

The Role of AI and Content Creativity in Building Brands and Enhancing MSME Competitiveness in the Digital Era

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ABSTRACT

The development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital transformation has created new opportunities for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to enhance their marketing capabilities, content creativity, and brand building. This study aims to analyze the role of AI and content creativity in building brands and enhancing MSME competitiveness in the digital era. The study employs a qualitative literature review approach by analyzing 20 scholarly articles published between 2018 and 2026. The literature was obtained from Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and international journal publisher platforms, and was subsequently selected based on the PRISMA 2020 principles and analyzed using descriptive-thematic synthesis. The findings indicate that AI functions as an enabling capability that supports consumer analysis, personalization, automation, ideation, and content production. The integration of AI with human creativity can generate more relevant, engaging, and adaptive content, thereby strengthening brand awareness, brand image, brand association, and brand equity. Stronger brands subsequently contribute to MSME differentiation and competitive advantage. The findings emphasize the importance of human-AI collaboration in developing sustainable competitiveness.

ABSTRAK

Perkembangan Artificial Intelligence (AI) dan transformasi digital telah menciptakan peluang baru bagi Usaha Mikro, Kecil, dan Menengah (UMKM) dalam meningkatkan kemampuan pemasaran, kreativitas konten, dan pembangunan merek. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis peran AI dan kreativitas konten dalam membangun brand serta meningkatkan daya saing UMKM di era digital. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan qualitative literature review dengan menganalisis 20 artikel ilmiah yang diterbitkan pada periode 2018–2026. Literatur diperoleh melalui Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, dan platform penerbit jurnal internasional, kemudian diseleksi menggunakan prinsip PRISMA 2020 dan dianalisis melalui descriptive-thematic synthesis. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa AI berperan sebagai enabling capability yang mendukung analisis konsumen, personalisasi, otomatisasi, ideasi, dan produksi konten. Integrasi AI dengan kreativitas manusia dapat menghasilkan konten yang lebih relevan, menarik, dan adaptif, sehingga memperkuat brand awareness, brand image, brand association, dan brand equity. Penguatan brand selanjutnya berkontribusi terhadap diferensiasi dan competitive advantage UMKM. Temuan menegaskan pentingnya kolaborasi manusia-AI dalam membangun daya saing berkelanjutan.

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has changed the way Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) conduct marketing activities, interact with consumers, and establish competitive positions in the market. The emergence of social media, e-commerce, and various digital platforms enables MSMEs to expand their market reach and communicate with consumers more quickly and interactively. However, easier access to digital channels has also intensified competition because consumers are confronted with an increasing number of product and brand choices. Under these conditions, MSMEs' ability to manage digital marketing is no longer limited to

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establishing a presence on digital platforms but also involves the ability to create relevant communication, build brand identity, and maintain consumer engagement. Ali Abbasi et al. (2022) found that social media marketing adoption among SMEs is influenced by perceived benefits, management support, competitive pressure, and environmental factors. These findings indicate that the utilization of digital technologies is increasingly associated with firms' ability to respond to competitive environments and develop marketing strategies that are appropriate to market characteristics.

Within this digital environment, brands have become increasingly important because they serve as a means of differentiation when consumers encounter various products with relatively similar characteristics. For MSMEs, brand building is not merely concerned with logos or visual identity but also encompasses the ability to create perceptions, experiences, trust, and consistent relationships with consumers. One important instrument in this process is content marketing, as content serves as a medium through which MSMEs communicate product value, stories, character, and brand identity to their audiences. Research on digital marketing strategies for creative MSME products indicates that social media, content marketing, influencer marketing, search engine marketing, and other digital channels can be used to increase brand awareness, attract consumers, and expand markets (Lubis et al., 2025). In this context, content quality has become increasingly important because consumers not only receive product information but also evaluate the creativity, relevance, uniqueness, and authenticity of the communication presented by a brand.

Content creativity has therefore become an important capability in MSMEs' digital marketing. Creative content enables business actors to transform product information into messages that are more attractive, understandable, and distinctive from those of competitors. Creativity can be expressed through storytelling, product visualization, short-form videos, educational materials, entertainment, and other forms of communication that correspond to audience and digital platform characteristics. As the volume of content produced by businesses continues to increase, the challenge faced by MSMEs is no longer simply how to produce content but how to create content that is relevant, original, authentic, consistent with brand identity, and capable of generating engagement. Empirical evidence from SMEs in Indonesia also indicates that Instagram-based content strategies can strengthen brand awareness, particularly when MSMEs face limitations in developing a structured digital presence (Tania & Sugianto, 2026). Thus, content creativity can be viewed as a marketing resource that helps MSMEs translate product characteristics and business identity into digital communication that provides value to consumers.

The development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has subsequently created new opportunities in the creation and management of digital content. AI enables marketing activities to be supported by data analysis, automation, personalization, and content generation. The development of generative AI has further enabled firms to produce text, images, videos, and various forms of marketing communication materials in a shorter period. Grewal et al. (2025) explain that generative AI has the potential to transform how marketers interact and communicate with consumers while supporting the creation and delivery of marketing content in various formats. Cillo & Rubera (2025) also position generative AI as an important development in innovation and marketing because of its ability to generate content and support various creative activities. For MSMEs with limited human resources, time, and marketing budgets, these developments provide opportunities to increase content production capacity without having to establish a large-scale marketing structure.

Nevertheless, the use of AI in content creation does not mean that human creativity is no longer necessary. Instead, the literature indicates that the effectiveness of AI in marketing is closely related to how the technology is combined with human capabilities. AI can assist in generating alternative ideas, texts, visuals, and market analyses, but humans remain necessary to determine creative direction, understand consumer contexts, maintain brand identity, and ensure that generated messages are consistent with organizational values. Research on the use of generative AI for social media content creation shows that fully AI-generated content can reduce perceptions of brand authenticity, whereas this negative effect can be mitigated when AI is used to support rather than completely replace humans in the content creation process (Brüns & Meißner, 2024). This finding indicates that the relationship between AI and creativity should be understood as human-AI collaboration, in which AI enhances production and analytical capabilities, while humans retain their roles in creativity, interpretation, authenticity, and strategic decision-making.

For MSMEs, the combination of AI and content creativity is particularly relevant because resource constraints represent one of the key characteristics of small-scale businesses. AI can help MSMEs overcome some of these limitations through automated content creation, promotional idea development, trend analy-

sis, communication personalization, and digital marketing management. A study on AI utilization in Indonesian MSME marketing indicates that limited financial resources, digital literacy, and strategic understanding remain barriers to the effective utilization of AI (Laksmono & Rendro, 2025). At the same time, recent research on generative AI marketing in small businesses indicates that the technology has the potential to improve competitive marketing performance by reducing costs, enhancing customer experiences, personalizing interactions, producing high-quality content, and utilizing market analytics, although its benefits remain influenced by budget constraints, AI competencies, infrastructure, and ethical considerations (Abrokwah-Larbi, 2026). Therefore, AI should be understood by MSMEs as a capability that strengthens marketing resources rather than merely as a tool for automating tasks.

The combination of AI and content creativity is further connected to brand building and MSME competitiveness. When AI is used to accelerate analysis, ideation, production, and personalization, while human creativity is employed to maintain brand differentiation, storytelling, and authenticity, MSMEs have greater opportunities to develop communication that is more consistent and responsive to market changes. This process can strengthen brand visibility, brand awareness, brand engagement, and brand trust, ultimately supporting MSMEs' ability to differentiate themselves from competitors. However, AI utilization also presents challenges, including content homogenization, reduced authenticity, transparency issues, intellectual property concerns, and potential technological dependence. Consequently, the competitiveness generated through AI does not merely originate from the ability to produce large volumes of content but from MSMEs' ability to strategically combine technology capability, marketing knowledge, human creativity, and brand identity. This perspective is consistent with the literature indicating that the success of SME digital marketing is influenced by a combination of technological, organizational, and competitive environmental factors (Ali Abbasi et al., 2022).

Although research on AI in marketing, content marketing, social media, and MSME digitalization continues to develop, the literature remains relatively fragmented. Some studies position AI primarily as an instrument for marketing automation and analysis, while others focus separately on content creativity, social media engagement, brand awareness, or MSME competitiveness. The development of generative AI also creates a need to understand how technological efficiency can be balanced with human creativity and brand authenticity. Therefore, a synthesis is needed that specifically explains how AI and content creativity can interact to build brands and strengthen MSME competitiveness in the digital era. This study addresses this gap through a qualitative literature review by synthesizing literature on AI, generative AI, content creativity, digital marketing, brand building, and MSME competitiveness. The synthesis aims to identify the role of AI in supporting creativity and marketing activities, explain the contribution of content creativity to brand building, identify supporting factors and barriers to AI adoption, and formulate a conceptual understanding of how AI capability and human creativity can be combined as strategic capabilities for building brands and enhancing MSME competitiveness.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

2.1 Artificial Intelligence in MSME Marketing Transformation

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has evolved from a supporting technology into a capability that can strengthen marketing processes, decision-making, and value creation within firms. In the context of MSMEs, the development of AI has become increasingly relevant because it enables business owners to access analytical, automation, personalization, and content production capabilities with relatively limited resources. A study by Ameen et al. (2022) indicates that AI has an increasingly close relationship with creativity in marketing and can influence various stages of the creative process. Meanwhile, Dwivedi et al. (2021) demonstrate that generative AI has the potential to transform how firms interact with consumers, produce marketing content, and develop products and services. Thus, AI functions not only as an efficiency-enhancing tool but also as a technology capable of expanding MSMEs' marketing capabilities.

