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The Implementation of Digital Marketing as a Marketing Strategy for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)

Imelda Sabrina Sibarani^{1*}, Ronauli Zebua², Terintia Riahni Tampubolon³, Jein Jessica Rajagukguk⁴, Ririntri Arianti Siregar⁵, Revalina Malau⁶, Putri Elisa Damanik⁷, Tasya Tatia Putri Sihite⁸

¹⁻⁸ Nommensen KHBP Pematangsiantar University, Indonesia

email: imeldasabrina22@gmail.com¹

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Abstract

This study examines the implementation of digital marketing as a marketing strategy for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and its contribution to the development of Batak Toba and Batak Simalungun ulos products at Horas Market. The research was conducted at Misel Nadeak Ulos Store, a traditional cultural product business established in 2016. Using a qualitative research approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation involving business owners and individuals involved in digital marketing activities. The findings indicate that the adoption of digital marketing through TikTok Live and Shopee expanded market reach, increased product visibility, strengthened customer trust, and improved purchasing accessibility. Digital platforms enabled customers to access products and conduct transactions without geographical limitations. However, challenges related to human resource management and digital content consistency remained during implementation. The study concludes that digital marketing serves as an effective strategy for enhancing MSME competitiveness, business sustainability, and the promotion of traditional cultural products in the digital marketplace.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Electronic Commerce, MSMEs, Sales Performance, Ulos Products.



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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has fundamentally transformed business activities, particularly in the field of marketing, by reshaping how firms communicate with consumers, promote products, and create competitive advantages in increasingly dynamic markets (Setiawan et al., 2025). Digital marketing has become an essential business strategy because it enables organizations to expand market coverage, establish interactive relationships with customers, and improve organizational performance through various digital platforms, including social media, search engines, and electronic commerce applications (Rachmawati, 2024). For Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), the adoption of digital marketing provides significant opportunities to strengthen business competitiveness despite limitations in financial, technological, and human resources (Sudiantini et al., 2024). Recent studies also demonstrate that digital marketing enhances product visibility, customer engagement, and business sustainability while enabling MSMEs to respond more effectively to rapidly changing consumer behavior and market demands (Uli & Anggraini, 2024). The increasing integration of digital technologies into entrepreneurial activities has consequently shifted digital marketing from being an optional promotional instrument into a strategic capability that supports long-term organizational resilience and sustainable growth (Ritz et al., 2019). This transformation has encouraged MSMEs across different sectors to reconsider conventional marketing practices and embrace digital innovation as an indispensable component of business development.

Traditional cultural products, such as Batak Toba and Batak Simalungun ulos, possess not only substantial economic value but also represent important cultural identities that contribute to preserving Indonesia's intangible cultural heritage. Despite this cultural significance, MSMEs engaged in traditional textile businesses frequently encounter difficulties in expanding their market reach and maintaining competitiveness because conventional marketing approaches are often unable to respond to increasingly digital consumer preferences (Brina & Siahaan, 2024). These challenges became considerably more severe during the COVID-19 pandemic, when mobility restrictions and declining physical interactions substantially reduced customer visits to traditional markets and disrupted the

operational sustainability of many small businesses (Dwivedi et al., 2020). The pandemic simultaneously accelerated digital transformation by compelling entrepreneurs to adopt technology-based marketing strategies in order to maintain customer relationships and sustain business performance under uncertain economic conditions (Ratten, 2021). Evidence from recent MSME studies indicates that businesses capable of integrating digital marketing into their operational activities generally demonstrate stronger adaptive capacity, broader market penetration, and higher competitiveness than businesses relying solely on conventional marketing channels (Asrah et al., 2024). These developments indicate that digital transformation has become a strategic necessity rather than merely a technological trend for MSMEs operating in both commercial and culturally based industries.

