International Journal of Economics, Business and Innovation Research
https://e-journal.citakonsultindo.or.id/index.php/IJEBIR
E-ISSN : 2964-0865
IJEBIR

# Micro-Influencers and Micro-Communities As Low-Cost Global Branding Strategies for Indonesian Msmes

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**Abstract**

*This study aims to analyze the use of micro-influencers and micro-communities as an alternative low-cost and effective global branding strategy for Indonesian Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the era of digital transformation. In the midst of the limitations of conventional marketing budgets, MSMEs are required to be adaptive in building brand awareness and customer loyalty across regional borders in order to penetrate the international market. Using a qualitative descriptive analysis approach based on literature review and empirical case studies, the results of the study show that the synergy between the characteristics of micro-influencers who have a high engagement rate and content authenticity with the depth of interaction in the micro-community able to form an integrated, organic, and sustainable digital marketing ecosystem. This combination has proven to be effective in reducing customer acquisition costs and accelerating the process of diffusion of local brand innovation in the global market. Despite being faced with internal challenges such as low digital literacy of business actors and content inconsistencies, the implementation of this strategy can be optimized through structured mentoring programs, strengthening brand identities based on local wisdom, and conducive regulatory and infrastructure support from the government.*

**Keywords:** ***Micro Influencer, Micro Community, Global Branding*****, Indonesian MSMEs, Digital Marketing.**



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## INTRODUCTION

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a crucial role as the backbone of Indonesia's national economy through their contribution of more than 60% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and their ability to absorb around 97% of the national workforce. Despite having a very strategic position, the sustainability and competitiveness of MSMEs are now being tested by the flow of digital transformation that is changing the business competition landscape from conventional media to more flexible and borderless digital platforms. On the one hand, the large number of internet users in Indonesia, which reaches more than 213 million people, opens up massive market penetration opportunities for local products. But on the other hand, most MSME players are still trapped in short-term sales activities without having the awareness to build a strong brand identity, so that domestic products tend to be difficult to compete and eliminated in an increasingly competitive global market.

The main obstacle faced by the MSME sector in expanding the international market is financial and capital limitations to allocate large-scale marketing budgets. Conventional promotional methods such as mass media advertising, international exhibitions, or the opening of physical networks require very high investment and are beyond the financial capacity of micro enterprises. Therefore, an alternative *global branding strategy* is needed that is not only cheap, but also precise in reaching relevant market segments. The use of *micro-influencers that rely on* soft selling-based *credibility* and *micro-community* management based on homogeneous interests and shared *identity* are present as integrated rational solutions. The synergy between the two is able to trigger persuasive *electronic word-of-mouth* recommendations, thereby minimizing customer acquisition costs while converting brand awareness into actual purchasing decisions for global consumers.

## DISCUSSION

### The Digital Landscape of Indonesian MSMEs and the Global Urgency of Low-Cost Branding

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are sectors that have a very important role in the Indonesian economy. In addition to being the largest absorber of labor, MSMEs also contribute significantly to the formation of the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Data shows that MSMEs account for more than 60% of Indonesia's GDP and are able to absorb around 97% of the national workforce. This condition shows that the sustainability and growth of MSMEs has a direct impact on national economic stability,


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income equity, and improvement of community welfare. Therefore, strengthening the competitiveness of MSMEs is a strategic agenda in Indonesia's economic development.

Entering the era of digital transformation, business competition patterns have undergone very significant changes. The development of information and communication technology has changed the way businesses market products, build relationships with customers, and create added value for consumers. Marketing activities that were previously dominated by conventional media such as brochures, billboards, radio, and television are now starting to shift towards digital platforms that are more flexible, fast, and efficient. This transformation creates new opportunities for MSMEs to compete not only in the local market, but also in the national and international markets. Digitalization allows businesses to reach consumers without being limited by geographical location and provide wider access to market information and consumer behavior.

