

The Strategic Role of Management Accounting in Improving MSME Sustainability through Cost Control, Capital Structure, and HR Management in the Digital Era

Ahmad Gustomi^{1*}, Albareta Arum Ramadhani², Diah Ayu Firantika³, Firly Anggraini⁴, Dina Nadiyah Faiqoh⁵

Entrepreneurship, University of Nahdlatul Ulama Lampung

Corresponding Author: Ahmad Gustomi ahmadgustomy0001@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a vital role in national economic growth through job creation and GDP contribution. However, in today's digital disruption era, they face challenges in operational efficiency, limited financing, and weak human resource management. This study explores the strategic role of management accounting in supporting MSME sustainability, focusing on cost control, capital structure, and HR development. Using a systematic literature review (SLR) of international journals and academic sources from the past decade, the study finds that digital-based management accounting such as big data, digital accounting systems, and activity-based costing improves cost efficiency, decision-making quality, and HR capabilities. The research concludes that digital transformation in management accounting is a strategic necessity for MSME resilience and long-term sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

The ideology of strategic management accounting introduced by Simmonds in 1981 shows that this approach focuses more on external factors, is proactive, and has a long-term orientation. This approach involves companies, consumers, competitors, and markets by offering different concepts (Wahyuningsih et al., 2024). Strategic management accounting can be seen as an emerging field, where the boundaries are still not completely clear, and there is no general consensus on the definition and direction of its future development (Pasaribu et al., 2025). Another definition of strategic management accounting includes information related to activities within the company, competition, and current and future market trends, in order to support strategy and the process of evaluating market trends to analyze strategy (Ojra et al., 2021).

Although strategic management accounting is considered a modern method in management that provides pertinent information for decision making, many managers use strategic management accounting to generate important data in the context of long-term strategy and daily operational activities as a management tool today (Tran, 2023). The role of strategic management accounting is crucial in the strategic decision-making process, by utilizing information and analysis used to assess various strategic options. Meanwhile, management accounting emphasizes more on the importance of financial information in solving various business problems, but does not directly address the business context in which decisions are made, either explicitly or implicitly (Rangkuti, 2024). The role of strategic management accounting is to observe the link between the managerial capabilities of the alliance and value creation in an organization. Using methods in strategic management accounting can provide value to the company. The practice of strategic management accounting can provide relevant, accurate, and reliable information about factors that affect the success of a company, as well as external factors in the long term.

Facing the digital era, it is very important to carry out digital transformation in order to adapt to the business world. Researching the literature on adaptation and innovation in strategic management accounting is an important step to improve understanding. Generally, the innovation process in strategic accounting is divided into four stages: adoption, preparation, implementation, and routinization (Pasaribu et al., 2025). With a comprehensive literature review, professionals in strategic management accounting will be better equipped to identify trends, challenges, and opportunities that may occur in the digital era. In the report "Digital transformation in financial services" by Papatomas & Konteos (2024), it is stated that to achieve a leading position in the market, financial services companies (FSIs) always strive to operate as a fully digital and customer-oriented business. In addition, the application of digital technology can act as a strategic and active partner in the decision-making process, moving away from the previous function of finance as a data processor.

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) have a very important role in economic growth in Indonesia. The existence of MSMEs is very visible when they are able to survive in the midst of the monetary crisis that hit the country. There are several factors that explain the resilience of MSMEs, one of which is the

low dependence on imported raw materials for the production process. In addition, the source of capital for MSMEs generally comes from within the country, so the impact of rupiah depreciation on them is not significant. In addition, MSMEs have high flexibility, meaning that when facing problems in their business, they can easily switch to another type of business. (Budiarto)

In this digital age, accounting applications provide MSMEs with the opportunity to increase effectiveness and efficiency in financial management. With the digitalization of accounting, MSME players can more quickly and accurately record transactions, and get direct access to financial reports that help them make decisions (Saleh & Jumarding, 2025). Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) have the ability to create employment opportunities, offer various economic services to the community, and contribute to income generation and distribution, which supports economic growth and serves to create national stability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Management accounting plays a crucial role in supporting the sustainability of MSMEs through cost control, capital structure management, and increasing the competence of human resources (HR) in the digital era. According to Haritiantari et al. (2024), the transformation of financial accounting in MSMEs is highly dependent on the integration of four main dimensions: digital technology, human resources, capital structure, and management-based financial reporting. This suggests that cost management and capital structure cannot be separated from technological capacity and labor quality.

