



Local Wisdom-Based Digital Marketing Strategy in Brambang Gareng Slawe MSMEs

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Abstract: This study examines the implementation of local wisdom-based digital marketing strategies by Brambang Gareng Slawe MSMEs in adapting to the demands of the digital market. Rooted in a qualitative case study approach, the research was conducted in Slawe Village, Mojokerto Regency, East Java, with seven purposively selected informants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation, and analysed thematically. The findings reveal that while MSMEs in this region have begun to engage digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram, their digital marketing strategies remain intuitive and unstructured. The integration of local values, such as traditional recipes, Javanese expressions, and visual cultural symbols, has enhanced product authenticity and emotional connection with consumers. However, significant barriers persist, particularly the lack of digital literacy, limited access to infrastructure, and the absence of dedicated branding personnel. Despite these constraints, the rise in digital consumer behaviour and community-based platforms presents strategic opportunities. This study concludes that cultural branding, when combined with basic digital marketing literacy, offers a viable pathway for rural MSMEs to achieve sustainable competitive advantage in the digital economy.

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INTRODUCTION

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a crucial role in the structure of Indonesia's economy. According to data from the Ministry of Cooperatives and MSMEs (2024), MSMEs contribute more than 60,5% to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and absorb approximately 97% of the labour force (Aprilia, et al. 2025). Nevertheless, the majority of MSMEs face significant challenges in digital transformation (Sinha, et, al, 2024), particularly in implementing effective product marketing strategies in the digital era.

Digital marketing has emerged as a vital tool in navigating the disruptive impact of technological advancements and shifting consumer behaviors in today's marketplace (Pradnyawati and Fristamara). In the context of who is affected, micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are particularly vulnerable yet simultaneously possess unique opportunities. Specifically, MSMEs that can strategically utilize digital platforms, such as social media and e-commerce, along with the tools they employ, are significantly more

likely to enhance their market visibility, reach new customer segments, and build stronger customer loyalty (Sari, et al. 2023). This platform is especially important when market volatility increases, such as during the post-pandemic recovery or in the face of economic uncertainty, as digital channels provide cost-effective and scalable alternatives to traditional marketing (Ningsih and Tjahjono 2024).

This transformation is taking place in various locations, but the disparity becomes particularly pronounced in rural regions, where MSMEs often face significant structural challenges. While urban-based MSMEs may have faster internet access, better exposure to digital training, and stronger digital ecosystems, many rural MSMEs still struggle with inadequate infrastructure and digital illiteracy (Kang 2024). Why does this matter lies in the growing digital divide. If rural enterprises fail to adopt modern marketing strategies, they risk being left behind in an increasingly competitive and digital economy (Willem, et al. 2024). These constraints that hinder MSMEs stem not only from poor technological access but also from the lack of digital marketing competence and the absence of tailored support systems for rural entrepreneurs.

The show of digital marketing implementation among rural MSMEs remains complex. It requires more than just the provision of tools; it demands culturally sensitive and context-specific strategies that align with local realities and needs (Sudewi et al. 2023). While some government programs and non-profit initiatives aim to bridge these gaps, their effectiveness often hinges on who delivers the training, what type of capacity-building is offered, and how well it resonates with the socio-economic backgrounds of rural business owners. Therefore, integrating local wisdom and community-based approaches into digital marketing strategies grounded in values, narratives, and cultural identity can become a transformational force, especially when adopted gradually with sustained mentorship and accessible infrastructure (Jothibasu and Rajendran 2024).

In the context of locally-based MSMEs such as *Brambang Gareng Slawe*, the digital marketing approach is not only a necessity of the times but also an opportunity to promote cultural identity and unique local values. Marketing strategies rooted in local wisdom provide a relevant approach to product differentiation, enhance emotional branding, and foster closer connections with consumers, particularly in domestic markets where traditional and local elements remain highly valued (Hafsawati 2022).

Brambang Gareng Slawe, as a representative of locally based enterprises, exemplifies an intriguing dynamic in the digital era. On one hand, they offer a product with strong market potential rooted in daily consumer needs. On the other hand, their adaptation to digital marketing strategies is often intuitive, lacking a structured approach or analytical foundation. The uniqueness of their product and the embedded local cultural values have not been fully leveraged as differentiating strengths in digital promotion.