The development of the digital ecosystem in Indonesia, with more than 213 million internet users, opens up a huge market opportunity for MSMEs to expand their marketing reach through various social media and marketplaces. However, the use of this technology is still hampered by low digital literacy, limited infrastructure, minimal capital, and a lack of understanding of MSMEs on the importance of *long-term branding*. On the other hand, conventional *branding* methods are also no longer relevant because they require large costs that are beyond the financial capacity of micro and small businesses. Therefore, MSMEs urgently need an alternative digital *branding* strategy that is cheaper, flexible, and effective to increase their competitiveness in a competitive market.

*Low-cost global branding* through digital platforms is one of the most relevant solutions to answer these challenges. *Digital branding* allows MSMEs to build brand identity, increase *brand awareness*, and strengthen customer loyalty at a relatively low cost compared to traditional marketing methods. Social media provides a space for MSMEs to convey product values, brand stories, and product uniqueness to consumers directly. In addition, various *digital marketing features* such as *content marketing*, *search engine optimization* (SEO), *influencer marketing*, and *customer relationship management* (CRM) can be used to strengthen brand image without requiring large promotional costs.

*Digital branding* is very important to build consumer trust and differentiate MSME products so that they can penetrate the global market without physical barriers. This digital transformation has been proven to improve business performance, efficiency, and *brand awareness* through real-time interactive communication. However, this success is highly dependent on the level of digital literacy of business actors in managing content



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and trends. Therefore, real synergy and support from the government, universities, and the private sector are needed through continuous training and mentoring.

Thus, Indonesia's digital landscape shows that opportunities for MSME development through the use of digital technology are increasingly wide open. In the midst of the limited marketing budget owned by most MSMEs, *a* digital-based low-cost global branding strategy is the most rational and effective choice. Through the use of social media, *marketplaces*, websites, and various other digital platforms, MSMEs are not only able to expand the market and increase competitiveness,but also have a greater opportunity to enter the global market and strengthen the position of Indonesian local products at the international level.

**The Concept of Micro-Influencer and Micro-Community**

The development of the digital marketing ecosystem has given birth to various typologies of communication actors who act as intermediaries between brands and consumers. One of the actors that is increasingly dominating contemporary marketing practices is *micro-influencers*. Definitively, *micro-influencers* are individuals with 10,000 to 100,000 followers who emerge as strategic actors in digital marketing thanks to high *engagement* rates and strong credibility on specific topics (*niches*). They are considered much more authentic, interactive, and trusted by the audience than celebrities or big *influencers* because the promotional messages conveyed feel natural and personal. Ultimately, authenticity and image alignment between *influencers* and products are crucial factors that determine campaign effectiveness, trust, and consumer loyalty more than just the number of followers.

In the taxonomy of digital *influencers* proposed by various researchers, the hierarchy based on the scale of followers is generally divided into several levels: (1) Nano-influencers: 1,000–10,000 followers. (2) Micro-influencers: 10,000–100,000 followers (3) Mid-tier influencers: 100,000–500,000 followers. (4) Macro-influencers: 500,000–1,000,000 followers. (5) Mega-influencers & Celebrities: Above 1,000,000 followers.

What distinguishes *micro-influencers* from other levels is not just the issue of the quantity of followers, but their approach to promoting products that tend to use *soft selling techniques*. This approach significantly improves the quality of the relationship with its audience. *Micro-influencers* are generally seen as ordinary individuals who have deep expertise or interests in a particular field. As a result, the content they produce is authentic, personalized, and relevant to the segmented community of followers. This


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condition creates a stronger emotional closeness between *micro-influencers* and their followers compared to *large-scale influencers.*

*Micro-influencer* It has a series of distinctive characteristics that distinguish it significantly, both from *Macro-Influencers* or *Mega-Influencers*. The main characteristics can be described as follows: (1) Engagement Rate (*Engagement Rate*) that is High. *Micro-influencer* consistently shows a much higher level of audience engagement compared to large-scale digital actors. An international study noted that on average *Engagement rate micro-influencers* on Instagram reached 6%, while *Mega-Influencers* It is only around 1.97%. In line with these global findings, research on Skintific products (Win Dafri Darisa et al., 2025) also shows that *micro-influencer* Record *Engagement Rate* by 5.07%, outperforming *Macro-Influencers* which only touched 3.25%. This data indicates that audiences are much more actively interacting, responding, and building two-way communication to content produced by *micro-influencer*.

