

Optimizing the Collaboration Between MSMEs and Digital Marketplaces: Innovative Strategies to Enhance Market Expansion and Business Sustainability in the Digital Economy Era

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Abstract. The rapid growth of digital transformation has urged Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to adapt by leveraging digital marketplace platforms as a primary strategy for expanding their market reach and maintaining business sustainability. This study is a literature review employing a qualitative approach and descriptive analysis to explore how strategic collaboration between MSMEs and digital marketplaces can be optimized within the context of Indonesia's digital economy. Data were collected from 35 scholarly articles and credible sources published between 2014 and 2025, with a strict selection process narrowing them down to 17 relevant articles for analysis. The results indicate that synergistic and innovative collaborations with digital platforms such as Tokopedia, Shopee, and GrabFood significantly contribute to market expansion, operational efficiency, and the strengthening of MSME brand identities. Case studies including Brodo, Kopi Kenangan, and Maicih illustrate successful collaborative practices through digital features, data-driven promotion, and continuous training. These findings highlight the importance of digital literacy, strategic planning, and cross-sectoral support in building an inclusive and sustainable digital ecosystem for MSMEs in Indonesia.

Keywords: MSMEs, Digital Marketplace, Strategic Collaboration, Market Expansion, Business Sustainability, Digital Economy.

1. Introduction

The background of this research stems from the global shift toward a digitized economic structure, which directly affects how business actors manage, market, and grow their enterprises. Amid the dynamics of the digital economy, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are encountering new challenges and opportunities that demand adaptive and innovative strategies. Previously reliant on conventional methods to reach their markets, MSMEs are now compelled to migrate to digital systems to remain relevant and competitive [1]. Digitalization is no longer optional but a pressing necessity for MSMEs to thrive in a technology- and data-driven ecosystem.

Digital marketplaces such as Tokopedia, Shopee, Bukalapak, and Lazada have become vital pillars in supporting MSME digital transformation. These platforms offer conveniences in transactions, logistics, promotions, and sales analytics, thereby granting broader market access without the need for significant physical investment. However, the presence of digital marketplaces has not been fully optimized by all MSMEs in Indonesia. Many MSME actors utilize only the basic features without developing strategic and synergistic collaborations with the marketplaces to support long-term business growth [2].

This situation is exacerbated by the limited understanding among many MSMEs regarding digital marketing strategies and the utilization of advanced marketplace features. In practice, many business actors follow digital trends without thorough planning or innovative strategy [3]. As a result, even though they are present on digital platforms, their outcomes remain suboptimal in driving both market expansion and business

sustainability. Yet digital marketplaces are sales channels and strategic partners in branding, data analytics, and consumer-driven product development in real time.

Therefore, it is essential to explore how optimal collaboration patterns between MSMEs and digital marketplaces can be formulated to create mutually beneficial synergies. This collaboration encompasses operational aspects and innovation, marketing strategy, information system integration, and long-term commitment from both parties. Innovative strategies formed through this collaboration will be key to building competitive advantages for MSMEs amid increasingly fierce and rapidly changing market competition [4].

The success of collaboration between MSMEs and digital marketplaces can be measured by how effectively MSMEs expand their market reach, increase sales volume, and maintain customer loyalty through data- and technology-driven approaches [5]. In this context, the ability of MSMEs to leverage marketplace insights such as sales trend data, consumer segmentation, and shopping behavior becomes crucial. Proactive marketplaces that offer training, analytical tools, and promotional support also play a significant role in strengthening the adaptive capacity of MSMEs in facing digitalization challenges.

On the other hand, MSME business sustainability is assessed based on sales growth and on their success in developing resilient and flexible business models amid rapid technological and market changes [6]. MSMEs that are able to establish strategic collaborations with digital marketplaces are generally more prepared to face disruptions, whether in terms of shifting consumer demand or changes in regulations. Such collaboration also creates opportunities for MSMEs to enhance their competitiveness through integration into a more inclusive and sustainable digital ecosystem.

This study also highlights the importance of a literature-based approach (literature review) in exploring best practices implemented by successful MSMEs in establishing strategic partnerships with digital marketplaces. Case studies of businesses such as Maicih (snack products), Brodo (local men's footwear), and Kopi Kenangan (cloud-based coffee retail) demonstrate that active collaboration with digital platforms contributes to market expansion, product innovation, and improved customer loyalty. This suggests that well-directed and strategic synergy can generate sustainable added value for MSMEs.

