

# A study on socio-aesthetic value accentuation and marketing performance: an SDL perspective

Value  
accentuation  
and marketing  
performance

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This study aims to build a conceptual model based on socio-aesthetic value accentuation (SAVA), positional advantage and sales-network power as the bridging process for enhancing sales performance in the context of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

**Design/methodology/approach** – A structural study methodology is adopted. In all, 200 owner-managers of SMEs were involved in the study and voluntarily spent time for an interview in the data collection process. To test the model and hypotheses, the authors used the analysis moment structure structural equation modeling (AMOS SEM structural model software to analyse 178 usable questionnaires).

**Findings** – The results demonstrate three strategic pathways to enhanced sales performance, namely, anchors on SAVA, positional advantage and sales-network power and are the basis of the separate contribution of our proposed strategic equilateral triangle model for conceptual bridging.

**Research limitations/implications** – The rejection of the hypothesis provides a room for further research. The sample frame of Indonesian SMEs limits the generalisation power of SAVA concept, which then calls for replication to achieve a broader generalisation. The theoretical implication of the study relates to strengthening the applicability of the theory of service-dominant logic in marketing studies.

**Practical implications** – There are several practical managerial implications for SME entrepreneurs seeking to improve sales performance.

**Originality/value** – This pioneering study explains the role of SAVA – positional advantage and sales-network power to bridge innovation capability and enhanced marketing performance.

**Keywords** Product-innovation capability, Positional advantage, Sales-network power, SMEs Indonesia, Socio-aesthetic value accentuation

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Background to the research

Innovation in small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) has become an interesting area of exploration for management scholars who have sought to explain the process and its role in enhancing marketing performance. Innovation is also considered a key determinant of company success. Innovation capability is recognised as a strategic asset of a company for several reasons. Firstly, innovation capability is a proven value creator in the market (Oduro, 2019; O’Cass and Sok, 2013). Secondly, innovation capability is a determinant for competitive advantage (Maldonado-Guzmán *et al.*, 2019; Le and Lei, 2019). Thirdly, innovation capability provides leverage to enhance marketing performance (Stezano and Espinoza, 2019; O’Cass and Sok, 2013; Liu *et al.*, 2017).

Several studies have shown that innovation capability is a determinant of performance, particularly marketing performance (Stezano and Espinoza, 2019; Pang *et al.*, 2019;



Maldonado-Guzmán *et al.*, 2019). Scholars such as Park *et al.* (2019) proved a direct impact on marketing performance, whereas Moccia *et al.* (2019) found the impact of innovation capabilities on the design process to improve marketing performance. Shuradze *et al.* (2017) proved the impact of innovation capabilities on the success of new product innovations; O’Cass and Sok’s (2013) study proved a real impact of innovation capabilities on SMEs’ growth. However, many studies have reported different results. Pang *et al.* (2019) showed that the ability to differentiate innovation has no impact on business innovation’s success, and Samson *et al.* (2017) found that innovation management has no impact on business performance. The findings of empirical studies are inconsistent on the influence of innovation capabilities on performance, and there is a need for further research.

To solve this gap, we adopt service-dominant logic (SDL; Vargo and Lusch, 2017) for a strong theoretical basis to bridging innovation capabilities and marketing performance. SDL provides insight into the importance of value co-creation for stakeholders by enabling innovation capabilities to increase value and provide a competitive advantage (Evans, 2016). Furthermore, well-generated value and congruence in the target market will be a leverage for success (Maldonado-Guzmán *et al.*, 2019; Singjai *et al.*, 2018). This study aims to develop and test a conceptual model of innovation capability using the socio-aesthetic value variables, sales network power and marketing performance.

The study of Indonesian SMEs is vital for several reasons. Firstly, SMEs are recognised as engines of the nation’s prosperity growth, mainly because of their contribution to a large portion of around 58% to 61% of the Indonesian gross domestic product (Tambunan, 2019). Secondly, even though the SME sector is an essential contributor to the gross domestic product, it is vulnerable to maintain its sustainability because of several obstacles such as lack of innovation (Sandi, 2019), access to bank loans and marketing (Tambunan, 2019).

Studies demonstrated the background of the dynamics of SMEs in Indonesia. SMEs still maintain their short-term sustainability because these produce relatively cheap and simple products because of the difference in their nature (Tambunan, 2008). Innovation is recognised as essential, but innovation studies in Indonesia show that the contribution of innovation to business sustainability is the lowest compared to other factors such as market knowledge and business performance (Arsawan *et al.*, 2020). The same conclusion came from Wahyono’s (2019) study that states that although product innovation is vital in building competitive superiority, its role is smaller than market knowledge that is managed to increase competitiveness in the market’s eyes. The role of innovation in explaining the SMEs’ performance is well recognised, but several studies indicate that the magnitude of its impact is not very deterministic (Najib and Kiminami, 2011; Wahyono, 2019). In other words, innovation is considered very important to leverage performance and sustainability, but for SMEs in Indonesia, innovation is still far from becoming a deterministic driver. Considering the inconsistent findings on the impact of product innovation capability to marketing performance as described in the previous section of this study and the lack of innovation capability in the Indonesia SMEs as one of the critical driver for performance (Arsawan *et al.*, 2020; Najib and Kiminami, 2011; Sandi, 2019; Wahyono, 2019), this study aims at proposing a conceptual model on the process for managing product innovation for enhancing SMEs’ marketing performance. Therefore, a study on innovation capability is justified; the model developed for this study was tested on SMEs in Indonesia’s creative industry.