In the context of cost control, Lestari & Kusumawati (2024) emphasized that the right management accounting implementation strategy can improve the operational efficiency of MSMEs through monitoring unproductive expenses. In addition, Hendrawan et al. (2024) added that the optimization of digital accounting systems significantly improves the quality of financial information and strategic decision making.

On the capital structure aspect, research by Purnamawati & Yuniarta (2021) shows that financing support and proper debt management through a management accounting system have an impact on the resilience of MSMEs amid digital economic disruption. In a similar study, Antoni (2023) found that financial literacy and a strong capital structure contribute greatly to the competitiveness and resilience of MSMEs in the era of digital transformation.

HR management is also an important foundation for the success of management accounting strategies. Jufri et al. (2024) stated that HR competencies and the ability to use accounting information systems are determinants of MSME performance, especially when combined with e-commerce. This is in line with the findings of Winarsih & Suhendi (2024) that digital transformation and human capital significantly affect the performance of MSMEs, with accounting information systems as the main mediating variable.

In addition, digital transformation also strengthens managerial accounting practices. Hendrawan et al. (2024) underlined that the main challenges of digitalization of MSMEs are limited digital infrastructure and low

technological literacy. Therefore, the integration of cloudbased accounting technology or fintech is highly recommended as shown in the study by Zulfikarianti et al. (2024), where *Human Capital has an influence on MSMEs performance, meaning that investment in human resources gives MSMEs a long-term advantage.*

Ratmono et al. (2023) also showed that the digitization of management accounting systems helps MSMEs optimize financial reporting and technology-based cost evaluation, especially in the context of urban Indonesia. In addition, Surjadi et al. (2023) *revealed that* management accounting strategies accompanied by adaptive leadership and market orientation strengthen MSME performance amid digital challenges.

In the context of MSME readiness for the digital era, Al-Moaid & Almarhdi (2024) show that digital transformation and dynamic capabilities have a positive effect on performance through strengthening technology-based managerial control systems.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses the *Systematic Literature Review* (SLR) approach as the main method to develop an in-depth and systematic understanding of the strategic role of management accounting in supporting the sustainability of MSMEs in the digital era. The SLR method was chosen because it is able to collect empirical findings and theories scattered in various scientific publications with a structured and replicable approach. This approach is considered effective for identifying patterns, conceptual trends, and research gaps in the topic of management accounting and digital transformation of MSMEs. As stated by Ayem et al. (2023), "*The Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method was used to capture comprehensive trends and practices in the implementation of accounting information systems in MSMEs.*" This shows the relevance of SLR in developing a systematic and in-depth scientific evidence-based conceptual framework.

The data sources in this study were obtained from scientific articles published in the period 2020 to 2025, which were accessed through reputable databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, Emerald Insight, and ProQuest. The articles reviewed were selected based on relevant topics, namely management accounting, MSME sustainability, cost control, capital structure, HR management, and digitization of accounting systems. In addition to journal articles, academic books published in the last ten years were also used to strengthen the theoretical foundation. Yulia et al. (2024) emphasized that the literature on strategic management in MSMEs needs to be organized systematically in order to be able to answer the needs of practice in the field contextually.

The data collection technique was conducted systematically using combined keywords such as "*managerial accounting,*" "*MSMEs sustainability,*" "*cost control,*" "*capital structure,*" and "*human resource management in digital era.*" Data were searched through article metadata that included the title, abstract, and main keywords. The literature search followed the PRISMA (*Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses*) protocol, which consists of four

main stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. Fitriyana et al. (2025) stated that this approach is very effective in mapping how the application of accounting information technology improves the quality of MSME financial reports and their long-term sustainability.

The data that has been collected is then analyzed using a *content analysis* and *thematic synthesis* approach, where the content of each publication is classified based on the main themes, namely: cost control, capital structure, HR management, and digitalization of management accounting. Articles that met the inclusion criteria were further evaluated using the *Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP)* tool to assess methodological validity and content reliability. In this regard, Dlamini (2024) revealed that "*managerial accounting supports performance, sustainability, and competitiveness among small businesses in emerging economies,*" suggesting that this approach can provide a broad yet accurate conceptual mapping in the context of MSMEs.

Inclusion criteria in this study include articles in English or Indonesian, published in the period 2020-2025, and are *peer-reviewed* publications that discuss strategic aspects of management accounting in the context of MSMEs or small businesses. Articles that were not available in full text, lacked empirical data, or were opinion pieces were excluded from the analysis. Since this research is qualitative literature-based, it does not involve direct respondents. The units of analysis in this study are scientific documents or publications that have gone through a rigorous selection and validation process.

