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Evaluating the Impact of Integrated Go-to-Market Systems on U.S. SMB Competitiveness

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Abstract: *The paper highlights the effects of integrated go-to-market (GTM) systems on the competitiveness of small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) in the United States, which is a significant gap in the knowledge of how resource-constrained companies can use systematic market strategies to their competitive advantage. Basing our argument on the Resource-Based View and the Dynamic Capabilities Theory, we used a mixed-methods approach that involved quantitative analysis of 450 SMBs in the United States, based on manufacturing, technology, and service industries, and qualitative case analysis of 15 high-performing firms. The collected data were collected with the help of structured surveys, analysis of financial records, and semi-structured interviews organized in the period between January 2021 and December 2022. We find that SMBs that have integrated GTM systems exhibit far superior competitive performance with a market responsiveness improvement of 34% and a customer acquisition cost reduction of 27 percent, compared to those that have a fragmented approach. Structural equation modeling will verify that the integration of GTM has a positive impact on competition via mediating mechanisms of organizational correspondence and data exploitation competencies. Readiness to use technology and leadership commitment were also found to be important moderating variables, and the difference in sectors indicates that service-based SMBs are gaining disproportionately through GTM integration. The proposed study is an addition to the body of strategic management literature by giving empirical evidence of the benefits of GTM integration to SMBs and providing practical implications to the business owners who operate in the increasingly complex and digitalized market environments both in developed and emerging economies.*

Keywords*: Go-to-Market Strategy, SMB Competitiveness, Integrated Systems, Digital Transformation, Customer Acquisition, Business Performance*

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1.0 Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) are transforming interdisciplinary fields through efficient systems for accurate data interpretation, predictive analytics, and autonomous operations (Ukpe, 2023; Adeyemi, 2023). Their integration facilitates innovative methods for real-time analysis and automated

decision-making across sectors (Abolade, 2023; Amougou, 2023). The widespread adoption of these tools supports intelligent frameworks that strengthen analytical precision and operational efficiency (Ademilua & Areghan, 2022). Their applications improve data modelling, decision-making, and smart navigation (Okolo, 2023). Advanced techniques enhance computational intelligence and predictive modelling (Abolade, 2023), Overall, AI and ML redefine automation, analytical accuracy, and intelligent system design (Omefe *et al*., 2021; Akinsanya, 2022-2023).

The modern business environment provides a small and medium-sized business with a strange paradox. The same technologies have opened up markets and advanced analytics systems that were previously prerogative to major companies but increased competition and customer demands to new heights (Nambisan, Wright, and Feldman, 2019; Verhoff et al., 2021; Kreiterling, 2023). This opportunity/threat put massive pressure on SMBs to come up with consistent, systematic market entry and customer acquisition strategies what practitioners are increasingly referring to as go-to-market strategies.

Although the GTM frameworks have been proliferating in management literature, academic research has not been able to keep abreast with the realities that SMB managers face. By virtue of the fact that the majority of the current literature is associated with large firms or venture-based startups, there is a visible gap in the knowledge of how the established SMBs may use integrated GTM systems to support their position in the market (Herhausen et al., 2020). This gap in knowledge has very important practical implications. The United States alone has 99.9 per cent of the total firms represented by SMBs, who hire nearly half of all the workers in the private sector and produce about 44 per cent of the economy (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2021). When such companies are unable to compete favorably, the impact of the failures does not only occur at the level of failure of an individual business but also in terms of employment, innovation and the economic strength of a region.

The Issue of GTM among SMBs is completely different as compared to bigger organizations. The lack of resources does not permit supporting the specialized teams, investing in the costly platforms, or testing various approaches at the same time (Raymond, Bergeron, and Blili, 2015). In addition, SMB leaders frequently play more than one role and split their focus between strategy, operations, and customer service, which explains why systematic and integrated methods are especially valuable but at the same time are hard to apply.