(2) Strong Authenticity and Credibility. The next characteristics that are the main strengths *micro-influencer* is the high perception of authenticity and credibility in the eyes of its followers. Based on research (Rahmandani et al., 2025) in the context of TikTok Indonesia, the emphasis on the authenticity and credibility of the message conveyed by *micro-influencer* proven to be able to increase the effectiveness of the strategy *Public Relations* and accelerating the process of forming consumer loyalty. In marketing communications, advertising facilitated by *micro-influencer* effective in attracting attention (*Caution*) and spark interest (*Interest*) consumers. These two aspects are the first steps in the AIDA model (*Attention, Interest, Desire, Action*) which is the foundation of the success of the promotion. The effectiveness of this model is strongly supported by research conducted by (WISSEN), which explains that the integration of *micro-influencer* in the strategy *Public Relations* can improve brand image (*Brand image*) as well as strengthening the relationship with the audience. The results of the study show that *micro-influencer* have a level of engagement (*Commitment*) which is higher compared to *Influencers* large, so that it is more effective in building authentic interactions. In terms of personal credibility, *micro-influencer* is perceived as a much more reliable source of information. In practice, the credibility is assessed by followers through the *Influencers* self-publishing, either through lifestyle (*Lifestyle*) or daily activities (*Daily Activity*).

(3) Specific and Segmented Audiences (*Niche Audience*). *Micro-influencers* are characterized by owning a follower base with very specific interests, hobbies, or needs (*niche audience*). These followers gather because of the alignment of interest in the special content presented. This condition is very beneficial for Micro, Small, and Medium


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Enterprises (MSMEs). This characteristic allows businesses to convey brand messages precisely and on target to the most relevant market segments, without having to waste their budget to reach a potential mass audience. (4) Cost Efficiency (Tariff Affordability). Unlike *mega-influencers* or celebrities who set fantastic *endorsement* rates, *micro-influencers* offer promotional services with a much lower investment value and are competitive. This price flexibility makes it an ideal marketing partner for MSMEs who often face limited promotional budgets. Although the costs incurred are relatively affordable, the impact of the resulting marketing reach remains effective, organic, and can be clearly measured through digital metrics.

Meanwhile, *a micro-community* is a relatively small and specific consumer group formed based on a common interest in a brand or product. In the context of digital marketing, this community becomes a forum for interaction, experience sharing, discussion, and active collaboration between members and brands. This community-based marketing strategy focuses on creating and managing customer groups to build long-term relationships and strong loyalty. In contrast to conventional *brand communities* that are broad and massive, *micro-communities* are characterized by a more limited membership scale, but have a much higher level of depth of interaction and emotional engagement. In the contemporary digital ecosystem, *micro-communities* manifest in various forms, such as WhatsApp or Telegram groups of loyal customers, discussion forums on Facebook, interaction columns of brands' social media accounts, to thematic sub-forums on platforms such as Reddit or Discord.

Research by (Qothrunnada & Pandrianto, 2024) by regarding the RUBI brand community *fire* Avoskin Indonesia beauty emphasizes that putting the brand in a central position to interact and build strong relationships with community members is the foundation of the strategy *Community-based branding* effective. These findings reinforce the relevance *micro-community*, especially for local MSME actors who want to build brand equity (*Brand Equity*) in a sustainable manner with budget efficiency.

*Micro-communities* have several distinctive characteristics that significantly differentiate them from mass-scale conventional brand communities. These characteristics include: (1) The Depth of Interaction between Members. Unlike mass communities where interactions are superficial where interactions between members are just knowing, liking, or commenting briefly without strong emotional ties or personal closeness, micro-communities encourage in-depth discussions, share real experiences, and provide recommendations based on personal knowledge of brands. The depth of this interaction results in an emotional attachment that strengthens consumer loyalty.



