

# Digital Technologies Application and Competitive Advantage for MSMEs Sustainability and Market Performance



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## ABSTRACT

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The development of digital technology and intense competition have forced owners of small firms (MSMEs) to adapt technological developments to compete with competitors quickly. This study examines the effect of digitalization and competitive advantage on market sustainability and performance. This study used a qualitative method by distributing questionnaires to 166 MSMEs owners in Indonesia. The finding of this research indicate that digitalization and competitive advantage affect sustainability and market performance. This study's results suggest to MSMEs owners that technological proficiency is crucial for companies to survive in an uncertain environment.

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## 1. Introduction

There has been a lot of research that proves that small firms have a crucial part in the accretion of developing countries because they can absorb > 90% of the workforce, thereby reducing unemployment (Budiarto et al., 2021; Lestari et al., 2020; Setiyawan et al., 2023). Despite having a strategic role, the Covid-19 Pandemic has affected in most MSMEs experiencing a fall-off in performance (Dua et al., 2020). Therefore, MSMEs must quickly adapt to an uncertain environment, implementing appropriate strategies such as innovation and digitalization to maintain their business (Del Baldo et al., 2022; Zutshi et al., 2021). In the new normal era, MSMEs owners must have different and superior business ideas to enter the market because competitors are increasingly aggressive (Respatiningsih, 2021).

To maintain their position, MSMEs can integrate strategy, innovation, and market orientation. The performance will improve if the owner can choose the right design, carry out continuous innovation and have a good market orientation. The owner's understanding of the market is fundamental because he can know and follow changes in consumer tastes. Market orientation will provide a commitment to customers because the combination of industry, customers, and suppliers will produce good market performance (Distanont & Khongmalai, 2020). Companies must respond to market performance and collaborate with business partners for organizational survival (Fatonah & Haryanto, 2022).

Most entrepreneurs think social media is the most effective platform for attracting customers (Latifah et al., 2022). An important strategy the owner must implement is to take advantage of digitization with social media platforms. Social media is a effective weapon for make familiar brand to consumers quickly and inexpensively (Yang et al., 2020). Social media and e-commerce are overgrowing, making it easier for MSMEs to sell products without having to deliver or set up a shop. Using social media makes the transaction process efficient, increasing income, reducing costs, and increasing customer satisfaction (Falahat et al., 2019). Implementing social media as a form of digitalization of technology also became it easier for buyers to obtain the information they want (Liew & Falahat, 2019).

This research is interesting because first, there are findings that MSMEs owners are less interested in technology because of unsafe online payments and lack of privacy (Gwee & Giantari, 2021). Second, a common managerial understanding so of the High Cost of Capital (Del Baldo et al., 2022). Third, consumers are more critical in choosing products, so that competition in e-commerce is getting more demanding (Srikalimah et al., 2020). Fourth, there needs to be an appropriate model standard that MSMEs can adopt to maintain the advantages and sustainability of the business (Obal et al., 2020). Fifth, implementing a strategy for digitalization is not easy because the owner will indeed worry if it fails (Tura et al., 2019)

## 2. Literature Review

Theory Resource Based View (RBV) is a framework and commonly used, especially in the application of competitive strategies to MSMEs (Singh et al., 2021; Joensuu-Salo et al., 2018; Yi et al., 2021). The RBV theory argues that the strategy chosen by companies should follow the resources they currently have to create value for the company (Toftgård, 2018). The RBV explains that companies can acquire a competitive advantage by optimizing resources so that the company can run its business sustainability. Companies that can utilize their resources efficiently will be able to leave competitors behind and increase their excellence (Lestari et al., 2020). This theory explains the use of resources owned strategically by management to support open innovation processes that affect organizational performance (Singh et al., 2021).

## **Digitalization**

Digitalization is the process of transforming from analog form to digital form using digital technology. Small firm Digital technology results from the development or transition from a simple way to a more efficient one. Digital or social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube) changing the behavior and perspective of consumers when interacting with companies and the products they sell (Bianchi, Constanza & Andrews, 2018). The challenge MSMEs must take advantage of is transforming from a traditional to an intelligent industry to reduce costs and create flexibility. Digital transformation will ease the integration process, increase productivity and quality, speed delivery times, and strengthen competitiveness (Del Baldo et al., 2022). The use of digital information will maintain competitiveness and improve value chain efficiency for companies. Digital technology makes it easier for organizations to conduct business transactions, communicate, and maintain business continuity in the long term. Digitalization of technology will improve performance through efficient and productive business scale to lead to a competitive organization. Companies that use information systems efficiently will be able to save costs and reduce the waste of resources (Fauzi & Sheng, 2022).