Based on these insights, this study aims to identify and analyze innovative strategies in the collaboration between MSMEs and digital marketplaces that can accelerate market expansion while ensuring business sustainability in the digital economy era. A literature review approach is employed to explore theoretical concepts and empirical practices from various relevant sources, enabling the formulation of an effective and applicable collaboration model for MSME actors in Indonesia.

1.1. MSME

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are an economic sector comprising business actors operating on a limited scale with constrained resources, yet they play a vital role in Indonesia's economy, particularly in job creation, income distribution, and contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) [7], [8]. MSMEs are spread across various sectors such as culinary, handicrafts, fashion, agriculture, and services, characterized by high flexibility but also a high vulnerability to market changes and economic crises. In the context of digital transformation, MSMEs are faced with the demand to adapt to technology and innovation in order to remain competitive and survive in a disruptive era. Strengthening MSMEs through digital support has thus become a crucial agenda in building an inclusive economy.

1.2. Digital Marketplace

A digital marketplace is an internet-based platform that connects buyers and sellers online, facilitating the transaction of goods or services by providing features such as product displays, payment systems, logistics, and promotional tools [9]. In Indonesia, digital marketplaces such as Tokopedia, Shopee, Bukalapak, Lazada, and Blibli play a pivotal role in democratizing market access for MSMEs, including those located in remote areas. The main advantage of marketplaces lies in their ability to eliminate geographical barriers, streamline buying and selling processes, and offer market data that can be utilized for business strategies. However, optimal utilization of these platforms requires sufficient digital literacy from MSME actors so they are not merely passive users, but active partners capable of growing through technology.

1.3. Strategic Collaboration

Strategic collaboration refers to a deliberately planned and mutually beneficial partnership between two or more parties to achieve long-term goals [10]. In the context of MSMEs and digital marketplaces, strategic collaboration involves integration between the production capacity of MSMEs and the digital infrastructure of marketplaces, training and mentorship, the use of data analytics, and joint promotions. It is about selling products on digital platforms, and building synergy in product innovation, customer service, and sustainable

business development. This collaborative strategy enables MSMEs to overcome resource limitations and expand their business potential more efficiently.

1.4. Market Expansion

Market expansion refers to the systematic effort to broaden the sales reach and distribution of products to a wider geographical area or new customer segments [11]. For MSMEs, market expansion can be done vertically (increasing market share within the same segment) or horizontally (entering new markets), with digitalization playing a key role in facilitating this process. Through digital marketplaces, MSMEs gain direct access to millions of active users, including consumers from outside their region or even from abroad, who were previously difficult to reach through conventional means. Digitally driven market expansion strategies also enable MSMEs to leverage consumer data, respond to market trends in real-time, and conduct promotions at a lower cost with greater precision.

1.5. Business Sustainability

Business sustainability is the ability of an enterprise to survive and grow in the long term while taking into account economic, social, and environmental aspects [12]. For MSMEs, sustainability is about operational continuity and profitability, and resilience to market changes, technological adaptation, and innovation capability. In the digital era, business sustainability is heavily influenced by how well MSMEs integrate their business processes with technology, maintain strong relationships with customers, and continuously generate added value. Collaboration with digital marketplaces is one of the key pathways to achieving such sustainability, as it provides a supportive ecosystem for data-driven growth and connectivity.

1.6. Digital Economy

The digital economy refers to an economic system based on the utilization of information and communication technology, where most production, distribution, and consumption activities occur digitally [13]. In Indonesia, the digital economy has grown rapidly in line with increasing internet penetration, e-commerce adoption, and the development of tech startups that contribute to a dynamic digital ecosystem. For MSMEs, the digital economy opens up new opportunities to scale up operations at relatively low costs, expand market reach, and gain access to various financial services and online training. However, this transformation also brings new challenges such as more intense competition, the need for digital literacy, and the demand for continuous innovation to avoid being left behind in the global digitalization wave.

