

Digital Marketing and Sales Performance Perceptions among Rural MSMEs: A Study in Sawang District, North Aceh

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 23 June 25

Final Revision: 20 September 25

Accepted: 09 October 25

Online Publication: 31 December 25

KEYWORDS

Digital Marketing, MSMEs, Sales Performance, Perceived Impact, Rural Entrepreneurship

KATA KUNCI

Pemasaran Digital, UMKM, Kinerja Penjualan, Persepsi Dampak, Kewirausahaan Pedesaan

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DOI

10.37034/jems.v8i1.165

ABSTRACT

In an increasingly digital economy, many micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) face challenges in adapting their marketing strategies to remain visible and competitive, particularly in rural or underserved regions. This study investigates how MSMEs in Sawang District, North Aceh Regency, experience and perceive the impact of digital marketing on their sales performance. Using a quantitative descriptive approach, data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using regression techniques to explore the association between digital marketing efforts and perceived business outcomes. The findings reveal a consistent positive relationship, suggesting that MSMEs that actively utilize digital tools—such as social media, websites, and online search platforms—tend to report more favorable assessments of their sales performance. Although both variables were assessed through self-reported measures, and therefore reflect perception rather than objective data, the results offer meaningful insight into how digital engagement shapes entrepreneurial confidence and strategic behavior. This underscores the importance of digital literacy, content effectiveness, and platform accessibility in empowering small businesses. The study recommends enhanced support through policy initiatives, training programs, and digital infrastructure to strengthen MSME capacity. Future research should consider integrating perceptual and objective indicators to more comprehensively assess the role of digital marketing in business development.

ABSTRAK

Di tengah perkembangan ekonomi digital yang pesat, banyak usaha mikro, kecil, dan menengah (UMKM) menghadapi tantangan dalam mengadaptasi strategi pemasaran mereka agar tetap relevan dan kompetitif, khususnya di wilayah pedesaan atau daerah yang belum sepenuhnya terdigitalisasi. Studi ini bertujuan untuk memahami bagaimana pelaku UMKM di Kecamatan Sawang, Kabupaten Aceh Utara, merasakan dan menilai dampak pemasaran digital terhadap kinerja penjualan mereka. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kuantitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner terstruktur dan dianalisis menggunakan teknik regresi untuk menelusuri hubungan antara aktivitas pemasaran digital dan persepsi kinerja usaha. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya hubungan positif yang konsisten, di mana UMKM yang lebih aktif memanfaatkan alat digital—seperti media sosial, situs web, dan platform pencarian *online*—cenderung memberikan penilaian yang lebih baik terhadap kinerja penjualan mereka. Meskipun seluruh variabel diukur secara perseptual dan tidak mencerminkan data objektif, temuan ini memberikan wawasan penting tentang bagaimana keterlibatan digital memengaruhi kepercayaan diri wirausaha dan strategi bisnis mereka. Penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya literasi digital, kualitas konten, dan aksesibilitas platform sebagai sarana pemberdayaan UMKM. Rekomendasi diarahkan pada penguatan dukungan melalui kebijakan publik, pelatihan, dan infrastruktur digital. Penelitian selanjutnya disarankan untuk menggabungkan indikator persepsi dan data objektif guna memperoleh pemahaman yang lebih utuh tentang peran pemasaran digital dalam pengembangan UMKM.

1. Introduction

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) serve as key drivers of employment, innovation, and inclusive growth within the Indonesian economy. According to Indonesia's Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs, more than 66 million MSMEs contribute approximately 61% to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), highlighting their indispensable role in national

development [1], [2]. Beyond their macroeconomic contributions, MSMEs also foster localized economic empowerment by creating jobs and enhancing community-level resilience, particularly in rural and semi-urban regions [3], [4].

In regional contexts like Sawang District in North Aceh Regency, MSMEs span a wide range of industries, including agricultural trade, culinary production,

handicrafts, and personal services. With 445 recorded MSMEs in the district, their presence signals strong entrepreneurial activity. However, many local enterprises struggle to scale up their operations due to limited market reach and insufficient marketing strategies [5], [6]. Traditional promotional approaches dominate their outreach efforts, often failing to deliver sustained sales growth in an increasingly digitized marketplace.