## **Competitive Advantage**

One of the company's goals is to increase growth and capture as many market opportunities as possible. Strategies for retaining and acquiring customers will lead to intense competition in companies in the same industry. The competitive competition will force companies to create advantages that can be achieved if companies use the right strategy (Gwee & Giantari, 2021). Competitive advantage can be explained as the integration of various items that differentiate MSMEs from their competitors to provide a unique and superior position in the market. The dimensions of competitive advantage consist of innovation, differentiation, and low costs (Udriyah et al., 2019). Companies can acquire a competitive advantage by reducing barriers, having the power of suppliers and buyers, and the accuracy of making decisions if the competition in the business increases (Lorenzo et al., 2018; Lestari et al., 2020).

## **Sustainability**

Sustainability is a strategy that aims to acquire social, environmental, and economic goals through organization activities to increase the firms long-term business performance (Shashi et al., 2018). To achieve sustainability, MSMEs must be able to manage both financial and physical resources (Gwee & Giantari, 2021). Companies with a sustainability orientation will try to create value for their customers by creating new products so that consumers consider the company to exist still. Companies can develop sustainability by combining various factors, including innovation, strong leadership, and going out looking for a geocentric approach. Sustainability is part of an innovative culture and aims to improve new product market performance (Obal et al., 2020). Organizations must enhance the quality of human resources and assets to support strategies to achieve long-term sustainability (Andriyani et al., 2023; Del Baldo et al., 2022).

## **Market Performance**

Market performance results from the work that companies do in sales and plays an essential role in assessing the strategy's success (Shashi et al., 2018). By creating designs and obtaining information from customers and competitors, marketing capabilities will make it easier for companies to penetrate the market and produce good performance (Joensuu-Salo et al., 2018). Good performance can be achieved by implementing market orientation,

understanding consumer needs and seeing market needs that are currently needed by consumers, understanding consumer desires in detail, and meeting market demands that are always different. Choosing the right strategy will open up opportunities for companies to acquire new customers and improve market performance (Udriyah et al., 2019).

### **The relationship between digitalization & sustainability**

The use of technology, including e-commerce, will help MSME owners obtain information so that businesses run better and benefit consumers (Falahat et al., 2019). In China, most companies use social media to increase consumer growth and business continuity. Communication on social media between users can build loyalty and increase customer satisfaction (Yang et al., 2020). Digital technology is an entry point for organizations to innovate and meet market needs. Digital technologies can increase growth and broad market reach because they can communicate in real-time (Camilleri, 2019). Findings in Europe show that the government provides policies for small firms to fight in the worldwide market. Government policy to support the sustainability of MSMEs is carried out by building start-ups as a foundation for increasing competitiveness (Del Baldo et al., 2022). The finding of research before explained that digitalization has a positive relationship with sustainability, meaning that SMEs can use digital strategies to deal with rapid environmental changes so they can survive (Parida et al., 2019). Based on the above findings, the hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Digitalization has a significant impact on sustainability.

### **The relationship between competitive advantage & sustainability**

Competitive advantage is a determining factor in achieving long-term performance for the company. Even though some businesses are inherited, they still operate because they can produce superior products (Gwee & Giantari, 2021). Competitive advantage reflects the company's capability to provide better value to consumers by offering more competitive prices than competitors. Competitive advantage also shows the power of MSMEs to provide more benefits and better services to consumers (Srikalimah et al., 2020). The managerial or strategic approach emphasizes opportunities to increase competitive advantage and create business prospects to achieve the company's long-term goals (Obal et al., 2020). The finding of research before explained that competitive advantage is positively related to sustainability, meaning that the benefits possessed in the competition will encourage sustainability for MSMEs (Srikalimah et al., 2020). Based on previous studies, the hypothesis proposed is:

H2: Competitive advantage has a significant impact on sustainability

### **Relationship between sustainability & market performance**

Companies with sustainability goals will implement strategies by strengthening their resources, including employees, to improve performance. Previous researchers have seen sustainability orientation as a branch of corporate innovation and market orientation. Companies will continuously seek unique and new ways to meet and exceed customer needs (Obal et al., 2020). Companies can develop and monitor organizational governance, leadership styles, and business plans to ensure that sustainability objectives will be successful, resulting in optimal market performance (Srisathan et al., 2020). Sustainability success depends on managerial attitudes and long-term strategies MSME owners use (Shashi et al., 2018). The finding of research before explained that sustainability has a positive relationship with market performance, meaning that sustainability can guarantee MSMEs meet consumer needs, increase market share and compete with competitors (Obal et al., 2020). Based on several previous findings, the hypothesis is:

H3: Sustainability has a significant impact on market performance.

### 3. Research Method

Researchers collected data on MSMEs in Indonesia through online and offline surveys. Questionnaires were distributed via Google Forms with a total of 20 questions. This study uses a purposive sampling technique with the criteria that only MSMEs use e-commerce & social media in their operations. The research took place for 4 months, from September to December 2022, with 166 questionnaires collected. Respondents answered questions about technology, competitive advantage, sustainability, market performance, and company performance. The data obtained were then analyzed to determine their validity and reliability. This reflects the authenticity and reliability of the data because the results collected are the respondents' personal opinions. The instrument used in this study was measured using a 5-point Likert scale, namely 1 (one) strongly disagree, 2 (two) disagree, 3 (three) neutral, 4 (four) agree, and 5 (five) strongly agree.

Table 1. Variable Measurement

Variable	Indicators
Digitalization (Yousaf et al., 2021)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Utilize digital technology in making products (to manage social, business, and ecological problems).</li> <li>2. Digital technology can help solve the problems I face.</li> <li>3. We are ready to use digital technology for business development.</li> <li>4. Use digital technology to find opportunities and innovate business.</li> </ol>
Competitive advantage (Lestari et al., 2020)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. My business can obtain products from the source to be marketed directly.</li> <li>2. We produce quality products at competitive prices.</li> <li>3. I guarantee that the product will be quickly delivered to the customer.</li> <li>4. We provide accessible service and communication with customers.</li> <li>5. We have expertise in explaining products in detail to attract customer interest.</li> <li>6. We use digital transaction, making it easier for consumers to search, pay, and track every transaction.</li> </ol>
Sustainability (Jin et al., 2019)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The products I sell use environmentally friendly packaging</li> <li>2. The products I sell are well-received by the local community</li> <li>3. In developing new products does not harm the environment</li> <li>4. Utilizing customer testimonials to ensure that the community accepts the product.</li> <li>5. Realize the importance of product sustainability in my business by improving product quality in the future</li> <li>6. I establish policies/procedures related to future business activities</li> <li>7. In future product development, I have set a detailed budget.</li> <li>8. I choose suppliers/suppliers and business partners who have the potential to provide raw materials sustainably.</li> </ol>
Market performance (Obal et al., 2020)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. New product development program under predetermined performance goals.</li> <li>2. The resulting new products successfully meet market needs</li> </ol>

### 4. Results and Discussion

We distributed questionnaires using 2 ways, offline and online, via the Google Form. Offline questionnaires were distributed in Yogyakarta Province, while other provinces were online through various WhatsApp groups. Offline distribution obtained 56 questionnaires, the remaining 110 via Google Forms. The finding of the analysis of the demographics of the samples are shown in Table 2. The finding of the research shows that 85% of MSMEs are

culinary while the rest are agriculture, fashion & art, furniture, event organizers, tour & travel, interior design, and craft <5%.