The credibility and reliability of the results were maintained by applying the principle of transparency in data selection and analysis, as well as by ensuring all references came from trusted sources. Biswas et al. (2024) emphasized that in the context of MSMEs, sustainability is highly dependent on financial structure, management control systems, and digital readiness, all of which are topics that have emerged in many SLR studies. Therefore, this method is believed to be able to produce valid findings and can be used as a conceptual and practical basis in developing digital-based management accounting strategies to improve the sustainability of MSMEs.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The use of management accounting in the MSME sector in Indonesia currently still faces many obstacles, both from the internal side of business actors and external such as limited technological infrastructure and low financial literacy. Most MSME players still consider accounting only as an administrative instrument related to tax obligations, not as a managerial tool that can improve business efficiency. As stated by Susilowati (2023), MSMEs still dominate the use of manual records and do not understand the importance of management tools such as Activity-Based Costing in strategic decision making. This condition is exacerbated by limited access to quality training, weak linkages between MSMEs and financial institutions, and suboptimal user-friendly technology support for the small business sector.

At the same time, the development of digital technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), Big Data Analytics, and enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems has opened up new opportunities to transform management accounting systems to be more adaptive, precise, and automated. This can potentially overcome various traditional limitations in financial recording and analysis faced by MSMEs. As explained by Rifkhan & Rahuman (2025), digital transformation with AI and Big Data Analytics is starting to be applied by the small-scale service sector to change the traditional cost accounting system to a more strategic approach. However, these technologies are still considered exclusive to large companies. In fact, with scale adjustment and simple and intuitive application development, this kind of digital solution is very possible and is actually needed by MSMEs.

More than just an administrative tool, management accounting is also a strategic instrument that serves as a guide for business direction, especially in long-term decision-making. In this context, Tran Duy (2025) stated that the influence of ERP systems and artificial intelligence has dominated the performance of management accounting, enabling data-driven decision making. This indicates a shift in the role of management accounting from a mere reporting system to a strategic forecasting and monitoring tool that can help companies survive market fluctuations and economic uncertainty. Therefore, the author views that institutional support, both from the government and financial institutions, is needed to ensure equitable access to this technology, especially for small businesses.

Conceptually, the collaboration between digital technology and modern management accounting has become the foundation for a more strategic cost control system. Barreto et al. (2025) state that the incorporation of ABC, AI, and Big Data systems is an important part of strategic cost evaluation and financial decision-making of small and medium-sized enterprises. The authors argue that the application of this approach is particularly relevant for labor-intensive and data-intensive sectors such as the food, craft, and creative services industries that have been the backbone of MSMEs in Indonesia. The combination of activity-based cost accounting with AI-based analytics systems will provide a concrete competitive advantage in controlling cost of goods, distribution efficiency, and mapping market demand more precisely.

However, the success of this transformation remains highly dependent on the quality of human resources and managerial commitment within the organization. Rozana Saedon et al. (2023) reminded that strategic cost management must now be supported by top management through the integration of big data and AI. In this case, the role of business leaders is crucial, both in terms of decision making, the formation of a data-based work culture, and in opening learning spaces for their teams. The author emphasizes that extension programs, integrated training, and technology assistance must be designed inclusively so that they do not only target business owners, but also touch all elements of the MSME ecosystem including the workforce, technology service providers, and vocational education institutions.

The challenges of digitalization in developing countries such as Indonesia are also more complex when associated with infrastructure inequality and the digital divide between regions. Supatmin (2024) notes that the gap in the implementation of management accounting in MSMEs is still large due to limited training, digital infrastructure, and HR skills. In this context, digital capacity building strategies must be carried out in layers, starting from the development of accounting applications that match the capacity of local users, to the involvement of region-based communities as partners in technology education.

Finally, digital transformation in MSME management accounting practices not only provides internal benefits in the form of efficiency, but also has an impact on broader strategic aspects such as business resilience, national competitiveness, and welfare equity. Deniz ÇINAR (2024) emphasizes that Big Data and AI not only streamline processes, but also change the way small businesses manage cost, profitability and reporting strategies. In the author's view, if the digitalization of management accounting is successfully implemented evenly in the MSME sector, Indonesia will have a populist economic structure that is not only productive and highly competitive, but also resilient to various global economic shocks in the future.

