

Digital Transformation of Women-Owned MSMEs: Marketing Strategies to Adapt to The Dynamics of Consumer Behavior in The Digital Era

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Abstract - Women-owned MSMEs play a strategic role in the national economy. However, many women MSMEs do not yet have adequate digital capacity to respond to changes in consumer behavior that now rely on technology in making purchasing decisions. In addition, structural barriers such as limited access to technology and capital, as well as socio-cultural barriers such as gender stereotypes and double workloads, complicate the process of adopting digitalization. Although many studies discuss these challenges, there are still limited studies that specifically explore the digital marketing strategies implemented by women-owned MSMEs in response to the dynamics of consumer behavior, especially in the local context. This study aims to analyze the digital marketing strategies adopted by women-owned MSMEs in Padang City. The approach used is a mixed method with an explanatory sequential design, starting with a survey of 125 women MSMEs, followed by in-depth interviews. The findings of this study indicate a significant shift in consumer behavior in the digital era, emphasizing the importance of convenience and ease in purchasing decisions. Therefore, it is crucial for women-led MSMEs to understand these behavioral changes and master appropriate marketing strategies to thrive in this evolving market landscape.

Keywords: Consumer Behavior; Digital Marketing; Women-Owned MSMEs

1. Introduction

Women have taken on a significant role in Indonesia's economy. Data indicates that over 60 percent of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Indonesia are run by women (Widia, 2021). These women-led MSMEs are a vital part of the economic strategy, contributing substantially to the national GDP and providing the majority of employment opportunities (Priambodo et al., 2024). Their contribution to GDP reaches 61 percent, and they account for up to 97 percent of total employment (Novitasari, 2022). However, despite their dominance in numbers, women-owned MSMEs predominantly operate at the micro level (Widia & Octafia, 2021). Research highlights a number of barriers hindering the success of these enterprises, including limited access to capital, the burden of dual roles, and gender-related challenges, often referred to as critical constraints (Gayatri & Wirawati, 2019; Rita et al., 2019). In many developing countries, gender equality issues are closely linked to patriarchal systems that place women in subordinate positions compared to men (Kapinga et al., 2018). Other studies have also identified procedural obstacles and biases within regulatory frameworks and cultural norms (Kapinga & Montero, 2017). These barriers encompass time constraints due to the dual demands of work and

family responsibilities, limited access to productive resources such as capital and land ownership, and a lack of access to information and business networks (Díaz-García et al., 2016; Figueroa-Armijos, 2017).

In light of these various challenges, digital technology has emerged as a transformative solution capable of reshaping the business landscape for women entrepreneurs. Technology acts as a "game changer" in challenging the notion that business is not suitable or profitable for women (Salamzadeh et al., 2024). It plays a critical role in dismantling market entry barriers, enabling greater participation in economic activities and even facilitating international expansion (Nambisan, 2017). Digital infrastructure is not merely a tool but also an empowering mechanism that broadens opportunities for women in business (Martinez Dy et al., 2018). Easy access to digital platforms helps overcome the social and structural limitations that often hinder business growth (Dy et al., 2017). With the aid of technology, women entrepreneurs can not only expand their market reach but also strengthen business networks, enhance operational efficiency, and gain access to information and resources that were previously difficult to obtain (Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018). The perspective of "entrepreneurship as emancipation" becomes increasingly relevant as technology enables women to

redefine their participation in both local and global economies (Friedrich & Steyaert, 2024; Karlsson, 2024; Rindova et al., 2009). Furthermore, digital technologies offer greater flexibility in balancing work and family life, allowing women to remain productive without compromising their domestic responsibilities (Pergelova et al., 2019).

Digital technology has fundamentally opened up significant opportunities for MSMEs, including women-led MSMEs, to market their products more broadly through digital platforms such as e-commerce and social media. Kotler et al. (2021) highlight that digital marketing enables businesses to connect more closely with consumers, leverage consumer data, and build loyalty more effectively. Digital marketing strategies allow MSMEs to compete in a broader market, even crossing geographic boundaries, at a lower cost compared to traditional marketing (Lahtinen et al., 2023). However, limited technological skills often hinder women-owned MSMEs from fully adopting digital marketing optimally (Haer & Mulyaningsih, 2023).