## 2. Theoretical foundation and model development

### 2.1 Socio-aesthetic value accentuation and the service-dominant logic perspective

Our socio-aesthetic value accentuation (SAVA) study is rooted in the SDL theory, with a focus on value creation, co-creation and value delivery for target markets and potential markets (Evans, 2016; Lagrosen and Grundén, 2014; Lusch *et al.*, 2007). Marketing tasks are

undertaken to create expected value in changing market conditions and follow the patterns of customer needs, especially when the consumer desires a change very quickly and unpredictably. Creating well-designed values is one of the company's key concerns to ensure its sustainability (Vargo *et al.*, 2008). As argued by Adner and Kapoor (2010), a value-creation process depends on the innovation ecosystem in the organisation. A full-support innovation ecosystem will undoubtedly facilitate the value-design and creation process. A good innovation ecosystem in an organisation provokes the ideation and implementation of innovation for its target market. To produce value as a strategic goal, a company with such an innovation ecosystem would exploit all strategic factors such as personal, socio-cultural and service-environmental resources (Bruce *et al.*, 2019). At least two directions can be taken in making value content for a company, with services being hard value or soft value (Auh, 2005). If the hard value direction is chosen, then the value will appear as a tangible product with specifications that are easily recognised. If a soft value direction is chosen, the value may be created in the form of a series of intangible elements that provide a unique sensory feeling for leveraging a likeliness.

In this discussion, we refer to Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) basic thinking on the "symbolic, hedonic and aesthetic nature of consumption" as a trigger for the flow of fantasies, feelings and fun that are a part of the experience of consuming something. A potential consumer's intangible-value experience may provide them with fantasies, feelings and pleasures that become a memory of value or long-term consumption memory. Values may be created that are iconic (Pearce *et al.*, 2015) or aesthetic and have long-term consumption-memory potential. The more iconic a product value, the higher the potential for building a consumption memory. Experiencing the aesthetic value of being attractive and good looking can lead to a positive emotion and the creation of a consumption memory (Shin, 2012). Looking, sensing and feeling are a part of the process of forming a good memory of value, also known as the consumption value. Companies may depend on their creativity and combine various values it produces. If the created values are well-positioned in the consumer's mind, then a consumption memory is created.

Once a product is created and ready to enter the market, one of the marketing tasks is to convey the value to its consumer. In Åkesson *et al.*'s (2016) study, the authors examined how value propositions are carried out. The value proposition can be understood as a process of delivering value in three strategic directions: cognitive, practical and discursive. The cognitive direction includes the company's effort to make consumers grasp the created value. A practical approach involves sales people using their experiences to determine the best way to deliver that value proposition, including the tacit knowledge they have to convey the value better. The discursive approach involves the marketing department using linguistic skills to articulate the product's benefits and advantages. In articulating these values, the marketing task is to communicate the value. Töytäri and Rajala (2015) found that the value proposition must highlight customer net benefits or the value provided will not attract consumers. However, because there are so many alternative values in a competitive market, only companies that intensively accentuate their value will have the potential to attract the consumer's attention. As a value-delivering activity (Lusch *et al.*, 2007), marketing is significant if the value is accentuated, differentiated and appropriately reiterated by the company's marketing organisation. Therefore, we postulate the SAVA concept that accentuates any social and aesthetic value attached to a specific product in a particular social and environmental context to leverage marketing performance. The question is how that value should be accentuated. As a part of value creation and delivery process, value could be accentuated through emphasising value cognition in the form of accentuating the unique character attached to a product, affirming that a value will satisfy

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consumer's wants and discursively affirming the value through accentuating local wisdom attributed to a product.

### *2.2 The influence of product-innovation capability on socio-aesthetic value accentuation*

As demonstrated in many studies on Indonesian SMEs, one of the failure factors of marketing performance in the lack of power of innovation process and innovation quality (Tambunan, 2019; Taneo Stefanus Yufra *et al.*, 2020; Wahyono and Hutahayan, 2020; Wahyono, 2019) resulted in a lower effectiveness of innovation capability in enhancing marketing performance. Tambunan (2019) mentioned that the lack of access to capital, business information, technology and skilled workers is known as constraints for SMEs' innovation and growth; therefore, a re-orientation to manage the innovation capability is necessary. Taneo Stefanus Yufra *et al.* (2020) found the necessity for increasing business competitiveness through innovation for improving the product quality. The innovation process should be reorganised and reoriented to be effectively affecting marketing performance (Wahyono and Hutahayan, 2020) and as a strategic instrument for enhancing competitiveness (Wahyono, 2019). Therefore, the innovation process and quality could be directed to the value creation and co-creation processes with accentuation to consumers' specific value.

