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Business Growth Strategy Through Digital Marketing Optimization at Tobaland Garment Factory

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Abstract

This study examines the implementation of business growth strategies through digital marketing optimization at Tobaland Convection, a localized garment and souvenir MSME located in the Lake Toba tourism area, Indonesia. The research employed an empirical participatory approach integrating direct mentoring, observation, semi-structured interviews, documentation, and reflective monitoring conducted over a two-month intervention period. The findings revealed a substantial transformation from intermediary-based conventional marketing toward direct digital engagement through Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and non-cash transaction systems. Digital content optimization strengthened market visibility, consumer interaction, and branding consistency by integrating visual storytelling and culturally embedded promotional narratives. The study also identified several structural constraints affecting sustainability, including limited digital literacy, inconsistent content management practices, logistical distribution barriers, and restricted adoption of digital financial systems. Participatory mentoring activities contributed significantly to strengthening entrepreneurial adaptability, strategic communication awareness, and operational confidence in managing digital platforms. The study concludes that sustainable MSME digital transformation depends on the integration of contextual adaptation, managerial learning, technological accessibility, and participatory empowerment strategies capable of aligning digital innovation with localized business realities.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, MSME Transformation, Business Growth, Participatory Mentoring, Strategic Communication.



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INTRODUCTION

The acceleration of digital transformation within the global economic landscape has fundamentally reconfigured the operational logic of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), particularly in relation to marketing practices, consumer engagement, and competitive positioning, where the increasing penetration of internet infrastructure and platform-based economies has shifted business growth strategies from product-centered orientation toward digitally mediated interaction ecosystems. Within this transition, digital marketing is no longer perceived merely as a supplementary promotional instrument, but rather as a strategic architecture through which enterprises construct visibility, market legitimacy, and adaptive resilience amid volatile market conditions. Contemporary discourse surrounding MSME development increasingly emphasizes the urgency of integrating social media ecosystems, data-driven promotion, and digital transaction systems into localized business models, especially in developing economies where conventional marketing structures often limit scalability and market reach. In Indonesia, the state has actively positioned MSME digitalization as a national economic agenda through various transformation programs aimed at strengthening productivity and market competitiveness in the digital era (Kementerian Koperasi dan Usaha Kecil dan Menengah Republik Indonesia, 2022). This macro-level policy orientation reflects a broader recognition that digital capability constitutes a decisive determinant of business sustainability, particularly for creative and culturally embedded industries whose market expansion potential relies heavily on visual communication and platform accessibility.

Existing studies have demonstrated that the adoption of digital marketing strategies contributes significantly to increasing MSME competitiveness, consumer engagement, and market penetration, although the effectiveness of such transformation varies substantially depending on organizational

readiness, technological literacy, and contextual adaptability. Research conducted by Arumsari et al. (2022) revealed that technology-based digital marketing enables MSMEs to reduce promotional costs while simultaneously expanding customer outreach through social media integration and digital communication channels. Parallel findings from Asyiffa et al. (2024) further indicated that digital marketing strategies strengthen business competitiveness by enhancing branding capacity and accelerating interaction between producers and consumers within highly dynamic commercial environments. More practice-oriented studies within community empowerment frameworks have also shown that social media optimization and marketplace utilization can stimulate measurable sales growth among small-scale convection businesses and creative industries (Sidqi et al., 2024; Wahyudi, 2025). Nevertheless, these studies collectively suggest that the success of digital transformation does not solely derive from technological adoption itself, but rather from the extent to which MSMEs are capable of strategically integrating digital tools into their broader business growth orientation, including communication management, visual branding consistency, and consumer relationship construction.