The rapid expansion of internet access and digital infrastructure in Indonesia presents a transformative opportunity for MSMEs to adopt digital marketing strategies. As of 2024, internet users in the country reached approximately 221 million, accounting for nearly 79.5% of the total population [7], [8]. This digital shift empowers MSMEs to use online platforms—such as social media, e-commerce websites, and digital analytics tools like Google Trends—to engage with broader audiences, personalize customer interactions, and promote products more cost-effectively [9], [10]. Digital marketing also enables businesses to compete in regional, national, and even global markets regardless of size or capital base.

Despite these advantages, the adoption of digital marketing remains uneven among MSMEs in rural areas. A pre-survey conducted on 30 MSME actors in Sawang District revealed that many still rely on conventional strategies due to a lack of digital skills, limited access to training, and low confidence in technology use [11], [12]. Meanwhile, those who have embraced digital tools reported increased visibility, improved customer engagement, and higher sales volumes. This discrepancy indicates the potential impact that digital marketing can have when appropriately leveraged.

This study investigates the influence of digital marketing strategies on MSME sales performance in Sawang District, North Aceh. Specifically, it addresses the research question: Does the implementation of digital-based marketing strategies significantly affect the sales performance of MSMEs in the region? By applying a quantitative methodology and simple linear regression analysis, this research aims to measure the strength and significance of the relationship between digital marketing usage and sales growth.

The significance of this research is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it contributes to the body of knowledge concerning digital marketing practices in the MSME sector, particularly in underserved rural economies [13], [14]. Practically, it provides evidence-based recommendations for MSME operators, local policymakers, and support institutions on how to design and implement effective digital strategies. Moreover, it supports the design of digital literacy programs and policy frameworks to facilitate inclusive digital transformation for small enterprises.

2. Research Method

2.1. Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative descriptive research design to explore the influence of digital marketing strategies on the sales performance of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Sawang District, North Aceh Regency. A quantitative approach was chosen to enable systematic measurement and statistical analysis of the relationship between the independent variable (digital marketing strategy) and the dependent variable (sales performance). The descriptive nature of the study facilitated a comprehensive understanding of current marketing practices and sales outcomes among MSMEs in the region, providing both numerical insights and contextual relevance [15], [16].

2.2. Population and Sampling

The target population for this study consisted of 445 MSMEs operating in Sawang District, covering a variety of business sectors including trade, services, and local crafts. Given practical constraints such as time, cost, and accessibility, the researchers employed stratified random sampling to ensure that the sample was representative of the various MSME categories. Using the Slovin formula with a 10% margin of error, the minimum sample size was calculated to be 82 respondents. To improve the robustness of the data and reduce the margin of statistical error, the final sample was increased to 100 MSMEs.

2.3. Data Collection

Primary data were gathered through three main techniques: direct observation, structured questionnaires, and document analysis. The observation component involved assessing the digital marketing tools and platforms used by each MSME, while the questionnaires were designed to capture the extent of digital marketing adoption and its perceived effect on sales. The questionnaire items were constructed using a Likert scale and distributed to MSME owners or managers. In addition, document review was conducted to validate information such as business registration, digital presence, and sales performance records where available.

2.4. Instrument Validation

Instrument validation was carried out through tests of validity and reliability. Validity was confirmed by correlating each item with the total score, where all items exceeded the critical r-value, indicating that they effectively measured their respective constructs. Reliability was assessed using internal consistency coefficients, with both variables surpassing the minimum acceptable threshold. These results confirmed that the questionnaire items were both valid and reliable for use in this study.

2.5. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed through several statistical procedures to evaluate the relationship between digital marketing strategies and sales performance. Descriptive analysis was used to present respondent profiles and summarize the main variables. To ensure the suitability of regression analysis, normality was assessed using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov method, and heteroscedasticity was evaluated by examining the distribution of residuals.

A simple linear regression model was applied to determine the influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable. The significance of the regression coefficient was tested using a t-test at the 5% significance level. The strength and direction of the relationship were examined through the Pearson correlation coefficient, while the coefficient of

determination (R²) indicated the extent to which variations in sales performance could be explained by digital marketing strategies.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Instrument Validation and Assumption Testing

To ensure the quality and consistency of the research instruments, both validity and reliability tests were conducted prior to data analysis. The validity test assessed the degree to which the questionnaire items accurately measured the constructs of digital marketing and sales performance. Using item-total correlation analysis, all indicators demonstrated correlation values (r-count) above the critical threshold of 0.197 at the 5% significance level (n = 100, df = 98), confirming that each item was statistically valid.

