

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES: EVIDENCE FROM SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES

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Abstract

How to cite this paper: Lubeniqi, G., & Uka, A. (2026). Strategic management tools and techniques: Evidence from small and medium-sized enterprises. *Journal of Governance and Regulation*, 15(2), 209–220. <https://doi.org/10.22495/jgrv15i2art18>

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ISSN Print: 2220-9352
ISSN Online: 2306-6784

Received: 21.09.2025
Revised: 06.01.2026; 25.02.2026
Accepted: 30.03.2026

JEL Classification: L21, L25, M12, M21
DOI: 10.22495/jgrv15i2art18

This study investigates the tools and techniques of strategic management for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Kosovo and Albania. These tools and techniques are used to organize and structure strategic activities and processes, thus influencing the decomposition of complex situations and the qualitative improvement of strategic decision-making (Bellamy et al., 2019; Clark, 1997). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine the level of use, practical utility effects, and current knowledge regarding strategic tools and techniques. To achieve the purpose of the study, a quantitative methodological approach was followed. Data were initially collected through a structured questionnaire designed using the Likert scale, while SPSS software was employed for the statistical analysis of the collected data. The empirical coverage was based on a survey of 100 SMEs across the two countries through a structured questionnaire. A total of 42 SMEs from Kosovo and 39 SMEs from Albania were considered as fully completed survey responses. The findings of the study indicate that the five most frequently used tools and techniques across both countries are: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats (SWOT) analysis, political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal (PESTEL) analysis, price analysis, customer satisfaction, and cost-benefit analysis. The same tools and techniques were also identified as having the greatest effect in terms of practical usefulness and current knowledge. The importance of this study lies in further enriching the existing literature on the dynamics and role of strategic management tools and techniques (SMTTs) by creating a framework of important information for managers, employees, consultants, organizational leaders, and researchers.

Keywords: Strategic Management Tools and Techniques, Small and Medium Businesses, Usage, Real Utility, Current Knowledge

Authors' individual contribution: Conceptualization — G.L. and A.U.; Methodology — G.L. and A.U.; Software — G.L. and A.U.; Formal Analysis — G.L. and A.U.; Investigation — G.L. and A.U.; Resources — G.L. and A.U.; Writing — Original Draft — G.L. and A.U.; Writing — Review & Editing — G.L. and A.U.

Declaration of conflicting interests: The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

1. INTRODUCTION

Strategic management over the past decades has undergone significant developments, creating a long and rich history. Early studies on strategy had

a normative and prescriptive purpose, which became embedded in the early 1960s within the sphere of applied management, often referred to as “business policy” and “business planning”. The field of strategic management experienced extraordinary

growth, particularly during the late 1970s and 1980s, when the publication of books such as *Strategic Management* by Schendel and Hofer (1979) and *Competitive Strategy* by Porter (1980) had a considerable impact on this development (Rumelt et al., 1991; Dagnino & Cinici, 2015). In this regard, strategic management is concerned with the organizational implementation of concepts developed in the academic sphere for the construction of strategies within organizations. It involves the examination of both the internal and external environments of a company in order to achieve organizational objectives through the efficient utilization of resources (Bracker, 1980).

According to Stonehouse and Pemberton (2002) and Mainardes et al. (2014), strategic management represents a spectrum of theories and frameworks that influence the direction of strategic actions across the entire organization, through tools and techniques designed to support managers in planning, reasoning, and analysis. Strategic management tools and techniques (SMTTs) constitute an important and useful component of strategic management. According to Afonina and Chalupský (2012), the term “management tool” implies the inclusion of diverse processes, methodologies, and analytical aspects. In contrast, Knott (2006) argues that the term “strategy tool” implies the incorporation of a broad range of approaches, instruments, exercises, ideas, and concepts, whose effects are linked to their influence on activities. In this respect, numerous scholars emphasize the existence of a wide and varied set of tools and techniques that businesses employ for goal setting, environmental assessment, and decision-making within the framework of strategic management (Clark, 1997; Stenfors, 2007; Afonina & Chalupský, 2012).

The application of SMTTs is more widespread among large businesses; however, the overall level of usage differs across enterprises. In small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), managers typically perform multiple functions, which limits and complicates the level of application of these tools and techniques. Nevertheless, an increase in the level of usage could significantly improve in the future, particularly through the expansion of knowledge regarding strategic tools and techniques. For businesses to understand their advantages, market position, and opportunities, to recognize competitors and identify competitive advantages, to grasp customer requirements, and to assess both the internal and external environments that influence performance, it is crucial to develop knowledge about SMTTs and their application.

The purpose of this study is to identify the level of usage and current knowledge of SMTTs among SMEs in Kosovo and Albania. Furthermore, in order to examine whether these tools and techniques have positively influenced the achievement of objectives and the improvement of strategic decision-making for SMEs across the two countries, the study also evaluates the effects and practical usefulness of their application. To fulfill the research purpose and to obtain statistically significant empirical results, the SPSS software was employed. Initially, descriptive analysis was carried out, followed by statistical analyses through correlation, regression, and comparative tests.

