

Navigating Digital Frontiers: A Systematic Literature Review of Digital Marketing Strategies in SMEs Across Emerging and Developed Economies (2015–2025)

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Abstract. This study presents a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of 127 peer-reviewed articles from 2015 to 2025 that explore digital marketing in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). By applying the PRISMA framework, the review synthesizes global research trends, theoretical perspectives, and empirical findings related to the adoption, implementation, and outcomes of digital marketing strategies in SMEs. The analysis highlights three central dimensions: technological advancement (e.g., AI, metaverse), strategic marketing approaches (e.g., content marketing, social media engagement), and contextual challenges, particularly in emerging economies. The study identifies a strong influence of Resource-Based View (RBV) and Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) frameworks, with increasing integration of entrepreneurial and sustainability-driven models. Moreover, the review uncovers a geographic gap where research predominantly focuses on developing countries, while advanced technologies receive more attention in developed economies. Key contributions of this study include a new classification model that connects contextual, conceptual, and methodological dimensions, and offers future research directions on emerging technologies, resilience during crises (e.g., COVID- 19), and inclusive digital transformation. This review not only enriches academic discourse but also provides practical insights for SMEs, policymakers, and digital ecosystem stakeholders aiming to foster sustainable business growth in the digital era.

Keywords: Digital Marketing Strategy in SMEs, SME’s Digital Marketing, Social Media Marketing for SMEs, SLR on SME’s Digitalization, Technology Adoption in Small and Medium Enterprises

Introduction

Digital marketing has become a key element in the growth and sustainability of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in various parts of the world, especially in the era of faster digital transformation. This topic is important globally because SMEs are the backbone of many countries' economies, and the adoption of digital marketing strategies can increase their competitiveness and market access. Early research on digital marketing, such as that

conducted by Taiminen and Karjaluo (2015), identified the use of digital channels as a critical factor for SMEs in Finland to achieve business success. In 2017, Foroudi et al. explored how digital technology is improving the marketing management capabilities of SMEs in the UK, showing that the adoption of this technology correlates positively with business growth. In the same year, Odoom et al. (2017) investigated the impact of social media on the performance of SMEs in Ghana, emphasizing the relevance of platforms such as Facebook and Twitter in increasing customer visibility and engagement. Entering the last decade, research has increasingly focused on the role of artificial intelligence (AI) and the metaverse in digital marketing. Drydakis (2022) showed that AI helped reduce the risk of SME's businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK, while Rehman et al. (2024) examined how the metaverse can improve SME's marketing capabilities in Saudi Arabia. In Indonesia, Munir et al. (2023) found that digital marketing and brand articulation capabilities significantly improve SME's marketing performance in South Sulawesi. A recent study by Sharabati et al. (2024) in Jordan confirms that digital transformation has a positive impact on SME's performance, especially in improving efficiency and access to global markets. These findings show that while challenges such as the digital divide still exist, SMEs that adopt digital marketing strategies tend to be more resilient in the face of global market dynamics. Thus, digital marketing is not only a business tool, but also a catalyst for inclusive and sustainable economic development.

Significant developments in topics related to marketing strategies and MSME performance show a shift in trends influenced by the adoption of digital technology and changing environmental factors. Initially, MSME marketing strategies relied more on traditional approaches, such as direct marketing and face-to-face communication, which were considered effective in building customer trust (Alnsour, 2018). However, with the advent of digital technology, especially social media and e-commerce platforms, there has been a drastic change in the way MSMEs promote their products and services. A study by Ainin et al. (2015) shows that the use of social media such as Facebook has improved the financial and non-financial performance of MSMEs, mainly through interactivity and cost-effectiveness. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of digitalization, with many MSMEs turning to online platforms to maintain their business operations (Hossain et al., 2022). The role of technology in improving the marketing capabilities of MSMEs is increasingly visible, especially in terms of customer relationship management and market expansion (Susanto et al., 2021). New approaches in digital marketing also emphasize the importance of data-driven strategies and the use of automated marketing tools to improve operational efficiency. For example, research by Mero et al. (2022) developed a framework for the implementation of SaaS-based software that allows MSMEs to conduct marketing operations in a systematic and structured manner. In addition, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in digital marketing further enhances the ability of MSMEs to conduct market analysis and personalize services (Enshassi et al., 2025). However, challenges in the adoption of this technology have also arisen, such as limited resources and a lack of digital competence among MSME owners (Setkute & Dibb, 2022). Nonetheless, recent studies show that training and technology support can help MSMEs overcome these barriers and improve their business performance (Sutherland et al., 2025). Thus, these changes not only affect the marketing practices of MSMEs, but also expand the understanding of the importance of technological adaptation in achieving business sustainability in the modern era.