Table 1. Validity Test Summary

| Variable | Item Codes | r-Count Range | r-Table (α = 0.05) | Validity Status |
|-----------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Digital Marketing (X) | X1.1 to X4.2 | 0.374 – 0.908 | 0.197 | All Valid |
| Sales Performance (Y) | Y1.1 to Y4.2 | 0.236 – 0.860 | 0.197 | All Valid |

In addition, the reliability test using Cronbach’s Alpha demonstrated internal consistency across both variable sets. The digital marketing construct produced a Cronbach’s Alpha value of 0.798, while the sales performance construct scored 0.657. As both values exceed the accepted threshold of 0.60, the instruments were deemed reliable for use in further analysis [17].

Table 2. Reliability Test Results

| Variable | Cronbach’s α | Threshold (≥ 0.60) | Status |
|-----------------------|--------------|--------------------|----------|
| Digital Marketing (X) | 0.798 | 0.60 | Reliable |
| Sales Performance (Y) | 0.657 | 0.60 | Reliable |

Following instrument validation, tests were performed to evaluate the assumptions for regression analysis. The normality test, assessed using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov method, returned an Asymp. Sig. value of 0.200, exceeding the significance threshold of 0.05. This indicates that the residuals are normally distributed, satisfying the normality assumption.

The heteroscedasticity test was conducted by analyzing the scatterplot of standardized residuals against predicted values. The visual inspection showed that data points were randomly and symmetrically scattered around the horizontal axis without forming any discernible pattern. This suggests that there was no evidence of heteroscedasticity, indicating constant variance in the residuals and meeting the assumption for linear regression.

3.2. Effect of Digital Marketing on Sales Performance

To assess the influence of digital marketing strategies on MSME sales performance, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted. The results indicate a statistically significant and positive relationship

between the independent variable (digital marketing) and the dependent variable (sales performance). The derived regression equation is on Equation 1.

$$Y = 13.481 + 0.601X \quad (1)$$

The equation represents a linear association between MSMEs' perceived use of digital marketing strategies and their self-reported sales performance. Specifically, for each unit increase in perceived digital marketing efforts (as rated by the respondent), there is a corresponding estimated increase of 0.601 units in their reported sales performance score. The intercept value of 13.481 reflects the baseline level of perceived sales performance when digital marketing activity is rated at zero.

The hypothesis was tested using a t-test, where the calculated *t-value* was 15.786, and the associated significance level was 0.001, which is well below the 0.05 threshold. Since the *t-value* exceeds the critical *t-table* value of 1.984 (df = 98), the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This confirms that digital marketing has a significant effect on MSME sales performance in Sawang District.

Table 3. Simple Linear Regression and Hypothesis Testing Results

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficient (B) | t- Value | Sig. (p- value) | Decision |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|----------|-----------------|-------------|
| Constant (Intercept) | 13.481 | – | – | – |
| Digital Marketing (X) | 0.601 | 15.786 | 0.001 | Significant |

The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) was calculated to determine the strength and direction of the relationship. The correlation coefficient was found to be 0.847, indicating a very strong and positive correlation between

digital marketing and sales performance. This means that MSMEs with greater digital marketing engagement tend to achieve higher levels of sales performance.

To further understand the model’s explanatory power, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was examined. The R^2 value was 0.718, which implies that 71.8% of the variation in sales performance among MSMEs can be explained by their digital marketing practices. The remaining 28.2% is attributed to other factors not covered in this model, such as pricing, customer service quality, or market demand.

Table 4. Correlation and Coefficient of Determination Summary

| Statistic | Value | Interpretation |
|--|-------|---|
| Pearson Correlation (r) | 0.847 | Very Strong Positive Correlation |
| Coefficient of Determination (R^2) | 0.718 | 71.8% of variance in sales explained by X |
| Adjusted R^2 | 0.787 | Model fit adjusted for number of predictors |

Overall, the statistical evidence confirms that digital marketing significantly and positively contributes to improving sales performance among MSMEs in the study area. The strength of this relationship highlights the importance of digital engagement as a strategic tool for business growth.

