

THE ROLE OF DIGITALIZATION IN ENHANCING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF AGRIBUSINESS MSMES IN BENGKULU CITY

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran digitalisasi dalam meningkatkan daya saing Usaha Mikro, Kecil, dan Menengah (UMKM) agribisnis di Kota Bengkulu, khususnya dalam meningkatkan jangkauan pasar, penjualan, dan pendapatan usaha. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara mendalam (in-depth interview). Subjek penelitian terdiri dari 10 pelaku UMKM agribisnis di Kota Bengkulu yang dipilih berdasarkan keterlibatan dan relevansinya terhadap penggunaan teknologi digital. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa 7 dari 10 pelaku UMKM telah mengadopsi digitalisasi melalui pemanfaatan platform digital seperti media sosial (WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram) dan marketplace (Shopee, Tokopedia, dan TikTok). Pemanfaatan digital tersebut terbukti mampu memperluas jangkauan pasar, meningkatkan interaksi dengan konsumen, serta berdampak pada peningkatan penjualan dan pendapatan. Sementara itu, 3 pelaku UMKM yang belum mengadopsi digitalisasi cenderung memiliki keterbatasan dalam jangkauan pasar dan menghadapi kesulitan dalam bersaing. Implikasi penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa digitalisasi menjadi faktor penting dalam meningkatkan daya saing UMKM agribisnis. Namun, masih terdapat kesenjangan adopsi teknologi yang disebabkan oleh keterbatasan literasi digital, modal, dan sumber daya manusia, sehingga diperlukan dukungan pelatihan dan pendampingan untuk meningkatkan kemampuan digital pelaku UMKM.

Kata kunci : digitalisasi, daya saing, UMKM, platform digital, pemasaran digital

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the role of digitalization in enhancing the competitiveness of agribusiness Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Bengkulu City, particularly in expanding market reach, increasing sales, and improving business income. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collected through in-depth

interviews. The research subjects consist of 10 agribusiness MSME owners in Bengkulu City, selected based on their involvement and relevance to the use of digital technology. The results show that 7 out of 10 MSME owners have adopted digitalization by utilizing digital platforms such as social media (WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram) and marketplaces (Shopee, Tokopedia, and TikTok). The use of these digital tools has proven to expand market reach, enhance customer interaction, and contribute to increased sales and income. Meanwhile, the remaining 3 MSME owners who have not adopted digitalization tend to have limited market reach and face difficulties in competing. The findings imply that digitalization is a key factor in improving the competitiveness of agribusiness MSMEs. However, there is still a gap in technology adoption due to limitations in digital literacy, capital, and human resources. Therefore, training and assistance are needed to improve the digital capabilities of MSME actors.

INTRODUCTION

Since the advancement of science and technology, the dynamics of MSME businesses have undergone significant changes on a global scale. The development of digitalization has encouraged MSME owners to shift from traditional business practices toward digital-based operations. This digital transformation provides benefits in increasing financial gains through higher online sales, wider market reach, and cost efficiency for consumers (Tambunan, 2019).

MSMEs play a very important role in addressing economic issues in Indonesia. Their contribution to national economic growth is substantial, accounting for more than 99% of the total number of businesses in the country. To remain sustainable and competitive, MSMEs need to implement proper management practices, including effective strategic planning to enhance their operational capabilities (Rahmat and Rudi, 2023).

Rapid technological and digital developments are characterized by ongoing and unpredictable digital transformation processes, making it challenging to accurately forecast MSME market demands in line with current trends (Khomah, *et al.*, 2022). MSMEs play a crucial role in the economy of Bengkulu City, acting as a key driver of income growth and community welfare. In the context of digitalization, MSMEs are required to adapt, innovate, and improve their

competitiveness in order not only to survive in local markets but also to compete in more modern markets. Digitalization serves as an important pillar that enables MSMEs to expand their market reach and compete more effectively. This phenomenon is particularly relevant in Bengkulu City, which has considerable economic potential but still faces structural constraints and limited access to technology and global markets (Pratama, 2021).

Business competition has become increasingly intense for MSME owners, and digitalization is one of the key strategies to market products and enhance business capacity. The implementation of digital systems enables MSME owners to respond more quickly to consumer demands for information and products. The utilization of digitalization thus provides positive impacts on MSME performance and competitiveness (Bangsawan, 2023).

METHOD

The observation was conducted from November to December 2025 using a descriptive qualitative approach. Data collection was carried out by recording information obtained from MSME owners in Bengkulu City as informants. This study utilized both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected directly through observations and interviews, while secondary data were obtained from journals, books, seminars, previous studies, and online sources. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format, with informants selected based on their relevance and involvement in the research topic. This approach allowed for a deeper exploration of their perspectives, experiences, and understanding regarding the use of digitalization.