Previous articles using the review method have made significant contributions to understanding the use and impact of digital marketing in various contexts, especially in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Molinillo and Japutra (2017) conducted a literature review to explore how SMEs adopt digital information and technology, focusing on the driving factors and outcomes of such adoption. They found that the use of digital technology in marketing-related positions allows SMEs to become more competitive, although the study is limited to the design of a review literature that has not yet been systematic. Furthermore, Pellegrino and Abe (2023) conducted a bibliometric study to explore the role of social media in SMEs in various countries. They identified the benefits of social media in marketing,

customer engagement, and market research, while also noting limitations such as the exclusive focus on Scopus-indexed articles and subjective interpretations of co-citation maps. Hossain et al. (2022) used the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on SMEs in Bangladesh. They found that digital transformation, including digital marketing, became a critical strategy that enabled SMEs to survive and achieve success, although the study was limited to the Bangladesh context and used qualitative data that reduced the generalization of findings. Amjad (2022) introduces the concept of Digital Entrepreneurial Marketing (DEM) through bibliometric analysis, which combines digital marketing and entrepreneurship, making it the most suitable approach for SMEs globally. However, this study does not focus on the development of theories and calls for further research in the development of theories in this field. Overall, the review methods used in the articles have helped uncover research trends such as increased digital transformation and social media use in SMEs, as well as the consistency of results that show the significant benefits of digital marketing. However, limitations such as narrow geographic scope, reliance on specific data sources, and lack of substantive synthesis in some studies have been identified as areas that need to be addressed in future research (Molinillo & Japutra, 2017; Pellegrino & Abe, 2023; Hossain et al., 2022; Amjad, 2022).

The development of research on the theme of digital marketing in SMEs has undergone various stages of literature synthesis through various review methods, but it still remains a challenge to integrate conceptual, contextual, and methodological dimensions holistically. Preliminary studies such as those conducted by Jadhav et al. (2023) used a systematic literature review (SLR) to explore the impact of digital marketing on SMEs in India, identifying that segmented strategies are still a major challenge, especially for SMEs in rural areas. However, this study is limited to the geographical context of India and pays less attention to the variation in the global economic context. Furthermore, Sigué and Biboum (2019) explored the use of social relationships in the marketing practices of SMEs in Cameroon, but lacked in integrating the findings with the rapidly growing digital marketing literature. A bibliometric approach such as that carried out by Amjad (2022) introduces the concept of Digital Entrepreneurial Marketing (DEM) as a synthesis between digital marketing and entrepreneurial marketing, but has not discussed the practical implications of this integration in depth. A scoping review study by Jayawardena et al. (2024) attempts to fill this gap by identifying effective digital marketing strategies in service sector SMEs in emerging economies, but is still limited in expanding geographical and sectoral contexts. In addition, a meta-analysis by Chatterjee et al. (2021) shows that the use of social media-based marketing tools increases the sustainable growth of SMEs, but lacks in exploring contemporary factors such as AI integration or the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Field studies such as Munir et al. (2023) have found that the ability to articulate brands mediates the impact of digital marketing on the performance of SMEs in Indonesia, but these empirical findings have not been adequately integrated in previous review literature. Based on these gaps, the proposed SLR will develop a new classification structure that covers contemporary issues such as AI integration, pandemic impacts, and data-driven marketing strategies, as well as a more integrative synthesis approach to connect empirical findings with conceptual developments in the literature. Thus, the main contribution of this SLR is in expanding contextual scope, deepening cross-dimensional integration, and exploring issues that have not yet been raised, resulting in a more comprehensive synthesis of literature that is relevant to evolving empirical trends.

The study conducted by Molinillo and Japutra (2017) is a review of the theoretical literature that examines the adoption of digital information and technology by organizations, especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs), with a focus on the driving factors and outcomes of the adoption process. The results of his research reveal that the adoption of digital technology for marketing purposes increases the competitiveness of SMEs (Molinillo & Japutra, 2017). However, the methods used are limited to non-systematic literature reviews, so they have limitations in terms of integration of findings and generalization of results. Furthermore, Hossain et al. (2022) conducted a Systematic

Literature Review (SLR) to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on SMEs in Bangladesh as well as the strategies used to deal with the crisis. The study found that digital transformation, including digital marketing, was a key factor in SME's success during the pandemic, although the study was limited to the Bangladesh context and relied on qualitative data (Hossain et al., 2022). Pellegrino and Abe (2023) conducted a bibliometric review to explore the role of social media in SMEs in different countries, with research results showing the benefits of social media in marketing, customer engagement, and market research. Although this method successfully identifies research trends and research gaps, its limitations lie in the subjective interpretation of the shared citation map as well as the exclusivity of the data sources from Scopus (Pellegrino & Abe, 2023). Overall, the review methods in these articles help uncover research trends, consistency of findings such as the importance of digital technology and social media for SMEs, as well as inconsistencies in results associated with variations in geographical and methodological contexts. Recommendations for future research include geographic scope expansion, integration of quantitative approaches, as well as exploration of the long-term impacts of SMEs' use of digital technologies and social media (Molinillo & Japutra, 2017; Hossain et al., 2022; Pellegrino & Abe, 2023).