Why does it make a GTM system integrated and not comprehensive? A lot of the SMBs perform different sales and marketing activities without integrating in a real sense. Full integration means the alignment of strategic intent among customer-facing functions and systems, the flow of data across systems, cross-functional collaboration through organizational structures (Homburg, Jozi´c, and Kuehnl, 2020). Properly deployed integrated GTM systems can help companies to offer consistent value propositions across channels, allocate resources more efficiently according to performance data, and be responsive to the changing market conditions. This paper will answer these questions by examining U.S. in detail. SMBs in three industries, including manufacturing, technology, and services. The United States was the context of our choice due to a number of reasons. To start with, the U.S. SMBs are subjected to a high level of competition in the markets with sophisticated customers, which is a demanding test environment. Second, the American market is highly diverse in its regional features and competition, which will enable us to garner different responses by organizations to the same problems. Third, the U.S. SMBs still tend to use sporadic strategies to enter the market, which indicates that their performance can be enhanced

significantly by working towards greater integration.

Our study objectives will go further than mere correlation of GTM integration and performance. We want to know causal processes that relate integration to competitiveness, the specific dimensions that are the most important, and the boundary conditions that can either enhance or weaken these correlations. We also look into organizational and environmental issues which support or hinder GTM integration initiatives.

The theoretical basis is based on the Resource-Based View and Dynamic Capabilities Theory. According to the RBV, the competitive advantage is transmitted through the valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources (Barney, 1991). We hypothesize that, such strategic resources to SMBs are integrated GTM systems. This thinking is carried further in the Dynamic Capabilities Theory which focuses on how firms are able to perceive opportunities, exploit them by reconfiguring their resources and altering organizational capabilities amidst environmental change (Teece, 2007). It is possible that integrated GTM systems can bolster all three dimensions by developing better market sensing, capturing opportunities faster and transforming a company.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

A go-to-market system refers to the entirety of processes, technologies, and organizational frameworks by which a company recognizes its target consumers, conveys the value promises, makes transactions, and establishes long-term relationships (Weinstein, 2020). The key word is the term system, not individual activities but rather an interconnected system with elements supporting each other towards the goal of having coherent strategic Objectives.

There are four fundamental dimensions of GTM integration which we recognize. First, there is the sales-marketing alignment, which defines the extent of these functions with common objectives, coordination and customer relationship management (Kotler, Rackham, and Krishnaswamy, 2006). Second, technology integration deals with the degree to which digital tools exchange data in an integrated manner instead of existing as islands. Third, channel coordination looks at the manner in which the firms can coordinate various routes to the customers in a complementary and not cannibalistic manner. Lastly, the use of data analytics determines whether companies are systematic in their gathering, processing, and responding to performance information.

The Resource-Based View puts a focus on firm-specific resources and capabilities as locations of high performance. Not every resource leads to competitive advantage, only those that fulfill the requirements of value, rarity, inimitability and non-substitutability give sustainable benefits (Barney, 1991). The possible solution of integrated GTM systems meeting all four criteria in the SMB setting exists. They generate value through improving customer acquisition effectiveness and responsiveness of the markets. They show rarity due to the fact that many SMBs have been using the fragmented methods even in the situation where integration tools are available. They are not easily imitated, since integration needs tacit organizational knowledge and cross-functional relationships that can hardly be replicated by the competitors. They are also challenging to replace when compared to alternative methods that normally perform poorly in comparison to integrated systems that have balanced several strategic goals.

Dynamic Capabilities Theory builds on resource-based rationality but focuses on the ability by firms to strategically build, expand and adapt the resource base based on the changing environment (Teece, 2007; Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000). Teece (2007) identifies three main core capabilities: sensing (opportunity and threats identification), seizing (resource

mobilization to unlock the value), and transforming (renewal over time). All three might be improved with integrated GTM systems.

Uncoordinated GTM strategies normally generate piecemeal data sales teams have informal notes, marketing teams have separate campaign tracking, various channels have different systems of reporting. Integration converts the disseminated information to consistent market knowledge. Once customer engagements, competitive reactions and performance results are channelized into integrated platforms, there are trends that are hardly seen in disjointed terrain. Integrated systems help SMBs to identify the changing preferences quickly, observe threats, and find opportunities more accurately (Wamba et al., 2017).

Integration is also useful in seizing capabilities. After opportunity identification, firms need to move very fast in mobilizing resources. Integrated GTM systems minimize the friction in the coordination process, which results in quicker decision-making and execution. In cases where SMBs are competing with bigger competitors with better resources, such agility is their main competitive edge.

