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Digital Transformation as a Catalyst for MSME Competitiveness and Development

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ABSTRACT




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Purpose: The purpose of this study is to determine the strategy for developing a culinary Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in market segments, target markets, product characteristics, pricing, location, promotion & economic based level that can improve competitiveness and sustainability.

Method: A qualitative descriptive design was implemented by targeting seven kitchen MSME founders through purpose sampling. The data was collected through in-depth interviews, structured observations and document analysis and it was analyzed via the thematic analysis to ascertain the emerging patterns and strategic practices.

Findings: MSMEs adapt through menu diversification, opening from early hours and using food delivery platforms as suggested by the results. Strategic location based home operations with reduced cost and customer flow. Promotions certain community led campaigns are good for the brand image Lack of digital marketing adoption. The biggest value-added features here are all about the freshness of products, with opportunity for growth in shelf stable innovation. These differences in financial strategies also underline the importance of enhanced financial literacy.

Novelty: This paper is also the first that combines a series of strategic, operational and socio-cultural dimensions of MSME development, integrating a rich body empirical field evidence with some well established theoretical frameworks for addressing market-driven (Porter 1979) and resource-based challenges.

Implications: The results are actionable for MSME owners, policymakers, and development agencies to design focused interventions in digital adoption, innovation, infrastructure upgrade, and financial management to drive sustainable growth and competitive advantage in the culinary industry.

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1. Introduction

However, in the last few years there was a transformative force that appeared and now stands as one of the definitive faces across MSMEs worldwide digital transformation. A review of 986 publications up to 2019 from Scopus and Web of Science, using bibliometric analysis, indicates that digital tools including e-commerce, fintech and innovation platforms are facilitating increased resilience, innovation capability and market penetration potential for MSMEs after 2020. A review of literature indexed in the Scopus database between 2020 and 2024 was conducted, and the results of this review are presented here (Abdul Basit et al., 2024; Phillips et al., 2024). This review focused on Indonesian SMEs (Huda, 2012; Irijayanti & Azis, 2012). It identified enablers of digital integration. These enablers are likely to be of low to medium priority. Examples include government support for broadband uptake (Philip et al., 2017; Sakti et al., 2024). This improves accessibility to infrastructure. It also enhances necessity-based digital literacy. The review also identified major or consistent barriers (Maldonado-Canca et al., 2025; Seyoum, 2024). These include finance scarcity and fund access. They also include a lack of technology readiness. Finally, they include stubborn firm



owner leader inertia (Cuel et al., 2024; Rabetino et al., 2025). A bibliometric mapping of digital transformation in the creative economy focused on MSMEs offers more detailed insights into how the discourse is unraveling entrepreneurship. It also shows that innovation ecosystems are at the centre of this discussion. There is an overall shift from SHS towards AI and platform-based business models (Chankseliani et al., 2025; Sun & Abdullahi Usman, 2024). Taken together, these studies validate beyond doubt that digital transformation is no longer an aspiration research theme but a necessity-driven strategic paradox for SMEs to stay ahead of the curve and sustain market relevance in rapidly-evolving technology-facilitated global business architecture (Pereira, 2024; Theunissen et al., 2025).

However, in realization of the importance of this digital imperative, MSMEs are encountering several structural issues and strategic in-congruence which we previously mentioned. While in Indonesia, empirical data proves digital strategy and market complexity significantly impacts SME performance, but have been underutilized to support by the mediating effect of digital transformation. Ahmad et al. (2023), Suder et al. (2022), show that digitalization has a significant positive influence on business performance, with competitive advantage being the mediating variable. However, the literature also suggests that the star has not yet fully reflected upon these integrating trends of AI, sustainability and platform-based business models in digital ecosystems. This exposes a critical divide whereby the positive potential of digital adoption is not sufficiently understood and operationalized in its strategic alignment with long-term business models and innovation trajectories (Ahmad et al., 2023; Sakti et al., 2024).

