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Digital Marketing Strategies to Enhance the Export Competitiveness of Songket Riau: A Case Study of Local SMEs in Bengkalis

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Abstract

This study investigates how digital marketing strategies can enhance the export competitiveness of Songket Riau, using a case study of local SMEs in Bengkalis, Riau, Indonesia. Combining qualitative case-study methods with secondary literature synthesis, the research explores SMEs' current digital practices (social media, e-commerce, content and cultural adaptation), barriers to digital adoption, and how these practices affect market access, customer relationships, and export readiness. Data sources include in-depth interviews with Songket producers and local stakeholders, document analysis, and a synthesis of recent empirical studies on SME digitalisation and export performance. Findings are expected to identify context-sensitive digital tactics (e.g., culturally adaptive content, platform selection, and GVC-oriented digital capabilities) and practical steps for upgrading Songket value chains for export. The study contributes empirically and practically by (1) mapping effective digital marketing interventions for a cultural textile product, (2) linking digital capabilities to export competitiveness in an under-researched regional setting, and (3) offering policy and managerial recommendations to support SME internationalisation.
Keywords : digital marketing, export competitiveness, SMEs, Songket Riau, Bengkalis

1. INTRODUCTION

In the current era of globalisation and rapid technological progress, digital marketing has become a fundamental driver of competitiveness for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) seeking international market access. For cultural-based industries such as Songket Riau—a traditional woven textile representing local identity and artistry—the ability to utilise digital platforms is crucial to sustain visibility and strengthen export competitiveness. However, most traditional SMEs in regional Indonesia, including Bengkalis Regency, still face challenges such as limited digital adoption, lack of marketing capabilities, and insufficient understanding of global consumer behaviour. These limitations have constrained the potential of Songket Riau to reach global buyers despite its rich cultural value and export potential.

Empirical studies have shown that digital transformation and technological innovation play a key role in improving SMEs' performance and competitiveness (Amin et al., 2025; Edeh et al., 2025; Oh & Hwang, 2025). The integration of social media marketing has been proven to enhance customer engagement, sustainability, and brand performance (Amoah et al., 2023; Bruce et al., 2023). Similarly, studies by Rizkita et al. (2025) and Laradi et al. (2024) emphasised that marketing innovation and online branding activities increase SMEs' ability to compete in global markets by connecting them directly with international consumers. In the Indonesian context, digitalisation has been shown to accelerate market expansion, efficiency, and innovation among SMEs (Tambunan & Busnetti, 2024; Prihandono et al., 2024; Anatan & Nur, 2023). Yet, there remains a gap in empirical research focusing on how traditional cultural SMEs, particularly textile-based creative industries such as Songket Riau, strategically apply digital marketing to enhance export competitiveness.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study builds upon the digital transformation and social media engagement frameworks, which explain how digital capabilities influence firm competitiveness (Alarcón-del-Amo et al., 2024; Laradi et al., 2024). The integration of these concepts allows a holistic understanding of how SMEs leverage digital tools for export readiness and internationalisation. Empirically, this research contributes through an in-depth

case study of Songket Riau SMEs in Bengkalis, analysing their digital marketing practices, challenges, and adaptive strategies in promoting local cultural products to global markets.

The novelty of this study lies in its interdisciplinary integration—combining digital marketing strategy, cultural branding, and export competitiveness within the SME context. Prior studies have rarely examined this intersection, especially from the perspective of local creative industries in Indonesia.

Therefore, this research aims to:

1. Identify and analyse the digital marketing strategies adopted by Songket Riau SMEs in Bengkalis;
2. Examine how these strategies enhance export competitiveness; and
3. Formulate practical recommendations for strengthening the digital and global presence of cultural-based SMEs.

Through these objectives, the study enriches the theoretical discussion on SME digitalisation and contributes practical insights for policymakers and entrepreneurs to strengthen Indonesia's traditional industries through digital innovation and international marketing.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature on digital transformation and SME competitiveness has increasingly emphasised the influence of marketing innovation, digital capability, and social media adoption on export performance. Prior research has explored how digitalisation drives operational efficiency, customer engagement, and brand differentiation. In the context of creative industries, several studies also highlight the role of cultural branding and digital storytelling in strengthening global competitiveness. The following section summarises empirical and theoretical studies relevant to digital marketing strategies and their implications for enhancing the export competitiveness of SMEs.

