



Effectiveness of UMKM Competitiveness Policies in the Digital Age

Kania Destriawati Adelia¹, Siti Khumayah^{2*}

Universitas Swadaya Gunung Jati

Corresponding Author: Siti Khumayah siti.khumayah@ugj.ac.id²

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effectiveness of MSME competitiveness enhancement policies implemented by the DKUKMPP of Cirebon City in the context of accelerating digital transformation. Using Thomas R. Dye's public policy theory as the analytical framework, the research employs a descriptive qualitative case study method with data collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation of officials and MSME actors involved in the digitalization program. Findings show that policies such as digital marketing training, e-commerce assistance, and licensing digitization have generated positive administrative outputs, yet substantive outcomes—including improved digital behavior, technological literacy, and market expansion—remain uneven. Key challenges include unequal access to resources, low digital literacy, limited bureaucratic competence, and communication strategies that lack inclusivity. The study concludes that policy effectiveness depends on multi-actor collaboration, equitable resource distribution, strengthened implementer capacity, and adaptive implementation models aligned with local social contexts.

INTRODUCTION

The digital era has brought about significant changes in the global business landscape. Digital transformation has opened up new opportunities for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to grow and develop. However, on the other hand, business competition has also become increasingly fierce. Therefore, MSMEs need to continue to adapt and improve their competitiveness in order to survive and thrive in this digital era. The competitiveness of MSMEs is very important for several reasons, namely market expansion, operational efficiency, personalization, and innovation. Despite the enormous opportunities, MSMEs also face a number of challenges in developing their competitiveness in the digital era, including limited resources, digital literacy, competition, and regulations. Factors Affecting the Effectiveness of MSME Competitiveness Development. The effectiveness of MSME competitiveness development is influenced by various factors, namely digital strategy, technology adoption, digital marketing collaboration, and government support.

The development of information and communication technology in the digital age presents both opportunities and challenges for MSMEs. The government has implemented a number of initiatives to improve the competitiveness of MSMEs through digitalization, such as tax breaks, access to digital capital, and digital literacy training. Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are very important to the country's economy, especially in terms of job creation and driving global economic expansion.

According to Astuti & Rosita (2024), Digital transformation has emerged as a key component of contemporary economic development, particularly in the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector. MSMEs contribute significantly to Indonesia's GDP (gross domestic product) and job creation. The Indonesian government has implemented a number of economic policy packages aimed at encouraging the digitization of MSMEs in order to accelerate digital transformation in this industry.

MSMEs contribute more than 60% of the national GDP and employ around 97% of Indonesia's workforce, making the sustainability and competitiveness of this sector crucial (Tohari et al., 2025). The digital era requires MSMEs to transform in order to compete in domestic and global markets. The Indonesian government, through its "Indonesia Digital 2025" roadmap, is promoting MSME digitalization programs that include digital marketing training, access to technology financing, and digital platform development. Digitalization is key to improving the competitiveness of MSMEs in the face of increasingly fierce competition in domestic and international markets. The government has launched various policies to encourage the digital transformation of MSMEs, such as digital training, digital equipment capital assistance, product promotion through e-commerce platforms, and regulations that support easy licensing and business protection.

The effectiveness of MSME competitiveness policies is influenced by various factors, namely digital strategy, technology adoption, collaborative marketing, and government support. Entrepreneurship is defined as the creative

and innovative abilities that serve as the foundation, strategies, and resources for seeking opportunities to achieve success (Desa, 2021).

LITERATURE RIVIEW

Policy Implementation

Public policy implementation is an important process that connects predetermined policy objectives with their realization in the field. This process can only begin after the objectives, programs, and resources have been thoroughly prepared. The success of implementation is greatly influenced by the degree of “implementability” of the policy, which includes the interests affected, the types of benefits, the desired changes, and the available resources.

According to Thomas R Dye in his book (*Awan Abdullah. et al. 2016*), policy implementation involves four main interconnected elements, namely:

1. Policy, public policy in Thomas R. Dye's perspective, is understood as “what the government chooses to do or not to do.”
2. Political Processes: Public policies are not born out of a vacuum but are the result of political processes.
3. Resources: Public policy cannot function without the support of resources.
4. Response to Public Issues: Public policy emerges as a form of government response to issues felt by the community.

Policy implementation models according to Thomas R Dye (*Analisis Kebijakan Publik, n.d.*) emphasizes the importance of the implementation context, including power, the interests of the actors involved, institutional characteristics, and implementer compliance. This model underscores that conflicts between actors and resource conditions are critical determinants of implementation success.

Public policy implementation is an action taken by implementers to carry out government programs in order to demonstrate results or achieve desired goals. To identify problems and improve policy implementation in the future, the implementation process and results must be continuously evaluated. Improving policy effectiveness requires organizational learning from previous implementation experiences (Kartiko et al., 2025).

