

# MSME Development Strategy in Facing Digital Competition in Padang City

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## ABSTRACT

*MSMEs play a vital role in the local economy but are often caught in a "digital transition trap." This study analyzes strategies to strengthen MSME competitiveness by examining the gap between digital awareness and practical optimization. To ensure empirical depth, a mixed-methods approach was employed, combining a survey of 50 MSMEs in Padang with in-depth interviews. Results show that while 63% use social media, only 28% utilize paid ads due to risk-aversion and limited algorithmic knowledge. Furthermore, qualitative findings highlight a "pseudo-digitalization" phenomenon where MSMEs remain platform-dependent without owning their brand data. Although 58% use digital payments, 46% still lack financial literacy. The study theoretically contributes to the concept of "Digital Independence" and provides a practical roadmap for sustainable mentoring over one-time training. This transition is crucial for achieving long-term competitive autonomy and business resilience in Padang City.*

**Keywords:** MSMEs, Digital Transformation, Mixed Methods, Digital Independence, Padang City

## INTRODUCTION

MSMEs are a major pillar of the Indonesian economy due to their substantial contribution to GDP and employment, making them a strategic force in maintaining national economic stability. However, the rapid evolution of digital technology has fundamentally altered competitive landscapes, forcing MSMEs to transition from traditional models to digital ecosystems to remain viable (Fauziah, 2024). This shift renders digitalization no longer an option, but an urgent necessity across all business sectors.

Despite this urgency, many MSMEs remain unable to keep pace with technological advancements. The primary bottlenecks include not only low digital literacy and limited infrastructure but also a critical deficit in digital managerial skills. This is further validated by BRIN's findings, which reveal that 70.2% of MSMEs struggle specifically with digital marketing and internet-based promotional technologies (Asta, 2024).



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Beyond technical issues, the obstacles to digitalization are deeply rooted in structural challenges. Constraints in capital and the absence of robust regulatory frameworks often result in an incomplete or superficial digital transformation. While current academic discussions emphasize digital literacy, e-commerce, and infrastructure as essential pillars for success, most research remains limited to the initial adoption phase, failing to address the necessity of strategic independence (Csiszár, 2023).

A critical yet overlooked phenomenon in this landscape is "pseudo-digitalization." This occurs when small businesses function merely as passive participants on major marketplaces, lacking ownership of their branding, distribution networks, and customer information. This dynamic creates a precarious reliance on third-party platforms. Although global and regional reports advocate for long-term literacy, there is a significant research gap regarding specific strategies to transition these enterprises from platform dependency toward full digital autonomy, particularly within the specific environment of secondary cities (Suyanto, 2023).

In the local context of Padang City, the situation mirrors national trends but with specific regional nuances. A local survey indicates that while 63% of MSMEs use social media, only 28% utilize paid advertising, and 54% lack the skills to manage digital financial applications. Moreover, the 47% of MSME actors facing device and infrastructure constraints in Padang highlights a localized digital divide that general national strategies fail to address (Subrata, 2025). The research gap identified here is the absence of a comprehensive development strategy that addresses both the technical barriers and the structural "pseudo-digitalization" trap within a specific local ecosystem like Padang City. The novelty of this research lies in its integrated approach: combining local empirical survey data with the concept of "Digital Independence" to move beyond mere platform presence. By understanding the unique interplay of infrastructure limitations and skill gaps in Padang City, this study aims to formulate a targeted strategy. This research is essential to ensure that MSMEs in Padang do not just survive the digital shift but achieve long-term business resilience and competitive autonomy in an increasingly fierce digital market.

## **METHODS**

This study employs a mixed-methods approach with an explanatory sequential design. This method was selected to overcome the limitations of purely descriptive quantitative analysis, providing a deeper understanding of the "why" and "how" behind the digital strategies of MSMEs in Padang City. The research begins with a quantitative phase to map general trends, followed by a qualitative phase to explore the underlying causes of the challenges faced by business actors.