Methods

Systematic Literature Review (SLR) Method Following PRISMA Guidelines



Prisma Reporting: Digital Marketing

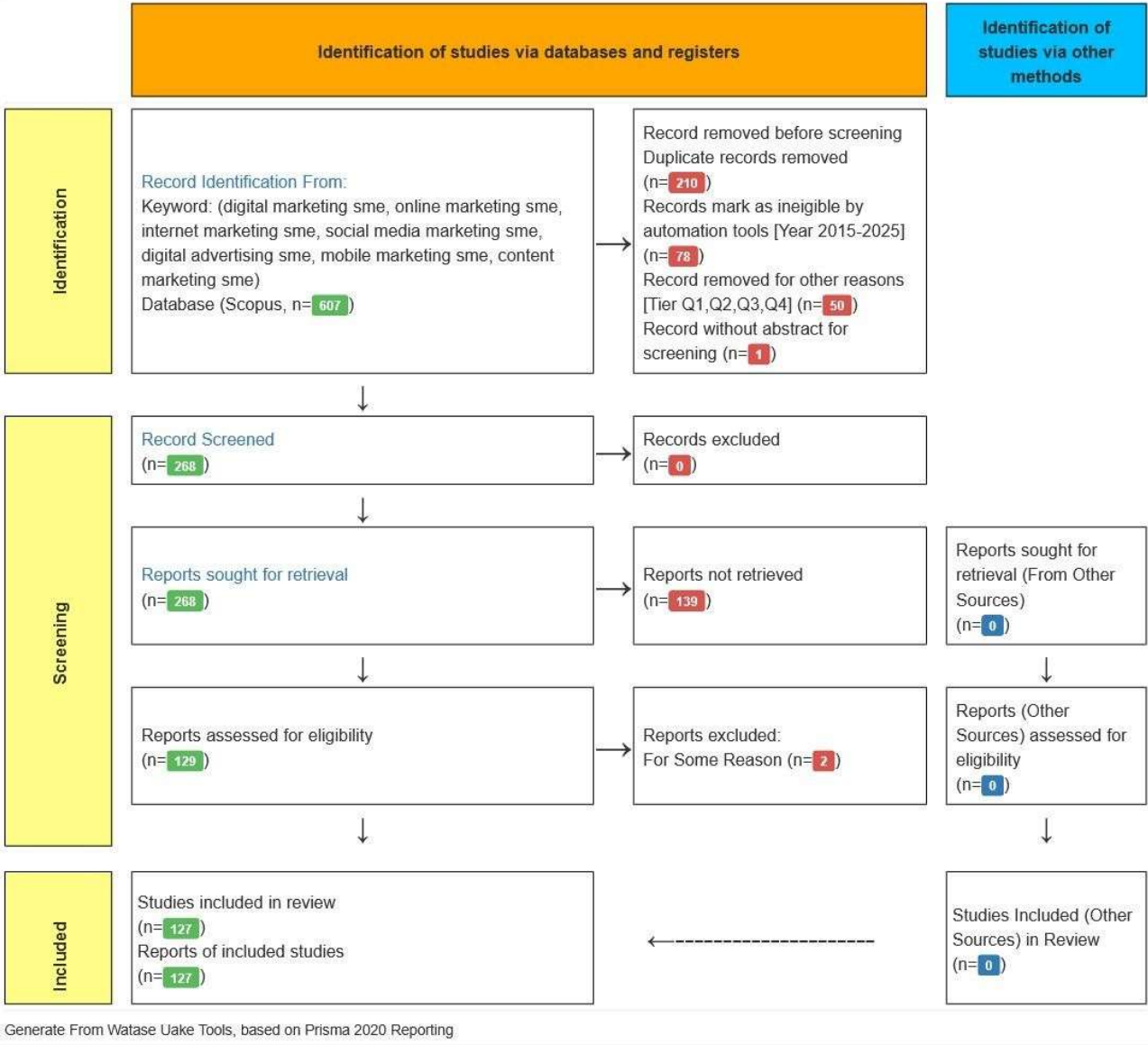


Figure 1. PRISMA SLR

The stages of Prisma:

1. Introduction This study adopted the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines proposed by Moher et al. (2009). PRISMA was chosen for its ability to improve the quality of reporting and systematic review methodologies (Panic et al., 2013) as well as its broad application across a wide range of disciplines (Siddaway et al., 2019; ter Huurne et al., 2017). The main focus of this study is on the identification stage, which involves searching for articles using specific keywords and reliable scientific databases.
2. Identification Stage
 - a. Article Search The article search process is carried out using specific keywords that are relevant to the research topic, namely: - Keyword Search: digital marketing SME's online marketing SME's internet marketing SME's social media marketing SME's digital advertising SME's mobile marketing SME's content marketing sme. These keywords are chosen to ensure a broad and in- depth coverage of the topic.

- b. The main database used is Scopus, chosen for its excellence in providing high-quality scientific articles through a rigorous indexing process (Lasda Bergman, 2012; Rocha et al., 2020). Scopus also has a good international reputation and extensive coverage, making it a more reliable source than alternatives like Google Scholar. The weaknesses of Google Scholar, such as repeated search results, duplication of articles, and inclusion of articles from predatory journals (Hariningsih et al., 2024), are the main reasons why Scopus is prioritized. In addition to Scopus, the search process also involves the Watase database (Wahyudi, 2024) which provides access to additional scientific sources.
 - c. Initial Search Results From the initial search on Scopus, a total of 607 articles were obtained. Here is a breakdown of the initial screening process: - Duplicate Records Removed: 210 articles were deleted due to duplication. - Records Marked as Ineligible by Automation Tools: 78 articles were deleted for not meeting the criteria for the year of publication (2015-2025). - Records Removed for Other Reasons: 50 articles were deleted because they did not meet the tier criteria (Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4). - Records Without Abstract: 1 article was deleted because it did not have an abstract. After the initial screening, a total of 268 articles remained to the screening stage.
- 3. Screening Stage - Record Screened: 268 articles were checked for relevance. - Records Excluded: No articles are excluded at this stage. - Reports Sought for Retrieval: 268 articles selected for full retrieval. - Reports Not Retrieved: 139 articles could not be retrieved due to access limitations. - Reports Assessed for Eligibility: 129 articles were assessed for eligibility. - Reports Excluded: 2 articles excluded for specific reasons (e.g., irrelevant or not meeting the criteria).
 - 4. Inclusion Level - Studies Included in Review: 127 articles were eventually included in the systematic review. - Studies Included (Other Sources): No additional sources are used.
 - 5. Qualitative Analysis After the inclusion stage, a qualitative analysis was carried out using the thematic analysis method. This process involves identifying patterns and themes that emerge from relevant articles. This thematic analysis is also supported by the Watase Uake System (Wahyudi, 2024), which ensures accuracy and validity in data processing.
 - 6. Conclusion The SLR method described above provides a systematic and reliable framework for conducting systematic reviews in a variety of cross-disciplinary research contexts. By following the PRISMA guidelines, the study ensures the transparency, validity, and relevance of the results obtained. -
- This explanation is prepared systematically and neutrally, so that it can be applied in various studies with different focuses and disciplines.

Result and Discussion

Emerging Trends

Influence Related Field In today's digital era, various related fields such as information technology, digital marketing, and entrepreneurship have a significant influence on the development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Information technology allows SMEs to adopt digital tools such as e-commerce and social media, which not only increase business visibility but also expand market reach. Recent studies show that SMEs that leverage e-commerce and social media platforms tend to experience improvements in marketing and financial performance, especially in developing countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia. However, the adoption of this technology often faces obstacles such as limited resources, lack of technical knowledge, and digital infrastructure challenges. On the other hand, digital marketing has become one of the key factors in increasing the competitiveness of SMEs. By using the right digital marketing strategy, SMEs can build stronger relationships with customers, increase brand

awareness, and even create customer loyalty. Research in Ghana and Nigeria shows that social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp have become effective tools for attracting new customers and retaining old ones. However, this success also depends on the ability of SMEs to optimize content and interaction on the platform, as well as their ability to adapt to changes in increasingly digital consumer behavior. In addition, entrepreneurship also plays an important role in encouraging innovation and growth of SMEs. Innovation-oriented entrepreneurship can help SMEs to develop new products and services that are relevant to market needs. Studies in China and India show that entrepreneurship focused on green innovation and digital marketing can improve the business sustainability and financial performance of SMEs. However, challenges such as limited capital, lack of access to global markets, and fierce competition are often obstacles for SMEs in achieving their full potential. Overall, collaboration between information technology, digital marketing, and entrepreneurship can be the key to success for SMEs in this digital era. By leveraging technology effectively, developing innovative marketing strategies, and applying strong entrepreneurial principles, SMEs can not only survive but thrive in the face of

increasingly complex market challenges and opportunities. However, support from various parties, including the government, financial institutions, and the community, is needed to create an ecosystem that supports the growth and sustainability of SMEs in the future.

