

Digital Marketing-Based Business Management Strategy for MSMEs in Luwuk City

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the implementation of digital marketing-based business management strategies among Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Luwuk City, Indonesia. The research was conducted to understand how MSMEs adopt digital tools to improve competitiveness, customer engagement, and business performance in the digital era. Using a qualitative research design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation involving 10 MSME owners from various sectors, including culinary, fashion, handicrafts, and services. The findings show that most MSMEs in Luwuk City have started integrating digital marketing platforms, particularly Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp Business, into their promotional strategies. Eight out of ten informants actively use social media to increase visibility and customer interaction, while only three have ventured into e-commerce platforms such as Tokopedia and Shopee due to logistical and payment challenges. The study also reveals that MSMEs adopting digital tools consistently experience sales growth, enhanced brand recognition, and improved management efficiency. However, obstacles such as limited digital literacy, unstable internet infrastructure, lack of advertising budgets, and minimal institutional support remain significant barriers. Digital marketing adoption has encouraged MSMEs to shift from traditional to more structured business management practices, supported by better record-keeping and customer communication. The study concludes that strengthening digital skills, strategic planning, and collaboration among stakeholders is essential to optimize MSME competitiveness in Luwuk City.

Keywords : Digital Marketing, Business Management, MSMEs, Luwuk City, Qualitative Research.

Introduction

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are a cornerstone of Indonesia's economic structure. According to data from the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs (2023), Indonesia has 65.46 million MSMEs, accounting for 99.9% of total businesses and contributing approximately 61.07% to national GDP. These enterprises employ around 97% of Indonesia's workforce, demonstrating their

crucial role in maintaining national economic resilience.

In Central Sulawesi Province, particularly in Luwuk City, MSMEs are among the key drivers of local economic activity. Based on data from the Banggai Regency Cooperatives and MSME Office (2024), there are approximately 8,742 registered MSMEs, dominated by the culinary sector (32%), fashion and crafts (27%), and agro-based businesses (18%). Despite their growth potential, the majority of these MSMEs still rely heavily on traditional marketing methods, such as word-of-mouth and direct sales, limiting their reach in an increasingly digital marketplace.

Table 1. MSMEs Luwuk

Sector	Number of MSMEs (2024)	Percentage	Primary Marketing Method
Culinary & Food Services	2,798	32%	Offline/Word of Mouth
Fashion & Crafts	2,360	27%	Local Exhibition, Social Media
Agro-Industry	1,574	18%	Distributor & Retail Network
Services & Others	2,010	23%	Limited Online Presence
Total	8,742	100%	—

Source: Banggai Regency MSME Office Report, 2024

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital technology among Indonesian MSMEs, yet a 2023 report by Google and Temasek revealed that only 37% of MSMEs in non-metropolitan areas (including Luwuk) have adopted consistent digital marketing strategies. Key barriers include limited digital literacy, insufficient training, and inadequate access to digital infrastructure. Digital marketing offers transformative potential for MSMEs by enabling low-cost promotion, data-driven decision-making, and real-time customer engagement. Tools such as social media advertising, SEO (Search Engine Optimization), e-commerce integration, and email marketing empower businesses to reach broader audiences beyond local boundaries. For example, MSMEs in nearby Gorontalo City that implemented structured digital marketing strategies experienced an average sales increase of 23% in 2023, according to the Central Sulawesi Economic Review (2024). To maximize these benefits, MSMEs in Luwuk City must develop digital marketing-based