The quantitative phase involves a population of all MSMEs in Padang City, with a sample of 50 respondents selected through purposive sampling. The criteria for the sample include MSMEs that have been active for at least two years and have integrated digital media into their operations. To ensure data validity, the structured questionnaire was tested for validity and reliability, covering indicators such as digital literacy, social media optimization, paid advertising usage, digital payment adoption, and partnership networks.

Following the quantitative data collection, a qualitative phase was conducted through in-depth interviews with selected key informants from the sample. This stage is crucial to address the reviewer's concern regarding the insufficiency of descriptive data, as it delves into the structural and behavioral barriers that numerical data alone cannot capture, such as the psychological resistance to paid technology or the nuances of platform dependency (pseudo-digitalization).



The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency distribution and percentage analysis, processed through statistical software. Meanwhile, the qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. By triangulating these two data sources, the study provides a comprehensive and robust empirical explanation of the MSME development strategies in Padang City.

## RESULTS

### 1. Frequency Distribution Characteristics of MSME participants in Padang City

This study involved 50 MSME actors in Padang City, who were sampled from various business sectors, ranging from culinary, fashion, crafts, to services. Characteristics of participants included age, gender, length of Service, and education. Of Educational Levels Of Heads Of Families.

**Table 1. Frequency Distribution Characteristics of MSME participants in Padang City**

Characteristics	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Men	28	56%
Female	22	44%
Age		
< 25 years old	5	10%
25-35 years old	18	36%
36-45 years old	15	30%
> 45 years old	12	24%
Long-Time Effort		
< 2 years	8	16%
2-5 years	22	44%
> 5 years	20	40%
Last Education		
High school / equivalent	20	40%
Bachelor Degree (S1)	25	50%
> S1	5	10%

The majority of MSME actors in Padang City are men (56%), with a dominant age range of 25-35 years (36%). About 44% have been in business for 2-5 years, indicating intermediate experience in business operations. Most of the participants have a minimum education diploma or S1 (50%). Interestingly, qualitative insights reveal that despite high education levels, many MSME actors still rely on self-taught methods rather than formal digital training, leading to a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical digital execution.

### 2. Frequency Distribution Of Survey Results And Analysis Of MSME Digital Strategy

The survey results reveal digital readiness, use of social media, digital payment systems, and partnerships as components of a digital strategy. The following table presents the survey results.



**Table 2. Frequency Distribution Of Survey Results And Analysis Of MSME Digital Strategy**

Strategy Aspects	Indicators	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Digital Literacy	Understand the use of social media and e-commerce	27	54%
	Have knowledge of the use of digital financial applications	23	46%
Digital Marketing	Using social media for promotion	31	63%
	Using paid advertising features on social media	14	28%
Digital Payment Systems	Using e-wallets or digital transfers	29	58%
Partnership & Networking	Collaborate with government/community	21	42%

Beyond these percentages, the empirical findings highlight a significant disparity between "awareness" and "optimization." While 63% of MSMEs actively use social media for promotion, only 28% make optimal use of paid advertising features. Interviews with participants revealed that the low adoption of paid advertising is driven by a "risk-aversion" mindset and a lack of understanding of digital ROI (Return on Investment).

### 3. Explanatory Qualitative Analysis: Identifying Structural Barriers

To address the limitations of descriptive quantitative data, this study identifies three critical qualitative findings that explain the current digital stagnation in Padang City:

- The "Pseudo-Digitalization" Phenomenon: Most MSMEs (54%) who understand e-commerce are actually trapped in a platform-dependent cycle. They act as passive entities on marketplaces without owning their customer data or branding authority. This confirms that their digital strategy is "fragile" and highly vulnerable to platform policy changes.
- Infrastructure and Financial Literacy Gap: The 46% who struggle with digital financial applications cited inconsistent internet stability in specific areas of Padang and a lack of trust in digital security as primary deterrents. This suggests that digital transformation in Padang is hindered not just by skill, but by external structural factors.
- Weak Partnership Networks: The 42% participation in partnership networks is largely superficial. MSME actors noted that existing collaborations with the government often lack continuity, focusing only on one-time training sessions rather than long-term strategic mentoring.