In the MSME context, the relevance of AI is particularly strong because resource constraints often hinder firms from conducting marketing activities consistently. Research on generative AI in SMEs suggests that the technology can democratize scalability and creativity capabilities, allowing firms with limited technical and financial resources to develop innovation and marketing activities (Rajaram & Tinguely, 2024). However, these benefits depend heavily on employee competencies, leadership, organizational culture, collaboration, and organizational readiness to integrate AI into business processes. Therefore, AI adoption in MSMEs should not be understood merely as a technology adoption decision but as a capability-development

process that connects technology with human resources and business strategy.

2.2 AI and Marketing Content Creativity

Content creativity is an important element of digital marketing because consumers are exposed to enormous volumes of information across various digital platforms. Under these conditions, MSMEs cannot simply produce content routinely; they need to create content that is attractive, relevant, distinctive, and capable of representing their brand identity. Kraus et al. (2019) demonstrate that content creation represents an important challenge for SMEs because small firms do not possess the same resources as large corporations. Therefore, the ability to produce content effectively constitutes an important component of MSMEs' digital marketing strategies.

AI provides new opportunities to strengthen this creative process. Ameen et al. (2022), through a review of 156 articles, demonstrate that the relationship between AI and marketing creativity encompasses various capabilities, including AI's ability to support idea generation, production, evaluation, and creative development. Pagani & Wind (2025) further demonstrate that AI can function as an instrumental resource, a tool for exploring alternative creative possibilities, and a means of encouraging unconventional thinking. Accordingly, creativity in the context of AI should not necessarily be understood as the replacement of human creativity but rather as a collaborative process that enables humans to access a wider range of ideas and accelerate content development.

The emergence of generative AI has further expanded these capabilities because the technology can generate text, images, videos, and various forms of multimodal content. Hartmann et al. (2025), for example, found that AI-generated marketing images can achieve very high levels of quality, realism, and aesthetics in consumer evaluations. This finding indicates that AI has the potential to reduce barriers to visual content production that previously required substantial technical expertise and financial investment. For MSMEs, this condition can enhance their ability to produce content more rapidly and diversely. Nevertheless, AI-generated content still requires human curation to ensure alignment with brand identity, consumer characteristics, cultural context, and the values that the business seeks to communicate.

2.3 Content Creativity and MSME Brand Building

In digital marketing, content does not merely function to communicate product information but also serves as an instrument for developing brand identity and relationships between brands and consumers. Consistent and relevant content can help consumers recognize a brand's characteristics, develop particular associations, and increase engagement with the brand. Hermaren & Achyar (2018) demonstrate that firm-created content and user-generated content on social media are associated with the development of customer-based brand equity, including brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty.

In the MSME context, the relationship between social media activities and brand building has also become increasingly evident. Febrian et al. (2022) demonstrate that social media activities can contribute to improving MSME brand equity through dimensions such as brand awareness and brand image. Research involving SMEs in Indonesia also identifies a positive relationship between social media use and brand equity, indicating that social media can be employed as a strategy for strengthening brand value (Shandy et al., 2023). These findings suggest that the quality and consistency of digital communication are important components of the brand-building process, particularly for MSMEs that often face limitations in utilizing conventional marketing media.

Content creativity has consequently become increasingly important because brands compete not only based on their products but also on their ability to create distinctive experiences and communication. Chokpitakkul & Anantachart (2020), through an analysis of 3,147 Facebook posts from successful SMEs in Thailand, found that social media brand communication encompasses strategies for presenting brand identity, implementing brand-based marketing activities, and developing secondary associations. This finding demonstrates that digital content can serve as a strategic medium for translating business identity into communication that is recognizable to consumers.

2.4 AI, Brand Building, and Customer Engagement

The integration of AI introduces a new dimension to brand-building processes because AI enables firms to analyze consumer data, understand behavioral patterns, personalize communication, and generate content that is more closely aligned with audience characteristics. Literature on AI-driven branding indicates that AI

can help establish dynamic relationships between consumers and brands while supporting the development of brand narratives that are more relevant to consumer needs (Deryl et al., 2023). From this perspective, AI functions not only as a content-generation tool but also as a capability that supports the management of relationships between brands and consumers.

This relationship is particularly important for MSMEs because brand building in digital environments depends heavily on the ability of firms to establish continuous interactions with consumers. Research on the strategic use of social media among SMEs demonstrates that social media can strengthen market-sensing capability and brand management capability, which subsequently contribute to marketing and financial performance (Cao & Weerawardena, 2023). These findings demonstrate that social media is no longer merely a promotional channel but has evolved into an element of strategic marketing capability. In this context, AI can strengthen these processes through data analysis, automation, personalization, and content production.

Furthermore, the relationship between digital content, brand equity, and business performance is also evident among Indonesian MSMEs. A study of food and beverage SMEs in Indonesia found that social media richness positively affects brand equity and subsequently supports business performance (Shandy et al., 2023). The richer the information available through social media, the greater the opportunity for consumers to obtain information and interact with brands. This finding reinforces the argument that content creativity and quality can constitute important mechanisms linking digital activities with brand building and business performance.

2.5 Brand and MSME Competitive Advantage

The competitiveness of MSMEs in the digital era is determined not only by price or product quality but also by their ability to develop marketing capabilities that are difficult for competitors to imitate. The Resource-Based View (RBV) considers valuable, rare, difficult-to-imitate, and non-substitutable resources and capabilities as the foundation for creating competitive advantage. From this perspective, the ability to utilize AI, produce creative content, manage brands, and establish consumer relationships can be viewed as a combination of capabilities that strengthens the competitive position of MSMEs.

Research on marketing capabilities among SMEs demonstrates that marketing capabilities are associated with market orientation and sustained competitive advantage (Mainardes et al., 2022). With stronger marketing capabilities, SMEs can understand market conditions, attract customers, and maintain their competitive positions. This perspective is particularly relevant to AI utilization because technology can serve as a resource that strengthens marketing capabilities; however, its strategic value emerges when technology is combined with organizational capabilities and human resources.

In the social media context, Chatterjee et al. (2024) found that social media marketing contributes positively to utilitarian value and hedonic value, which are subsequently associated with the strategic competitive advantage of SMEs. This finding demonstrates that digital marketing activities can generate both functional value and consumer experiences, thereby helping firms establish competitive positions. Accordingly, content creativity can be viewed not merely as a communication activity but as a source of value creation that helps MSMEs differentiate themselves from competitors.

Research in Indonesia also demonstrates a positive relationship between social media use and SME performance. Wibawa et al. (2022) found that MSMEs use social media for branding, advertising and promotion, community interaction, trust and relationship building, reaching potential consumers, and conducting relatively low-cost promotional activities with adaptable content. These findings demonstrate that social media can function as a strategic instrument for MSMEs to build brands while strengthening marketing capabilities despite limited resources.

2.6 Integration of AI, Content Creativity, Brand, and Competitive Advantage

Based on the literature, the relationships among AI, content creativity, brand building, and MSME competitiveness can be understood as a set of interconnected capabilities. AI provides technological capabilities for generating ideas, analyzing consumers, personalizing communication, and accelerating content production. Content creativity then translates these capabilities into communication that is relevant, engaging, and consistent with brand identity. Effective communication can strengthen brand awareness, brand image, brand association, and brand equity, which subsequently have the potential to strengthen customer relationships and the competitive position of MSMEs. Literature on AI and marketing creativity supports the view that AI

creates the greatest value when it is used to augment rather than simply replace human creative processes (Ameen et al., 2022).

This relationship is also consistent with the development of literature on digital transformation and SME competitiveness. Meier et al. (2025) demonstrate that digital transformation can function both as an enabler and an outcome of competitive advantage among SMEs, while digital competitiveness depends on alignment among technical, organizational, and cultural dimensions. Therefore, AI adoption does not automatically generate competitive advantage. Its benefits depend on MSMEs' ability to integrate AI with marketing strategy, human creativity, brand identity, and consumer needs.

2.7 Theoretical Synthesis and Research Gap

The overall literature indicates that research on AI, creativity, digital marketing, and MSMEs has expanded considerably. However, studies that specifically integrate AI and content creativity as mechanisms for brand building and enhancing MSME competitiveness remain relatively limited. Some studies examine AI and marketing creativity in general, whereas others focus on social media use, brand equity, or MSME performance. Research on AI in SMEs has also frequently emphasized efficiency, innovation, and digital transformation, while the relationship between AI capabilities in generating or enhancing content creativity, brand building, and competitive advantage still requires a more comprehensive synthesis.

