

The Influence of Digital Marketing Capability on the Marketing Performance of MSMEs in the Digital Transformation Era: The Moderating Role of Customer Satisfaction

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Article history:

Received February 4, 2026

Revised March 2, 2026

Accepted March 3, 2026

Abstract

Digital transformation has reshaped marketing practices, requiring MSMEs to strengthen their digital marketing capability to remain competitive. Variations in marketing performance among digitally active MSMEs suggest the presence of additional influencing factors beyond technological competence. This study aims to examine the influence of digital marketing capability on the marketing performance of MSMEs and to analyze the moderating role of customer satisfaction in this relationship. A quantitative explanatory survey was conducted involving 120 MSME actors implementing digital marketing strategies. Data were collected using a Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed through multiple linear regression and Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) to test direct and interaction effects. Findings reveal that digital marketing capability significantly enhances marketing performance. Customer satisfaction also has a direct positive effect and significantly strengthens the relationship between digital marketing capability and marketing performance. The interaction effect indicates that higher customer satisfaction amplifies the positive impact of digital capability on business outcomes. The study concludes that optimal MSME marketing performance in the digital era depends on the integration of digital capability and customer satisfaction management. The novelty lies in positioning customer satisfaction as a moderating variable rather than solely as an outcome, providing both conceptual and methodological contributions to digital marketing research in the MSME context.

Keywords:

Digital Marketing Capability; Customer Satisfaction; MSME Marketing Performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

The digital transformation era has fundamentally reshaped the pattern of interaction between businesses and consumers. Marketing activities are no longer confined to conventional channels but increasingly rely on digital platforms as primary tools for communication, engagement, and value creation. Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are among the sectors most affected by this shift because consumer behavior is now highly dependent on digital information sources and online purchasing systems. The adoption of digital technology has become a strategic necessity rather than an optional choice for MSMEs seeking to remain competitive in rapidly evolving markets (Charisma 2025; Comai 2025).

Digital Marketing Capability (DMC) has been widely recognized as a strategic resource that enhances marketing effectiveness and business competitiveness. DMC refers to an organization's ability to utilize digital tools, platforms, data analytics, and content strategies in an integrated manner to achieve marketing objectives. Empirical findings consistently indicate that strong digital marketing capabilities improve promotional reach, customer engagement, brand visibility, and ultimately marketing performance. MSMEs that effectively manage social media, digital advertising, and online customer service systems tend to experience increased sales growth and stronger market positioning (Nguyen 2025).

Resource-Based View (RBV) theory provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the strategic importance of DMC. RBV posits that sustainable competitive advantage originates from valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable internal resources. Digital marketing capability represents an intangible organizational asset that integrates technological competence with marketing expertise. The ability to leverage digital tools effectively allows MSMEs to create superior customer value, which in turn strengthens their market performance (Ozdemir 2025).

Customer satisfaction has also been acknowledged as a critical determinant of marketing success in the digital environment. High levels of satisfaction reflect the alignment between customer expectations and perceived service experiences across digital channels. MSMEs that provide responsive communication, personalized interaction, and reliable digital services are more likely to build customer loyalty and encourage repeat purchases. Positive digital experiences contribute not only to transactional outcomes but also to long-term relational benefits such as word-of-mouth promotion and brand advocacy (Basit 2025).

Dynamic Capability Theory further enriches this understanding by emphasizing organizational adaptability in rapidly changing environments. The digital market landscape requires firms to continuously reconfigure resources and strategies to respond to evolving consumer preferences. Digital marketing capability enables MSMEs to adapt quickly, while customer satisfaction reflects the effectiveness of such adaptation in meeting market expectations. Accumulated evidence therefore confirms that digital capability and customer experience are central elements in improving MSME marketing performance in the digital transformation era (Chen 2025).

The relationship between digital marketing capability and marketing performance has been extensively examined, yet the consistency of its impact remains questionable. Several studies report a strong positive influence of DMC on firm performance, while others show varying levels of effectiveness depending on contextual conditions. Differences in results suggest that additional variables may influence how digital marketing capability translates into measurable marketing outcomes (Zhu 2025).