A value may be well accentuated if a company has developed and continues to develop its innovation capabilities. According to Stezano and Espinoza (2019), innovation capability can be developed through the organisational routines of research and development practices. Innovation capability may be mirrored in the company's success in developing new patents and products and creating new values. Shuradze *et al.* (2017) found that innovation capability may be seen in the ability to configure a value beyond its existing contents or any effort to experiment and invent new products or services. Innovation may be proved in a completely new product or service becoming available. Other researchers such as O'Cass and Sok (2013) saw product-innovation capabilities as including activities, routines, business processes and behaviours for exploiting the most up-to-date technology available; developing new products; extending the firm's product range; improving existing product quality; and improving production flexibility. Innovation capability could also be understood as a developmental capability (Oliveira *et al.*, 2019), to accentuate values that are necessary to highlight to attract consumer attraction, which is a critical factor for increasing innovation performance. Innovation capability as an organisational routine to create new products and services (Stezano and Espinoza, 2019) may be understood as an effort to find new venues to revitalise saturated demand and the need for market rejuvenation (Shuradze *et al.*, 2017). Innovation capability can be understood as the ability to create new ways to fill market needs (O'Cass and Sok, 2013). For innovation capability to improve marketing performance, this capability should be seen as an instrument to strengthen the SAVA of the product or service produced. Only if the company can accentuate the value they have created, will they improve their marketing performance. We thus propose our first hypothesis:

*H1. Product-innovation capability has a positive influence on SAVA.*

Sales performance is one of the most crucial measures for SMEs' marketing performance. Lack of macro-marketing information in the SME environment leads companies to prioritise sales performance as a critical measure of marketing performance. Accentuating social values through the creation of socio-aesthetic value will be a magnetic force that is attractive in the market and leverages marketing performance. Sales-based performance can be measured with reference to various accomplishments, such as adding new customers and

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increasing sales and sales revenue (Singh *et al.*, 2017). Conducting a SAVA will leverage sales performance. One of the critical points of an SDL is that performance is determined by the strength of the value generated and how well that value is positioned (Vargo and Lusch, 2017; Vargo *et al.*, 2008). Technically, this involves a process of articulating value by finding various ways to accentuate that value. A well-articulated and accentuated value will be attractive to the market, and our logic is therefore that such a value will have a substantial impact in improving sales performance. Our study refers to the basic view of Choi and Reid (2016), Chowdhury *et al.* (2014) and Zagata (2012). That is, if innovation capabilities are used to articulate values, such as by accentuating unique ethnographic attributes, configuring a series of distinctive local wisdom characters and emphasising unique and distinctive motifs to be physically attractive in appearance, those values will become a good market attraction and increase the company's selling power. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H2.* SAVA has a positive influence on sales performance.

In explaining the non-significant effect of innovation capability on marketing performance, we emphasise that innovation capability is an input resource. As such, it should serve as a driver of good marketing processes, such as accentuating the value. In the SDL theory, value creation that accentuates, for example, authenticity and uniqueness with a touch of local culture will boost sales performance (Vargo and Lusch, 2017). Innovation capability must, therefore, be a prerequisite for value creation that is capable of accentuating value. Studies by Shuradze *et al.* (2017) and Bruce *et al.* (2019) revealed that an effective accentuation of values will leverage the market attractiveness of a product. This can be explained by several logics. Firstly, in a competitive market, only those who are able to articulate the value of their products with strong and distinctive accents are able to appear as the consumer's choice priority. Secondly, in a dynamic market, a differentiated socio-aesthetic value can differentiate one product from another. The value accentuation thus becomes the driver for highlighting this differentiated value (Wang and Li, 2017; Schnurr *et al.*, 2016). Hence, a mediating hypothesis is proposed:

*H3.* SAVA mediates the influence of product-innovation capability on sales performance.

### *2.3 Product-innovation capability, positional advantage and sales performance*

As posited by Jogaratnam (2017), a firm's portfolio of resources and capabilities may determine its positional advantage in executing a marketing strategy that acts as a stepping-stone for enhancing the performance. The seminal work of Day and Wensley (1988) on competitive superiority introduced the strategic importance of resources and capability in differentiating a product or service by engaging in value-adding activities that lead to a superior value for the consumer. According to SDL, a company is successful because of its ability to create a value that has certain uniqueness for its target market. A variety of values, including innovation and novelty, can be generated by the differentiation process a company develops.

A positional advantage is critical in enhancing sales performance. Such an advantage can be generated by innovation; success in innovating a product may result in a series of products being better than those offered by competitors. A positional advantage is any dominance a company creates and results from the excellent deployment of the company's marketing instruments. Matear *et al.* (2004) found that positional advantage may arise as a consequence of innovation capability. This capability may lead to the company's products

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or services being of premium versus basic quality, having innovative versus imitative product values and differentiated versus undifferentiated features. For [Carbonell and Rodriguez \(2006\)](#), success in innovation may result in a positional advantage that acts as a stepping-stone to achieving marketing and sales performance. Thus, a positional advantage is rooted in innovating a product in the sense of generating any authentic and aesthetic value-oriented configuration of product features through innovation ambidexterity ([Hughes et al., 2010](#)).