Table 1: Top Digital Marketing Citation Article Report

RANK	JOURNAL	TIER	AUTHOR	YEAR	CITES	TITLE
1	Industrial Management & Data Systems	Q2	Ainin, Solomon; Parveen, 2015 Farzana; Moghavvemi, Sedigheh; Jaafar, Noor Ismawati; Mohd Shuib, Nor Liyana		355	Factors influencing the use of social media by SMEs and its performance outcomes
2	Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development	Q3	Taiminen, Heini Maarit; Karjaluoto, Heikki	2015	277	The usage of digital marketing channels in SMEs
3	Journal of Strategic Marketing	Q3	Quinton, Sarah; Canhoto, 2017 Ana; Molinillo, Sebastian; Pera, Rebecca; Budhathoki, Tribikram		237	Conceptualising a digital orientation: antecedents of supporting SME's performance in the digital economy
4	Journal of Enterprise Information Management	Q2	Odoom, Raphael; Anning-Dorson, Thomas; Acheampong, George	2017	182	Antecedents of social media usage and performance benefits in small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

5	Management Decision	Q2	Quaye, Daniel; Mensah, Isaac	2019	139	Marketing innovation and sustainable competitive advantage of manufacturing SMEs in Ghana
6	Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal	Q3	Foroudi,Pantea; Gupta,Suraksha; Nazarian,Alireza; Duda,Marta	2017	117	Digital technology and marketing management capability: achieving growth in SMEs
7	Operations Research Perspectives	Q	Hossain, Mohammad Rakibul; Akhtar, Fahmida; Sultana, Mir Misnad	2022	105	SMEs in Covid-19 Crisis and Combating Strategies A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and A Case from Emerging Economy
8	European Management Journal	Q1	Obermayer, Nora; K?vári, Edit; Leinonen, Jaana; Bak, Gerda; Valeri, Marco	2021	104	How social media practices shape family business performance: the wine industry case study
9	The Bottom Line	Q4	Molinillo, Sebastian; Japutra, Arnold	2017	104	Organizational adoption of digital information and technology a theoretical review
10	Journal of Business Ethics	Q1	Agag, Gomaa	2017	101	E-commerce Ethics and Its Impact on Buyer Repurchase Intentions and Loyalty An Empirical Study of Small and Medium Egyptian Businesses

Context Classification

Based on the table that shows the context of the research area and its citations, it can be seen that the theme of Digital Marketing has a wide and diverse scope, especially in the context of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). The context of this research area covers a wide range of geographical areas, including developing countries such as Indonesia, Ghana, and Nigeria, as well as developed countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States. This shows that digital marketing is a relevant global phenomenon for SMEs in various economic and

social contexts (Ainin et al., 2015; Amoah et al., 2021). The distribution of citations in the table shows that research in developing countries such as Indonesia and Ghana has a significant portion.

For example, research by Ainin et al. (2015) in Malaysia showed the importance of using Facebook in improving the performance of SMEs, while Amoah et al. (2021) in Ghana examined the use of social media as a strategic tool for the sustainability of SMEs. This shows that in developing countries, digital marketing is often seen as a solution to overcome resource limitations and increase global competitiveness. On the other hand, research in developed countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States focuses more on technological aspects such as AI and the metaverse (Drydakis, 2022; Rehman et al., 2024), which reflects the trend of more advanced technology adoption. Implicitly, these contextual trends suggest that digital marketing for SMEs is not only about the use of social media platforms, but also involves the adoption of advanced technologies such as AI, IoT, and the metaverse. For example, Drydakis (2022) found that AI applications can reduce business risks during the COVID-19 pandemic, while Rehman et al. (2024) identified the metaverse as a strategic tool to enhance the marketing capabilities of SMEs. However, challenges such as the digital divide and lack of technology literacy are still encountered in many developing countries, as revealed by Alnsour (2018) in Jordan and Eze et al. (2021) in Nigeria. The relevance of the digital marketing theme to future research challenges and opportunities is huge. With the development of technology, SMEs need to continue to adapt to remain competitive. The main challenge is how to ensure that SMEs in developing countries can access and utilize these technologies effectively (Kabanda & Brown, 2017). In addition, future research needs to focus on developing a more holistic framework, combining technological, social, and environmental aspects, as suggested by Maziriri (2020) in the context of green marketing. Thus, digital marketing is not only a tool to improve business performance, but also to support sustainable development and global economic inclusivity.