Effectiveness of Policies in Improving the Competitiveness of MSMEs

According to (Rakista, 2021) stated that the government was very fortunate in terms of synergy between institutions, the relevance of programs to the needs of MSMEs, and continuous policy evaluation. They suggested a needs-based policy approach to design more targeted interventions. The government has shown that involvement in the formulation and implementation of MSME digitization policies has a significant impact on the sustainability of programs such as collaborative models between the public and private sectors, which are considered the most effective approach (Santoso et al., 2025) . According to (Zein et al., 2025) shows that the MSME Go Digital program initiated by the government through the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs has had a positive impact on expanding the MSME market. This policy encourages small businesses to adopt technologies such as e-commerce, social media, and digital payment

systems. However, it is also evident that the impact of this policy is uneven, especially for MSMEs in rural areas or those with low digital literacy. Meanwhile, (Wicaksono et al., 2023) Fiscal incentive policies, such as digital training subsidies and low taxes, will only be effective if accompanied by continuous guidance. This confirms that partial policy approaches tend to produce short-term effects.

Competitiveness in the Digital Age

MSMEs in improving digital competitiveness include low technological literacy, limited access to digital infrastructure, and low managerial capabilities. These factors cause many MSMEs to become “passive users” of technology without actually utilizing it for business transformation. (Ilmu et al., 2016) Highlighting the importance of digital mindset as one of the indicators of MSME success in competing in the digital market. MSMEs that are able to integrate technology into their operational processes tend to be more adaptive and innovative. In this era of globalization, MSMEs generally lack understanding of social media, therefore it is clear that many MSMEs still need guidance from the government, which is why a seminar and free services for MSMEs are being held. This is one of the government programs carried out in collaboration with various parties, one of which is Gunung Jati University. The program includes several special training sessions for MSMEs. These training sessions include online marketing training, content creation training, digital financial management training, and technical assistance.

METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted using descriptive qualitative writing with case study methodology to evaluate the effectiveness of policies in improving the competitiveness of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the era of digitalization. The main focus of this study is on competitiveness policies in the era of digitalization. The research process was carried out between December 2024 and March 2025, using data collection techniques such as in-depth interviews, direct observation in the field, and document analysis. The aim is to examine the role of local governments in implementing these digital policies and their impact on improving the competitiveness of MSME players.

Data collection in this study was carried out through in-depth interviews, direct observation in the field, and documentation of various relevant activities. The key informants in this study were officials or staff in charge of micro-business development policies at the Cirebon City Cooperative, Small and Medium Enterprises, Trade and Industry Agency (DKUKMPP) and the Business Development Service (BDS) Agency. Meanwhile, supporting informants included MSME players who had utilized digital systems.

To ensure data validity, the researcher used source triangulation, which involves comparing information from various parties to obtain an objective and comprehensive understanding. Data validity was strengthened by confirming the consistency between the information obtained from relevant government agencies and the direct experiences of MSME actors in dealing with the implementation of the business licensing digitization policy using Thomas R Dye.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of measures taken by the Cirebon City Cooperative, Small and Medium Enterprises, Trade, and Industry Agency (DKUKMPP) in improving the competitiveness of MSMEs in the digital era. In-depth interviews, observations, and documentation were used in the descriptive qualitative methodology of this study to collect data. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection methods through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Data validity is strengthened by source triangulation techniques, which involve informants from the DKUKMPP and MSME actors who have been affected by digitalization policies, such as digital marketing training and e-commerce facilitation. Data analysis was conducted based on Thomas R. Dye's public policy theory, which defines policy as "what the government chooses to do or not to do." Through this framework, the study evaluates how policies designed by DKUKMPP are selected, implemented, and impact the capacity building and competitiveness of MSMEs amid the digital economy transformation. The main emphasis is on how local governments effectively adopt digital policies and the extent to which these policies contribute to ease of doing business, technology adaptation, and digital market penetration by MSME actors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on data obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation, this study will present findings related to the effectiveness of policies in improving the competitiveness of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the era of digitalization in the city of Cirebon. The analysis in this study uses Thomas R. Dye's public policy theory perspective, which states that public policy is "what the government chooses to do or not to do." Therefore, the evaluation of policy effectiveness focuses on the extent to which the Cirebon City government actively designs, implements, and evaluates policies that can improve the adaptability of MSMEs to digitalization.

This approach emphasizes the examination of local government strategic decisions on whether the policies implemented reflect support for MSME actors, particularly in terms of access to digital technology, digital-based entrepreneurship training, and simplification of licensing procedures through digital systems. Furthermore, the effectiveness of policies is also seen from the government's success in removing structural barriers that hinder digital adoption by MSMEs, such as limitations in digital infrastructure and technological literacy. Referring to Dye, this study also examines non-policy aspects, namely areas that should be a concern but have not been addressed by policy. This is important in order to assess not only what the government has done, but also what has been neglected and its impact on the competitiveness of MSMEs in the digital era.