The concept of digital marketing emphasizes the integration of online communication technologies to improve organizational performance through wider market accessibility, stronger customer engagement, and more efficient promotional activities across multiple digital platforms (Kannan & Li, 2017). Social media applications, electronic commerce marketplaces, live-streaming features, and digital content creation have become essential marketing instruments that enable MSMEs to communicate directly with customers while reducing geographical and operational barriers (Rusdana et al., 2022). Empirical evidence consistently suggests that the implementation of digital marketing contributes positively to business development by increasing sales performance, strengthening customer trust, and improving long-term business sustainability among MSMEs (Nurhasanah et al., 2023). Similar findings further demonstrate that the successful utilization of digital marketing depends not only on technological adoption but also on entrepreneurs' capability to design attractive digital content, maintain interactive communication with consumers, and continuously evaluate marketing performance through digital platforms (Saputra et al., 2023). Community-based implementation programs have likewise confirmed that digital marketing significantly improves promotional effectiveness and commercial opportunities for small businesses operating in competitive environments (Mawahib et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the extent to which these strategic advantages can be achieved remains highly dependent on the characteristics of individual business sectors, indicating that contextual investigations are required to explain variations in digital marketing implementation across different types of MSMEs.

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that digital marketing contributes positively to MSME development by increasing product visibility, customer engagement, business competitiveness, and sales performance across various industrial sectors (Aditya & Rusdianto, 2023). Existing empirical research has predominantly concentrated on MSMEs operating in food, fashion, handicrafts, and general retail businesses, revealing that digital marketing adoption strengthens promotional effectiveness and facilitates broader market expansion through integrated online platforms (Dewi, 2024). Similar investigations have further emphasized that social media utilization, marketplace integration, and digital branding significantly improve customer acquisition and organizational performance when implemented systematically by MSMEs (Rusnendar et al., 2024). Although these findings confirm the strategic importance of digital marketing, relatively limited attention has been devoted to MSMEs that commercialize traditional cultural products whose marketing objectives extend beyond economic profitability toward cultural preservation (Sutaguna et al., 2024). Even fewer studies have examined how live-streaming commerce through platforms such as TikTok Live, combined with electronic commerce applications such as Shopee, influences the sales performance of traditional textile enterprises operating within local cultural markets (Rachmawati et al., 2023). This imbalance in the existing literature indicates that the contextual dynamics of digital marketing implementation within culturally embedded MSMEs remain insufficiently explored despite their increasing relevance in the digital economy.

These conceptual and empirical limitations create an important research gap because the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies cannot be fully generalized across different MSME sectors without considering the unique characteristics of cultural products, consumer behavior, and local business environments. Traditional textile businesses such as Batak Toba and Batak Simalungun ulos enterprises combine commercial objectives with the preservation of cultural identity, making their digital marketing practices substantially different from those adopted by conventional retail businesses. The present study addresses this gap by examining the implementation of digital marketing at Misel Nadeak Ulos Store, located in Horas Market, which initially relied exclusively on offline transactions before gradually adopting TikTok Live and Shopee as primary digital marketing channels during the

COVID-19 pandemic. By investigating the transition from conventional to digital marketing within a culturally oriented MSME, this study seeks to generate a more comprehensive understanding of how digital technologies contribute to business resilience, customer engagement, and sales sustainability in local markets. Rather than merely evaluating marketing outcomes, the study also considers how digital platforms facilitate the commercialization of traditional products while simultaneously supporting the preservation of Indonesia's cultural heritage. This contextual perspective is expected to enrich the current digital marketing literature by providing empirical evidence from a sector that has received relatively limited scholarly attention.

This study aims to analyze the implementation of digital marketing strategies at Misel Nadeak Ulos Store, evaluate their influence on the sales performance of Batak Toba and Batak Simalungun ulos products, and identify the challenges encountered throughout the digital transformation process. The research is positioned to contribute to a broader understanding of how culturally based MSMEs adapt digital marketing practices within increasingly competitive business environments while maintaining the authenticity and cultural value of their products. The findings are expected to extend the discussion of digital marketing implementation beyond conventional MSME sectors by providing insights from the perspective of traditional textile enterprises operating in local markets. The study also offers practical implications for MSME owners seeking to strengthen business competitiveness through digital platforms without compromising the cultural identity embedded in their products. Ultimately, this research contributes to the growing discourse on digital transformation, cultural entrepreneurship, and sustainable MSME development by demonstrating the strategic role of digital marketing in supporting both economic resilience and cultural preservation in the digital era.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed an empirical qualitative research design to explore the implementation of digital marketing strategies and their impact on business performance in Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). A qualitative approach was selected because it enables researchers to obtain a comprehensive understanding of social phenomena, participants' experiences, and business practices within their natural settings while emphasizing contextual interpretation of the observed phenomena (Miles et al., 2020). The research was conducted at Misel Nadeak Ulos Store, located in Horas Market, Medan, Indonesia, a business established in 2016 that specializes in Batak Toba Ulos, Batak Simalungun Ulos, Songket, and various Batak cultural accessories. The research participants consisted of the business owner and individuals directly involved in managing and implementing digital marketing activities. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their knowledge, experience, and involvement in business operations relevant to the research objectives. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and documentation to obtain comprehensive information regarding digital marketing implementation, the utilization of TikTok Live and Shopee, customer engagement, and business development.