business management strategies that integrate marketing, operations, and human resource development. Such strategies require not only technological tools but also managerial commitment, training programs, and collaboration between local government, educational institutions, and business associations.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative research design with a descriptive approach. The purpose of this design is to explore and understand how MSMEs in Luwuk City apply digital marketing in managing their businesses. The qualitative method allows researchers to obtain in-depth information about the experiences, perceptions, and strategies used by MSME owners in the process of digital transformation. The research focus includes three main aspects: (1) the implementation of digital marketing strategies, (2) business management practices applied by MSME owners, and (3) the impact of digital marketing on business performance and competitiveness. This approach emphasizes a deep understanding of real situations rather than numerical measurement. The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with selected MSME owners from various sectors such as culinary, crafts, and services, as well as with officers from the Banggai Regency MSME Office. Observations were made directly at business locations to understand how MSMEs implement digital marketing in their daily operations. Secondary data were collected from government reports, previous studies, and related online publications. The research subjects were chosen using purposive sampling, meaning participants were selected intentionally based on specific criteria, such as MSME owners who actively use digital platforms for business promotion and management. In total, 10–12 key informants participated in the study, representing different business sectors and experience levels. Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data reduction involves selecting and simplifying the information obtained from interviews and observations. The results are then presented in descriptive form, and conclusions are drawn to identify patterns and relationships related to digital marketing-based management strategies. The research procedure includes several steps: preparation and literature

review, determination of informants, interview and observation activities, transcription and data analysis, and drawing conclusions. To ensure data validity, the researcher uses triangulation techniques, combining interview results, observations, and documentation to confirm the accuracy and consistency of the findings. This qualitative approach is expected to provide a deep understanding of how MSMEs in Luwuk City manage their businesses using digital marketing, the challenges they face, and the strategies that can be developed to improve competitiveness in the digital era.

Results and Discussion

Overview of Research Results

The research was conducted in Luwuk City, which serves as the economic center of Banggai Regency and hosts a diverse range of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). A total of 10 key informants participated in this study, representing various business sectors such as culinary, fashion, handicrafts, and services. Each informant had operated their business for at least two years, ensuring that participants possessed sufficient experience in managing business activities and adapting to market changes. These MSME owners had also begun integrating digital platforms including Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp Business, and Shopee as part of their promotional and sales activities. Data collection was conducted over a three-week period, combining in-depth interviews, direct field observations, and documentation. Interviews were carried out both face-to-face and online, depending on the informants' availability and business schedules. Each session lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and focused on exploring how MSME owners understand, adopt, and manage digital marketing in their business operations. Field observations were conducted to validate interview responses by observing how these MSMEs used digital tools in their daily marketing activities, such as posting on social media, managing online transactions, and responding to customers. Documentation, including photos of digital advertisements and screenshots of online stores, was also collected to support the findings.

The research results indicate that MSMEs in Luwuk City are in the early stages of digital transformation. Business owners are increasingly aware of the importance of using digital marketing to expand market reach and strengthen competitiveness. However, the level of digital adoption and

literacy among MSME owners varies significantly. Some informants have actively used multiple platforms to promote and sell products, while others still use digital tools in a limited and inconsistent manner. Most MSMEs initially adopted digital tools informally, primarily for communication or posting basic product information. Over time, however, they began to integrate digital activities into their business management, such as maintaining regular posting schedules, responding to customer feedback promptly, and recording sales data from online orders. For example, several culinary business owners reported using Instagram Stories and WhatsApp Broadcast messages to inform customers about new menu items and daily promotions. Meanwhile, fashion and handicraft entrepreneurs used Shopee and Facebook Marketplace to reach buyers outside the local area, demonstrating that digital marketing has started to open new opportunities for business expansion beyond Luwuk City.

Despite these positive developments, the findings also reveal that digital marketing implementation remains uneven. MSMEs with younger owners or higher educational backgrounds tend to be more adaptive and experimental in using online tools, while older entrepreneurs often rely on assistance from family members or employees to manage social media accounts. This variation highlights that digital literacy and generational factors play a crucial role in shaping how MSMEs utilize technology. In general, the study shows that MSMEs in Luwuk City are transitioning from traditional to digital business practices, reflecting a growing awareness of the need for innovation in marketing and management. However, this transformation is still at a developing stage, requiring further training, consistent practice, and institutional support to help business owners maximize the potential of digital marketing for long-term growth.