The shift in consumer behavior in the digital era also influences how MSMEs interact with the market (Octafia et al., 2024). Consumers are increasingly accustomed to using the internet and mobile devices to search for information, compare products, and make purchases online. According to a McKinsey report (2020), online shopping trends in Indonesia continue to rise, driven by the growth of e-commerce and increased internet access among the population (Company, 2021). For MSMEs, especially those managed by women, adapting to this consumer behavior is crucial to remain relevant and competitive. However, many women-owned MSMEs have yet to fully capitalize on digital marketing's potential due to limitations in technological skills and digital literacy (Octafia & Widia, 2023).

Similarly, technological advancements have brought significant changes in consumer behavior, where they increasingly rely on the internet and mobile devices for shopping and searching for product information (Niken et al., 2022). This shift requires MSMEs to adopt relevant digital marketing strategies. Women-owned MSMEs that can leverage digital platforms such as social media, e-commerce, and data-driven marketing have substantial opportunities to expand their market reach and boost competitiveness. Digital technology also provides business owners with the advantage of reaching potential consumers without spatial or temporal limits. However, many women-owned MSMEs still need support in developing digital skills to fully capitalize on these opportunities (Susanti et al., 2023). Additionally, it is crucial for business owners to understand these changes, particularly in consumer behavior, to remain competitive and harness available opportunities.

Consumer behavior refers to understanding consumers' actions and the motives underlying those (Zhou, 2022). This behavior involves comprehending how consumers choose, buy, use, and even dispose of products or services. In the digital era, consumer

behavior has begun to change, especially evident in the increased initiative, rationality in shopping habits, and a tendency toward personalization, differentiation, and simplification. By understanding these behaviors, businesses can utilize the information to develop effective marketing strategies. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize the strong connection between consumer behavior and digital marketing. Businesses can understand consumer behavior by leveraging digital technology, such as tracking product likes and comments on online platforms.

With the increasing relevance of digital marketing and changing consumer behavior, a growing body of research has explored digital transformation in MSMEs and its impact on competitiveness. However, most studies have tended to generalize MSMEs without disaggregating gender specific dynamics. Moreover, while the potential of digital marketing to enhance market reach is well acknowledged, limited empirical studies have examined how women-owned MSMEs specifically design and implement digital marketing strategies in response to changing consumer behavior, especially in local contexts like Padang City. Given that Padang has the highest number of MSMEs in West Sumatra, and that women play a crucial role in its entrepreneurial ecosystem, a localized and gender-sensitive study is vital. This research seeks to fill this gap by investigating the challenges, strategies, and opportunities experienced by women-owned MSMEs in Padang in adapting to the digital era, thus contributing to more inclusive and sustainable entrepreneurial development.

Like other cities, Padang City has made MSMEs a primary focus. The Department of Cooperatives, Small, and Medium Enterprises reports that Padang City has approximately 41,787 MSMEs, the highest number among all cities and districts in West Sumatra (Ghaffar, 2016). These MSMEs are spread across various sectors, such as retail, food services, services, crafts, and others. The high and diverse number of MSMEs is one reason why this research is concentrated in Padang City. This study also continues previous research that examined the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) analysis and women-owned MSMEs in Padang City. Therefore, the continuity of this research is expected to support the analysis and formulation of effective strategies to foster more inclusive and sustainable growth for women-owned MSMEs.

2. Research Methods

This study employs an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative methods in a sequential manner to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the digital marketing strategies adopted by women-owned MSMEs in Padang City. This approach is chosen because it allows the researcher to first identify general patterns through quantitative data, and then deepen and explain the meaning behind those patterns using qualitative data. Therefore, this design is highly

suitable for understanding complex and context-specific phenomena such as digital technology adoption in women’s entrepreneurship.

In the quantitative phase, a cross-sectional survey was conducted using structured questionnaires, collecting primary data at a single point in time. The survey involved 125 women-owned MSMEs selected from the official database of the Micro and Small Business Empowerment Division of the Office of Cooperatives and MSMEs in Padang City. Out of a total of 1,701 MSMEs in the Koto Tengah District, 181 were identified as being women-owned. The sample size of 125 was determined using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error. The questionnaire was designed to measure the level of digital marketing adoption (e.g., use of social media, e-commerce platforms, digital promotions), consumer behavior, and the perceived impact of these strategies on sales growth and customer engagement.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2} \quad (1)$$