The primary research instrument was the researcher, supported by interview guidelines, observation sheets, and documentation records to ensure consistency throughout the data collection process. Data credibility was strengthened through the comparison of information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation so that findings could be interpreted comprehensively from multiple sources (Miles et al., 2020). It should be noted that this study did not include quantitative sales reports or detailed financial records as analytical evidence; therefore, the assessment of business performance and the influence of digital marketing on sales was derived from participants' experiences and perceptions regarding changes following the adoption of digital marketing platforms. The collected data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis following the interactive model of data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification to identify patterns and develop meaningful interpretations of the findings (Miles et al., 2020). Ethical considerations were maintained by obtaining participants' voluntary consent prior to data collection, respecting confidentiality, and ensuring that all collected information was used solely for academic research purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Business Profile and Pre-Digital Marketing Conditions of Misel Nadeak Ulos Store

Misel Nadeak Ulos Store is a micro-enterprise specializing in traditional Batak cultural products, including Batak Toba Ulos, Batak Simalungun Ulos, songket, and various Batak cultural accessories. The business was established in 2016 by Rosalinda Manurung and operates at Horas Market, Medan, Indonesia, where traditional products are traded and introduced to local consumers. Based on interviews with the business owner and direct observations, the marketing activities conducted before digital transformation were fully dependent on conventional offline mechanisms. Product promotion, customer communication, and transactions were primarily carried out through direct interaction between sellers and buyers at the physical store. This condition illustrates the common characteristics of traditional MSMEs that rely on physical marketplaces and personal relationships as the foundation of their marketing activities (Purwana et al., 2017).

The findings indicate that the pre-digital marketing condition of Misel Nadeak Ulos Store was influenced by limited market accessibility and restricted promotional capacity. The owner explained that most customers were obtained from visitors who came directly to Horas Market, resulting in a customer base that was largely concentrated within the local area. Although the products offered contained cultural and artistic values, these advantages had not been widely recognized by consumers outside the immediate marketplace environment. The absence of digital promotional channels limited the ability of the business to introduce product characteristics, cultural meanings, and product variations to broader consumer segments. This finding supports previous research indicating that conventional marketing practices often create challenges for MSMEs in expanding market reach because promotional activities remain dependent on physical customer presence (Aditya & Rusdianto, 2023).

The competitive conditions within Horas Market also affected the development of Misel Nadeak Ulos Store before adopting digital marketing strategies. Observation results revealed that the business operated among other sellers offering similar traditional products, creating competition in attracting consumer attention and maintaining market positioning. Under conventional marketing conditions, product differentiation mainly depended on the quality of physical products and the ability of sellers to explain product uniqueness directly to customers. However, the symbolic value, historical meaning, and cultural narratives associated with Batak products had limited opportunities to reach consumers beyond direct interactions at the marketplace. Similar challenges have been identified among MSMEs in Medan, where limited promotional innovation reduces the ability of businesses to strengthen brand awareness and compete in broader markets (Brina & Siahaan, 2024).

The interview data further showed that promotional activities before digital transformation were conducted through relatively simple approaches, such as direct selling, personal recommendations, and repeat customer relationships. These methods allowed the business to maintain connections with existing customers but provided limited opportunities to establish continuous engagement with potential consumers. The marketing process was highly dependent on customer visits, meaning that fluctuations in marketplace activity directly influenced opportunities for sales interaction. From a marketing perspective, this situation reflects the limitations of traditional promotional approaches in creating long-term customer relationships because communication is mostly restricted to transactional encounters. Digital marketing development has changed this pattern by enabling businesses to provide information, communicate with customers, and build relationships through technology-based platforms (Kannan & Li, 2017).