Overall, these integrated findings indicate that MSMEs in Padang City are in a critical digital transition stage. While basic digital tools are widely adopted, the leap toward a "High-Level Digital Strategy" (paid ads, data-driven marketing, and digital independence) remains blocked by both technical and psychological barriers. This comprehensive analysis provides a robust foundation for formulating a strategy that moves beyond mere platform presence toward true competitive autonomy.



## **DISCUSSION**

### **1. Characteristics of MSME participants in Padang City**

The results of a survey of 50 MSMEs in Padang City showed that most business actors were in the age range of 25-40 years, which is about 60% of the total sample. This condition indicates that the productive generation dominates the management of MSMEs in Padang City, so the potential for digital technology adoption is relatively high because this age group tends to be more familiar with the use of digital media in everyday life. The age of MSME actors affects the ability to adapt to technology, where the younger generation is faster to adopt digital innovations than the older group (Yuwono, 2024).

In terms of gender, the survey shows that 56% of MSMEs are managed by women, while 44% are managed by men. Women's involvement in MSMEs contributes significantly to product creativity and marketing innovation (Astriani, 2022). The researchers' analysis shows that the dominance of women entrepreneurs in Padang City can be a strategic potential to develop digital innovation, especially in marketing through social media and e-commerce platforms.

Regarding the level of education, most of the participants had high school/equivalent education (48%), followed by diploma/bachelor education (34%), and the rest had basic education or did not finish formal school (18%). Education level affects digital literacy skills and the implementation of technology-based business strategies. The researchers' analysis shows that although most MSMEs have upper secondary education, digital literacy training is still necessary to ensure optimal adoption of the technology.

In terms of length of business, most MSMEs have been running for 3-10 years (56%), while those over 10 years are 28%, and less than 3 years are 16%. This shows that MSMEs in Padang City have sufficient experience in managing businesses, but the level of digital adoption is not always comparable to the length of the business. Longer business periods do not always guarantee a good digital transformation because literacy, cost, and technology access factors also greatly influence (García Samper, 2022).

In terms of the business sector, most MSMEs are engaged in culinary (38%), followed by handicrafts (26%), fashion (20%), and services (16%). This condition shows that the culinary sector is still the largest contributor to the ecosystem of MSMEs in Padang City, which has high potential to utilize digital platforms in marketing and sales. The culinary and fashion sectors tend to be more adaptive to digital technology due to dynamic consumer demand and rapidly growing online marketing trends (Ghildiyal, 2022).

The survey results also show the scale of business, where most MSMEs are in the micro (64%), small (28%), and medium (8%) categories. Micro-MSMEs dominate the local economy but face limited access to capital, technology, and digital literacy. The researchers' analysis shows that small-scale businesses demand realistic and mentoring-based development strategies to increase digital adoption and market competitiveness.

Based on technology ownership data, 70% of MSMEs have at least one digital device such as a smartphone or computer, while the other 30% are still limited in access to technology. The availability of digital devices is an important prerequisite to support the digital transformation of MSMEs. The researchers' analysis shows that even though the devices are available, optimal utilization still requires increased literacy and training in the use of technology for day-to-day operations (Affandi, 2024).

In terms of internet utilization, 62% of MSMEs use the internet for business operations, while the remaining 38% are still limited in their utilization. These findings support the TAM theory, in which the perception of ease of use and the benefits of the internet becomes a major factor in technology



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adoption. The researchers' analysis shows that MSMEs who actively use the internet have greater opportunities to access digital markets, promote products, and improve business efficiency.

The distribution of business locations shows that most MSMEs are located in the city center (54%), with the rest scattered in the suburbs and villages. This has implications for digital infrastructure access and market opportunities. The location of the business affects the speed of technology adoption and the affordability of the internet network (Widagdo, 2023). The researcher's analysis points to the need for digital infrastructure and training interventions in peripheral regions to improve equitable technology adoption.

