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Strategic Planning Frameworks and Sustainable Competitive Advantage for Small and Medium Enterprises in Nyarugenge District, Kigali City

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Abstract

Purpose: The study examined the influence of strategic planning frameworks on the sustainable competitive advantage of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Nyarugenge District, Kigali City. Specifically, it analyzed the effects of environmental scanning, Porter's Five Forces framework, and the Balanced Scorecard on SME competitiveness.

Methodology: A cross-sectional design using a mixed-methods approach was adopted. Data were gathered from 132 participants drawn from 49 SMEs through questionnaires, interviews, and document review, selected via stratified random sampling. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlations, and multiple regression in SPSS v30, while qualitative data were thematically analyzed. Reliability was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81.

Findings: Results revealed a strong positive relationship between the three predictors and sustainable competitiveness ($R = .943$, $R^2 = .890$). Porter's Five Forces framework emerged as the most influential predictor ($\beta = .623$, $p < .001$), followed by environmental scanning ($\beta = .304$, $p = .0106$) and the Balanced Scorecard ($\beta = .230$, $p = .018$). SMEs that systematically applied these frameworks achieved improved operational efficiency, customer retention, and long-term competitiveness. Qualitative findings supported the quantitative results, emphasizing proactive market analysis and strategic adaptability as core practices among SMEs.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The study enriches strategic management theory by integrating environmental scanning, Porter's model, and the Balanced Scorecard into a unified framework for SME competitiveness. Practically, it demonstrates that structured strategic planning enhances resilience and sustainability in resource-limited contexts. Policymakers and SME support institutions are encouraged to promote capacity-building programs, embed strategic management training, and incentivize adoption of planning frameworks through tailored financial and advisory mechanisms.

Keywords: *Environmental Scanning, Porter's Five Forces, Balanced Scorecard, Strategic Planning, Sustainable Competitive Advantage*

JEL Codes: *M10, L20, L25, O31*

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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary global business environment, strategic planning has become a critical determinant of sustainable competitive advantage, particularly for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) operating in dynamic and resource-constrained contexts. SMEs constitute over 90% of businesses globally and contribute approximately 40% of GDP in emerging economies (World Bank, 2023). Despite this significance, many SMEs continue to experience operational stagnation and premature failure, largely due to weak strategic planning and inadequate competitive positioning. In response, strategic management literature underscores the need for structured frameworks, such as environmental scanning, Porter's Five Forces, and the Balanced Scorecard, that enable firms to align internal capabilities with external opportunities and threats.

Existing global and regional development initiatives recognize this imperative. Institutions such as the World Bank (2024) and the International Development Association (IDA21, 2023) emphasize that embedding strategic foresight, agility, and stakeholder feedback in business planning fosters SME resilience in volatile environments. Similarly, the GovTech Strategic Plan (2022–2024) advocates for data-driven and performance-oriented planning among enterprises facing rapid technological and market shifts. However, these policy frameworks, while informative, primarily focus on macro-level institutional strategies rather than firm-level mechanisms that SMEs can adopt to strengthen competitiveness. Thus, there remains a practical and empirical gap in understanding how specific strategic planning frameworks translate into sustainable competitive outcomes at the enterprise level.

Empirical studies have provided partial insights into this relationship. Alhosseiny (2023) argues that sustainable competitive advantage emerges from integrating strategic thinking and agility with structured frameworks that support environmental monitoring and adaptation. Similarly, Mulyaningsih *et al.* (2020) found that among Indonesian SMEs, environmental scanning and capability development significantly enhance competitiveness. However, most prior studies have either focused on large firms, emphasized a single framework such as environmental scanning or the Balanced Scorecard, or remained largely descriptive without integrating multiple strategic tools into one coherent analytical model. Consequently, there is limited empirical evidence demonstrating how a combined application of environmental scanning, Porter's Five Forces, and the Balanced Scorecard influences sustainable competitiveness in SMEs, particularly in emerging African contexts.

Within Africa, SMEs contribute over 50% to GDP and nearly 80% to employment (AfDB, 2023), yet many fail to sustain growth beyond five years. In Rwanda, SMEs account for 98% of all businesses and nearly half of national GDP (RDB, 2024), but over 30% report stagnation or decline within their first three years (NISR, 2023). This persistent performance gap reflects inadequate strategic planning, limited market intelligence, and weak responsiveness to competitive forces. While national initiatives, such as the Made-in-Rwanda Strategy and the SME Development Policy (2021), seek to enhance innovation and competitiveness, firm-level strategic capacities remain underdeveloped.

Nyarugenge District presents a particularly relevant empirical setting for examining these dynamics. As Kigali City's central commercial hub, it hosts a dense concentration of SMEs that operate under intense competition, rapid market changes, and customer preference volatility. This environment provides a fertile context to test the practical efficacy of strategic

planning frameworks under real-world competitive pressures. Yet, according to the Private Sector Federation (PSF, 2023), many SMEs in Nyarugenge lack formal strategic plans and rarely employ structured frameworks such as Porter's model or the Balanced Scorecard. This gap offers both conceptual and contextual justification for investigating how these frameworks jointly shape SME competitiveness and sustainability in Rwanda's urban economy. Against this background, the present study examines the influence of strategic planning frameworks, specifically environmental scanning, Porter's Five Forces, and the Balanced Scorecard, on the sustainable competitive advantage of SMEs in Nyarugenge District, Kigali City. By integrating these models into a unified analytical approach, the study contributes to bridging theoretical, contextual, and practical gaps in strategic management scholarship and SME practice.