The research findings suggest that the main limitation experienced by Misel Nadeak Ulos Store before digitalization was not related to the quality or uniqueness of its products, but rather to the effectiveness of its marketing system. Traditional Batak products possess strong cultural identity and potential market value, yet these characteristics require appropriate communication strategies to reach wider consumer groups. The limited use of promotional media prevented the business from fully utilizing the cultural value of its products as a competitive advantage. Dewi (2024) explains that MSMEs need to adjust their marketing strategies because changes in consumer behavior have shifted product discovery and purchasing decisions toward digital environments. The experience of Misel Nadeak Ulos Store demonstrates that businesses with distinctive products still require adaptive marketing approaches to maximize market opportunities.

The initial marketing conditions of Misel Nadeak Ulos Store provide an important explanation regarding the necessity of digital transformation in its business development process. Before adopting

digital marketing, the business faced several structural challenges, including narrow market coverage, limited promotional channels, and dependence on physical customer visits. These challenges represent common issues encountered by MSMEs that operate within traditional market systems and seek to improve their competitiveness. Previous studies emphasize that digital marketing adoption can assist MSMEs in expanding market access, increasing product visibility, and improving commercialization opportunities through technology-based communication channels (Purwana et al., 2017). The transition toward digital marketing at Misel Nadeak Ulos Store can be understood as a strategic adaptation to overcome conventional marketing limitations and create opportunities for broader business development.

Digital Transformation and Digital Marketing Adoption During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic became a significant turning point in the marketing development of Misel Nadeak Ulos Store because it disrupted conventional business activities that relied on direct customer interactions. Based on interview findings, the implementation of mobility restrictions and the decline in marketplace activities significantly reduced the number of customers visiting Horas Market. The owner explained that the decrease in physical transactions created uncertainty because most sales activities previously depended on face-to-face purchasing processes. This situation encouraged the business to search for alternative marketing channels that could maintain customer communication and support business continuity despite restrictions on physical activities. Similar conditions were experienced by many MSMEs during the pandemic, where digital adaptation became an important mechanism for maintaining business operations amid economic disruption (Dwivedi et al., 2020).

The research findings reveal that the adoption of digital marketing at Misel Nadeak Ulos Store emerged as a strategic response to changing market conditions rather than merely a temporary solution during the pandemic. The business began utilizing TikTok Live and Shopee as digital platforms to promote products, communicate with customers, and facilitate online transactions. Through these platforms, the business was able to display products without requiring customers to visit the physical store directly. The transition represented a change in the marketing orientation of the business, shifting from location-based selling toward a more flexible and technology-supported approach. Ratten (2021) argues that entrepreneurial adaptation during crisis periods requires businesses to develop new capabilities, particularly through the utilization of technology to maintain resilience and identify alternative opportunities.

The implementation of TikTok Live provided Misel Nadeak Ulos Store with a new method of presenting traditional products through interactive digital communication. Based on observations and interviews, live streaming activities allowed the owner to demonstrate product details, explain the cultural meanings of Ulos, and respond directly to customer inquiries during promotional sessions. This interaction created a more engaging shopping experience compared with conventional promotional methods that were limited to physical encounters. The use of live streaming also enabled the business to communicate the uniqueness of traditional products to audiences who were previously unreachable through offline marketing channels. The findings support the digital marketing framework proposed by Kannan and Li (2017), which emphasizes that digital platforms have transformed marketing communication by integrating customer interaction, information exchange, and relationship development into a single environment.

In addition to TikTok Live, the adoption of Shopee contributed to the transformation of the business's transaction system and product accessibility. The interview results showed that Shopee was utilized as an online marketplace where customers could view product catalogs, access purchasing information, and complete transactions without geographical limitations. Features such as product ratings, customer reviews, and digital payment systems provided additional support in building consumer confidence during online purchasing processes. This platform-based approach expanded the function of marketing from simply promoting products to creating an integrated purchasing experience. Research by Rusdana et al. (2022) highlights that effective digital marketing communication enables MSMEs to improve competitiveness by combining promotional activities, customer interaction, and transaction convenience through digital platforms.