Positional advantage may be either value-based or delivery-based ([Morgan, 2012](#)). As a value-based superiority, a positional advantage is the relative superior value attached to an innovative product, such as innovative product features, quality or appearance. Delivery-based superiority is an advantage in the product's availability and accessibility ([Martin et al., 2017](#); [Morgan, 2012](#)) and maintaining a strategic role in attracting customers to a distribution channel. Therefore, and in line with the SDL perspective, an SME in a competitive market will have a strong basis for positional advantage by pursuing a combination of aesthetic value configuration and accentuation and product-innovation capability. Innovation, as one of the most influential marketing capabilities, is a strategic instrument for sustaining a positional advantage to enhance superior performance ([Martin et al., 2017](#)). Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H4.* Innovation capability has a positive influence on positional advantage.

*H5.* Positional advantage has a positive influence on sales performance.

#### *2.4 Socio-aesthetic value accentuation, positional advantage and sales-network power*

SAVA is carried out to emphasise the resulting value to the distribution channel and the final consumer. A company whose product is well accentuated can highlight that the value is more likely to sell that product to retailers in the distribution channel. As underlined in the study of [Fouad et al. \(2018\)](#), benefits of the innovation process, such as new and unique benefits with a value proposition that is superior to that of competitors, are a good instrument for enhancing the competitive advantage from the customer perspective. Whether innovation capability is recognised as a front-end (creativity) skill or back-end (delivery) skill ([Briganti and Samson, 2019](#)), it leverages value accentuation for customers and articulates a way to achieve a positional advantage. A front-end skill in the form of creativity such as in the cultural value, easily identified in an embroidery product, may make that product one that is prioritised by a customer over that of a competitor ([Wang and Yao, 2016](#)) and create a positional advantage. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H6.* SAVA has a positive influence on positional advantage.

The sales network has always been one of the determinants of the smooth flow of goods from the manufacturer to the end-user or consumer. In a competitive market, a company will only sell products and services in a sales network if the activity has a good economic benefit. In this framework, a company's success is very much dependent on the effectiveness of its sales network. In studying the power of sales networks, [Smith \(2015\)](#) and [Zhang and Wu \(2017\)](#) found that a sales network's power is its ability to push a product to achieve good performance. This would include a network's capacity to speed the delivery of the product to the customer, the degree of attractiveness to business partners that the company is in the network and the comparative advantage of the product for business partners in the network.

To obtain this economic benefit, a distribution-network member will ascertain whether the product has the power to attract consumers, as they will purchase the product for further distribution rather than holding it on consignment. The distribution-network members will determine whether products have high saleability or not. This selling power will affect the sales-turnover rate. For SMEs, high sales turnover is essential because the investments made from limited funds need to provide a fast return. By attracting consumers, a product can gain the company positional advantage. The greater the positional advantage, the more likely the product is to become the consumer's choice. As previously discussed, a product's positional advantages may take the form of superiority in product attributes, delivery or saleability, which is logically one of the factors that are attractive for markets and consumers. What is attractive to consumers, of course, becomes the basis for considering the appropriate distribution channels. The following hypothesis is proposed:

*H7. SAVA has a positive influence on sales-network power.*

If the company has a positional advantage – a superiority to the rest of the market players – such superiority may be in the form of innovative product features, quality, appearance, availability and accessibility (Martin *et al.*, 2017; Morgan, 2012). In that case, those superiorities will attract sales-network partners to cooperate in the sales process. Zhang and Wu (2017) found that sales-network power may be mirrored in the ability to push a product by leveraging good marketing and sales performance. In conceptualising positional advantage, Day and Wensley (1988) showed that the basis of positional advantages is superior customer value, which is only produced if the company can show superior value in its core and extended values. Creating superior customer value is the basis for the creation of distributional rent in distribution channels. It is a motive for companies to work hard and persistently increase the marketability of the products they sell. In practice, this distributional rent might be superior in saleability or perceived relational benefits associated with a company that produces a specific product (Iršič, 2017). Indirectly, distributional rents may arise from the superiority of sales attributes and delivery service. The distributional rent generated by a positive advantage will make the product attractive to customers in the distribution network by making it easier to obtain financial benefits from selling the product. We thus posit the following hypothesis:

*H8. Positional advantage has a positive influence on sales network power.*

If a company's product has various advantages that facilitate the distribution of the product into a wider market and to a broader target group, then the availability of the product may act as the basis for attracting consumers and creating sales. Our logic is that to make distribution channels more able to market their products, companies must be a source for performance. The power of the sales network may manifest in several ways (Zhang and Wu, 2017; Smith, 1997), such as by speeding up delivery services, enhancing the customer value and the ability to attract further customers. The sales network may be a source of power if there is a mutual inter-dependence between the company and the members of its distribution network. The higher the potential of a source of power, the higher the sales-network power. Therefore, we posit that sales-network power consists of a portfolio of distribution power provided by the company to its sales network. If the sales-network members enjoy the benefit of various powers enabled by the company, it will become a source of improved marketing performance. We thus posit the following hypothesis:

*H9. Sales-network power has a positive influence on sales performance.*

Based on the literature review and the logic of the proposed hypotheses, the conceptual research model is presented in [Figure 1](#).