Two Theoretical Frameworks TOE and RBV, this study follows a theoretical framework consisting of two approaches the Technology Organization Environment (TOE) model, and Resource Based View (RBV). In this light, the TOE framework which is broadly based argues that technological capabilities, organizational readiness and environmental context are important elements for predicting the adoption and effective use of innovations here digital transformation within MSMEs (Bag et al., 2025; Bhuiyan, 2024; Mondal et al., 2023, 2025). At the same time, RBV argues that unique resources of a firm specific type (digital skills key-rate technology, competitive approach, inf innovation culture) contribute to sustainable competitive advantage. Both these frameworks in combination help theorize how MSMEs can internalize and operationalize digital technologies to combine capabilities (TOE) with strategic resources (RBV) leading towards enhanced performance and sustained competitiveness.

The potential advantages of digital transformation are numerous and interdependent, as reported in prior literature Al Sulaity et al. (2025), Cobbinah et al. (2025), P. Li et al. (2025), Rana et al. (2025), but yet fragmented in their reporting focusing on distinct benefits across adoption rates, infrastructure or strategic outcomes. The findings based on a bibliometric review underline the following five main themes: digital tools, fintech, innovation, barriers and performance. The same way, digital economy-SME research shows barely researched intersections for theme mapping are sustainability (AI) platform business models (Chopra et al., 2024; Schuhbert et al., 2023). The empirical work in Indonesian market evidences that digital strategy and market complexity positively improve SME performance but this relationship is not clearly operationalized by the mediating role of transformation (Setiawan et al., 2025). Additionally, although the digitalization-performance link is supported through competitive advantage for Semarang SMEs, the question of scalability as well as generalizability across sectors remains inconclusive. Given the mixed evidence and limited perspectives, there is an urgent necessity for integrative research investigating the combined effects of contextual enablers e. g., government support, infrastructure), internal capabilities e. g., digital competency, strategic orientation and emergent technologies e.g., AI, platform models from a unified perspective that brings together TOE and RBV as these single lenses have yet not provided satisfactory results. Where this study excels over previous literature is in uniting these lenses with a conceptualized overview specifically of how MSME digital transformation may develop competitive advantage, and sustain performance within different contexts. We contribute to the scholarly understanding of MSME digital resilience and strategic renewal by overcoming omissions in prior frameworks and synthesizing dimensions of strategy, technology and resources.

Thus, the purpose of this research are: 1) to formulate an integrative TOE RBV model for comprehending digital transformation in MSMEs 2) to check empirically how and under what conditions do digital infrastructure, organizational preparedness, strategic orientation towards innovation and emerging technologies e.g., AI, platform integration, contribute positively to transformation and competitive advantage development with the final aim of improved performance in MSMEs both singularly as well cross sectional case studies. The study globally contributes to both scholarship and practice by reconciling theoretical perspectives and expanding empirical scope. This work theoretically contributes to MIS and SME literature by proposing a model of how digital transformation impacts on performance. In practice, it has the potential to assist policymakers, development agencies and business practitioners alike in developing specific interventions from improved infrastructure to capacity-building programmes that support sustainable digital transformation of MSMEs at a global scale.

2. Literature review

2.1 Participation in community recycling business

Notably, community participation is a key factor in the success of local enterprises like culinary-based MSMEs as contribution commune. Engaging community participation informs a deeper knowledge about what segments of consumers actually want in a marketplace, thus aligning the business strategy with key consumer demand. Literature suggests that participatory strategies promote inclusion of all actors in enterprises, generate social capital and reinforce resilience of enterprises in competitive markets (Arnstein, 2019; Roseland & Spiliotopoulou, 2021). This participation within gastronomy reinforces more than ever the level of response in the market and generates innovation through co-creation and feedback for producers. By contrast, limited community involvement typically leads to inflexible tactics that miss the mark with changing consumer tastes and inhibit meaningful market penetration or competitive differentiation.

2.2 Infrastructure and accessibility challenges

Sufficient infrastructure, including production facilities, distribution channels and market accessibility are key to the progress of culinary MSMEs. In terms of operationalisation and scalability, empirical research underscores that the availability of physical spaces, transportation network as well as support facilities greatly impact the efficiency and scalability (Nugroho et al., 2022; Pavlovich, 2020). These constraints trickle down to culinary businesses, impacting supply chain management, the distribution radius and capacity to receive customers at your kitchen. As long as strategic investments are made, along with support for regulatory take-up or activity by the public- and private-sector complements of capacity constraints, there is potential to increase the overall competitiveness and operational resilience.

