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From the 4Ps to Omnichannel Capability: Marketing Policy Gaps among SMEs in Tu Liem, Hanoi

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Abstract

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) increasingly combine traditional marketing-mix decisions with digital channels, yet resource constraints can produce uneven adoption across the 4Ps. This study provides a place-based assessment of marketing policy among 120 SMEs operating in Tu Liem Ward, Hanoi. Primary data were collected from January to May 2026 using a standardized five-point Likert questionnaire administered to owners, directors, marketing managers and personnel responsible for sales or marketing, supplemented by in-depth interviews with managers, marketing specialists and local economic-management officials. Descriptive statistics and comparative analysis show a distinct pattern. Product policy is comparatively strong in quality control (78.3%) and product improvement (63.3%), although new-product launches remain limited (42.5%) and trademark protection is incomplete (53.3%). Pricing remains dominated by cost-plus logic (65.8%), with only 45.0% of firms applying flexible pricing. Distribution has moved online: 84.2% sell through Facebook and 79.2% report online-channel revenue, but only 57.5% claim omnichannel activity and most lack integrated customer, inventory and order data. Communication is heavily concentrated in Facebook marketing (90.0%) and paid advertising (67.5%), while SEO (38.3%), email marketing (28.3%) and CRM (34.2%) remain weak. The results indicate that the main challenge is not digital presence itself but the transition from fragmented channel use to integrated, data-enabled marketing capability.

Keywords: SMEs, Marketing Mix, Digital Marketing, Omnichannel, Marketing Capability, Hanoi, Vietnam, 4Ps

1. Introduction

SMEs typically compete with fewer financial, human and technological resources than large firms, yet they often possess greater organizational flexibility. This combination makes marketing policy a central management challenge: firms must allocate scarce resources across product development, pricing, distribution and communication while responding quickly to changing customers and digital platforms. The digitalization of commerce has intensified this challenge because maintaining a social-media presence is no longer equivalent to possessing an integrated marketing capability.

Tu Liem Ward in Hanoi provides a useful local setting for studying this transition. The study setting is an urbanizing business environment characterized by new commercial centers, expanding residential areas and a growing population of young SMEs. Rather than examining one industry, the research studies a cross-section of enterprises competing within the same geographical market. This place-based design makes it possible to identify common implementation bottlenecks that may be obscured in national aggregates.

The study asks a straightforward but practically important question: where are local SMEs strongest and weakest across the 4Ps, and how far have digital tools become embedded in those policies? The answer is not simply that SMEs need more online marketing. The survey evidence indicates that many firms are already active on Facebook, Zalo, e-commerce marketplaces and TikTok. The more consequential gap concerns integration: fragmented multichannel selling, limited use of customer data, low adoption of CRM and SEO, and insufficient long-term marketing planning.

This article reframes the project findings as an international SME-marketing contribution. It combines the traditional 4P lens with the concepts of marketing capability, dynamic capability and omnichannel integration to distinguish between basic digital presence and a more mature, coordinated marketing system.

2. Theoretical Background

The marketing-mix framework remains a useful organizing device for SME decision making because it separates four interdependent policy domains: product, price, place and promotion (Kotler & Keller, 2016) [8]. In smaller firms, however, these domains are rarely managed by specialized departments. Owners and sales personnel often perform multiple marketing tasks, making capability constraints and coordination particularly important.

The resource-based and dynamic-capabilities perspectives help explain why two firms using the same social platform can obtain very different outcomes. Marketing capability is not merely the possession of a website or social-media account; it is the ability to sense customer needs, configure resources, coordinate channels, measure performance and adapt decisions over time (Eggers *et al*., 2018) [4]. Digital marketing can lower access costs for SMEs, but effective use still requires content skills, analytics, customer-data management and strategic consistency (Bocconcelli *et al*., 2017; Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019) [1, 2].

Omnichannel strategy adds a further layer. A firm may sell through a physical store, Facebook, Shopee and TikTok Shop and still remain only multichannel if orders, inventory and customer information are managed separately. This distinction helps interpret the Tu Liem evidence: channel proliferation is relatively advanced, but data synchronization and journey integration remain immature. This distinction is central to the present article because it explains why digital adoption rates alone can overstate marketing maturity.

The study therefore evaluates the 4Ps not as isolated tactical instruments but as an integrated capability system. Product and pricing decisions create the value proposition, distribution determines accessibility and convenience, and communication builds awareness and relationships. Weakness in any one domain can reduce the returns from investments in the others.

3. Methodology

The research uses a descriptive mixed-method design. Secondary materials include local socio-economic reports, statistical publications and prior studies from 2023 onward. Primary fieldwork was conducted from January to May 2026 in Tu Liem Ward, Hanoi.