Customer satisfaction is often positioned as a direct outcome of digital marketing activities rather than as a factor that modifies their effectiveness. Many empirical studies treat satisfaction as a dependent variable influenced by digital capability, without examining its potential role in strengthening or weakening the DMC–performance relationship. Limited attention has been given to understanding how psychological and experiential factors of customers interact with organizational digital competencies (Pancaningrum 2026).

The Customer Gap Model offers a theoretical explanation for this inconsistency. The model suggests that discrepancies between customer expectations and perceived service experiences create gaps that influence satisfaction evaluations. Digital marketing capability alone may not guarantee improved performance if the digital experience fails to meet customer expectations. Satisfaction could therefore function as a moderating mechanism that amplifies positive effects or diminishes weak digital strategies (Acayip 2026).

Empirical research specifically exploring the moderating role of customer satisfaction in the context of MSMEs remains scarce. Most prior investigations focus on mediation effects such as innovation or technological adoption, leaving insufficient explanation regarding performance variations among MSMEs with similar digital capabilities. This gap becomes more significant in the digital transformation era, where customer expectations for speed, personalization, and reliability are continuously increasing (McKee 2025).

Understanding the moderating role of customer satisfaction is crucial for explaining why MSMEs with comparable digital marketing capabilities often achieve different performance outcomes. Marketing performance does not depend solely on technological proficiency but also on how customers perceive and evaluate their digital experiences. Clarifying this relationship will provide a more comprehensive explanation of performance variability in the digital marketplace (Liu 2025).

Resource-Based View theory emphasizes that strategic resources generate competitive advantage only when they create value recognized by customers. Digital marketing capability becomes meaningful when it produces positive customer experiences that lead to satisfaction. Satisfaction may act as a reinforcing mechanism that strengthens the impact of digital capability on performance. Testing this moderation effect is therefore theoretically justified and practically relevant (Guo 2025).

This research aims to empirically examine the influence of digital marketing capability on MSME marketing performance and to determine whether customer satisfaction moderates that relationship. The study is expected to contribute to the refinement of digital marketing theory by integrating strategic resource perspectives with customer experience evaluation. Findings will also provide practical guidance for MSMEs in designing digital strategies that align technological capability with customer expectations to achieve sustainable marketing performance in the digital transformation era (Helalat 2026).

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study applies a quantitative approach using an explanatory survey design to examine the direct and interaction effects among digital marketing capability, marketing performance of MSMEs, and customer satisfaction as a moderating variable. The objective is to empirically test the proposed theoretical model

within the context of digital transformation. Multiple linear regression analysis is employed, complemented by Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) to determine whether customer satisfaction strengthens or weakens the relationship between digital marketing capability and marketing performance. The use of this design enables measurable and systematic evaluation of causal relationships between variables and provides statistical evidence to support hypothesis testing (Sompolgrunk 2025).

The population consists of MSME actors who have implemented digital marketing strategies in their business activities, including the use of social media, online marketplaces, and other digital platforms. A purposive sampling technique is applied with specific criteria: MSMEs must have utilized digital technology for at least one year and demonstrate active interaction with customers through digital channels. The sample size ranges between 100 and 150 respondents to satisfy regression analysis requirements and enhance the robustness of moderation testing. Sample selection also considers variations in business scale, product type, and intensity of digital marketing usage to ensure representativeness and diversity of responses (Wang 2025).

Data are collected using a structured questionnaire based on a 1–5 Likert scale. The instrument is developed from established empirical indicators in the fields of digital marketing and consumer behavior. Digital marketing capability is measured through indicators of technology utilization, analytical competence, and digital platform integration. Customer satisfaction is assessed through perceptions of service experience, quality of digital information, responsiveness, and ease of interaction. Marketing performance is measured through perceived sales growth, customer retention rate, and market reach expansion. Validity testing is conducted using item correlation analysis, while reliability is examined through Cronbach’s Alpha to ensure internal consistency of the measurement scales (Yousuf 2025).