Problem Statement

In an ideal strategic management environment, small and medium enterprises are expected to formulate, implement, and continuously review their strategic plans using structured frameworks that incorporate environmental scanning, competitive analysis, and performance monitoring tools (World Bank, 2021). Such frameworks enable enterprises to anticipate market trends, mitigate external threats, align resources with long-term goals, and sustain competitive advantage. However, the reality on the ground in Rwanda remains far from this ideal. Despite the existence of supportive policy instruments such as the SME Development Policy (MINICOM, 2021) and the National Strategy for Transformation (NST1, 2017–2024), most SMEs continue to operate without formalized or actionable strategic plans. The Ministry of Trade and Industry (MINICOM, 2023) reported that only 28% of SMEs in Kigali possess documented strategic plans, and of these, fewer than 15% regularly revise or implement them using structured tools such as environmental scanning or competitive industry analysis.

In Nyarugenge District, a key commercial hub within Kigali City, SMEs face intensifying competition, shifting consumer preferences, and rising operational costs, yet most lack clear strategic roadmaps to navigate these pressures. According to the Rwanda Development Board (RDB, 2024), over 40% of SMEs in urban districts, including Nyarugenge, fail to scale operations or sustain profitability beyond their third year. Similarly, the Private Sector Federation (PSF, 2023) highlights that many SMEs overlook the use of structured strategic planning models such as Porter's Five Forces or the Balanced Scorecard framework, limiting their capacity to make data-driven decisions and monitor organizational performance.

The magnitude of this problem is increasingly visible in the stagnation and closure of otherwise promising SMEs across Nyarugenge. The absence of systematic environmental scanning mechanisms prevents these enterprises from detecting emerging risks or opportunities in Rwanda's rapidly evolving urban economy. Likewise, the failure to utilize frameworks such as Porter's Five Forces undermines understanding of industry dynamics, competitive intensity, and buyer–supplier relations, while the limited adoption of performance measurement tools like the Balanced Scorecard weakens strategic alignment and responsiveness. Comparative empirical evidence from Mulyaningsih, Deni, Komariah, Firdausijah, and Yuniarti (2020) in Indonesia revealed that SMEs integrating environmental scanning and internal capability analysis into their planning processes achieve significantly higher levels of market positioning and profitability. This aligns with the Rwandan context, where strategic planning among SMEs remains largely informal, reactive, and detached from long-term competitiveness, especially in fast-changing urban markets such as Nyarugenge District.

To address this critical gap, the present study seeks to examine how the application of strategic planning frameworks, specifically environmental scanning, Porter's Five Forces, and the Balanced Scorecard, influences the sustainable competitive advantage of SMEs in Nyarugenge District, Kigali City. Unlike previous research that has concentrated on large firms or public sector organizations, this study focuses on urban SMEs to generate localized and evidence-based insights. By exploring how these frameworks are understood, applied, or underutilized, the study contributes both theoretically and practically to the discourse on SME competitiveness. The findings are expected to inform entrepreneurs, policymakers, and SME development institutions such as RDB, BDF, and MINICOM in designing interventions that institutionalize structured strategic planning. Ultimately, the study supports Rwanda's private sector transformation agenda under NST1 (2017–2024) and aligns with global priorities articulated in IDA21 and the World Bank Strategic Directions (2024), which position SMEs as essential drivers of inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

General Objective

The general objective of this study was to examine the influence of the strategic planning framework on the sustainable competitive advantage of selected SMEs in Nyarugenge district, Kigali city.

Specific Objectives

- i. To determine the influence of Environmental Scanning on the sustainable competitive advantage of selected SMEs in Nyarugenge district, Kigali city.
- ii. To examine the influence of Porter's five forces framework on the sustainable competitive advantage of selected SMEs in Nyarugenge district, Kigali city.
- iii. To assess the influence of balanced scorecard framework on the sustainable competitive advantage of selected SMEs in Nyarugenge district, Kigali city.

Research Hypotheses

- i. **H₀₁:** Environmental scanning has no significant influence on the sustainable competitive advantage of selected SMEs in Nyarugenge District, Kigali City.
- ii. **H₀₂:** Porter's five forces framework does not significantly affect the sustainable competitive advantage of selected SMEs in Nyarugenge District, Kigali City.
- iii. **H₀₃:** Balanced scorecard framework has no significant influence on the sustainable competitive advantage of selected SMEs in Nyarugenge District, Kigali City.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Dynamic Capabilities Theory, Porter's Five Forces Theory, and the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) model collectively ground the current study. The Dynamic Capabilities Theory, introduced by Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997), extends the Resource-Based View by emphasizing a firm's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies in response to dynamic environments. Unlike static resource-based approaches, this theory foregrounds adaptability, innovation, and learning as central to competitive success. Dynamic capabilities, such as sensing opportunities, seizing them, and transforming organizational resources, are particularly vital for SMEs operating in fluid business contexts like Kigali's urban economy. This theory directly supports the first objective of the study, which examines the influence of environmental scanning on sustainable competitive advantage. Environmental scanning

represents the sensing capability within dynamic capability theory, enabling firms to collect intelligence on consumer preferences, regulatory shifts, and competitor actions. Ngabonziza and Rwigema (2022) found that Rwandan SMEs with strong environmental scanning practices were more adaptive and resilient to market disruptions. Likewise, Karanja and Wanjohi (2023) established that Kenyan SMEs with high dynamic capabilities managed technological changes and policy shocks more effectively, resulting in superior market positioning. By grounding environmental scanning in Dynamic Capabilities Theory, the study highlights how adaptability and responsiveness enhance a firm's ability to sustain a competitive edge in volatile environments.

