

DIGITAL MARKETING CAPABILITY AND MSME COMPETITIVENESS IN SOPPENG REGENCY: A CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines how digital marketing can strengthen the competitiveness of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Soppeng Regency, Indonesia, and identifies the organizational conditions required for digital activities to generate business value. **Methodology:** The study uses a structured narrative literature review that purposively synthesizes peer-reviewed studies on digital marketing, social media, marketplace adoption, digital transformation, entrepreneurship, and MSME development, with priority given to evidence from Soppeng and comparable small-business settings. Official regional planning documents are used only to establish local policy context. **Findings:** The synthesis shows that digital marketing is most effective when it is treated as an organizational capability rather than as isolated social-media promotion. Market reach and visibility must be connected to informative content, customer engagement, a simple transaction pathway, service responsiveness, entrepreneurial knowledge, and performance measurement. Local evidence also reveals an important boundary condition: promotion by itself does not necessarily increase sales, indicating that conversion mechanisms and operational readiness matter. **Originality/Value:** The article integrates fragmented local evidence into the P5-Soppeng framework: digital-readiness mapping, market positioning, content production, conversation and conversion, and performance measurement. **Practical Implications:** The framework provides a staged approach for MSME owners, local government, universities, and business-support organizations to design capability-based digitalization programs that can be implemented with limited resources.

KEYWORDS: Competitiveness; Digital Marketing; Digital Transformation; Msmes; Social Media; Soppeng

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INTRODUCTION

Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are central to local economic activity because they create employment, distribute income, support household livelihoods, and connect production with local demand. Their competitiveness, however, is increasingly shaped by changes in how customers search for information, compare alternatives, communicate with sellers, and complete purchases. Digital channels have therefore become relevant not only to large firms but also to owner-managed businesses that historically depended on physical location, personal networks, and conventional promotion. In this environment, the strategic issue is no longer whether small firms have access to social media or messaging applications, but whether they can transform those tools into repeatable marketing capabilities that create customer value and support business performance (Kannan & Li, 2017; Verhoef et al., 2021).

The challenge is particularly important for MSMEs because digital adoption is constrained by limited managerial time, small budgets, uneven employee skills, and a high dependence on the owner. Taiminen and Karjaluo (2015) show that small firms may have access to digital channels without using them strategically, while Ritz et al. (2019) demonstrate that owner-managers frequently perform digital marketing themselves and therefore evaluate technologies through perceived usefulness, ease of use, and expected business outcomes. Research on SME digitalization similarly indicates that technology, skills, and strategy need to be combined; digitalization is associated with performance when resources are translated into actual organizational use rather than retained as isolated assets (Eller et al., 2020).

These findings are relevant to Soppeng Regency, South Sulawesi, where the development of MSMEs is linked to local economic policy, entrepreneurship, and the need to expand market access. Recent field research in Soppeng identifies limited capital, weak product innovation, low digital literacy, and intense competition as constraints on MSME development (Sulfiana et al., 2025). Other local studies show that technology training, social-media use, marketplace development, entrepreneurial knowledge, motivation, and marketing quality all affect how small businesses can respond to these pressures (Adawiah et al., 2024; Asmini & Abbas, 2022; Ismail & Nusri, 2022; Patappari et al., 2023; Patappari & Waru, 2022). Thus, digital marketing in Soppeng is not a purely technical problem; it is a capability-development problem embedded in the realities of local business management.

Local empirical evidence also provides a useful basis for a more nuanced argument. Minarti (2025) reports that digital marketing has a positive and significant relationship with MSME competitiveness in Soppeng and highlights the roles of brand awareness and customer engagement. Minarti, Alam, and Patappari (2026) further show that social-media content quality positively affects customer engagement and purchase intention, with engagement functioning as a partial mediator. In contrast, Abbas, Minarti, and T (2022) find that promotion did not significantly increase sales in the case of Toko Sulawesi Soppeng. Rather than treating the results as contradictory, they can be interpreted as evidence that promotional exposure is insufficient when it is not connected to value communication, customer response, a clear purchase path, and other elements of the marketing system.

