



DO HOTELS IN ALBANIA USE STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES AND TOOLS, AND HOW DO THESE IMPACT THEIR PERFORMANCE?

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to identify the strategic management tools known and applied in hotels in the tourist town of Saranda. Furthermore, this study will identify the impact that those tools and techniques have on the hotels' performance. This study used the questionnaire method to collect data. The questionnaires were distributed to 105 different types and categories of hotels. The data were processed using SPSS and a multiple linear regression model was used to test the hypothesis. Based on the results of the interviews, it turned out that some of the tools and techniques of strategic management use were not known by the hotels. Financial analysis, cost-benefit, and SWOT analysis were the most popular and most used analyses by surveyed hotels. Meanwhile, some of them, such as gap analysis, and portfolio analysis, were not recognized by a considerable number of these hotels. This conclusion comes as a result of several factors that were identified during the analysis. Another result of this study showed that a positive relationship was identified between strategic management tools/techniques and hotel performance. This paper offers new insights into the role of strategic management tools and techniques in the success of hotels, along with their recognition and application within the industry.

Keywords: strategic management techniques and tools, performance, hotel structure, Albania, strategic management



INTRODUCTION

Accommodation is one of the main and most important sectors of the hospitality industry, which is decisive in the economic development of many tourist destinations. As the main form of accommodation, the hotel sector plays an important role in developing countries not only in economic development, but also in poverty alleviation and job creation (Okumus, 2010). The economic impact of this sector varies from one country to another and depends on several factors including the availability of suitable materials and equipment, the availability of skilled personnel, the need for imported labor, and the level of various taxes that apply to the hotel or the tourists (Cain, 2012).

One of the characteristics that make accommodation different from other industries is the lack of reservation policy, those accommodation services that are not immediately consumed are considered as lost production (Bakiu, 2010). The lost income for the past days cannot be recovered. Even in the other case when there is more demand than the host capacity, the hotels cannot serve all the customers. Since demand cannot be maintained, maintaining a balance in accommodation demand and supply is one of the challenges of managing these structures (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, & Gilbert, 2008).

Organizations operating in hospitality industry are facing numerous competitive challenges due to globalization and the complexity of environment in which they operate (Okumus, 2010). Strategic management and its practices can make a significant contribution to these organizations as well as other organizations facing today's competitive challenges.

One of the main aspects of the tourism industry is intensive competition (El-Said & ElMakkawy, 2017), which means that these organizations are in that category of businesses that operate in an environment of intense competition. If customers are not satisfied with the service in these organizations, they can very easily replace them with another organization of the same type (Luo, 2018). This industry is also significantly affected by economic pressures. Studies conducted in the field of tourism have found it reasonable that these organizations, in order to withstand the pressure of competition and other factors found in the business environment, must adapt contemporary strategic management practices (El-Said & ElMakkawy, 2017) (Afonina, 2015) (Cater & Pucko, 2010).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Use of strategic management technique and tools

According to Mintzberg, there are four main elements of strategic management: strategy analysis, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, and strategy control, which do not work alone. In fact, they are interdependent and dynamic (Mintzberg H. A., 1998). What should be

considered in this process is the development of a strategy that begins with analyzing the organization's internal and external environment (Chaneta, 2012). Ensuring the best possible knowledge and understanding of both environments, managers can design a better strategy to achieve the intended strategic and financial results. To achieve this, a variety of strategic techniques and tools can be applied.