2.3 The use of marketing techniques along with digital technology in the culinary industry

Building potential market for culinary MSMEs requires good marketing strategies. Digital platforms that encompass of social media, e-commerce marketplace and online advertising have now occupied an inevitable position in targeting more customers and marketing the brand digitally anywhere on the planet earth (Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014; Dwivedi et al., 2021). Research suggests that digital marketing cuts down on promotion costs, offers a means of interacting with customers in real-time and can assist marketers to arrive at decisions based on data (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). That said, the digital technology is yet to be fully utilised by a lot of culinary MSMEs due to limited digital literacy, no incorporated branding mechanism and poor promotional planning.

2.4 Product quality, innovation, and competitive advantage

In the culinary world, nothing is more important than product quality when it comes to customer satisfaction and repeat purchases. High standards in taste, presentation, hygiene and safety are important to generate trust (Zeithaml 1988; Grunert 2005), and loyalty. In addition, product innovation, be it through flavors, packaging or fusion culinary concepts offers competitive service amid the highly saturated markets (Sørensen & Torfing, 2017). One of the most

common reasons for losing consumer engagement is that he gets bored very easily and changes his mind as soon a new idea initiates.

2.5 Capacity building and entrepreneurial training for culinary MSME

Aside from that, training and capacity-building projects are indeed an essential strategy for boosting managerial skills, improving service quality and developing products within culinary MSMEs. Entrepreneur education in general a critical nexus with business performance as it creates and allocates resources through creativity, testing ideas by applying financial literacy knowledge and showing leadership traits (Rae, 2006; Nabi et al., 2017). Entrepreneurial mentorship programs as well as workshops that facilitate skill development are a great way to fill knowledge gaps and help entrepreneurs keep up with the changing market conditions and consumer expectations.

3. Method

3.1 Research design

The research design of this study is descriptive quality, where a theoretical explanation or systematic theory in the MSME level strategy development in the culinary sector may be described systematically by qualitative analysis and reported as findings. The qualitative method provides a detailed picture of the experiences, beliefs and strategies of entrepreneurs in their operational environments. It also allows for the flexibility in data collection and analysis to change as new findings develop throughout the research process. Qualitative designs are also better suited to understand the socio-economic complexity of human behavior in natural settings, according to Creswell & Poth (2018). The data collection remained layered using direct observation, semi-structured interviews and document analysis in order to provide triangulation for validity of the results (Patton, 2015). The method supports the study of what MSME owners directly know and are willing to share, as well as their tacit knowledge from which a whole overview can be drawn about sustainability and growth strategies constitute in their enterprise.

3.2 Population and sampling

The population in the study was all culinary MSMEs registered at Mekarwangi Village, Tanah Sareal District, City of Bogor as many as 20 business is recorded in the System OSS RBA (2023). Key informants with extensive experience and expertise related to the research objectives were purposefully sampled. In the context of a qualitative inquiry, this kind of sampling makes sense because it concentrates on cases that are informative than on cases that provide the most information (Palinkas et al. 2015). The informants selected cover the diversity of business types, length in years of operation and owner type making data representation more far reaching within the sector.

3.3 Observation and interview instruments

Primary data were collected using structured observation and semi-structured interview guides in this study. Observation sheets were developed to record potential factors like the kind of business facilities, variety of products, hygiene practices used, customer flow and marketing interventions. The interview instrument included open-ended questions about entrepreneur backgrounds, entrepreneur motivation, entrepreneur operation challenge and innovation practice in the firm or project, overseas marketing and future plan. According to Kallio et al. Semi-structured interviews.

3.4 Data analysis

A qualitative thematic analysis was conducted on the collected data in line with Braun & Clarke's (2006) six steps of: familiarization with data, creating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and constructing the report. This approach is commonly applied in qualitative research to discover patterns and meanings within large data sets. Employing researcher-reflexivity to reduce interpretive bias (Nowell, Norris & White, 2017), data validity was ensured through the triangulation of observation, interviews and document review.

This helped collect both the surface propositions as well as the deep structures in their narratives and understand the strategies, problems and potentials for culinary MSME development.