Porter's Five Forces Theory, developed by Michael Porter (1979), remains one of the most influential models for analyzing industry structure and competitive dynamics. The theory identifies five forces that determine the intensity of competition and, consequently, the level of profitability and sustainability achievable in any industry: threat of new entrants, bargaining power of buyers, bargaining power of suppliers, threat of substitutes, and rivalry among existing firms. This framework supports the second objective of the study, which explores the influence of Porter's Five Forces on sustainable competitive advantage among SMEs in Nyarugenge District. In fragmented and highly competitive markets such as retail, service, and agro-processing sectors, understanding the external competitive environment is vital for effective strategic positioning. Kusa, Duda, and Suder (2021) demonstrated that Polish SMEs that routinely analyzed competitive pressures optimized pricing, product innovation, and customer relationship strategies, outperforming rivals. Similarly, Ndubuisi-Okolo and Owuamanam (2023) showed that internal alignment with external competitive forces strengthened SMEs' innovation and market reach. In this study, Porter's framework is linked to sustainable competitive advantage by explaining how SMEs position themselves strategically within their industry to defend profitability and long-term survival against external threats.

The Balanced Scorecard (BSC), developed by Kaplan and Norton in 1992, provides a comprehensive performance management system that integrates financial and non-financial measures to ensure strategic alignment and continuous improvement. It evaluates performance through four perspectives: financial, customer, internal business processes, and learning and growth. The model grounds the third objective of the study, which assesses the influence of the Balanced Scorecard on sustainable competitive advantage. Empirical evidence shows that SMEs adopting BSC frameworks experience better organizational alignment, resource optimization, and customer satisfaction. For example, Auka and Langat (2020) found that Kenyan SMEs conducting periodic strategic reviews and benchmarking recorded improved profitability and market adaptability. Similarly, Ruzindana and Irechukwu (2023) demonstrated that Rwandan SMEs utilizing strategic evaluation tools, such as performance indicators and feedback loops, achieved stronger operational sustainability. The Balanced Scorecard therefore relates to the dependent variable by operationalizing strategic control and internal monitoring, ensuring that strategy execution translates into sustained competitive outcomes through continuous performance feedback.

Collectively, these three frameworks offer a holistic theoretical model for understanding sustainable competitive advantage among SMEs. The Dynamic Capabilities Theory explains how firms adapt by developing sensing and learning abilities (adaptability dimension); Porter's Five Forces Theory explains how firms position themselves within external market and

industry structures (competitive positioning dimension); and the Balanced Scorecard provides the tools to control and align internal processes with strategic objectives (strategic control dimension). Together, they form a comprehensive framework linking adaptability, positioning, and control to long-term competitiveness. This integration underscores that SMEs in volatile environments such as Nyarugenge District can sustain competitive advantage not merely through resource possession, but through their ability to sense external changes, strategically position themselves within competitive forces, and continuously evaluate and refine performance.

Empirical Review

A review of recent peer-reviewed articles and dissertations has provided strong empirical support, practical evidence, and statistical findings that enrich the understanding of strategic management practices. Scholars Heriyanto, Febrian, Sugiarto, Handoko, and Syofian (2021) conducted a study titled “Competitive Advantage in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs): A Systematic Mapping Study” published in the Management Theory and Studies for Rural Business and Infrastructure Development. The purpose was to classify and synthesize research trends on competitive advantage in SMEs globally. Using the Systematic Mapping Study (SMS) method, the researchers examined articles spanning strategic factors including environmental scanning, ICT usage, human resource development, and knowledge management. Their findings emphasized that SMEs adopting structured environmental scanning processes, like trend monitoring and competitor profiling, experienced improved agility and competitiveness. Although not theory-bound, the study provided robust descriptive insights on environmental factors influencing SMEs' strategic positioning.

Similarly, Hamed (2023), in “The Role of Strategic Sensitivity in Sustainable Competitive Advantage,” investigated the level of interest and implementation of strategic sensitivity within the General Company for the Manufacture of Cars and Equipment. Guided by the resource-based view and dynamic capabilities theory, the study revealed that strategic sensitivity significantly influenced sustainable competitive advantage. The ability to sense, interpret, and respond to environmental changes emerged as a critical enabler of sustained advantage.

Researchers, Ntegamaherezo and Irechukwu (2024), in “Strategic Planning and Success of Non-Governmental Organizations’ Development Initiatives: A Case of African Enterprise Rwanda,” examined the effect of environmental scanning on project success using a mixed-method cross-sectional design. Data from 131 respondents showed a strong positive correlation between environmental scanning and project success ($r = 0.822$, $\text{sig} = 0.000$). The findings suggest that continuous environmental scanning enhances competitive positioning and long-term sustainability. Likewise, Uwamahoro and Mbonimana (2021), in “Effect of Strategic Planning on Family Business Project Sustainability in Kigali,” found that strategic planning dimensions, including environmental scanning, reduced uncertainty and strengthened long-term decision-making, leading to sustained business performance.

Furthermore, Oloo (2024), in “Strategic Planning Impacts on the Performance Dynamics of Micro Enterprises in Kisumu County,” found that environmental scanning enabled firms to identify new markets, anticipate policy changes, and plan proactive strategies. SMEs engaging in regular SWOT analyses and monitoring recorded improved market share retention. Similarly, Alharafsheh and Ezmigna (2023), in their study on “The Impact of Business Strategy on Competitive Advantage and Performance of SMEs in Jordan,” confirmed a significant

relationship ($p \leq .000$) between environmental scanning practices and sustainable competitive advantage. Scholars such as Ndubuisi-Okolo and Owuamanam (2023) and Saka and Olowo (2020) reinforced that structured strategic planning, execution, and evaluation are positively associated with SME sustainability and competitiveness. These findings align with Porter's competitive forces model, emphasizing the need for SMEs to institutionalize strategic actions and strengthen internal competencies to withstand external pressures.

In the Rwandan context, Ruzindana and Irechukwu (2023) assessed strategic practices in processing and manufacturing SMEs and revealed that those with effective strategy execution mechanisms were more resilient to competitive pressure and supplier power. Mutabazi and Gitahi (2023) showed that strategic growth plans improved sales ($r = 0.424$), investment ($r = 0.740$), and profit ($r = 0.484$), confirming that market intelligence and customer engagement strengthen strategic positioning. Similarly, Kigenza and Irechukwu (2023) found that evaluation mechanisms such as performance monitoring and risk planning significantly influenced organizational outcomes ($r = 0.893$, $R^2 = 0.521$), reinforcing the Balanced Scorecard's learning and growth dimensions.