From a contemporary marketing perspective, integrating digital marketing strategies with local wisdom can serve as a strategic and sustainable approach. Previous studies have demonstrated that incorporating local narratives, regional languages, cultural symbols, and visual representations of local identity into digital content can significantly enhance consumer engagement and foster long-term trust (Hafsawati, 2022; Sudewi et al. 2023).

The transformation toward a digital economy has significantly influenced how Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) operate, particularly in marketing their products. In Indonesia, numerous studies have focused on the adoption of digital marketing among MSMEs, with a strong emphasis on technical aspects such as the use of e-commerce platforms, digital literacy, and the effectiveness of social media campaigns

(Ananda et al. 2023; Ndriha et al. 2024). While these studies provide valuable insights, they tend to concentrate on urban-based enterprises with relatively better access to infrastructure and education, leaving a gap in understanding how rural MSMEs navigate the digital landscape (Setiawan, et al, 2023).

Moreover, current literature often overlooks the potential role of local wisdom, such as regional languages, traditional narratives, symbolic representations, and community-based values, as a strategic asset in digital marketing (Jasin Mochammad 2018). In many rural contexts, these cultural elements are integral to the identity of a product or service but have yet to be systematically utilised within digital marketing strategies (Soni et al. 2024; Magfirah and Muhammin 2023). Local wisdom is often regarded as an anthropological feature, rather than a branding tool that can foster emotional connection and customer loyalty (Holt 2012). This condition reveals a critical gap: the intersection between digital marketing and cultural branding remains underexplored, especially in the context of village-based MSMEs in Indonesia.

The specific case of *Brambang Gareng Slawe*, a rural MSME specializing in traditional fried shallots, highlights the need for deeper investigation. This enterprise operates in a unique socio-cultural setting where marketing is not only about product visibility but also about storytelling, trust-building, and cultural representation. Despite the business's potential and increasing use of digital platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram, its digital marketing efforts remain largely unstructured and intuitive. The product's cultural uniqueness and symbolic value have not been fully leveraged to create a differentiated identity in the digital space.

This study aims to address these gaps by examining how *Brambang Gareng Slawe* leverages digital marketing in conjunction with local wisdom to adapt to shifting market conditions. Unlike previous research that views digitalisation primarily through economic or technological lenses, this study adopts a cultural marketing approach that emphasises the strategic use of local narratives, language, and symbolism. This research contributes to the theoretical enrichment of cultural branding within the field of digital marketing, especially for MSMEs in rural settings.

The novelty of this research lies in its interdisciplinary framework, which combines digital marketing strategies with perspectives from cultural anthropology and rural development. First, it introduces a conceptual model that integrates local cultural values into digital branding. Second, it provides empirical evidence through a qualitative case study approach, revealing how rural MSMEs can build a competitive advantage by embedding authenticity and emotional engagement in their marketing strategies. Third, it offers practical implications for policymakers, development agencies, and local entrepreneurs by showing how cultural resources can be transformed into digital marketing capital.

In an era dominated by globalized and standardized digital content, this study emphasizes the strategic importance of cultural authenticity and contextual relevance in establishing a brand identity. By examining a locally rooted MSME through a cultural marketing lens, this research not only fills a significant academic gap but also provides actionable insights for sustaining traditional businesses in the modern digital economy.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Indonesia

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are productive business entities managed by individuals or groups with limited economic scale, yet they make significant contributions to national economic development. In Indonesia, the definition of MSMEs is officially regulated under Undang-Undang Nomor 20 Tahun 2008 concerning Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises. According to this law, MSMEs are categorized based on their net assets and annual turnover. A micro enterprise is defined as a business with net assets of up to IDR 50 million (excluding land and buildings used for the business) or with annual turnover not exceeding IDR 300 million. A small enterprise has net assets ranging from IDR 50 million to IDR 500 million or an annual turnover between IDR 300 million and IDR 2.5 billion. Meanwhile, a medium-sized enterprise has net assets between IDR 500 million and IDR 10 billion, or a turnover ranging from IDR 2.5 billion to IDR 50 billion.