Accordingly, this study positions AI capability as a technological capability that strengthens marketing processes, content creativity as a mechanism for creating attractive and relevant digital communication, brand building as a process involving the development of brand awareness, brand image, brand association, and brand equity, and competitive advantage as a strategic outcome of the combination of these capabilities. This perspective positions AI not as a replacement for human creativity but as an enabling capability that can expand the scope of creativity, improve content production efficiency, and help MSMEs establish more consistent brand communication. Ultimately, the combination of technological capability, human creativity, brand strength, and market-sensing capability constitutes an important foundation for enhancing MSME competitiveness in the digital era.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative literature review approach to provide an in-depth analysis of the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and content creativity in building brands and enhancing the competitive advantage of MSMEs in the digital era. This approach was selected because the study does not aim to statistically test relationships among variables but rather to identify, compare, interpret, and synthesize findings from previous studies to develop a conceptual understanding of the relationships among AI, content creativity, brand building, and MSME competitive advantage. The review covers literature published during the period 2018–2026, with a final sample of 20 scholarly articles that met the inclusion criteria and were relevant to the research focus. This period was selected to capture the development of AI concepts in digital marketing, ranging from the use of AI for data analysis and marketing automation to the emergence of generative AI in content creation and brand building.

In this study, AI is positioned as an enabling capability that can enhance MSMEs' ability to obtain consumer insights, implement personalization, automate marketing activities, and generate content. Content creativity is conceptualized as a value-creation mechanism that enables MSMEs to produce relevant, engaging, and distinctive content. Brand building is understood as a process of strengthening brand awareness, brand image, brand association, and brand equity, whereas competitive advantage refers to the ability of MSMEs to create superior value and differentiation compared with competitors. Accordingly, the research design is directed toward explaining how AI can support content creativity, how content creativity strengthens brand building, and how stronger brands contribute to the competitive advantage of MSMEs.

3.2 Data Sources and Literature Search Strategy

The data sources for this study consist of secondary literature obtained from several academic databases and scholarly publication platforms, namely Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and international academic journal publisher platforms. The literature search was limited to publications issued between 2018 and 2026. The search strategy employed combinations of keywords representing the core concepts of the study. The keywords included "artificial intelligence," "generative AI," "AI capability," "content creativity," "creative

content," "digital content," "brand building," "brand equity," "brand awareness," "competitive advantage," "SMEs," and "MSMEs." These keywords were combined using the Boolean operators AND and OR to obtain more relevant search results. Several search combinations were employed, including "artificial intelligence" AND "digital marketing" AND SMEs, "generative AI" AND "content creativity," "AI capability" AND "brand building," "creative content" AND "brand equity," and "digital marketing" AND "competitive advantage" AND SMEs. The search process considered title, abstract, keywords, publication year, research context, and relevance to the objectives of the review. The initial search identified 80 potentially relevant articles. All articles obtained from the various sources were subsequently compiled and examined to identify duplicate records before proceeding to the subsequent selection stages.

3.3 Literature Selection Criteria and Process

The literature selection process followed the principles of PRISMA 2020, which comprise four main stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion (Page et al., 2021). Applying these stages ensured that the literature selection process was systematic, transparent, and accountable. Articles were included when they met the following criteria: (1) published between 2018 and 2026; (2) scholarly journal articles or credible academic sources; (3) addressed AI, generative AI, AI capability, content creativity, digital marketing, branding, brand equity, or competitive advantage; (4) relevant to MSMEs, SMEs, marketing, business, or digital transformation; and (5) provided empirical, conceptual, or theoretical findings that could contribute to the literature synthesis. Articles were excluded when they: (1) focused exclusively on the technical aspects of AI without relevance to marketing, creativity, branding, or competitiveness; (2) lacked sufficient relevance to business or marketing contexts; (3) did not provide adequate information regarding the research focus and findings; (4) were duplicate records; or (5) consisted of editorials, news articles, opinion pieces, or other non-academic sources.

The selection process was conducted in several stages. During the identification stage, 80 articles were obtained from all search sources. Following duplicate checking, 10 articles were removed because they represented the same publications identified across multiple databases. Consequently, 70 unique articles proceeded to the screening stage. During the screening stage, the 70 articles were assessed based on their titles, abstracts, keywords, publication years, and relevance to the research focus. Thirty articles were excluded because they did not adequately address AI, content creativity, digital marketing, branding, competitive advantage, or the relevant business context. Thus, 40 articles proceeded to the full-text assessment stage. During the eligibility stage, the 40 articles were examined in full based on their alignment with the research objectives, source quality, research context, theoretical contribution, clarity of findings, and relevance to the review focus. At this stage, 20 articles were excluded because they did not provide sufficient conceptual or empirical contributions to the research focus. Consequently, 20 final articles met all selection criteria and were included in the literature analysis and synthesis. The literature selection process can be summarized as follows.

Table 1. Literature Selection Process

Selection Stage	Number of Articles	Calculation/Description
Articles identified	80	Initial search results
Duplicate articles removed	10	80 – 10
Articles for screening	70	Unique articles
Articles excluded during screening	30	Not relevant to the research focus
Articles for full-text assessment	40	70 – 30
Articles excluded during eligibility assessment	20	Did not meet the eligibility criteria
Final articles analyzed	20	40 – 20

Thus, from the 80 articles identified during the initial search, 20 articles met all selection criteria and were included in the review. The final inclusion rate was: $20 \div 80 \times 100\% = 25\%$. This indicates that 25% of the articles identified during the initial search ultimately met the selection criteria and were used as the basis for the qualitative literature review.

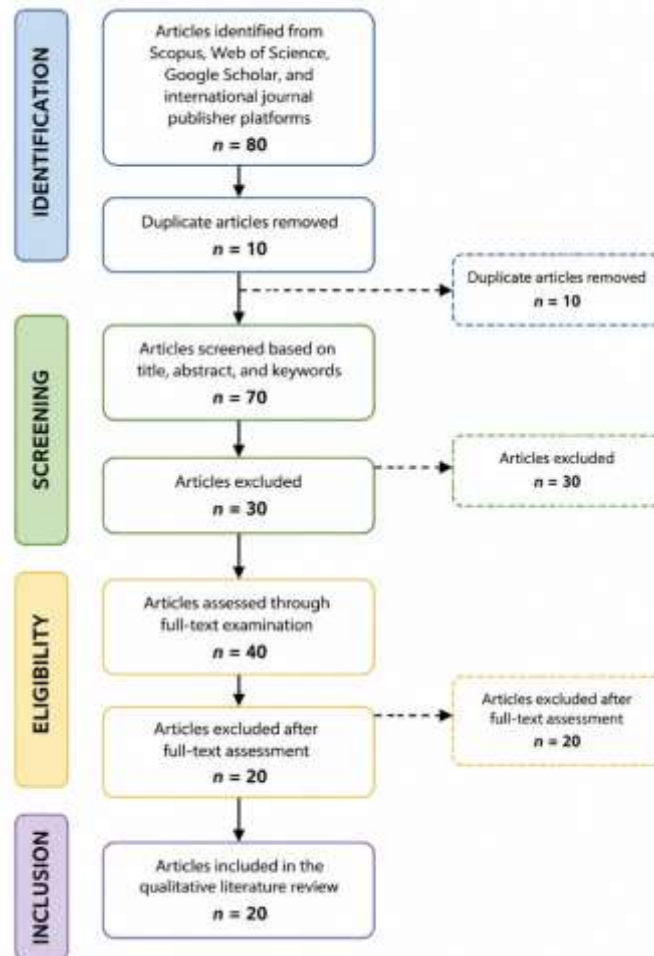


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram of Literature Selection

The figure illustrates that the literature selection process was conducted systematically, beginning with 80 initially identified articles and resulting in 20 final articles included in the review. The PRISMA diagram is positioned after the explanation of the literature selection process and before the discussion of the literature analysis technique.

3.4 Literature Analysis and Synthesis Technique

The 20 selected articles were analyzed using a descriptive-thematic synthesis technique. This technique was employed to identify patterns, similarities, differences, conceptual developments, and relationships among findings across the reviewed studies. The analysis did not involve statistical meta-analysis but relied on interpretation and categorization of findings according to themes relevant to the research objectives. At the initial stage, information from each article was systematically extracted, including the authors and publication year, research focus, research context, research approach or method, key concepts or variables, main findings, and relevance to the present study. The extracted information was then compared across articles to identify recurring patterns and trends. The findings were subsequently organized into several major themes. The first theme is AI as a Digital Marketing Capability, which encompasses the use of AI for consumer data analysis, market segmentation, personalization, consumer behavior prediction, marketing automation, and improved marketing efficiency.

The second theme is AI and Content Creativity, which examines the ability of AI and generative AI to support the creation of ideas, texts, images, videos, designs, and various forms of marketing content. This theme also considers how AI can improve the speed, variety, personalization, and adaptability of content production. The third theme is Content Creativity and Brand Building, which analyzes how creative, relevant, consistent, and engaging content can support brand awareness, brand image, brand association, and

brand equity. The fourth theme is Brand Building and Competitive Advantage, which examines how stronger brands can create differentiation, increase consumer attachment, strengthen reputation, and improve the competitive position of MSMEs. The fifth theme concerns the Integration of AI, Human Creativity, Brand Building, and Competitive Advantage. This theme synthesizes the findings to explain the conceptual mechanism underlying the study. Based on the synthesis, AI is viewed as an enabling capability that allows MSMEs to enhance their ability to generate and develop content. Content creativity can subsequently strengthen the brand-building process, while stronger brands can become a source of differentiation and competitive advantage.