Despite the growing body of literature concerning MSME digitalization, substantial conceptual and empirical limitations remain insufficiently addressed, particularly regarding the uneven nature of digital adaptation among geographically peripheral enterprises and the tendency of prior studies to reduce digital marketing into narrowly technical dimensions detached from socio-spatial realities. Most existing research predominantly focuses on training effectiveness, platform utilization rates, or short-term promotional outcomes without critically examining how structural constraints such as geographical isolation, distribution inefficiencies, and localized digital literacy shape the sustainability of digital marketing implementation itself (Firdausiyah & Rusdianto, 2025). Concurrently, the majority of studies position MSMEs as passive recipients of technological intervention rather than active agents negotiating complex operational realities within hybrid marketing systems. Maimuna et al. (2024) identified that low digital literacy and limited technological understanding remain central barriers to digital economic transformation, yet the study stopped short of exploring how these barriers interact with specific business characteristics, consumer behavior patterns, and localized infrastructural limitations. Similar tendencies can also be identified within training-centered community service studies that emphasize intervention outputs while underexploring long-term strategic adaptation processes at the enterprise level (Thahira et al., 2025). Such gaps indicate the need for a more context-sensitive and process-oriented analytical framework capable of explaining digital marketing implementation not merely as technological migration, but as an adaptive transformation embedded within specific economic, geographic, and organizational realities.

The unresolved tension between the normative promise of digital transformation and the practical limitations experienced by local MSMEs generates an urgent scientific and practical problem that requires deeper investigation, particularly for businesses operating within tourism-oriented peripheral regions where market dependency, logistical costs, and infrastructural disparities significantly influence commercial sustainability. Convection-based enterprises such as Tobaland occupy a unique position within this dynamic because their products possess strong visual commodification potential that aligns closely with digital marketing logic, yet their operational environment simultaneously exposes them to distributional and technological vulnerabilities that conventional digitalization narratives frequently overlook. This condition becomes increasingly critical considering that many MSMEs continue to rely heavily on intermediary-based marketing structures, limiting both business autonomy and direct consumer engagement despite the availability of accessible digital communication platforms. Community service initiatives oriented toward digital marketing optimization therefore cannot be reduced to technical assistance alone, but must instead be understood as strategic empowerment processes capable of restructuring business interaction patterns, improving market independence, and strengthening adaptive entrepreneurial capacity within rapidly evolving digital economies. The absence of empirically grounded studies examining how localized MSMEs navigate this transition within real operational contexts creates a significant gap between policy ambition and implementation reality.

Within this intellectual landscape, the present study positions itself not merely as an evaluative examination of digital marketing utilization, but as a critical inquiry into how strategic digital adaptation operates within the specific context of a locally embedded convection enterprise undergoing transitional transformation from intermediary-dependent marketing toward direct consumer engagement systems. Unlike previous studies that predominantly emphasize generalized training outcomes or platform adoption metrics, this study focuses on the relational interaction between technological adaptation,

business growth strategies, and contextual operational constraints experienced by Tobaland Convection as a tourism-oriented MSME located in the Lake Toba region. The study also departs from dominant techno-centric perspectives by situating digital marketing as a socially negotiated process shaped by visual product characteristics, entrepreneurial adaptability, logistical realities, and evolving consumer communication patterns. In methodological terms, the integration of qualitative case study inquiry with direct mentoring engagement allows this research to capture the lived transformation process of MSME digitalization in a more holistic and intervention-oriented manner, reflecting the practical complexity often absent from conventional quantitative assessments of digital marketing effectiveness. The use of participatory observation and sustained assistance further strengthens the analytical capacity of this study to examine not only outcomes, but also the adaptive mechanisms underlying strategic business transformation within localized MSME environments (Anebelle & Ramadhan, 2025).

This study aims to analyze the business growth strategy implemented through the optimization of digital marketing within Tobaland Convection while simultaneously identifying the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing its implementation process in a geographically peripheral MSME setting. The research contributes theoretically by extending contemporary discussions on MSME digital transformation beyond platform adoption narratives toward a more contextualized understanding of adaptive digital marketing practices embedded within localized business realities. Methodologically, the study contributes through the integration of participatory mentoring and qualitative case-based inquiry as an intervention-oriented analytical model capable of capturing dynamic transformation processes in community-based entrepreneurial settings.