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(2) High Homogeneity of Interest. *Micro-community* characterized by a very high homogeneity or similarity of interests among its members. They are connected by common values, hobbies, or specific preferences to a particular brand or product. This phenomenon is in line with the research of Hur, Ko, and Valacich (2011) in (Alan Lapudooh et al., n.d.) stating that in order to create substantial customer loyalty, companies need a brand community that is able to build strong relationships with consumers through a bond based on a shared identity (*Shared Identity*). (3) Participation Rate of Active Members. In a community, members not only act as recipients of information, but are also actively involved in various activities, such as sharing product experiences, providing reviews, giving suggestions, and discussing their needs and expectations for a brand. In addition, the involvement of members in providing input related to products and services can help MSMEs better understand market needs so that they are able to present innovations that are in accordance with consumer desires. Such continuous interactions can build trust, strengthen the emotional connection between consumers and brands, and increase customer loyalty in the long run.

(4) Digital-Based Accessibility and High Connectivity. The last characteristic is the high accessibility supported by the use of various digital platforms such as conversation groups (WhatsApp/Telegram), social media, *online* forums, and community applications (Discord/Reddit). These platforms allow two-way communication to take place in *real-time* without the constraints of space and time. For MSMEs, this condition provides strategic advantages because the dissemination of product information and increased consumer engagement can be achieved at a relatively low cost. In the end, this ease of access directly contributes to expanding brand visibility and strengthening the MSME market position in the eyes of consumers.

When compared to conventional marketing approaches such as paid advertising in the mass media or collaborations with *Mega-Influencers*, a strategy based on *micro-influencer* and *micro-community* offers a number of comparative advantages that are very relevant for Indonesian MSMEs that generally operate with limited promotional budgets. From the perspective of cost efficiency, utilization *micro-influencer* offers much more affordable investment value compared to *Macro-Influencers* or celebrities. In line with the findings of the study (Win Dafri Darisa et al., 2025), this micro-scale digital marketing strategy is able to optimize limited budget allocation to produce effective branding impact. Through this approach, brands can reach target consumers in a more personalized way, so that the costs incurred are directly proportional to the increase in customer loyalty generated.



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From the perspective of the effectiveness of consumer engagement, micro-influencers and micro-communities result in more meaningful interactions. Study on the Somethinc brand community on TikTok Shop Indonesia (Lithuania, 2024) Demonstrating that innovative community-based marketing strategies that are responsive to market trends contribute significantly to building brand loyalty. This confirms that the community approach, even if it is small-scale, is able to produce a substantial branding impact. From a brand credibility and trust perspective, micro-influencers and micro-communities outperform conventional paid advertising significantly. A trusted influencer, when collaborating with a brand, will transfer that trust to consumers, thereby increasing brand awareness while creating a positive impression in the eyes of consumers. The trust and expertise of influencers makes it easier for consumers to recognize and remember brands.

Finally, from the perspective of content relevance, *micro-influencers* who move in a specific scope (*niche*) are able to produce content that is much more relevant to certain consumer segments. When the alignment between *influencer* personas, content messages, and brand values is well maintained, marketing communication will be delivered naturally and persuasively. This relevance is the main foundation of their comparative advantage in increasing conversion probability, turning brand *awareness* into an actual purchase decision.

**Micro-Influencer Mechanism as a Catalyst for MSME Brand Visibility in the Global Market**

In the ever-evolving global digital marketing landscape, Indonesian micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) face a fundamental challenge in the form of limited resources in building brand visibility in the international market. Conventional approaches such as large-scale paid advertising and collaborations with high-priced celebrities are often structural obstacles for MSME actors operating with limited marketing budgets. In the midst of this condition, the phenomenon *micro-influencer* Individuals with a follower base of between 10,000 and 100,000 accounts on digital platforms are emerging as a strategic alternative that offers cost efficiency as well as high brand communication effectiveness. (Juliah et al., 2025) This subchapter critically analyzes the working mechanism of micro-influencers as a catalyst for the visibility of Indonesian MSME brands in the global market, by linking the phenomenon to a theoretical framework *Social Influence Theory, Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM), Diffusion of Innovation Theory,* and *Relationship Marketing Theory.*