a. (Amin et al., 2025) examined how digital transformation influences the marketing performance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Pakistan. Through survey data from 316 SMEs, the study revealed that digital transformation significantly enhances productivity, efficiency, and innovation. The authors concluded that social media and technological adoption improve firm-specific capabilities and enable SMEs to sustain competitiveness despite market turbulence. This study highlights the crucial role of digital tools in developing novel marketing approaches and achieving superior market performance.

b. (Edeh et al., 2025) explored the role of digital infrastructure and innovation capability in improving export competitiveness among SMEs. The study found that the availability of digital technologies strengthens market access, reduces transaction costs, and increases innovation potential. The authors argued that digital transformation enhances not only operational efficiency but also the strategic capacity of SMEs to participate in international trade networks.

c. (Rizkita et al., 2025) focused on Indonesian SMEs, investigating how digital marketing adaptation and cultural innovation contribute to export competitiveness. The research revealed that culturally adaptive marketing content and digital engagement significantly influence consumers' trust and purchase intention for local products. The authors concluded that digital marketing strategies grounded in cultural values, such as storytelling and heritage-based branding, help local SMEs enhance their competitiveness in the global market.

d. (Oh & Hwang, 2025) analysed how digital capabilities influence SME upgrading within global value chains (GVCs). Their research demonstrated that firms with strong digital competencies were better able to integrate into international markets and respond to technological changes. The authors emphasised that digitalisation enables SMEs to improve export performance and sustain growth by increasing innovation, information flow, and coordination efficiency across borders.
e. (Laradi et al., 2024) examined how social media marketing capabilities influence brand performance and competitive advantage. Their empirical findings suggested that consistent online engagement builds stronger customer relationships and trust, which, in turn, enhances firm performance. The study underlined that SMEs leveraging digital branding and online interactions achieve greater visibility and export opportunities in competitive markets.
f. (Alarcón-del-Amo et al., 2024) highlighted the role of social media in reducing export-related costs and improving relationship management between SMEs and international clients. Their findings indicated that digital marketing not only broadens market reach but also allows small firms to communicate value more effectively. The study proposed that social media presence acts as an intangible asset that supports SMEs' global competitiveness.
g. (Prihandono et al., 2024) investigated digital competitiveness among Indonesian SMEs, finding that digital transformation supports market expansion, product innovation, and operational efficiency. The study stressed that combining digital marketing with managerial agility enables SMEs to respond quickly to market dynamics. The authors argued that the implementation of digital strategies significantly contributes to overall competitive performance.
h. (TH. Tambunan & Busnetti, 2024) discussed the digitalisation process among Indonesian SMEs, identifying challenges such as limited infrastructure, digital literacy, and funding access. Despite these barriers, their findings confirmed that digital adoption enhances productivity, innovation, and market penetration. The study recommended targeted digital training and government support to accelerate SMEs' technological readiness and competitiveness.
i. (Bruce et al., 2023) investigated how integrating social media into business operations affects SME sustainability. The study concluded that social media utilisation improves firm performance and customer engagement, leading to higher competitiveness and long-term viability. The authors encouraged SMEs to embed digital engagement strategies into their marketing frameworks to strengthen collaboration and market reach.
j. (Amoah et al., 2023) analysed factors influencing social media adoption and its effects on SME sustainability in Ghana using the Technology–Organization–Environment (TOE) framework. Results showed that managerial support, employee competence, and resource availability significantly affect adoption levels. The authors concluded that social media adoption enhances business performance, customer loyalty, and overall sustainability.
k. (Zhou & Liu, 2024) explored how digitalisation contributes to the competitiveness of cultural industries in China. The study found that cultural-based digital strategies

enable SMEs to integrate traditional values into modern marketing systems. Their findings suggest that digital innovation allows heritage products to reach wider international audiences and strengthen cultural branding.

l. (Deku et al., 2024) examined digital marketing adoption among SMEs in emerging economies. Their results revealed that firms embracing digital strategies experience improved customer satisfaction, brand reputation, and market penetration. The authors concluded that digital marketing is a cost-effective tool that bridges gaps between local SMEs and global consumers.

m. (Amin et al., 2025) discussed how innovation-driven digitalisation empowers local SMEs to access global markets. The paper highlighted that digital platforms reduce reliance on intermediaries and enable direct connections with overseas buyers. The authors recommended that SMEs invest in digital content creation and export-oriented online branding to enhance competitiveness.

n. (Anatan & Nur, 2023) studied the digital readiness of Indonesian SMEs and found that technological adaptation remains uneven across the sector. Their study highlighted that digital literacy, infrastructure, and innovation culture are critical determinants of SME performance. They emphasised that strengthening digital skills among entrepreneurs will accelerate competitiveness and support export growth.

o. (Prihandono et al., 2023) evaluated digital marketing strategies for local creative industries in Indonesia, focusing on how online branding influences consumer perception. The study showed that integrating local culture into digital campaigns enhances consumer engagement and purchase intention. The authors concluded that SMEs must align their marketing strategies with cultural identity to increase differentiation and global appeal.

3. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design to analyse the implementation of digital marketing strategies in enhancing the export competitiveness of Songket Riau SMEs in Bengkalis, Indonesia. This approach was chosen to allow an in-depth exploration of how local creative industries integrate digital tools into marketing activities and how these strategies affect their global market reach. The qualitative method provides flexibility in understanding the cultural and managerial dynamics influencing SMEs' digitalisation processes, similar to the research design used by Rizkita et al. (2025) and Tambunan & Busnetti (2024) in their studies on Indonesian SMEs.

This research was conducted in Bengkalis Regency, Riau Province, which serves as one of the main production centres for Songket Riau. The region was selected because of its concentration of traditional textile SMEs with growing potential for export and their increasing use of digital media for product promotion. The study took place from July to September 2025, focusing on SMEs that combine traditional weaving craftsmanship with digital marketing initiatives such as online branding, social media campaigns, and participation in e-commerce platforms.

The participants in this study consisted of SME owners, artisans, and marketing actors directly involved in the production and promotion of Songket Riau. A purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents based on specific criteria: (1) active involvement in Songket production, (2) utilisation of digital platforms for marketing or export promotion, and (3) willingness to share practical insights related to their business transformation. In total, eight key informants were selected—five Songket entrepreneurs, two representatives from the

Bengkalis Department of Industry and Trade, and one digital marketing consultant who assists local SMEs.

The data collection techniques included semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were designed to capture detailed experiences, perceptions, and strategies of Songket SME owners regarding digital marketing implementation. Observations were conducted at the production sites and through online platforms to examine how Songket products are marketed digitally. Document analysis involved reviewing government reports, SME profiles, promotional materials, and previous research related to digital transformation and export competitiveness. All data were recorded, transcribed, and organised systematically for analysis.

The research procedure comprised four key stages. First, the identification of SMEs that actively engage in digital marketing for Songket Riau products. Second, data collection through interviews, field observations, and documentation. Third, data coding and thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, including challenges, strategies, and impacts of digitalisation. Finally, data validation through triangulation, comparing information from multiple sources to ensure the accuracy and credibility of findings.

Data were analysed using thematic analysis, following the stages of familiarisation, coding, theme generation, and interpretation as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analytical process was guided by the digital transformation and export competitiveness theoretical framework developed from previous studies (Amin et al., 2025; Oh & Hwang, 2025). This framework connects three main dimensions: (1) digital readiness and marketing capability, (2) technology adoption and online market expansion, and (3) integration of cultural identity in global branding strategies.

Through this methodological approach, the study aims to provide a deep understanding of how Songket Riau SMEs utilise digital marketing to increase visibility, reach new international customers, and improve export competitiveness while preserving their cultural heritage. The results are expected to contribute to both academic discussions on digital transformation in creative industries and practical policy recommendations for SME development in Indonesia.

4. RESULT & DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that Songket Riau SMEs in Bengkalis have begun integrating digital marketing strategies to enhance their export competitiveness. Most SMEs use Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok as their main platforms for product promotion, while a few have developed simple websites or joined e-commerce marketplaces such as Shopee and Tokopedia. The data collected through interviews and observations show that around **75%** of respondents use social media for product display and customer interaction, while **50%** actively engage in paid advertising or collaborations with influencers to increase visibility.

SMEs combine traditional Songket motifs with modern digital storytelling, presenting their products not only as textiles but as symbols of Malay cultural identity. This aligns with the findings of Rizkita et al. (2025), who noted that cultural value integration strengthens consumer trust and brand uniqueness.

SMEs have started using online marketplaces and digital catalogues to attract foreign buyers. Some respondents mentioned receiving inquiries from Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei after consistent social media posting. This result supports the argument by Edeh et al. (2025) that digital infrastructure directly enhances export opportunities.