RESEARCH METHODS

This community service program employed an empirical participatory approach conducted at Tobaland Convection, a small-scale garment and souvenir business located in Tomok Parsaoran Village, Simanindo District, Samosir Regency, North Sumatra, Indonesia. The target community consisted of the business owner and operational actors directly involved in the production and marketing processes of the enterprise. The program was designed as an intervention-oriented digital marketing assistance initiative aimed at strengthening business growth capacity through the optimization of social media utilization, direct digital communication systems, and basic non-cash transaction mechanisms. The implementation process was carried out over a two-month period through several integrated stages, including preliminary observation to identify operational and marketing constraints, needs assessment through participatory discussions with business actors, preparation of digital marketing strategies tailored to the characteristics of the business, direct mentoring in the use of Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp as marketing channels, and continuous monitoring of the adaptation process during implementation. The participatory nature of the program enabled the business actors to become actively involved not only as beneficiaries, but also as collaborative partners in determining strategic priorities aligned with their operational realities and market conditions.

Empirical evaluation data were collected through direct observation, semi-structured interviews, documentation, and reflective monitoring during the mentoring process. The evaluation focused on measuring changes in marketing practices, digital engagement capacity, and business interaction patterns before and after the implementation of the program. Several indicators were used to assess program effectiveness, including the establishment of direct communication channels with consumers through WhatsApp, increased utilization of social media platforms for product promotion, improvement in digital content management practices, expansion of customer reach beyond conventional souvenir distribution networks, and the adoption of non-cash payment mechanisms through bank transfer systems. Qualitative analysis was applied to interpret behavioral changes, adaptive responses, and operational challenges experienced by the business actors throughout the intervention process. The evaluation process was conducted collaboratively through periodic reflection sessions involving both facilitators and community partners to ensure that the implemented strategies remained contextually relevant, sustainable, and responsive to the actual needs of the enterprise.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Digital Marketing Transformation and Business Adaptation at Tobaland Convection

The mentoring program revealed that Tobaland Convection initially relied on intermediary-based distribution systems centered around souvenir vendors operating within the Lake Toba tourism area.

This marketing structure limited direct interaction between producers and consumers, resulting in weak customer retention and low brand recognition. Field observations during the preliminary assessment phase indicated that promotional activities were conducted informally without strategic content planning or audience segmentation. Similar structural limitations among local convection-based MSMEs were identified by Bayhaqi et al. (2024), who argued that dependency on traditional sales channels reduces adaptive competitiveness in digitally mediated markets.

The implementation phase demonstrated gradual changes in marketing behavior after the introduction of participatory digital marketing assistance through Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp Business. Business actors began to understand the importance of visual consistency, product presentation, and communication responsiveness in attracting digital consumers. Interview findings showed that product inquiries increased after the publication of short-form promotional videos emphasizing local cultural aesthetics embedded in Tobaland products. The role of social media optimization in strengthening consumer engagement aligns with findings reported by Arindra et al. (2025), particularly regarding the effectiveness of TikTok-based promotional communication in increasing product visibility among small-scale enterprises.

The adaptation process was not exclusively technological but also behavioral, particularly concerning the transition from passive selling patterns toward proactive digital engagement strategies. During the mentoring sessions, business actors experienced initial difficulties in producing structured visual content because previous marketing practices depended almost entirely on direct offline distribution. Reflective monitoring indicated that content creation skills improved after iterative guidance involving product photography, caption formulation, and hashtag optimization. Laily et al. (2025) emphasized that creative content management constitutes a central determinant in strengthening MSME competitiveness within platform-driven digital environments.



Figure 1. The Process of Pressing Screen-Printed Stickers onto T-Shirts

The production process documented during field observation also revealed that operational activities possessed strong visual storytelling potential capable of supporting digital branding strategies. Figure 1 regarding the screen-printing sticker press process can be placed in this fourth paragraph because it directly illustrates the production authenticity highlighted during content development activities. Business actors increasingly utilized production-stage documentation as part of social media narratives intended to strengthen perceptions of craftsmanship quality and local product identity. This finding supports the argument proposed by Setia and Barkah (2022), who explained that visual authenticity significantly contributes to expanding audience reach and engagement in social media-based marketing ecosystems.

