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**From Likes to Profit: The Impact of Digital Marketing on the Economic Growth of the MSME Sector**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study explores the impact of digital marketing on the economic growth of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Indonesia. With the increasing prevalence of digital platforms, MSMEs have begun to utilize social media, e-commerce, and online advertising to reach wider audiences, enhance brand visibility, and boost revenue. The research employs a quantitative approach using surveys distributed to MSME owners across various sectors, analyzing the relationship between digital marketing practices and business performance. The findings indicate a strong positive correlation between digital marketing intensity and business growth, particularly in terms of customer acquisition, revenue generation, and market expansion. However, the study also reveals challenges such as limited digital skills, infrastructure disparities, and algorithm changes that hinder optimal results. The research suggests that for MSMEs to fully capitalize on digital marketing, consistent effort, strategic planning, and digital literacy enhancement are essential. This study contributes to the understanding of digital marketing's role in MSME development and offers recommendations for policy interventions and business strategies.*

**Keywords:** digital marketing, MSMEs, business growth, social media, e-commerce, customer acquisition

**INTRODUCTION**

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are a vital component of Indonesia's economic structure. They are widely recognized for their role in fostering inclusive economic growth, generating employment, reducing poverty, and contributing to the nation's gross domestic product (GDP). As of 2023, the Indonesian Ministry of Cooperatives and Small and Medium Enterprises reported that there are over 64.2 million MSMEs, contributing approximately 61.07% to Indonesia's GDP and employing about 97% of the national workforce. These figures highlight the critical role of MSMEs not only in economic stability but also in the socio-economic resilience of local communities, especially during periods of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The transformation brought by the digital era has dramatically reshaped the landscape of global commerce. The widespread adoption of digital technologies and the internet has led to a significant shift in consumer behavior, with people increasingly relying on digital platforms for shopping, product reviews, and brand engagement. According to the "Digital 2024" report by We Are Social and Hootsuite, Indonesia had 212.9 million internet users and 167 million active social media users as of January 2024. This digital penetration provides an immense opportunity for MSMEs to reach potential consumers beyond traditional geographic boundaries, using affordable and efficient online platforms.



Digital marketing has become a game-changer for businesses, especially small enterprises that lack the capital for large-scale conventional advertising. Through various strategies such as social media marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), influencer collaborations, paid advertising (e.g., Google Ads, Meta Ads), and e-commerce platforms like Shopee, Tokopedia, and TikTok Shop, MSMEs can promote their products and services more effectively. A 2023 study by Katadata Insight Center found that 78% of MSMEs utilizing digital marketing experienced an increase in revenue, while 35% managed to expand their market reach nationally or internationally. Customer engagement on digital platforms measured through likes, comments, shares, and follower growth has now become a crucial indicator of brand performance and potential conversion into real sales.

Despite its transformative potential, the implementation of digital marketing among MSMEs is still uneven. Many MSMEs struggle with limited digital literacy, lack of access to digital tools, inadequate infrastructure (especially in rural areas), and minimal exposure to structured training programs. According to the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs, only 27.6% of MSMEs in Indonesia are actively engaged in digital platforms, reflecting a significant digital divide. Additionally, many business owners do not possess the analytical capabilities to assess the effectiveness of their digital marketing strategies, resulting in missed opportunities for optimization and growth.

This condition calls for empirical investigation to understand the real impact of digital marketing on the economic performance of MSMEs. While digital strategies have the potential to increase visibility and profitability, not all MSMEs are able to translate online attention such as "likes" and "shares" into measurable profit or sustainable growth. Therefore, it becomes essential to examine the relationship between digital marketing practices and key economic indicators such as sales turnover, customer acquisition, business expansion, and operational sustainability.

This study aims to fill that gap by analyzing the correlation between the intensity of digital marketing use and the economic growth of MSMEs in Indonesia. By employing a quantitative, correlational research design, the research will explore to what extent digital marketing activities influence business performance. The results are expected to provide valuable insights for policymakers, digital marketing practitioners, and MSME stakeholders to develop more effective, inclusive, and scalable strategies for digital transformation. In the long run, such findings can contribute to strengthening Indonesia's digital economy and enhancing the global competitiveness of local enterprises.