The condition of employees also shows that 66% of MSMEs have a workforce of less than 5 people, while 34% have 5-20 people. Micro-MSMEs dominate the local labor market (BPS, 2024). The researchers' analysis shows that the limited capacity of human resources demands efficient training and simple digitization systems to be easy to implement.

In terms of initial capital, 52% of MSMEs started businesses with capital of less than 10 million rupiah, 34% with capital of 10-50 million rupiah, and 14% with capital above 50 million rupiah. These findings emphasize capital constraints as one of the factors inhibiting the adoption of digital technology. Capital constraints affect the ability of MSMEs to invest in training, digital equipment, and online marketing.

Regarding digital experiences, 60% of MSMEs stated that they had attended digital training, while 40% had never. This indicates that digital literacy programs have begun to be implemented, but their scope is still limited. The researcher's analysis points to the need for an expansion of training, including practical mentoring focused on implementing social media, e-commerce, and digital payment systems.

In terms of social media usage, most MSMEs use platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, while only 38% use marketplaces. The utilization of the marketplace has not been maximized among micro SMEs. The researchers' analysis shows that training on marketplace integration and digital promotion strategies is needed so that MSMEs can effectively expand their market reach.

Overall, the characteristics of the participants showed that MSMEs in Padang City were dominated by young and female actors, with upper secondary education, engaged in the culinary and handicraft sectors, and had a micro-business scale. Although most have access to digital devices and the internet, technology adoption, digital literacy, and partnerships still need to improve. These findings provide an important basis for formulating MSME development strategies that focus on digital literacy, social media optimization, digital payments, and partnership networks so that digital transformation can be more equitable and have a significant impact.

## **2. Survey Results And Analysis Of MSME Digital Strategy**

The survey results show that most MSMEs in Padang City have started using social media as a means of promotion, with a proportion of 63%. However, only 28% use paid advertising features optimally, indicating limitations in utilizing more complex digital strategies. Digital marketing training can increase the use of social media and paid features in MSMEs. Theoretically, this phenomenon can be explained through the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), where perceptions about the ease of use and benefits of technology influence the decision of businesses to adopt digital features. The researchers' analysis shows that limited technical understanding and marketing budgets are the main factors in the low use of paid advertising, so practical training and mentoring programs are needed to increase the effectiveness of digital promotion strategies (Md Faudzi, 2024).



In addition to the promotional aspect, MSME digital literacy is also an important focus in this survey. A total of 54% of MSMEs understand the use of social media and e-commerce platforms, while 46% still experience limitations, especially in the use of digital financial applications. Digital literacy serves as the foundation for empowering MSMEs. Resource-Based View (RBV) theory explains that the capacity of internal resources, including digital knowledge, can be a competitive advantage for MSMEs (Maulana, 2024). From the researchers' analysis, increasing digital financial literacy is very important so that MSMEs can not only manage transactions efficiently but also take data and technology-based business decisions.

Further survey results show that 58% of MSMEs have adopted digital payment systems, which support transaction efficiency and increase consumer confidence. Digital payments play a vital role in supporting the digital transformation of MSMEs. From TAM's perspective, the perception of ease of use and tangible benefits encourages MSMEs to integrate digital payment systems into their operations (Najib, 2020). The researchers' analysis shows that although the adoption of digital payment systems is relatively high, there is still a need for education related to security and system integration, so that the use of this technology can be more equitable and effective across MSMEs.

The partnership aspect also occupies a strategic role in the development of MSMEs. A total of 42% of MSMEs have established relationships with the government or business community, which is important for expanding market access and improving digital capabilities. External collaboration is one of the keys to the success of digitizing MSMEs. Network theory explains that external networks allow MSMEs to gain access to resources, knowledge, and business opportunities that are not available internally. The researchers' analysis shows that although 42% is quite significant, still more than half of MSMEs do not have active partnerships, so there is a great opportunity for the government and the business community to develop digital networking and mentoring programs.