The mentoring intervention also encouraged the restructuring of communication patterns between business actors and consumers through the use of WhatsApp as a direct ordering platform. Prior to the intervention, customer communication remained mediated through resellers, limiting opportunities for relationship-based marketing practices and personalized service interactions. Observational data indicated that consumers responded positively to direct communication because they could customize orders and obtain immediate product information. Deri et al. (2025) noted that interactive communication systems represent an important dimension of digital marketing effectiveness because they strengthen consumer trust and transactional efficiency simultaneously.

An important transformation emerged from the increasing awareness among business actors regarding the strategic role of branding consistency in digital competition. Initial observations revealed that Tobaland products lacked a cohesive visual identity despite possessing strong ethnic and cultural uniqueness associated with Lake Toba tourism narratives. Mentoring activities subsequently focused on integrating logo placement, visual tone consistency, and product storytelling within digital promotional content. Ardissa et al. (2025) argued that MSME competitiveness in convection industries increasingly depends on the ability to combine marketing digitalization with strategic brand positioning capable of differentiating products within saturated online marketplaces.

The participatory approach used throughout the program generated stronger adaptive commitment because business actors were directly involved in identifying marketing constraints and determining implementation priorities. This collaborative dynamic reduced resistance toward technological adaptation since the intervention process was perceived as contextually relevant rather than externally imposed. Reflective interviews demonstrated that business actors became more confident in operating social media platforms independently after repeated mentoring and evaluation sessions. The effectiveness of participatory mentoring in strengthening entrepreneurial adaptability was similarly emphasized by Handayani et al. (2025), particularly within community-based convection business transformation programs.

The following table summarizes the transformation indicators identified during the implementation of the digital marketing optimization program at Tobaland Convection. The data were generated through observation records, mentoring evaluations, and communication monitoring conducted during the two-month intervention process. The table demonstrates that digital adaptation occurred progressively across marketing communication, promotional strategy, and transaction management dimensions. Kartika et al. (2026) highlighted that measurable changes in content marketing behavior frequently indicate the emergence of sustainable digital adaptation capacity among local MSMEs.

Table 1. Transformation of Digital Marketing Practices and Business Communication Systems at Tobaland Convection Before and After the Mentoring Program

Transformation Aspect	Initial Condition	Post-Intervention Condition
Marketing System	Dependent on souvenir vendors	Direct consumer communication via WhatsApp
Promotional Media	Offline and reseller-based	Instagram and TikTok utilization
Content Management	Unstructured product promotion	Visual content planning and scheduling
Consumer Interaction	Indirect and passive	Interactive and responsive communication
Payment System	Cash transactions dominant	Bank transfer-based non-cash transactions

The findings presented in Table 1 indicate that digital transformation within MSMEs should not be interpreted merely as technological migration but as an organizational adaptation process involving communication restructuring, identity formation, and consumer relationship expansion. The improvement in direct customer interaction demonstrated that digital platforms enabled business actors to gain stronger control over marketing processes previously dominated by intermediaries. Qualitative monitoring also revealed that consumers perceived the business as more credible after social media

accounts became consistently active and visually organized. Mahendra and Prastian (2025) similarly observed that marketing strategy refinement within convection enterprises significantly contributes to improving business competitiveness and customer trust formation.

Another important finding concerns the selective nature of platform adoption within localized MSME environments. Although social media utilization developed considerably during the mentoring process, marketplace integration remained limited due to geographical distribution challenges and relatively high shipping costs. Business actors considered that large-scale e-commerce competition would reduce pricing competitiveness because logistic expenses substantially affected final product prices. Airadiansah and Kaniawati (2025) explained that business planning strategies among convection enterprises must remain adaptive to operational realities, particularly concerning cost structures and market accessibility constraints.