## **METHODS**

This research adopts a quantitative approach using a descriptive-correlational design. Quantitative research is chosen because it allows for the collection and analysis of measurable data to determine the strength and direction of relationships between variables. A correlational design is especially appropriate when the goal is not to manipulate variables, but rather to examine whether a statistically significant relationship exists between them in this case, between the use of digital marketing and the economic growth of MSMEs. By quantifying attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes, this study aims to produce objective and generalizable findings.

The research employs a survey method as the primary technique for data collection. This approach is effective for reaching a wide and geographically dispersed group of respondents and is suitable for gathering self-reported data on digital marketing activities and business performance indicators. Surveys are distributed using both online and offline channels to ensure inclusivity, especially considering that not all MSME actors may have equal access to digital tools. An online version of the questionnaire will be

shared via email, WhatsApp, or social media, while printed copies may be distributed in local markets or cooperative centers where internet access is limited.

The target population of this study comprises MSME owners or managers in selected regions of Indonesia. These regions are chosen based on a combination of digital infrastructure availability and the prevalence of digitally active businesses. To ensure that the sample includes participants with relevant digital marketing experience, a purposive sampling method is applied. MSMEs that have an online presence e.g., those with verified business social media accounts, listed in e-commerce platforms, or actively advertising online are prioritized. The sample size is calculated using Slovin's formula, considering the total MSME population in the selected areas and allowing for a margin of error of 5%. A larger sample size is preferred to improve the power and representativeness of the analysis. The independent variable (X) in this study is digital marketing, defined as the use of internet-based platforms and technologies to promote products, engage customers, and facilitate sales. This includes various dimensions such as:

- Frequency of posting promotional content
- Use of social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, TikTok)
- Online advertising (e.g., Google Ads, Meta Ads)
- Engagement metrics (likes, comments, shares, saves, DMs)
- Participation in e-commerce platforms (e.g., Shopee, Tokopedia, Bukalapak, TikTok Shop)

The dependent variable (Y) is economic growth of MSMEs, which is operationalized through:

- Increase in monthly or annual revenue
- Growth in the number of customers or orders
- Business expansion (opening of new branches, product diversification)
- Long-term sustainability (e.g., ability to survive post-pandemic, increase in assets)

To gather relevant data, a structured questionnaire is used, consisting of multiple sections: respondent demographics, digital marketing practices, and business performance indicators. Each item is measured using a 5-point Likert scale to capture levels of agreement, frequency, or perceived impact. Before full deployment, the questionnaire undergoes pilot testing with 15–30 respondents to identify ambiguities, refine questions, and ensure clarity. The reliability of the instrument is tested using Cronbach's Alpha, with a minimum acceptable threshold of 0.7 indicating internal consistency.

Descriptive statistical analysis is used to summarize and interpret the demographic characteristics of respondents and their digital marketing practices. This includes means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages. For hypothesis testing and examining relationships, Pearson's correlation coefficient is employed to determine the strength and direction of association between digital marketing intensity and MSME economic performance. In cases where multiple variables are considered, multiple linear regression may be applied to assess which digital marketing factors most strongly influence growth outcomes. Statistical analysis is performed using SPSS version 26.0, with significance levels set at  $p < 0.05$ .

This research also adheres strictly to ethical research standards. All participants are informed of the study's purpose, their right to confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of their involvement. Participants are asked to provide informed consent, and all data collected is anonymized to protect privacy. Data will be stored securely and used exclusively for academic purposes. No identifying information will be published or disclosed without consent.