A critical synthesis of the reviewed studies demonstrates a collective recognition of the importance of strategic planning dimensions in enhancing organizational sustainability and performance. These contributions span various sectors across developing economies such as Rwanda, Nigeria, and Kenya. However, while these studies provide valuable empirical insights, their robustness and generalizability remain constrained by several methodological, theoretical, contextual, and conceptual limitations. The dominance of quantitative, cross-sectional survey designs, limited theoretical integration, and urban-based sampling have hindered nuanced understanding of how dynamic strategic processes evolve over time. Furthermore, external environmental factors such as regulatory frameworks, macroeconomic shifts, and digital transitions remain underexplored, leaving a gap in understanding how such variables moderate strategic planning-performance relationships. Conceptually, previous studies often emphasize formulation and implementation while neglecting performance evaluation, innovation orientation, and feedback mechanisms, critical components of strategic effectiveness. Moreover, the scarcity of mixed-method approaches limits interpretive richness, as overreliance on self-reported quantitative data may exaggerate the perceived maturity of strategic practices.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in Figure 1 illustrates the hypothesized relationships among the three independent variables: environmental scanning, Porter's Five Forces Framework and balanced scorecard and their collective impact on the dependent variable, Sustainable Competitive Advantage of SMEs in Rwanda.

Independent Variables:

Strategic Planning Framework

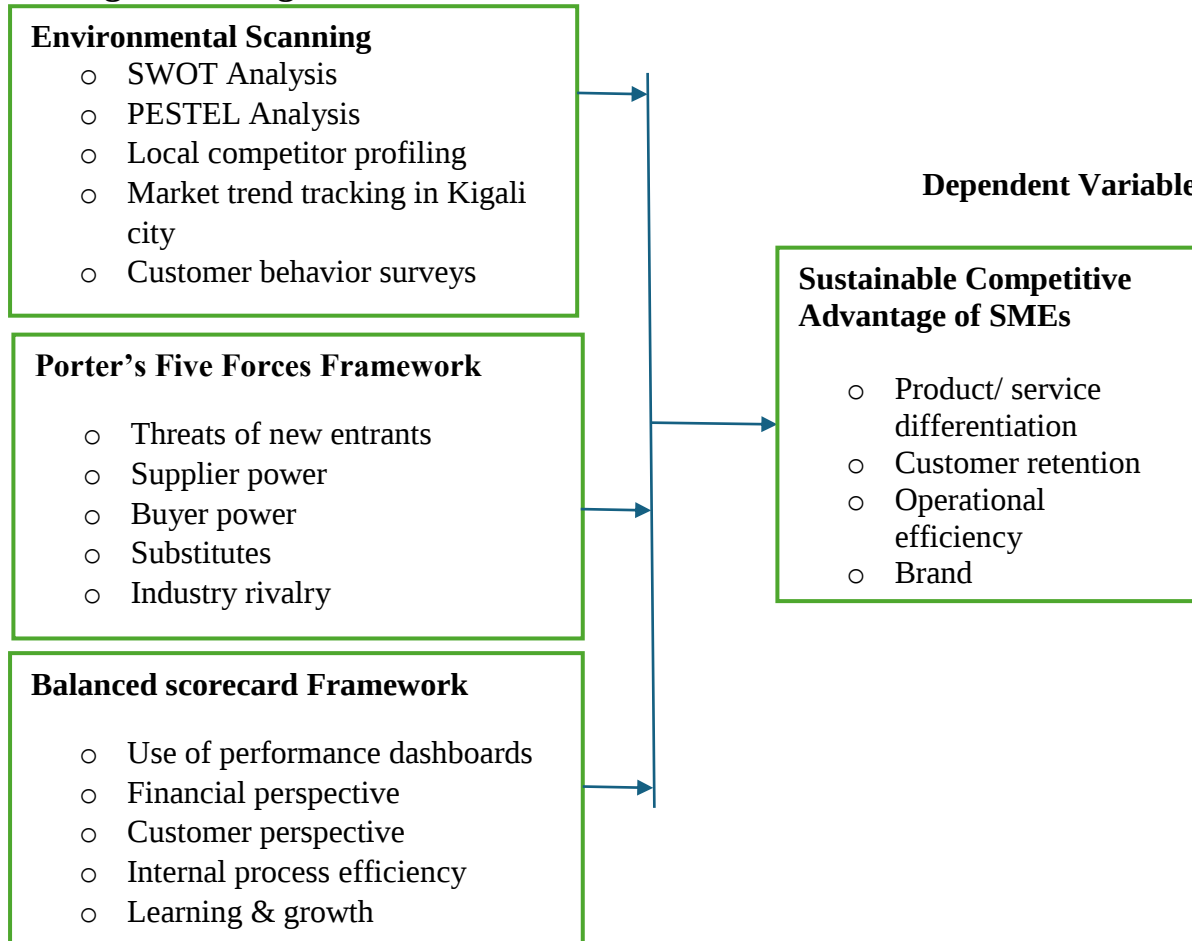


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Researcher (2025)

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey and correlational research design. According to Kimemia (2024), a descriptive survey design is appropriate for obtaining information on the status of phenomena and describing “what exists” regarding specific variables or conditions. This design enabled the collection of factual, attitudinal, and perceptual data from Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Nyarugenge District concerning their strategic planning frameworks and sustainable competitive advantage. The target population comprised owners, senior managers, and strategy-involved staff of registered SMEs operating in Nyarugenge District, Kigali City. According to the Rwanda Development Board (RDB, 2024), there were approximately 487 registered SMEs in the district, covering sectors such as trade, services, manufacturing, and ICT. Considering practical constraints of time, cost, and accessibility commonly acknowledged in SME strategic management research (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019), the study focused on 10% of these SMEs (49 enterprises), yielding a target population of 196 and a sample size of 132 determined using Slovin’s formula.