The international literature supports this interpretation. Chatterjee and Kar (2020) find that social-media marketing can improve business outcomes in SMEs, but its adoption depends on perceived usefulness, ease of use, compatibility, and cost. Matarazzo et al. (2021) show that digital transformation creates customer value when firms develop sensing and learning capabilities, while Li et al. (2018) emphasize managerial cognition, social capital, team building, and organizational capability in SME digital transformation. Digital marketing should therefore be understood as a coordinated set of routines for sensing market needs, creating and communicating value, converting attention into transactions, learning from data, and adjusting business practices.

Despite growing research, the Soppeng literature remains fragmented. Existing studies typically examine one component at a time, such as promotion, content quality, marketplace applications, entrepreneurship training, or motivation. There is still limited integration of these findings into a practical model that explains how a resource-constrained local MSME can move from basic digital presence to measurable market performance. This gap is important because simply recommending that MSMEs “use social media” does not specify what they should do first, how channels should be connected to transactions, how performance should be assessed, or how local institutions can support the process.

Accordingly, this article addresses three questions: (1) How does digital marketing contribute to MSME competitiveness in Soppeng? (2) What organizational and market conditions determine whether digital marketing produces meaningful outcomes? and (3) How can the available evidence be integrated into a staged implementation framework appropriate for resource-constrained MSMEs? The article contributes by positioning digital marketing as a capability rather than a platform choice and by developing the P5-Soppeng framework as a contextual synthesis of international and local evidence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital marketing as a capability

Digital marketing encompasses the use of digital technologies and channels to create, communicate, deliver, and capture value through customer interactions that can be monitored and improved over time. Kannan and Li (2017) emphasize that digital marketing involves connected processes, data, touchpoints, and customer relationships rather than a collection of stand-alone technologies. Dwivedi et al. (2021) similarly highlight customer engagement, social-media interaction, digital content, mobile communication, and emerging technologies as interdependent areas of contemporary marketing. This perspective shifts managerial attention from “being online” to designing a coherent customer journey.

For small firms, such coherence requires capability development. The dynamic-capabilities view proposes that competitive adaptation depends on the ability to sense opportunities and threats, seize opportunities through decisions and resource commitments, and reconfigure routines when conditions change (Teece, 2007). Applied to digital marketing, sensing includes learning what customers need and which channels they use; seizing includes producing relevant content, responding to inquiries, and creating a purchase path; reconfiguring includes adjusting content, service processes, channel

allocation, and offers based on observed results. Matarazzo et al. (2021) and Li et al. (2018) show that SME digital transformation depends on such learning and organizational capability, not simply on technology acquisition.

Social media, content quality, and customer engagement

Social media offers MSMEs low-entry-cost access to audiences, but the value of the channel depends on the quality of communication and interaction. Chatterjee and Kar (2020) associate social-media marketing adoption with improved business outcomes, customer connection, sales, and identification of customer needs, while Tiago and Veríssimo (2014) underline the strategic importance of digital and social-media participation for firm-customer interaction. For local MSMEs, the most important implication is that reach metrics are intermediate outcomes. Visibility is valuable only when consumers receive enough information and trust to continue toward inquiry, purchase, recommendation, or repeat buying.

This logic is confirmed in Soppeng by Minarti et al. (2026), whose survey of social-media users interacting with local micro and small businesses finds positive relationships among content quality, customer engagement, and purchase intention. Informative, relevant, and attractive content can reduce uncertainty and stimulate interaction, while two-way engagement strengthens the path toward purchase intention. Content should therefore answer practical customer questions: what the product is, for whom it is intended, what benefits it provides, how much it costs, how it can be ordered, whether it is available, and why the seller can be trusted. Local identity can also support differentiation when it is authentic and relevant to the product.

Transaction integration and organizational readiness

Digital marketing has limited commercial value if communication is disconnected from transaction. Ismail and Nusri (2022) show that a web-based marketplace can address limitations in product information, promotion, and ordering for a village enterprise in Soppeng. Aini and Alimuddin (2023) likewise document the practical relevance of social-media marketing for a rural catering business in Soppeng. These studies indicate that a useful digital system does not need to be technologically complex; it needs to reduce friction between customer interest and purchase.