The adoption of digital marketing also reflects changes in the business capabilities required by MSMEs in responding to technological development. Before digital transformation, the business mainly depended on physical customer traffic, whereas digital platforms allowed the owner to actively reach

consumers through online promotional activities. This shift required adjustments in marketing practices, including learning how to create digital content, manage online interactions, and utilize platform features effectively. The findings demonstrate that digital transformation involves not only technological adoption but also organizational learning and adaptation among business actors. Rachmawati et al. (2023) explain that the implementation of digital marketing strategies in MSMEs requires continuous adjustment because technological platforms create new patterns of competition and customer engagement.

The digital transformation experienced by Misel Nadeak Ulos Store demonstrates how technology can support MSME resilience and create new opportunities for traditional cultural businesses. The transition from offline marketing to digital platforms enabled the business to overcome several limitations associated with conventional selling practices, particularly restricted market reach and dependence on physical customer visits. Although the implementation process required adaptation and learning, digital marketing provided opportunities to introduce Batak cultural products to wider audiences while maintaining business activities during uncertain conditions. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that digital marketing adoption can strengthen MSME development by improving promotional effectiveness and expanding commercialization opportunities (Rachmawati et al., 2023). The experience of Misel Nadeak Ulos Store illustrates that digital transformation can function as a strategic pathway for small businesses to adapt to changing economic and technological environments.

The Contribution of Digital Marketing to MSME Business Performance

The implementation of digital marketing through TikTok Live and Shopee generated several changes in the business performance of Misel Nadeak Ulos Store, particularly in terms of market accessibility and product exposure. Based on interview findings, the owner perceived that digital platforms enabled the business to reach customers beyond the geographical limitations of Horas Market. Before digital adoption, customer acquisition depended largely on physical visits, whereas online platforms allowed potential buyers from different regions to discover and access Batak cultural products. This change indicates that digital marketing expanded the business communication space by connecting local products with wider consumer networks. Previous studies have shown that digital marketing provides MSMEs with opportunities to overcome geographical barriers and strengthen product commercialization through technology-based marketing channels (Nurhasanah et al., 2023).

One of the most significant impacts identified in this study was the expansion of market reach through digital platforms. The owner explained that TikTok Live and Shopee increased product visibility because customers could access product information without visiting the physical store directly. The ability to display Ulos products through digital catalogs and live demonstrations allowed consumers to understand product characteristics, variations, and cultural meanings more effectively. This condition was particularly important for traditional products because purchasing decisions are often influenced not only by product appearance but also by the cultural value attached to the products. The findings support previous research indicating that digital marketing implementation can strengthen MSME competitiveness by increasing promotional coverage and creating wider opportunities for consumer engagement (Setyawati et al., 2023).

Digital marketing also influenced the pattern of customer interaction between the business and consumers. The interview results revealed that TikTok Live created opportunities for real-time communication, where customers could ask questions, request product demonstrations, and receive direct responses from the seller. This interaction provided a different marketing experience compared with conventional selling practices that were limited to customers physically visiting the store. Digital communication enabled the business to develop closer relationships with consumers by providing faster responses and more personalized product explanations. This finding aligns with research by Saputra et al. (2023), which emphasizes that digital marketing strategies can improve MSME competitiveness by strengthening communication processes between businesses and customers.

The adoption of digital platforms also contributed to operational flexibility in managing marketing activities. The owner explained that promotional activities could be conducted without being restricted by marketplace operating hours because product promotion, customer communication, and transaction processes could be managed through digital platforms. Compared with conventional marketing, which required continuous physical presence at the store, digital marketing reduced

dependence on direct selling activities. The integration of promotional and transactional functions within digital platforms allowed the business to manage marketing activities more efficiently. Previous studies have found that digital marketing adoption can support MSME performance by improving operational effectiveness and providing more flexible approaches to managing business activities (Uli & Anggraini, 2024).