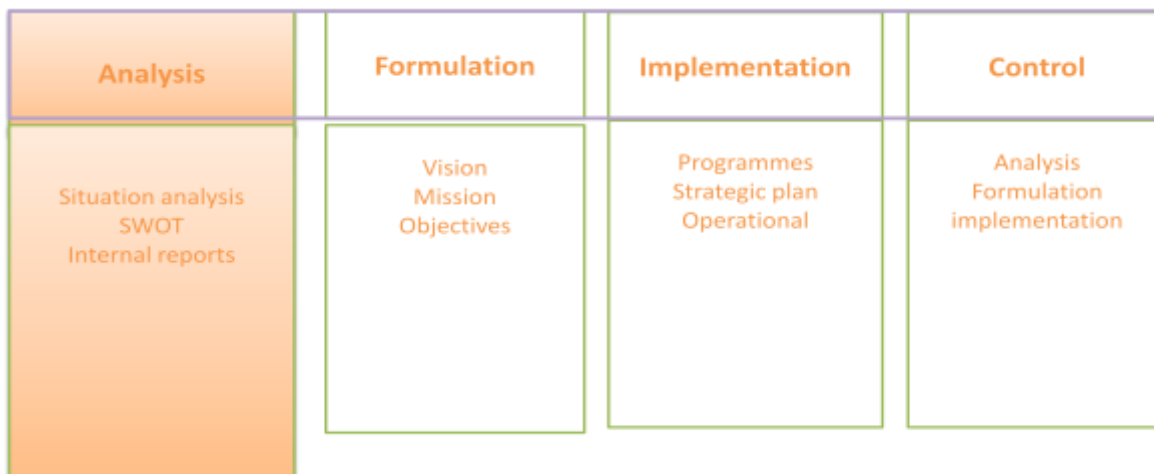


Figure 1: Strategic management elements

As we mention, a large number of tools and techniques have been developed to help managers identify and manage strategic decisions. The use of these tools brings many benefits to the business; they allow managers to change valuable data into forms suitable for decision-making and activity, increasing awareness about the business environment as well as about strategic issues (Fleisher & Bensoussan, 2003). Through them, organization identifies opportunities and threats that help reduce the risk involved in making certain decisions. They define priorities in large and complex organizations, as well as provide a framework for assessing the relative importance of different business portfolios (Fleisher & Bensoussan, 2003) (Lilian, Njau, & Naghea, 2024). Frost suggests that they can also be seen as a valuable communication device that managers can use to present complex issues (Frost, 2003).

Armstrong lists various areas where SMTT can be applied, such as: general management, marketing management, operations management, financial management, human resource management, information technology, management science, planning and allocation of resources, as well as efficiency and effectiveness (Armstrong, 1993). The use of analysis and techniques of strategic management in these areas help managers and leaders in the decision-making process (Armstrong, 1993).

Qehaja, Kutllovci, and Shiroka, in their study brought a summary of empirical studies on the use of strategic management tools, the results showed that the use of SMTTs (Strategic Management Tools and Techniques) was encountered more often in larger organizations (Qehaja, Kutllovci, & Shiroka, 2017). It is also noted that in all types of organizations in developed and developing countries, the SWOT analysis turned out to be the most used tool. The strategic management tools used varied depending on the size of the organizations and depending on the countries where the studies were conducted. Among the most used tools were SWOT analysis, PEST analysis, cost-benefit analysis, "What if" analysis and vision and mission analysis. Al Katheeri suggests that the type of tool or technique used during strategic analysis will depend on the availability of planning tools and the level of skills required to use them (Al Katheeri, 2016). While Elbanna concludes that ease of use and required resources are not the main determinants of the extent and frequency of use of strategic management tools (Elbanna, 2013).

In a study conducted by (Nakayama, 2018) in Japan, which involved a sample of 364 subjects from the manufacturing and retail sectors, the use of strategic management tools and techniques was analyzed, comparing sectors and assessing the relationship between awareness of these tools and organizational performance. The results of the research showed that SWOT analysis was highly valued as a tool and technique, with a high usage rate in both the manufacturing industry (ranked first) and the retail industry (ranked third) among Japanese companies. On the other hand, the Strategy Canvas and VRIO analysis had the lowest usage rates, suggesting that they are not as widely adopted, likely due to their relatively recent nature compared to other analytical tools. Thus, this study hypothesizes:

H1 - Strategic Management Technique and Tools are known and used by hotels in the region of saranda.

Some strategic management techniques and tools are listed below:

VRIO analysis

VRIO analysis (Value, Rarity, Inimitability, and Organization) is the tool used to analyze the internal resources and capabilities of the organization to find out if these can be a source of a sustainable competitive advantage. This intern analysis tool was first developed by Barney J. (in 1991), in his work "Organizational resources and sustainable competitive advantage", where the author identified four attributes that the organization's resources must possess in order to become a source of an advantage sustainable competitive (Barney J. , 1995). According to VRIO, resources must be valuable, rare, inimitable and irreplaceable. His original framework

was called VRIN. In his later paper *Looking Inside for Competitive Advantage*, in 1995; Barney introduced the VRIO framework, which was an improved variant of the VRIN model.

