



## **Development Of Optimization Strategies For MSMEs' Competitive Advantages In The Digital Era**

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### **Abstract**

Maximizing digitalization is essential for MSMEs to thrive, requiring strategies that align with their business models. The digital era brings challenges, especially rising competition, necessitating precise approaches to sustain competitiveness. During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, Yeyadana Store adapted by adopting the 7P Marketing Mix, upgrading technology, and optimizing SEO content, which transformed its operations. MSMEs must adopt similar strategies to stay competitive and meet evolving customer expectations. This study examines factors affecting MSME competitiveness in Palu and suggests optimization strategies to support growth in the digital era. Employing a mixed-method approach, it begins with quantitative data collection and analysis, followed by qualitative validation. Findings reveal that only 36% of MSMEs in Palu use digital marketing, while 64% depend on traditional methods, emphasizing the need for wider digital adoption. Key strategies proposed include product and service development, customer data analysis, digital skill enhancement, social media marketing, and strategic partnerships.

**Keywords:** Digital, Competitive Advantage, Optimization, Strategy, MSMEs.

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### **Introduction**

MSME is an acronym for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises. According to Law No. 20 of 2008 on Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises, MSMEs are productive economic businesses owned by individuals or business entities that meet the criteria for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (Musaropah et al. 2019). MSME players are currently one of the pillars supporting the local economy. The growth of MSMEs has increased due to the government's efforts to accelerate the people's economy (Putra and Sajida 2023). However, competition has become more Based on a report by the Ministry of Cooperatives and Small and Medium Enterprises of the Republic of Indonesia (Admin 2021), MSMEs constitute the largest sector in generating

employment opportunities. In this country, MSMEs provide over 97% of employment across all business sectors, making a significant contribution to reducing unemployment.

The Ministry of Communication and Information Technology of the Republic of Indonesia stated in 2020 that utilizing e-commerce for MSME product marketing expands market access, especially through e-commerce platforms and social media, thereby opening opportunities for MSMEs to reach broader markets both nationally and internationally. Leveraging digital platforms can increase sales volumes, breaking geographical boundaries.

The digital era is inevitable. Marketing expert Yuswohadi has revealed that to survive, MSME players must maximize the benefits of digital development (Triwijayati 2023). Innovation plays a vital role in giving MSMEs a competitive edge. By using digital technology, MSME players can enhance operational efficiency, create unique and attractive products for consumers, and improve customer service quality (Fauzi and Sheng 2023; Rahman et al. 2021). Technology-based service quality influences customer satisfaction, which directly impacts customer loyalty to MSME products and services (Bala and Verma 2019).

To thrive in the digital era, specific skills are required to remain competitive against both local and global competitors. The ability of MSME players to face these challenges can be measured by internal and external factors they manage to leverage. One way for organizations or MSME players to succeed is by developing unique capabilities and fostering solid collaboration to drive innovation and compete effectively in the digital age (Umam and Mafruhah 2022).

E-commerce utilization also plays a critical role for MSME players. Data captured by e-commerce platforms can be used for decision-making and business innovation development. To enhance their competitiveness, MSME players should collaborate with fellow MSMEs and large companies, prioritize short-term strategies, and modify sales strategies by integrating technology into transaction processes (Ritter and Pedersen 2020).

This study explores in detail how MSME players develop effective and efficient strategies. With a better understanding of the competitive landscape and customer needs, MSME players in Palu City can be better prepared to face global and local challenges and take advantage of the growth opportunities offered by the digital era to strengthen their market position .

The research aims to understand how MSME players in Palu City utilize digital technology to strengthen their market competitiveness. Additionally, the study examines the various obstacles faced when implementing competitive strategies in the digital era, including resource constraints, technological skills, and other factors affecting strategy effectiveness. On the other hand, it also seeks to identify new opportunities emerging in the digital era and formulate dynamic strategies to enable MSMEs in Palu City to compete effectively in an ever-changing business environment.

MSME players in Palu City must navigate rapid digital transformation. Knowledge gaps impact the potential economic gains that local MSME players could achieve (Raysharie et al. 2023). Competition is increasingly fierce, especially with new competitors and consumer shifts to online platforms (Tidd and Bessant 2018). Customer satisfaction remains a key factor in maintaining and growing market share. This research urges the formulation of strategic guidelines to help local MSME players address these challenges and seize opportunities in the digital era by focusing on applicable technological solutions (Fauzi and Sheng 2023; Vidyanata et al. 2023).

