

# Digital Transformation of Halal Food MSMEs to Increase Competitiveness: A Qualitative Case Study of Makcik Cam Traditional Culinary in Medan

Dian Khairiah, Nur Ahmadi Bi Rahmani, Imsar<sup>1,2,3</sup>

Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara

Correspondence email: diankhairiah317@gmail.com

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## Abstract

Digital transformation has become a key element in increasing the competitiveness of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), especially in the halal culinary sector, which faces challenges adapting to technology and digital market dynamics. This study aims to analyze the implementation of digital transformation in the Makcik Cam MSME, to understand its impact on increasing competitiveness and the strategies implemented in facing the challenges of digitalization. Using a qualitative approach with a strategic case study on the Digital Transformation of Halal Food, data was collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation of the business. This study used inductive thematic analysis. The results show that the digitalization process is carried out gradually through the use of social media, online platforms, and social network-based promotions. However, limited digital literacy, technological infrastructure, and marketing data management are key challenges. This research demonstrates that halal values are appropriate because they ensure that the entire production, distribution, and marketing processes of a product or service meet halal standards established by Islamic law and provide added value to consumers and businesses. This study provides theoretical contributions in developing the concept of locally-based digital transformation and halal values, and offers effectiveness for halal culinary MSMEs in Indonesia.

**Keywords:**Digital Marketing; MSMEs; Halal Food.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation in Indonesia is an effort to transform various aspects of people's and the nation's lives through the adoption and utilization of digital technology. This encompasses transformations across sectors such as public services, the economy, education, and industry, with the goal of improving efficiency, productivity, and quality of life. Advances in digital technology have enabled businesses to reach broader markets, improve operational efficiency, and strengthen relationships with consumers directly through online platforms. The current digital era demonstrates that trade



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activities are no longer limited to specific social or economic groups.(Febriyanti, 2020)Therefore, business actors are required to make various changes in order to develop and maintain the sustainability of their business.(Bakso et al., 2022).

Economic development is reflected in the increase in business activities, including cooperatives and MSMEs, which play an important role in driving economic growth and equality.(Ichsan et al., 2023)In Indonesia, MSMEs play a strategic role in supporting the national economy, contributing 60.5% to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and absorbing more than 97% of the national workforce.(Sidabutar & Siswanto, 2024)However, amidst this enormous potential, MSMEs also face significant challenges in remaining competitive in the rapidly changing digital era, particularly in the halal culinary sector, which is currently experiencing significant growth as a result of increasing awareness among Muslim consumers regarding the halal nature of products.(Salqaura et al., 2023).

Business actors and consumers in Indonesia must be aware of the benefits of implementing the halal industry concept.(Batubara et al., 2022). The halal industry and Indonesia's economic growth have a good and important short-term relationship.(Imsar et al., 2024)Although the halal food market opportunity in Indonesia is enormous, many MSMEs are still unable to optimize the strategic use of digital technology.(Prihandono et al., 2024)Based on existing facts, for business actors producing halal products, registering for certification with the relevant authorities is a strategic step in building consumer trust and encouraging increased purchasing decisions.(Nasution et al., 2020)This strategy aims to increase business competitiveness and create opportunities for businesses to continue operating.(Jannah & Aisyah, Siti, 2024)Limited digital literacy, low access to technological infrastructure, and a lack of systematic support are the main obstacles in the digital transformation process of MSMEs.(Pokhrel, 2024).

The concept of competitive advantage in halal food MSMEs includes aspects of product differentiation, utilization of digital platforms, and integration of halal values in all business processes.(Apriliyanto, 2023)In practice, the success of MSMEs in implementing digital marketing strategies such as the use of social media, collaboration with local celebrities, and changes to online services such as marketplaces has been proven to significantly improve product conditions and sales.(Haque, 2024)Internally, the business benefits from product diversity, strong brand credibility, and market adaptability. Externally, the business faces

growing demand, consumer preferences for unique species, and promotional opportunities through social media.(Competitiveness & Info, 2025).