2. Method

The research method used in this study is a literature review approach with a qualitative perspective. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore, identify, and analyze various concepts, strategies, and empirical findings related to the collaboration between Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and digital marketplaces in the context of market expansion and business sustainability within the digital economy era. This qualitative research is descriptive in nature, aiming to systematically and comprehensively present the phenomenon under study based on previously published information, without the collection of primary data directly from the field. The data collection process was carried out by reviewing literature from various scientific and credible sources. Articles and publications used as analytical material were retrieved from the Google Scholar database as well as official websites of reputable institutions relevant to the topics of MSMEs, digital marketplaces, business innovation, and sustainability. The search was limited to publications from the period 2014 to 2025 to ensure that the data and literature used were current and relevant to recent developments in the field of MSME digitalization. The initial stage of data collection yielded a total of 35 scientific articles and other publication sources. However, to maintain the quality and focus of the study, a strict selection process was conducted based on criteria such as topic relevance, currency of information, clarity of methodology, and the article's contribution to the discussion of strategic collaboration between MSMEs and digital marketplaces. From this selection process, 17 articles were ultimately chosen as the most suitable and in-depth sources for further analysis. Data analysis was conducted using qualitative descriptive techniques by grouping, interpreting, and synthesizing information from the selected literature. The researcher aimed to identify patterns, relationships, and key findings related to innovative strategies in MSME-marketplace collaboration and their impact on market expansion and business sustainability. The results of this analysis are presented in the form of a comprehensive argumentative narrative, intended to enrich the understanding of the researched issue while also providing a conceptual foundation for developing applicable strategies within the Indonesian MSME context.

3. Result and Discussion

The development of the digital economy in Indonesia has revolutionized the national business ecosystem by offering vast opportunities as well as complex challenges for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), which serve as the backbone of the economy. The increasing penetration of the internet, rapid adoption of smartphones, and the growing culture of online shopping have driven a shift in how MSMEs operate—from traditional business models to digital-first approaches, particularly through the use of e-commerce platforms, social media, and digital payment applications. However, the gap in adaptive capabilities among MSME players has become a critical issue, as many still lack sufficient capacity in terms of digital literacy, customer relationship management (CRM) systems, and the ability to formulate data-driven and effective digital marketing strategies. Moreover, challenges also arise from regulatory dynamics, the cost of technology adoption, and the shortage of skilled human resources in managing digital channels. On the other hand, digital platforms such as Tokopedia, Shopee, and Bukalapak have created new spaces for collaboration, allowing MSMEs to access broader markets, increase product visibility, and achieve supply chain efficiency through the integration of logistics technology. Nevertheless, this collaboration has not yet been strategically maximized, as many MSMEs still treat digital platforms merely as display windows without building data-based competitive advantages or nurturing long-term customer relationships. Therefore, a more systematic and inclusive approach is needed to promote synergy between MSMEs and digital platforms, not only in terms of technology but also through integrated training, regulatory support, and partnerships that enable MSMEs to scale up sustainably by enhancing digital capabilities, market competitiveness, and long-term business resilience.

Digital marketplaces like Tokopedia, Shopee, and Bukalapak have evolved into essential commercial infrastructure, redefining how MSMEs reach markets, promote products, and operate efficiently through tech-based features such as recommendation algorithms, customer loyalty systems, logistics integration, and analytic dashboards that facilitate data-driven decision-making. However, the effectiveness of these platforms as enablers of MSME growth largely depends on the entrepreneurs' ability to build collaborative partnerships rather than simply using the marketplace as a passive sales channel. On the ground, many MSMEs rely heavily on seasonal promotions and price wars to attract buyers, without fully understanding how to optimize features such as flash sales, live commerce, product bundling, or customer insights to drive sustainable growth. The lack of digital literacy, weak content strategies, and minimal data-driven approaches are major barriers to forming strategic partnerships with marketplaces. On the other hand, digital platforms also need to see MSMEs not just as product providers but as ecosystem partners that can be developed through mentoring programs, performance-based incentives, and technology integration tailored to the specific needs of micro and small business sectors. The transformation of the relationship between MSMEs and marketplaces must shift from a transactional model to a strategic partnership that emphasizes co-innovation, capacity building, and the creation of new, sustainable economic value that benefits both parties in the long term.

The case of Brodo, a local men's shoe brand from Bandung, exemplifies an adaptive and strategic digital transformation in leveraging the marketplace ecosystem for sustainable business growth. Initially operating conventionally, Brodo realized that digital penetration through platforms like Tokopedia and Shopee was not merely an alternative distribution option but a primary channel for brand building, reaching new consumers, and strengthening competitive positioning. Brodo's success lies in its ability not only to market products through marketplaces but also to utilize advanced features such as precisely targeted paid campaigns through customer data segmentation, co-curated seasonal promotions with e-commerce teams, and the use of live streaming and interactive content to foster real-time brand engagement and storytelling [14]. Brodo's approach illustrates how MSMEs can evolve beyond being mere "sellers" on marketplaces into "strategic partners" who help design digital consumer experiences while managing customer relationships through a consistent omnichannel approach across digital and offline touchpoints. In this process, Brodo has aligned itself with the digitalization trend, becoming an active player in creating a brand narrative relevant to the urban and millennial markets, building a loyal customer community, and integrating marketplace data to optimize product innovation and future marketing planning. This makes them a concrete example of how local MSMEs can grow significantly through a mature, personalized, and long-term-oriented digital collaboration strategy.