3.3. Discussion

The results of this study reveal a significant and positive association between the use of digital marketing strategies and sales performance among MSMEs in Sawang District, North Aceh. The regression analysis demonstrates that increased engagement in digital marketing correlates with higher self-reported sales performance, as shown by the strong coefficient and high explanatory power of the model ($R^2 = 0.718$). These findings align with and reinforce previous empirical studies that have established digital marketing as an effective means for enhancing visibility, customer interaction, and market competitiveness for small enterprises [18], [19].

The strength of the observed relationship ($r = 0.847$) suggests that MSMEs that actively adopt digital marketing channels—such as social media, websites, and online search optimization—experience improved sales outcomes. This reflects the growing importance of digital transformation in business operations, particularly in emerging economies where digital tools can help compensate for resource constraints and limited physical infrastructure [20], [21]. In the local context of Sawang District, where many MSMEs previously relied on conventional marketing approaches, the adoption of digital strategies may represent a leap in operational efficiency and reach.

In addition, the findings support the theoretical premise that digital marketing enhances customer engagement and drives consumer purchase intentions, even among small-scale enterprises [22], [23]. Platforms such as

Instagram, WhatsApp Business, and Google My Business allow MSMEs to interact directly with customers, respond in real time, and personalize offers. Such customer-centric communication not only increases visibility but also fosters loyalty and trust—factors known to influence sales performance [24], [25].

While the present study shows a strong association, it is essential to recognize that sales performance in this study was measured using subjective perceptions, rather than objective financial data. This means the equation reflects the relationship between how much digital marketing owners believe they engage in and how well they believe their business is performing. This is consistent with behavioral research that highlights how managerial perception influences strategic choices and performance evaluation [26], [27].

Moreover, contextual factors—such as digital literacy, internet infrastructure, and customer readiness—may influence both the effectiveness of digital marketing and how MSME owners assess performance [28], [29]. For example, MSMEs in urbanized or digitally saturated regions may experience stronger impacts from online promotion than those in areas with limited internet penetration or digital payment systems.

This research provides actionable insights for MSMEs and policymakers. First, it underlines the need to build digital capability among small business operators through structured training and accessible digital infrastructure. Government bodies, local chambers of commerce, and digital platforms can play a vital role in supporting MSME digitalization. Second, the findings suggest that the success of digital marketing initiatives depends not only on platform usage but also on the strategic alignment between business goals and digital content delivery [30], [31].

However, several limitations must be acknowledged. The study's reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias or inconsistency in variable measurement. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design limits causal inference. Future research should consider longitudinal data and include objective financial indicators to enhance the generalizability and predictive accuracy of the findings. Additionally, it would be beneficial to explore mediating variables such as brand awareness, digital customer experience, and marketing content quality.

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that digital marketing holds meaningful potential for enhancing how MSMEs perceive and pursue growth in today’s increasingly digital economic environment. The strong and positive association observed between digital marketing efforts and sales performance suggests that small businesses that embrace digital platforms tend to view themselves as more competitive, visible, and responsive to customer needs. Importantly, these findings reflect *perceptions*,

not objective performance metrics. Both digital marketing engagement and sales outcomes were measured based on the respondents' self-reported experiences. While this limits the model's predictive scope, it offers valuable insight into how MSME owners interpret and respond to their digital initiatives—a perspective that significantly shapes entrepreneurial behavior and strategic decisions. Recognizing this, efforts to support MSMEs should go beyond technical access and focus on building confidence, creativity, and strategic understanding in the digital space. Business development programs should emphasize digital literacy, data-driven thinking, and storytelling skills that help translate marketing activity into real business value. Policymakers and support institutions must work to close the digital divide—addressing gaps in infrastructure, awareness, and practical training. Future research should consider combining perceptual data with objective indicators such as revenue growth, customer acquisition, or digital traffic to provide a more complete view of digital marketing's impact. Ultimately, digital engagement is not simply a means to advertise—it is a way to reimagine how MSMEs connect, compete, and grow in a rapidly changing world.

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