Resource-based model (RBM)

The resource-based model (RBV) is a model that sees resources as the key to superior organizational performance. RBV is an approach which helps the organization to achieve competitive advantage. Proponents of this view argue that organizations should look within the company to find sources of competitive advantage rather than looking to the competitive environment for it.

Benchmarking technique

Benchmarking technique is the process of continuous improvement of the business or organization by assessing the space for improvement, comparing the current position with the previous one, or with the business practices of relevant competitors, thus setting the standards to be achieved. Freytag and Hollensen in their article in *TQM Magazine* considered benchmarking as a way to measure an organization's strategies and performance against competing organizations, both inside and outside the industry, with the aim of identifying best practices that can be adopted and implemented by organizations to improve their performance (Feytag & Hollensen, 2001).

SWOT analysis

The results of many studies show that the SWOT analysis is the most used analysis by businesses for examining the internal and external environment of the organization (Afonina, 2015) (Kume & Leskaj, 2010). According to Harrison, the main goal of strategic management is to balance the organization with the external environment and maintain this balance for a long time (Harrison P., 2010). According to this author, organizations achieve this balance by evaluating new programs and services to maximize organizational performance.

SMTT and organisational Performance

Strategic management techniques and tools provide many benefits in the strategy-making process. Using these tools, managers can reduce the risk involved in making decisions, set priorities in large complex organizations, and easily assess the relative importance of different business portfolios. They are also valuable communication tools that managers can use to present complex issues (Frost, 2003). Much research has been developed regarding the

impact that strategic management tools and techniques have on the performance of organizations. From the study conducted by Kalkan in Antalya, Turkey, regarding the use of strategic planning tools, their use was less common compared to other studies that these authors referred to (Kalkan & Bozkur, 2013). This could be explained by the lack of financial and human resources of SMEs. As a result of this study, the most commonly used tools and techniques in Turkish businesses were strategic planning, human resource analysis, total quality management, customer relationship management, financial analysis, vision/mission, PEST, and benchmarking.

The use of strategic planning tools varies according to the region where they are applied (Kalkan & Bozkur, 2013). According to Kalkan & Bozkur, the SMTT that are preferred to use in North America are: customer relationship management, strategic planning and the less used benchmarking. While European managers are more likely to use benchmarking, customer relationship management and strategic planning (Kalkan & Bozkur, 2013). Asian executives are more likely to use customer relationship management, strategic planning, and mission/vision statements, while Latin Americans are more likely to use strategic planning and benchmarking.

Elbanna, suggests that various SMTT, such as a SWOT analysis, PESTEL analysis, stakeholder analysis, etc., can be used to develop strategic plans, they help in formulating strategy as well as increase the performance of organizations. Many researchers have investigated the use of strategic planning tools in different countries (Elbanna, 2013).

The study conducted by (Uzel, M; Obwogi, J; Namusonge, G, 2013) in the hotel industry in Kenya was based on the premise that strategic management practices affect organizational performance (Uzel, M; Obwogi, J; Namusonge, G , 2013). The study's results affirmed this premise, indicating that strategic management tools—such as CRM, Strategic Planning, ICT, Strategic Competitive Positioning, and Organizational Learning—significantly and positively influenced organizational performance. This study was further continued by (Muthoka & Wario, 2014) who proved that strategic management tools had a significant effect on the performance of the Tourism sector (Muthoka & Wario, 2014). They recommended that the tourism industry should have a clear strategic planning and put more emphasis in the strategy implementation stage on issues that can help the organization improve its performance.

A large part of the participants in the study developed by (Varelas & Apostolopoulos, 2020) indicated that they had not used any strategic management tools except to identify the strengths and weaknesses within the organization, as well as the opportunities and

threats, outside it (analysis SWOT), and the majority agreed that strategic management was important in increasing their performance (Varelas & Apostolopoulos, 2020).

By implementing clearly defined performance indicators and regularly evaluating overall performance in alignment with desired objectives, organizations establish an effective system for continuously tracking progress toward their goals (Alharbi, 2024).