The case of Kopi Kenangan underscores the importance of strategic synergy between MSMEs and digital platforms in creating business models that are adaptive, consumer-oriented, and sustainable amidst the highly dynamic food and beverage industry. Kopi Kenangan not only expanded its distribution but also built a digital ecosystem that supports a comprehensive consumer experience—from fast ordering to well-targeted promotions by integrating services such as GrabFood, ShopeeFood, and Tokopedia [15]. This collaboration is further enhanced through co-branding strategies and exclusive campaigns co-developed with platform partners, such as

launching new menus wrapped in interactive digital narratives, bundling discounts linked to purchasing behavior data, and app-based loyalty programs that foster emotional attachment between consumers and the brand. Kopi Kenangan's advantage lies in its sophisticated use of data-driven marketing approaches—they leverage insights from order patterns, purchase timing, and menu preferences to design personalized offers and algorithm-based customer retention strategies. This approach creates a layered impact: not only does it boost purchase frequency and short-term conversions, but it also shapes a brand identity that is agile, responsive, and always relevant to the lifestyle of urban digital consumers. In this regard, Kopi Kenangan demonstrates that MSMEs can adopt digital collaboration models not just to expand distribution channels but also to increase brand value, strengthen competitiveness, and build customer loyalty through strategic use of technology, analytics, and platform partnerships in a holistic and forward-looking manner.

The collaboration between MSMEs and digital marketplaces has now moved beyond marketing and distribution, evolving into a strategic platform for data-driven product innovation and real-time market experimentation. This is exemplified by Maicih, a spicy snack brand from Bandung, which utilizes e-commerce platforms as virtual laboratories to test the appeal of new products before mass production. Maicih can quickly validate consumer preferences, reduce the costs of traditional research by leveraging marketplace features such as limited-time flash sales, small-batch market testing, and systematic customer review collection, and optimize innovation cycles through an agile and responsive approach [16]. Digital marketplaces provide instant access to product performance metrics—from initial sales volume, view-to-purchase conversion rates, to customer sentiment in reviews—all of which can be translated into concrete insights for reformulating flavors, packaging, and branding strategies. The strength of this approach lies in its cost-efficiency and rapid iteration, allowing MSMEs to test business hypotheses directly within a dynamic and measurable ecosystem, rather than relying on costly and time-consuming conventional market research. Furthermore, this innovative collaboration encourages MSMEs like Maicih to not only respond to market trends but also create them through bold, feedback-driven product exploration. The marketplace should be viewed as an interactive space that supports co-creation between producers and consumers, paving the way for MSMEs to grow through data-driven innovation, rapid adaptability, and emotional proximity to an ever-evolving target market.

The effectiveness of the MSME-digital marketplace collaboration is further reinforced by training and capacity-building programs designed to cultivate digitally active entrepreneurs who are proficient in modern business management. Programs such as Mitra Tokopedia and Shopee Kampus UMKM are not merely educational initiatives but structural empowerment instruments that bridge the gap in digital literacy and entrepreneurship at the micro-scale. Their training content covers not only technical aspects of online store management but also strategic areas such as brand differentiation, leveraging consumer data for targeted advertising, and long-term financial planning [17]. MSMEs that actively participate in these trainings tend to exhibit more stable performance, better market trend recognition, and greater confidence in making data-informed decisions rather than relying solely on intuition. These trainings also lead to improved customer service quality, more professional product packaging, and bolder efforts to reach broader markets through export features provided by the platforms. Beyond that, these programs foster a community of digital MSME actors who share best practices and support each other, creating a sustainable collaborative learning ecosystem. The marketplaces also benefit from improved partner quality, directly impacting customer satisfaction and platform reputation. Therefore, training becomes both a supporting activity and a core component of building an inclusive e-commerce ecosystem, strengthening MSME competitiveness while ensuring that digital transformation is not only technological but also grounded in sustainable human capacity development.