Conceptually, the literature synthesis can be represented as follows: AI Capability → Content Creativity → Brand Building → Competitive Advantage. However, this relationship is not automatic because the effectiveness of AI utilization is influenced by factors such as human creativity, digital skills, organizational capabilities, data quality, marketing strategy, and ethical and responsible AI use. Therefore, this study positions AI not as a replacement for human creativity but as a technology capable of strengthening and expanding MSMEs' creative and strategic capabilities. Through this descriptive-thematic synthesis, the study develops a conceptual understanding of how the integration of AI and content creativity can support brand building and ultimately contribute to the competitive advantage of MSMEs in the digital environment.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Literature Selection Results and Characteristics

Based on the literature selection process described in the methodology section, this study identified 20 scholarly articles published between 2015 and 2026 that met all inclusion criteria. These 20 articles were used as the basis for analyzing the relationships among Artificial Intelligence (AI), content creativity, brand building, and competitive advantage in MSMEs/SMEs. The selected literature indicates that research on AI and marketing has evolved from discussions of technology utilization for automation, data analysis, and marketing efficiency toward the use of generative AI to support creativity, content production, personalization, and consumer interaction. At the same time, literature on digital marketing and social media demonstrates that high-quality content and consistent brand communication play important roles in developing brand awareness, brand image, brand association, and brand equity. The literature synthesis reveals a consistent conceptual pattern: AI can strengthen marketing capabilities and content creation processes; content creativity can strengthen brand building; and strong brands can become sources of differentiation and competitive advantage for MSMEs. However, several studies also indicate that AI utilization does not automatically generate competitive advantage because its effectiveness depends on human capabilities, digital competencies, organizational readiness, data quality, and the strategic use of technology.

Table 2. Summary of the Selected Literature

No.	Authors	Research Focus	Context	Main Findings	Relevance
1	Ali Abbasi et al. (2022)	Social media marketing adoption	SMEs	Social media marketing adoption is influenced by perceived benefits, management support, competitive pressure, and environmental factors.	Demonstrates the importance of technological, organizational, and environmental factors in developing MSME digital marketing capabilities.
2	Hermaren & Achyar (2018)	Firm-created and user-generated content	Social media and brands	Firm-created content and user-generated content are associated with customer-based brand equity, including brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty.	Explains the role of digital content in developing brand value.
3	Kraus et al. (2019)	Content creation and digital marketing	SMEs	Content creation represents an important challenge for SMEs because of their resource limitations compared with larger firms.	Supports the importance of efficiency and content production capabilities for MSMEs.
4	Chokpitakkul & Anantachart	Social media	SMEs in Thailand	Analysis of 3,147 Facebook posts	Demonstrates that social

	(2020)	brand communication		indicates that SMEs use social media communication to present brand identity, conduct brand-based marketing activities, and develop secondary associations.	media content is a strategic instrument for brand building.
5	Dwivedi et al. (2021)	Generative AI and marketing	Marketing and consumer interaction	Generative AI has the potential to transform consumer interaction, marketing content production, and product and service development.	Provides a conceptual foundation for the role of generative AI in marketing transformation.
6	Ameen et al. (2022)	AI and marketing creativity	Marketing	AI is associated with various stages of the marketing creativity process, including ideation, production, evaluation, and creative development.	Supports AI as a technology capable of expanding marketing creativity.
7	Febrian et al. (2022)	Social media marketing and brand equity	Indonesian SMEs	Social media activities can enhance MSME brand equity through improvements in brand awareness and brand image.	Demonstrates the relationship between digital activities and MSME brand building.
8	Mainardes et al. (2022)	Marketing capabilities and competitive advantage	SMEs	Marketing capabilities are associated with market orientation and sustained competitive advantage.	Supports the view that marketing capabilities constitute a source of competitive advantage.
9	Wibawa et al. (2022)	Social media utilization	Indonesian MSMEs	Social media is used for branding, advertising and promotion, community interaction, trust building, consumer reach, and relatively low-cost promotional activities.	Demonstrates the strategic benefits of social media for MSME marketing and branding.
10	Deryl et al. (2023)	AI-driven branding	Branding and consumer relationships	AI can support dynamic relationships between consumers and brands and help develop more relevant brand narratives.	Explains the role of AI in strengthening brand building and consumer relationships.
11	Cao & Weerawardena (2023)	Strategic social media use	SMEs	Strategic social media use strengthens market-sensing capability and brand management capability, contributing to marketing and financial performance.	Demonstrates that social media has evolved into a strategic marketing capability.
12	Shandy et al. (2023)	Social media richness and brand equity	Indonesian food and beverage SMEs	Social media richness affects brand equity and subsequently supports business performance.	Connects digital content quality, brand equity, and business performance.
13	Rajaram & Tinguely (2024)	Generative AI and SMEs	SMEs	Generative AI can democratize scalability and creativity, but its benefits depend on employee competence, leadership, organizational culture, and organizational readiness.	Explains both the opportunities and conditions required for effective AI utilization by MSMEs.
14	Chatterjee et al. (2024)	Social media marketing and strategic competitive advantage	SMEs	Social media marketing contributes to utilitarian and hedonic value, which are subsequently associated with strategic competitive advantage.	Demonstrates that digital marketing can create consumer value and strategic advantage.
15	Brüns & Meißner (2024)	Generative AI and social media content	Brand communication	Fully AI-generated content can reduce perceived brand authenticity, whereas using AI to support humans can mitigate this negative effect.	Emphasizes the importance of human-AI collaboration in maintaining brand authenticity.
16	Grewal et al. (2025)	Generative AI in marketing	Marketing and consumer interaction	Generative AI has the potential to transform how marketers interact and communicate with consumers and supports content creation and	Strengthens the position of generative AI as a marketing-enabling technology.

				delivery.	
17	Hartmann et al. (2025)	AI-generated marketing images	Marketing content	AI-generated marketing images can achieve high levels of quality, realism, and aesthetics in consumer evaluations.	Demonstrates AI's ability to enhance visual content production capabilities.
18	Pagani & Wind (2025)	AI and creative processes	Creativity and innovation	AI can function as an instrumental resource for exploring creative possibilities and encouraging unconventional thinking.	Supports AI as an augmentation mechanism for human creativity.
19	Laksmono & Rendro (2025)	AI adoption in MSME marketing	Indonesian MSMEs	Financial constraints, digital literacy, and strategic understanding represent barriers to effective AI utilization.	Identifies major barriers to AI implementation among Indonesian MSMEs.
20	Abrokwah-Larbi (2026)	Generative AI marketing and competitive performance	Small businesses	Generative AI can improve competitive marketing performance through cost reduction, customer experience, personalization, content quality, and market analytics, but faces budget, AI competency, infrastructure, and ethical constraints.	Supports the relationship between AI and competitive advantage while highlighting the importance of enabling conditions.

4.2 AI as a Digital Marketing Capability in MSMEs

The literature synthesis indicates that Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly evolving from a supporting digital technology into a strategic digital marketing capability that strengthens MSMEs' ability to identify, understand, reach, communicate with, and respond to consumers. This transformation is important because the strategic value of AI does not originate solely from the availability of sophisticated algorithms, but from the ability of firms to employ these technologies repeatedly within marketing activities. AI capabilities can support consumer-data processing, market segmentation, prediction of consumer behavior, personalization of marketing messages, automation of routine marketing activities, content generation, and evaluation of marketing responses. Dwivedi et al. (2021) demonstrate that the development of generative AI creates new possibilities for firms to interact with customers, produce marketing content, and support the development of products and services. Grewal et al. (2025) further indicate that generative AI has the potential to transform marketing communication by enabling firms to create, modify, and distribute content in multiple formats more rapidly. These capabilities are particularly relevant to MSMEs because small businesses generally operate with limited marketing budgets, smaller teams, fewer specialized employees, and more restricted analytical resources than larger firms. AI therefore has the potential to reduce some of the disadvantages associated with limited scale by providing MSMEs with access to analytical and creative functions that previously required substantial human, financial, and technological resources.

The contribution of AI becomes more significant when its functions are examined across the entire digital marketing process rather than merely at the content-production stage. MSMEs can potentially use AI to analyze customer interactions, identify emerging preferences, develop customer segments, generate alternative promotional messages, personalize communication, evaluate campaign performance, and identify opportunities for improving subsequent marketing activities. This means that AI can shorten the cycle between obtaining market information and converting that information into marketing action. Nevertheless, technological availability cannot be equated with organizational capability. Ali Abbasi et al. (2022) demonstrate that social media marketing adoption among SMEs is influenced not only by perceived technological benefits but also by management support, competitive pressure, and environmental factors. Rajaram & Tinguely (2024) similarly demonstrate that the organizational benefits of generative AI depend substantially on employee competence, leadership, organizational culture, and organizational readiness. These findings suggest that two MSMEs may have access to identical AI technologies yet obtain substantially different results because their abilities to interpret data, formulate prompts, assess outputs, align AI with marketing objectives, and integrate the technology into everyday routines differ. Therefore, AI access should be distinguished analytically from AI capability, because the former refers to possession or availability of technology, whereas the latter concerns the firm's ability to mobilize that technology systematically toward strategic marketing objectives.