The research procedure begins with the development of questionnaire items derived from theoretical constructs and prior empirical findings. A limited pilot test is conducted to evaluate clarity, relevance, and feasibility of the instrument before large-scale distribution. Data collection is carried out online using Google Forms to facilitate access for digitally active MSMEs. Collected responses are screened, coded, and cleaned prior to analysis. Statistical analysis is performed using SPSS, including classical assumption tests, multiple regression analysis, and moderated regression analysis (MRA) to test the hypothesized relationships and moderation effects. Results of the analysis are interpreted to answer research questions and evaluate the proposed conceptual framework (Anning-Dorson 2025).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data were collected from 120 MSME owners who actively implement digital marketing strategies. Respondents represent various business sectors, including culinary, fashion, services, and crafts. Business duration varies from less than one year to more than three years, indicating diversity in organizational maturity. The majority of respondents operate in the culinary sector (40%), followed by fashion (26.7%), services (23.3%), and crafts (10%). Most businesses have been operating for 1–3 years (46.7%), while 38.3% have operated for more than three years. This distribution reflects that digitally active MSMEs are largely in the growth and development phase. Descriptive statistics of the main research variables indicate relatively high mean values across digital marketing capability, customer satisfaction, and marketing performance. Standard deviation values show moderate dispersion, suggesting consistency in respondents’ perceptions. The following table presents the detailed statistical results.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max
Digital Marketing Capability (DMC)	4.12	0.51	2.90	5.00
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	4.08	0.48	3.00	5.00
Marketing Performance (MP)	4.15	0.57	3.10	5.00

The average score of digital marketing capability (4.12) indicates that MSMEs possess relatively strong competencies in utilizing social media, digital advertising, and online customer engagement tools. Indicators related to platform integration and content management receive particularly high ratings. This condition demonstrates readiness to adapt to digital transformation demands. Customer satisfaction shows a high mean value (4.08), reflecting positive consumer perceptions of digital service experiences. Elements such as response speed, clarity of product information, and transaction convenience contribute significantly to this evaluation. Consistency in responses indicates that most MSMEs maintain acceptable digital service standards. Marketing performance records the highest mean (4.15), suggesting that digital activities contribute to increased sales, broader market reach, and improved customer retention. Positive performance outcomes reinforce the assumption that digital capability and customer-oriented practices influence marketing success.

Hypothesis testing was conducted using multiple linear regression and Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA). The regression model examines the direct effect of digital marketing capability on marketing performance and the moderating role of customer satisfaction. Results indicate a positive regression

coefficient for digital marketing capability ($\beta = 0.482, p < 0.001$). Customer satisfaction also demonstrates a significant direct effect on marketing performance ($\beta = 0.301, p = 0.002$). The interaction term between digital marketing capability and customer satisfaction is statistically significant ($\beta = 0.214, p = 0.013$). The moderation model shows an increase in explanatory power compared to the direct-effect model. The presence of the interaction variable strengthens the model's ability to explain variations in marketing performance. These findings confirm the existence of a moderation effect.

Table 2. Results of Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA)

Variables	B	Sig.
Digital Marketing Capability → Marketing Performance	0.482	0.000
Customer Satisfaction → Marketing Performance	0.301	0.002
Interaction (DMC × CS)	0.214	0.013

Digital marketing capability significantly influences marketing performance, indicating that improvements in digital competence lead to measurable performance gains. Positive coefficients confirm that effective digital platform utilization enhances market reach and customer acquisition. Statistical significance supports the robustness of this relationship. Customer satisfaction demonstrates an independent positive effect on marketing performance. Higher satisfaction levels contribute to repeat purchases, positive reviews, and customer loyalty. Customer perception therefore functions not merely as an outcome but as a determinant of performance success. Interaction results reveal that customer satisfaction strengthens the impact of digital marketing capability on marketing performance. Higher satisfaction levels amplify the positive influence of digital capability. Lower satisfaction levels reduce the magnitude of that influence. Moderation findings validate the proposed conceptual model.