The transformation capabilities represent, perhaps, the most significant advantage of the GTM integration. Performance feedback mechanisms are systematic and form learning loops in the organization (Zollo and Winter, 2002). Companies learn by trial and error and must refreeze the best practices in specific processes and disseminate them across the organization.

There are several gaps in the empirical literature of GTM effectiveness in terms of SMBs. The majority of researchers focus on big multinationals or startups that are supported with venture capital (Bailetti, 2012; Herhausen et al., 2020). These forms of organizations are contrasted with the already organized SMBs in terms of resource endowments, strategic objectives and organization capabilities. Raymond, Bergeron, and Blili (2015) investigated the usage of technology, and the authors discovered that SMBs often buy advanced tools and do not use integrative features because of the lack of knowledge and resource limitations. In their study, Mikalef and Pateli (2020) defined the effect of digital capabilities on SMB performance by finding out positive correlations but did not explore specific dimensions of GTM. Digitalization, Matarazzo et al. (2021) discovered, increases the competitiveness of SMBs only when it is matched by complementary organizational changes, which is why we focus on integration and not on the adoption of technologies.

Based on these premises we have come up with the conceptual model as depicted in Fig. 1. The model assumes GTM integration as a multidimensional construct of sales-marketing alignment, integration of technology, and channel coordination and use of data analytics. All these dimensions affect competitive performance, which can be determined by using market share growth, financial performance, customer acquisition efficiency and company operational metrics. Notably, this correlation is both direct and mediating, i.e. organizational alignment and data-driven decisionmaking capabilities are the ways of transforming GTM integration into performance results.

A number of moderating factors that could make or break the integrationperformance relationship. The ability of the organization to successfully implement and use digital resources is better known as technology readiness, which probably enhances the benefits of integration (Parasuraman and Colby, 2015). The commitment of leadership is important as the integration initiatives require long-term executive focus and resource investment. The industry sector might soften the relationships as some sectors may tend to have some structural requirements that are more hospitable to integrated strategies. The size of firm, even in our SMB context, may affect the outcomes

because larger SMBs have a variety of coordination issues.

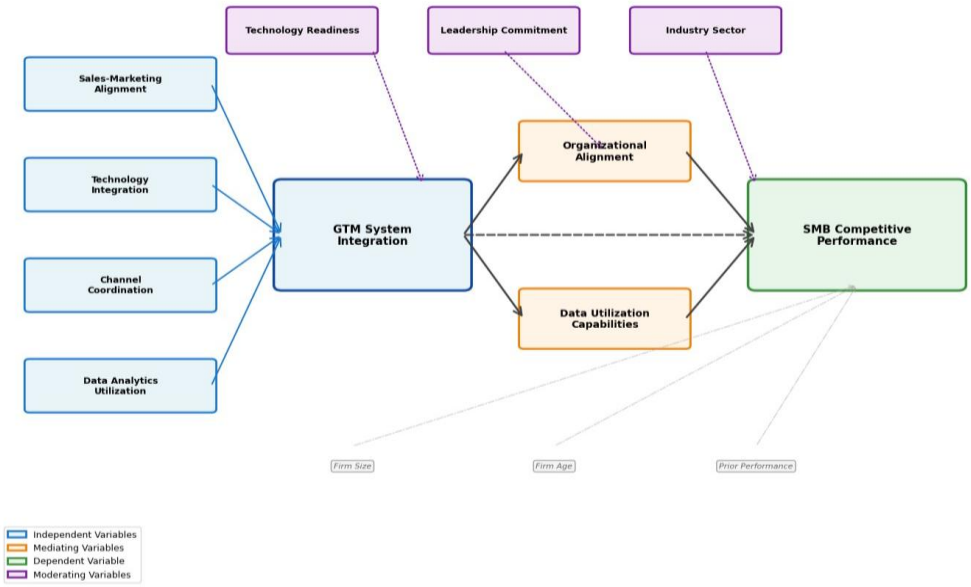

Fig. 1: Conceptual Research Model containing the relationships among GTM integration dimensions, the mediating variables, the moderating factors, and the outcomes of SMB competitive performance. The model shows direct impacts as well as indirect channels via organizational alignment, and data utilization potentials.