Accordingly, the synthesis suggests that AI should be conceptualized as an enabling digital marketing capability rather than an independent source of competitive advantage. AI creates strategic value when technological functionalities are combined with marketing knowledge, consumer understanding, human judgment, organizational routines, and clearly defined brand objectives. This distinction helps explain why adoption statistics alone provide an incomplete measure of digital transformation among MSMEs. An MSME that occasionally uses generative AI to create promotional captions cannot necessarily be considered to possess a strong AI marketing capability. Capability development occurs when AI becomes integrated into recurring processes of market sensing, content development, personalization, customer interaction, performance evaluation, and organizational learning. In this sense, AI potentially enables MSMEs to perform marketing activities faster and at greater scale, but the quality and strategic relevance of those activities continue to depend on human and organizational capabilities. The synthesis therefore supports a progression from AI Access → AI Utilization → AI Integration → Digital Marketing Capability → Strategic Marketing Value, emphasizing that the transition from technology adoption to capability development represents the critical mechanism through which AI can generate meaningful benefits for MSMEs.

4.3 AI and Content Creativity

The second major theme emerging from the synthesis of the 20 selected articles concerns the relationship between AI and content creativity. The literature indicates that AI can expand the range, speed, and flexibility of the creative process by supporting ideation, alternative exploration, production, evaluation, adaptation, and content refinement. Ameen et al. (2022) demonstrate that the relationship between AI and marketing creativity encompasses multiple stages of the creative process, indicating that AI can participate not only in final content production but also in earlier processes of generating and developing ideas. Pagani & Wind (2025) reinforce this perspective by demonstrating that AI can function as an instrumental resource for exploring creative possibilities that may be difficult, costly, or time-consuming to generate manually. The development of generative AI further expands these opportunities because text, images, audio, video, designs, and other multimodal materials can increasingly be produced within relatively short periods. Hartmann et al. (2025) demonstrate that AI-generated visual content can achieve substantial levels of quality, realism, and aesthetic performance. Collectively, these findings suggest that AI reduces several technical and resource barriers to content creation, allowing MSMEs with relatively limited creative teams to access a wider range of creative production possibilities.

For MSMEs, this expansion of creative capacity is particularly important because digital marketing increasingly requires a continuous flow of content across multiple platforms, audiences, formats, and stages of the customer journey. MSME owners can potentially employ AI for brainstorming campaign themes, developing initial concepts, creating alternative headlines and captions, producing visual materials, adjusting tone and language, adapting messages to different consumer segments, and rapidly testing alternative communication approaches. These capabilities enable MSMEs to increase both the quantity and variety of content without requiring a proportional increase in human resources. However, content quantity should not be confused with creativity itself. Generative AI can produce numerous alternatives, but those alternatives still require human evaluation regarding relevance, originality, cultural appropriateness, emotional resonance, strategic consistency, and fit with brand identity. Brüns & Meißner (2024) demonstrate that fully AI-generated social media content can negatively affect perceived brand authenticity, while the use of AI as a supporting mechanism for human content creation can reduce this negative effect. This finding is critical because MSMEs frequently rely on authenticity, personal stories, local identity, owner presence, and close customer relationships as important sources of differentiation. Excessive automation may therefore increase production efficiency while simultaneously weakening some of the relational attributes that make small brands distinctive.

The synthesis consequently suggests that the most productive conceptual relationship is not AI versus human creativity, but rather human-AI collaborative creativity. AI contributes computational speed, idea variation, information processing, scalability, and technical production capacity, while humans contribute contextual understanding, lived experience, cultural sensitivity, emotion, intuition, storytelling ability, ethical judgment, and strategic interpretation. In this relationship, AI can expand the creative possibility space, whereas humans determine which possibilities are meaningful for the brand and its consumers. This distinction also suggests that MSMEs should not evaluate AI-supported creativity simply by asking whether AI can generate content comparable to human-produced materials. A more important managerial question is

whether AI helps human actors develop content that is more relevant, differentiated, engaging, and strategically aligned than they could produce using their existing resources alone. The creative process can therefore be conceptualized as Human Insight → AI-Assisted Ideation and Production → Human Selection and Refinement → Contextualized Creative Content. Such a collaborative model positions AI as an amplifier of human creativity rather than its substitute and explains why human oversight remains central to achieving authentic and strategically meaningful digital communication.

4.4 Content Creativity as a Mechanism of Brand Building

The synthesis further demonstrates that content creativity occupies a central position in the process through which digital marketing activities are translated into brand value. Digital content constitutes one of the primary interfaces between MSMEs and consumers because it communicates product attributes, business identity, values, stories, experiences, and distinctive brand characteristics. Hermaren & Achyar (2018) demonstrate that both firm-created content and user-generated content are associated with dimensions of customer-based brand equity, including brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. This finding indicates that digital content performs more than an informational function; it also shapes how consumers recognize, interpret, evaluate, and remember brands. Febrian et al. (2022) similarly demonstrate that social media activities can strengthen MSME brand equity through brand awareness and brand image, while Shandy et al. (2023) identify relationships among social media richness, brand equity, and business performance in Indonesian food and beverage SMEs. Chokpitakul & Anantachart (2020) further demonstrate that SMEs use social media communication to communicate brand identity, implement brand-related marketing activities, and construct secondary associations. Together, these studies show that content represents an important mechanism through which relatively small firms can build symbolic and relational market value despite limited physical and financial resources.

The strategic importance of content creativity arises from its ability to transform ordinary product information into communication that attracts attention, creates meaning, and establishes recognizable associations in consumers' minds. In increasingly crowded digital environments, MSMEs compete not only with businesses selling similar products but also with the enormous volume of information continuously appearing in consumers' social media feeds. Creative content can therefore function as an attention mechanism that increases the probability that a brand will be noticed and remembered. However, attention represents only the first stage of the brand-building process. Consistent exposure to distinctive visual styles, narratives, tone of voice, product values, and brand stories can gradually strengthen recognition and create specific associations. When these associations are relevant and favorable, they contribute to a stronger brand image and subsequently to broader brand equity. Febrian et al. (2022) provide support for this relationship by demonstrating the importance of brand awareness and brand image in the social media context, while Hermaren & Achyar (2018) show how content can be connected with multiple dimensions of customer-based brand equity. Thus, creative content becomes strategically meaningful when individual posts and campaigns accumulate into coherent perceptions of what the brand represents.

Based on these findings, content creativity can be conceptualized as an intermediate mechanism that translates digital marketing capability into brand-building outcomes through a cumulative cognitive and relational process. The sequence can be represented as Content Creativity → Consumer Attention and Engagement → Brand Awareness → Brand Image/Association → Brand Equity. This expanded sequence emphasizes that creative content is not the final objective of digital marketing but an instrument for developing meaningful consumer perceptions. The quality of this process also depends on consistency. Highly creative content that changes identity, tone, visual language, or core values continuously may attract temporary attention without developing stable brand associations. Conversely, creativity anchored in a clear brand identity can simultaneously provide novelty and continuity, allowing MSMEs to remain interesting while retaining recognizability. Therefore, the synthesis indicates that the strategic value of content creativity derives not simply from originality but from relevant, differentiated, authentic, and consistent creativity capable of strengthening consumer memory and meaning. This perspective is particularly important for AI-assisted marketing because the increased capacity to generate content should ultimately be directed toward coherent brand development rather than content volume alone.

4.5 AI, Brand Building, and Customer Engagement

The literature synthesis also demonstrates that AI can contribute to brand building by improving MSMEs' capacity to understand consumers and develop more relevant forms of interaction. AI enables firms to analyze digital traces generated through social media engagement, search behavior, transactions, reviews, comments, inquiries, and other customer interactions, thereby helping identify consumer preferences, behavioral patterns, segments, and emerging needs. Deryl et al. (2023) demonstrate that AI-driven branding can support more dynamic relationships between consumers and brands and contribute to the development of relevant brand narratives. This suggests that AI's role in branding extends beyond content production because analytical capabilities can inform how brands communicate, which themes they emphasize, and how communication is adapted to different customer groups. Cao & Weerawardena (2023) demonstrate that the strategic use of social media can strengthen market-sensing capability and brand management capability among SMEs. This finding is important because it positions digital platforms simultaneously as communication channels and sources of market intelligence. When combined with AI, social media information can potentially create a continuous process in which firms observe consumer responses, interpret those responses, adapt marketing activities, and subsequently obtain new data from the resulting interactions.