The comparison between conventional and digital marketing practices implemented by Misel Nadeak Ulos Store is presented in Table 1. The table demonstrates several differences between offline and digital approaches, particularly regarding market reach, promotional mechanisms, customer interaction, and transaction flexibility. The findings indicate that digital marketing provides broader opportunities for business development because promotional activities are no longer dependent solely on physical customer visits. The comparison also illustrates that digital platforms provide additional features, such as live interaction and customer reviews, which were unavailable in conventional marketing practices. These findings reinforce the argument that digital marketing creates strategic advantages for MSMEs by integrating promotion, communication, and transaction processes within a connected business environment.

Table 1. Comparison of Offline and Digital Marketing Practices at Misel Nadeak Ulos Store

Aspect	Offline Marketing Practices	Digital Marketing Practices
Market reach	Limited to customers visiting Horas Market	Accessible to customers from wider regions
Product visibility	Dependent on physical store visits	Supported through digital catalogs and live streaming
Promotional activities	Conducted through direct selling and recommendations	Conducted through TikTok Live and Shopee features
Customer interaction	Limited to face-to-face communication	Enabled real-time interaction through digital platforms
Transaction process	Requires physical customer presence	Supports online purchasing and digital transactions
Customer trust mechanism	Built through direct interaction	Supported by ratings, reviews, and online reputation

The findings also indicate that digital marketing contributed to the development of consumer trust, particularly through platform-based credibility mechanisms. The owner observed that customers were more confident in purchasing products online because they could view ratings, reviews, and previous customer experiences on digital platforms. These features reduced uncertainty among consumers who had never visited the physical store and supported purchasing decisions through additional information sources. For traditional cultural products, trust is an important factor because consumers often require detailed information regarding product authenticity, quality, and cultural significance. Research by Asrah et al. (2024) and Sudiantini et al. (2024) highlights that digital marketing platforms can strengthen MSME competitiveness by improving consumer confidence and expanding opportunities for customer acquisition.

Regarding sales performance, the owner perceived that digital marketing contributed to increased sales opportunities and improved business development compared with the previous offline-only approach. However, this study does not use quantitative sales records, financial statements, or transaction databases as analytical evidence. Therefore, the perceived improvement in sales performance is interpreted based on qualitative information obtained from interviews and observations rather than measurable financial growth indicators. This methodological limitation does not eliminate the importance of the findings because qualitative evidence provides insight into how business actors experience and interpret the contribution of digital transformation to their operations. Similar studies emphasize that digital marketing adoption can support MSME growth by improving market exposure, strengthening customer relationships, and increasing commercialization potential (Mawahib et al., 2024; Rusnendar et al., 2024).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that digital marketing has contributed to several dimensions of MSME performance, including market expansion, customer engagement, operational flexibility, and

consumer trust development. The transformation experienced by Misel Nadeak Ulos Store shows that digital platforms can become strategic resources for traditional businesses seeking to maintain competitiveness in changing market environments. The results also indicate that digital marketing should not be understood merely as a promotional tool but as a broader business strategy that influences communication patterns, customer relationships, and market opportunities. The experience of Misel Nadeak Ulos Store supports previous research emphasizing the importance of digital adaptation for MSMEs in achieving sustainable development within increasingly technology-oriented markets (Setyawati et al., 2023; Sudiantini et al., 2024).

Challenges, Implications, and Future Development of Digital Marketing Implementation

Although digital marketing provided several benefits for Misel Nadeak Ulos Store, the implementation process also involved several challenges that influenced the effectiveness of its application. Based on interview findings, one of the main challenges was related to human resource capacity in managing both conventional and digital business activities simultaneously. The owner explained that each employee already had specific responsibilities, but work arrangements could become less efficient when certain employees were unavailable. This condition occasionally caused overlapping tasks between product preparation, customer service, and digital marketing activities. The findings indicate that digital transformation requires not only technological adoption but also adequate organizational capability to manage new marketing responsibilities effectively. Previous research emphasizes that successful digital marketing implementation among small businesses depends on the ability of organizations to develop internal capabilities and adapt resources according to changing business environments (Ritz et al., 2019).

Another challenge identified in this study relates to the continuous demand for digital content development and platform adaptation. The use of TikTok Live and Shopee requires businesses to consistently provide attractive content, understand customer preferences, and adjust marketing strategies according to platform developments. The owner indicated that maintaining consistency in online promotion requires additional effort because digital consumers tend to expect updated information and engaging product presentations. Unlike conventional marketing activities that are relatively stable, digital marketing environments continuously change due to evolving consumer behavior, platform features, and content trends. Rachmawati (2024) explains that digitalization in MSME marketing requires continuous learning because technological development creates new demands for business actors to improve their digital competencies.