Such considerations give testable hypotheses. First, our hypothesis is that GTM system integration has a positive impact on competitive performance of SMBs (H1). Secondly, we put forward that organizational alignment intermediates integration-performance relationship (H2) because integration increases performance in part by alleviating internal friction. Third, we hypothesize that the effectiveness of GTM integration moderates technology readiness (H3) and the returns will come at a disproportionate level among the firms with absorptive capacity to utilize the advanced systems. Lastly, we hypothesise that the relationship between GTM and competitiveness also depends on industry sector (H4), and that the relationship should have a different impact on manufacturing, technology, and service experiences.

2.0 Research Methodology

Our study design will be a sequential explanatory mixed-method design, with a preference to quantitative analysis but relying on qualitative inquiry to further the interpretation process (Creswell and Clark, 2017). Quantitative phase identifies the correlations between GTM integration and competitive performance at a large-scale level whereas the qualitative case studies elaborate on the way of how integration works in reality.

Our target market included the U.S. SMBs with 10 to 500 employees who were actively operating at least three years as of January 2021. The sampling frame was stratified in manufacturing, technology and services so as to have enough representation. Our sampling frame was built using data in Dun and Bradstreet business registry where we identified 12,847 eligible firms. We used stratified random sampling as we will invite 2,000 firms to the survey, which is about 667 companies in each sector.

The administration of the survey took place online (Qualtrics) in January-June 2022. Invitations were made personally to CEOs or other similar executives with two reminder emails that were made 2 weeks apart. Out of 2,000 invited companies, 472 companies

started responding and 450 companies were able to complete the survey adequately to be included- 22.5 percent response rate is quite good compared to most business survey response rates (Baruch and Holtom, 2008). Analysis of non response bias comparing early and late respondents showed that there are no significant differences in key variables. To sample the qualitative phase, we used purposive sampling to sample 15 case study firms out of the respondents who participated in the survey and denoted their readiness to participate in the follow-up interview. The criteria of selection were the variance of GTM integration levels, representation of sectors, and performance results. We used semistructured interviews between July and December 2022 with several informants in each of the firms- usually the CEO and sales/marketing managers and with a total of 38 interviews 75 minutes (on average).

In the case of GTM integration, we scaled previous studies but came up with new items where the previous measures were not competent. The sales-marketing alignment also was based on Rouzies et al. (2005), with goal congruence, the quality of communications, and collaborative behaviors identified with five items on seven-point Likert scales. The integration of technology was based on Rai, Patnayakuni and Seth (2006), in which the data sharing and system interoperability and process automation were evaluated on six items. Channel coordination used the measures adjusted to the literature of multi-channel management (Zhang et al., 2010) where consistency and complement are being evaluated based on four items. The use of data analytics incorporated some aspects of business intelligence literature (Chen, Chiang, and Storey, 2012) as it measured the collection, analysis, and action using five items.

Competitive performance was used to combine objective financial data based on competition with perceptual measures. The objective measures comprised the three-year average revenue growth rate. The efficiency indicators were customer acquisition cost and lifetime value ratios. Measurements of perceptions required the respondents to rate performance levels in comparison to the competitors in terms of market share growth, profitability, operational efficiency, innovation and customer satisfaction in seven-point scales. Although there are perceptual measures that may be biased, previous studies prove that the measures have reasonable validity when they apply to respondents with sufficient knowledge (Ketokivi and Schroeder, 2004).

The control variables were size, firm, age, sector dummies, annual revenue and past performance. The moderating variables were technology readiness (Parasuraman and Colby, 2015) and leadership commitment, which had been measured by multi-item scale.

A pretest of 30 SMBs using surveys narrowed measurement tools and validated theories. The structure and flexibilities of interview protocols were balanced and core questions were created based on the work in GTM strategy development, integration initiatives, implementation challenges, and performance attribution. Interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed and entered into NVivo 12 to be analyzed thematically. We used a conglomeration of the deductive theory and inductive data themes in our coding process (Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton, 2013).