The findings of this study reveal that SMTTs are indeed used by SME managers in both countries. The five most commonly applied SMTTs among

SMEs in Kosovo are: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats (SWOT) analysis, price analysis, political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal (PESTEL) analysis, cost-benefit analysis, and customer satisfaction. In contrast, the five most frequently used SMTTs among SMEs in Albania are: SWOT analysis, PESTEL analysis, price analysis, financial statement analysis, and customer satisfaction. Similarly, the findings indicate that for the same SMTTs — namely SWOT analysis, PESTEL analysis, price analysis, cost-benefit analysis, and customer satisfaction — SME managers in both countries demonstrated the highest level of knowledge, while their practical usefulness was also rated the strongest among these tools and techniques.

In this context, the contribution of this study lies in understanding the dynamics of SMTTs, which are essential for SME managers in achieving organizational objectives and enhancing strategic decision-making through the effective utilization of these tools and techniques. Moreover, the existing literature will be enriched by providing valuable and meaningful insights for managers, employees, consultants, organizational leaders, and other stakeholders.

The significance of this study rests on the fact that, for the first time, Kosovo and Albania are jointly examined and compared within the context of the Western Balkans in terms of the level of usage, current knowledge, and practical usefulness of SMTTs for SMEs.

The structure of the study is as follows: Section 2 reviews the relevant literature, Section 3 analyzes the research methodology, Section 4 presents the results, Section 5 presents the discussion, and Section 6 provides a conclusion.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The growing body of academic literature has increasingly addressed the nature and significance of SMTTs (Webster et al., 1989; Clark, 1997; Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015; Langley, 1988; Frost, 2003; Tassabehji & Isherwood, 2014). However, a general consensus has yet to be reached regarding a widely accepted classification of the SMTT spectrum. Different authors who have analyzed, developed, and proposed classifications of SMTTs have portrayed them within varying paradigms. One of the earliest classifications was carried out by Prescott and Grant (1988), who established an evaluation profile of 21 techniques across 11 dimensions.

Similarly, Webster et al. (1989) developed a classification of 30 strategic planning tools considered useful for managers in the construction of strategies. Hussey (1997), through a dictionary format, presented another classification of SMTTs. This dictionary provides descriptions of the main techniques intended to give readers a comprehensive perspective with extensive information on these tools and techniques. In a similar vein, Clark (1997) classified another list of SMTTs, offering new descriptive evidence valuable for practitioners in the development of strategies. In a later study, Knott (2006) classified strategic tools and techniques into three distinct applications, oriented towards: a) the strategic thinking aspect, b) the strategic decision-making aspect, and c) the strategy implementation aspect.

Gunn and Williams (2007) argue that managers' understanding and use of SMTTs enhance motivation and, at the same time, help academics and practitioners adopt a more humanistic approach as opposed to a purely normative and rational one. Armstrong (1982), however, contends that it is impossible to make a scientific assessment of the value of planning if planning techniques are not described. In this regard, the role of SMTTs has been examined by many scholars (Miles et al., 1997; Stonehouse & Pemberton, 2002; Clark, 1997; Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015; Knott, 2006; Höglund et al., 2018).

According to Clark (1997), the range of strategic tools — including models, methodologies, instruments, and techniques — aims to support strategic decision-making. Similarly, Knott (2006) emphasizes that strategic tools play a crucial role as a compass for developing thinking in the structuring and organization of activities and processes. Stenfors (2007) further defines strategy tools and techniques as mechanisms available to support strategic work. The creation of these tools serves to enhance knowledge, efficiency, and creativity for individuals, groups, or managers seeking strategic advantage. In this direction, Vaitkevičius et al. (2006) argue that SMTTs play a significant role in the strategic management process by performing several functions, including: a) collecting and increasing information, b) fostering the potential and exchange of new ideas, and c) monitoring systems and processes of strategic plans. Similarly, Afonina and Chalupský (2013) highlight that SMTTs aim to improve organizational performance by mitigating various disadvantages, while organizational leaders use these tools and techniques as support mechanisms ranging from the strategic analysis phase to strategic selection. For example, SWOT analysis is a tool for analyzing the internal and external environment to create a detailed understanding of the business environment. A SWOT analysis is made up of four components: 'strengths' refer to positive internal factors; 'weaknesses' are negative internal features, while 'opportunities' are positive characteristics of the external environment; 'threats' are negative external factors (Patnaik & Poyyamoli, 2015; Benzaghta et al., 2021). Porter's Five Forces model is useful for managers to understand the structure of the industry and to be able to assess the competition within that industry and thus to identify opportunities and threats (Pangarkar & Prabhudesai, 2024; Miyamoto, 2015). According to Guidotti (2024) and Rasmussen et al. (2017), benchmarking is an approach to measure, evaluate, and identify deficiencies in the internal business environment by comparing, understanding, and adapting the best practices of leading businesses from the external environment. Through this technique, organizations achieve the integration of internal and external knowledge, thus producing innovation and improvement within themselves. Whereas brainstorming is a different thinking technique used as a strategic framework to expand creativity and innovation (Chang & Li, 2025; Kalargiros & Manning, 2015). According to Mansi et al. (2017) and Fitzsimmons et al. (2022), the mission statement is the main epicenter in the strategy creation dynamics while keeping a unified business. While the vision

statement is a panorama of the future of a business that encompasses the way the business will operate, society, and stakeholders.