The overall transformation observed at Tobaland Convection demonstrates that digital marketing optimization within localized MSMEs requires context-sensitive adaptation rather than standardized technological replication. The intervention process generated meaningful behavioral and operational changes because digital strategies were aligned with the enterprise's production characteristics, market orientation, and organizational readiness. Continuous mentoring, reflective evaluation, and participatory decision-making became decisive factors supporting the sustainability of the transformation process. Anebelle and Ramadhan (2025) emphasized that qualitative participatory approaches possess strong analytical relevance in capturing adaptive social processes occurring within community-based economic transformation initiatives.

The Role of Digital Content Strategy in Expanding Market Reach and Consumer Engagement

The implementation of digital content strategies at Tobaland Convection demonstrated a significant shift in the enterprise's approach toward market communication and audience targeting. Prior to the mentoring intervention, promotional efforts were conducted sporadically without structured planning, resulting in limited consumer engagement and weak digital visibility. Observational findings revealed that product uploads were previously inconsistent and lacked persuasive narratives capable of strengthening consumer interest. Arumsari et al. (2022) explained that MSMEs frequently experience stagnation in digital promotion because social media is often utilized only as a display platform rather than as an integrated communication strategy.

During the mentoring process, the business actors were introduced to content categorization techniques involving product showcases, production documentation, customer testimonials, and cultural storytelling related to Lake Toba identity. This strategy generated stronger audience interaction because promotional materials became more emotionally engaging and visually coherent. Monitoring data indicated that posts incorporating local cultural aesthetics received higher levels of consumer response compared to purely transactional promotional uploads. Wiratmani and Nugeroho (2025) emphasized that digital marketing effectiveness within convection industries depends substantially on the ability to combine product promotion with narrative-based branding approaches capable of strengthening emotional consumer attachment.

The increasing use of TikTok as a promotional medium contributed significantly to expanding audience reach among younger consumers interested in localized fashion products. Business actors initially perceived TikTok as an entertainment-oriented platform unsuitable for small-scale business promotion, yet mentoring sessions gradually shifted this perception through practical demonstrations of algorithm-based content dissemination. Short-form videos documenting product packaging, screen-printing activities, and customer orders generated measurable increases in profile visits and direct communication inquiries. The effectiveness of TikTok-oriented digital communication strategies among MSMEs was also highlighted by Arindra et al. (2025), particularly concerning the acceleration of brand awareness development within highly competitive online environments.

Content optimization activities also focused on improving visual consistency across Instagram feeds and story features to strengthen professional business impressions. Prior observations indicated that inconsistent image quality and irregular posting schedules weakened audience retention and reduced algorithmic visibility. Mentoring sessions encouraged business actors to implement simple visual branding principles, including color consistency, logo placement, and caption uniformity. Firdausiyah and Rusdianto (2025) argued that structured digital marketing practices enhance the

credibility of MSMEs because audiences increasingly evaluate professionalism through visual presentation quality in digital environments.



Figure 2. The Process of Packing Souvenir T-Shirts

The operational activities documented during the product packaging process became another important component of digital storytelling strategies introduced during the mentoring intervention. Figure 2 concerning the Tobaland shirt packaging process can be placed in this fifth paragraph because it directly illustrates the visual operational narrative utilized in promotional content development. Consumers demonstrated stronger engagement toward behind-the-scenes production content because such materials conveyed perceptions of authenticity, craftsmanship, and product reliability. Sidqi et al. (2024) similarly found that operational transparency presented through digital media contributes positively to increasing consumer confidence in convection-based MSME products.

An important behavioral change identified during the program involved the emergence of strategic awareness regarding audience interaction management. Before the intervention, business actors rarely responded promptly to customer inquiries because digital communication was not perceived as a critical business component. Reflective monitoring showed that response speed improved substantially after mentoring activities emphasized the relationship between communication responsiveness and customer conversion potential. Asyiffa et al. (2024) noted that digital competitiveness among MSMEs increasingly depends on the ability to maintain interactive and responsive communication systems capable of sustaining consumer trust within online transaction ecosystems.