Theory Classification



Figure 2.Theory Classification

"Key Concepts and Theoretical Scope" The concept of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) has evolved significantly over the decades, reflecting broader economic, technological, and social transformations. SMEs are typically defined as businesses with fewer than 500 employees, encompassing a diverse range of industries and sectors. Historically, SMEs were perceived as secondary players in the economy, overshadowed by larger corporations. However, the advent of digitalization and globalization has repositioned SMEs as crucial drivers of economic growth, innovation, and employment (Tolossa et al., 2024). The integration of entrepreneurial marketing practices, particularly in developing economies like Ethiopia, underscores the pivotal role SMEs play in sustainable development (Tolossa et al., 2024). The adoption of digital marketing strategies has further enhanced SME's competitiveness, enabling these enterprises to engage with global markets and improve performance metrics (Agag, 2017; Drydakis, 2022). Theoretical frameworks such as the Technology- Organization-Environment (TOE) model and

Resource-Based View (RBV) have been instrumental in analyzing SME's dynamics, particularly in contexts of technological adoption and resource optimization (Enshassi et al., 2025; Rehman et al., 2024). Recent studies have also explored the impact of social media and artificial intelligence on SME's performance, highlighting the nuanced interplay between technological capabilities and organizational strategies (Alford & Jones, 2024; Enshassi et al., 2025). The concept of entrepreneurial orientation, coupled with digital transformation, has emerged as a critical factor in enhancing SME's resilience and innovation capacity (Lee & Hallak, 2020; Tan et al., 2025). As SMEs continue to navigate the complexities of the digital economy, the integration of sustainable practices and green marketing strategies has gained prominence, reflecting a shift towards environmentally conscious business models (Matosas-López, 2024; Maziriri, 2020). This evolving landscape underscores the importance of SMEs in fostering economic resilience and sustainable development across diverse contexts." Based on the analysis of the theory classification table and citations in previous research related to digital marketing, it can be observed that Resource-Based View (RBV) is the most dominant theory used. RBV theory is applied in various research contexts, especially in the environment of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in various countries such as Ghana (Abrokwah-Larbi & Awuku-Larbi, 2023), Malaysia (Cheah et al., 2022), and Indonesia (Munir et al., 2023). RBV emphasizes the importance of a company's internal resources as a basis for creating a competitive advantage, which is relevant in the context of digital marketing as companies need to make effective use of technology and marketing strategies to survive in a competitive market. In addition to RBV, another theory that is often used is the Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) framework, especially in research related to technology and social media adoption (Ali et al., 2022; Olaleye et al., 2021), as well as Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT) which emphasizes the ability of companies to adapt to changing business environments (Anim et al., 2023). The citation distribution shows that RBV theory is widely used in research in developing countries such as Ghana and Malaysia, which suggests that SMEs in those countries need a resource-based approach to improve their digital marketing performance. On the other hand, the TOE framework is more widely used in research focused on the adoption of technology and social media, especially in Asia and Africa (Ali et al., 2022; Olaleye et al., 2021). This shows that SMEs in these countries are still in the early stages of technology adoption, so they need to understand the technological, organizational, and environmental factors that affect the success of digital marketing implementation. The implication of this trend is that future research will need to focus more on the integration of RBV and TOE theories to develop a more comprehensive digital marketing model, particularly for SMEs in developing countries. In addition, it is also necessary to consider new theories such as Social Media Engagement Theory (SMET) (Bruce et al., 2023) and Resource Advantage Theory of Competition (RAToC) (Munir et al., 2023) to understand the dynamics of competition in the digital age. The research challenge ahead will be how SMEs can make optimal use of technology under limited resource conditions, while research opportunities lie in the exploration of new technology applications such as the metaverse and artificial intelligence in the context of digital marketing (Rehman et al., 2024). Thus, the theme of digital marketing remains relevant and has great potential to contribute to the development of business theories and practices in the future.