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure proportional representation across respondent categories. Stratification was based on the functional roles of participants, including Managing Directors, Business Managers, Operations Managers, and Marketing Officers. Within each stratum, simple random sampling was applied to select participants. A mixed-methods approach integrated both quantitative and qualitative data collection. Primary data were obtained through structured surveys and semi-structured interviews, while secondary data were sourced through document reviews. Reliability was tested using the test-retest method, where the same questionnaire was administered twice to 13 respondents (10% of the final sample) within three days, and consistency across tests confirmed reliability. Internal consistency was further verified through Cronbach's alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.81, which indicated acceptable reliability. Validity was ensured through content, construct, and criterion-related validity checks.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS Version 30 and MS Excel 2016, while qualitative data were examined through thematic content analysis. Prior to statistical analysis, data underwent editing and coding to correct inconsistencies and encode categorical responses numerically. Normality tests were conducted to ensure the suitability of variables, particularly Likert-scale items, for parametric analysis. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were computed to summarize respondents' perspectives on strategic planning frameworks and competitive advantage. Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) assessed the strength and direction of relationships between each independent variable and sustainable competitive advantage, with positive and negative r -values indicating direct and inverse relationships, respectively. To determine the predictive influence of strategic planning frameworks on competitive advantage, multiple linear regression analysis was conducted using the following model:

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

Where Y represents sustainable competitive advantage, X_1 – X_3 denote the dimensions of strategic planning frameworks, β_0 is the constant, β_1 – β_3 are regression coefficients, and ε represents the error term. Qualitative data from interviews and document reviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically through iterative steps of familiarization, coding, theme identification, and narrative synthesis. The study observed ethical research standards in accordance with Mount Kenya University's ethical guidelines and Rwanda's Data Protection Law No. 058/2021 of 13/10/2021. Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, provided voluntary consent, and assured of confidentiality, data protection, and the safeguarding of their rights and welfare. Given the involvement of SME owners and managers with potentially sensitive business insights, the research ensured anonymity and respect for autonomy throughout all stages.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics

The demographic results indicated a balanced gender representation, with 53.6% male and 46.5% female respondents, suggesting gradual progress toward gender inclusivity in SME leadership in Nyarugenge District, in line with Rwanda's policies promoting women's economic empowerment (MINICOM, 2024). Most SMEs operated in trade (60.6%), followed by services (18.9%), ICT (15.7%), and manufacturing (4.7%), reflecting Rwanda's SME structure dominated by commerce and retail due to low entry barriers (PSF, 2023). In terms of

age, 76% of respondents were aged 26–35 years, 13% were 36–45, 6% were above 46, and 5% were below 25, confirming that SMEs are largely youth-driven and innovation-oriented (NISR, 2024). Regarding job roles, 40% were business strategists, 29% finance or marketing officers, 21% operations managers, and 10% managing directors, showing that data were drawn mainly from individuals actively engaged in strategic planning and decision-making. Finally, 66% of respondents had 2–5 years of business management experience, 28% had over 5 years, and 6% had less than 2 years, indicating that most participants possessed substantial managerial exposure, enhancing the reliability and contextual depth of responses on strategic planning frameworks and sustainable competitive advantage.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive results revealed that SMEs in Nyarugenge District demonstrated strong adherence to the three strategic planning frameworks; environmental scanning, Porter's Five Forces, and the Balanced Scorecard, with overall means of 4.53, 4.49, and 4.51 respectively, indicating consistently high levels of strategic engagement. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that their enterprises routinely monitored competitors, customer trends, and regulatory shifts while leveraging digital tools to identify opportunities and threats, reflecting a proactive strategic culture. These findings align with Heriyanto *et al.* (2021) and Hamed (2023), who observed that systematic environmental scanning enhances agility and competitive positioning, and correspond with Ntegamaherezo and Irechukwu (2024), who found a strong correlation between scanning practices and project success in Rwanda. Similarly, results under Porter's Five Forces framework indicated that SMEs actively managed rivalry, supplier relations, and entry barriers, findings consistent with Ndubuisi-Okolo and Owuamanam (2023) and Saka and Olowo (2020), who noted that structured competitive intelligence enhances SME sustainability in dynamic markets. Balanced Scorecard results showed high emphasis on financial indicators (mean = 4.83) and customer feedback (mean = 4.54), corroborating Auka and Langat (2020) and García and Adame (2020), who confirmed that financial and customer perspectives remain dominant in SME performance measurement. However, lower mean scores for learning and growth (4.11) suggest that capacity-building remains a weaker dimension, echoing Kaplan and Norton's (2020) argument that neglecting staff development limits long-term strategic alignment.

Qualitative data from interviews and document reviews provided rich context reinforcing these quantitative trends. Respondents emphasized vigilance in monitoring customer demand, competitor pricing, and regulatory shifts as essential to sustaining competitiveness, with one strategist noting that "if we do not scan, we risk losing our customers to more alert competitors." Strategy documents reviewed also revealed routine use of environmental audits, market analyses, and customer surveys, demonstrating embedded scanning culture. Similarly, insights related to Porter's model underscored the intensity of competition and supplier negotiations, as operations managers highlighted the need to "adjust strategies quickly when new entrants emerge" and "negotiate regularly to stabilize prices." Balanced Scorecard-related discussions confirmed that SMEs frequently tracked sales, profit margins, and customer satisfaction but invested minimally in structured staff development. This pattern mirrors findings by Ruzindana and Irechukwu (2023), who linked robust performance evaluation to sustainability yet cautioned that limited human capital investment constrains long-term competitiveness. Collectively, these results indicate that SMEs in Nyarugenge are strategically proactive, blending financial and market intelligence approaches with adaptive competitive

practices, though future resilience will depend on strengthening learning-oriented and innovation-driven strategic dimensions.