We can also say that SMTT do not have the same impact on organizational performance. Based on literature, some SMTT can have a stronger impact on organizational performance (Katheeri, 2016) while others have no impact on it. Therefore, there is a need for these elements to be studied individually, where the impact that each one has on performance is studied. As a result, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2- Strategic management technique and tools have a positive effect on hotel performance in the Saranda region.

METHODOLOGY

The study

In this descriptive study primary data was used. For the collection of this data, the questionnaire method was used. The questionnaire was organized in three sections; the first section included structured questions with multiple choice questions, which required general data. The second section included questions evaluated with the Likert scale, related with strategic management technique and tools. The questions of this section were used before in the study conducted by Al Katheeri, 2016, and El-Said & ElMakkawy, 2017. The third section related with hotel performance in the last five years. This section had 18 questions, which evaluated with the Likert scale. Organisative performance is relied with issues such: profits, room occupancy rate, market share, the number of existing customers, new customers, number of staff, etc.

Sampling

This study examines the information collected from 105 hotel establishments operating in the Saranda region. Only hotels with an annual turnover exceeding 1 million ALL and resorts were included in the study. For sample selection, the stratified sampling method was used, a method that is suitable when the population from which a sample is drawn is not homogeneous (Kothari, 2012). Stratified sampling involves dividing the population into distinct strata, where each stratum represents a homogeneous group, ensuring that the sample is more representative.

Pilot test

One of the most important techniques to ensure the validity of the questionnaire is the pilot test. For this purpose, the questionnaire was initially tested with a "pilot group" of hotel establishments to assess whether it was understandable, had a logical flow of questions, and to identify any necessary adjustments. The goal of the pilot test was to refine the questionnaire so that respondents would not face difficulties in answering the questions, and to avoid issues with data recording.

The questionnaire testing was carried out in two phases. The first phase took place in February, during which ten questionnaires were distributed in Google Forms format to verify if this distribution model would work and if the questionnaire was understandable for the interviewees. In the second phase, which took place in March, five hotel managers were interviewed, and direct interviews were conducted. The aim of this phase was to ensure that the terminology used in the questionnaire was clear and appropriate for the hotel managers.

Data collection

After testing the questionnaire and making any possible improvements based on feedback gathered during the testing phases, the next step was to collect data from the selected hotel establishments for further surveying. The interviews were conducted by the researcher herself, taking into account the specifics and complexity of the topic. The completion of the questionnaire was done directly with the interviewee. The individuals who completed the questionnaire were managers, administrators, or individuals with significant roles within these establishments. The questionnaires were distributed to a sample of 106 hotel establishments, of which 105 were deemed valid for further processing. This number of establishments was selected to ensure a representative sample and to guarantee that the collected data would be reliable and accurate. The distribution and completion period of the questionnaires lasted three weeks, during the month of April.

Data analysis

The data collected from the questionnaires were coded and prepared for analysis. The coding process involved categorizing the responses and converting them into formats suitable for statistical analysis. After this process, the data were prepared for further analysis, which would be conducted with the help of SPSS 24, one of the most widely used and efficient tools for processing and analyzing statistical data.

FINDINGS

The study included data obtained from 105 questionnaires. Table 1 summarizes demographic data collected from the hotels included in the study:

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and demographics of participants (N = 105)

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percentage
Annual revenue:			
Under 5 million ALL	28	27%	27%
5-8 million ALL	24	23%	50%
8-14 million ALL	23	22%	72%
Over 14 million ALL	29	28%	100%
Number of employees:			
Under 15 employees	81	78%	78%
16-30 employees	17	16%	84%
31-50 employees	5	4%	88%
Over 50 employees	2	2%	100%
Is your hotel a family business?			
Yes	88	84%	84%
No	17	16%	100%
If Yes, are you one family member?			
Yes	83	94%	94%
No	5	6%	100%
Are you familiar with the strategic management concept?			
Yes	76	72%	72%
No	29	28%	100%
The hotels were you work, draft strategic plans?			
Yes	53	51%	51%
No	52	49%	100%
If Yes, who drafts strategic plans?			
Administrator	10	19%	19%
Owners	19	35%	54%
Manager	18	33%	87%
Experts	7	13%	100%

According to Albanian legislation, the indicator that shows the size of the business is the annual revenue. Most of the interviewed businesses, precisely 28% of them, belonged to the ALL 5 million range and 25% of respondents belonged to the range 5-8 million ALL. This means that most of them are small business. According to the literature mentioned in the section above, in most cases small business does not have the resources needed to draft strategic planning and use strategic tools. Another demographic data collected was number of employees. According to respondents the major hotels included in the study, about 78% of them have fewer than 15 employees. Only 2% of them have more than 50 employees in their business.