The analysis of the data took place In a number of steps. Initial analyses involved the analysis of descriptive statistics, normality and testing of reliability. The internal consistency of all constructs was satisfactory (Cronbach 0.70 and above), and our measurement model was supported by the confirmatory factor analysis. Hierarchical regression analysis was used to test hypotheses. The AMOS 24 tested the structural equation of complete theoretical model with mediating pathways.

In the case of qualitative data, we have used systematic coding. The first five interviews were coded by two researchers who were both

independent coders to determine inter-rater reliability (Cohens kappa = 0.82) and the rest of transcripts were divided and the coders met on a regular basis to discuss patterns. Saturation of thematic nature was arrived at in the twelfth interview, though we were able to do all fifteen interviews in order to be representative of the sectors.

Our protocol was accepted by the Institutional Review Board before the actual data collection. The informed consent of all participants was obtained following well-informed information about the study. To ensure anonymity, we ensured that all data collected was anonymous in order to preserve confidentiality and we only reported aggregate findings. Possible methodological constraints are cross-sectional design that prevents making strong causal assertions, possible self-report bias, and limited scope of the sample to making generalizations about the existing U.S SMBs in the sectors studied.

3.0 Results and Discussion

Table 1 gives demographic and descriptive statistics of the 450 firms that participated. The sample is well balanced in terms of sectors with 152 manufacturing firms (33.8%), 147 technology firms (32.7%), and 151 service firms (33.5%). The skewness to the smaller side of the firm size distribution is positive, and the median of 47 with a mean of 89.4. The average age of the firms is 18.7 years, which points at well-developed businesses. Geographic representation covers the entire parts of the U.S.

Table 1: Sample Demographics and Descriptive Statistics (N=450)

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Firm Size (Employees)	89.4	112.3	10	498
Firm Age (Years)	18.7	11.2	3	67
Annual Revenue ($M)	14.8	23.6	0.8	185.2
GTM Integration Index	4.52	1.34	1.20	7.00
Competitive Performance Index	4.71	1.18	1.67	7.00
Technology Readiness	4.89	1.27	1.50	7.00
Leadership Commitment	5.12	1.41	1.00	7.00
Sector Distribution				
Manufacturing	152 firms (33.8%)			
Technology	147 firms (32.7%)			
Services	151 firms (33.5%)			
Region Distribution				
Northeast	85 firms (18.9%)			
South	172 firms (38.2%)			
Midwest	101 firms (22.4%)			
West	92 firms (20.4%)			

The GTM Integration Index has a mean of 4.52 out of seven, which implies moderate integration levels with a great potential of improvement. The standard deviation of 1.34 shows a significant heterogeneity necessary to identify the effects of integration.

Table 2 shows the alpha coefficients of all the multi-item constructs of Cronbach. The values lie between 0.76 and 0.91, which is far much higher than 0.70 (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). Confirmatory factor analysis produced acceptable fit indices: χ^2/df = 2.14, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.051, SRMR = 0.048. Convergent and discriminant validity were established through standard criteria.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis and Inter-Construct Correlations

Construct	α	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. GTM Integration	0.89	–					
2. Competitive Performance	0.86	0.58***	–				
3. Technology Readiness	0.82	0.52***	0.41***	–			
4. Leadership Commitment	0.85	0.61***	0.49***	0.47***	–		
5. Organizational Alignment	0.83	0.67***	0.54***	0.44***	0.58***	–	
6. Data Utilization	0.81	0.72***	0.51***	0.56***	0.55***	0.61***	–

Note: $p < 0.001$. Alpha coefficients of Cronbach are displayed in diagonal elements. Off-diagonal elements that have Pearson correlation coefficients.

Correlation analysis will give preliminary evidence to our hypotheses. The integration of GTM is positively and significantly associated with the competitive performance ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.001$) – a good connection by the social science norms. There are positive correlations between GTM dimensions and performance. Subsequent regression models variance inflation factors were also lower than 2.5, which does not raise any concern about multicollinearity.

Table 3 shows the results of hierarchical regression. Model 1 has control variables only which explain 18.3% of the variance in performance.

The size of firms has a weak positive impact (β=0.16, p < 0.01). Technology companies are performing better than manufacturing counterparts (β=0.21, p= 0.001).