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The right micro-influencer selection strategy is a critical determinant of the success of the MSME global branding campaign. In the context of international market penetration, selection cannot be based solely on the number of followers, but must consider cultural *fit*, the demographic relevance of the audience to the target segment, and the thematic authority of the influencer on the product category being marketed

Framework *Relationship Marketing Theory* (Berry, 1983; Morgan & Hunt, 1994) provides an important analytical foundation here. The relationship between MSMEs and cross-border micro-influencers should ideally not be just a short-term commercial transaction, but a strategic partnership based on mutual trust and commitment. An influencer who has an organic relationship with the product, for example, a Malaysian food blogger who genuinely likes Indonesian artisan food products will convey the brand's message with greater congruence, which in turn increases credibility in the eyes of local audiences (Robing et al, 2024). Recommended selection parameters include: (1) *Audience Alignment* = how large is the proportion of influencers' followers in the target market region. (2) *Niche Authority* = level of specialization of content in relevant product categories. (3) *Commitment Quality* = Analyze comment sentiment to ensure authentic non-bot interactions. (4) *Value Congruence* = the suitability of the value and aesthetics of influencers with the brand identity of MSMEs. Analytics tools such as HypeAuditor, Modash, and Heepsy can be leveraged to validate these parameters quantitatively.

One of the most crucial comparative advantages of micro-influencers is their ability to produce authentic content that resonates with specific audiences. Concept *authentic content* Content that is perceived as honest, personal, and uncontaminated by excessive commercialization interests becomes the foundation for the formation of global consumer trust. (Abreu, 2019) This research confirms that the authenticity of micro-influencer content significantly affects follower trust, which further correlates positively with purchase intent.

This mechanism can be explained through the framework *Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM)*. Micro-influencer content is essentially a form of e-WOM that is creatively packaged, where product recommendations are conveyed in a personal narrative that feels more like a friend's suggestion than an advertisement. Especially in a cross-cultural context, authentic narratives about real experiences using Indonesian MSME products for example, a Dutch culinary influencer documenting how to brew Toraja coffee or process tempeh has a persuasive power that goes far beyond generic advertising, as it adds a layer of cultural validation from the perspective of local consumers (Reza et al., 2025). Digital platforms have different characteristics in supporting the authenticity of this


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content. (1) Instagram is effective for aesthetic visual communication that builds brand aspirations. (2) TikTok excels in content *short-form video* which is viral and able to penetrate the young demographic across countries. (3) YouTube is suitable for in-depth reviews that build informational authority. (4) X (Twitter) plays a role in real-time conversations and opinion formation among media-savvy consumers. The choice of platform should be tailored to the content consumption behavior of the target market in each destination country.

The strategy of international market penetration through micro-influencers is in line with the principle *of Diffusion of Innovation Theory* (Rogers, 1962). Within this framework, micro-influencers serve as *early adopters* and *opinion leaders* in their niche communities, which plays a role in accelerating the diffusion of innovation in this case Indonesian MSME brands that are just entering foreign markets to a wider group of followers. This diffusion model works gradually: from innovators (micro-influencers themselves) early adopters (core followers who are actively involved) early majority (wider community)

Digital community approach (*micro-community*) nurtured by micro-influencers creates an ecosystem of trust that accelerates this process. Focused communities such as specialty coffee fan groups, ethnic handicraft lovers, or communities *Zero-waste living* on various platforms is a niche market segment that is very relevant for many Indonesian MSME products that have unique cultural and sustainability values. Penetration into this community through micro-influencers whose members are trusted is much more efficient than the mass marketing approach (*Mass Marketing*), because it eliminates the attention filtering barrier (*Attention Filtering*) that are increasingly high among global consumers (Pambudi & Takarini, 2023).