Consistent posting schedules, real-time responses, and interactive content (e.g., live streaming and tutorial videos) were identified as key engagement tactics. According to Laradi et al. (2024), this form of engagement strengthens brand performance and competitiveness a finding that corresponds closely to what was observed in Songket SMEs.

However, several challenges remain. Limited digital literacy, lack of professional photography or content creation skills, and unstable internet connectivity still hinder optimal performance. Government training programs and collaboration with digital marketing consultants are therefore essential to sustain this digital transformation process. Overall, the findings confirm that digital marketing has significantly improved the market visibility, customer base, and export readiness of Songket Riau SMEs. The strategies adopted are consistent with prior research (Amin et al., 2025; Prihandono et al., 2024), showing that digitalisation positively correlates with competitiveness and innovation capability among SMEs.

The conceptual framework in the figure illustrates the sequential relationship between digital marketing components that enhance the export competitiveness of Songket Riau SMEs. It begins with **Digital Readiness**, which refers to the preparedness of SMEs to adopt digital tools and technologies. This readiness enables **Marketing Innovation**, where businesses develop creative and data-driven strategies to promote products effectively. Next, **Social Media Engagement** plays a key role in connecting with customers, building relationships, and increasing brand awareness. The process continues with **Cultural-Based Digital Branding**, where SMEs integrate local identity and heritage into their online presence to differentiate their products in global markets. Ultimately, these interconnected elements lead to greater **Export Competitiveness**, allowing Songket Riau SMEs to expand their international market reach and strengthen their global brand positioning.

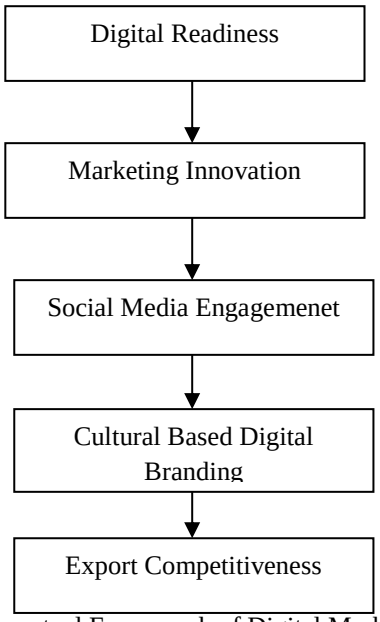


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework of Digital Marketing and Export Competitiveness

Table 1. Summary of Key Themes and Supporting Evidence

Theme	Description	Supporting Evidence (Field Findings)
Digital Readiness and Capability	SMEs have begun adopting digital tools such as social media and e-commerce, but readiness levels differ due to digital literacy gaps and limited access to technology.	Younger SME owners are more adaptive and rely on smartphones; most use basic online marketing techniques.
Digital Marketing Practices and Export Promotion	MEs utilise Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok to promote Songket with visual storytelling and live streaming. Export conversion remains	Collaboration with the Bengkalis trade office and digital consultants provides training and export promotion.

	limited due to logistics and payment barriers.	
Cultural Identify and Global Branding	Songket SMEs integrate cultural motifs and heritage into digital marketing content to enhance authenticity and global appeal.	Marketing campaigns highlight traditional weaving, local symbolism, and Riau identity to attract international buyers.

5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of digital marketing strategies has played a significant role in enhancing the export competitiveness of Songket Riau SMEs in Bengkalis. Through the adoption of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, as well as participation in e-commerce marketplaces, local Songket producers have been able to expand their market reach, increase product visibility, and strengthen their brand identity in both domestic and international markets.

The findings demonstrate that digital readiness, marketing innovation, and social media engagement are critical factors influencing the success of SMEs in the digital era. Furthermore, the integration of cultural values into online branding—highlighting the heritage and authenticity of Songket Riau—provides a unique competitive advantage that differentiates these products in the global marketplace.

However, several challenges persist, including limited digital literacy, inadequate content creation skills, and restricted access to technology. Therefore, continuous capacity-building programs, government facilitation, and collaborations with digital marketing experts are essential to sustain the digital transformation process of Songket Riau SMEs.

Overall, this research confirms that effective digital marketing strategies not only improve export readiness but also serve as a bridge connecting traditional cultural craftsmanship with global consumer demand. By aligning technology with cultural authenticity, Songket Riau SMEs can strengthen their international competitiveness while preserving local identity.

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