The mentoring program also revealed that digital marketing effectiveness was closely related to the capacity of business actors to understand audience preferences and platform-specific communication dynamics. Instagram audiences responded more positively to aesthetically organized product catalogs, whereas TikTok audiences demonstrated stronger engagement toward informal and process-oriented video content. This differentiation encouraged business actors to adapt promotional strategies according to platform characteristics rather than replicating identical content across multiple channels. Wahyudi (2025) explained that platform-sensitive promotional strategies increase MSME communication effectiveness because consumer interaction patterns differ significantly between digital ecosystems.

The following table presents qualitative indicators related to changes in digital engagement capacity and audience interaction patterns observed during the implementation of the content optimization strategy. The evaluation data were compiled from communication records, platform

monitoring, and reflective observations conducted throughout the mentoring process. The table demonstrates that content management improvements generated measurable changes in audience responsiveness and communication intensity. Kementerian Koperasi dan Usaha Kecil dan Menengah Republik Indonesia (2022) identified digital engagement strengthening as one of the central indicators of successful MSME digital transformation initiatives.

Table 2. Changes in Digital Engagement Indicators of Tobaland Convection Before and After Digital Marketing Optimization Intervention

Digital Engagement Indicator	Initial Condition	Post-Intervention Condition
Posting Consistency	Irregular uploads	Scheduled weekly content uploads
Audience Interaction	Minimal consumer response	Increased comments and direct messages
Promotional Content	Product display only	Storytelling and production-based content
Consumer Communication	Delayed response patterns	Faster and more interactive communication
Brand Visibility	Limited local exposure	Wider online audience reach

The data presented in Table 2 indicate that structured content strategies contributed not only to increasing audience reach but also to strengthening relational communication between business actors and consumers. Observational findings demonstrated that customers who engaged repeatedly with content were more likely to conduct direct inquiries and recommend products to others through personal networks. The emergence of interaction-based promotion patterns reflects the transformation of social media from passive advertising spaces into participatory communication environments. Kartika et al. (2026) argued that sustainable MSME growth increasingly relies on content marketing strategies capable of integrating consumer participation and digital interaction simultaneously.

The mentoring process also highlighted the importance of adaptive learning mechanisms in strengthening digital marketing sustainability among localized MSMEs. Business actors initially depended heavily on facilitator guidance during content creation and platform operation activities, yet gradual improvements in technical confidence became evident throughout the implementation phase. Semi-structured interviews revealed that repeated practical exposure generated stronger willingness to independently explore platform features and promotional experimentation. Thahira et al. (2025) emphasized that continuous experiential learning constitutes a critical component in strengthening long-term digital literacy among small-scale business communities.

Another analytical finding concerns the relationship between cultural product identity and digital market differentiation. Tobaland products possessed distinctive visual elements associated with Batak cultural symbolism and tourism identity, enabling the enterprise to occupy a niche market segment less vulnerable to direct price competition. The mentoring intervention therefore focused not only on increasing promotional intensity but also on strengthening symbolic differentiation through digital narratives emphasizing locality and authenticity. Syahnas and Wahyu (2025) explained that strategic differentiation based on localized identity represents an important competitive development approach for convection enterprises operating within increasingly saturated digital markets.

The overall findings indicate that digital content optimization within Tobaland Convection functioned as a multidimensional strategy encompassing branding development, consumer interaction enhancement, and market expansion simultaneously. The effectiveness of the intervention emerged not from technological sophistication alone but from the contextual integration of visual storytelling, platform adaptation, and participatory learning processes aligned with the enterprise’s operational realities. Digital communication gradually transformed from an auxiliary promotional activity into a strategic business instrument shaping customer relationships and competitive positioning. Maimuna et al. (2024) emphasized that successful digital transformation within MSMEs depends substantially on

the interaction between technological accessibility, adaptive entrepreneurial behavior, and contextually relevant implementation strategies.

