though this research engaged
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3 mixed methods, a wider investigation could expand our knowledge of the implications of the
4 competence.
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Qualitative Market Research

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Table 1: In-depth interviews with managers

| Interview date | Interview position | Interview approx. length |
|--|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 12.10.2015 | Top Executive | 54 min |
| 15.10.2015 | | 38 min |
| 22.01.2016 | | 96 min |
| 30.08.2016 | | 26 min |
| 01.09.2016 | | 64 min |
| 08.08.2016 | | 32 min |
| 15.03.2016 | Communication and Design Manager | 48 min |
| 12.10.2015 | | 121 min |
| 08.08.2016 | | 54 min |
| 22.08.2016 | Managing Director | 75 min |
| 15.03.2016 | | 45 min |
| 14.12.2015 | | 35 min |
| 15.10.2015 | Design Strategy Manager | 75 min |
| 15.10.2015 | Marketing Manager | 26 min |
| 02.07.2016 | | 47 min |
| 26.05.2016 | Risk Assurance Director | 55 min |
| 27.05.2016 | Senior Business Advisor | 40 min |
| 31.05.2016 | Senior Manager | 30 min |
| 08.08.2016 | | 64 min |
| 22.08.2016 | | 24 min |
| 30.08.2016 | | 65 min |
| Topics discussed: | | |
| -The understanding of core competence | | |
| -The factors that influence core competence | | |
| -Their experience of what they understand the tangible/ intangible assets and its influence on core competence | | |
| -Discussion of digital technology and whether it influences on competence | | |
| -Discussion of marketing capability and the main perceived impacts on core competence | | |

Source: The Researcher

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Figure 1: Framework of digital technology, tangible/intangible assets, marketing capability, and competencies