Academically, MSMEs are understood as flexible and adaptive economic units that play a crucial role in job creation, income distribution, and poverty alleviation, particularly in rural areas and within the informal sector (Sinha, et al. 2024). MSMEs are also recognized as the driving force behind local economies, capable of integrating social values and local cultural wisdom into business practices (Herissuparman et al. 2024). Despite facing various challenges, including limited access to capital, technology, and markets (Mahardhika et al. 2024), MSMEs remain a foundational pillar in Indonesia's economic structure and serve as a vital platform for grassroots entrepreneurship.

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a pivotal role in Indonesia's economic structure, serving as both a source of employment and a driver of regional economic growth. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs (Aprilia, et al. 2025), MSMEs account for more than 99% of all business units in the country and contribute over 60% to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The theoretical understanding of MSMEs in Indonesia is closely tied to development economics and inclusive growth frameworks, where small-scale enterprises are not merely economic actors but also agents of social transformation and local empowerment.

Scholars such as (Tambunan 2019) emphasize that MSMEs in Indonesia are strongly embedded in the informal economy, often characterized by family-based ownership, limited capital, and low levels of managerial and technological sophistication. Despite these limitations, MSMEs are resilient and adaptive, especially during periods of economic uncertainty such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Auliya et al. 2022). Their capacity to survive is largely influenced by social capital, local networks, and cultural embeddedness within their communities.

Theoretically, the growth and sustainability of MSMEs depend on several key factors: access to capital, market access, human resource development, and regulatory support (Kuncoro 2012). In recent years, the integration of digital technology has emerged as a critical determinant of competitiveness. The diffusion of digital platforms, including social media and online marketplaces, is reshaping how MSMEs reach customers and position their brands (Huda, et al, 2023). However, in rural and semi-urban contexts, digital transformation remains uneven due to infrastructural barriers, digital illiteracy, and cultural resistance.

Furthermore, the concept of "glocalization" (Robertson 1995) becomes increasingly relevant in explaining how Indonesian MSMEs adapt global strategies to their local

contexts. Many rural-based MSMEs incorporate indigenous knowledge, cultural values, and local wisdom into their business models, thereby creating a unique market identity. This cultural embeddedness not only enhances brand authenticity but also aligns with the values of local consumers, leading to increased trust and loyalty (Arsita et al, 2020).

In summary, MSMEs in Indonesia are complex entities shaped by economic, cultural, and technological forces. Understanding their development requires an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates economic theory, digital transformation, and sociocultural dimensions. Strengthening MSMEs is thus not only a matter of financial and technical support, but also one of nurturing local identity and adapting to the dynamic consumer behavior of the digital era.

Digital Marketing and Strategic Engagement

Digital marketing has emerged as a key strategy in modern marketing, enabling businesses to reach and interact with consumers through digital platforms in a personalized and cost-effective manner. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) define digital marketing as the strategic use of online platforms, including social media, websites, email, and search engines, to increase product visibility, brand engagement, and sales performance. Similarly, Kotler, et al (2021) emphasize the interactive and measurable nature of digital marketing, which enables firms to enhance customer experiences through tailored content and engagement.

For micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), particularly in developing economies, digital marketing offers a competitive edge compared to traditional promotion, especially when resources are limited (Huda, et al, 2023). However, success depends on aligning strategies with market characteristics and understanding the dynamics of consumer behaviour in digital environments. Recent studies indicate that today's consumers prefer content that is authentic, emotionally resonant, and locally meaningful (Bağcı and Taşçıoğlu 2024). Consequently, narrative-based digital content rooted in local values can serve as a powerful tool for consumer engagement.

Local Wisdom and Cultural Branding in Marketing

Local wisdom (indigenous knowledge systems) comprises cultural values, symbols, and practices developed within specific communities in response to their socio-environmental conditions. In the marketing domain, local wisdom serves as a symbolic resource that reinforces brand identity, shapes consumer perception, and fosters long-term loyalty (Musnaini et al. 2022). As (Geertz 1973) suggests, cultural values are not merely heritage artefacts but essential sources of meaning that shape how products are interpreted and consumed.