(Priyo Nugroho et al., 2022)explained that digitalization helps business continuity by increasing sales and revenue in halal culinary during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, research results(Hariani et al., 2024) The research stated that the digitalization of halal food MSMEs through the Go Digital program facilitates consumer reach, network building, and product brand awareness, thereby boosting production efficiency and effectiveness, as well as expanding the market.(Study et al., 2023)shows that digital marketing, brand image and service facilities have a significant positive influence on customer decisions.

#### Digital Transformation

In this era, technology continues to develop rapidly(Nurbaiti Nurbaiti, Asmuni Asmuni, Andri Soemitra, Imsar Imsar, 2023)Digital transformation is recognized as a crucial solution for developing and enhancing the competitiveness of halal MSMEs in Indonesia, particularly amidst unstable economic conditions and increasingly fierce market competition.(Karyani et al., 2021)By utilizing digital technology, halal MSMEs can expand market access, improve operational efficiency, and strengthen consumer trust through halal certification and optimal digital marketing.(Ariani et al., 2022)The government is also encouraging all MSMEs to go digital and obtain halal certification to increase their competitiveness in the global market, in line with efforts to support the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).(Judge, 2021)The government is also encouraging all MSMEs to go digital and obtain halal certification to increase their competitiveness in the global market, in line with efforts to support the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).(Ummah, 2019).

#### Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)

MSMEs (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises) are business sectors run by individuals, groups or business entities with a small to medium scale according to the criteria stipulated in Law Number 20 of 2008.(Nurahmadi Bi Rahmani, Nuri Islami, 2024). MSMEs consist of three categories, namely micro businesses that have a maximum net worth of IDR 50 million and annual sales of IDR 300 million, small businesses with net worth between IDR 50 million and IDR 500 million and annual sales between IDR 300 million and IDR 2.5 billion, and medium businesses that have wealth and sales greater than small businesses but still below large businesses.(Sinaga et al., 2024).

#### Halal Food

Halal food is any type of food and drink that is permissible for consumption according to Islamic teachings, including aspects of its substance, method of preparation, and processing in accordance with Islamic law. Linguistically, halal means "permitted" or "not prohibited," and according to Islamic law, halal food must be derived from halal ingredients and slaughtered or processed in a manner that complies with Islamic law, such as mentioning the name of Allah during slaughter and avoiding impurities or haram ingredients.(Salqaura et al., 2023).

In accordance with Surah Al-Baqarah, which reads:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ كُلُوا مِمَّا فِي الْأَرْضِ حَلَالًا طَيِّبًا وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ

Translation:

"O mankind, eat of what is lawful and pure on earth, and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, Satan is to you a clear enemy." (QS. Al-Baqarah: 168)

This verse teaches Muslims to consume only food and drink that is halal and good (thayyib). This principle is the main foundation of the halal industry, which must ensure that all production, distribution, and consumption processes comply with sharia regulations to maintain halal standards.(Tarigan, 2019).

In Indonesia, with a predominantly Muslim population, halal products are increasingly in demand and are supported by halal certification regulations that guarantee quality and consumer trust. This halal certification is not only crucial for meeting domestic market demand but also opens up export opportunities to the rapidly growing global market. The Indonesian government is actively promoting the development of the halal industry through various programs and awards, such as the 2025 Indonesia Halal Industry Awards (IHYA), which aims to increase the competitiveness and innovation of the national halal sector. However, the development of the halal industry still faces challenges such as increasing halal literacy and product innovation to compete in the digital era and globalization.(Highlights, 2024).

### Competitiveness

According to Porter's (1985) theory of competitiveness, a business can achieve competitive advantage through three main strategies: cost leadership, product differentiation, and focus. A differentiation strategy prioritizes the creation of unique products or services, so that consumers are willing to pay more for the special features offered.(Hilamaya, MP, Mursito, B., & Sarsono, 2021)Meanwhile, a cost leadership strategy focuses on efficiency, enabling a

company to produce goods at a lower cost than competitors, allowing for competitive pricing. A focus strategy is implemented by selecting a specific market segment and serving its needs more effectively than competitors.