4. Result

4.1 Business segmentation

The results suggest that segmentation strategies used by culinary MSMEs in the study areas are divided into operating hours, menu variation and promotion. Some business owners make these efforts as extending their hours, by varying the types of menus offered and by actively using online food delivery applications like ShopeeFood, Grabfood or Gofood in order to expand marketing space. This is in concordance with the study of Rachmawati et al. (2022), who observe that sales growth is higher among MSMEs employing multi-channel marketing than those using single channel operations. Examples of more differentiated businesses include the breakfast stall that sells Aceh-style noodles and partners with neighbouring vendors or another small lontong sayur joint that encourages home-based services through WhatsApp. These strategies resonate with the small enterprises notion of “value co-creation,” as small enterprises may provide collaborative and services diversification elements in the customer experience (Chathoth et al., 2016). The segmentation techniques employed here focus on flexibility towards general product and compliance with service level attributes, which allows industries to accommodate diverse consumer requirements while maintaining system efficiency.

4.2 Target market

Because everybody needs food universal market, the consumer segment of culinary MSMEs in Mekarwangi is broad, and successes of niche markets also rise. A good case is Rumah Kuliner Esha, which among various other seblak menus, has a steady market of teenage girls demonstrating the significance of knowing there are at least as significant numbers in psychographic segmentation. This is consistent with the idea that, according to Kotler and Keller, (2016), successful targeting involves a match between product benefits sought by well-defined groups of customers, which in this case equates with some consumer bootstrap segment. Previous studies (Ryu & Han, 2011) highlight the importance of identifying niche segments to increase consumer loyalty as it relates to foodservice markets where an emotional attachment contributes to repeat purchases. Though most businesses target a mass market by nature, basically every product and service can be given a unique spin when it comes to niche targeting which creates more opportunities for brand differentiation, competitive positioning and stability in your demand generation even in saturated markets.

4.3 Product characteristic

Culinary MSMEs generally make products fresh on a daily basis and do not leave them overnight to maintain freshness and safety, a key element for consumer confidence (Grunert 2005). Only one enterprise, Rumah Kuliner Esha, also provides frozen products like seblak, tteokbokki, and odeng that are stock-sensitive so the sellers do not have to worry that their product will soon expire in a few days. Research by Abdul-Rahman et al. To this effect, Parisutha Kalyani (2016) explains in Food Control that the consumers for small scale food businesses have significantly impressions on purchase tendencies through product freshness and quality assurances. The variability in product shelf life at the MSME level caps into the possibility for innovation on food preservation capability without sacrificing taste and nutrition, particularly targeting channels that go beyond immediate consumption business opportunities.

4.4 Pricing strategies

Cost-plus pricing mechanisms are applied to create values that remain just, yet profitable. In accordance with what Kotler and Armstrong (2018) have described as a penetration pricing strategy, many owners spoonfully start reducing prices to adapt both more customers. In saturated markets, MSMEs compete on price which is particularly important in price sensitive segments as firms under-price their peers for public contracts or dollar shoppers (Muhammad et al., 2021). If you can keep the flavor quality high and deliver better prices, your customers will come back for more and spread the word. On the other hand, continuously using price reduction as a way to beat competitors may eat at margins, so striking that balance between affordability and perceived value becomes make or break.

4.5 Business location

Amongst the remaining and busy streets rather than industrial parks, four out of the seven MSMEs are located in households which caters for walk-ins to some extent while reducing rental costs. Location theory in small business management, for example, argues that strategic positioning with good visibility and access is effective at attracting 7 customers without the need for established physical storefronts (Parsa et al., 2015). Their home-based operations are cost-minimizing strategies, allowing resources to be invested in other areas of the business (marketing and product innovation). However, this model could potentially limit the ability to scale service at higher quantities, unless new infrastructure is created.