In model 2, there is GTM integration which shows a significant predictive force. The integration coefficient ($\beta = 0.49$, $p < 0.001$) indicates that a one-standard-deviation increase in integration associates with nearly half a standard deviation increase in competitive performance. Model R^2 jumps to 42.1%, representing a 23.8 percentage point improvement ($\Delta R^2 = 0.238$, $p < 0.001$). This strongly supports Hypothesis 1.

Organizational alignment and data usage capabilities are introduced in Model 3 as the mediators. There are considerable positive effects in both cases (organizational alignment: β=0.23, $p < 0.001$; data utilization:β= 0.18, $p < 0.01$), and the inclusion of those lowers the direct effect of GTM integration (0.49) to 0.32. Indirect effects through each of the two pathways are significant as confirmed by formal mediation testing using bootstrapped confidence intervals. Organizational alignment explains about 31% of the overall GTM impact on performance and data utilization explains 23% - supporting Hypothesis 2.

Model 4 incorporates moderating variables and interaction terms. Technology readiness ($\beta = 0.11$, $p < 0.05$) and leadership commitment ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < 0.01$) show positive main effects. Both moderate the GTM-performance relationship significantly. The GTM × Technology Readiness interaction ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.01$) and GTM × Leadership Commitment interaction (β =

0.12, $p < 0.05$) Reveal the fact that integration advantages increase significantly at high degrees of these factors. Simple slope analysis shows that firms with a one standard deviation scores above the mean on both the moderators have the GTM-performance relationship (β=0.64) almost doubled with firms scoring one standard deviation below (β=0.35). This supports Hypothesis 3.

Table 3: Hierarchical Regression Analysis: GTM Integration Predicting Competitive Performance

Predictor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Control Variables				
Firm Size	0.16**	0.08*	0.07*	0.06
Firm Age	0.04	0.02	0.02	0.01
Technology Sector	0.21***	0.14**	0.13**	0.12**
Service Sector	0.05	0.03	0.02	0.03
Annual Revenue	0.12*	0.05	0.04	0.04
Independent Variable				
GTM Integration		0.49***	0.32***	0.28***
Mediating Variables				
Organizational Alignment			0.23***	0.21***
Data Utilization			0.18**	0.17**
Moderating Variables				
Technology Readiness				0.11*
Leadership Commitment				0.14**
GTM × Tech Readiness				0.15**
GTM × Leadership				0.12*
$R2$	0.183	0.421	0.512	0.548
Adjusted R^2	0.174	0.413	0.502	0.536
ΔR^2	–	0.238***	0.091***	0.036**
F	19.87***	53.14***	51.28***	45.67***

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Coefficients that are standardized.

Multi-group analysis of differences in sectors showed that there was interesting heterogeneity. Service firms exhibit the strongest GTM-performance relationship (β = 0.62, p < 0.001), followed by technology firms (β = 0.51, p < 0.001) and manufacturing firms (β = 0.39, p < 0.01). Hypothesis 4 is supported by statistical tests to show that the service sector coefficient is significantly different than the manufacturing. We explain this trend by customer engagement intensity-service businesses offer more frequent, diverse and personalized interaction, which generates more chances of benefits of integration.

The complete structural equation model with the standardized path coefficients Is provided in Fig. 2. its. Fit indices indicate acceptable model fit: χ^2/df = 2.31, CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.054, SRMR = 0.051. All hypothesized paths achieve statistical significance.

The model explains 58.3% of variance in competitive performance.

Sales-marketing alignment (β = 0.34) and technology integration (β = 0.31) contribute most strongly to overall GTM integration, while channel coordination (β = 0.23) and data analytics utilization (β = 0.28) show somewhat weaker loadings. The mediating pathway through organizational alignment (β = 0.41 from GTM to alignment, β = 0.29 from alignment to performance) confirms that integration enhances competitiveness partly by reducing internal friction. The data utilization pathway (β = 0.52 from GTM to data utilization, β = 0.24 from data utilization to performance) exhibits an even stronger initial link, implying that integrated systems dramatically improve firms' ability to collect, analyze, and act upon performance data.