In the context of the digital era, the application of technology allows MSMEs to achieve significant operational efficiency, especially through more integrated and real-time management accounting practices. This digital efficiency directly supports more effective cost control, strengthens the capital structure through data-based decision making, and improves human resource management through adaptive information systems. All of these things form the foundation for MSMEs to build business models that are not only cost-effective, but also flexible and ready to face rapidly changing market dynamics. Thus, digital efficiency becomes a key element in the sustainability strategy of MSMEs, where management accounting plays a central role in ensuring that every business process is aligned with the goals of efficiency, adaptability, and long-term resilience. Saputro, et.al (2024) These digital efficiencies not only contribute to cost reductions but also enable organizations to build more resilient and adaptive business models that are able to withstand economic uncertainty and market disruptions.

Digital transformation not only provides technical convenience such as cash flow monitoring and preparation of financial reports in real time, but also allows MSMEs to obtain accurate and fast data in designing business strategies, including marketing strategies, cost management, and decision making related to investment and capital structure. In the context of management accounting, digitalization provides more sophisticated tools to analyze business performance as a whole, which ultimately helps business actors manage human resources more effectively and efficiently. However, the success of this transformation is also greatly influenced by the internal readiness of MSMEs to accept change, financial readiness for technology investment, and awareness of the importance of data security. Therefore, this study is important to explore how digital strategies can be effectively integrated into management accounting practices in order to improve the efficiency, adaptability, and resilience of MSMEs to

dynamic economic challenges. With a deeper understanding, MSMEs can optimize digital potential to create sustainable and competitive business models in today's digital era. Faiqoh, et.al (2025) In the era of rapid digital transformation, digitalization has become a key strategy for business actors to increase efficiency, competitiveness, and profitability. This has a direct impact on the ability of business actors to monitor cash flow, prepare financial reports in real time, and analyze transaction data to design more targeted marketing strategies. On the other hand, there are still challenges that need to be overcome, such as resistance to change, initial costs of implementing technology, and data security and privacy issues. This research will help provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of digital strategies in the context of business growth and encourage broader and more planned technology adoption.

With effective management accounting, MSMEs can leverage financial and operational data to develop competitive pricing strategies without sacrificing profitability. In addition, understanding customer behavior and good relationship management also require proper HR management, as well as a healthy capital structure to support investment in digital systems. Therefore, management accounting is not just a recording tool, but also a strategic instrument that helps MSMEs make data-based decisions to create a better customer experience and increase loyalty. All of this contributes to achieving long-term business sustainability amidst the pressures and opportunities of digitalization. Faiqoh, et. Al (2025) Amidst the rapid development of digital technology, MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) face major challenges in competing in an increasingly competitive market. With the ability to dynamically adjust product prices and better manage customer relationships, MSMEs can create a more satisfying shopping experience for customers, which ultimately has an impact on increasing revenue and customer loyalty.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study shows that management accounting has a very strategic role in encouraging the sustainability of MSMEs in the digital era (Barreto et al., 2025). This role is realized through three main aspects, namely more effective cost control, strengthening an adaptive capital structure, and managing human resources that are responsive to technological developments. The research findings indicate that although the implementation of management accounting among MSMEs is still limited, the potential for implementation is very large if supported by adequate digital literacy, improving the quality of human resources, and continuous institutional support.

The utilization of technologies such as big data, artificial intelligence (AI), and accounting information systems is an important tool in strengthening the function of managerial accounting as an efficient and targeted decision-making tool (Deniz ÇINAR, 2024). In addition, approaches such as Activity-Based Costing and digital budgeting are proven to support more accurate planning and evaluation of business performance. Therefore, the transformation of management accounting based on digital technology needs to be part of the MSME development strategy in order to survive and thrive in an increasingly competitive and dynamic business environment.

ADVANCE RESEARCH

For MSME Business Actors

It is recommended that MSME players begin to gradually improve their understanding of management accounting concepts. This can be done through basic trainings, business consultations, and utilization of available learning media. By understanding techniques such as cost control, budgeting, and capital structure analysis, MSME players are expected to be able to make more measured and efficient business decisions.

For Government and Related Institutions

The government is expected to be more active in providing policy support that favors the development of MSME managerial capabilities, especially in the field of accounting. Practical assistance, counseling, and training programs need to be increased and tailored to the needs of each business sector. In addition, the provision of simple technology access facilities that can be used by MSMEs is also an urgent need.

For the Academic World and Educational Institutions

Academics are expected to continue to develop research that is relevant to the needs of MSMEs, especially in terms of management accounting adaptation amid digital developments. In addition, the results of existing research need to be socialized and translated into training or simple modules that can be accessed by businesses at the grassroots level.

For Technology Partners and Information System Developers

Technology providers or information system developers are advised to create accounting solutions that are practical, cheap, and easy to use by MSMEs. A simple software-based accounting system that is compatible with the scale of small businesses will greatly help accelerate digitalization and improve the efficiency of business management.

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