Organizational readiness is the other side of the transaction problem. Patappari and Waru (2022) and Patappari et al. (2023) emphasize practical technology and social-media training for entrepreneurship, while Asmini and Abbas (2022) focus on entrepreneurial knowledge and Adawiah et al. (2024) on motivation and business performance. Together, these local studies suggest that MSME digitalization requires routines: updating product information, producing content, responding to customers, recording orders, managing service quality, and learning from results. If these routines are absent, the adoption of more platforms may increase workload without improving outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a structured narrative literature review. The approach is appropriate because the objective is to integrate heterogeneous evidence from quantitative studies, qualitative studies, technology-development research, and community-based entrepreneurship programs rather than to estimate a single pooled effect. The review is deliberately contextual: international literature is used to establish conceptual mechanisms, while Indonesian and Soppeng-based studies are used to evaluate how those mechanisms appear in a local MSME environment.

Sources were purposively selected according to four criteria. First, the source had to address digital marketing, social-media marketing, marketplace or e-commerce use, digital transformation, customer engagement, entrepreneurship capability, or MSME development. Second, the source had to present a clear research purpose and interpretable method or analytical argument. Third, priority was given to peer-reviewed journal articles and to studies involving SMEs or owner-managed businesses. Fourth, for the local evidence base, priority was given to research conducted in Soppeng Regency or directly involving Soppeng businesses and communities. Official Soppeng planning regulations were consulted only to confirm the regional policy setting; they were not treated as evidence of causal marketing effects.

The review primarily covers literature published from 2014 to August 2026, with the exception of Teece (2007), which is retained as a foundational theoretical source on dynamic capabilities. The source set includes established international studies on digital marketing and SME digitalization, Indonesian digital-marketing studies, and Soppeng-specific studies by Minarti, Ismail, Patappari, Asmini, Adawiah, and other local researchers. Sources that were duplicative, lacked sufficient methodological information, or were not directly relevant to the research questions were not used in the analytical synthesis.

Analysis was conducted in four stages. First, each source was reviewed for context, method, core finding, and stated implications. Second, findings were coded into recurring themes: digital readiness, market positioning, content quality, customer engagement, transaction integration, entrepreneurial capability, and performance measurement. Third, local findings were compared with broader SME and digital-transformation research to identify convergent mechanisms and boundary conditions. Fourth, the themes were integrated into a staged implementation model. The interpretation deliberately avoids converting association into causation where the original studies do not support causal claims. Because the studies differ substantially in design, constructs, samples, and outcomes, no statistical meta-analysis was attempted.

The method has two limitations that are relevant to interpretation. It is not a systematic review designed to identify every publication in the field, and the Soppeng evidence base remains relatively small. The resulting framework should therefore be regarded as a theoretically informed and contextually grounded proposition for implementation and future testing, not as a validated causal model for all MSMEs in the regency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Synthesis of local evidence

The Soppeng evidence presents a consistent overall pattern but also an important caution. Digital marketing, content quality, marketplace access, training, and entrepreneurship capability are repeatedly associated with improved market access or business readiness. At the same time, the finding of Abbas et al. (2022) that promotion alone did not significantly increase sales shows that marketing communication should not be treated as an automatic sales mechanism. The practical issue is system integration: attention must be connected to information, trust, conversation, ordering, fulfilment, and measurement.

Source	Design / Context	Main Finding	Implication for Soppeng MSMEs
Abbas et al. (2022)	Quantitative; retail store in Soppeng	Promotion did not significantly increase sales.	Do not equate promotional activity with conversion; diagnose price, product, service, and transaction factors.
Minarti (2025)	Quantitative; 100 digitally active MSMEs in Soppeng	Digital marketing positively affects competitiveness, with brand awareness and engagement highlighted as mechanisms.	Set marketing objectives beyond posting frequency; connect visibility and engagement to competitive outcomes.
Minarti et al. (2026)	PLS-SEM; 120 social-media users in Soppeng	Content quality increases engagement and purchase intention; engagement partially mediates the relationship.	Standardize informative, relevant, credible, and actionable content.
Ismail & Nusri (2022)	Applied marketplace development; BUMDes Rompegading	Marketplace integration improves product information, promotion, and ordering.	Connect social-media attention to a clear catalog and ordering channel.
Aini & Alimuddin (2023)	Case study; rural catering business in Soppeng	Social media is relevant for expanding promotion and supporting sales activity.	Use channel-specific content and local market targeting for service businesses.
Patappari & Waru (2022); Patappari et al. (2023)	Community training; Soppeng	Practical IT and social-media skills support entrepreneurship.	Prioritize hands-on capability building and repeatable routines, not one-off seminars.
Asmini & Abbas (2022);	Entrepreneurship/community development; Soppeng	Knowledge, motivation, and performance	Integrate digital skills with entrepreneurship, discipline, and