Constraints, Sustainability Challenges, and Strategic Directions for Digital Business Growth

The implementation of digital marketing optimization at Tobaland Convection revealed that technological adaptation among localized MSMEs remains strongly influenced by structural, geographical, and organizational constraints that extend beyond technical platform accessibility. Although business actors demonstrated increasing willingness to adopt digital communication systems, several operational limitations continued to affect the sustainability and scalability of the transformation process. Reflective monitoring conducted during the mentoring program showed that digital adoption frequently progressed unevenly because technological readiness did not automatically correspond with managerial preparedness. Maimuna et al. (2024) explained that entrepreneurial digital transformation is often constrained by the interaction between limited technological literacy, infrastructural disparities, and weak organizational adaptation capacity.

One of the most significant barriers identified during the implementation process concerned the limited ability of business actors to consistently manage digital content production over extended periods. Initial enthusiasm toward social media utilization gradually encountered practical challenges related to time allocation, content planning, and creative exhaustion caused by overlapping production responsibilities. Semi-structured interviews revealed that the business owner frequently prioritized operational production activities over digital communication management during periods of increased customer demand. Thahira et al. (2025) argued that MSMEs commonly experience sustainability difficulties in digital marketing implementation because content management requires continuous strategic attention rather than incidental promotional activity.

The challenge of maintaining digital consistency became increasingly visible in relation to audience engagement fluctuations across social media platforms. Monitoring data indicated that interaction levels tended to decline during periods when upload frequency decreased or visual presentation quality became inconsistent. This condition demonstrated that algorithm-based digital ecosystems demand continuous adaptation and active participation to sustain market visibility. Setia and Barkah (2022) emphasized that social media optimization strategies require systematic scheduling and engagement management because platform algorithms reward consistency and audience interaction intensity.

Geographical conditions also emerged as a substantial structural obstacle affecting the expansion potential of Tobaland Convection within broader national digital marketplaces. The enterprise's location within the Lake Toba tourism region created logistical disadvantages associated with relatively high shipping costs compared to urban-based competitors operating closer to distribution centers. Business actors expressed concerns that participation in large-scale marketplace ecosystems could reduce pricing competitiveness because transportation expenses significantly increased final product costs. Airadiansah and Kaniawati (2025) explained that convection business development strategies must account for operational distribution realities because geographic constraints frequently influence market accessibility and competitive positioning.

The persistence of limited digital financial integration also reflected broader challenges concerning technological adaptation within community-based enterprises. Although bank transfer systems were gradually adopted during the mentoring process, QRIS implementation had not yet been fully integrated due to limited understanding among local consumers and business actors regarding digital transaction systems. Observational findings indicated that many transactions still relied on conventional payment preferences because customers perceived digital payment methods as unfamiliar or complicated. Kementerian Koperasi dan Usaha Kecil dan Menengah Republik Indonesia (2022) identified financial digitalization gaps as one of the central challenges hindering comprehensive MSME transformation within emerging digital economies.

The mentoring intervention further demonstrated that sustainable digital transformation requires stronger managerial integration between marketing strategy, operational planning, and business development orientation. Initial observations revealed that Tobaland Convection operated primarily through reactive business patterns focused on short-term sales fulfillment rather than long-term strategic positioning. Mentoring activities consequently encouraged business actors to begin organizing promotional schedules, customer communication archives, and simple performance monitoring systems

to strengthen strategic decision-making. Majid et al. (2025) argued that integrated management strategies involving marketing, branding, and operational coordination significantly improve MSME growth sustainability within competitive business environments.

The following table summarizes the principal constraints and strategic responses identified during the implementation and evaluation stages of the digital marketing optimization program. The data were compiled through participatory reflection sessions, field observations, and communication evaluations conducted collaboratively with business actors. The table demonstrates that business sustainability challenges emerged from both internal organizational limitations and external structural conditions affecting digital adaptation processes. Handayani et al. (2025) emphasized that productive mentoring initiatives become more effective when intervention strategies directly address practical operational constraints experienced by local business communities.