The incorporation of local narratives, languages, symbols, and traditions into marketing strategy has been conceptualized as cultural branding (Holt 2012). This approach embeds cultural identity within brand storytelling, enabling enterprises to differentiate their offerings in crowded digital spaces. Empirical studies from Indonesia have demonstrated the effectiveness of this approach in promoting traditional foods, crafts, and clothing (Syahputra et al. 2023).

MSMEs and the Digital Transformation Landscape

Despite the increasing relevance of digital marketing, MSMEs, especially those operating in rural areas, face substantial challenges in digital transformation. Beyond technology adoption, digitalization requires skilled human resources, strategic vision, and

cultural adaptability. Structural constraints, such as limited financial capital, low digital literacy, and a lack of marketing expertise, often hinder full implementation (Rachmawati 2024).

Nonetheless, the COVID-19 pandemic catalysed digital engagement among MSMEs, driving the use of social media and messaging platforms for customer outreach for rural-based enterprises such as *Brambang Gareng Slawe*, digital marketing must go beyond functionality to incorporate community values and socio-cultural relevance. Localized strategies rooted in tradition and community identity are more likely to resonate with domestic consumers, particularly within culturally cohesive societies.

This perspective aligns with the “glocalization” paradigm, global strategies adapted to fit local realities (Robertson 1995). Integrating digital marketing with local wisdom not only enhances cultural resonance but also creates a competitive advantage that is difficult to replicate in homogeneous digital markets.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, utilizing a case study method, with a focus on the Brambang Gareng Slawe MSMEs as the unique unit of analysis. A qualitative method is suitable for exploring the contextual meanings, values, and strategies related to digital marketing practices that are embedded with local wisdom (Creswell and Poth 2023). The goal is not generalisation, but a deep understanding of how rural MSMEs integrate cultural identity into digital marketing efforts.

The study was conducted in Slawe, Pacet District, Mojokerto, East Java, an area known for its traditional fried shallot production and emerging digital marketing practices. The fieldwork took place from March to Mei 2025. Informants were selected purposively, including MSME actors who had used digital marketing for at least one year, branding decision-makers, content creators who incorporated local cultural elements, and local consumers or community figures. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis of digital content and customer engagement.

Thematic analysis, as outlined by (Braun and Clarke 2006), was employed to identify key themes, including promotional strategies, local narratives, and consumer perceptions. Data validation was ensured through source and technique triangulation, as well as member checking with informants to enhance credibility (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study was conducted in Slawe Village, located in the Slawe, Pacet District of Mojokerto Regency, a region widely recognized as a production hub for *Brambang Goreng Gareng Slawe*, a traditional fried shallot product with a loyal regional market. Most of the local MSME actors are household entrepreneurs who have developed their businesses over generations and began adopting digital marketing platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of seven key informants were interviewed, including four active MSME owners, one community leader, and two loyal consumers who are active on social media.

Findings from in-depth interviews and field observations reveal that MSME actors in Brambang Gareng Slawe employ several digital marketing strategies. The primary method involves utilising local social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp Business, and Instagram. These platforms serve as the main promotional tools, where visual content such as picture of the product, packaging, and consumer testimonials plays

a significant role in building trust and engagement. One informant stated, "We upload the photos from the home production site, so people know it's authentic and hygienic". Additionally, many entrepreneurs utilise WhatsApp broadcast messages to promote weekly discounts and bundled product packages, particularly during festive seasons and harvest times. Another common strategy is collaboration with local government.

The integration of local wisdom into digital promotion is also prominent. Content frequently highlights family narratives and cultural heritage, emphasising that the product is made from a traditional recipe passed down through generations, using high quality ingredients thereby strengthening the product's authenticity and emotional value. The use of refined Javanese expressions in captions such as "*renyah gak mlempem*" serves as a distinctive feature that differentiates these products from others.