Competitiveness refers to the ability of a business or organization to maintain and improve its position in the market by offering superior products or services compared to competitors. (Pambudi, 2022) MSMEs that are able to adapt to technological changes and consumer needs tend to be more competitive than those that still rely on conventional methods.

According to Crown Dirgontoro in (Mohamad & Niode, 2020), competitiveness is a development of the value that can be created to meet the needs of buyers. Factors influencing competitiveness include competition and business strategy, supporting industries and substitute products, local demand conditions, and the role of government and opportunities.

The problem of this research is that many MSMEs do not understand how to optimally utilize digital technology for their businesses. This includes a lack of knowledge about e-commerce platforms, online marketing, data management, and digital transaction security. The digital transformation approach in MSMEs can be explained through a framework that emphasizes the importance of adapting to technological changes to increase competitiveness. This study aims to analyze in depth the digital transformation process implemented by MSME Makcik Cam, a traditional culinary business based on halal values. The focus of this research includes identifying the digital strategies used, their impact on business competitiveness (market expansion, increased sales, and brand strengthening), as well as the challenges and obstacles faced during the digitalization process.

## 2. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study strategy, which aims to understand in depth the digital transformation process at Makcik Cam MSMEs in Medan City in the context of increasing competitiveness in the traditional halal culinary sector. (Purwanto et al., 2020) Makcik Cam's efforts allow researchers to delve into the internal dynamics of MSME digital transformation and the interaction between technology, local culture, and halal values in daily business practices.

The data sources used in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through direct observation at the business location

and in-depth interviews with One respondent, the owner of the Makcik Cam MSME, was Mrs., and six regular consumers were Mrs. Halimah, Mrs. Sintia, Mrs. Mirna, Mrs. Ina, Mr. Rudi, and Mr. Anto. Secondary data was obtained from business documents and reports related to halal food MSMEs as triangulation and analysis support. (Wahyuni & Pudjowati, 2024).

Data collection techniques were carried out using the triangulation method, namely participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. (Yuanitasari et al., 2025) The questions were about how Makcik Cam's MSME is managed and also about the halal status of its products. The inclusion criteria in this study were: (1) the informant is the main actor in the management of Makcik Cam's MSME or a regular consumer who understands the dynamics of changes in the business's marketing strategy; (2) the informant is actively involved in the digitalization process, either directly or as a product user who is affected by the digital strategy. (Salqaura et al., 2023).

The data analysis technique uses the inductive thematic analysis method, as explained by Miles and Huberman, which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification. (Abdul Wahab et al., 2024).

### **3. RESULTS AND FINDINGS ANALYSIS**

#### **Digital Transformation Process in Makcik Cam MSMEs**

The digital transformation of Makcik Cam's MSMEs began gradually in 2018. Initially, the marketing process was carried out conventionally through consignment sales and direct door-to-door sales. However, with the increasing penetration of information technology and market awareness of digital products, business owners began utilizing digital platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and online food ordering services such as GrabFood and Shopee Food. Based on interviews with Makcik Cam MSME business owners, they said that "the use of social media is an important key in expanding the marketing reach of Makcik Cam's traditional cake products, with increased promotional intensity carried out organically through visual content and informal collaborations with local public figures. Documentation shows that business owners have also begun exploring TikTok as a promotional medium in the past two months, which has proven to generate a viral response from consumers."

This finding is consistent with the results of previous studies which stated that the adoption of social media has a significant influence on the efficiency of promotion and distribution in halal food MSMEs in Indonesia. (Salqaura et al.,

2023), as well as providing opportunities to expand market coverage through community-based digital partnerships and online platforms.(Priyono et al., 2020).

### **The Impact of Digital Transformation on Competitiveness**

Digital transformation has been proven to significantly increase Makcik Cam's competitiveness in three main aspects: market expansion, increased sales, and strengthened brand awareness. Information from interviews with Makcik Cam MSME business owners stated that "product sales have consistently increased since digital promotions were carried out, especially during the momentum of Ramadan and religious holidays." Information from interviews with other consumers interviewed, namely Mrs. Ina, said that "Innovation and high product quality make this business a top choice for customers looking for delicious and quality food." The business owner also mentioned that the involvement of local artists and celebrities in voluntarily promoting the product provided a major boost to brand visibility on social media.