Implementation of Digital Marketing Strategies

From the research findings, eight out of ten MSME informants reported actively using social media platforms, particularly Facebook and Instagram, as their main marketing tools. These platforms were chosen because they are easy to use, low-cost, and widely accessed by local consumers in Luwuk City. The business owners mainly use them to post product photos, create short videos, share customer testimonials, and communicate directly with customers through private messages or comment sections. Many informants emphasized that visual content and frequent posting are key to attracting more

customers. For instance, one informant the owner of a local snack business explained:

“Posting regularly on Instagram helps attract younger customers. Sales increased about 30% since I started promoting online.”

This statement reflects how social media engagement can directly influence customer interest and sales growth. Similarly, a fashion boutique owner mentioned that promotions through Instagram Stories and Facebook Ads helped reach new customers outside Luwuk City. These findings are consistent with Duffett (2020), who stated that interactive social media platforms strengthen brand loyalty and enhance customer relationships through two-way communication. Despite the success of social media, the research also found that only three informants had expanded to e-commerce platforms such as Tokopedia and Shopee. These MSMEs recognized the benefits of e-commerce such as reaching national markets and simplifying transactions but faced obstacles in logistics management, delivery costs, and digital payment systems. Some business owners expressed difficulty handling multiple orders and tracking shipments, particularly those operating without dedicated staff.

One handicraft entrepreneur commented:

“I tried selling on Shopee, but I found it hard to manage the shipping process and payment confirmation. It’s easier to sell directly through WhatsApp.”

This insight shows that while MSMEs are aware of the potential of online marketplaces, limited digital skills and resource constraints hinder their full participation. These challenges echo findings by Rahayu & Day (2022), who observed that MSME digitalization in rural Indonesia is often slowed by weak infrastructure and lack of technical support. Field observations also revealed that most MSMEs continue to rely on local delivery services and cash-on-delivery transactions. This approach allows customers to pay upon product receipt but limits the ability of MSMEs to expand beyond local markets. The reliance on manual systems indicates that digital transformation is still partial, with technology being used primarily for promotion rather than integrated business operations.

MSMEs that consistently use digital platforms especially social media reported clear improvements in brand visibility, customer interaction, and sales performance. They also benefited from faster communication with customers and more effective promotion of new products. However,

several issues remain prevalent, including the absence of structured marketing plans, limited use of analytical tools, and insufficient advertising budgets. Many informants admitted that they post content irregularly and have not yet analyzed customer engagement data such as likes, comments, or reach metrics. This situation illustrates that while awareness of digital marketing is growing, most MSME owners have not yet developed strategic or data-driven marketing approaches. They tend to focus on the operational aspects of running their business rather than long-term marketing planning.

The findings suggest that MSMEs in Luwuk City are transitioning from basic digital usage toward strategic adoption, yet they still need capacity building and structured training to manage digital marketing effectively. This supports the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), which explains that technology adoption depends on perceived usefulness and ease of use. MSME owners recognize the benefits of digital marketing, but limited understanding and technical skills reduce the level of implementation. To achieve sustained digital transformation, MSMEs must strengthen both digital competencies and managerial practices, supported by local government initiatives such as digital literacy workshops, mentoring programs, and affordable online advertising guidance. By improving these aspects, digital marketing can become not just a tool for promotion, but a core component of business strategy and growth in Luwuk City.

Business Management Practices

The results of interviews and field observations show that the business management practices of MSMEs in Luwuk City are generally still simple and traditional, though signs of improvement have appeared alongside the adoption of digital technology. Most MSME owners manage their businesses independently, with limited delegation of tasks, and rely heavily on personal experience rather than structured planning or written business strategies.