Source	Design / Context	Main Finding	Implication for Soppeng MSMEs
Adawiah et al. (2024)		routines support business development.	operational management.
Sulfiana et al. (2025)	Qualitative; MSME development in Soppeng	Capital, innovation, digital literacy, and market competition remain key constraints.	Segment support by readiness and combine marketing assistance with broader business development.

Table 1. Synthesis of Soppeng-based evidence. Source: Author synthesis of cited studies.

Digital readiness before platform expansion

The first result is that readiness is more important than platform count. The temptation to open multiple social-media and marketplace accounts can be counterproductive when the same owner must also manage production, customer service, bookkeeping, and fulfilment. Taiminen and Karjaluo (2015) show that SMEs often underutilize available digital tools because they lack strategic integration, while Eller et al. (2020) find that digitalization depends on a bundle of technological, human, and strategic resources. In Soppeng, the relevance of skills is reinforced by local training studies and by Sulfiana et al. (2025), who identify digital literacy as a continuing constraint.

A practical readiness assessment should therefore precede channel expansion. At minimum, the MSME should know who is responsible for digital communication, whether product information is complete, whether prices and stock can be updated, how orders will be recorded, how quickly inquiries can be answered, and whether delivery and payment options are clear. A business that cannot maintain these basics is likely to gain more from stabilizing one primary discovery channel and one transaction channel than from adding new platforms. This staged approach follows the capability logic of Li et al. (2018): organizational transformation occurs through managerial learning and capability building, not through technology adoption alone.

Positioning and content quality as conversion foundations

The second result is that content quality becomes more effective when it is anchored in positioning. Positioning clarifies the target customer, the primary problem solved by the product, the evidence supporting the offer, and the reason to choose the business rather than an alternative. Without this clarity, social-media content tends to become repetitive product displays or discount announcements. That pattern may create activity without building a distinctive market meaning.

For MSMEs in Soppeng, locally grounded differentiation can be especially useful where products are connected to food, agriculture, craft, services, family production, or community identity. Locality should not be used as decoration; it should explain origin, process, quality, freshness, craftsmanship, convenience, or trust when those attributes matter to customers. Minarti et al. (2026) provide direct local evidence that content quality supports engagement and purchase intention. The operational implication is to create a small content architecture: product education, proof of trust, promotional offers, and

interaction. Each category should answer a different customer question and include a clear next action.

The contradictory-looking result of Abbas et al. (2022) is useful here. Promotion that is not supported by compelling value, price logic, service quality, product fit, and transaction convenience may not improve sales. Digital marketing should therefore not be reduced to promotional intensity. Its stronger contribution lies in reducing customer uncertainty and coordinating the steps from awareness to purchase.

Conversation, trust, and transaction integration

The third result concerns the transition from visibility to conversion. Digital customer journeys contain multiple points at which potential buyers may stop: incomplete product information, slow replies, unclear prices, uncertain delivery fees, complicated ordering, lack of payment options, or weak trust signals. These frictions are particularly significant for small businesses because customers often compare several sellers within minutes. A high-engagement post may therefore produce little commercial value if the ordering process is confusing.

Local evidence supports a simple solution. Ismail and Nusri (2022) show the value of integrating product information and ordering in a marketplace, while Aini and Alimuiddin (2023) demonstrate the relevance of social-media marketing for a local catering context. The specific technology can vary: a marketplace storefront, a structured WhatsApp Business catalog, a simple web catalog, or a combination of social media and messaging. The principle is the same: every promotional touchpoint should point to a low-friction next step, and customers should receive consistent information across channels.