Several recent studies have called for a broader understanding of SMTTs — specifically, how they should be developed, tested, and, in particular, how they should be utilized in practice (Whittington, 2004; Wright et al., 2013; Gunn & Williams, 2007; Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Whittington (2004) argues that managers still face a gap in knowledge, skills, and adequate tools to successfully create strategies and implement tasks. According to Stenfors (2007), in order for tools and techniques to be practically applied in the development and support of more productive strategies, it is necessary to transform theoretical knowledge into an integrative process embedded within these tools and techniques. Wright et al. (2013) further contend that when managers encounter complex environments and unstable situations, a deeper understanding of SMTTs benefits them due to the advantages these tools create in supporting decision-making beyond the limited framework of knowledge. Rigby and Bilodeau (2013) and Stenfors (2007) also emphasize that a deeper understanding of each tool positively influences their effective use in achieving organizational objectives. According to these authors, companies succeed by recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of each tool, as well as their overall effects, and creatively integrating them to exploit new opportunities at the right time, in the right way, and with the necessary capabilities.

At a broader level, SMTTs generate a variety of benefits. According to Aldehayyat and Anchor (2008), they foster awareness, increase confidence, and enhance security in the decision-making process. Large companies can benefit from their ability to facilitate the prioritization of objectives, while for diverse companies, this set of tools and techniques serves as a means of assessing portfolio impacts. Frost (2003) adds that beyond their analytical role, these tools and techniques can also function as important communication mechanisms and assist in interpreting complex issues. In this regard, Afonina and Chalupský (2012) describe SMTTs as a spectrum of methods, instruments, concepts, and approaches that influence strategic decision-making by supporting strategic management at several specific stages, thereby simplifying complex situations. Similarly, Clark (1997), Stenfors (2007), and Gunn and Williams (2007) highlight that these tools: a) positively reshape the concept of strategic thinking, b) support problem-solving, and c) assist in the formulation and development of various strategies.

Consequently, such tools and techniques can create a solid foundation for companies to build competitive advantages, enabling them to meet objectives through well-informed and appropriately oriented decision-making (Wright et al., 2013).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The analysis included a selected spectrum of 15 SMTTs across a total of 100 SMEs from both Kosovo and Albania. The primary motivation for conducting this study was grounded in prior

research with similar objectives regarding the examination of SMTTs (Clark, 1997; Frost, 2003; Gunn & Williams, 2007; Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015).

The research is based on a quantitative methodological approach. Adopting this approach allows for a broader statistical analysis and facilitates a more comprehensive identification of managers' perceptions and experiences regarding SMTTs. Data were initially collected through a structured questionnaire designed using the Likert scale (Taherdoost, 2019; Harpe, 2015). The Likert scale is a mechanism that is widely used in the context of research as a psychometric tool for measuring judgments, attitudes, satisfaction, and various perceptions. In the context of this research, the Likert scale was implemented at the five-point level, where respondents were asked to respond symmetrically to express their degree of agreement with the presented statements. Their categorization was carried out through the following scaling: "I completely disagree", "I disagree", "I neither agree nor disagree", "I agree", "I completely agree". The coding of the responses was carried out through a numerical series. Negative responses were presented with a low numerical value of zero, while positive responses were presented with a high value of five, and neutral responses were presented with a numerical value of three. The tools used to analyze the Likert scale data are: descriptive statistical analysis, comparative test analysis and correlation analysis (Koo & Yang, 2025).

The SPSS program was used for the statistical analysis of the collected data. This program allows the analysis of scientific data, which is important for the purposes of research studies. Through SPSS, survey analysis, data extraction, processing, and management can be performed through the use of techniques such as descriptive statistical analysis, comparative test analysis, and correlation analysis (Satya & Mohammed, 2024). In this regard, in this study, data from descriptive statistical analysis were used to estimate the mean, response frequency, and standard deviation. Comparative test analysis was used to assess and identify the distinguishing nuances between respondents, using t-tests, regression analysis, and analysis of variance. While correlation analysis served as a technique to assess the variables and the relationship between them, using Pearson correlation analysis (Koo & Yang, 2025).

The data collection was conducted between February and May 2025, through email distribution of the questionnaire to 50 SMEs in Kosovo and 50 SMEs in Albania. The targeting of respondents was generally non-diversified and focused on managers at middle and senior levels. Within the analyzed period, a total of 42 SMEs from Kosovo and 39 SMEs from Albania were considered fully completed survey responses.