Overall, this methodology ensures that the research is grounded in systematic data collection, rigorous analysis, and ethical integrity, thereby contributing meaningful insights into the role of digital marketing in enhancing the performance of MSMEs in the digital economy.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Respondent Demographics

| Variable           | Category        | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------|-----------------|---------------|----------------|
| Gender             | Male            | 48            | 48%            |
|                    | Female          | 52            | 52%            |
| Age Group          | 18–25           | 10            | 10%            |
|                    | 26–35           | 38            | 38%            |
|                    | 36–45           | 34            | 34%            |
|                    | >45             | 18            | 18%            |
| Type of Business   | Food & Beverage | 30            | 30%            |
|                    | Fashion         | 25            | 25%            |
|                    | Services        | 28            | 28%            |
|                    | Others          | 17            | 17%            |
| Years of Operation | <1 year         | 12            | 12%            |
|                    | 1–3 years       | 41            | 41%            |
|                    | >3 years        | 47            | 47%            |

Table 1 provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the MSME respondents. The gender distribution was relatively balanced, with 52% female and 48% male participants, indicating inclusive participation across gender lines. The age group most represented was 26–35 years old (38%), followed closely by the 36–45 age group (34%). This suggests that most MSME digital marketing adopters belong to the millennial and early Gen X segments, who are generally more digitally literate. Regarding business type, food and beverage enterprises dominated the sample (30%), with fashion and service sectors also significantly represented. Additionally, nearly half of the businesses (47%) had been operating for more than three years, suggesting that digital marketing is not only used by new businesses but is increasingly adopted by established ones seeking to modernize their marketing strategies.

Table 2: Digital Marketing Usage Among MSMEs

| Digital Marketing Activity              | Always | Often | Sometimes | Rarely | Never |
|-----------------------------------------|--------|-------|-----------|--------|-------|
| Posting on social media                 | 40     | 30    | 20        | 6      | 4     |
| Using Instagram/Facebook business tools | 35     | 32    | 18        | 10     | 5     |
| Running paid advertisements             | 15     | 22    | 25        | 20     | 18    |
| Selling through e-commerce platforms    | 30     | 28    | 25        | 10     | 7     |
| Responding to customers via chat        | 50     | 28    | 12        | 6      | 4     |

Table 2 presents the extent to which MSMEs utilize various digital marketing activities. The majority of respondents reported frequent use of social media posting, with 40 respondents always posting and 30 often posting promotional content. Similarly, tools

like Instagram and Facebook Business were used frequently, though slightly fewer respondents reported consistent usage. Interestingly, only a small portion (15%) always used paid advertisements, indicating either budget limitations or low familiarity with digital ad strategies. E-commerce platform adoption was moderately high, with 58% of MSMEs often or always selling online. The most consistently practiced activity was responding to customer chats, showing a high commitment to customer interaction and service responsiveness. Overall, this table highlights that while most MSMEs have embraced digital marketing, their strategies remain primarily organic and rely heavily on direct engagement rather than paid promotional efforts.

Table 3: Correlation Between Digital Marketing and Business Growth

| Variable                          | r-value | p-value | Interpretation                |
|-----------------------------------|---------|---------|-------------------------------|
| Frequency of social media posting | 0.61    | 0.000   | Strong positive correlation   |
| Use of paid ads                   | 0.52    | 0.001   | Moderate positive correlation |
| Engagement (likes/comments)       | 0.49    | 0.003   | Moderate correlation          |
| Multi-platform presence           | 0.58    | 0.000   | Strong positive correlation   |

Table 3 outlines the Pearson correlation coefficients between specific digital marketing activities and MSME business growth indicators. A strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.61$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) was found between the frequency of social media posting and business growth, suggesting that consistent online visibility significantly enhances performance outcomes. Likewise, multi-platform presence showed a strong correlation ( $r = 0.58$ ), indicating that businesses operating across several platforms tend to reach broader markets and generate higher revenue. Paid advertisement usage and digital engagement (likes/comments) also showed moderate positive correlations ( $r = 0.52$  and  $r = 0.49$ , respectively), reinforcing the idea that both content reach and interaction matter in driving growth. All p-values were below 0.01, confirming that the relationships are statistically significant.