Trust is part of this conversion infrastructure. Responsive communication, accurate availability, transparent pricing, customer testimonials, visible contact details, and reliable fulfilment reduce perceived risk. Minarti et al. (2026) show that engagement is not merely a vanity metric; it can function as an intermediary between content quality and purchase intention. For a small local firm, conversation therefore has both marketing and service functions.

Performance measurement and organizational learning

The fourth result is that measurement should be proportionate to business capacity. Verhoef et al. (2021) argue that digital transformation changes the metrics firms need, and the same principle applies at micro scale. MSMEs do not need complex analytics to begin learning. A simple weekly or monthly record can track content published, reach, meaningful interactions, inquiries, orders, digital-channel sales, repeat purchases, and response time. These indicators form a basic funnel from exposure to commercial outcome.

Measurement has two purposes. First, it prevents the business from evaluating success solely through follower counts or likes. Second, it converts daily marketing activity into organizational learning. If educational content produces more qualified inquiries than discount posts, or if one platform generates many views but few orders, the owner can reallocate effort. This is consistent with the dynamic-capability emphasis on sensing, seizing,

and reconfiguration (Teece, 2007) and with evidence that digital transformation depends on learning capability (Matarazzo et al., 2021).

The P5-Soppeng implementation framework

Based on the synthesis, this article proposes the P5-Soppeng framework. The framework is not a new technology model; it is a sequence for organizing limited resources. The stages are Digital-Readiness Mapping, Market Positioning, Content Production, Conversation and Conversion, and Performance Measurement. The sequence is intentionally practical: an MSME should first establish what it can sustain, then clarify the market promise, communicate that promise consistently, connect attention to transaction, and learn from measurable results.

Stage	Core Question	Minimum Actions	Simple Indicators	Capability Built
1. Digital-Readiness Mapping	What can the business manage consistently?	Assign responsibility; audit devices, skills, product data, stock, payment, delivery, and response capacity.	Profile completeness; response capacity; product-data completeness.	Operational readiness
2. Market Positioning	Who is the target customer and why should they choose us?	Define segment, problem, value proposition, proof, and local differentiation where relevant.	Message consistency; qualified inquiries.	Market sensing and value articulation
3. Content Production	What information helps customers decide?	Create a content calendar covering education, trust, offer, and interaction; maintain a reusable content bank.	Publishing consistency; saves/shares; engagement quality.	Communication capability
4. Conversation & Conversion	How does attention become a transaction?	Use clear calls to action; standardize replies; link catalog/marketplace; clarify price, payment, delivery, and fulfilment.	Inquiries; conversion rate; response time; completed orders.	Customer-interface and transaction capability
5. Performance Measurement	What should be continued, changed, or stopped?	Review weekly/monthly funnel metrics; compare content, channel, and offer performance; adjust resource allocation.	Digital sales; repeat orders; conversion trend; cost/time efficiency.	Learning and reconfiguration capability

Table 2. P5-Soppeng framework for staged digital-marketing capability development. Source: Author synthesis.

The framework also clarifies why some interventions fail. Training that focuses only on content creation may improve aesthetics while leaving the ordering process unchanged. Marketplace development may improve transaction convenience while failing to generate demand if positioning and communication are weak. Paid promotion can increase reach while reducing profitability if the business cannot identify which inquiries become orders. P5-Soppeng treats these activities as interdependent stages rather than separate projects.

The framework is consistent with the broader literature on SME digital transformation. The readiness stage reflects resource and adoption constraints identified by Ritz et al. (2019), Chatterjee and Kar (2020), and Eller et al. (2020). Positioning and content production reflect the customer-value and engagement logic of Kannan and Li (2017), Dwivedi et al. (2021), and Minarti et al. (2026). Conversation and conversion connect communication to transaction, consistent with the local marketplace findings of Ismail and Nusri (2022). Performance measurement operationalizes the learning and reconfiguration dimension emphasized by Teece (2007), Matarazzo et al. (2021), and Verhoef et al. (2021).

PRACTICAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

For MSME owners, the most important recommendation is to reduce unnecessary digital complexity. A small business should not select channels because competitors use them; it should select them according to customer behavior and management capacity. One channel may be designated for discovery and engagement and another for transaction. The owner should maintain a minimum product-information standard and a simple response protocol so that marketing does not create demand that the business cannot serve.