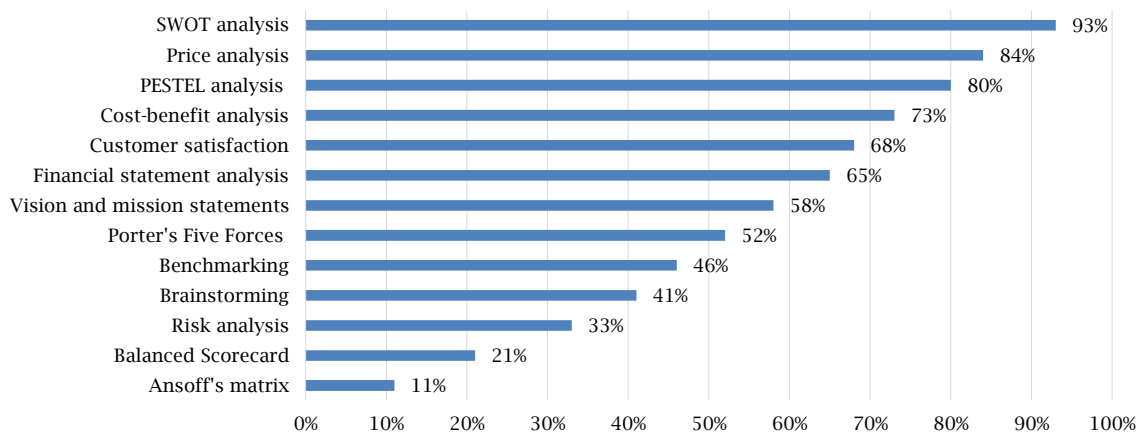
The study adhered to the classification of enterprises according to the Laws No. 03/L-031 for Kosovo and No. 43/2022 for Albania. The categorization of SMEs in both countries was as follows: micro-enterprises with 0-9 employees, small enterprises with 10-49 employees, and medium enterprises with 50-249 employees.

4. RESULTS

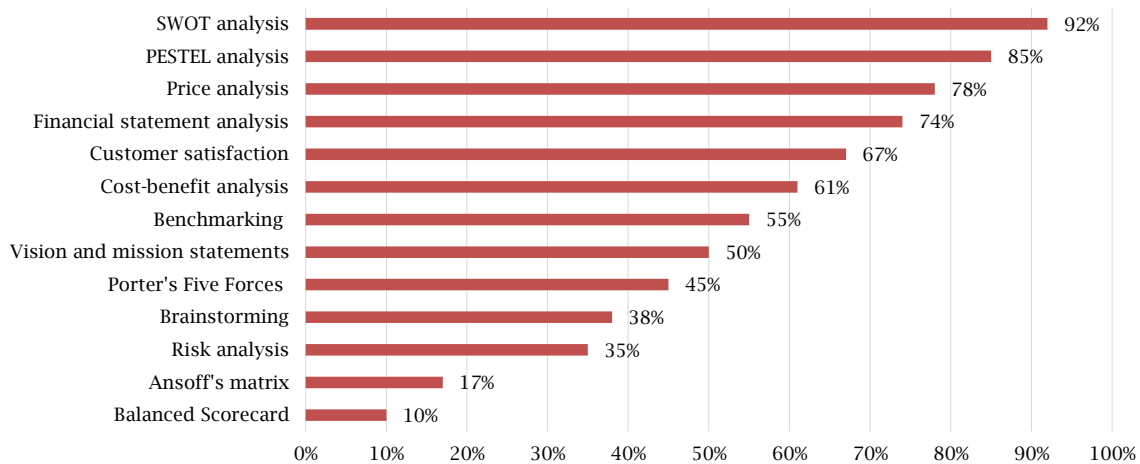
Although academic literature contains studies on SMTTs, there is still no study that examines and compares two countries – Kosovo and Albania – within the context of the Western Balkans regarding the level of usage, current knowledge, and practical usefulness of SMTTs for SMEs. According to Gunn and Williams (2007), the use of SMTTs and the enhancement of knowledge about them by managers positively influence motivation, the achievement of objectives, and the improvement of strategic decision-making within organizations. Additionally, it allows academics and practitioners to adopt a more humanistic approach as opposed to a purely normative and rational one. Stenfors (2007) further emphasizes that the creation of these tools and techniques serves to support the growth of knowledge, efficiency, and creativity for individuals, groups, or managers seeking effective decision-making and the creation of strategic advantages. These strategic tools and techniques function as mechanisms available to assist in strategic activities. Overall, numerous authors have empirically demonstrated that strategic tools and techniques play a key role in the implementation of strategic planning for businesses.

This section of the study presents the responses of participants regarding the use of SMTTs.

Figure 1. Strategic management tools and techniques used in Kosovo (%)



Source: Authors' calculation.

Figure 2. Strategic management tools and techniques used in Albania (%)

Source: Authors' calculation.

Based on the findings illustrated in Figures 1 and 2, it is observed that SMEs in both countries show a usage rate of over 50% for eight SMTTs, whereas only five SMTTs are used at a lower rate of less than 40%. The findings indicate that SWOT analysis is rated by SME managers as the most frequently used tool across both countries. The usage rate of SWOT analysis for SMEs in Kosovo is 93%, while for SMEs in Albania it is 92%. These results are consistent with similar findings in Slovakia (Lesnikova et al., 2023), Iran (Nouri & Soltani, 2017), the United Kingdom (UK) and Türkiye (Glaister et al., 2009), and Lithuania (Vaitkevicius, 2007). SWOT analysis is an important and widely used instrument for organizations to analyze the internal and external environment of a business by assessing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (Husin & Haron, 2020).