Several informants explained that they usually make business decisions based on intuition or daily sales performance rather than formal data analysis. A culinary business owner stated:

“I plan promotions or discounts based on what I feel is needed that week. I don’t have a written business plan, but I can tell what customers like by seeing what sells fast”

This statement reflects that MSME management in Luwuk City often relies on practical

experience and daily observation rather than data-driven decision-making. Such informal management approaches are common in small businesses but can limit long-term growth and financial control. Nevertheless, digital adoption has begun to encourage more organized management behavior among MSME owners. For example, several informants mentioned that using digital tools such as BukuKas, Moka POS, or Excel spreadsheets helps them record income, expenses, and stock levels more accurately. One fashion store owner shared:

“Before using the app, I wrote sales in a notebook. Sometimes I forgot to record everything. Now, with the system, I can see my daily income and what products sell best”

This indicates that even simple digital systems can help MSME owners transition from informal to semi-structured business management practices. The presence of digital tools increases awareness of financial accountability, inventory control, and performance evaluation aspects that were previously overlooked. The findings also reveal differences in management styles across sectors. Culinary and service-based MSMEs tend to be more adaptive and customer-focused, while handicraft and fashion businesses emphasize creativity and production management. Despite these differences, all informants acknowledged the importance of maintaining customer relationships, timely responses, and quality consistency as core management principles. Digital platforms, especially WhatsApp Business, are used not only for promotions but also for handling orders, responding to customer inquiries, and maintaining communication effectively functioning as a customer relationship management (CRM) tool.

Challenges remain in human resource management and strategic planning. Most MSMEs do not yet have dedicated staff to handle marketing or financial operations, resulting in multitasking by the owner. The lack of time and skills for marketing analysis limits their ability to evaluate campaign effectiveness or identify consumer trends. This situation is consistent with Wijaya et al. (2021), who stated that many MSMEs in developing regions operate with minimal managerial structure and depend heavily on owner-led decision-making. The study also found that MSME owners with higher education levels or exposure to digital training programs exhibited better organizational skills and were more open to adopting structured management practices. They are more likely to use digital dashboards, manage financial reports, and plan social media content in advance. Conversely, MSMEs with limited

education backgrounds tend to view digital marketing as an occasional tool rather than an integral part of business operations.

The research indicates a gradual shift from traditional management toward digital-based business practices. MSME owners are beginning to understand that digital marketing is not only about promotion but also about improving management efficiency and decision-making. As technology adoption increases, business management becomes more systematic, transparent, and performance-oriented. This pattern supports the Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991), which emphasizes that internal capabilities such as knowledge, skills, and technological competence are strategic resources for competitive advantage. In the case of Luwuk City, digital skills and adaptive management behavior are emerging as key resources that can strengthen MSME competitiveness in the digital era.

However, to sustain this progress, MSMEs still require training and mentoring programs focused on strategic planning, digital content management, and financial literacy. Strengthening these management aspects will ensure that digital marketing becomes part of a comprehensive business management system, not merely an add-on for promotion.

Challenges in Digital Marketing Adoption

Although many MSMEs in Luwuk City have begun to adopt digital marketing, the research findings reveal that several significant challenges still hinder the full and sustainable implementation of digital-based business strategies. These challenges are mainly related to digital literacy, infrastructure, financial capacity, and institutional support. The first major challenge is the low level of digital literacy among MSME owners. Most informants admitted that they had learned to use social media and online tools through trial and error rather than formal training. Many of them are familiar with using Facebook or WhatsApp for communication, but lack the knowledge to design attractive promotional content, analyze customer engagement, or utilize advertising features effectively. One handicraft business owner explained:

“I know how to post pictures, but I don’t really understand how to make my posts reach more people or appear in ads. I just rely on regular uploads.”

This statement shows that while MSME owners recognize the potential of digital platforms, their

limited understanding of digital marketing strategies reduces the effectiveness of their online promotion. This finding aligns with Rahayu and Day (2022), who stated that digital skill limitations remain a key barrier to MSME digital transformation in rural and small urban areas. The second challenge concerns technological and infrastructure constraints. Several informants reported unstable internet connections, especially in areas outside Luwuk City's urban center. This affects their ability to upload product photos or respond quickly to online customer inquiries. Additionally, limited access to reliable digital equipment such as smartphones with good cameras or computers restricts the quality and consistency of online content. One culinary business owner mentioned:

"Sometimes the signal is slow, and I can't reply to customers quickly. I also don't have a good camera, so my product photos don't look attractive."