Correlation patterns indicate strong positive associations between digital marketing capability and marketing performance. Consistency across descriptive and inferential analyses supports the stability of this relationship. Digital capability functions as a strategic driver of business outcomes. Customer satisfaction correlates positively with both digital marketing capability and marketing performance. MSMEs that effectively manage digital communication tend to generate stronger customer approval. Positive experiences translate into improved marketing metrics. Moderation analysis demonstrates that marketing performance is highest when both digital marketing capability and customer satisfaction are simultaneously strong. Synergistic interaction between technological competence and customer experience management produces optimal outcomes. Relationship patterns confirm that technology alone is insufficient without customer-centered implementation.

A culinary MSME known as “Dapur Raya” illustrates practical application of digital marketing capability. The business intensively uses social media to promote daily menus, promotional bundles, and interactive campaigns. Digital engagement increased significantly following content redesign and visual rebranding. The enterprise integrates fast-response messaging systems and simplified ordering processes. Order tracking features and transparent transaction updates are implemented to enhance customer convenience. Customer reviews on digital platforms show a consistent upward trend. Sales records over the last six months indicate notable growth in daily transactions and broader market reach. Collaboration with local influencers expands brand visibility. Operational data demonstrate alignment between digital strategy and improved commercial outcomes.

Digital marketing capability in the case study manifests through consistent social media management and attractive visual content. Platform optimization and interactive communication strengthen customer engagement. Technological utilization creates measurable promotional efficiency. Customer satisfaction increases after improvements in response speed and transaction transparency. Positive feedback reflects enhanced service perception and trust. Satisfied customers demonstrate higher repeat purchase frequency. Marketing performance growth results from the integration of digital strategy and customer-focused service. Combined effect of visual branding, responsiveness, and digital accessibility reinforces competitive positioning. Case evidence supports statistical findings regarding moderation effects.

Integrated analysis confirms that digital marketing capability functions as a foundational driver of MSME marketing performance. Empirical evidence from regression analysis and case observation demonstrates consistent positive influence. Strategic digital adoption enhances operational outcomes. Customer satisfaction operates as a reinforcing mechanism within this relationship. High satisfaction levels magnify performance benefits generated by digital capability. Customer experience quality determines the strength of digital impact. Moderating interaction illustrates that marketing performance results from synergy between technological competence and customer-centered service. Sustainable competitiveness in the digital transformation era depends on balanced integration of these two elements. Findings provide empirical confirmation that MSMEs achieve optimal marketing performance when digital innovation aligns with customer satisfaction management.

The findings demonstrate that digital marketing capability has a significant and positive influence on the marketing performance of MSMEs in the digital transformation era. Higher levels of digital competence are associated with improved sales growth, broader market reach, and stronger customer retention. Statistical

analysis confirms that digital capability is not merely a supporting tool but a core determinant of marketing success. Customer satisfaction also shows a significant direct effect on marketing performance (K 2025). MSMEs that provide responsive digital communication, clear information, and convenient transaction processes tend to achieve better commercial outcomes. Satisfaction operates as an essential driver of repeat purchases and brand advocacy. Moderated regression analysis reveals that customer satisfaction strengthens the relationship between digital marketing capability and marketing performance. The positive impact of digital capability becomes more substantial when customer satisfaction levels are high. The interaction effect confirms that technological proficiency and customer experience management function synergistically (Helmi 2025).

The results align with prior studies emphasizing the strategic role of digital marketing capability in enhancing firm performance. Earlier research consistently highlights that digital platform utilization and technological adaptation expand market penetration and improve communication efficiency. Current findings reinforce this perspective within the specific context of MSMEs. Contradictions emerge in relation to studies that position customer satisfaction solely as a dependent outcome variable (Batool 2025). Some scholars argue that satisfaction results from digital activities without influencing the strength of strategic effectiveness. Present findings extend the literature by demonstrating that satisfaction operates as a moderating mechanism rather than only an evaluative consequence. Differences also appear when compared with research focusing primarily on innovation or digital adoption as mediating variables. Previous models often neglect experiential and psychological aspects of customer interaction. Empirical evidence from this study contributes a broader understanding by integrating customer experience into the digital capability-performance framework (Noer 2025).