Geographic Distribution of Studies

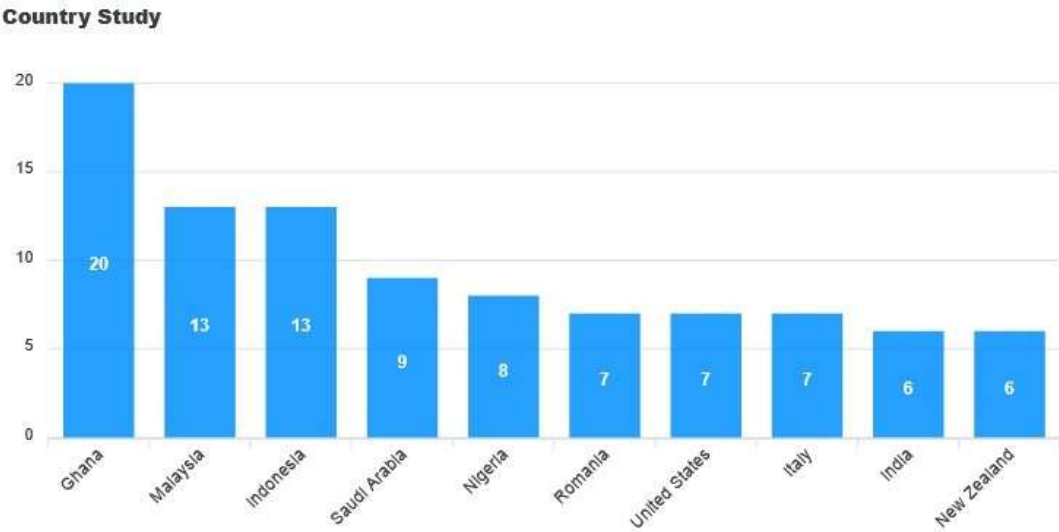


Figure 3. Country Study

The analysis of the table shows that research on digital marketing in SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) has been conducted in various geographical locations, with a primary focus on developing countries. Countries such as Ghana, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Nigeria stand out as the most research locations, reflecting the importance of digital marketing in supporting economic growth in the region (Abrokwah-Larbi & Awuku- Larbi, 2023; Masood & Zaidi, 2021). These developing countries face similar challenges, such as limited resources and infrastructure, which makes research on digital marketing relevant to improve the competitiveness of SMEs (Munir et al., 2023). The distribution of citations suggests that research conducted in developing countries often gets wide attention, especially if the findings can be applied globally. For example, research in Indonesia on the impact of digital marketing on the marketing performance of SMEs has received many citations, because the findings can be adapted by other countries with similar economic conditions (Udayana et al., 2024). However, research in developed countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia has also received significant citations, especially if the focus is on technological innovation and sophisticated digital marketing strategies (Foroudi et al., 2017). A contextual trend seen is the increasing interest in research on the integration of digital technologies in the marketing strategies of SMEs, especially in the post-COVID- 19 pandemic era. Studies show that SMEs that adopt digital platforms such as social media and e-commerce are able to survive and even thrive during crises (Odoom et al., 2017). This indicates that digital marketing is not only a tool to increase sales, but also as a business resilience strategy (Munir et al., 2023). The implication of this trend is the need to increase digital literacy for SME’s owners, especially in developing countries, as well as policy support from the government to expand access to digital technology (Okfalisa et al., 2021). In addition, future research needs to examine more deeply how SMEs can leverage new technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and the metaverse to improve their marketing performance (Rehman et al., 2024). The final evaluation shows that the theme of digital marketing in SMEs remains relevant to face global challenges such as market changes and increasingly fierce competition. Future research opportunities include exploring the impact of emerging technologies such as blockchain and IoT on SME’s marketing strategies, as well as cross-cultural studies to understand the differences in digital marketing adoption in different regions (Ghazwani & Alzahrani, 2023). Thus, this research not only enriches the academic literature, but also provides practical solutions for the development of local and global economies.