While the ranking from the second position onward differs between SMEs in the two countries, this variation is not substantial, particularly in terms of percentage participation. For SMEs in Albania, PESTEL analysis occupies the second position with 85% usage, whereas for SMEs in Kosovo, price analysis is second with 84% usage. These results are similar to findings reported in Jordan (Aldehayyat et al., 2011) and the Czech Republic (Afonina, 2015). PESTEL analysis is a tool for examining the environment in which a business operates through PESTEL factors (Bourgeois et al., 2024),

whereas price analysis is a technique for assessing overall market prices to develop a pricing strategy that balances business profit and value creation for the customer (Kienzler & Kowalkowski, 2017).

For Kosovo, the SMTTs used above the 50% threshold are: PESTEL analysis (80%), cost-benefit analysis (73%), customer satisfaction (68%), financial statement analysis (65%), vision and mission statements (58%), and Porter's Five Forces (52%). In Albania, the usage ranking is: price analysis (78%), financial statement analysis (74%), customer satisfaction (67%), cost-benefit analysis (61%), benchmarking (55%), and vision and mission statements (50%).

The findings also indicate that there is no significant difference in the usage of SMTTs below the 50% threshold, either in terms of percentage or the types of tools. For example, among SMEs in Kosovo, benchmarking is used at a rate of 46%, compared to Porter's Five Forces at 45% among SMEs in Albania. Further, the least applied tools for SMEs in Kosovo are: brainstorming (41%), risk analysis (33%), balanced scorecard (21%), and Ansoff's matrix (11%). For SMEs in Albania, the least used SMTTs are: brainstorming (38%), risk analysis (35%), Ansoff's matrix (17%), and balanced scorecard (10%).

The remaining part of the analysis focuses on evaluating the relationship between the application and the practical usefulness of SMTTs among SMEs in both Kosovo and Albania.

Table 1. Real practical usefulness when using strategic tools and techniques by business size in Kosovo

<i>Tools and techniques</i>	<i>Usefulness</i>	<i>Micro-business</i>	<i>Small businesses</i>	<i>Medium businesses</i>
SWOT analysis	Useful and moderately useful	84%	82%	85%
	Limited and useless usefulness	16%	18%	15%
Price analysis	Useful and moderately useful	71%	74%	78%
	Limited and useless usefulness	29%	26%	22%
PESTEL analysis	Useful and moderately useful	74%	68%	70%
	Limited and useless usefulness	26%	32%	30%
Cost-benefit analysis	Useful and moderately useful	71%	69%	66%
	Limited and useless usefulness	29%	31%	34%
Customer satisfaction	Useful and moderately useful	65%	70%	72%
	Limited and useless usefulness	35%	30%	28%
Financial statement analysis	Useful and moderately useful	61%	67%	64%
	Limited and useless usefulness	39%	33%	36%
Vision and mission statements	Useful and moderately useful	57%	60%	65%
	Limited and useless usefulness	43%	40%	35%
Porter's Five Forces	Useful and moderately useful	61%	50%	66%
	Limited and useless usefulness	39%	50%	34%
Benchmarking	Useful and moderately useful	53%	57%	64%
	Limited and useless usefulness	47%	43%	36%
Risk analysis	Useful and moderately useful	62%	55%	53%
	Limited and useless usefulness	38%	45%	47%
Brainstorming	Useful and moderately useful	51%	53%	50%
	Limited and useless usefulness	49%	44%	50%
Balanced scorecard	Useful and moderately useful	54%	48%	46%
	Limited and useless usefulness	46%	52%	54%
Ansoff's matrix	Useful and moderately useful	49%	55%	58%
	Limited and useless usefulness	51%	45%	42%

Source: Authors' calculation.

Table 2. Real practical usefulness when using strategic tools and techniques by business size in Albania

<i>Tools and techniques</i>	<i>Usefulness</i>	<i>Micro-business</i>	<i>Small businesses</i>	<i>Medium businesses</i>
SWOT analysis	Useful and moderately useful	82%	84%	86%
	Limited and useless usefulness	18%	16%	14%
PESTEL analysis	Useful and moderately useful	73%	72%	71%
	Limited and useless usefulness	27%	28%	29%
Price analysis	Useful and moderately useful	70%	71%	73%
	Limited and useless usefulness	30%	29%	27%
Customer satisfaction	Useful and moderately useful	68%	69%	70%
	Limited and useless usefulness	32%	31%	30%
Cost-benefit analysis	Useful and moderately useful	66%	67%	69%
	Limited and useless usefulness	34%	33%	31%
Financial statement analysis	Useful and moderately useful	60%	63%	66%
	Limited and useless usefulness	40%	37%	34%
Benchmarking	Useful and moderately useful	54%	59%	64%
	Limited and useless usefulness	46%	41%	36%
Vision and mission statements	Useful and moderately useful	62%	53%	68%
	Limited and useless usefulness	38%	47%	32%
Porter's Five Forces	Useful and moderately useful	54%	59%	59%
	Limited and useless usefulness	46%	41%	41%
Risk analysis	Useful and moderately useful	58%	61%	56%
	Limited and useless usefulness	42%	39%	44%
Brainstorming	Useful and moderately useful	52%	55%	51%
	Limited and useless usefulness	48%	45%	49%
Ansoff's matrix	Useful and moderately useful	51%	48%	50%
	Limited and useless usefulness	49%	52%	50%
Balanced scorecard	Useful and moderately useful	47%	53%	59%
	Limited and useless usefulness	53%	47%	41%

Source: Authors' calculation.