Relevant case studies can be found on Indonesian specialty coffee brands. Kopi Kenangan and various artisan coffee brands from Aceh, Flores, and Toraja have successfully leveraged the coffee community's micro-influencer network in Europe and North America to build brand awareness organically. These influencers are generally baristas, independent roasters, or coffee lovers with followers between 5,000 and 50,000 consistently producing educational content about flavor profiles, sustainable harvesting methods, and local farmer narratives, which simultaneously builds *Brand Awareness* while strengthening the positioning of the Indonesian brand as a global quality premium coffee producer (Iqbal et al., 2024).


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International Journal of Economics, Business and Innovation Research
https://e-journal.citakonsultindo.or.id/index.php/IJEBIR
E-ISSN : 2964-0865
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**The Role of Micro-Communities in Building Cross-Border Brand Loyalty and Trust**

The development of digital technologies has changed the global marketing paradigm from a mass reach-based approach to a community-based approach. In this context, micro-communities have emerged as an increasingly relevant strategy for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in building customer loyalty and brand trust in the international market. Micro-communities are small-scale digital communities formed based on shared interests, values, lifestyles, or specific needs, such as online forums, Facebook groups, Discord, Reddit, and Telegram. In contrast to social media audiences that are broad and heterogeneous, micro-community members have a higher level of engagement, creating more personalized, authentic, and relationship-oriented interactions.

(1) Micro communities are an effective means for MSMEs to build trust and credibility in the global market without large costs. In cross-border transactions full of uncertainty, international consumers trust recommendations, reviews, and real experiences of fellow community members that are considered more objective than conventional advertising. Through this voluntary discussion, a social validation mechanism is created that strengthens positive brand perceptions as well as an emotional bridge that connects MSMEs with global consumers in a sustainable manner. (2) Micro communities play an important role in creating sustainable customer loyalty through active engagement and strong emotional connections. According to Social Identity Theory, when customers feel they are part of a brand community, they not only make a repurchase but also adopt the brand's values, culture, and identity. This emotional bond encourages them to voluntarily recommend products to others, resulting in a much stronger loyalty than just a short-term discount strategy.

(3) Digital communities significantly reduce customer acquisition costs through the organic network effect, in contrast to paid advertising which requires constant investment. On platforms such as Discord or Reddit, satisfied customers voluntarily act as word-of-mouth promotional agents while providing direct feedback to MSMEs. This approach is much more efficient than mass marketing because at a relatively low cost, active participation of members is able to produce a long-term promotional impact. (4) Interest-based digital communities enable MSMEs to build a global customer ecosystem organically without a physical presence. Through platforms like Reddit or Discord, businesses such as specialty coffee producers or eco-friendly products can interact consistently, educate products, and share production stories to create emotional bonds with international consumers. This strategy is even more effective because the use of


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*user-generated content* in the community is considered much more authentic, relevant, and influential than the company's official promotions.

**Synergy of Micro-Influencers and Micro-Communities as an Integrated Global Branding Ecosystem**

The development of digital marketing has shifted the paradigm of brand communication from a mass approach to a more personal and community-based approach through the synergy of *micro-influencers* and *micro-communities*. *Micro-influencers*, with small followers but high *engagement*, serve as credible communication agents. Meanwhile, *micro-communities* become a space for continuous interaction for audiences with similar interests and values. The integration of the two forms an adaptive, efficient, and organic global branding strategy, which is very relevant for the development of MSMEs.

Conceptually, *micro-influencers* act as an effective "entry point" to reach new audiences personally thanks to the presence of social closeness (*parasocial interaction*). In the context of the global market, they become an emotional and cultural bridge that introduces local products to the international realm at minimal cost. Once brand awareness is formed through *influencers*, the role is relayed to *the micro-community* as a customer retention space. In this community, consumers are actively involved in sharing reviews (*co-creation value*), so that their position shifts from just buyers to brand *advocates*.

This synergy forms a continuous *branding* cycle : *micro-influencers* capture the public's attention, while communities deepen emotional attachment. This collaboration significantly reduces customer acquisition costs because marketing runs organically through digital word-of-mouth recommendations (*e-WOM).* As an illustration, local fashion MSMEs can collaborate with *micro-influencers* on Instagram or TikTok to attract foreign market niches, then direct them to digital forums such as Discord or WhatsApp Groups to build intensive two-way communication.