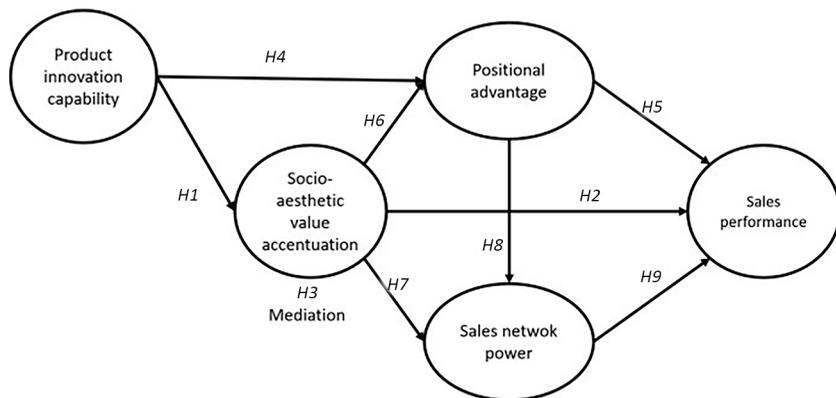
Our model postulates that product-innovation capability, as a strategic input will only increase sales performance. Moreover, this ability can increase the accentuation of socio-aesthetic values. A well-defined aesthetic value will drive positional excellence and increase the company's sales-network power as the basis for increasing sales performance.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Sample design and data collection

We chose SMEs in Indonesia to test our proposed model for several reasons. Firstly, SMEs are very dynamic companies because these are not bound by strict organisational protocols, so these are flexible in doing business. Secondly, the SMEs identified are successful in the market; these have sustained their business for 10 years in a competitive market. The SMEs struggle as a result of the flooding of the market with imported, cheap and attractive handicrafts from China. There is a two-fold reaction to the flooding of the market with imported products. Firstly, the market for locally made traditional handicraft and souvenir products is eroded. Simultaneously, cheap and attractive handicraft and souvenir products from China provide a way for local entrepreneurs to learn, be inspired and develop attractive and cheap products.

To determine the sample size, we refer to [Hair \*et al.\*'s \(2010\)](#) study that states, for a structural equation model (SEM) with five or fewer construct, the minimum sample size should be 100. To achieve the statistical power level of 0.95, we adopted the Soper sample size calculator for structural equation modelling ([Soper, 2006](#)), based on five latent variables with 16 observed variables and probability level of 0.05, resulted in a minimum sample size of 173. As our real sample size of 200 is above the minimum calculated sample size of 247–300 ([Hair \*et al.\*, 2010](#); [Soper, 2006](#)), the adequacy level is reached. The current research is based on a convenience sample of the 200 owners of SMEs we invited to participate in our study. Respondents were SME owner–managers, and it was assumed that they were the rightful representatives of the company. Data was collected through a structured interview process. We interviewed the SMEs' owner–managers using a questionnaire and then scored their responses directly to the questionnaire answer sheet. Of those surveyed, 102 of their SMEs were in the handicraft industry and 98 in the fashion industry. The handicraft industry and the fashion industry are sub-sectors of Indonesia's creative industry.



**Figure 1.**  
Structural model

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Handicraft SMEs produce artistically valued products from wood, metal and textiles. These include wooden wall decorations and furniture, lanterns, various furniture items made of synthetic rattan and decorative products made of brass and the like. Fashion products sold have expressive and aesthetic functions and include artistically embroidered clothing, footwear and accessories, such as batik and artistic knitted bags made of coconut shell waste. Of a sample of 200 owner–managers, 22 respondents were excluded during data processing due to the invariability of the questionnaire items’ responses – the final data comprises 178 SME owner–managers, which is still above minimum sample sized required for testing the hypotheses.

### 3.2 Development of measures

To obtain interval data, we developed a research scale using the anchoring technique proposed by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). To easily capture the respondent’s opinion on our research, a bipolar numerical scale was developed, which anchored responses between the Numbers 1 and 10. Product-innovation capability was measured using a three-item scale based on O’Cass and Sok (2013) and Liu *et al.* (2017). SAVA is a newly developed four-item scale inspired by Zagata (2012), Chowdhury *et al.* (2014) and Choi and Reid (2016). The scale to measure sales-network power was adapted from Smith (1997) and Zhang and Wu (2017). The positional advantage scale used in this study was adapted from the scale in Iršič (2017) and Martin *et al.* (2017). Finally, the sale-performance scale we used comprises three scale items developed from the scale in Singh *et al.* (2017). The final scaled items are presented in Table 1.

### 3.3 Validity and reliability of the measurement scales

A confirmatory factor analysis was carried out to evaluate the validity and reliability of the indicators used to measure the constructs used. We found the distribution of our data to extend beyond the criteria for normality. With reference to the formula for handling non-normal data in Tabachnick and Fidell (2012), we adopted the negative skewness solution:  $X_n = 1/(k-X)$ . This solution resulted in a normalised data distribution. With reference to Arbuckle (2016) and Tabachnick and Fidell (2012), we adopted the average variance extracted (AVE) measure of convergent validity to evaluate the degree of validity of the items used in the construct. The resultant AVE is above the threshold point of 0.50: 0.67 for product-innovation capability, 0.65 for SAVA, 0.63 for product advantage, 0.69 for sales-network power and 0.60 for sales performance. All items had standardised factorial loads above 0.60 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). To measure the reliability of our construct, we adopted a construct reliability index (Arbuckle, 2016) with a cut-off value  $\geq 0.70$ , resulting in a magnitude of 0.86 for product-innovation capability, 0.88 for socio-aesthetical value accentuation, 0.83 for product advantage, 0.87 for sales network power and 0.82 for sales performance as presented in Table 1.