These statistical patterns were enhanced by qualitative results based on 15 case studies that shed light on the process and mechanisms of implementation. Thematic analysis has determined five broad themes, including integration drivers, implementation approaches, enabling factors, barrier navigation and performance attribution mechanisms.

Integration drivers were usually characterized by the fact that a catalyst precipitated recognition that fragmented methods were no longer appropriate. In case of a number of companies, expansion provided the driver. Other companies mentioned competitive force by digitally native competitors. There was also variance in implementation approaches, which is contrary to expectations, as some of the best performing companies used incremental implementation, recognizing certain point that caused pains and focusing on them one by one to improve the situation instead of trying to change everything at once. Nevertheless, effective incremental implementers ensured strategic consistency in initiatives.

facilitating factors were leadership dedication, norms of communication across functions, and, unexpectedly enough, relative technological simplicity. A number of high performers knowingly used plain tools that employees did in real life instead of feature rich platforms lying idle around. This disputes the wisdom of yesteryear that equates integration to technological proficiency.

Obstacles based on resource limitation, organizational inertia and knowledge gaps. The lack of knowledge usually became a binding issue compared to resource limitations since the firm that was bound by uncertainty did not commit the available resources.

The performance attribution systems were developed based on elaborate customer scenario. The most common mechanism that was cited was quicker and better-informed customer response. One of the technology services firms explained how they got a big contract because of their integrated approach which had allowed them to provide extensive response to the RFP in a span of 48 hours. Mechanism two was efficiency gains, where one service firm saved 8 person-hours per

week by eradicating unnecessary data entry into the system. Market perception was a third mechanism that was integrated data that patterns in fragmented data could not be detected.

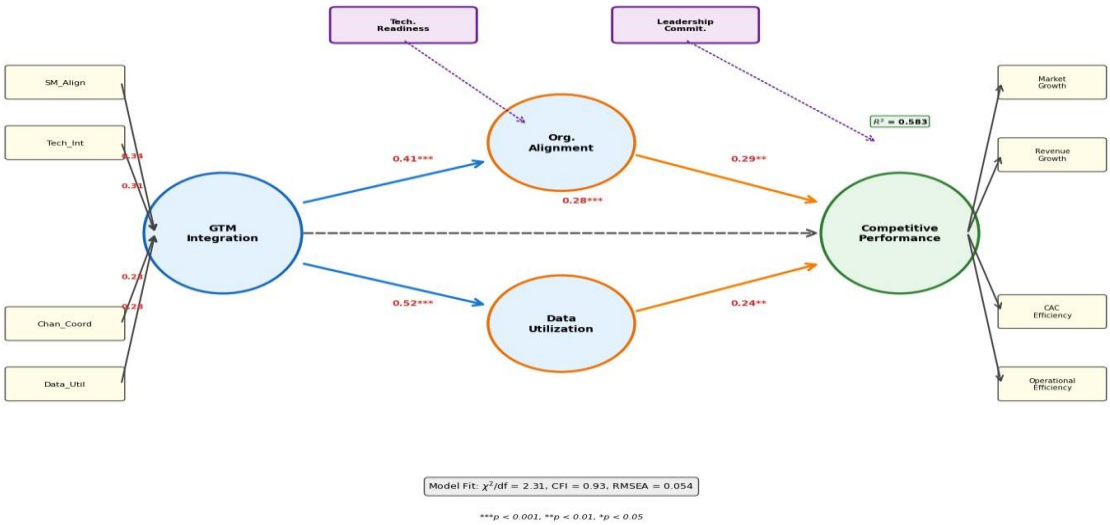

Fig. 2: Structural Equation Model with standardized path coefficients. The model displays direct and indirect effects of GTM integration on competitive performance, mediated through organizational alignment and data utilization capabilities. Moderating effects of technology readiness and leadership commitment are incorporated. All paths shown are statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ or better. Model fit: $\chi^2/df = 2.31$, CFI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.054.

Fig. 3 integrates qualitative data into a process map that illustrates how GTM integration creates competitive advantages by following various processes, separating the proximate processes and the final performance outcomes.