From the perspective of consumer behavior, this strategy is very successful because it takes advantage of the trust and social identity factor. Modern consumers are much more likely to trust recommendations from *peer-to-peer* individuals as well as community spaces that provide a *sense of belonging* than conventional advertising. For Indonesian MSMEs, this is the main competitive advantage to build an authentic and competitive global image in the international market without having to lose the unique characteristics of their local identity.


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However, the success of this ecosystem demands strategic management and consistent content management. MSME actors must be selective in choosing *micro-influencers* that are in line with brand values, while actively reviving the community so that it is not passive or has a negative impact. Through the proper use of consumer data and two-way communication, the integration of *micro-influencers* and *micro-communities* will be the most rational solution for resource-constrained MSMEs to build a loyal and sustainable global customer base.

**Implementation Challenges and Strategic Recommendations for Indonesian MSMEs**

Real challenges faced by MSMEs include: (1) Low Digital Literacy**.** One of the biggest obstacles faced by Indonesian MSMEs is the low digital literacy among business actors. Many MSME owners, especially in rural areas, do not have basic knowledge and skills in using digital technology, such as social media, e-commerce platforms, and digital financial systems. This condition makes it difficult for them to adopt digital marketing strategies that have actually been proven effective in increasing brand (Masitoh et al., 2025) *awareness* and market reach. A real case study can be seen in Amali Eatery, an F&B MSME in Bandung, which before receiving mentoring had inconsistent social media content, unattractive captions, and did not use relevant *hashtags*, all due to a lack of understanding of digital strategies. This is a general picture experienced by many MSMEs in Indonesia. (Sutina et al., 2025)

(2) Content Consistency That Is Difficult to Maintain**.** Creating content is easy, but keeping it consistent is a challenge in itself. Many MSMEs upload content unscheduled, use non-uniform visuals, and do not have a clear content direction. Without consistency, audiences find it difficult to recognize the brand identity of an MSME, and social media platform algorithms won't help expand the reach of that content. This consistency is also related to the limitation of human resources. MSMEs are generally run by a few people, so digital marketing is often done in passing, without a structured strategy. (3) Limited Capital and Infrastructure (Sutina et al., 2025) (Sitompul et al., 2025) **.** Digital transformation requires investment, from devices, training, to paid advertising costs. For most MSMEs, especially micro businesses, this expense feels heavy. Not to mention the uneven condition of internet infrastructure, especially in rural areas and remote areas (Sitompul et al., 2025) . As a result, MSMEs in cities and villages have a considerable digital skills gap, and this is a real barrier to the equitable distribution of MSME digital growth nationally.



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(4) Brand Credibility That Has Not Been Built**.** MSMEs that have just entered the digital world often face trust problems from consumers. Without a strong brand identity starting from logos, colors, taglines, to consistent communication tones, potential customers will hesitate to choose MSME products over more well-known brands. This is referred to as weak *brand awareness* and *brand credibility* (Sutina et al., 2025) . In the context of global branding, this challenge is even greater because MSMEs must be able to appear convincing not only in the local market, but also compete with brands from abroad that already have a mature digital identity (Anggraeni Bakhtiar, 2026) . (5) Resistance to Change**.** Many MSME actors, especially the older generation, feel comfortable with the way they are used to selling. The adoption of new technologies is considered complicated, risky, and unnecessary. This cultural resistance is one of the non-technical obstacles that is quite difficult to overcome (Anggraeni Bakhtiar, 2026) . Without a change *in mindset* from within, no amount of advanced training and facilities will have a significant impact. (6) Lack of Regulatory and Policy Support**.** Regulations that do not fully support the digitalization of MSMEs are also a barrier. Complicated e-commerce tax policies, lack of incentives for MSMEs that want to go digital, and the lack of adequate data protection make many MSME actors increasingly hesitant to move into the digital realm (Putri Andita et al., 2025).