In response to whether their hotel was a family business, 82% of respondents answered "yes," indicating that the individuals surveyed were either owners or administrators. When asked if they were family members of the owners, 78% responded affirmatively. This closely aligns with the previous question, suggesting that family businesses often involve relatives in leadership or management roles.

When asked about their familiarity with the term "strategic management," 71% of respondents indicated that they were knowledgeable about the concept. However, only 49% reported that they had actually created strategic plans. In response to questions regarding who developed the strategic plans for their hotels, 54% of respondents indicated that the plans were created by the owners or administrators. The findings suggest that the number of plans is influenced by the knowledge and expertise of the owners and their family members.

H1 - Strategic management technique and tools are known and used by hotels in the region of Saranda.

To test the above hypothesis we had use the frequency test. The strategic tools tested in the study are: Financial Analysis, Cost-Benefit Analysis, Benchmarking, Value Chain Analysis, SWOT Analysis, 'What if' Analysis, Resource-Based Modelling, Portfolio Analysis, PEST Analysis and Gap Analysis. The frequency test showed that the most used techniques by the hotels in the study were Financial Analysis and Cost-Benefit Analysis, respectively 84% and 85% of the hotels used them. The methods that were least known by the hotels are: the assessment of standards was not known by 30% of them, the Value Chain Analysis was also not known by 48% of them as a method and 10% had never used it, the Analysis "What if" was not known by 47% of respondents, continuing with the Source-Based Model which was not known by 36%. The most unknown method in the study was found to be the Portfolio Analysis in the measure of 53% and the GAP analysis in the measure of 43%.

Table 2: Frequency Table, strategic planning tools

	Financial Analysis	Cost-Benefit Analysis	Benchmarking	Value Chain Analysis	SWOT Analysis	'What If' Analysis	Resource-Based Modeling	Portfolio Analysis	PEST Analysis	Gap Analysis
Never	2	3	9	9	6	18	12	24	10	11
Rarely	4	3	8	07	17	5	11	7	16	11
Sometimes	9	7	3	4	14	9	11	6	17	13
Often	35	36	26	16	18	10	11	3	17	13
Always	51	51	27	19	25	14	22	9	22	21
Don't know	4	5	32	50	25	49	38	56	23	36
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	105	105	105	105	105	105	105	105	105	105

H2- Strategic management technique and tools have a positive effect on hotel performance in the Saranda region.

The strategic technique and tools tested in the study are Financial Analysis, Cost-Benefit Analysis, Benchmarking, Value Chain Analysis, SWOT Analysis, 'What If' Analysis, Resource-Based Modeling, Portfolio Analysis, PEST Analysis and Gap Analysis, which were the independent variables and the performance of hotels dependent variable.

Table 3: Analysis of Variance for SMTT

ANOVA ^a						
Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Regression	10.930	10	3.643	3.927	.011 ^b	
Residual	92.773	93	0.928			
Total	103.703	103				

a. Dependent Variable: Performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Value Chain, Benchmarking, Portfolio, Cost-Benefit, SWOT, PEST

To test the hypothesis raised above, for the impact of SMTT on the performance of hotels in Saranda region, multiple linear regression was used. From the following table we note that the value of Sig. is equal to 0.011, which means that these variables are unimportant, since the allowed values of sig<0.05.

Table 4: Regression results

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.325 ^a	0.105	0.079	0.963

a. Predictors: (Constant), Value Chain, Benchmarking, Portfolio , Cost-Benefit, SWOT, PEST

b. Dependent Variable: Performance

Individual regression results show a statistically significant positive linear relationship between strategic tools and techniques and hotel performance ($\beta = 0.076$, P-value = 0.011). Therefore, H2 is accepted though $\beta \neq 0$ it is very close to it, and the p-value was smaller than 0.05 (P-value= 0.011).