## 4. Statistical analysis and results

The AMOS 23.0 SEM is used to test the proposed model to obtain our model and hypotheses testing result. We selected the SEM technique in testing our model and hypotheses for several reasons. Firstly, as Nachtigall *et al.* (2003) mentioned, an SEM works with several equations simultaneously, where the same variable may represent a predictor (regressor) in one equation and a criterion (regressand) in another equation which is appropriate for our proposed model. Secondly, as emphasised by Tarka (2018), “SEM allows researchers to answer a set of interrelated questions in a single, systematic, and comprehensive analysis by modelling the relationships among multiple independent and dependent theoretical

**Table 1.**  
Measurement of  
validity and  
reliability of the  
construct

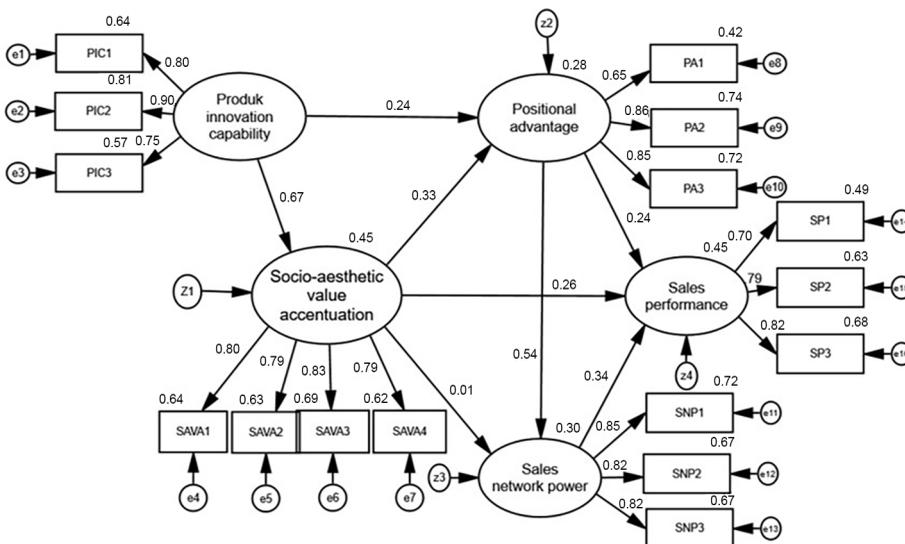
Variable and indicator	Scales item	Reference	Std. loading	Critical ratio $\geq 1.96$	CV- AVE $\geq 0.50$	CV- CRI $0.70$
Product-innovation capability						
PIC1	Exploiting the most-up-to-date technology available for product development	O' Cass and Sok, 2013; Liu <i>et al.</i> , 2017	0.80	11.89*	0.67	0.86
PIC2	Extending the firm's product range		0.90	11.89*		
PIC3	The ability to provide a variety of new products rapidly		0.76	11.85		
Socio-aesthetical value accentuation						
SAVA1	Our product accentuates the unique ethnographic attributes.	<i>New developed scale inspired by the study of Choi and Reid, 2016;</i>	0.82	7.68*	0.65	0.88
SAVA2	Our product is mirroring the unique character of local wisdom.	Chowdhury <i>et al.</i> , 2014; and Zagata, 2012	0.83	7.68*		
SAVA3	Our product is designed with a differentiated motif.		0.86	6.98		
SAVA4	The aesthetical appearance of our product is very appealing.		0.70	6.98		
Positional advantage						
PA1	Superior in crafted product	<i>Adapted from Irsić (2017) and Martin et al. (2017)</i>	0.85	12.02*	0.63	0.83
PA2	Superior in variety of crafted product		0.86	12.02*		
PA3	Superior in product saleability		0.65	8.95		
Sales-network power						
SNP1	We are always good at the speed of delivery to our customer.	<i>Adapted from Smith, 1997; Zhang and Wu, 2017</i>	0.82	11.85*	0.69	0.87
SNP2	We are more attractive for our business partners in our business network.		0.84	11.85*		
SNP3	We are both dependent on the other to be successful.		0.83	12.03		
Sales performance						
SP1	We generate high level of sales revenue.	<i>Adapted from Singh et al., 2017</i>	0.70	9.22*	0.60	0.82
SP2	Our sales is growing in these 3 years.		0.79	9.22*		
SP3	We exceed our stated sales target.		0.82	9.06		

**Notes:** \*CFA was run twice, with interchange indicators as a constraint in the model to get the critical ratio CV-AVE: Convergent validity – average variance extracted; CR: Construct reliability index

constructs simultaneously.” Thirdly, the advantage of using an SEM in the analysis is to test the mediational process in a simultaneous way (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2012).