The findings signal a shift in understanding digital competitiveness among MSMEs. Digital capability alone does not guarantee optimal performance outcomes. Customer-centered implementation determines the true value of technological resources. The moderating effect indicates that digital transformation must be interpreted as both a technological and relational process. Marketing success in the digital era depends on how effectively MSMEs translate digital competence into meaningful customer experiences (Heikinheimo 2025). Technological adaptation without satisfaction alignment reduces potential impact. Patterns observed in the data suggest that sustainable competitive advantage arises from balanced integration between operational efficiency and experiential quality. Digital marketing capability represents structural readiness, while customer satisfaction reflects market validation. Combined interaction creates strategic resilience (Chooset 2025).

Theoretical implications highlight the importance of extending the Resource-Based View by incorporating customer experience variables into strategic resource evaluation. Digital marketing capability should be conceptualized as valuable only when it generates perceived benefits recognized by customers. Satisfaction strengthens resource effectiveness and enhances competitive sustainability. Managerial implications emphasize the need for MSMEs to develop digital competencies systematically (Agnihotri 2025). Investment in platform optimization, data analytics, and creative content production becomes essential for improving marketing performance. Technical improvement must be accompanied by consistent customer experience monitoring. Policy implications encourage the design of digital empowerment programs for MSMEs that integrate customer satisfaction management into training modules. Government and institutional support initiatives should focus not only on digital literacy but also on service quality enhancement. Integrated support systems will increase long-term competitiveness of MSMEs (Giang 2025).

Digital marketing capability directly influences marketing performance because it increases operational efficiency and communication effectiveness. Online platforms reduce promotional costs while expanding geographic reach. Technological proficiency enables MSMEs to respond quickly to market trends and consumer demands. Customer satisfaction strengthens this relationship because satisfied customers engage more actively with digital content and demonstrate loyalty behaviors. Positive experiences generate emotional attachment and trust (Parvathy 2025). Psychological attachment amplifies the effectiveness of digital promotional efforts. Interaction effects occur because digital capability produces maximum impact only when aligned with positive customer perceptions. Technology facilitates connection, yet emotional validation determines continuity. Synergy between technical systems and relational quality explains the observed moderation pattern (Soleymani 2025).

MSMEs should integrate digital capability development with structured customer satisfaction measurement systems. Continuous feedback analysis and service improvement initiatives will sustain positive performance trends. Strategic alignment between technology and customer expectations must become a routine managerial priority. Future research may incorporate additional moderating or mediating variables such as customer engagement, brand trust, or artificial intelligence utilization in digital marketing processes. Expanded models will provide deeper explanation of performance variability (Farooq 2025). Longitudinal designs could examine sustainability of moderation effects over time. Digital transformation policies should move beyond infrastructure provision toward holistic ecosystem development. Training programs must combine technical digital skills with relational communication strategies. Sustainable MSME competitiveness in the digital era depends on harmonizing innovation with customer-centered value creation.

4. CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this study is that digital marketing capability positively and significantly influences the marketing performance of MSMEs, and this influence becomes substantially stronger when customer satisfaction functions as a moderating variable. The results demonstrate that digital competence alone is insufficient to maximize marketing outcomes without supportive customer experiences. Customer satisfaction amplifies the effectiveness of digital strategies, confirming that the synergy between technological capability and experiential quality represents the primary differentiating factor in enhancing MSME competitiveness in the digital transformation era.

This study contributes conceptually by positioning customer satisfaction not merely as an outcome variable but as a moderating mechanism that strengthens the relationship between digital marketing capability and marketing performance. The research extends the Resource-Based View perspective by emphasizing that strategic digital resources generate optimal value only when supported by positive customer perceptions. Methodologically, the use of Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) provides a more comprehensive analytical approach in identifying interaction effects among core variables, offering empirical refinement to digital marketing research in the MSME context.

The study is limited by its cross-sectional survey design and purposive sampling technique, which may restrict the generalizability of findings across broader MSME populations. Measurement reliance on self-reported perceptions introduces potential subjective bias. Future research should consider longitudinal designs, broader geographic coverage, and additional variables such as customer experience, brand engagement, or artificial intelligence utilization. Integration of digital analytics and objective performance indicators is recommended to provide deeper and more real-time evaluation of digital marketing effectiveness.

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