For MSMEs, this capability can contribute to more responsive and relevant consumer communication. Rather than distributing identical messages to all audiences, AI-assisted analysis can help identify which types of content are most attractive to specific consumer segments, what questions or concerns frequently emerge, which publication periods generate stronger responses, and which communication styles lead to higher engagement. Such knowledge can then be used to adapt content, offers, recommendations, and service interactions. This personalization potentially strengthens customer engagement because consumers receive communication that appears more closely aligned with their needs and interests. However, personalization should not be reduced to automated targeting. Brand relationships depend on perceptions of relevance, trust, authenticity, and reciprocity, meaning that AI-generated recommendations need to remain consistent with the broader character and values of the brand. Deryl et al. (2023) support the notion that AI can contribute to more dynamic consumer-brand relationships, while Cao & Weerawardena (2023) emphasize the strategic role of market sensing and brand management capability. Taken together, these findings indicate that AI can strengthen both the informational side of branding—understanding consumers—and the relational side—responding to consumers through more meaningful interactions.

Accordingly, the relationship between AI, customer engagement, and brand building can be understood as a continuous learning cycle: Consumer Data → AI Analysis → Consumer Insight → Content Personalization → Customer Engagement → Brand Relationship → New Consumer Data. The final stage is particularly important because consumer responses generate additional information that can inform subsequent marketing activities. Brand building therefore becomes more dynamic and iterative than traditional one-way communication models. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this cycle depends on whether MSMEs use consumer data responsibly and whether personalized communication continues to feel authentic rather than excessively automated or intrusive. AI can improve the precision and responsiveness of consumer interaction, but human judgment remains necessary to interpret context and maintain appropriate relational boundaries. The synthesis consequently suggests that the strongest contribution of AI to branding lies not in replacing interpersonal relationships but in providing MSMEs with better information and scalable tools for managing those relationships. AI-enabled engagement can therefore create brand value when technological personalization is combined with authentic communication, customer understanding, and consistent brand identity.

4.6 Brand Building as a Source of MSME Competitive Advantage

The synthesis of the 20 selected articles indicates that brand building can function as an important source of competitive advantage for MSMEs because strong brands enable firms to compete through differentiation that extends beyond functional product attributes and price. In markets where competing MSMEs may offer products with similar characteristics and where technological tools increasingly become accessible to many businesses, intangible dimensions such as recognition, trust, perceived value, emotional association, and customer relationships become increasingly significant. Mainardes et al. (2022) demonstrate that marketing capabilities are associated with market orientation and sustained competitive advantage among SMEs, supporting the argument that competitive advantage is influenced by firms' capacity to interpret market needs and manage marketing activities effectively. Chatterjee et al. (2024) further demonstrate that social media

marketing can generate both utilitarian and hedonic value that subsequently contributes to strategic competitive advantage among SMEs. These findings suggest that competitive advantage is created not only when a product performs effectively but also when customers perceive functional, symbolic, emotional, or experiential reasons to prefer one business over another. Brand building provides a mechanism through which these forms of value become attached to a recognizable market identity.

The role of branding becomes particularly significant for MSMEs because many small businesses face structural difficulties in competing through scale, extensive distribution networks, large advertising expenditures, or sustained price reductions. Wibawa et al. (2022) demonstrate that Indonesian MSMEs use social media for branding, advertising and promotion, community interaction, trust building, and reaching potential customers at relatively low cost. Digital platforms therefore provide MSMEs with opportunities to develop visibility and customer relationships without necessarily reproducing the resource-intensive marketing approaches of large corporations. When these activities successfully create brand awareness, positive associations, and trust, consumers may become more willing to recognize, consider, recommend, or repeatedly purchase from the MSME. A strong brand can consequently reduce the degree to which competition is determined exclusively by price and enable MSMEs to develop differentiated market positions based on identity, reputation, authenticity, community, service experience, or product meaning. In this sense, brand equity can operate as an intangible strategic asset that accumulates through repeated interactions and becomes increasingly difficult for competitors to reproduce exactly.

Accordingly, competitive advantage in this synthesis should be understood as the MSME's ability to create and sustain superior perceived value, differentiation, customer relationships, and a distinctive brand position relative to competitors, rather than simply achieving lower costs or temporary sales increases. The relationship can be expressed as Brand Awareness and Positive Associations → Brand Trust and Equity → Customer Preference and Relationship → Differentiation → Competitive Advantage. The significance of this sequence is that marketing outcomes become strategically valuable when they contribute to durable customer perceptions and behaviors. Mainardes et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of marketing capabilities for sustained competitive advantage, while Chatterjee et al. (2024) demonstrate how digital marketing can create different forms of customer value. Therefore, the synthesis supports the argument that brand building constitutes an important bridge between digital marketing activities and strategic market outcomes. For MSMEs, the ultimate value of AI-supported marketing should consequently not be evaluated solely through faster content creation or increased posting frequency, but through whether those activities strengthen a brand position that enables the firm to be recognized, trusted, preferred, and differentiated in increasingly competitive digital markets.

4.7 Barriers and Enabling Conditions for AI Utilization in MSMEs

Although much of the literature highlights the potential benefits of AI, the synthesis identifies significant technological, human, organizational, financial, and ethical barriers that may prevent MSMEs from realizing these benefits. Laksmono & Rendro (2025) indicate that financial constraints, digital literacy, and strategic understanding constitute important barriers to AI utilization among Indonesian MSMEs. Abrokwah-Larbi (2026) similarly demonstrates that the marketing benefits of generative AI in small businesses are influenced by budget constraints, AI competencies, infrastructure, and ethical considerations. These findings indicate that technology access does not automatically translate into effective technology utilization. An MSME may have access to inexpensive or even free generative AI applications while lacking the knowledge required to select appropriate tools, formulate effective instructions, validate outputs, protect customer information, or integrate AI with existing marketing processes. Resource scarcity can also make experimentation difficult because MSME owners frequently perform multiple managerial and operational roles simultaneously. Consequently, even technologies designed to reduce workload may initially require time, training, organizational adaptation, and learning before their productivity benefits become visible. This gap between technological accessibility and organizational absorptive capacity represents an important limitation in assumptions that generative AI inherently democratizes sophisticated marketing capabilities.

The synthesis also identifies risks arising from the way AI is used rather than merely from whether it is adopted. Brüns & Meißner (2024) demonstrate that fully AI-generated social media content may reduce perceived brand authenticity, indicating that extensive automation can produce negative consequences for brand relationships. This challenge is especially relevant to MSMEs because personal identity, local knowledge, owner narratives, cultural characteristics, and direct customer relationships often constitute

meaningful sources of differentiation. Excessive reliance on generative AI may also contribute to content homogenization when many businesses use similar platforms, prompts, templates, visual styles, or algorithmically generated language. Furthermore, inaccurate AI outputs, inappropriate cultural representations, privacy concerns, copyright uncertainties, and insufficient disclosure may introduce reputational and ethical risks. Therefore, the relevant managerial question is not simply whether MSMEs should use AI, but which activities should be supported by AI, which require stronger human control, and how the balance between efficiency and authenticity should be managed. These considerations reinforce the need to distinguish strategic AI integration from indiscriminate automation.

Based on the overall literature, effective AI utilization among MSMEs depends on an interconnected set of enabling conditions comprising digital literacy, AI competence, human creativity, organizational readiness, data quality, marketing knowledge, brand identity, and ethical AI use. Digital literacy provides the basic capacity to interact with digital technologies, while AI competence supports more advanced understanding of how AI can be selected, instructed, evaluated, and strategically applied. Human creativity ensures that AI-generated outputs remain differentiated and contextually meaningful, whereas organizational readiness allows new technologies to be embedded within routines and responsibilities. Data quality strengthens the relevance of analysis and personalization, while marketing knowledge ensures that AI activities correspond to consumer and strategic objectives rather than technological novelty. Clear brand identity provides boundaries and direction for content generation, and ethical AI use helps address authenticity, privacy, transparency, and responsible content practices. Importantly, these factors operate as an interconnected capability system rather than independently. Consequently, AI effectiveness can be expressed as $\text{AI Technology} \times \text{Human Capability} \times \text{Organizational Capability} \times \text{Marketing Capability} \times \text{Responsible Governance}$, emphasizing that weaknesses in one component may limit the benefits generated by others. This explains why AI adoption alone cannot guarantee superior marketing outcomes.

4.8 Integration of AI, Content Creativity, Brand Building, and Competitive Advantage

Based on the overall synthesis, a clear conceptual pattern emerges in which AI capability, content creativity, brand building, and competitive advantage form a sequential but interconnected value-creation mechanism. AI initially provides digital capabilities that enable MSMEs to process consumer information, identify patterns, explore ideas, automate repetitive activities, produce multiple content alternatives, and personalize communication more efficiently. These functions expand the resources available to MSMEs for content development, particularly under conditions of constrained budgets and limited specialized personnel. However, AI-generated outputs do not automatically possess strategic value. Human actors remain responsible for interpreting consumer context, selecting communication themes, defining brand values, determining appropriate narratives, and deciding whether generated materials accurately represent the business. Content creativity therefore functions as the first transformation mechanism through which technological capability is converted into communicative value. AI expands the space of possible ideas and formats, while human creativity and marketing judgment determine which of those possibilities become meaningful content. In this sense, the relationship between AI capability and content creativity is enabling rather than substitutive.