In the continuously evolving digital era, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) face new challenges and opportunities to strengthen their competitive advantage (Huda 2024; Istifadah and Tjaraka 2021). Competitive advantage refers to an organization's ability to offer unique and valuable benefits to customers that are difficult for competitors to replicate (Barney 1991; Huda and Priyono 2017; Porter 1985). In the context of MSMEs, the adoption of digital technology can be a crucial factor in enhancing competitiveness, particularly through innovations in social media, e-commerce, and data analytics to bring products closer to consumers (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick 2019). Digitalization helps MSMEs improve product accessibility while

expanding market reach across various consumer segments (Kotler and Armstrong 2020). The importance of competitive advantage can be illustrated in the following table:

<b>As The Competitive Advantage Aspect</b>	<b>Explanation</b>	<b>Source</b>
Increasing Consumer Appeal	Competitive advantage makes MSMEs able to attract consumers by offering unique value, so that they are preferred over competitors.	Porter, M. E. (1985). <i>Competitive Advantage: Creating and Sustaining Superior Performance</i> .
Enhancing Customer Loyalty	Value-added products and services will increase customer satisfaction and loyalty, strengthening long-term relationships.	Kotler, P., & Armstrong, G. (2020). <i>Principles of Marketing</i> .
Expanding Market Share	Competitive advantage allows MSMEs to expand market share by providing value that competitors do not have.	Kementerian Koperasi dan UKM RI. (Tim Penulis 2021). <i>Laporan Tahunan Kinerja UMKM di Indonesia</i> .
Improving Business Sustainability	With strong competitiveness, MSMEs can survive in the long term and face various changes in market conditions.	Teece, D. J. (2018). <i>Business Models and Dynamic Capabilities</i> .
Enhancing Innovation Capability	Competitive advantage encourages MSMEs to continue to innovate and improve products or services according to market needs.	Rogers, E. M. (2003). <i>Diffusion of Innovations</i> .
Reducing Dependency on Low Prices	MSMEs with a competitive advantage can attract customers because of quality or innovation, not just low prices, increasing profits without undermining market prices.	Rangkuti, F. (2020). <i>Strategi Pemasaran dan Analisis SWOT: Mengidentifikasi Kekuatan dan Kelemahan UMKM di Indonesia</i> .
Strengthening Position in Local and Global Markets	Competitive advantage allows MSMEs to be more competitive in local markets and opens up opportunities for expansion into international markets.	Asian Development Bank (ADB). (2018). <i>The Role of SMEs in Indonesia's Economy</i> .

The digital transformation of MSMEs in Indonesia is affected by various factors, such as technology infrastructure, adoption rate, and limited financial resources and digital knowledge. Based on a McKinsey (2021) study, MSMEs that utilize digital platforms have the potential to grow 2-3 times faster than MSMEs that have not connected to digital platforms. This shows the importance of access to digital infrastructure and partnerships with technology companies in maintaining MSME competitiveness (McKinsey 2021). However, limitations in technology use are a challenge, especially for MSMEs in rural areas with limited internet access and lack of technical training.

According to the Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory, long-term competitive advantage can be achieved through the utilization of internal resources that are unique and difficult for competitors to replicate (Barney 1991). In MSMEs, these resources include local knowledge, specialized expertise and strong community networks. With digital technology, MSMEs can increase the value of these resources through more effective digital marketing and personalization (Teece 2018), allowing them to build customer loyalty through a more personalized shopping experience, especially through interactions on social media.

In addition, Dynamic Capability (DC) Theory is also relevant in analyzing the adaptability of MSMEs in the digital era. DC describes a firm's ability to adapt to business changes through rapid and flexible innovation (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997). MSMEs need to understand market trends, update products, and adapt services to digital technology. Tools such as data analytics and process automation help MSMEs adapt quickly and improve their competitiveness (Ritter & Pedersen, 2020).

Customer-centric marketing theory is also an important basis for MSME marketing strategies in the digital era. With easier access to data, MSMEs can better understand their customers' needs and preferences. According to Lemon and Verhoef (Lemon and Verhoef 2016), this approach allows MSMEs to create products and services that are relevant and tailored to market needs. Data from digital interactions such as social media or e-commerce help MSMEs conduct more accurate market segmentation to compete more effectively.

Innovation Diffusion Theory (Rogers 2003) highlights the importance of rapid technology adoption for MSMEs to remain competitive. Technologies such as e-commerce and digital payments drive the growth of MSMEs by expanding customer reach and improving operational efficiency. In the digital era, MSMEs that are able to innovate faster have the opportunity to maintain their competitive advantage, especially in reaching consumers in areas that are difficult to reach with traditional marketing methods (Lee, Hsieh, and Chen 2020).

The use of Social Media Marketing as an effective and cost-effective marketing tool is also an important strategy. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) state that social media allows MSMEs to build closer customer engagement through personalized interactions. By optimizing social media, MSMEs can increase brand visibility and build a loyal customer community, creating a distinct competitive advantage. Marketing strategies that prioritize creative content and added value help MSMEs stand out amidst the competition.