The success of MSME and digital marketplace collaboration does not solely depend on technological support but critically hinges on the readiness of business actors to transform their mindset into a digital mindset. In this shift, digital platforms are no longer seen merely as product showcases but as strategic ecosystems that enable long-term value creation [5]. This change requires MSMEs to actively explore features such as sales insight dashboards, automated market segmentation, consumer behavior analytics, and ad retargeting tools—resources that were once exclusive to large corporations. MSMEs can identify best-selling products by geographic location by integrating such data into decision-making processes, design marketing campaigns based on consumer habits, and personalize services with greater precision. A digital mindset also encourages entrepreneurs to manage brand reputation proactively, build meaningful customer interactions through live chat or product review features, and develop growth strategies based on measurable digital KPIs like conversion rates, customer retention, and return on ad spend. MSMEs that internalize this mindset are generally more agile in responding to market dynamics, more daring in innovation, and more resilient in the face of economic uncertainty. Thus, cultivating a digital mindset is not only about adopting technology but also about transforming the ways of thinking, working, and growing in an increasingly competitive and evolving digital economy.

The overall discussion emphasizes that collaboration between MSMEs and digital marketplaces, as a response to the pressures of the digital economy, has become a strategic element in shaping the long-term competitiveness of MSMEs amid national economic transformation. The success of this collaboration largely depends on adaptive use of technology, data-driven planning, and the entrepreneurs' commitment to continuous learning and evolution within a dynamic digital ecosystem. Case studies from Brodo, Kopi Kenangan, and Maicih demonstrate that active engagement in marketplace features—such as consumer insights, targeted promotional campaigns, and MSME training—has a direct impact on operational efficiency, customer loyalty, and significant market expansion. More than just facilitating transactions, this collaboration creates a co-creation space between platforms and entrepreneurs, where MSMEs are not merely technology users but strategic partners in digital business model innovation. This success does not occur instantly but is the result of consistent processes supported by the willingness to develop a digital mindset, respond swiftly to market feedback, and use technology as a growth tool. Therefore, the synergy between local entrepreneurial strength and advanced digital technology forms the cornerstone of MSME resilience and sustainability in the face of increasingly complex and unpredictable global challenges.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that strategic collaboration between Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and digital marketplaces represents a critical step in addressing challenges and leveraging opportunities in the digital economy era. Digital marketplaces not only serve as sales channels but also offer a variety of supportive features such as promotional systems, consumer analytics, digital training, and logistics integration—tools that can be optimized by MSMEs to expand their markets and enhance business sustainability. Case studies such as Brodo, Kopi Kenangan, and Maicih demonstrate that MSMEs capable of establishing strategic partnerships with digital platforms, effectively utilizing sales data, and actively participating in digital capacity-building programs are more likely to experience significant growth and remain competitive in an increasingly dynamic market.

The practical implications of this study highlight the need for MSME actors to adopt a more proactive stance in forming strategic collaborations with digital marketplaces, rather than simply being passive users. For the government and other stakeholders, the findings of this research emphasize the importance of providing inclusive digital infrastructure, promoting digital literacy assistance, and implementing incentive policies that support the acceleration of MSME digital transformation. Meanwhile, digital marketplace platforms also play a crucial role in continuously developing inclusive and educational partnership programs, ensuring that MSMEs from various sectors and scales can benefit equally.

There is a growing need to strengthen synergy between MSMEs, marketplace platforms, educational institutions, and the government to build a digital ecosystem that holistically empowers MSMEs. MSMEs are encouraged to focus on marketing strategies, develop consumer data analysis skills, create market-driven product innovations, and build strong brand identities. Marketplaces, in turn, are advised to offer more collaborative spaces based on data and personalized promotions, as well as to integrate training features directly into their platforms. In the future, further research is needed to explore success indicators of such collaborations and contextual factors such as geographic location, industry sector, and the level of digital literacy among MSMEs.

This study acknowledges several limitations. First, as a qualitative literature review, it does not present primary or quantitative data that could directly demonstrate causal relationships between variables. Second, the literature scope is limited to the period between 2014 and 2025 and draws primarily from Google Scholar and a few reputable websites, leaving the possibility that relevant literature may have been overlooked. Third, the case studies presented predominantly reflect MSMEs that are relatively established and digitally connected, which means the findings may not fully represent MSMEs located in underserved areas or with limited access to technology. Future research is encouraged to complement this qualitative approach with quantitative data and direct field studies.

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