Correlation analyses

This section used correlation analysis to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between strategic positioning framework dimensions and sustainable competitive advantage. This section provides insights into whether these variables are positively, negatively, or not significantly related.

Table 1: Correlation matrix

		Environmental scanning	Porters five forces framework	Balanced scorecard	Sustainable competitive advantage
Environmental scanning	Pearson Correlation	1			
	N	127			
Porter's five forces framework	Pearson Correlation	.955**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001			
	N	127	127		
Balanced scorecard	Pearson Correlation	.950**	.925**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001		
	N	127	127	127	
Sustainable competitive advantage	Pearson Correlation	.923**	.938**	.900**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	
	N	127	127	127	127

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Research Findings (2025)

The correlation matrix results in Table 1 reveal strong interrelationships among the three strategic tools themselves, with environmental scanning highly correlated with Porter's framework ($r = 0.955$, $p < 0.001$) and the balanced scorecard ($r = 0.950$, $p < 0.001$). Porter's framework and the BSC are also strongly correlated ($r = 0.925$, $p < 0.001$). This triangulation indicates that organizations often use these strategic tools complementarily rather than in isolation. Their combined correlation with sustainable competitive advantage is equally high: environmental scanning ($r = 0.923$), Porter's framework ($r = 0.938$), and balanced scorecard ($r = 0.900$). These results align with the integrative arguments of scholars Seyadi and Elali (2021), who emphasized that strategic agility requires the joint use of external scanning and internal evaluation frameworks. The findings are also consistent with Abosede, Obasan, and Alese (2020), who advocated for integrated use of SWOT, KPIs, and competitive mapping in SMEs for stronger market positioning. Thus, this study provides empirical evidence that organizations leveraging all three tools simultaneously achieve superior, sustainable competitiveness.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis evaluates the combined and individual effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable, sustainable competitive advantage. This section identifies which factors significantly contribute to the sustainable competitive positioning of SMEs and assesses the overall model's predictive strength.

Table 2: R model Summary between Strategic Planning Framework and Sustainable Competitive Advantage

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.943 ^a	.890	.887	.2286	2.335

a. Predictors: (Constant), Balanced scorecard, Porter's five forces framework, Environmental scanning
b. Dependent Variable: Sustainable competitive advantage

Source: Research Findings (2025)

The regression model summary results in Table 2 reveal a strong relationship between the predictors and the dependent variable, sustainable competitive advantage. The model recorded a multiple correlation coefficient of $R = .943$, indicating a very high degree of linear association between the independent variables and sustainable competitive advantage among SMEs in Nyarugenge District. The R Square value of .890 implies that approximately 89% of the variance in sustainable competitive advantage can be explained by the three strategic management frameworks under consideration, while the adjusted R Square of .887 demonstrates the robustness of the model after adjusting for predictors. This proportion is considerably high in social science research, confirming the explanatory power of the model.

The standard error of the estimate (.2286) was relatively small, further affirming model accuracy in predicting outcomes. The Durbin–Watson statistic (2.335) fell within the acceptable range of 1.5–2.5, suggesting that there was no serious autocorrelation problem in the residuals, and the assumption of independence of errors was satisfied. This strengthens confidence in the regression estimates. Comparable findings were reported by Ntegamaherezo and Irechukwu (2024), who established a strong correlation ($r = 0.822$, $p < 0.001$) between environmental scanning and project success, underscoring the ability of structured strategic practices to explain large proportions of outcome variance. Similarly, Kigenza and Irechukwu (2023) reported adjusted $R^2 = 0.521$ in their analysis of Balanced Scorecard systems, albeit lower than the present study's .887, demonstrating that this study captured more holistic explanatory factors.

Table 3: ANOVA Results between Strategic Planning Framework and Sustainable Competitive Advantage

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	51.821	3	17.274	330.553	<.001 ^b
	Residual	6.428	123	.052		
	Total	58.249	126			

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainable competitive advantage

b. Predictors: (Constant), Balanced scorecard, Porter's five forces framework, Environmental scanning

Source: *Research Findings (2025)*

The ANOVA results in Table 3 demonstrated the overall significance of the regression model. The regression sum of squares (51.821) was far greater than the residual sum of squares (6.428), indicating that the predictors accounted for the majority of variance in sustainable competitive advantage. The computed F-statistic of 330.553 with a p-value < .001 confirmed that the model was statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This implies that environmental scanning, Porter's five forces framework, and the balanced scorecard jointly make a significant contribution to predicting sustainable competitive advantage among SMEs. These results are consistent with Saka and Olowo (2020), whose regression analysis found that execution of strategic actions significantly enhanced long-term SME sustainability, yielding statistically significant F-values.

Table 4. Regression Coefficients between strategic planning framework and sustainable competitive advantage

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	-.117	.149		-.783	.435		
	Environmental scanning	.320	.135	.304	1.626	.0106	.057	17.548
	Porters five forces framework	.656	.109	.623	6.034	<.001	.084	11.869
	Balanced scorecard	.240	.105	.230	1.329	.018	.093	10.704

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainable competitive advantage

Source: *Research Findings (2025)*

The coefficients in Table 4 provide insight into the unique contribution of each predictor variable. The regression model equation became:

$$\text{Sustainable Competitive Advantage} = -0.117 + 0.320(\text{environmental scanning}) + 0.656(\text{Porter's five force framework}) + 0.240(\text{balanced scorecard framework})$$