Such conditions illustrate how technological inequality still affects business performance at the local level. Without adequate infrastructure, digital marketing cannot be fully optimized, regardless of the owner's willingness to learn. The third challenge is financial limitation. Several MSME owners expressed concern about the cost of running paid advertisements or hiring staff to manage online marketing. Most businesses operate with small profit margins, making them hesitant to allocate funds for digital promotion. For instance, one fashion entrepreneur explained:

"I wanted to use Facebook Ads, but I was afraid of wasting money because I didn't know how to manage it. So I just rely on free posts."

This demonstrates that financial concerns are closely tied to digital knowledge—many MSMEs fear investing in something they do not fully understand. Similar findings were reported by Nugroho et al. (2023), who observed that cost perception and lack of training are major deterrents to digital adoption among Indonesian MSMEs. The fourth challenge is the lack of structured institutional support. Although the local government, through the Banggai Regency MSME Office, occasionally conducts training and seminars, these programs are often short-term and not tailored to the diverse needs of different sectors. Some participants also noted that after attending training, there was no follow-up mentoring or evaluation, which made it difficult to maintain implementation consistency.

"We were once invited to a digital marketing workshop, but it was only one day. After that, there

was no follow-up or practical guidance,” said one service business owner.

This finding suggests that capacity-building initiatives must go beyond one-time workshops and focus on sustained mentoring to ensure effective knowledge transfer. In addition, cultural and behavioral factors play a role. Some MSME owners especially older entrepreneurs expressed skepticism about the value of online marketing. They tend to trust traditional marketing methods such as direct selling or personal networks, which have worked well for them in the past. This generational gap creates a digital divide between older and younger business owners, as also noted by Kaur and Sandhu (2019), who found that younger entrepreneurs are more open to experimenting with new technologies.

The main challenges in digital marketing adoption among MSMEs in Luwuk City are interrelated: low digital literacy, weak infrastructure, limited financial resources, insufficient institutional support, and generational mindset differences. These factors collectively limit the speed and depth of digital transformation at the local level. Overcoming these challenges requires collaborative efforts between MSME owners, local government, educational institutions, and private technology providers. Training programs should be practical, continuous, and sector-specific, focusing not only on technical skills but also on managerial and strategic aspects of digital marketing. With comprehensive support, MSMEs in Luwuk City can build stronger digital capabilities, enabling them to compete more effectively in the modern marketplace

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that MSMEs in Luwuk City are experiencing a gradual transformation toward digital-based business management, primarily driven by the increasing awareness of digital marketing's importance in expanding market reach and improving competitiveness. However, this transformation remains partial and uneven, influenced by variations in digital literacy, financial capacity, and managerial practices among MSME owners. The study found that most MSMEs have adopted social media platforms, particularly Facebook and Instagram, as their main promotional channels. These platforms are preferred because of their ease of access, low cost, and large user base, consistent with findings from Duffett (2020) and Taneja & Toombs (2014), who

emphasized that social media enables small businesses to enhance visibility and build direct relationships with customers through interactive communication.

In line with the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), MSME owners in Luwuk perceive digital marketing as useful but still find it challenging to use due to limited skills and lack of confidence. Many rely on informal trial-and-error methods, indicating that perceived usefulness is high, but perceived ease of use remains relatively low. This gap explains the uneven adoption patterns observed among different sectors. The findings also support the Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991), which posits that internal resources such as knowledge, skills, and innovation are critical for building competitive advantage. In this context, MSMEs with better digital literacy, educational background, and adaptability demonstrate more effective use of technology for marketing and management. These enterprises tend to apply digital tools not only for promotion but also for financial recording, customer management, and data tracking, reflecting the early stages of strategic digital integration.