In addition, based on the responses of consumers interviewed, namely Mrs. Halimah stated that, "Makcik Cam products are considered to have high quality and taste and are packaged with good hygiene and halal standards, which are key factors in increasing customer loyalty." Another consumer response interviewed, namely Mrs. Mirna, stated that "The food at Makcik Cam is very delicious and the price is affordable and also the presentation of food at Makcik Cam is very neat and appetizing and also the taste of food at Makcik Cam is very distinctive and authentic." This phenomenon is in line with the findings(Wahyuni & Pudjowati, 2024)which shows that digitalization of marketing strategies and halal quality management can strengthen the competitiveness of food MSMEs in local and regional markets. Other research by(Wibowo et al., 2021) also shows that the integration of halal values with digital strategies improves the reputation and sustainability of MSMEs in the national halal ecosystem.

### **Challenges in Implementing Digital Transformation**

Despite positive developments, Makcik Cam's MSMEs face various challenges in implementing digital transformation. The main challenges are limited human resources (HR) with adequate digital literacy, as well as limitations in utilizing data analytics and marketing automation. Based on interviews with MSME owners, Makcik Cam stated that "social media account management is still done manually by business owners, without the support of a team or integrated digital marketing tools. Furthermore, limited technological

infrastructure and additional costs for digital adaptation are also significant obstacles."

This condition is also reflected in a study by (Rohayati & Abdillah, 2024), which states that many MSMEs in Indonesia are not yet fully prepared to adopt digital technology due to limited access, training, and technical assistance. Another consumer response interviewed, namely Mrs. Sintia, stated that "With a combination of high product quality and competitive prices, this food business has strong competitiveness in the market." Challenges in digital halal certification that have not been fully optimized also slow down the integration of digital business processes in the halal food sector. (Yuanitasari et al., 2025). Based on the responses of consumers interviewed, Mr. Anto stated that "This food business has strong competitiveness because it offers a unique menu and competitive prices and with high product quality and good service, this business is able to compete with other food businesses in this area." This shows that the Makcik Cam MSME is developing very well.

### **Adaptive Strategies in Developing Halal Food MSMEs**

In response to these challenges, Makcik Cam's MSMEs implemented flexible, adaptive strategies. One of these strategies is leveraging social networks, both with consumers and Instagram celebrities, to promote organically without additional costs. Based on interviews with consumers, Ms. Mirna stated that "this business maintains consistent product quality, especially in terms of taste, halal certification, and cleanliness, as a form of differentiation from competitors." This strategy allows Makcik Cam to maintain traditional characteristics while remaining relevant amidst modern food trends. Based on the responses of consumers interviewed, Mr. Rudi stated that "The quality of the food at this business is very high, with fresh ingredients and neat presentation. And friendly and professional service makes customers feel appreciated and want to return."

This finding confirms the research results (Dewi & Hakiki, 2023), which emphasizes the importance of social and cultural collaboration in shaping digital strategies for MSMEs based on local uniqueness. In the context of digitalizing halal MSMEs, a differentiation strategy based on cultural and spiritual values is key to building a strong brand identity in the digital era. (Kurniawan et al., 2020).

## **4. DISCUSSION**

The results of the study indicate that the digital transformation process undertaken by the Makcik Cam MSME has had a significant impact on increasing competitiveness, in line with the main objective of this study, which is to identify the implementation of digital transformation and its impact on traditional halal culinary businesses. The implemented strategies, such as utilizing social media,



informal collaboration with Instagram celebrities, and adopting online delivery platforms, have successfully expanded the market and increased brand awareness. Furthermore, despite facing various obstacles such as limited digital literacy and inadequate technological infrastructure, Makcik Cam has been able to capitalize on digitalization opportunities with an adaptive approach based on cultural values and halal standards.