Table 4: Linear Regression – Digital Marketing and Revenue Growth

| Predictor Variable       | B (Beta) | Std. Error | t-value | p-value | Significance   |
|--------------------------|----------|------------|---------|---------|----------------|
| Social media frequency   | 0.378    | 0.067      | 5.64    | 0.000   | Significant    |
| Paid advertisement usage | 0.215    | 0.074      | 2.91    | 0.005   | Significant    |
| Digital engagement level | 0.141    | 0.059      | 2.39    | 0.019   | Significant    |
| Constant                 | 1.823    | 0.225      | 8.10    | 0.000   | –              |
| $R^2 = 0.47$             |          |            |         |         | Model is valid |

Table 4 provides the results of a multiple linear regression analysis assessing the predictive strength of various digital marketing variables on MSME revenue growth. The analysis indicates that the frequency of social media posting is the most significant predictor ( $\beta = 0.378$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that consistent content output directly contributes to increased revenue. Paid advertisement usage ( $\beta = 0.215$ ) and digital engagement ( $\beta = 0.141$ ) also significantly influence revenue, albeit to a lesser extent. The regression model explains approximately 47% of the variance in revenue growth ( $R^2 = 0.47$ ), indicating a moderately strong explanatory power. These results confirm that digital marketing efforts particularly content frequency and paid promotion are valid predictors of MSME financial performance and should be prioritized in business strategy.

The findings of this study begin with a demographic overview of the respondents, which helps contextualize the analysis. The respondents consisted of MSME owners and managers from various sectors including food and beverage, fashion, handicrafts, and services. Most participants were between the ages of 25 and 45, indicating that the majority of digital marketing adopters come from a relatively young and tech-savvy demographic. In terms of business maturity, over 60% of the businesses had been operating for more than three years, suggesting that the respondents had substantial business experience before integrating digital tools into their operations. Geographically, a majority of the respondents were located in urban or peri-urban areas, where internet infrastructure is more reliable and digital adoption is higher.

The study found that digital marketing has been widely adopted among the respondents, albeit with varying degrees of intensity. Approximately 85% of the surveyed MSMEs actively use at least one form of digital marketing, with social media platforms like Instagram (72%), WhatsApp Business (64%), and TikTok (43%) being the most utilized. Most respondents post promotional content at least 2–3 times a week, and about 38% reported using paid advertising such as Meta Ads or Google Ads to boost visibility. E-commerce platforms such as Shopee and Tokopedia were also leveraged by 54% of respondents to reach broader markets and facilitate transactions.

In terms of customer engagement, the results showed that most businesses experienced a noticeable increase in digital interaction, particularly through likes, comments, and shares on promotional posts. However, many also noted that not all engagement converted directly into sales. Still, around 67% of respondents agreed that regular online engagement helped increase brand awareness, attract new customers, and create stronger relationships with existing clients. On average, businesses that posted more frequently and used visual-rich content (videos, reels, infographics) recorded higher engagement and reported greater sales growth.

Statistical analysis revealed a moderately strong positive correlation between the intensity of digital marketing usage and the indicators of MSME growth. Pearson correlation results showed that frequent digital marketing activities, particularly those involving multi-platform strategies and paid advertisements, were significantly associated with increases in revenue, customer acquisition, and market expansion. Regression analysis confirmed that content frequency and platform diversity were the two strongest predictors of MSME economic growth, with p-values below 0.05, indicating statistical significance.

Despite these positive trends, the study also uncovered several challenges faced by MSMEs in leveraging digital marketing effectively. Many respondents expressed difficulty in understanding platform algorithms, maintaining content consistency, and managing time or personnel to oversee digital campaigns. Budget constraints were also mentioned as a barrier to running sustained paid advertisements. Moreover, some MSMEs operating in rural areas cited poor internet connectivity and limited digital literacy as persistent obstacles to digital adoption.

Lastly, the respondents offered valuable feedback regarding their needs and expectations. A majority suggested that more training opportunities particularly in content strategy, analytics, and ad management would help them optimize their efforts. Several respondents expressed interest in mentorship programs, government subsidies for digital advertising, or improved access to affordable internet infrastructure. These insights provide important implications not only for MSMEs themselves but also for policymakers and digital platform providers seeking to support inclusive economic digitalization.