$$n = \frac{181}{1 + 181(0,05)^2} = 124,6$$

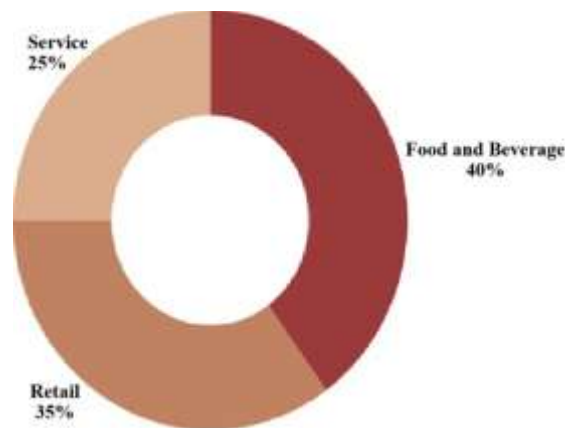
In the qualitative phase, structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of women MSME owners who had previously participated in the survey. These interviews aimed to gain deeper

insights into the challenges faced in the process of digital transformation, including technological barriers, limited digital literacy, capital constraints, and socio-cultural factors. The qualitative data also captured personal narratives related to the impact of digital strategies on business sustainability and resilience. This phase provides richer context and explanation to the quantitative findings, particularly in answering the “why” and “how” behind the implementation of digital strategies by women entrepreneurs.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Respondent Characteristics

This study involves 125 respondents, all women-owned MSME owners in Padang City, representing various business sectors. From Figure 1, it can be seen that the majority of respondents operate in three main sectors: food and beverage (40%), retail (35%), and services (25%). Respondents in the food and beverage sector primarily run culinary businesses such as catering, baked goods, snacks, and packaged drinks, with a digital marketing focus on showcasing products and offering promotions. The retail sector, which includes clothing, accessories, and handicrafts businesses, frequently utilizes social media and e-commerce platforms to introduce new collections and reach more consumers. Meanwhile, the services sector includes businesses in beauty, education, and consulting.



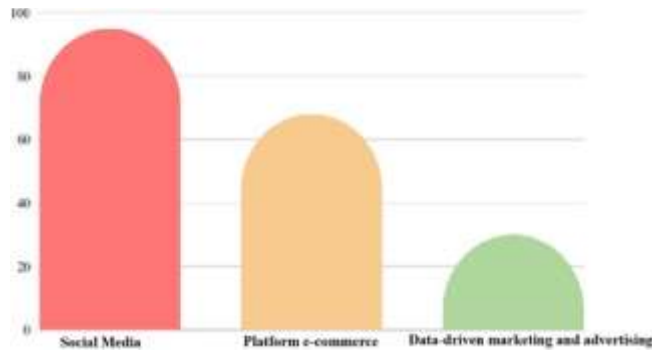
Data processed by researchers, 2025

Figure 1. Business Sectors of Women-Owned MSMEs in Padang City

3.2 Level of Digital Marketing Strategy Adoption

Figure 2 presents the distribution of digital marketing platforms utilized by respondents. All respondents have utilized digital marketing as a strategy, with 95% using social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp as their primary channels. Commonly posted content includes product photos, videos, promotions, and customer testimonials. About 68% have also joined e-commerce platforms such as Shopee, Tokopedia, Lazada, and similar sites

to expand their market and streamline transactions. However, only 30% employ data-driven marketing or paid ads due to budget constraints, although they recognize the effectiveness of these strategies in increasing market reach. The majority of respondents, 65%, are actively engaged on digital media, posting new content around 2-3 times a week and using interactive features like direct messages or e-commerce chat functions to respond to customer inquiries.



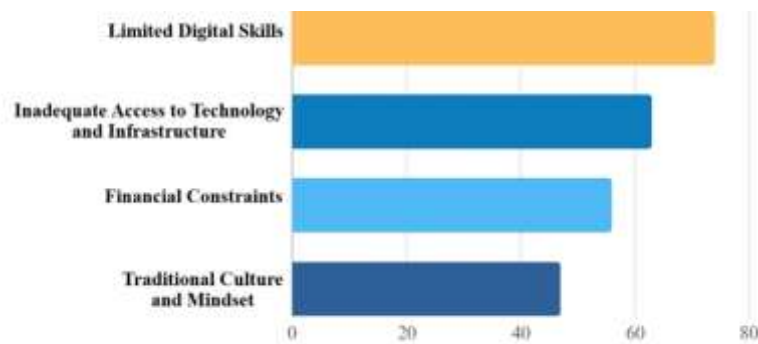
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Figure 2. Digital Marketing Strategies Adopted by Women-Owned MSMEs in Padang City (In percentages)

In terms of experience, about 50% of respondents have been using digital marketing for over three years, while the rest have only become active in the past year. However, limited technical knowledge remains a primary challenge, particularly in understanding social media algorithms and effectively utilizing paid advertising features. Additionally, 40% of respondents feel that time is a constraint, especially for those running their businesses without staff support.