The results indicated that Porter's five forces framework ($\beta = .623$, $p < .001$) was the most influential predictor, demonstrating that SMEs systematically analyze industry rivalry, buyer power, supplier power, threat of substitutes, and threat of new entrants gain substantial advantages in sustaining competitiveness. This aligns with Kusa, Duda, and Suder (2021), who

found that active monitoring of competitive rivalry and supplier concentration strongly influenced SME performance, with statistically significant coefficients. Environmental scanning ($\beta = .304$, $p = .0106$) also had a significant effect, confirming that SMEs that routinely monitor their environments adapt faster and sustain market presence. These results resonate with the findings of Hamed (2023), who reported that strategic sensitivity significantly influenced sustainable competitive advantage, and with Oloo (2024), who showed that SMEs practicing regular SWOT analysis recorded improved performance. Finally, the balanced scorecard ($\beta = .230$, $p = .018$) had a statistically significant positive effect, demonstrating that the systematic use of financial, customer, internal process, and learning-growth perspectives contributes to long-term sustainability. This is consistent with García and Adame (2020), who confirmed that SMEs applying customer and financial metrics were more competitive. The collinearity statistics ($VIF > 10$) suggest potential multicollinearity but given the theoretical distinctiveness of the predictors and their empirical support, the results remain valid for interpretation.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 5. One-Sample T Test

	T	df	Test Value = 0.05		Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
			Significance			Lower	Upper
			One-Sided p	Two-Sided p			
Environmental scanning	79.868	126	<.001	<.001	4.4776	4.367	4.589
Porter's five forces framework	77.619	126	<.001	<.001	4.4445	4.331	4.558
Balanced scorecard	79.525	126	<.001	<.001	4.4618	4.351	4.573

Source: Research Findings (2025)

H₀₁: Environmental scanning has no significant influence on sustainable competitive advantage

The regression results confirmed that environmental scanning significantly predicted sustainable competitive advantage ($\beta = .304$, $p = .0106$). The one-sample t-test in Table 5 results reinforced this finding, with a mean score of 4.4776 significantly greater than the test value of 0.05 ($t = 79.868$, $p < .001$). This implies that SMEs that engage in systematic environmental scanning processes, such as monitoring competitors and market trends, are more likely to achieve sustainable competitiveness. Therefore, hypothesis one is rejected.

H₀₂: Porter's five forces framework does not significantly affect sustainable competitive advantage.

The regression analysis revealed that Porter's framework was the strongest predictor ($\beta = .623$, $p < .001$). The one-sample t-test, Table 15 results ($t = 77.619$, $p < .001$, mean difference = 4.4445) confirmed that SMEs extensively apply competitive forces analysis in sustaining advantage. This indicates that SMEs that effectively analyze buyer and supplier power, competitive rivalry, and substitutes outperform competitors in achieving long-term sustainability. Therefore, hypothesis two is rejected.

H₀₃: The balanced scorecard framework has no significant effect on sustainable competitive advantage

The regression results showed that the balanced scorecard significantly predicted sustainable competitive advantage ($\beta = .230$, $p = .018$). The one-sample t-test Table 15 results confirmed this outcome ($t = 79.525$, $p < .001$, mean difference = 4.4618). This suggests that SMEs that apply financial, customer, internal process, and learning and growth perspectives are better positioned to sustain competitive advantage. Therefore, hypothesis three is rejected.

Discussion**Influence of Environmental Scanning on Sustainable Competitive Advantage**

The findings demonstrated that environmental scanning had a statistically significant and positive influence on the sustainable competitive advantage of SMEs in Nyarugenge District ($\beta = .304$, $p = .0106$), with a strong correlation ($r = .965$, $p < .001$). This confirms that SMEs which actively monitor external factors such as competitor behaviour, customer preferences, and regulatory shifts are more capable of maintaining operational efficiency, customer retention, and long-term competitiveness. The high mean score (4.53) and low standard deviations reflected strong consensus that environmental scanning is deeply embedded in SME strategic routines. These results are consistent with the Dynamic Capabilities Theory, which emphasizes that firms able to sense and respond to environmental changes develop superior adaptive capacity. Environmental scanning allows SMEs to anticipate opportunities and threats early, enabling proactive strategic responses. Empirical studies by Heriyanto et al. (2021) and Hamed (2023) similarly affirmed that systematic environmental scanning enhances organizational agility and competitiveness in dynamic markets. Locally, Ntegamaherezo and Irechukwu (2024) found a strong correlation between scanning practices and project success in NGOs, echoing the present findings. The qualitative results corroborated the quantitative outcomes: interviewees described environmental monitoring as essential for “avoiding surprises” and sustaining customer loyalty. This convergence implies that SMEs in Nyarugenge are strategically aware and apply scanning practices not only for reactive adjustments but for proactive innovation. Overall, environmental scanning emerged as a foundational capability that strengthens resilience, responsiveness, and sustained competitive positioning.

Influence of Porter’s Five Forces Framework on Sustainable Competitive Advantage

Porter’s Five Forces framework emerged as the strongest predictor of sustainable competitive advantage among SMEs ($\beta = .623$, $p < .001$), with high correlations across all performance dimensions, particularly operational efficiency ($r = .957$) and long-term competitiveness ($r = .957$). The high overall mean (4.49) showed that SMEs actively engage in analyzing market rivalry, supplier and buyer power, substitutes, and potential entrants, core determinants of market sustainability. The findings are anchored in Porter’s Five Forces Theory, which asserts that competitive advantage is shaped by a firm’s ability to manage these external pressures. The high explanatory power ($R^2 = .890$) in the overall model suggests that SMEs employing this framework systematically position themselves in their industries, neutralizing competitive threats and optimizing profit potential. Empirical consistency is observed with Ndubuisi-Okolo and Owuamanam (2023) and Saka and Olowo (2020), who reported that SMEs leveraging competitive intelligence tools outperformed rivals through better market adaptability. Qualitative findings further reinforced this position: respondents described active competitor

monitoring, supplier negotiations, and substitute awareness as regular practices. These insights affirm that SMEs in Kigali have embraced structured strategic thinking, applying Porter's model not as a theoretical concept but as a practical decision-making tool. Therefore, the study validates that competitive strategy formulation, through rivalry assessment, entry barrier control, and supplier management, is integral to sustaining SME competitiveness in resource-constrained environments.