For local government and business-support organizations, digitalization programs should be segmented by readiness. Beginners need basic business profiles, catalogs, photo and copywriting practice, messaging-business features, and transaction routines. Intermediate MSMEs can be supported with marketplace optimization, customer databases, simple dashboards, and content calendars. More advanced businesses can be introduced to paid advertising, customer segmentation, automation, and cross-channel analytics. This tiered approach is more defensible than delivering the same seminar to businesses at very different stages of maturity.

Program evaluation should also move from attendance to outputs. Useful outputs include a completed digital business profile, a functioning catalog, a four-week content plan, a defined response standard, a working transaction link, and a one-page performance dashboard. Such deliverables are observable and can be followed up during mentoring. Patappari and Waru (2022) and Patappari et al. (2023) demonstrate the importance of practical technology assistance, while Asmini and Abbas (2022) and Adawiah et al. (2024) remind policymakers that entrepreneurial knowledge and motivation are part of implementation capacity.

Universities can contribute by providing diagnostic clinics, student-assisted content production, simple analytics templates, and longitudinal mentoring linked to measurable

business problems. Collaboration with local government can also improve the evidence base by standardizing indicators across training cohorts. Instead of only asking whether participants were satisfied with training, evaluation can track whether businesses maintained their digital assets, improved response time, increased qualified inquiries, or generated repeat purchases over several months.

At the policy level, the findings suggest that digital marketing should be integrated with wider MSME-development priorities. Sulfiana et al. (2025) identify capital, product innovation, digital literacy, and competition as interconnected constraints. A business with weak product quality or unreliable production cannot solve its competitiveness problem through communication alone. Digital marketing support should therefore be coordinated with product improvement, packaging, licensing where relevant, financial management, logistics, and access to financing.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has several limitations. First, it is a structured narrative review rather than a systematic review or meta-analysis. The article provides a transparent thematic synthesis but does not claim exhaustive database coverage. Second, the number of Soppeng-specific peer-reviewed studies remains limited and the designs are heterogeneous, ranging from surveys to case studies, applied system development, and community-service programs. Third, some local studies focus on specific businesses or communities, so their findings should not be generalized mechanically to every MSME sector in the regency.

Future research should empirically test the P5-Soppeng framework across sectors and districts. A useful design would classify MSMEs by digital-readiness level and examine whether progression through the five stages predicts improvements in inquiry quality, conversion, digital-channel revenue, and repeat purchase. Comparative studies could also test whether food, fashion, crafts, services, and agricultural-processing MSMEs require different content or transaction configurations. Longitudinal research is especially important because capability building may produce gradual effects that are not visible in short cross-sectional studies.

Further research should also investigate the cost side of digital marketing. Increased reach is not necessarily efficient if it requires excessive owner time, advertising expenditure, platform fees, or fulfilment complexity. Measures of marketing productivity, customer acquisition cost, response time, and contribution margin would strengthen the economic interpretation of digital adoption.

CONCLUSION

Digital marketing can strengthen MSME competitiveness in Soppeng by expanding market reach, improving brand visibility, enabling customer engagement, and reducing friction in information and transactions. However, the evidence does not support a simplistic conclusion that more promotion or more platforms automatically increase sales. Local findings show that promotion may fail when it is disconnected from product value, service, transaction convenience, and organizational readiness, while stronger outcomes emerge when content quality, engagement, marketplace access, entrepreneurial capability,

and measurement are combined. This article therefore conceptualizes digital marketing as an organizational capability. The proposed P5-Soppeng framework—Digital-Readiness Mapping, Market Positioning, Content Production, Conversation and Conversion, and Performance Measurement—offers a staged route for translating this capability perspective into practice. For MSMEs, the framework favors manageable routines and measurable outcomes over platform proliferation. For government, universities, and support organizations, it implies readiness-based mentoring and output-oriented program evaluation. The framework remains a proposition derived from literature synthesis and should be tested with primary longitudinal data, but it provides a coherent basis for designing digital-marketing interventions that are more closely aligned with the operating realities of MSMEs in Soppeng Regency.

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