Journal Classification

Journal Classification

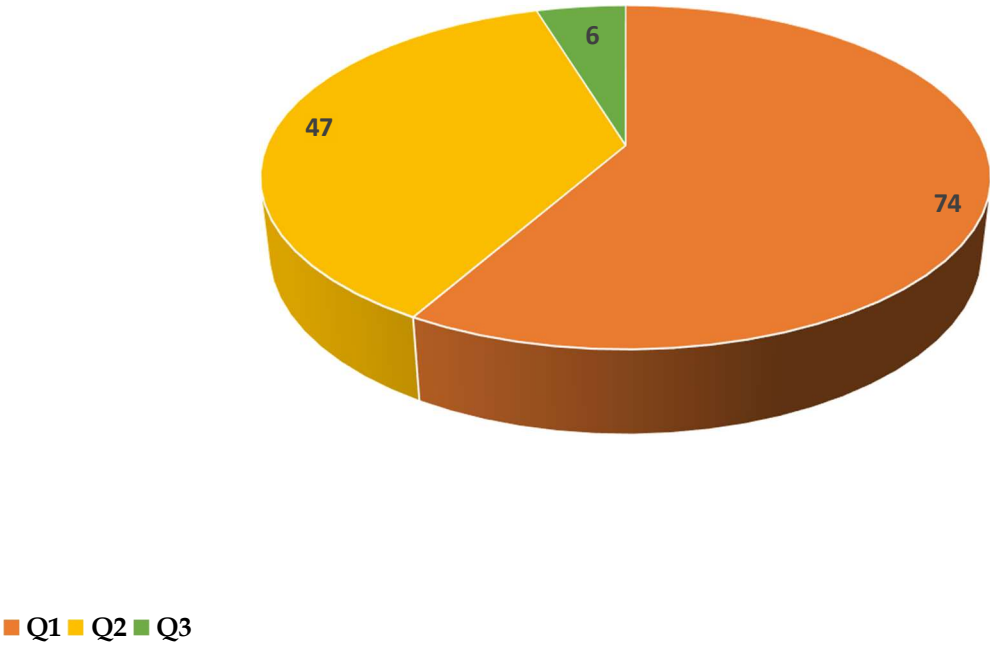


Figure 4. Journal Classification

Based on the table showing the classification of journal names and citations from each journal, it can be analyzed that journals with Q1 tier dominate research related to digital marketing in the context of SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises). A total of 74 of the 127 journals listed are included in the Q1 tier, with journals such as Industrial Marketing Management, Journal of Business Research, and Sustainability being the most frequently referenced (Serra-Cantalops et al., 2020). This dominance shows that the topic of digital marketing and SMEs has received significant attention from the academic community, especially in reputable journals. In addition, the citation distribution shows that these studies are widely conducted in developing countries such as Indonesia, Ghana, and Malaysia, indicating that digital marketing is seen as an important tool to improve the competitiveness and performance of SMEs in these regions (Ainin et al., 2015; Amoah et al., 2021). This trend also reflects significant practical implications. For example, these studies have discussed how the use of social media and digital technology can improve the business performance of SMEs, especially in the post-COVID-19 pandemic context (Hossain et al., 2022). This shows that digital marketing is not only relevant to expand the market, but also to increase business resilience in the face of global crises. In addition, the emergence of themes such as the adoption of AI, metaverse, and IoT technologies in research suggests that SMEs are starting to leverage advanced technologies to achieve business sustainability (Rehman et al., 2024; Suci et al., 2021). The evaluation of the relevance of this theme shows that digital marketing will continue to be an important field of research in the future, especially in the face of global challenges such as digital transformation and increasingly fierce business competition (Pellegrino & Abe, 2023). Future research opportunities may include a more in-depth exploration of the integration of new technologies such as blockchain and AI in the marketing strategies of SMEs, as well as comparative studies between countries to understand differences in the adoption of digital technologies. Thus, this theme is not only relevant to solving today's challenges, but also opens up new opportunities for innovation and business development in the digital age.

The results of this Systematic Literature Review show that digital marketing has experienced rapid development as the main strategy in increasing business competitiveness and sustainability in the SME's sector. Three key trends

were identified: the integration of advanced technologies such as AI and the metaverse; the use of social media and e-commerce to expand market reach; and structural challenges faced by SMEs, especially in developing countries.

Studies in developed countries have highlighted more cutting-edge technologies and data-driven strategies, as in studies by Drydakis (2022) and Rehman et al. (2024), while studies in developing countries such as Indonesia and Ghana have focused on the use of social media and the constraints of technology adoption (Munir et al., 2023; Amoah et al., 2021). This inequality indicates the need for an adaptive approach that considers the readiness of local digital infrastructure and competencies.

Theoretically, the dominance of Resource-Based View (RBV) theory and the TOE Framework shows that the success of digital marketing in SMEs is greatly influenced by internal (resources and capabilities) and external factors (technological and regulatory environment). In addition, the emergence of new approaches such as Digital Entrepreneurial Marketing (Amjad, 2022) shows the need to combine innovation, entrepreneurship, and digital marketing.

The SLR also highlights the importance of ecosystem support, including the role of governments, technology platforms, and training institutions in helping SMEs carry out digital transformation in an inclusive manner. Thus, the integration between conceptual literature and empirical findings through a cross- disciplinary approach is urgently needed to drive the sustainability of SMEs in the dynamic digital era.

Conclusion

This study concludes that digital marketing is an important catalyst for the growth and resilience of SMEs in the digital era. Through a systematic review of 127 studies, it was found that the success of the adoption of digital marketing strategies was greatly influenced by the readiness of technology, the internal capacity of SMEs, and the support of the external environment. The use of RBV and TOE theories is the dominant framework in explaining the adoption process and its impact. In developing countries, digital marketing often plays a role as a solution to resource constraints, while in developed countries it is more focused on optimizing advanced technologies. The main challenges remain the digital divide and lack of technology literacy, which require cross-sector collaboration to address. The study contributes by offering a new classification model and future research direction that includes the exploration of new technologies such as AI, metaverse, and blockchain in the context of SMEs. Therefore, digital marketing is not only a marketing tool, but also a sustainable economic development strategy.

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