Innovation Diffusion theory (Rogers 2003) highlights the importance of rapid technology adoption for SMEs to remain competitive. Technology such as e-commerce and digital payments encourages SME growth by expanding customer reach and improving operational efficiency. In the digital age, SMEs who are able to innovate faster have the opportunity to maintain their competitive advantage, especially in reaching consumers in areas that are difficult to reach with traditional marketing methods (Lee et al. 2020).

The use of Social Media Marketing as an effective and cost-effective marketing tool is also an important strategy. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) stated that social media allows SMEs to build closer customer engagement through personal interaction. With social media optimization, SMEs can improve brand visibility and build a loyal customer community, creating different competitive advantages. Marketing strategies that prioritize creative content and value added help SMEs stand out amidst intense competition in the digital world. Follow important aspects of strategy, technology, innovation and collaboration.

<b>Aspects</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Optimization Strategy</b>	<b>Example of Implementation</b>
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Utilization of Technology	Adopt digital technology to improve operational efficiency and market access	Digitalized business processes, adoption of e-commerce platforms	SMEs use a marketplace to reach consumers outside the area at low cost
Market Understanding	Analyze consumer preferences and needs in depth	Analyze consumer behavior data through digital platforms	The use of analytics to understand consumer preferences in choosing products popular on the market
Product Innovation	Product and service development according to market trends and needs	Development of new products based on local needs	Culinary SMEs create new flavor variants that follow local market tastes or diet trends
Digital Capacity Development	Improve digital skills of SMEs to be able to compete in the digital age	Digital skills training, access to digital literacy	Government and private programs in providing digital training for improving competence of SMEs
Strategic Collaboration	Building a collaborative network with other business or large companies	Collaboration and synergy with large companies and fellow SMEs	SMEs fashion partners with logistics companies to accelerate the delivery process
Disruptive Innovation	Utilize innovations that are able to change market structure and give competitive edge	Adoption of new technologies, such as digital payments	Use of QR code for payments that facilitate transactions and increase convenience for consumers
Value Chain Optimization	Shorten supply chain to reduce costs and increase service speed	Supply Chain Integration, use of e-commerce platforms	SMEs agribusiness market directly to consumers without intermediaries at a more competitive price
Local Advantage	Utilize the uniqueness and local resources to create product differentiation	Local based products, branding that accentuates local value	SMEs craft produce products with local raw materials, such as traditional weaving fabric or bamboo woven

## Methods

The Mix approach will be used by the method of combining qualitative and quantitative combinations, in order to strengthen or confirm the results obtained. This will help researchers to obtain a more complete and in-depth picture of the phenomenon studied. The model mix methods used in this study are the approach of the explanatory include data and quantitative analysis in the first stage, and followed by collection and analysis or qualitative at the second stage, to strengthen the results of quantitative research conducted in the first stage of the population of this research sample are the participants of SMEs in the hammer city, based on the database of the hammer city that the number of Small Business 49090 and Medium Business 564. This research was conducted on MSME actors in hammer city based on 3 segmentation of profit income levels obtained by MSME actors over the past year; 1) Rp. 1.000.000,00; 2) Rp. 5.000.000,00; 3) Rp. 10.000.000,00

## **Result**

### **Carateristic Respondents**

The This study began with the determination of objectives and relevant variables, followed by obtaining permission for initial data collection from related institutions, namely the Kesbangpol Office of Palu City and the Department of Cooperatives and MSMEs. Initial data were gathered through interviews and direct observations with four informants, consisting of the Head of the MSME Division of Palu City and three MSME entrepreneurs with monthly incomes ranging from IDR 15 to 25 million who have thriving businesses. Subsequently, the researcher conducted additional interviews and distributed questionnaires to MSME entrepreneurs as supporting data. The study involved a sample of 50 MSME entrepreneurs selected based on the type of business and monthly income, which were categorized into three groups: IDR 1 million, IDR 5 million, and IDR 10 million per month. The data obtained through interviews, observations, and questionnaires were then organized and presented in table format to facilitate analysis and understanding.

### **Table 1**

#### **Carateristic Respondents**



Category	Frequency	Percent
< 5 Jt	13	26.0
5 Jt	9	18.0
≥ 10 Jt	28	56.0
Total	50	100.0

It is important to understand these characteristics so that the results of the research can be interpreted accurately and according to the population studied. Typically, these characteristics include factors such as demographics, social status, and economics, which play a role in grouping respondents and analyzing emerging response patterns. Here are the characteristics of respondents based on the category of business types used by researchers:

Table 2  
Business Category Based on KBLI

	Frequency	Percent
Other Agriculture Support Activities	1	2.0
Chicken Breeding & Raising Business	1	2.0
Car & Motorcycle Repairs Through Online Media	1	2.0
Snack Industry	5	10.0
Restorant	23	46.0
Clothing Retailing	3	6.0
Service	4	8.0
Building Construction Service	1	2.0
Courier Activity	1	2.0
Travel Agency	1	2.0
Salon Activity and Beauty Products	4	8.0
Other Health Practices Activities	1	2.0
Printing Activity	1	2.0
Activities of Kos-kosan Accommodation Providers	1	2.0
Entertainment Activities	1	2.0
Retail Merchants through media for a wide range of goods	1	2.0
Total	50	100.0

Table  
Test Results for Validity and Reliability

Digital Marketing Utilization Strategy	Frequency	Percent	Mean
Development of Marketing Strategies for MSMEs in the Digital Age	32	64.0	23.33
Development of Optimal MSME Marketing Strategies in the Digital Age	18	36.0	
Total	50	100.0	

The table above illustrates the frequency and percentage distribution related to the utilization of digital marketing strategies by MSMEs. Out of a

total of 50 respondents, 64% (32 respondents) indicated that the development of MSME marketing strategies in the digital era is still suboptimal. On the other hand, 36% (18 respondents) stated that the strategies they employ are already optimal. The average utilization of digital marketing strategies among all respondents was recorded at 23.33.

These findings indicate that the majority of MSMEs are still facing challenges in optimizing their digital marketing strategies, although a portion has successfully implemented them effectively. This data can serve as a reference for further identifying the factors influencing the success of digital marketing strategy implementation in the MSME sector.

**Discussion**

Findings Based on Digital Transformation Model Assessment - David L. Rogers 2016 :

Domain	Description	Implementation Strategic
Costumer	Develop methods to understand and engage customers using data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use social media to understand customer needs.</li> <li>• Building active communication through digital platforms</li> </ul>
Competition	Strive to adapt by collaborating within the digital ecosystem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build strategic partnerships with digital platforms.</li> <li>• Focus on customer feedback rather than competitors.</li> </ul>
Data	Make data the primary source for decision-making.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilize analytical tools.</li> <li>• Implement data-driven decision-making</li> <li>• Protect and secure customer data.</li> </ul>
Innovation	Leverage technology to create new products, services, or business models aligned with the digital era.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct small-scale and intensive experiments.</li> <li>• Use AI or IoT technology.</li> </ul>
Value	Focus on adding new value to the digital experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve customer experiences through omnichannel integration.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use digital platforms to expand market reach.</li> </ul>
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The research findings show that SMEs in Palu City that have adopted digital technology have experienced more significant growth compared to those still using traditional methods. The use of digital technology allows for a broader consumer reach and provides advantages that conventional strategies do not offer. However, the interest of SME actors in shifting to digital-based strategies and optimizing technology use is still relatively low, so many have not fully utilized the potential of digital technology to face competition.

To enhance the competitiveness of SMEs in the digital era, data shows that the restaurant sector has great potential, representing 46% of all businesses, indicating a high interest in the culinary industry. The use of digital technology has allowed SMEs to quickly recover after the Covid pandemic and improve competitiveness (Putra and Sajida 2023). Optimizing digital technology, such as online ordering systems and social media marketing, can further increase competitiveness in this sector. In addition, the snack food, services, and beauty sectors also have promising potential if optimized through e-commerce platforms and digital applications (Nurdianti et al. 2024). Furthermore, technology utilization enables resource efficiency and reduces waste generation. In other sectors with lower percentages, such as agriculture, construction, and boarding house accommodation, there are still opportunities for niche markets that require digitization. With strategies focused on technology use and digital marketing, SMEs can enhance.

MSMEs in Palu City, it can be concluded that to face competition in the digital era, it is necessary to develop strategies based on consumer needs. MSME players have a significant opportunity to grow in this fast-paced digital era. Based on the analyzed documents, there are various innovative strategies that can be implemented to enhance competitiveness and expand the market for MSMEs in Palu City, as follows:



## Conclusion

An effective business strategy requires a holistic approach that considers various essential aspects, such as product and service development, which serve as the foundation for creating added value for customers. Through innovation, quality enhancement, and customer data analysis, businesses can meet market demands, strengthen competitiveness, and maintain customer loyalty. Optimal data utilization enables companies to design more targeted and effective marketing strategies, especially in the digital era, which demands improved digital skills to maximize technology in operations and marketing.

Additionally, the integration of digital tools, analytics, and automation systems plays a vital role in enhancing efficiency and expanding market reach. Promotion through social media and collaboration with local influencers are also key strategies for building brand trust and accelerating business growth. Strategic partnerships and collaborations further strengthen networks, share resources, and foster mutually beneficial innovation. By strategically combining all these aspects, along with government regulatory support, companies can establish a solid foundation for sustainable growth and adapt to the dynamics of competition in the digital era.

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