The analysis results show a clear pattern of variation in the application of SMTTs among micro-enterprises, small enterprises, and medium enterprises in Kosovo and Albania. This variation is also evident in the practical usefulness of these tools, which differs according to business size.

First, as shown in Figures A.1 and A.2 (see Appendix), the findings indicate that the level of SMTT application is generally more widespread among medium enterprises compared to small and micro-enterprises in both Kosovo and Albania. Second, as presented in Tables 1 and 2, the results demonstrate that the level of practical usefulness of these tools and techniques is also more pronounced

among medium enterprises compared to small and micro-enterprises. However, the frequency of SMTT usage is higher among small enterprises than among micro-enterprises. These patterns are similar across SMEs in both countries. Similarly, the trend in the effects of practical usefulness remains consistent, indicating that the level of real usefulness of SMTTs is higher in small enterprises than in micro-enterprises.

Further analysis for SMEs in Kosovo shows that SWOT analysis is the most widely applied tool. The usage rates are 98% for micro-enterprises, 96% for medium enterprises, and 93% for small enterprises. In contrast, Ansoff's matrix is the least

applied, with participation rates of 23% for medium enterprises, 15% for small enterprises, and 9% for micro-enterprises. Among the 13 SMTTs included in the main analysis, the five most frequently applied tools are: SWOT analysis, price analysis, PESTEL analysis, cost-benefit analysis, and customer satisfaction, consistently across all three enterprise sizes. This ranking is also consistent with the effects of practical usefulness; for SMEs in Kosovo, SWOT analysis exhibits the highest usefulness across all categories, with effectiveness rates of 85% for medium enterprises, 82% for small enterprises, and 84% for micro-enterprises.

Similarly, the findings for SMEs in Albania are generally consistent, although minor differences exist in application rates according to business size. For example, SWOT analysis remains the most applied tool, but the participation rates differ slightly from those in Kosovo: 98% for medium enterprises, 97% for small enterprises, and 95% for micro-enterprises. Among the least applied tools, the balanced scorecard shows participation rates of 17% for medium enterprises, 15% for small enterprises, and 13% for micro-enterprises.

However, in Albania, there is a difference in the ranking of SMTTs in terms of application. Among the 13 main SMTTs, the five most frequently used tools across all enterprise sizes are: SWOT analysis, PESTEL analysis, price analysis, financial statement analysis, and customer satisfaction. Regarding practical usefulness, SWOT analysis again shows the highest impact, with effectiveness rates of 86% for medium enterprises, 84% for small enterprises, and 82% for micro-enterprises. In contrast, the balanced scorecard exhibits the lowest practical usefulness, with effectiveness rates of 53% for micro-enterprises, 47% for small enterprises, and 41% for medium enterprises. The next part of the analysis examines the level of knowledge that managers of SMEs in Kosovo and Albania have regarding SMTTs.

As shown in Figures A.3 and A.4 (see Appendix), the SMTTs with the highest knowledge levels among managers in SMEs from both countries are SWOT analysis, PESTEL analysis, price analysis, customer satisfaction, and cost-benefit analysis. Based on these findings, the primary reason for this high level of knowledge is that these SMTTs are widely used within businesses, creating a systematic and traditional experience of application. In general, these tools and techniques are not highly complex to implement and are usually associated with relatively low costs of use. On the other hand, SME managers in both countries have highlighted that tools such as the balanced scorecard and Ansoff's matrix exhibit a significant knowledge gap.

Overall, based on the analysis of Figures A.3 and A.4 (see Appendix), managers in both countries demonstrate a moderate level of knowledge of SMTTs. However, there is a notable difference between a group of SMTTs for which managers have adequate knowledge and another group for which knowledge is relatively weak. These results suggest that if SMEs in both countries aim to increase the level of SMTT application, they must proportionally enhance managers' and employees' knowledge of these tools and techniques.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this research indicate that SMEs in Kosovo and Albania have generally used SMTTs that are not complex to apply and that are focused specifically on the analysis of the external and internal environment. The data show that there is a dominance of a limited group of SMTTs that have been implemented by SMEs in both countries. The group with the most widespread application of SMTTs by SMEs of both countries is SWOT analysis, PESTEL analysis, price analysis, cost-benefit analysis, and customer satisfaction. This prevalence of the broad application of these tools and techniques indicates a more pronounced orientation towards operational, analytical, and prognostic tools than an orientation towards tools that are more strategic, such as the balanced scorecard and Ansoff's matrix. These results show that SME managers have implemented more SMTTs that do not require large investments of time, money, and advanced knowledge. The results of this study are in harmony with the results identified in Slovakia (Lesnikova et al., 2023), Iran (Nouri & Soltani, 2017), the UK and Türkiye (Glaister et al., 2009), Lithuania (Vaitkevičius, 2007), Jordan (Aldehayyat et al., 2011), and the Czech Republic (Afonina, 2015; Afonina & Chalupský, 2013).

Also, another component that is observed is that there is a proportional increase between the level of use of SMTTs and the size of businesses. This is particularly reflected in medium-sized businesses, which reflect a higher level of managerial skills and a more proper structural organization.