Policies

Public policy in Thomas R. Dye's perspective is understood as "what the government chooses to do or not to do." According to Thomas R Dye, the success of a policy is largely determined by whatever the government chooses to do or

not to do, meaning that public policy includes both concrete actions and policy omissions that have an impact.

In this context, the policy to strengthen the competitiveness of MSMEs in the era of digitalization in the city of Cirebon is an intervention by the local government, particularly the Office of Cooperatives, SMEs, Trade, and Industry (DKUKMPP), to create conditions conducive for MSMEs to adapt and thrive amid the digital wave. This policy stems from real needs in the field, namely the low penetration of digital technology among MSME actors, especially in the micro sector and among older entrepreneurs. This is an important basis for an in-depth analysis of how the policy is implemented and the extent to which it is effective.

In the first dimension, namely the political process, Dye emphasizes that public policy is the result of interactions between actors in the political system. In this case, the digital MSME empowerment policy in Cirebon City cannot be separated from the influence of actors such as the regional executive, the legislature, MSME associations, and educational institutions. The policy formulation process goes through a development planning consultation mechanism (*Musrembang*) that gradually accommodates the aspirations of MSME players regarding digital training needs, online market access, and technological understanding. However, dominant actors such as the local government tend to play a greater role in determining the final form of the policy, so that the participation of business actors is not yet fully optimal.

The dimension of policy information transmission or delivery is key to effective implementation. DKUKMPP has used various media to convey policy information, such as face-to-face seminars, group socialization, and the use of social media. Digital socialization is carried out through YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp community groups for MSMEs. Although this strategy reaches most young and tech-savvy entrepreneurs, older people and micro-entrepreneurs in rural areas still experience an information gap. This lack of fully inclusive information transmission poses a challenge to the equitable dissemination of policies.

According to Dye, public policy is also a response to issues that are considered important by the community. The low competitiveness of local MSMEs in the digital ecosystem has become a real problem, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, which has accelerated digitalization. Local governments see this as a public issue that must be addressed systematically. Unfortunately, MSME actors' perceptions of the urgency of digitalization still vary, with some feeling that transformation is not yet necessary due to the limitations of the local market. This shows a disconnect between the perceptions of the government and the target community, which can hinder the success of the program.

The policy output in this context is the number of training sessions conducted, the number of participants, and the number of MSMEs that have successfully created marketplace or business social media accounts. Based on DKUKMPP data for 2023, there was a 40% increase in the number of training sessions compared to the previous year, with more than 1,500 business actors participating. However, only about 55% of participants actively utilized digital

platforms after the training. This shows that the output is not directly proportional to the outcome or long-term behavioral change.

The outcome as the tangible impact of the policy can be seen from the extent to which MSME players experience increased income, market expansion, or operational efficiency through digital technology. Findings from interviews show that some MSME players experienced an increase in orders after becoming active in the marketplace. However, there were also business players who did not continue digital practices due to limitations in time, expertise, and internet access. This indicates that the outcomes of the policy have not been fully optimized, especially for vulnerable groups who need further assistance.

The effectiveness of policy transmission is also influenced by the government's ability to convey messages clearly and in an easy-to-understand manner. The language used in socialization materials is often too technical and not tailored to the educational level of MSME players. (Digital et al., 2025) In addition, social media as a means of conveying information has not been optimized in interactive forms such as two-way webinars or online consultation services. Therefore, a more adaptive communication strategy is needed with a visual approach, video tutorials, and the use of local language that is more familiar to business players.

One adaptive strategy that has begun to be implemented is a community-based digital mentoring program. Through this program, MSME players are directly guided by mentors from among young people who have technological expertise. This program has been implemented on a limited basis in two subdistricts as a pilot project and has shown positive results in improving the digital capabilities of participants. However, the coverage of this program is still very small compared to the total number of MSMEs in Cirebon City, which reaches more than 12,000 business units.

Political Process

This policy is also influenced by external factors such as national regulations related to the digitization of MSMEs and support from the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs. The integration of local policies with central policies is not yet fully synchronized, for example in the use of social media, which is still confusing for some MSME actors in the regions. This lack of synchronization can reduce the effectiveness of implementation in the field. Therefore, harmonizing policies across levels of government is an important aspect that must be addressed.

Field observations have found that social and cultural factors also influence policy effectiveness. Older business actors tend to be reluctant to change traditional sales methods and feel intimidated by digital technology. The dominance of oral culture also makes the delivery of written information less effective. Therefore, policies need to be adapted to the local socio-cultural context so that they are more easily accepted by the target community.