To test the proposed model and hypotheses, statistical analysis was conducted in a three-step process. Firstly, the goodness-of-fit statistics for the proposed model were evaluated. The results were a  $\chi^2 = 154.070$  with a significance level of 0.000. This result remains beyond the minimum level of  $\geq 0.05$  required for statistical significance. According to Arbuckle (2016) and Tabachnick and Fidell (2012), chi-square significance is sensitive to the sample size, and a non-statistical measure of the goodness-of-fit test can be used for small samples. The evaluation of goodness-of-fit statistics is found good and acceptable indicators. The indices were: GFI = 0.904, NFI = 0.907, TLI = 0.953, CFI = 0.962 and RMSEA = 0.058. This model evaluation procedure resulted in the model’s acceptance, and further analysis was conducted to test our proposed hypotheses (Figure 2).

As Table 2 shows, all hypotheses were accepted, except H7 on the effect of SAVA on sales-network power, which was rejected. Finally, we conducted mediation-hypothesis testing. We adopted the four-step testing procedure from Baron and Kenny (1986). This process resulted in a significant regression weight of 0.438 for the independent variable to the dependent variable in the first step. Running the second step for regression of the independent variable to the mediating variable resulted in a significant regression weight of 0.671. The third step, the regression of the mediation variable to the dependent variable, resulted in a significant regression weight of 0.476. The final step of re-running the independent variable’s regression to the dependent variable with an insertion of the mediation variable resulted in the regression weight decreasing from 0.438 (significant) to 0.223 (insignificant) at 5%. We should be more cautious in accepting the full mediation conclusion because of the reduction in regression weight with a significant probability of 6.1%, which is significant if the cut-off value is 10%. As this level is below 10%, it is better to conclude that partial mediation is obtained.



**Note:** Model test: Chi-square = 154.070; significance = 0.000; DF = 96; GFI = 0.907; NFI = 0.907; TLI = 0.953; CFI = 0.962; RMSEA = 0.58

**Figure 2.**  
Conceptual research  
model

Hypothesis	Std. estimates	Estimate	Std. error	Critical ratio	<i>p</i>	Conclusion
<i>H1</i> : Product-innovation capability → Socio-aesthetical value accentuation	0.673	0.646	0.084	7.693	***	Accepted
<i>H2</i> : Socio-aesthetical value accentuation → Sales performance	0.263	0.111	0.037	2.953	0.003	Accepted
<i>H3</i> : Socio aesthetical value accentuation mediates the influence of product-innovation capability on sales performance.	We follow the Baron and Kenny procedure (1986) in a four-process calculation in P1 to P4, resulting in a partial mediation conclusion.					Accepted
Process (P) 1: IV → DV	0.438	0.183	0.038	4.758	***	Accepted
P2: IV → MV	0.671	0.643	0.084	7.647	***	Accepted
P3: MV → DP	0.476	0.213	0.042	5.088	***	Accepted
P4: IV → DV	0.223	0.093	0.050	1.870	0.061	Rejected
<i>H4</i> : Product-innovation capability → Positional advantage	0.243	0.264	0.124	2.133	0.033	Accepted
<i>H5</i> : Positional advantage → Sales performance	0.245	0.091	0.039	2.313	0.021	Accepted
<i>H6</i> : SAVA → Positional advantage	0.331	0.375	0.131	2.863	0.004	Accepted
<i>H7</i> : SAVA → sales-network power	0.011	0.013	0.110	0.123	0.902	Rejected
<i>H8</i> : Positional advantage → Sales network power	0.541	0.577	0.105	5.473	***	Accepted
<i>H9</i> : Sales-network power to Sales performance	0.345	0.120	0.033	3.594	***	Accepted
Total effect size:						
Product-innovation capability → Sales performance						0.380
Socio-aesthetical value accentuation → Sales performance						0.409
Positional advantage → Sales performance						0.431
Sales-network power → Sales performance						0.345

**Table 2.**  
Hypothesis testing

Evaluation of strategic paths to improve marketing performance is analysed by comparing the total effect of variables in this structural model. The total effect of product-innovation capability is 0.380, which is smaller than the total effect of SAVA's (0.409), positional advantage (0.431) and sales-network power (0.345). This figure indicates the importance of inserting the SAVA for bridging the influence of product-innovation capability on sales performance. The total effect size denotes the importance of positional advantage and sales-network power as a strategic instrument to support SAVA in enhancing sales performance.

## 5. Discussion, conclusions, implications, limitations and future research directions

### 5.1 Discussion and conclusions

To the best of our knowledge, the extant literature has not built and confirmed a model based on the strategic relationship between SAVA-related positional advantage and sales-network power to bridge innovation capability and enhance sales performance. The acceptance and rejection of the proposed hypotheses provide conclusions on several strategic pathways to enhance sales performance. The first pathway moves from innovation capability to SAVA to sales performance. Innovation capability should be exploited to accentuate the socio-aesthetic value inherent in the product to be offered. Hence, innovation capability is an essential strategic input. However, if this input cannot drive the accentuation of value from consumers' perspective in a competitive market, then a sales increase may not happen. The current study confirms the concept of value proposition in

SDL (Vargo and Lusch, 2017), in that value must be not only created but also well-articulated and transmitted to consumers. A marketing strategy will only be effective if the product's created value is appropriately articulated and accentuated. Focussed and continuous accentuation will help create, improve and sustain marketing performance, especially sales performance at the SME level in Indonesia.