The study findings also show that there is a correlation between the level of use, knowledge and real practical benefit for similar SMTTs. This shows that managers' real experience plays a key role in formulating judgments on SMTT, enabling them to assess their rationality, efficiency, and degree of use.

The identified findings indicate that there is a pressing need for SMEs between the two countries to invest in increasing managerial capacities through investment in training and knowledge development. This would allow for an increase in the use of SMTTs that are more advanced and strategic versus those that are more basic and traditional.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined the level of usage, practical usefulness, and current knowledge of SMTTs among managers of SMEs in Kosovo and Albania. The results indicate that SMTTs are actively utilized by SME managers in both countries, although differences in usage exist according to enterprise size. SWOT analysis emerged as the most frequently used strategic tool across all SME sizes in both countries. These findings are consistent with similar studies conducted in Slovakia (Lesnikova et al., 2023), Iran (Nouri & Soltani, 2017), the UK and Türkiye (Glaister et al., 2009), and Lithuania (Vaitkevičius, 2007).

Further data show that the most widely used SMTTs following SWOT analysis for SMEs in both countries are: PESTEL analysis, price analysis, cost-

benefit analysis, financial statement analysis, and customer satisfaction. Differences in usage frequency across the various SME sizes are also observed. Conversely, the least applied SMTTs are Ansoff's matrix and the balanced scorecard.

Similarly, the results are largely consistent regarding the practical usefulness of SMTTs during their application. SME managers in both countries reported that SWOT analysis had the most positive impact in practice. In addition to SWOT analysis, tools that demonstrated a significant practical effect include PESTEL analysis, price analysis, cost-benefit analysis, and customer satisfaction. According to managers' reports, the balanced scorecard and Ansoff's matrix were considered to have the lowest positive impact during practical application.

These results are generally aligned with the level of current knowledge that SME managers in both countries possess regarding SMTTs. Overall, managers have knowledge of these tools and techniques, although notable differences remain. The evidence suggests a positive correlation between managers' knowledge levels and both the frequency of usage and the practical usefulness of SMTTs across all SME sizes in both countries.

For example, the highest knowledge levels were reported for SWOT analysis, PESTEL analysis, price analysis, cost-benefit analysis, and customer satisfaction. These tools were also the most frequently applied and had the greatest positive impact in practice. Conversely, tools and techniques with lower knowledge levels, such as Ansoff's matrix and the balanced scorecard, were less frequently

applied and generated smaller practical benefits. This pattern demonstrates that the level of managerial knowledge is closely mirrored in both the usage rates and the real-world effectiveness of SMTTs during practical application.

In conclusion, based on the findings, the 10 most frequently used SMTTs across different SME sizes in Kosovo are: SWOT analysis, price analysis, PESTEL analysis, cost-benefit analysis, customer satisfaction, financial statement analysis, vision and mission statements, Porter's Five Forces, benchmarking, and brainstorming.

Similarly, for SMEs of various sizes in Albania, the 10 most frequently used SMTTs are: SWOT analysis, PESTEL analysis, price analysis, financial statement analysis, customer satisfaction, cost-benefit analysis, benchmarking, vision and mission statements, Porter's Five Forces, and brainstorming.

Some limitations of this study include certain variables that were not addressed, which could have provided additional insights for both businesses and the statistical robustness of the results regarding SMTTs. To address these gaps, future research should consider aspects such as: a) identifying the most significant challenges that businesses face when applying SMTTs, b) examining the impact of these tools on business development, and c) exploring ways to enhance managers' and employees' confidence in implementing SMTTs, thereby supporting them in selecting the most effective tools to achieve organizational objectives in specific situations.

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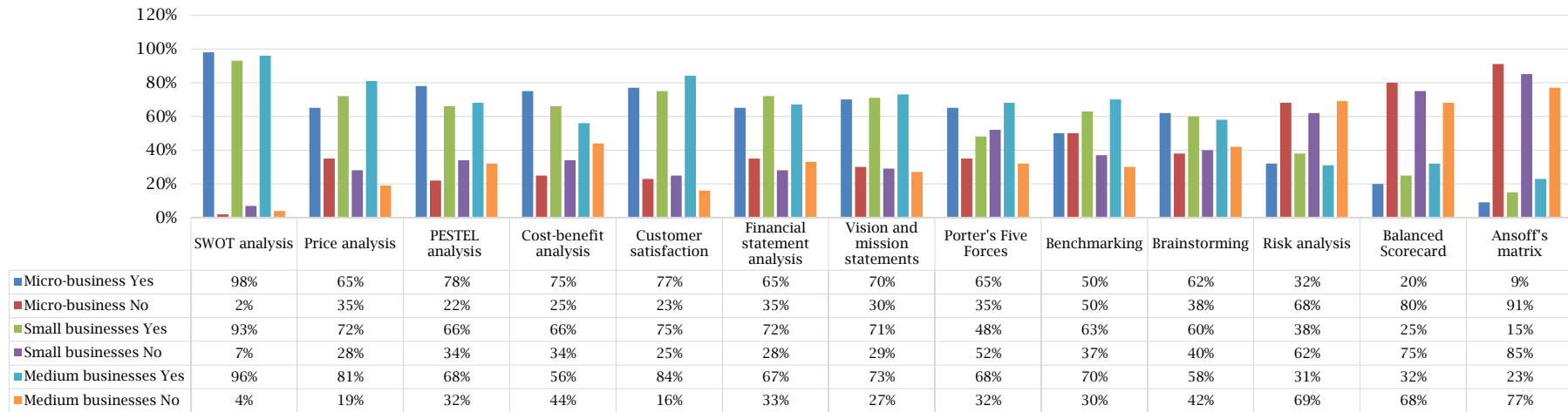
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APPENDIX