The quantitative component is based on a standardized questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale to assess product, price, place and promotion policies. Respondents were owners, directors or deputy directors, marketing managers, and staff responsible for marketing or sales in SMEs operating in the study area. Questionnaires were distributed directly and electronically. The analytical dataset contains 120 SMEs.

The qualitative component consists of in-depth interviews guided by open questions with enterprise managers, marketing specialists and local economic-management officials. Qualitative evidence is used to contextualize the descriptive patterns and explain constraints related to finance, staffing, data, technology and management capability.

The quantitative analysis relies on frequencies, percentages and mean scores, supplemented by comparisons across firm categories in the original report. Because the project is designed primarily as a diagnostic assessment rather than a causal model, the present article avoids causal language. Some sections of the report also present customer-satisfaction indicators on a 120-observation basis, but a separate customer sampling frame is not documented. Those figures are therefore treated here as contextual descriptive indicators and are not used for inferential claims.

4. Results

4.1 Product policy: Quality orientation with limited new-product development

Product policy is the strongest of the four domains. A total of 78.3% of surveyed SMEs report regular quality control, 68.3% maintain a relatively diverse product portfolio, and 63.3% have improved products within the previous three years. The mean score for stable product quality is 3.92 out of 5. These results suggest that firms recognize basic quality and assortment as necessary conditions for local competition.

The main weakness is the shift from incremental improvement to systematic innovation. Only 42.5% report launching a new product during the study period, and the mean score for regular new-product development is 3.31. Only 27.5% prepare an annual product-innovation plan. Similarly, 53.3% have registered trademark protection and 59.2% provide regular after-sales service. The data therefore describe an SME product system that is responsive but still largely reactive: firms improve existing offers after market signals emerge rather than operating formal research-and-development or market-insight processes.

Quality governance is also informal. Only 35.8% report a written quality-control process, and approximately 38.3% apply formal management, technical or safety standards. For smaller firms, this reliance on owner experience can provide flexibility but makes consistency harder to scale.

Table 1: Product-policy indicators

Product indicator	Firms	Share (%)
Relatively diverse product portfolio	82	68.3
Regular product quality control	94	78.3
Product improvement in past three years	76	63.3
New product launched	51	42.5
Packaging/design improved	69	57.5
Trademark registered	64	53.3
Regular after-sales service	71	59.2
Regularly collect customer feedback	67	55.8

4.2 Price policy: Competitive but still cost-led

Pricing remains centered on traditional cost-plus methods: 65.8% of firms use cost plus a desired profit margin, compared with 48.3% that regularly refer to market and competitor prices. Discounts are common (61.7%) and 56.7% run promotions regularly, but only 45.0% apply flexible pricing by customer group or selling occasion. The mean score for price flexibility is 3.29, the lowest among the reported price criteria.

This pattern indicates that SMEs use price aggressively as a short-term competitive instrument but have not widely developed value-based or data-enabled pricing. The report notes that many firms lack market databases and specialized pricing tools. As a result, promotions and discounts tend to be episodic rather than part of a segmented customer-value strategy.

Table 2: Pricing-policy indicators

Price indicator	Firms	Share (%)
Cost-plus pricing	79	65.8
Market/competitor-based pricing	58	48.3
Customer discount policy	74	61.7
Regular promotions	68	56.7
Flexible pricing by customer group	54	45.0
Monitor/adjust for market price changes	63	52.5

4.3 Place policy: Extensive digital reach but incomplete omnichannel integration

Distribution has diversified substantially. Physical stores remain dominant (90.8%), but Facebook (84.2%) and Zalo (73.3%) are widely used for selling and customer contact. More than half of the firms use Shopee (52.5%), while 40.0% sell through TikTok Shop. Overall, 79.2% report revenue from online channels.

At first glance, the 57.5% rate of reported omnichannel selling appears high. The descriptive evidence, however, distinguishes true omnichannel integration from parallel multichannel use. In many firms, physical stores, social platforms and marketplaces operate as separate systems; customer data, inventory and orders are not synchronized. This is the central distribution gap. The problem is therefore less about adding more channels and more about integrating the channels already in use.

Table 3: Distribution channels and digital capabilities

Distribution channel/capability	Firms	Share (%)
Physical store/direct outlet	109	90.8
Sales website	57	47.5
Facebook	101	84.2
Zalo	88	73.3
Shopee	63	52.5
TikTok Shop	48	40.0
Agents/points of sale	54	45.0
Formal distributor	38	31.7
Reported omnichannel selling	69	57.5
Revenue from online channels	95	79.2

4.4 Promotion: Social-media intensity without equivalent data capability

Promotion is highly digital in terms of visible channel use. Facebook Marketing is used by 90.0% of firms, TikTok Marketing by 60.0%, and paid online advertising by 67.5%. Nearly half (48.3%) conduct periodic livestream selling, while 70.0% report after-sales customer-care activity. These practices help explain why 61.7% report increased new-customer acquisition after marketing activity and 65.8% report a relatively strong return-customer rate.