Within the theoretical framework of digital transformation in MSMEs, these findings emphasize that digitalization is not merely a technical issue, but also reflects structural changes in how businesses manage marketing, production, and interactions with consumers. (Prihandono et al., 2024) confirms that digital transformation plays a significant mediating role between digital strategy and market complexity in improving the performance of MSMEs in Indonesia. Competitiveness theory in the context of halal food also positions the integration of religious values as a difficult-to-imitate differentiating advantage, which in the case of Makcik Cam is reflected in the commitment to maintaining product quality and halal certification. This research supports the theory that differentiation based on cultural values and halal certification can be a competitive advantage that is difficult for competitors to imitate, thus supporting the concept of a value-based economy and competitive advantage. In addition, digitalization as a technological tool increases efficiency and expands markets, in line with digital economic theory, which enables small businesses to remain competitive through technological innovation and adaptation.

When compared with previous studies, the findings in this study show a consistent pattern but in a more specific context. (Adnyana & Iswanto, 2021) For example, a study found that culinary MSMEs in Karawang are also undergoing digital transformation through social media and online platforms. However, their biggest challenges lie in the intensity of digital competition and the lack of adaptation in narrative- and visual-based online promotional strategies. Unlike Makcik Cam, which relies on the power of local narratives and organic consumer testimonials, other MSMEs rely heavily on paid promotions and aggressive approaches that do not always align with the halal values or authenticity of traditional products. The study by (Janah et al., 2022) also emphasized the importance of a cultural value-based marketing strategy to maintain the sustainability of traditional halal culinary businesses amidst the onslaught of modern food, an approach also adopted by Makcik Cam in maintaining Malay identity as a key differentiator.

The scientific contribution of this article lies in its in-depth understanding of the local and cultural contexts of the digitalization process of halal food MSMEs. Unlike previous research, which was more macro- or conceptual in nature, this study provides a concrete, field-based illustration of how digital transformation is pragmatically implemented by small businesses with limited resources, yet still capable of generating a significant impact on their existence and growth. This enriches the literature on

adaptive strategies in the digitalization of traditional MSMEs and can serve as a basis for developing policy intervention models based on local wisdom and religious values.

Based on these findings, there are several important implications to consider. For researchers, this study opens up space for further exploration of the integration of digitalization with cultural identity and halal compliance in MSMEs across Indonesia. For business owners, an adaptive approach like Makcik Cam's demonstrates that digital transformation can be achieved without significant capital, by maximizing social networks and the power of online communities. For the government and policymakers, these results underscore the need for affirmative policies that support digital literacy training, incentives for Sharia-compliant digital platforms, and facilitating access to technological infrastructure for traditional businesses.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the digital transformation undertaken by the Makcik Cam MSME in Medan City has significantly contributed to increasing the competitiveness of traditional halal-based culinary businesses. Through the use of digital platforms such as social media, online delivery services, and organic social network-based promotional strategies, this business has successfully expanded its market, increased sales volume, and strengthened its brand image among consumers. The findings also reveal that this digital transformation process is gradual and adaptive, tailored to the capacity of available resources and the cultural and religious values inherent in business practices. On the other hand, several challenges such as limited digital literacy, limited technological infrastructure, and suboptimal use of digital data remain obstacles to accelerating this transformation.

This research makes a significant contribution to the development of digital transformation studies for halal MSMEs, particularly in the traditional culinary sector. Theoretically, this study emphasizes the importance of integrating digital strategies and differentiation based on cultural and halal values as the foundation of competitive advantage in the digital economy. Its practical contribution lies in providing a concrete model of how MSMEs with limited resources can still effectively implement technology-based innovation through an adaptive and community-based approach. Conceptually, this article broadens the understanding of digital transformation in the context of MSMEs, which is oriented not only towards operational efficiency but also towards preserving local identity and spiritual values in business.

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**Dian Khairiah, Nur Ahmadi Bi Rahmani, Imsar.** Writing original draft preparation. Ideas; formulation or evolution of overarching research goals and aims.

#### CONFLICT OF INTERESTS:

We state that there are no known conflicts of interest associated with this publication, and that there has been no significant financial assistance for this work that could have influenced its outcome.

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