Figure A.1. Application of strategic management tools and techniques by business size in Kosovo (%)



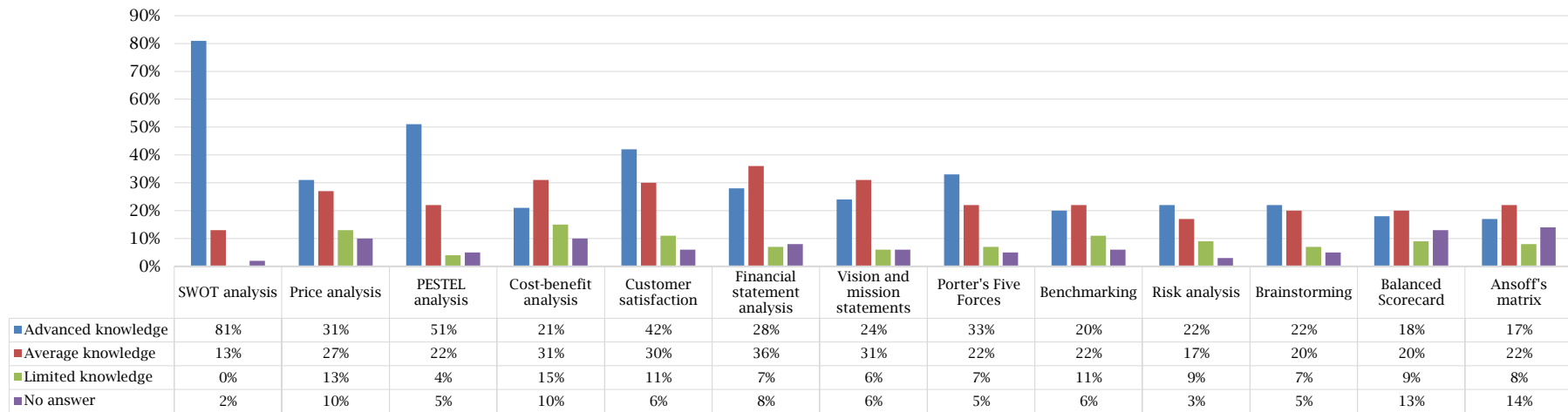
Source: Authors' calculation.

Figure A.2. Application of strategic management tools and techniques by business size in Albania (%)



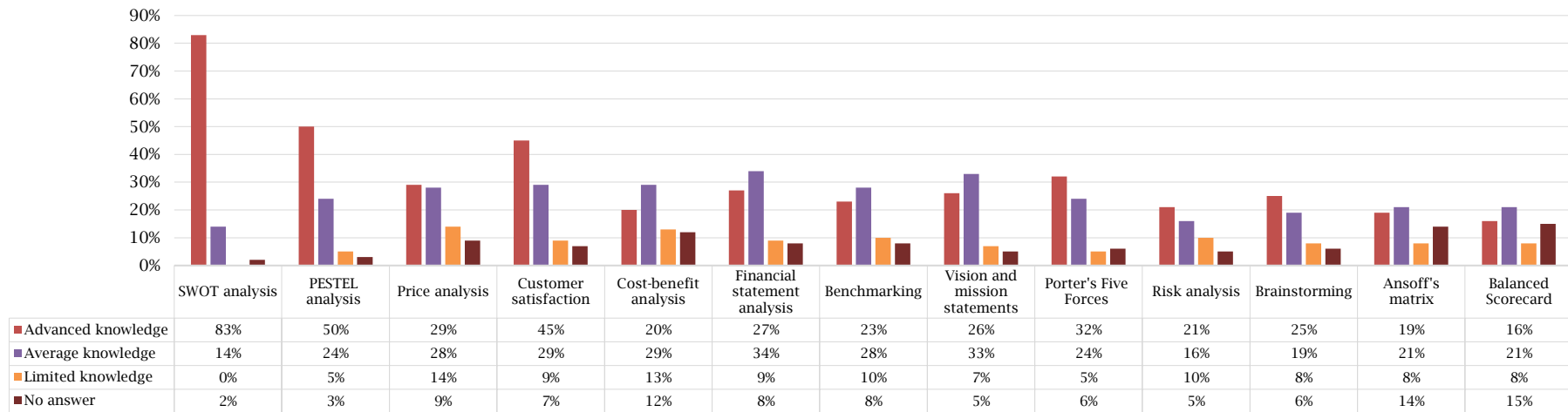
Source: Authors' calculation.

Figure A.3. Managers' knowledge of strategic management tools and techniques used in Kosovo (%)



Source: Authors' calculation.

Figure A.4. Managers' knowledge of strategic management tools and techniques used in Albania (%)



Source: Authors' calculation.