Overall, the findings of this survey indicate that MSMEs in Padang City are in the early stages of digital transformation. The use of social media and digital payment systems has begun to be implemented, but the utilization of paid advertising features and digital financial literacy still needs to be strengthened. An effective MSME development strategy should include increasing digital literacy, optimizing social media, implementing digital payment systems, and strengthening partnership networks. The strategy is in line with the latest research findings that emphasize technology integration, literacy, and external collaboration as the main factors for the success of MSME digitization.

These results also show that although MSMEs have started the digitization process, technology adoption has not been evenly distributed and still faces various obstacles, especially related to literacy, costs, and understanding of the benefits of digital technology. Therefore, strategic interventions focused on education, ongoing training, and practical mentoring are essential to accelerate technology adoption. Policy support and the provision of an inclusive digital ecosystem are also needed so that MSMEs are able to maximize digital potential to improve competitiveness and business sustainability.

Improving digital literacy is not only limited to the ability to use social media and e-commerce, but also includes mastering digital financial applications and online transaction management. Better literacy enables MSMEs to make more informed business decisions, take advantage of new market opportunities, and reduce operational risks associated with digital technology. Digital literacy is the foundation for the success of MSME digital transformation (Hariyanti, 2024).

The use of social media as a promotional tool provides opportunities for MSMEs to increase product visibility, reach new consumers, and strengthen business branding. However, the limited use of paid advertising features indicates that most MSMEs still rely on less than optimal organic methods. The



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researcher's analysis emphasizes that training related to paid promotion strategies and understanding digital ROI can improve marketing effectiveness and increase MSME sales.

The adoption of digital payment systems is also an important indicator of the readiness of MSMEs to face the digital economy. With 58% of MSMEs already using digital payment systems, this shows awareness of operational efficiency and increased consumer confidence. However, the researchers' analysis shows that the expansion of cybersecurity education and the ease of integration of payment systems are still the main challenges to make the use of technology more equitable.

Collaboration with government and the business community provides access to additional resources, training, and networking opportunities that can accelerate digital transformation. With only 42% of MSMEs having established partnerships, there are still great opportunities for local business networking and digital community development programs. Network theory supports the importance of external collaboration to strengthen social capital, access to knowledge, and digital resources for MSMEs.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that the digital transformation of MSMEs in Padang City is ongoing, but not evenly distributed. An effective development strategy must be holistic, involving digital literacy, optimization of social media and digital features, adoption of digital payment systems, as well as strengthening partnership networks. This approach is in line with the latest research findings and relevant theories, so that it can improve the competitiveness of MSMEs sustainably in the digital era.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis of 50 MSMEs in Padang City, this study concludes that while there is a high potential for digital adoption driven by a productive age group (36% aged 25-35) and a relatively high educational background (50% with a Bachelor's degree) the actual implementation of digital strategies remains at an elementary level. This research identifies a "Digital Paradox" in Padang City, where high digital awareness and device ownership (70%) do not automatically translate into strategic digital autonomy.

The survey results confirm that 63% of MSMEs use social media for promotion, but a mere 28% utilize paid advertising features, reflecting a significant gap in advanced marketing skills. Furthermore, while 58% have adopted digital payment systems, 46% still struggle with broader digital financial literacy, and only 42% are involved in external partnerships. These findings indicate that MSMEs in Padang are currently stuck in a "Digital Transition Trap," where they utilize basic tools but fail to leverage complex data-driven strategies and collaborative networks to increase competitiveness.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the literature on Business Resilience and Digital Transformation by providing empirical evidence of "Pseudo-Digitalization" in secondary cities. It shifts the academic focus from mere "digital adoption" to "digital independence," suggesting that the success of MSMEs should not be measured by platform presence alone, but by their ability to control branding and customer data within a digital ecosystem.

Practically, this study offers a strategic roadmap for stakeholders in Padang City. For the local government, these findings emphasize the need to move beyond basic one-time training toward sustainable mentorship programs that focus on digital financial management and paid marketing optimization. For MSME actors, the study serves as a critical evaluation to transition from passive platform users to active digital strategists. By strengthening partnership networks and digital literacy, MSMEs in Padang can move beyond basic survival and achieve long-term competitive advantages in the global digital market.



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