DISCUSSION

The results of the study regarding the use of SMTT may have been influenced from various factors; firstly the sample taken in the study was heterogeneous where most of it consisted of small businesses. Referring to the literature, small businesses do not have sufficient resources to carry out this process. According to Ghobadian, O`Regan, & Thomas, small organizations do not have sufficient resources for using SMTT, while the opposite happens with medium and large organizations. The results of the study conducted by Kalkan & Bozkur, 2013, showed that the use of strategic management tools in small businesses was at a very low rate. They explained these conclusions with the lack of financial and human resources.

The result of the study can also be attributed to the fact that 82% of hotel structures in the Saranda region are family businesses, which means that the extent of using these techniques is limited by their individual skills and knowledge. Also, the dynamism of the market, the uncertainty that these organizations feel in the face of ever-increasing competition, prevents them from investing in programs and resources that can help them, in the impossibility to perform this process by them.

The literature refers that market dynamism can also prevent managers from making formal plans, as information is more incomplete, although according to Ghobadian, O`Regan, & Thomas, the opposite should happen, when the market is uncertain managers should be more alert for more information.

Finally, we can say that strategy formulators in the studied organizations do not yet have the necessary knowledge and skills to properly use strategic planning tools. This can also be seen from the responses to the questionnaire regarding the recognition of these tools, where a significant number of them did not know them.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study revealed that the Financial Analysis, Cost Benefit Analysis and SWOT Analysis were the most popular and used analyzes by the surveyed hotels. Meanwhile, some of them, such as Gap analysis, Portfolio analysis, What if, were not recognized by a considerable number of these structures. This result is also related to the fact that the percentage of hotels that did not recognize these practices was significant, about 32%. Also factor that may brought such a result are:

First, 82% of the surveyed hotels were family businesses, which, as we mentioned above, have "limited abilities" in managerial skills. In other words, these businesses based on the leadership skills of the owner-managers and their family members, placing family relatives in leadership positions. This is also supported by the fact that 76% of the people who filled out the questionnaire were relatives of the hotel owner. Second, it is related to the fact that 70% of the businesses surveyed in the study were small businesses, based on the literature, the majority of small businesses fail to apply strategic management practices, due to the lack of resources necessary to carry out this process. Whether those are financial resources or human resources, which for the reasons cited above, the small business does not have the necessary skills for their disposal. Thirdly, 49% of the hotels that admitted to drawing up strategic plans, although 70% of them accepted to know the concept of strategic management. Also, the surveyed administrators and managers affirmed that in forecasting demand or plans for the future, they were based on previous experiences and their intuition. Fourth, the people who drafted strategic plans were mostly the owner or his relatives. This is also related to the point we cited above in which the planning and use of strategic management practices is dependent on the skills and knowledge these individuals have in this filed.

Also, the results of the study showed that strategic techniques and tools were perceived as important in the performance of hotels. The findings of this study, in which SMTT affect organizational performance, are also supported by previous studies cited in this paper like (Kalkan & Bozkur, 2013), (Uzel, M; Obwogi, J; Namusonge, G, 2013), (Elbanna, 2013), (Muthoka & Wario, 2014), (Varelas & Apostolopoulos, 2020), (Alharbi, 2024).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Continuous training for managers and leaders of accommodation structures regarding the importance of strategic management practices and, in particular, SMTT, for the contribution they provide in the analysis and continuous improvement of their business operations.

It is very important for the managers of these structures to understand the significance of the knowledge and education level required for the person managing this business. It is

recommended that these managers include individuals with the necessary managerial skills and education, even if they are not family members, to ensure a more professional and efficient administration of the business.

It is well-known in the literature that small businesses often fail in developing strategic plans due to a lack of adequate knowledge. Therefore, it is recommended to involve external consultants to assist in the adaptation of strategic management practices, especially when these businesses lack the necessary capacity to carry out this process on their own.

FURTHER RESEARCHER

Further studies could analyze the factors that influence as barriers to the use of strategic management techniques and tools. Further studies could also analyze each of the phases of strategy formulation, and the impact they have on performance.

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