More specialized digital capabilities are much less common. Only 38.3% perform SEO, 28.3% use email marketing, and 34.2% operate CRM software. The report also describes paid-media budgets as generally low, with most firms spending below VND 10 million per month, and notes weaknesses in content professionalism, campaign measurement and customer-data exploitation. The result is a recognizable 'digital presence without digital integration' pattern.

Table 4: Marketing-communication indicators

Communication indicator	Firms	Share (%)
Facebook Marketing	108	90.0
TikTok Marketing	72	60.0
Official website	69	57.5
SEO	46	38.3
Email Marketing	34	28.3
Periodic livestream selling	58	48.3
Paid online advertising	81	67.5
Regular promotion programs	76	63.3
After-sales customer care	84	70.0
CRM application	41	34.2
New customers increased after marketing	74	61.7
Return customers at a fairly high level	79	65.8

5. Discussion

The Tu Liem evidence reveals an important distinction between flexibility and capability. SMEs are flexible in the sense that they can adjust products, prices and channels quickly. Yet flexibility is often owner-led and experience-based rather than supported by formal processes, data or specialist teams. This helps explain why firms perform relatively well on quality control, competitive pricing and social-media presence but less well on new-product systems, dynamic pricing, CRM, SEO and integrated omnichannel operations.

The findings are consistent with the broader SME marketing literature, which emphasizes that digital tools reduce entry barriers but do not automatically produce strategic capability (Bocconcelli *et al*., 2017; Saura *et al*., 2019) [1, 9]. The high adoption of Facebook and Zalo demonstrates that local firms can reach customers at low cost. The low adoption of CRM and email marketing, however, suggests that customer relationships are not yet managed as reusable data assets. Similarly, selling on several channels does not create an omnichannel experience unless stock, orders, pricing and customer histories are coordinated.

A second insight concerns the 4Ps themselves. The evidence does not support abandoning the traditional marketing mix in favor of digital marketing. Instead, digital capability should be embedded inside each P: customer analytics for product development, data-supported pricing, integrated order and inventory management for place, and measurement automation for promotion. The practical problem is therefore one of orchestration rather than simple tool adoption.

Finally, the place-based approach highlights the role of the local business ecosystem. Small firms often cannot individually finance advanced analytics, training or e-commerce infrastructure. Local authorities and business associations may therefore create shared capabilities through training, platform partnerships, advisory services and market-connectivity programs.

6. Managerial and Local-Policy Implications

For product policy, SMEs should formalize customer-feedback loops, introduce basic annual innovation planning, document quality-control procedures and treat trademark registration as a strategic asset rather than an administrative afterthought. Product innovation need not imply large R&D expenditure; systematic testing of small variations can convert existing responsiveness into a repeatable capability.

For price, firms should gradually move from cost-plus pricing toward a hybrid approach that incorporates competitor intelligence, perceived customer value and segment-specific willingness to pay. Even simple customer and transaction databases can support more disciplined discount rules and reduce excessive reliance on blanket price competition.

For distribution, management priority should shift from opening additional channels to integrating existing ones. A lean omnichannel architecture can begin with synchronized product catalogs, inventory visibility, order status and common customer identifiers across stores, marketplaces and social platforms.

For promotion, the immediate capability gaps are SEO, CRM, lifecycle communication and performance measurement. Low-cost AI and automation tools may help smaller firms create content and respond to customers, but these tools should be linked to clear objectives and human oversight rather than adopted as isolated technologies.

For local government and business associations, the findings support practical programs in digital marketing analytics, local SEO, marketplace operations, CRM adoption, intellectual-property registration and omnichannel process design. Shared training and advisory services can reduce fixed capability costs for micro and small firms.

7. Conclusion and Limitations

This study shows that SMEs in Tu Liem are not digitally absent. On the contrary, they are highly active on low-cost social and commerce platforms. Their central challenge is the transition from fragmented activity to integrated marketing capability. Product quality and incremental improvement are comparatively strong; pricing is competitive but still cost-led; distribution is increasingly digital but not fully omnichannel; and communication is visible on social media but weak in SEO, CRM, email marketing and analytics.

The research is descriptive and place-specific, so the results should not be interpreted as causal or generalized automatically to all Vietnamese SMEs. The sample contains 120 enterprises in one Hanoi locality and relies primarily on manager/self-reported indicators. The qualitative interview sample and the separate sampling frame underlying the customer-satisfaction indicators are not documented in sufficient detail, which limits reproducibility. Future research could use stratified samples across districts, collect matched manager-customer data, estimate links between marketing capability and performance, and examine whether integrated digital capability mediates the relationship between the 4Ps and SME growth.

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