The main challenges faced by women-owned MSMEs in Padang City in fully adopting digital marketing are summarized in Figure 3, which

highlights issues related to digital skills, access to technology, financial constraints, and traditional mindsets. Most women-owned MSMEs still face limitations in digital skills, with around 70% of respondents acknowledging difficulties in operating digital tools and marketing platforms. These challenges are often compounded by limited technology access, such as inadequate devices and unstable internet connections. These constraints affect the MSMEs' ability to engage with consumers and effectively leverage digital marketing technology.



Data processed by researchers, 2025

Figure 3. Main Challenges Faced by Women-Owned MSMEs in Digital Marketing (in percentages)

Financial constraints are a significant factor, with more than half of the respondents struggling to invest in digital marketing tools and expenses, such as social media advertising. The final challenge is a prevailing business culture and mindset that still prioritizes traditional marketing methods, leading to a perception that digital adoption is not a priority. Given these challenges, it is evident that the successful digital transformation of women-owned MSMEs requires comprehensive support, including digital skills training, financial assistance, and the provision of adequate technological infrastructure.

3.3 Consumer Behavior and Preferences in Digital Marketing

This study identifies consumer behavior and

preferences for online shopping as a key factor influencing the marketing strategies of women-owned MSMEs. The digital transformation, coupled with business innovation, has significantly altered consumer expectations and behavior. Data indicates that consumers strongly prefer fast, practical, and secure transactions, particularly through e-commerce platforms that simplify the shopping experience. As shown in Table 1, 30% of the surveyed women-owned MSMEs indicated that their customers exhibit a preference for e-commerce platforms, primarily due to the availability of secure payment systems and user-friendly features that support seamless transactions. Additionally, 28% acknowledged that partnerships with online food delivery services have been highly beneficial in reaching customers. These findings

suggest that the adoption of new technologies has driven women-owned MSMEs to respond proactively to changing dynamics by transforming their business

strategies to align with the digital era.

Table 1. Consumer Behavior and Preferences in Digital Marketing

| Consumer Behavior and Preferences | Freq | Percent | Cum |
|--|------|---------|-------|
| Purchases through e-commerce platforms | 38 | 30,36 | 30,36 |
| Collaboration with online food delivery services | 31 | 25 | 55,36 |
| Product reviews and testimonials on social media | 56 | 44,64 | 100 |

Data processed by researchers, 2025

In addition, many consumers use social media to seek product information and read reviews from other users before making purchasing decisions. Consequently, around 45% of MSMEs report that consumer engagement increases when they actively manage their social media accounts. Sales also tend to rise significantly when products are featured in review content from accounts with a large number of followers and high engagement rates. These accounts, often consisting of influencers or product reviewers from specific communities, have loyal audiences interested in the product recommendations they promote. When women-owned MSME products are reviewed by these influential accounts, consumer trust and interest tend to increase, which can ultimately drive significant sales growth. Therefore, it is not uncommon for them to collaborate with several accounts to boost consumer interest.

Data and facts in the field indicate that consumer behavior has undergone significant transformation due to advancements in digital technology. Market trends reveal a shift in consumer preferences toward online platforms, where digital interactions play a crucial role in influencing purchasing decisions both online and offline. Supported by search tools and social media, consumers are now more informed, connected, and actively engaged in the purchasing process. Digital technology also enables consumers to contribute to value creation, such as customizing products to their needs, supporting local distribution, and providing helpful reviews for other users.

Additionally, it highlights that mobile devices have become essential tools supporting modern shopping habits, including the practice of reviewing products in physical stores before making purchases online. Continuous innovations in digital technology are expected to fundamentally reshape consumption patterns, with the adoption of such technologies likely to become a new standard, replacing traditional business methods. Companies unable to adapt to these changes risk losing their competitive edge and being outpaced by competitors more adept at leveraging the latest technologies.