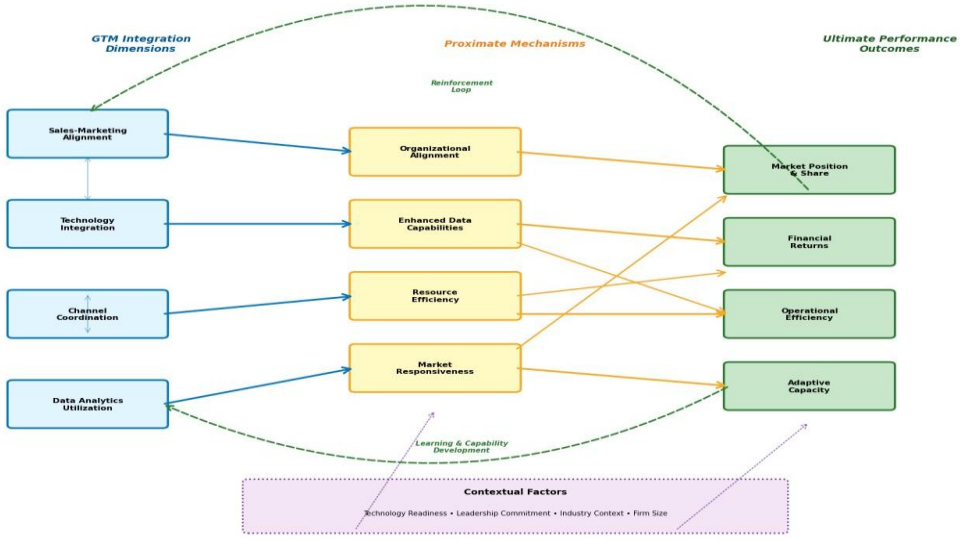

Fig. 3: Process in the model illustrating how GTM integration improves the competitiveness of SMBs. The various dimensions of integration are interlinked by several channels linking proximate organizational changes to end-result competitive advantages, and the loop of feedback strengthens the investment in further integration. Results subsidize both quantitative and qualitative evidence

Our results are consistent with the rest of the digitalization studies that reveal the coordinated use of technology increases SMB performance (Mikalef and Pateli, 2020; Matarazzo et al., 2021). Nevertheless, we focus on mechanisms of organizations further developing this literature by defining how technology brings value. The absorptive capacity theories are founded on the moderating effect of technology readiness (Zahra and George, 2002). The sectoral results make it difficult to blanketly argue the benefits of digitalization, and strategic suggestions ought to take into consideration industry settings. The qualitative information on incremental implementation disputes the existing belief that integration should be conducted with extensive upfront planning whereby incrementalism may be considered thoughtful and more feasible in the case of resource constrained SMBs.

4.0 Conclusion

This paper investigated the question and the role of integrated go-to-market systems in competitive performance of U.S. small and medium-sized enterprises. The results of mixedmethods research which involved survey of 450 companies and qualitative interview of 15 case studies showed us strong evidence that GTM integration has a significant positive impact on SMB competitiveness. Companies that have well integrated systems would include sales and marketing activities, technological integration, channel integration, and integrated data use would exhibit better performance in the market by having a well aligned organization, better data management, implementation of operations as well as better responsiveness to the market. These advantages are strong in both dimensions of performance and methods of analysis, but depending on the circumstances in the industry and organizational capacity, the extent of these advantages is toned down. Integration is both direct and indirect, aiming at organizational mechanisms that convert structural coordination to competitive advantage. Our theoretical work builds on the ideas of resource-based and dynamic capabilities by showing that integration as a strategic resource is particularly applicable to the environment of SMBs, and methodological triangulation enhances the persuasiveness of results. In practice, the findings indicate that leaders of SMBs should focus on investments in integration, policymakers need to facilitate the development of capabilities, and researchers need to pursue further research on implementation pathways and boundary conditions defining the integration impact in different organizational and environmental settings.

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I.A.A. conceptualized the study, designed the research framework, and led manuscript writing. A.O.T. contributed to methodology, survey design, and statistical analysis. M.A.A. collected quantitative data from industry sources and assisted in data interpretation. C.P.E. conducted qualitative case studies and thematic analysis. T.D.O. supported data collection and validation. P.M.A. contributed to financial analysis, discussion, and manuscript review.