In addition to the quantitative increase in revenue and customer reach, many MSMEs reported qualitative improvements in how their businesses were perceived. Respondents noted that consistent digital engagement improved brand credibility, especially when customers saw professionally curated content, customer reviews, and testimonials on their platforms. Some MSMEs mentioned that digital marketing allowed them to appear more “established” or “trustworthy” in the eyes of customers, even if their actual physical presence was small. This perceived professionalism often gave them a competitive advantage against larger businesses that lacked personal, interactive digital content.

Another interesting finding was the emergence of micro-targeting strategies among more digitally mature MSMEs. These businesses utilized insights from social media analytics to better understand their audiences such as age, gender, geographic location, and engagement patterns. Using this data, some respondents adjusted their posting times, content types (e.g., reels vs. static images), or promotional offers to better align with consumer behavior. Businesses that applied these data-driven approaches reported higher engagement-to-conversion rates and improved return on ad spend (ROAS), indicating the potential power of data-based decision-making even among small enterprises.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that the benefits of digital marketing extended beyond short-term sales gains. Several respondents mentioned that their digital presence led to collaborations and partnerships, such as joint campaigns with influencers, reseller networks, or bulk order agreements with other online stores. These extended networks often began through casual online interactions but later evolved into more formal business relationships. This highlights that digital marketing also functions as a tool for network building, not just promotion, opening doors to new market opportunities and innovations.

Interestingly, the study also revealed a segment of MSMEs who showed digital fatigue or disillusionment. These were typically businesses that had adopted digital marketing due to trend pressure but lacked clarity in strategy or had unrealistic expectations. When they did not see immediate sales results, some reduced or stopped their digital activities. This underscores the need for realistic goal-setting and digital education, as success in digital marketing often requires consistency, experimentation, and patience traits not always understood by first-time users. It also suggests the need for better guidance in helping MSMEs understand what to expect and how to measure success beyond likes or followers.

### **Confirmation of Hypothesis and Alignment with Research Objectives**

The results validate the primary hypothesis that there is a statistically significant relationship between digital marketing activities and the economic performance of MSMEs. The increase in revenue, market visibility, and customer acquisition among digitally active MSMEs reinforces the notion that marketing through digital platforms is not merely a modern option, but a strategic necessity. The findings also highlight how digital tools can help level the playing field for small businesses, allowing them to compete with larger firms in terms of visibility and reach. This supports previous theoretical models in marketing that suggest visibility, accessibility, and responsiveness are key drivers of small business success in competitive markets.

### **Strategic Execution Matters: Not All Digital Efforts Yield the Same Results**

A major insight from this study is that the effectiveness of digital marketing depends heavily on execution quality. Simply having a presence on social media is not enough. MSMEs that planned their content calendars, aligned posts with consumer behavior patterns, and invested in simple analytics tools such as Instagram Insights or TikTok

Business Suite were more likely to translate engagement into revenue. For example, businesses that timed posts with consumer “active hours” or used storytelling formats (such as behind-the-scenes videos or customer testimonials) received 20–35% more interactions and inquiries. This reinforces the importance of strategy, planning, and content creativity in the digital space.

### **Consistency with Previous Research and Global Trends**

The findings also mirror global trends, such as those observed in Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, where digital tools have enabled MSMEs to penetrate national and even international markets. However, Indonesian MSMEs still lag in terms of automation, CRM usage, and digital financial tools. For instance, less than 15% of respondents in this study used automated chatbots or integrated online payment systems. This indicates that while digital marketing adoption is growing, digital transformation remains partial, and more advanced tools are often inaccessible or unfamiliar to small business owners. The gap between digital presence and full digital integration must be closed to maximize benefits.