Strategic recommendations that can be made include: (1) Structured and Sustainable Digital Literacy Training. The most basic solution is to provide an easily accessible digital literacy training program, especially for MSMEs in areas that have been less affordable. This training should teach not only how to use the platform, but also content strategies, simple copywriting, and how to read performance data. The real results can be seen from the case of Amali Eatery, where after receiving assistance for 90 days, her Instagram engagement rate increased from 1.12% to 4.9%, and her TikTok, which was originally 0%, managed to reach 4.0% (2) Mentoring, Not Just Training (Sitompul et al., 2025) (Sutina et al., 2025). **.** One-time training is not enough. MSMEs need continuous assistance so that the knowledge gained can really be applied. The *capstone project* model as applied in Amali Eatery's mentoring where students or consultants are directly involved in helping MSMEs can be an effective and scalable model. This approach combines theory with real practice, so that the results are more pronounced. (Sutina et al., 2025)

(3) Building a Strong Brand Identity From the Beginning**.** Before being aggressive on social media, MSMEs need to have a clear brand identity. It includes a consistent logo, color palette, font, tagline, and *tone of voice* in communicating with customers. The



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rebranding done to Amali Eatery changed the color scheme to a warmer *earth tone* and adjusted the typography proved to help create a more professional and recognizable image (Sutina et al., 2025) . A strong brand foundation is a key requirement to be able to compete at a wider level, including the global market. (4) Gradual adoption of digital strategies**.** MSMEs do not have to directly use all platforms and technologies at once. The gradual approach is much more realistic and effective: starting from building a presence on social media to build *awareness*, then entering e-commerce for product distribution, then using a digital CRM (*Customer Relationship Management*) system to maintain customer loyalty. With a clear sequence, MSMEs can learn while growing without having to be overwhelmed. (Anggraeni Bakhtiar, 2026).

(5) Utilizing Collaboration and Digital Ecosystem**.** MSMEs do not need to run alone. Collaboration with major digital platforms such as Tokopedia, Shopee, or Bukalapak can help expand market reach quickly. In addition, collaborations with *Key Opinion Leaders* (KOLs) or relevant influencers have also proven effective, such as what Amali Eatery did with *@cooltourindonesia*'s Instagram account which has 26.2 thousand followers, resulting in an 8% increase in followers in just two weeks (Sutina et al., 2025) **.** (6) The role of the Government as the Main Facilitator**.** The government has a very important role in creating an ecosystem conducive to the digitalization of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). The first concrete step that can be taken is to accelerate the development of internet infrastructure in underserved areas to reduce the digital gap between MSMEs in cities and villages. In addition, the government needs to provide fiscal incentives, such as tax breaks or training fee subsidies, for MSMEs that actively adopt digital technology. In order to increase competitiveness, the government must also facilitate halal certification through an easier and more affordable process, especially for MSMEs in areas such as Sulawesi. This step is a strategic differentiation value that meets the *criteria of Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, and Non-substitutable* (VRIN), making it difficult for competitors to imitate while opening up great opportunities in the halal-aware global market. Finally, the government needs to encourage cross-sector collaboration involving educational institutions and digital platforms to design an integrated and targeted mentoring program (7) Integrating Local Values as a Global Power. In the context of (Masitoh et al., 2025). *global branding*, Indonesian MSMEs actually have unique advantages that foreign brands do not have: local wisdom, cultural traditions, and distinctive authentic values. Halal MSMEs in Sulawesi, for example, can build *brand loyalty* by utilizing local stories, typical traditional culinary, and Islamic values through authentic and relatable digital content. These values, if packaged with the right digital


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strategy, can actually become a special attraction in the international market (Anggraeni Bakhtiar, 2026).

## CONCLUSION

The synergy between the credibility of micro-influencers and the depth of interaction within micro-communities offers an efficient digital marketing solution for Indonesian SMEs to reduce customer acquisition costs while breaking into international markets. Despite challenges such as low digital literacy, inconsistent content, limited capital, and brand credibility issues, this global branding strategy can still be continuously optimized. The key lies in structured training and mentoring, strengthening brand identity based on local wisdom, the gradual adoption of technology, and supportive regulations and infrastructure from the government.

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