Table 2. Respondent Demographics

		Yogyakarta	Jakarta	Central Java	West Java	East Java	Riau	Bali	West Kalimantan	Banten	Southeast Sulawesi
Gender	Men	28	12	5	4	5	-	1	2	3	1
	Women	23	20	15	16	7	2	4	5	7	6
Education	Bachelor	30	15	8	7	5	1	2	3	4	3
	Others	21	17	12	13	7	1	3	4	6	4
Running of Business	<3 years	21	10	13	16	5	2	3	2	4	5
	3-5 years	20	14	3	2	4	-	2	3	4	2
	>5 years	10	8	4	2	3	-	-	2	2	-
Using of E-commerce	<1 year	21	10	13	16	5	2	3	2	4	5
	1-3 years	20	14	3	2	4	-	2	3	4	2
	3-5 years	8	8	4	1	3	-	-	2	2	-
	>5 years	2	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Primary data processed in 2022

After successfully collecting data and conducting MSMEs profile analysis, the next stage is testing data quality (validity and reliability testing) and testing hypotheses using Smart PLS. PLS analysis uses two approaches, namely the measurement model and the structural model (Hair et al., 2019). The validity test uses the convergent validity test using Average Variance Extracted (AVE) with a cutoff of 0.5 and discriminant validity using outer loading and cross-loading with a cutoff of 0.7. The target value for the cross-loading variable must be greater than the other variables. Reliability testing uses Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability with a cutoff of 0.7.

Table 3. Construct Reliability and Valid

	Cronbach's Alpha	Rhoa-A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Digitalization	0.897	0.900	0.922	0.663
Competitive Advantage	0.866	0.869	0.909	0.714
Sustainability	0.708	0.716	0.872	0.774
Market Performance	0.900	0.902	0.919	0.588

Source: Primary data processed in 2022

Table 4. Outer Loading Value

Digitalization	Competitive Advantage	Sustainability	Market Performance
0.791	0.882	0.740	0.896
0.823	0.858	0.825	0.863
0.878	0.868	0.728	-
0.884	0.737	0.803	-
-	0.774	0.726	-
-	0.755	0.757	-
-	-	0.826	-
-	-	0.723	-

Source: Primary data processed in 2022

Table 5. Cross Loading

Digitalization	Competitive Advantage	Sustainability	Market Performance
0.791	0.377	0.515	0.473
0.823	0.396	0.455	0.298
0.878	0.357	0.492	0.391
0.884	0.405	0.540	0.409
0.431	0.882	0.560	0.453
0.324	0.858	0.538	0.402
0.337	0.868	0.543	0.418
0.382	0.737	0.543	0.348
0.375	0.774	0.501	0.330
0.369	0.755	0.475	0.312

0.356	0.409	0.740	0.263
0.535	0.507	0.728	0.382
0.393	0.561	0.803	0.318
0.423	0.443	0.726	0.339
0.377	0.566	0.757	0.411
0.403	0.475	0.826	0.413
0.539	0.527	0.723	0.408
0.519	0.467	0.825	0.365
0.417	0.414	0.445	0.896
0.408	0.407	0.392	0.863

Source: Primary data processed in 2022

Structural model testing uses the R Square coefficient for sustainability and market performance variables. The results of structural model testing show that the small R Square value in the sustainability model is 0.534 and market performance is 0.228 (Table 6). The results of this research provide opportunities for next study to examine the factors related to market performance.