3.4 The Impact of Digital Marketing Strategies on Sales and Business Growth

The influence of digital marketing strategies on sales and business growth for women-owned MSMEs

in Padang City shows a significant impact. Based on survey data, 95% of women-owned MSMEs that adopted social media as their main marketing channel experienced a sales increase of 20-30% compared to before they implemented digital strategies. This increase is attributed to enhanced product exposure and the ease of direct interaction with consumers, allowing MSMEs to quickly respond to inquiries and build relationships with customers. The use of social media, particularly Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp, enables women-owned MSMEs to reach a broader consumer base and create stronger brand awareness through engaging visual content.

Furthermore, 68% of MSMEs that combine social media with e-commerce platforms report sales increases of up to 40% compared to the period before their digital transformation. This combination proves effective as consumers can view product reviews and interact via social media before completing purchases on e-commerce platforms that offer quick and secure transaction processes. Digital marketing also allows MSMEs to leverage data from social media and e-commerce to understand consumer behavior, such as product preferences and optimal purchasing times, which are then used to develop more targeted marketing strategies. This data indicates that digital marketing strategies not only contribute to increased sales but also accelerate the overall growth of MSMEs, creating long-term opportunities in a competitive business environment.

3.5 Digital Transformation and Gender

To strengthen the analysis, this study also delves into gender-related challenges faced by MSMEs, aiming to provide a comparative perspective on the performance of women-owned and men-owned MSMEs, particularly in terms of technological adoption and expertise. The findings reveal significant differences between businesses led by women and men in their perceptions of digital transformation, with gender serving as a moderating factor influencing the use of social media. Literature on digital transformation highlights that women entrepreneurs often view social media as a critical tool for enhancing business visibility, customer engagement, and market reach (Hanna et al., 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This aligns with the study's findings that women-owned MSMEs in Padang City are more active in

leveraging social media compared to their male-owned counterparts.

However, despite their high engagement with social media, women entrepreneurs often face challenges in mastering advanced ICT skills, necessitating external support in digital strategy development. Research suggests that this gap might stem from systemic gender disparities in access to technical education and training, as well as societal expectations that prioritize non-technical roles for. Interestingly, the study also notes that women-owned MSMEs tend to hire more ICT-skilled staff to compensate for their limitations, a trend that emphasizes their proactive approach to overcoming technological barriers.

In contrast, men-led MSMEs are more inclined towards technical roles, reflecting a traditional gender division in technology-related tasks. Women entrepreneurs, meanwhile, focus on managerial aspects of technology, such as strategic planning and relationship management, which are critical for fostering long-term business growth. This highlights the dual importance of technological and interpersonal skills in building resilient MSMEs.

The study underscores the need for further exploration of gender disparities, particularly the social, cultural, and economic factors that shape women's entrepreneurial experiences in Padang City. For instance, societal norms and limited access to financial resources can hinder women's ability to invest in digital tools and training, further perpetuating the digital divide. Moreover, during crises these disparities are likely to intensify, potentially impacting the recovery and resilience of women-led businesses.

Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach, including targeted policy interventions to promote gender equity in digital access and skill-building programs tailored to women entrepreneurs. By bridging the gender gap in digital literacy and fostering an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem, policymakers can enhance the capacity of women-owned MSMEs to thrive in an increasingly digital economy.

4. Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of digital marketing strategies as a key element for enhancing the competitiveness and growth of women-owned MSMEs in the digital era. With significant changes in consumer behavior increasingly prioritizing the ease and convenience of online shopping, women-managed MSMEs in Padang City need to adopt and optimize various digital platforms, such as social media and e-commerce, to meet consumer preferences. The study finds that the use of social media, e-commerce platforms, and the digital utilization of consumer data has a significant positive impact on sales increases and market expansion.

However, the adoption of digital marketing still faces several challenges that need to be

addressed, particularly those related to limitations in digital skills, access to technology, and the socio-cultural barriers faced by women entrepreneurs. Additionally, limitations in financial resources and technical knowledge also restrict the potential of women-owned MSMEs to implement digital marketing optimally. Therefore, comprehensive support from various stakeholders, including the government and the private sector, is necessary to provide digital skills training, financial assistance, and more adequate technological infrastructure.

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