Influence of the Balanced Scorecard Framework on Sustainable Competitive Advantage

The balanced scorecard (BSC) framework also showed a significant positive influence on sustainable competitive advantage ($\beta = .230$, $p = .018$; $r = .945$, $p < .001$), confirming that performance measurement systems strongly shape competitiveness. SMEs reported high adoption of financial and customer perspectives (means = 4.83 and 4.54 respectively), but relatively lower emphasis on learning and growth (mean = 4.11). This suggests that while financial and customer metrics dominate, long-term sustainability could be enhanced through greater investment in employee development and innovation capacity. The results align with the Balanced Scorecard Model (Kaplan & Norton, 1996; 2020), which integrates financial and non-financial measures to translate strategy into performance. By employing BSC frameworks, SMEs can track performance comprehensively, link activities to strategic goals, and identify gaps in execution. These findings support Auka and Langat (2020), who established that firms using regular KPI reviews sustain performance, and García and Adame (2020), who confirmed strong associations between customer-focused metrics and competitiveness. In Rwanda, Ruzindana and Irechukwu (2023) found that evaluation mechanisms enhance sustainability, a conclusion mirrored here. The responses from the interviews strengthened these results, revealing that SMEs frequently monitor profits, customer satisfaction, and internal processes but tend to underinvest in continuous staff development. This partial adoption of BSC perspectives underscores both a strength and a growth area: while measurement drives short-term gains, long-term advantage demands a balance across all perspectives. Hence, the study concludes that BSC application, when holistic, fosters strategic alignment, operational efficiency, and enduring competitiveness.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concludes that the adoption of structured strategic planning frameworks is vital for achieving and sustaining competitive advantage among SMEs in Kigali. Environmental scanning significantly contributes to strategic adaptability and environmental responsiveness by enabling SMEs to anticipate market changes and make informed decisions. Firms that conduct regular environmental assessments are more likely to exploit emerging opportunities while mitigating potential risks. Porter's Five Forces framework emerged as the most influential determinant of competitive sustainability. Its application provides SMEs with an in-depth understanding of the competitive landscape, allowing them to design strategies that respond effectively to market forces. The framework enables managers to anticipate competitor actions, negotiate better supplier relationships, and position their products strategically to meet customer expectations. The balanced scorecard plays a crucial role in translating strategic plans into measurable performance outcomes. It enhances the alignment between strategic goals and operational performance across financial, customer, internal process, and learning perspectives. The study therefore concludes that the integration of environmental scanning,

competitive analysis, and performance measurement frameworks collectively fosters sustainable competitiveness and strategic coherence among SMEs.

Policy Recommendation

SME owners and managers should institutionalize regular environmental scanning processes to ensure continuous awareness of market trends, customer preferences, regulatory changes, and technological developments. Developing internal mechanisms for data collection, market intelligence, and competitor analysis will allow SMEs to adapt strategies promptly and maintain market relevance. Authorities responsible for SME development, including local government and business support agencies, should design targeted capacity-building programs focused on strategic management competencies. Such programs should train entrepreneurs in practical application of Porter's Five Forces and balanced scorecard tools, ensuring that strategic planning becomes an integral part of everyday decision-making rather than a one-off activity. Business associations and financial institutions should collaborate to support SMEs in embedding strategic management practices through financial incentives and advisory services. Credit facilities could be tied to the presence of sound strategic frameworks, encouraging SMEs to adopt structured planning as a prerequisite for funding. This will enhance managerial discipline and long-term sustainability. SMEs should also adopt digital management tools that integrate environmental scanning and balanced scorecard indicators. Such systems would help managers monitor key performance metrics in real time, align operations with strategic goals, and track progress toward competitiveness and sustainability objectives.

Government policymakers should incorporate strategic management education and mentorship programs into national SME development strategies. Policies promoting entrepreneurship should not only focus on financing but also emphasize knowledge-based competitiveness through training in strategic planning frameworks. There is also a need for the Ministry of Trade and Industry, in collaboration with Rwanda Development Board (RDB), to establish guidelines that encourage SMEs to periodically review and report on their strategic management practices. Introducing certification or recognition programs for strategically managed SMEs would incentivize adoption of environmental scanning and balanced scorecard systems. Furthermore, policy interventions should promote partnerships between SMEs and academic institutions to foster research-driven innovation, ensuring that strategic management becomes evidence-based and contextually adaptive.

Suggestions for Further Study

Future studies should explore additional theoretical frameworks such as the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Dynamic Capability Theory to deepen understanding of internal drivers of competitiveness among SMEs. Comparative studies across districts and sectors within Rwanda are recommended to assess contextual differences in the application and effectiveness of strategic planning frameworks. Longitudinal studies could provide insights into how sustained application of these frameworks influences SME growth trajectories over time. Qualitative case studies focusing on managerial perspectives would also enrich understanding of the practical challenges and best practices in implementing environmental scanning, competitive analysis, and balanced scorecard tools. Finally, regional comparative research across East Africa would help identify cross-country similarities and differences in strategic management adoption, offering lessons that could inform integrated policy approaches for SME competitiveness within the region.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to knowledge by integrating environmental scanning, Porter's Five Forces, and the Balanced Scorecard into a unified model explaining sustainable competitive advantage among SMEs in Rwanda. It extends existing theories by demonstrating how strategic adaptability, competitive positioning, and performance measurement collectively enhance long-term competitiveness. The findings provide empirical evidence that SMEs in emerging economies can achieve sustainability through structured strategic management practices, thereby enriching both theoretical understanding and practical application of strategic frameworks in resource-limited contexts.

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