Creative content subsequently contributes to brand building by increasing the visibility, recognizability, meaning, and distinctiveness of MSMEs within digital markets. Attractive content can capture attention and strengthen brand awareness, while consistent, relevant, and authentic communication can influence brand image and the associations consumers attach to the business. Over time, accumulated positive perceptions and experiences can strengthen brand equity. A stronger brand subsequently creates opportunities for competitive advantage because consumers become more capable of identifying and distinguishing the MSME from competing alternatives. Recognition, positive associations, trust, and emotional or functional value can strengthen consumer preference, engagement, recommendation, and retention. The conceptual mechanism can therefore be expressed as $\text{AI Capability} \rightarrow \text{Content Creativity} \rightarrow \text{Brand Awareness/Image/Association} \rightarrow \text{Brand Equity} \rightarrow \text{Competitive Advantage}$. Importantly, this sequence demonstrates why AI should not be expected to create competitive advantage directly merely because a firm adopts the technology. Its strategic contribution occurs through intermediate marketing capabilities and consumer perceptions that convert technological inputs into differentiated market value.

The effectiveness of this sequential relationship is strengthened or constrained by Human Creativity, Digital Skills, Organizational Capability, Marketing Knowledge, Data Quality, Brand Identity, and Ethical AI Use. These factors explain the heterogeneity of outcomes among MSMEs that may have access to similar

technological tools. Two firms using the same generative AI application can develop substantially different content and brand outcomes because their customer knowledge, creativity, ability to evaluate outputs, strategic orientation, and brand identities differ. This insight also provides a more nuanced understanding of digital competitive advantage. When AI technologies become widely accessible, competitive advantage is unlikely to result from the technology itself because competitors can acquire similar tools. Differentiation instead emerges from the unique ways in which AI is combined with firm-specific human and organizational resources. Therefore, the synthesis supports a capability-conversion logic: Technology is converted into Creative Capability; Creative Capability is converted into Brand Value; Brand Value is converted into Competitive Advantage. This mechanism constitutes the central integrative explanation of how AI may create strategic marketing value for MSMEs.

4.9 Discussion from the Resource-Based View Perspective

The findings can be further interpreted through the Resource-Based View (RBV), which explains competitive advantage in terms of heterogeneous resources and capabilities possessed and deployed by firms. From this perspective, AI technology alone is unlikely to constitute a sustainable source of competitive advantage because many AI platforms are increasingly accessible to large numbers of businesses. When competing MSMEs can use similar generative AI systems for content creation, analysis, translation, personalization, or automation, possession of the technology becomes relatively easy to imitate and therefore provides only limited differentiation. This does not mean that AI lacks strategic importance. Instead, AI should be understood as a potentially valuable technological resource whose contribution depends on the complementary resources with which it is combined. The literature synthesis demonstrates that human creativity, marketing knowledge, consumer understanding, brand identity, digital skills, and organizational capability substantially influence how MSMEs utilize AI. Consequently, two firms with access to identical technological resources can achieve very different marketing outcomes because they differ in their ability to configure, interpret, and deploy these technologies within specific business contexts.

From an RBV perspective, the strategically significant resource is therefore not AI technology in isolation, but the unique configuration created by combining AI with firm-specific intangible capabilities. Human creativity can make generated outputs more original and contextually meaningful; customer knowledge can improve the relevance of personalized communication; marketing capability enables AI outputs to be aligned with segmentation, positioning, and communication objectives; and brand capability ensures that content contributes consistently to recognizable identity and brand value. These complementary resources may be more difficult to imitate because they are accumulated through experience, organizational learning, customer interaction, and the historical development of each MSME. The synthesis can therefore be represented as AI Technology + Human Creativity + Marketing Capability + Consumer Knowledge + Brand Capability + Organizational Capability → Strategic Competitive Advantage. The importance of the combination is that the same AI output can produce different strategic consequences depending on the organizational context in which it is interpreted and used. Technology creates possibilities, but capabilities determine whether those possibilities are converted into superior market value.

This interpretation extends the RBV discussion by positioning AI as a complementary and enabling resource within a broader capability bundle rather than automatically categorizing AI itself as a rare or inimitable resource. As AI becomes more standardized and widely available, sustainable differentiation may increasingly depend on how firms orchestrate common technologies with uncommon organizational knowledge and identities. For MSMEs, this is particularly important because they may not possess the financial capacity to develop proprietary AI systems; nevertheless, they can potentially develop distinctive ways of applying shared technologies based on local knowledge, customer relationships, entrepreneurial intuition, storytelling, cultural understanding, and differentiated brand identities. Thus, the strategic question shifts from “Does the MSME possess AI?” to “Does the MSME possess a distinctive capability for combining AI with its existing resources?”. This distinction strengthens the theoretical argument that competitive advantage originates from capability configuration rather than technology possession. AI can consequently enhance competitive advantage when it complements resources that are valuable and relatively difficult for competitors to reproduce, thereby allowing MSMEs to transform broadly accessible digital technology into firm-specific marketing and brand capabilities.

4.10 Research Gap and Conceptual Contribution

The synthesis of the 20 selected articles demonstrates that previous research has generated substantial knowledge concerning individual relationships among AI, digital marketing, creativity, branding, and SME competitive outcomes, yet these streams remain insufficiently integrated. Research on AI and generative AI frequently emphasizes technological functionality, automation, efficiency, analytics, personalization, or content production, while creativity research tends to focus on ideation and human-AI collaboration. Branding studies primarily examine social media activities, brand awareness, brand image, brand associations, or brand equity, whereas competitive advantage studies commonly emphasize broader marketing capability, market orientation, digital capabilities, or business performance. Consequently, existing knowledge provides strong explanations of individual components but a comparatively weaker understanding of the complete mechanism through which AI is converted into strategic value for MSMEs. In particular, the literature does not sufficiently explain why firms with access to similar AI technologies may achieve different brand and competitive outcomes. This fragmentation creates an important theoretical gap because technological adoption cannot be assumed to translate automatically into superior performance without identifying the intermediate processes through which that translation occurs.

A second research gap concerns the limited integration of human and organizational conditions into explanations of AI-enabled marketing outcomes. Existing studies demonstrate that AI can improve efficiency and content generation, while other studies show that creativity and social media communication contribute to brand development. However, there remains a need to explain how human creativity, digital competence, organizational readiness, marketing knowledge, data quality, brand identity, and ethical AI use shape the transition from AI utilization to meaningful marketing outcomes. This issue becomes increasingly important as generative AI tools become widely accessible. If technological access becomes relatively homogeneous, variation in outcomes is likely to originate from differences in complementary capabilities rather than from access itself. Furthermore, the risk identified by Brüns & Meißner (2024) regarding reduced authenticity in fully AI-generated content indicates that more automation does not necessarily produce better branding outcomes. This suggests a need for future empirical studies to examine the conditions under which human-AI collaboration produces stronger creative, brand, and competitive outcomes than AI-intensive automation. Such investigation could clarify which forms of AI utilization augment strategic marketing capabilities and which merely increase content-production efficiency without creating differentiated customer value.

Based on these gaps, the principal conceptual contribution of this study lies in integrating the four previously fragmented perspectives into a single capability-conversion mechanism: AI as an enabling digital marketing capability, content creativity as the mechanism for creating communication value, brand building as the mechanism for accumulating consumer-based brand value, and competitive advantage as the strategic outcome. The proposed relationship therefore extends beyond the conventional assumption that AI adoption directly improves business performance. Instead, this study argues that technological capability must pass through intermediate creative and branding processes before it can generate meaningful competitive differentiation. In conceptual terms, the mechanism can be summarized as AI Capability → Content Creativity → Brand Building → Competitive Advantage, with its effectiveness supported by complementary human, organizational, data, and marketing capabilities. This perspective contributes to the literature by shifting attention from technology adoption toward technology-to-value conversion. Consequently, the success of AI among MSMEs should not be evaluated only through productivity indicators such as faster content production or lower marketing costs, but by whether MSMEs can transform AI capability into distinctive creative communication, transform that communication into stronger brand equity, and ultimately transform brand equity into a more sustainable competitive position.

4.11 Conceptual Model Derived from the Literature Synthesis

Based on the analysis and discussion of the 20 selected articles, the conceptual model derived from the literature synthesis positions AI capability as the initial enabling capability that expands MSMEs' ability to collect and interpret consumer information, explore creative alternatives, automate selected marketing activities, personalize communication, and increase content-production capacity. However, the model deliberately does not position AI as a direct determinant of competitive advantage because the literature indicates that technological accessibility alone does not ensure superior strategic outcomes. Instead, AI capability first influences Content Creativity, which represents the mechanism through which technological possibilities are

converted into relevant, differentiated, and engaging marketing communication. Content creativity subsequently contributes to Brand Building, encompassing the progressive development of brand awareness, brand image, brand associations, and ultimately brand equity. Brand building then serves as the principal mechanism through which creative digital communication is converted into Competitive Advantage, manifested in stronger differentiation, consumer preference, trust, relationships, and superior perceived value. Thus, the primary sequential relationship proposed by the model is AI Capability → Content Creativity → Brand Building → Competitive Advantage.