The findings also reveal that adapting to digital platforms involves a learning process beyond basic technological usage. Although TikTok Live and Shopee provide accessible marketing facilities, maximizing their potential requires understanding content strategies, customer interaction patterns, and platform mechanisms. For a traditional cultural-product business, digital adaptation also requires the ability to translate cultural values into digital communication formats that are attractive to modern consumers. This process is important because the uniqueness of products such as Batak Ulos is not only based on physical appearance but also on cultural meanings and historical narratives. Research by Sutaguna et al. (2024) highlights that MSMEs need to develop digital marketing capabilities that combine technological skills with creative strategies to ensure that local products remain competitive in digital marketplaces.

The implementation of digital marketing at Misel Nadeak Ulos Store has several implications for MSME development, particularly for businesses that promote cultural and traditional products. The findings demonstrate that digital platforms can function as instruments for expanding economic opportunities while simultaneously supporting the wider recognition of local cultural products. Through online platforms, traditional products that were previously accessible mainly within local markets can reach consumers from different geographical areas. This condition indicates that digital marketing has the potential to connect economic development with cultural preservation by enabling local businesses to introduce cultural identities through modern communication channels. Setiawan et al. (2025) argue that sustainable MSME performance increasingly depends on the ability of businesses to integrate digital strategies into long-term development planning.

From a broader perspective, the experience of Misel Nadeak Ulos Store indicates that digital marketing adoption should be viewed as a continuous strategic process rather than a one-time technological change. The effectiveness of digital marketing depends on the ability of businesses to

maintain innovation, improve digital skills, and respond to changing consumer expectations. For MSMEs operating in cultural product sectors, digital transformation provides opportunities to strengthen competitiveness while maintaining the authenticity of local products. However, the benefits of digital marketing cannot be separated from the challenges of resource availability, knowledge development, and adaptation capacity. These findings reinforce the importance of strengthening MSME capabilities through digital literacy programs and continuous business development support.

This study also has several limitations that need to be considered when interpreting the findings. The research was conducted in a single MSME setting, namely Misel Nadeak Ulos Store, which limits the transferability of findings to other businesses with different characteristics and operational environments. In addition, the study relied on qualitative data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation, without incorporating quantitative sales records, financial reports, or transaction data. As a result, the influence of digital marketing on business performance was analyzed based on the experiences and perceptions of participants rather than statistical measurement of financial outcomes. Future research is recommended to involve a larger number of MSMEs from various sectors and combine qualitative insights with quantitative performance indicators to provide a more comprehensive understanding of digital marketing effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that digital marketing contributes significantly to supporting the sustainability and business development of MSMEs engaged in traditional cultural product marketing. The findings reveal that the transition from conventional marketing practices to digital platforms enabled Misel Nadeak Ulos Store to overcome limitations associated with local market dependence, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic when physical customer interactions were significantly reduced. The utilization of TikTok Live and Shopee provided opportunities to expand market reach, improve product visibility, strengthen customer trust through digital reviews and ratings, and increase flexibility in marketing and transaction processes. Digital transformation was identified not only as a technological adjustment but also as a strategic adaptation that enhanced business resilience in responding to changing market conditions. For traditional cultural businesses, digital marketing also functions as a medium for introducing and promoting local heritage products to broader consumer communities while maintaining their economic relevance.

Despite the positive contributions of digital marketing, this study highlights that successful implementation requires continuous adaptation, particularly in terms of human resource readiness, content management, and digital competency development. The experience of Misel Nadeak Ulos Store indicates that digital platforms can strengthen MSME competitiveness and create new opportunities for sustainable growth, although challenges related to operational management remain present. The findings should be interpreted within the limitations of a qualitative research approach, as the study relied on interviews, observations, and documentation without incorporating quantitative sales records or financial performance data. Future research is recommended to involve a larger number of MSMEs and integrate quantitative indicators to measure the direct impact of digital marketing adoption on business performance. Such investigations would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how digital transformation contributes to MSME growth across different business sectors.

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