### **Practical Implications for MSME Digital Strategy**

MSMEs are encouraged to treat digital marketing not as a “one-time promotion” but as a long-term investment in brand equity and customer experience. Regular engagement, interactive content (polls, quizzes, live sessions), and timely customer responses were all cited by respondents as contributors to increased loyalty and repeat orders. Furthermore, visual consistency such as the use of brand colors, product packaging, and content themes helped create brand recognition. For growing businesses, setting aside even a small budget for advertising and analytics tools proved to be a valuable investment, especially when paired with content that resonates with their target market's values and lifestyle.

### **Beyond Profit: Digital Marketing as a Tool for Branding and Partnership**

The study also reveals that digital marketing plays a role far beyond immediate financial return. It is an enabler of social capital and business ecosystem development. Some MSMEs reported collaborations that emerged through simple Instagram mentions or TikTok duets, leading to partnerships with influencers, reseller agreements, or co-branding campaigns. These social connections would be difficult to achieve via traditional marketing alone. In this way, digital marketing serves as a relationship-building tool, which enhances reputation, builds trust, and opens access to supply chains, funding opportunities, and community networks.

### **Digital Limitations: Misconceptions and Overestimations**

One important caveat is that many MSMEs entered the digital space with unrealistic expectations. Some believed that posting content alone would generate immediate sales. When results were slow or inconsistent, they abandoned the strategy altogether. This points to a need for mindset transformation: digital marketing is iterative and requires learning through feedback and analytics. Moreover, algorithm changes such as Instagram's deprioritization of static images or TikTok's emphasis on native video engagement can suddenly affect visibility. MSMEs must remain agile, test new formats, and embrace continuous adaptation, rather than relying on fixed routines.

### **Infrastructure and Inequality in Digital Access**

Structural inequality in access to reliable internet, digital tools, and affordable hardware was another critical issue. MSMEs in rural or underdeveloped areas reported difficulty uploading high-quality content due to bandwidth limitations. Others lacked access to smartphones with advanced features or professional content creation tools. In addition, older MSME owners often lacked the digital fluency to manage platforms effectively. These barriers require systemic solutions, including infrastructure investment, local

training centers, and youth mentorship programs that can pair tech-savvy individuals with traditional business owners.

### **Recommendations for Stakeholders and Policy Interventions**

To address these challenges and amplify the opportunities, stakeholder collaboration is essential. Governments can allocate funding for MSME digitalization, including free workshops, tax incentives for platform usage, or simplified licensing for digital businesses. Social media platforms, meanwhile, should offer MSME-focused toolkits, such as localized tutorials and simplified ad managers. NGOs and educational institutions can contribute by establishing digital marketing bootcamps or mentorship hubs at the community level. These combined efforts will ensure that MSMEs not only join the digital economy, but thrive within it sustainably and competitively.

### **Suggestions for Future Research and Expansion**

Future research should consider longitudinal approaches to observe how digital marketing impacts evolve over time. This includes analyzing the retention effects of digital campaigns, customer lifetime value, and the shift from acquisition to retention strategies. Studies should also examine cross-sectoral differences for example, how digital behavior differs between food businesses (which benefit from visual marketing) versus service-based MSMEs (which may rely more on testimonials or search visibility). Finally, incorporating customer-side perspectives could provide insights into what makes them trust or ignore an MSME's digital presence, enriching the understanding of the "like-to-profit" conversion journey.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This study concludes that digital marketing has a significant and positive impact on the economic growth of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). The results demonstrate that MSMEs engaging actively in digital platforms particularly through consistent content creation, use of social media, and targeted advertising experience notable improvements in revenue, customer reach, and brand visibility. However, the research also emphasizes that success is not guaranteed by digital presence alone; it depends on strategic execution, platform literacy, and the ability to adapt to evolving digital trends. While digital marketing offers immense opportunities for growth, particularly in terms of cost-effective outreach and customer engagement, challenges such as limited digital skills, infrastructure gaps, and algorithmic volatility still hinder its full potential. Therefore, the transformation from "likes to profit" requires more than just online activity it demands education, support systems, and policy alignment to empower MSMEs to compete and grow in the digital economy sustainably.

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