Secondly, the next effective strategy pathway goes from innovation capability to SAVA to positional advantage to sales performance. The SAVA based on innovation capability should be the basis for building a positional advantage in a competitive market. If the positional advantage is achieved, then it is logical to expect an increase in sales performance; this means that innovation must be the basis on which companies establish positional advantages that can be leveraged by accentuating its product's socio-aesthetic values. In reality, no company is free from competition. Therefore, companies must invest in marketing to increase their positional advantage as a stepping-stone for enhancing sales performance. For SMEs, developing positional advantages is an absolute requirement; without a positional advantage, the company will not be effective in improving marketing performance, especially sales performance.

Our study confirms a third strategic pathway from product innovation to positional advantage to sales-network power and sales performance. This study proves that good product-innovation capabilities should support positional advantage and determine marketing success in a competitive dynamic. We argue that positional advantage is leveraged by success in exploiting technology for rapidly developing and extending a product range and configuring product attributes in a novel setting (Liu *et al.*, 2017; O'Cass and Sok, 2013). The marketing strategy is fluid in a competitive marketplace unless the company sustains its positional advantage in attracting distribution-channel members, which then determines sales performance.

The rejection of the hypothesis on the influence of SAVA on sales-network power was not expected. However, this hypothesis's rejection brings new SME management insight: the key to a company's success is its ability to build a positional advantage in distribution channels. Therefore, our study findings demonstrate that accentuating or emphasising the product value is not always beneficial and useful in enhancing distributional power. By contrast, sales-network members only consider it beneficial to work together to spread the products into the marketplace when a company has succeeded in achieving a full positional advantage. Our findings demonstrate that sales-network power will be more substantial if sales management is driven by a positional advantage that is leveraged by innovating and accentuating the value generated by the product or service. Strong sales-network power is, of course, a distributional asset that boosts performance.

### 5.2 Research implications

This research's findings contribute to knowledge on the theoretical implications of an SDL application in management for SMEs. The first implication is that the concept of value creation and value co-creation rooted in Vargo and Lusch (2017) strengthens the notion that innovation capability is the primary capital for value creation that an SME should have. Our findings show that innovation, which is usually at the core of large company competition through value co-creation, could be applied in SME management in the form of a value-accentuation process. The SDL concept contributes a particular management disposition to SMEs to continue innovating, even if on a simple scale. As long as these are able to provide distinctive value to the customer as a result of the co-creation process, value accentuation, as a part of value articulation, can be the key to success. Value delivery can be understood as a process of balancing the SAVA process, positional advantage and sales-network power to

strengthen the service delivery process. This is a concrete answer to how SMEs adopt the SDL philosophy for improving performance.

Two main managerial insights follow from these research findings. Considering the magnitude of the structural path's total effect confirmed by this research model, two key factors to improve sales performance are identified, namely, positional advantage and SAVA. As the highest total effect on sales performance is the positional advantage, the implication for SMEs' strategy development is to enhance and echo the positional advantage. SMEs may choose to boost the positional advantage by echoing the crafted products' superiority through promotion activities. The company may be resonating the advantages of product variety when they encounter with customer and consumer. The company may also echo the advantage of product saleability that the product becomes more profitable for customers who will detail the product or the end consumer who will use it.

Moreover, this study's findings suggest that enhancing the strength of SAVA is one of the essential managerial directions for SMEs. Value accentuation may be boosted from the company's perspective by highlighting the innovative value and, more importantly, from the consumer's point of view, by providing a product that meets the sought-after value. The company should continuously emphasise programs to accentuate Indonesian unique ethnographic attributes' characteristics, strengthening the local wisdom elements used in products such as images with symbols of Indonesian social life. The strength of SAVA can be implemented by accentuating differentiated motifs that exist in the variety of products they crafted. It is also essential to accentuate the authenticity of the product's aesthetical appearance in the promotion program or the selling display.

Furthermore, product-innovation capability is an essential asset that SME entrepreneurs should develop and sustain. The consequence of competitive dynamics is that the existing innovativeness may be quickly eroded, as most of the Indonesian SMEs are lacking innovation capability. The company should continuously invest in enhancing its innovation capability. Finally, sales-network power should be continually developed and maintained by providing marketing support to the sales network to spread and promote the product. It is urgent to strengthen the company's distributional power by continuously enhancing the positional advantage.

### *5.3 Research limitations and future research*

The rejection of the hypothesis regarding the effect of SAVA on sales-network power provides rooms for further research. Further research could be directed at explaining how to manage the SAVA process to increase distributional power. The SAVA study presented in this paper is preliminary; further developments such as dimensionalisation of the SAVA construct as an instrument in a soft-marketing strategy for improving marketing performance. This study covers only a sample frame of Indonesian SMEs; therefore, this SAVA concept lacks generalisation power to enhance sales and marketing performance. The SAVA study's replication opens up research venues to achieve a broader generalisation.

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