Table 3. Key Constraints and Strategic Responses in the Implementation of Digital Marketing Optimization at Tobaland Convection

Identified Constraint	Observed Impact	Strategic Response
Limited content management skills	Inconsistent promotional activity	Continuous mentoring and content planning guidance
High shipping costs	Reduced marketplace competitiveness	Focus on direct-order communication systems
Low digital financial literacy	Limited QRIS adoption	Gradual transaction education and adaptation
Production-centered work patterns	Weak digital consistency	Scheduling and task allocation assistance
Limited technological confidence	Slow platform adaptation	Repetitive practical mentoring sessions

The findings presented in Table 3 indicate that digital marketing sustainability within localized MSMEs requires adaptive strategies capable of balancing technological ambition with contextual operational feasibility. The decision to prioritize WhatsApp-based direct communication instead of aggressive marketplace expansion reflected a pragmatic adaptation strategy shaped by geographical and economic realities. Business actors demonstrated greater confidence in utilizing communication platforms that aligned directly with their production capacity and customer interaction patterns. Ardissa et al. (2025) explained that MSME digital competitiveness depends not only on technological adoption intensity but also on the strategic appropriateness of selected implementation models within specific business contexts.

Another important analytical finding concerns the relationship between participatory mentoring and entrepreneurial confidence development. Repeated interaction between facilitators and business actors encouraged the emergence of reflective learning processes through which operational problems were discussed collaboratively rather than treated as individual limitations. Business actors gradually became more willing to experiment with digital promotion formats after recognizing that adaptation challenges constituted part of a broader organizational learning process. Anebelle and Ramadhan (2025) emphasized that participatory qualitative approaches possess strong relevance for community empowerment programs because they facilitate reciprocal learning dynamics and context-sensitive problem identification.

The intervention process also revealed that localized cultural identity can function simultaneously as both a market strength and an operational limitation within digital business ecosystems. Tobaland products possessed distinctive ethnic characteristics associated with regional tourism narratives, enabling stronger differentiation within visual digital markets. However, reliance on tourism-oriented consumer segments also created market vulnerability during periods of fluctuating visitor activity and seasonal demand changes. Mahendra and Prastian (2025) argued that convection enterprises require diversified marketing orientations capable of balancing localized identity advantages with broader market adaptability to sustain long-term business growth.

Digital transformation at Tobaland Convection demonstrated that MSME development cannot be reduced to technological intervention alone because sustainable business growth depends on the interaction between managerial adaptation, contextual strategy formulation, and organizational learning capacity. The mentoring program generated meaningful operational improvements because digital marketing strategies were implemented through participatory processes responsive to actual business conditions rather than standardized technological prescriptions. Reflective evaluation further indicated that gradual adaptation models were more effective for sustaining entrepreneurial confidence compared to accelerated platform integration approaches. Wiratmani and Nugeroho (2025) noted that sustainable digital business transformation among convection enterprises requires continuous assistance mechanisms capable of strengthening both technical competence and strategic business awareness simultaneously.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of digital marketing optimization at Tobaland Convection demonstrated that participatory and context-sensitive digital transformation strategies can significantly strengthen the adaptive capacity, market reach, and operational autonomy of localized MSMEs operating within geographically constrained environments. The transition from intermediary-dependent marketing systems toward direct consumer engagement through Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp generated meaningful changes in communication patterns, branding practices, and customer interaction management, while simultaneously revealing that sustainable digital growth depends not merely on technological adoption but on the integration of strategic content management, entrepreneurial learning, and organizational adaptability. The findings further indicated that visually driven content strategies strengthened audience engagement and enhanced brand visibility by combining local cultural identity with platform-oriented promotional approaches capable of increasing consumer trust and interaction intensity. At the same time, the persistence of structural barriers such as limited digital literacy, inconsistent content management capacity, logistical constraints, and restricted digital financial integration highlighted the necessity of gradual and adaptive implementation models aligned with operational realities. The participatory mentoring approach employed throughout the program enabled collaborative problem-solving processes that strengthened business actors' confidence in navigating digital ecosystems while maintaining contextual relevance and practical feasibility. These findings reinforce the argument that sustainable MSME digital transformation requires the simultaneous alignment of technological accessibility, managerial capability, strategic communication practices, and localized business conditions in order to produce long-term competitive growth within increasingly digitalized market environments.

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