DISCUSSION

Based on the interviews conducted, an initial assessment was carried out on 10 agribusiness MSME actors in Bengkulu City. The results show that 7 of them have adopted digitalization. This includes the use of social media for product promotion, selling through online marketplace platforms, and e-commerce applications, including local platforms such as Bengkulu Mall, which are

specifically designed to directly market local MSME products that were previously limited in their business development.

Operationally, the implementation of digitalization in business management provides convenience for MSME actors in managing inventory and recording income and expenses. This improves the accuracy and speed of business responses to market changes, which is essential for maintaining competitiveness in the digital era. Furthermore, more intensive interaction with customers through chat and review features on digital platforms enhances service responsiveness and has been shown to increase customer satisfaction.

Table 1. Customers

No.	MSME	WA	FB	IG	Marketplace	QRIS
1	Kopi Gading	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	Keripik Pisang GiwiGewi	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
3	Sirup Jeruk Kalamansi Bengkulu	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	Kerupuk Ikan Tuiru	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
5	Kopi Lancor	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
6	Keripik Ubi 3 Putri	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
7	Kerajinan Bunga Rafflesia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
8	Makanan Tradisional	No	-	-	-	-
9	Depot Bunga Abadi	No	-	-	-	-
10	Keripik Singkong	No	-	-	-	-

The survey table provides a clear overview of digital adoption among MSME samples in Bengkulu City. Overall, the level of digital adoption is relatively high among the majority of business actors. Seven MSMEs—namely Kopi Gading, Keripik Pisang GiwiGewi, Sirup Kalamansi Bengkulu, Kerupuk Ikan Tuiru, Kopi Lancor, Keripik Ubi 3 Putri, and Kerajinan Bunga Rafflesia (such as bags,

keychains, and other products)—have implemented digitalization comprehensively by utilizing various online platforms.

These MSME actors use WhatsApp primarily for direct communication and customer service, allowing customers to easily inquire about product availability and pricing with quick responses. Facebook is utilized to build communities and expand marketing reach, while Instagram serves as a visual-based marketing platform to strengthen brand identity and attract consumer interest, particularly among younger audiences (Dian *et al*, 2023)

In addition, digital platforms (*e-commerce*) such as Shopee, Tokopedia, TikTok, and Lazada are used to expand distribution channels beyond Bengkulu City. Most of these MSMEs have been using marketplaces for approximately 3–5 years due to their ease of use and relatively low operational costs. These platforms also provide access to large numbers of daily visitors and promotional features, such as discounts and campaigns, which support increased sales performance (Heni, *et al*, 2022).

Despite the high level of adoption, a digital gap still exists. The findings reveal that some MSMEs have not fully utilized digital technologies due to limited technical knowledge and skills. Three MSMEs, including traditional food businesses, still rely on conventional methods, resulting in limited market reach and lower income (Ika, 2024). Their sales are primarily conducted offline through local markets and consignment in souvenir shops, making it difficult to compete in the digital era. The absence of marketplace utilization also reduces product visibility compared to competitors with stronger digital branding (Kurniawan and Maemunah, 2019).

Overall, digitalization has contributed to a gradual increase in MSME revenues over time. However, delayed adoption of digital technology places certain businesses at a competitive disadvantage. Cases such as Depot Bunga Abadi and cassava chip MSMEs highlight challenges related to limited capital, low digital literacy, and inadequate skills.

Therefore, government intervention through digital literacy programs, training, and continuous assistance is essential to support MSMEs that have not yet

adopted digitalization. Such efforts are necessary to reduce the digital divide and enhance the competitiveness of MSMEs in the modern market.

CONCLUSION

Digitalization has brought significant changes to MSME businesses and has become a strategic solution for increasing income through the use of social media and marketplaces as marketing and sales channels. The seven MSME owners presented in the table above demonstrate that digitalization plays an important role in enhancing competitiveness in Bengkulu City, particularly in expanding market reach beyond the local area and improving their ability to develop higher-quality product branding compared to traditional competitors. However, despite these positive impacts, the adoption of digitalization has not been fully optimized. Several MSMEs, such as traditional food businesses, Depot Bunga Abadi, and cassava chip enterprises, have not yet adopted digital practices. Their vulnerable conditions, including limited knowledge and skills, hinder their development. The “No” indicators in the table highlight that, although digitalization is crucial for success, there remains a segment of MSMEs that require additional support and training to bridge this gap and compete effectively in the modern market.

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