Despite the creative use of local wisdom and social media platforms, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in rural areas such as Slawe face a range of complex challenges in adopting digital marketing strategies. One of the most significant obstacles is limited digital literacy, which affects both the efficiency and scalability of their marketing efforts. Many business owners do not fully understand how digital platforms work, particularly when it comes to paid advertising tools, content optimization, analytics, and platform-specific algorithms. This lack of knowledge severely limits their ability to compete in an increasingly algorithm-driven digital market. Most of these entrepreneurs rely solely on organic outreach or trial-and-error methods, which are often inconsistent and yield limited results. This problem is further compounded by insufficient access to digital infrastructure. In some key production hamlets, where the majority of these MSMEs are located, internet connectivity remains unreliable, disrupting their ability to consistently update promotional content or respond promptly to customer inquiries online.

Another structural barrier lies in the human resource limitations faced by these small-scale enterprises. The majority of MSMEs in Slawe are family-owned and operated, typically managed by a core group of household members without specialized staff for marketing, branding, or customer engagement. This absence of dedicated personnel results in fragmented and unsystematic digital branding efforts, where marketing responsibilities are often handled informally or only during spare time. Without formal division of labor or strategic planning, these enterprises usually struggle to maintain a consistent online presence, let alone develop data-driven campaigns or build long-term customer relationships through digital platforms.

However, despite these constraints, promising opportunities have begun to emerge. One of the most notable trends is the rise of digitally active local consumers, particularly individuals between the ages of 20 and 40, who are increasingly dependent on online platforms for shopping, product discovery, and brand interaction. This demographic represents a valuable and untapped market for MSMEs, particularly those offering culturally rooted and locally sourced products. Furthermore, consumer awareness of and loyalty to local products have risen significantly in the post-pandemic era, as many people now place greater value on authenticity, tradition, and community-based economies. This shift in consumer preferences presents a strategic opportunity for MSMEs to leverage their unique cultural identity as a key component of their branding narratives.

Additionally, the presence of local digital communities, such as Facebook groups like *Slawe Produk Lokal*, has played a crucial role in supporting the promotion of MSME products without requiring significant financial investments. These community-based platforms enable business owners to engage directly with potential customers, receive real-time feedback, and

participate in localized promotional campaigns that resonate with shared cultural values. This engagement, achieved through storytelling, local language use, and visual narratives rooted in tradition, has proven to be more effective than generic advertisements, especially in fostering a sense of connection between the product and the consumer.

Consumer perceptions further reinforce the value of this approach. Interviews with two loyal customers indicated that the local narratives make the product feel “warmer and more familiar.” They expressed greater trust in MSME products that openly showcase their production processes. Moreover, the use of regional languages and ethnic design elements was seen as “unique and differentiating” from mainstream competitors.

Overall, this study demonstrates that a digital marketing strategy rooted in local wisdom can create emotional value and cultural resonance for rural MSMEs. These findings support (Holt 2012) theory of cultural branding, which emphasises the power of cultural values in building brand loyalty. The digital adoption barriers observed are consistent with those reported by (Nugroho et al. 2024), who note that rural MSMEs often struggle with access to technology and training. However, this study also demonstrates that contextually relevant and culturally embedded approaches, such as utilising local language and incorporating video testimonials, can effectively address these limitations. It can therefore be concluded that successful digital marketing for MSMEs does not require technological sophistication, but rather strong narrative, cultural authenticity, and social proximity.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that integrating local wisdom into digital marketing strategies offers meaningful value for rural-based MSMEs, particularly in strengthening emotional branding and fostering consumer trust. Brambang Gareng Slawe MSMEs have initiated the use of digital platforms but face several challenges, most notably limited digital literacy, inadequate infrastructure, and the absence of human resources specialised in digital promotion. These constraints result in fragmented branding efforts, preventing the full realisation of cultural identity in digital spaces. Nevertheless, the existence of digitally active consumers and localised promotional communities opens up new opportunities for inclusive digital growth. The findings affirm that successful digital marketing for rural MSMEs does not necessarily require technological sophistication; rather, it depends on narrative strength, cultural authenticity, and community engagement. Therefore, capacity building in digital literacy, combined with structured branding strategies rooted in local culture, is essential for enabling these enterprises to thrive in the evolving digital economy.

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