4.6 Promotional strategies

Combination of traditional Word-of-Mouth and Digital, along with the Discount, Cashbacks and Social Promotions i.e., “*Jum’ at Berkah*” where free or discounted meals are provided to online transport drivers. This kind of community-based marketing is a reflection on corporate social responsibility (CSR) for micro-enterprises that can build customer loyalty and brand image as stated in the research conducted by Fatma et al. (2020). There are several areas in which the government can intervene so as to further strengthen the MSME, like better adoption of digital marketing which plays an important role in building successful collaboration between customers and businesses (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

Table 1. Summary of Key results

Variable	Key Observations	Supporting Literature
Business Segmentation	Diversified menu, extended hours, use of delivery apps	Rachmawati et al. (2022)
Target Market	Broad demand with niche focus (teen females for seblak)	Kotler & Keller (2016)
Product Characteristics	Mostly fresh daily; one uses frozen products	Abdul-Rahman et al. (2016)
Pricing Strategy	Cost-plus, competitive pricing	Muhammad et al. (2021)
Location	Home-based, main road access	Parsa et al. (2015)
Promotion	Discounts, CSR-based “ <i>Jumat Berkah</i> ”	Fatma et al. (2020)
Economic Considerations	Capital reinvestment, cost control	Barney (1991)

5. Conclusion

The present research offers a comprehensive qualitative study of five culinary MSME traits specific to the types of characteristics: 1) segmentation, 2) target market, 3) product/ characteristic policies, 4) pricing policy, location placement strategy promotion and economic. The results show that many businesses do adopt more flexible strategies expanded menus, delivery platforms, competitive prices – but digital marketing to increase their market draw is little utilized. On demand live-streaming, an environmentally friendly “showroom” model that brings the cars to the consumer’s doorstep, with home based operations along strategic roads leads to low customer acquisition and operating costs but there are infrastructural challenges and a huge problems in scaling. Freshly Preparing One’s way to Quality Assurance, Customers like and if one could restrict high shelf-life product launch tendency which forms larger market expansion there. Promotions, particularly community-based programs like “*Jumat Berkah*”, work not only as a magnet to attract customers but also the method to build brand image & local engagement. Meanwhile, financially, MSMEs take measures to secure their earnings and sustain a profitable business, despite the fact that they are in dire need of financial literacy for a better resource allocation. These lessons highlight the need for holistic support such as skill training on digital marketing, innovation and financial management coupled with ecosystem-level measures to better infrastructure and market access. Implementing these measures, culinary MSMEs will be able to increase competitiveness, grow in a sustainable way and make significant contributions to economic resilience and social welfare benefits more broadly as the EBM continues.



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Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A. Cross-cutting Issues

Code	Business Type & Main Products	Location Description
C-01	Home-based eatery – local cuisine	Residential complex
C-02	Food stall – traditional snacks	Village center
C-03	Home-based eatery – rice and side dishes	Neighborhood street
C-04	Food stall – traditional dishes	Village center
C-05	Small restaurant – mixed menu	Main road
C-06	Food stall – breakfast, Acehese noodles, pempek	Housing complex
C-07	Home-based eatery – rice dishes	Neighborhood
C-08	Home-based eatery – mixed menu	Housing complex
C-09	Home-based eatery – rice and side dishes	Neighborhood
C-10	Home-based eatery – fried rice	Village street
C-11	Catering service – morning cakes	Housing complex
C-12	Street food stall – spicy seblak	Housing complex
C-13	Home-based eatery – rice and side dishes	Neighborhood
C-14	Food processing industry – snacks	Village area
C-15	Food processing industry – packaged food	Housing complex
C-16	Home-based eatery – traditional vegetable salad and desserts	Housing complex
C-17	Home-based eatery – dim sum	Housing complex
C-18	Street food stall – fried rice	Main road
C-19	Street food stall – grilled satay	Village street
C-20	Food stall – breakfast items	Mosque canteen

Appendix B. Definition of variables

Informant Code	Business Type & Main Products	Years in Operation	Premises Ownership
R-01	Catering & morning cakes	10 years	Own premises
R-02	Street food stall – spicy seblak	5 years	Rented
R-03	Breakfast stall – Acehese noodles & pempek	14 years	Own premises
R-04	Traditional vegetable salad & desserts	2 years	Own premises
R-05	Grilled satay	5 years	Rented
R-06	Dim sum	3 years	Own premises
R-07	Breakfast stall – rice & vegetable dishes	4 years	Rented

Appendix C. Supplementary material



Supplementary data to this article, including detailed interview guidelines, observation checklists, and anonymized respondent profiles, can be found in the online version at (<https://doi.org/10.69725/ami.v1i2.204>).

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