The model also recognizes that this relationship depends on a set of complementary enabling conditions, particularly Human Creativity, Digital Skills, Organizational Capability, Marketing Knowledge, Data Quality, Brand Identity, and Ethical AI Use. Human creativity provides contextual judgment, storytelling, emotion, cultural sensitivity, and originality that prevent AI-supported content from becoming generic or inauthentic. Digital skills and AI competence determine whether MSMEs can operate, evaluate, and refine technological outputs effectively, while organizational capability determines whether AI can be incorporated into recurring marketing routines rather than used sporadically. Marketing knowledge ensures that technological use remains aligned with segmentation, positioning, customer needs, and communication objectives, whereas data quality influences the reliability of consumer insight and personalization. Brand identity provides strategic boundaries that ensure consistency between AI-generated content and the values represented by the business. Finally, ethical AI use becomes increasingly important for protecting authenticity, privacy, transparency, and responsible consumer interaction. These factors therefore do not simply function as additional variables but constitute the capability environment within which AI-generated marketing value is produced.

Overall, the model demonstrates that the combination of technological and human capabilities provides a stronger foundation for MSME competitiveness than either element independently. AI increases analytical capacity, production speed, personalization, and idea exploration, while human actors retain responsibility for interpreting context, establishing strategic priorities, protecting authenticity, and determining the direction of the brand. Content creativity then converts these combined capabilities into communication value, while brand building accumulates that communication value into consumer perceptions and relationships capable of supporting competitive differentiation. The model consequently explains why the adoption of identical AI technologies may generate different strategic outcomes across MSMEs. Competitive advantage emerges not from the technology itself but from the effectiveness with which AI is integrated with human creativity, marketing capability, organizational processes, consumer understanding, and a distinctive brand identity. In this sense, the conceptual model represents a technology-to-creativity-to-brand-to-advantage pathway, positioning AI as an enabling capability whose ultimate strategic contribution is realized through complementary firm-specific resources and capabilities.

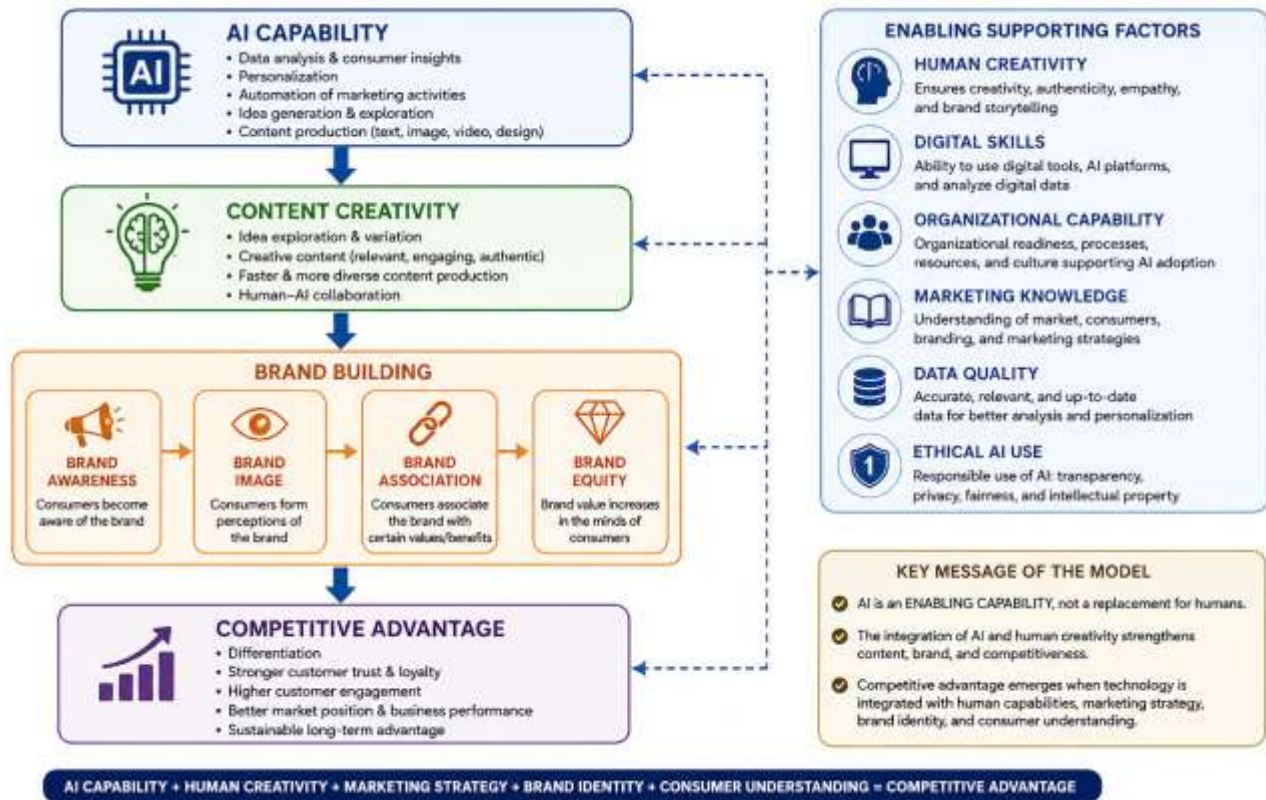


Figure 2. Conceptual Model

5. CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION, SUGGESTION, AND LIMITATIONS

This study aimed to analyze the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and content creativity in building brands and enhancing the competitive advantage of MSMEs in the digital era through a qualitative literature review of 20 scientific articles published between 2018 and 2026. The results of the descriptive-thematic synthesis indicate that AI has evolved from merely a supporting technology into an enabling capability that can strengthen MSMEs' marketing capabilities through data analysis, personalization, automation, ideation, and content production. AI also contributes to enhancing content creativity by enabling MSMEs to generate various alternatives of text, images, videos, designs, and marketing materials more quickly and efficiently. However, the effectiveness of AI remains dependent on human creativity, as human involvement is still essential in determining creative direction, storytelling, context, authenticity, and brand identity. Furthermore, creative, relevant, consistent, and authentic content can strengthen brand awareness, brand image, brand association, and brand equity, ultimately supporting differentiation and competitive advantage among MSMEs. Accordingly, the synthesis generates the conceptual relationship AI Capability → Content Creativity → Brand Building → Competitive Advantage, with the effectiveness of this relationship influenced by human creativity, digital skills, organizational capability, marketing knowledge, data quality, and the ethical and responsible use of AI.

This study provides theoretical and practical implications for understanding the use of AI in MSME marketing. Theoretically, the findings extend the Resource-Based View (RBV) perspective by demonstrating that AI does not automatically constitute a source of competitive advantage. Instead, its strategic value emerges when AI is combined with valuable and difficult-to-imitate resources and capabilities, such as human creativity, marketing knowledge, consumer understanding, and brand identity. Practically, MSMEs should utilize AI not only for content production automation but also for consumer analysis, idea development, communication personalization, and evaluation of marketing activities, while maintaining human oversight to ensure that generated content remains consistent with the brand's characteristics and values. For governments and other stakeholders, these findings highlight the importance of developing AI literacy, digital marketing skills, and creative content development programs that are not limited to technical competence in using AI, but also emphasize the integration of technology with marketing strategy, branding, creativity,

ethics, and consumer needs.

This study has several limitations, particularly because it employed a qualitative literature review approach. Consequently, the synthesis depends on the quality, characteristics, and perspectives of previous studies and does not statistically test the relationships among the concepts examined. The review included 20 final articles from 80 articles initially identified, meaning that some relevant perspectives or findings may not have been comprehensively captured. In addition, the analyzed literature covered the period from 2018 to 2026 and included SMEs or MSMEs from various countries with different business environments, levels of digitalization, cultures, and infrastructure. Therefore, the findings cannot necessarily be generalized directly to all MSMEs. The rapid development of generative AI may also cause some findings to become less relevant as new technologies and practices emerge. Furthermore, the conceptual relationship AI Capability → Content Creativity → Brand Building → Competitive Advantage proposed in this study has not yet been empirically tested within a specific MSME population and therefore requires validation through field-based research.

Future research is recommended to empirically examine the relationships among AI capability, content creativity, brand building, and competitive advantage using quantitative approaches such as Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). Future studies may specifically examine the mediating roles of content creativity and brand building, as well as the moderating or supporting roles of AI literacy, digital skills, organizational readiness, and marketing capability. Further research could also employ a mixed-methods approach to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of MSMEs' experiences in using AI to create content and build brands. For MSME practitioners, AI adoption should be implemented strategically while maintaining human creativity and control throughout the content creation and branding processes. Meanwhile, governments and relevant stakeholders are encouraged to strengthen training programs in AI, digital marketing, content creation, and branding, while also providing adequate digital infrastructure and organizational support. Thus, AI utilization should not be directed merely toward technology adoption, but toward the development of technology-enabled human capability that can sustainably strengthen creativity, brand building, and the competitive advantage of MSMEs.

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