However, the study also highlights persistent challenges that hinder the optimization of digital marketing. The main obstacles include low digital literacy, limited infrastructure, financial constraints, and inconsistent institutional support. These findings align with Rahayu & Day (2022) and Nugroho et al. (2023), who observed similar barriers among MSMEs across Indonesia. Weak internet connectivity and inadequate access to quality digital devices were found to directly affect the ability of entrepreneurs to manage their online presence effectively. The generational gap remains a critical factor. Younger entrepreneurs are more likely to experiment with e-commerce and paid advertising, while older business owners prefer traditional methods such as face-to-face selling or word-of-mouth marketing. This generational divide reflects what Kaur & Sandhu (2019) describe as “digital resistance,” where attitudes toward technology adoption are influenced by personal experience and comfort levels with change.

In terms of business management, digital tools have encouraged some MSMEs to become more organized in managing finances, inventory, and marketing plans. The use of simple digital applications such as BukuKas or Moka POS has improved record-keeping accuracy and accountability. This development is significant because it marks the early stage of digital managerial evolution from

traditional, intuition-based management toward a more structured and data-informed approach. Despite these positive shifts, the majority of MSMEs are still operating without formal business strategies or marketing analytics frameworks. Content creation remains inconsistent, and online campaigns are rarely evaluated using measurable indicators such as engagement rate or conversion. This indicates that the digital transformation process is still tactical rather than strategic, focused more on execution than long-term planning.

To overcome these challenges, this study suggests that collaborative interventions are essential. Local governments, universities, and private sectors need to work together to provide continuous training, mentoring, and infrastructure support. Programs should not only focus on basic digital skills but also on strategic management competencies, such as market analysis, content design, and performance measurement. This aligns with the Triple Helix Model (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000), which emphasizes the synergy between government, academia, and industry in fostering innovation and economic development. This research underscores that the digitalization of MSMEs in Luwuk City is an evolving process that requires time, support, and capacity-building. The growing use of digital tools marks a positive shift in business culture and mindset, reflecting a move toward greater adaptability and innovation. However, sustainable transformation will depend on the ability of MSME owners to integrate digital marketing into comprehensive business management systems not merely as a promotional tactic but as a strategic driver of competitiveness and growth.

Conclusion

This study explored how Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Luwuk City utilize digital marketing as part of their business management strategy. The findings reveal that digital transformation among MSMEs is underway but still developing. Most business owners recognize the importance of digital marketing for increasing visibility, attracting customers, and improving sales performance. However, adoption levels vary depending on the owner's digital literacy, financial resources, and willingness to adapt. Approximately 80% of MSMEs surveyed in this study actively use social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp Business as their primary marketing tools. These platforms serve not only as communication channels but also as tools for

product promotion and customer engagement. Some MSMEs reported tangible benefits, such as a 25–30% increase in sales after consistent online promotion. Nevertheless, only a small portion—around 30% of informants—have ventured into e-commerce platforms like Tokopedia or Shopee due to logistical and payment management challenges.

From a management perspective MSME owners in Luwuk City are gradually shifting from traditional, experience-based decision-making toward more structured and data-informed management practices. The integration of simple digital tools for financial recording and inventory tracking reflects growing awareness of efficiency and accountability. However, the study found that most MSMEs still operate without formal business plans or dedicated marketing personnel. The key challenges identified include low digital literacy, unstable internet infrastructure, limited capital for digital investment, and insufficient institutional support. Generational and educational gaps further influence digital adoption levels, with younger, more educated entrepreneurs showing higher adaptability. This study concludes that digital marketing has become a vital component of MSME development in Luwuk City, driving greater competitiveness and sustainability. However, the transformation process remains uneven and incomplete, requiring ongoing support in training, mentoring, and infrastructure development.

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