Table 6. R Square

	R Square	Adj. R Square
Sustainability	0.534	0.529
Market performance	0.228	0.223

Source: Primary data processed in 2022

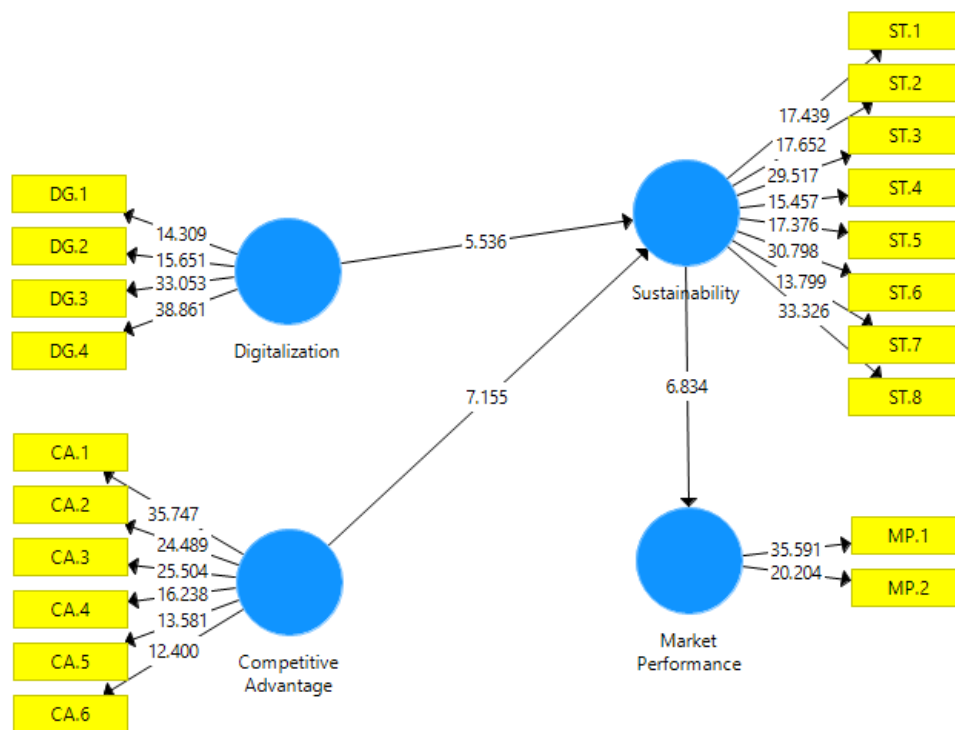


Figure 1. Research Model  
Source: Primary data processed in 2022

Table 7. Hypotheses Testing

	Beta	Mean	SD	T Statistics	P Value
Digitalization → Sustainability	0.477	0.482	0.067	7.155	0.000**
Competitive advantage → Sustainability	0.378	0.374	0.068	5.536	0.000**
Sustainability → Market performance	0.477	0.487	0.070	6.834	0.000**

\*\* Sig < %

Source: Primary data processed in 2022

The results of hypothesis testing using the bootstrap technique with a p-value of 1%, which shows that all hypotheses are supported (Table 7 & Figure 1). This research will be beneficial for considering MSMEs who want to use technology and have advantages for business sustainability. The Covid-19 pandemic has taught MSMEs owners to adapt to technological advances because many consumers currently carry out online activities using various applications, ordering food and sending merchandise. The study results prove that MSMEs owners must realize that digitalization is essential to continue having customers. Digitalization will bring about significant changes and increase and expand market share because it can penetrate distance and time. Digitalization will help owners improve their knowledge and process information faster to be helpful in decision-making. This speed will encourage MSMEs to compete toward business sustainability (Del Baldo et al., 2022).

Competitive advantage gives the company better value than other companies, it can be in terms of lower prices and better quality, or the company can sell unique products. Competitive advantage also shows that the company can implement excellent service to make consumers comfortable and happy with the company. For MSMEs to compete and survive in a rapidly changing and uncertain environment, competitive advantage is the key. The competitive advantage that can create differences from competitors will encourage MSMEs to have better long-term performance (Srikalimah et al., 2020).

The company's sustainability is a motivation to continue to seek or create new things beyond market needs; besides that, the company must strengthen relationships with vendors, employees, and consumers to produce good market performance. The sustainability of MSMEs will positively impact product performance, service performance, and sales performance. Therefore, sustainability is a weapon for companies in maintaining consumers and increasing loyalty so that company sales improve (Obal et al., 2020). Sustainability, an important goal for MSMEs, will generate good value for consumers so that they survive (Del Baldo et al., 2022).

## 5. Conclusion

The results of the hypotheses state that competitive advantage and digitalization have a significant impact on sustainability, and sustainability has a significant impact on market performance. These findings indicate that MSMEs must determine strategies to have a competitive advantage and be able to adapt to technological changes to maintain sustainability and produce good market performance according to company goals. This research has three limitations: first, this research measures performance only based on market performance, suggesting that further researchers develop performance measurements with three elements, namely sales volume, profitability, and market (Gwee & Giantari, 2021). Second, the number of research objects is still limited, so the next study can widen the object of study and multiply the number of samples so that the results reflect the actual conditions in MSMEs (Budiarto et al., 2021). Third, this study uses all types of MSMEs, suggesting that further research only focuses on one type of business, for example, the creative industry, because previous research has explained that small firms with creative industries have better performance (Parida et al., 2019).

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