Evaluation policies from Dye's perspective require a systematic feedback mechanism. However, in Cirebon City, the evaluation of digital MSME empowerment programs is still internal and does not involve independent

parties. Data evaluation also focuses more on quantitative aspects such as the number of training sessions, without looking at the quality of changes in business actors' behavior. The addition of qualitative evaluation methods such as focus group discussions and case studies will greatly help in understanding the obstacles and successes in the field.

The wide digital divide between business actors in the city center and the suburbs shows the need for a more inclusive approach. Local governments need to develop a long-term policy roadmap that focuses not only on training, but also on digital infrastructure development, partnerships with the private sector, and adequate financial support for the digital transformation of MSMEs. In this way, policies will be more sustainable and able to respond to the challenges of the digital era as a whole. Based on the overall analysis according to Thomas R. Dye's theory, it can be concluded that the effectiveness of MSME competitiveness policies in the era of digitalization in Cirebon City has shown significant efforts but still faces various structural, social, and technical challenges.

To increase its effectiveness, synergy between actors, fairer distribution of resources, adaptive communication strategies, and holistic evaluation mechanisms are needed. Only then will this policy be truly capable of driving the digital transformation of MSMEs in an inclusive and sustainable manner. In an effort to support the development of local MSMEs, the Innovation & Development Institute (LIP) of Gunung Jati University (UGJ) in collaboration with the Cirebon City Cooperative, SME, Trade, and Industry Agency (DKUKMPP) is organizing the 2024 Integrated Business Guidance for Digital Entrepreneurship (BUSTER H GODI) program on December 19, 2024, at the UGJ Faculty of Medicine Building. This program is designed to empower micro, small, and medium enterprises (SMEs) through the use of digital technology in developing their businesses.

Integrated Business Training and Guidance for Entrepreneurs to Go Digital (BUSTER H GODI) is an educational and mentoring activity for business actors (MSMEs) under the auspices of the Cooperative, Small and Medium Enterprises, Trade and Industry Agency (DKUKMPP), which is also the organizer of the activity in collaboration with UGJ, UIN Siber Syekh Nurjati Cirebon, UMC, Untag, and UCIC. This activity is a concrete manifestation of the government's efforts to drive economic growth through SME business guidance.



Figure 1. Go Digital Entrepreneurship Training Front 2025

Source: UGJ Campus 4 Medical Department, Cirebon City 2025

Resources Distribution

In terms of resource distribution, policies to strengthen the competitiveness of digital MSMEs require support in the form of budgets, human resources for training, and digital infrastructure. DKUKMPP has provided regular technology-based training such as marketplace training, digital content creation, and digital financial management. However, the distribution of this training is still focused in urban areas, while MSME actors in rural districts have difficulty accessing these facilities. This disparity in resource allocation shows that the policy has not evenly distributed support to all levels of MSME actors.



Figure 2. Front for MSME Development Through Free Services

Source: DKUKMPP Cirebon City

The aspects of power and influence cannot be ignored. In implementing this policy, local governments have full authority over program design and the selection of training partners. Meanwhile, MSME communities and community self-help groups have not been widely involved as active partners in the implementation process. This creates an unequal power relationship and results in a low sense of ownership among business actors towards the programs being implemented. To increase effectiveness, policies need to encourage the involvement of local actors and empower them as agents of change within the MSME community.

In terms of influence, Dye reminds us that public policy is often shaped by interest groups that wield significant influence. In this case, pressure from large industry players and digital platforms can influence local government priorities. For example, local MSME players face competition from large marketplaces that offer discounts and cheap logistics services. Local policies need to favor MSMEs by providing fiscal incentives, special training, and protection against digital market monopolies. In addition to external influences, it is also important to pay attention to the internal dynamics of government organizations. In implementing MSME digitalization policies, there are challenges in terms of the competence of the apparatus. Not all DKUKMPP staff have technical skills in digital technology, so training and socialization are often only theoretical and not practical. This has an impact on the effectiveness of delivering material to MSME players, especially those who need direct examples or practical experience in managing digital businesses.

The Cirebon City Government needs to review its internal human resource strengthening strategy before distributing programs to the community.

Internal training activities for government officials can be a first step to ensure professional quality public services. In addition, partnerships with professional training institutions or digital volunteers (such as the digital talent scholarship program) could also be a solution to bridge this competency gap. This push comes in response to the low level of MSME digitization (only ~25% of 2,060 businesses are digital). The pandemic has been a strong impetus for some MSMEs to go digital due to technology adoption, but many still lack understanding or human resources.



Figure 3. Digital Marketing Guidance Front

Source: BDS (Business Development Service) of Cirebon City

Response to Public Issues

The Cirebon City Government needs to review its internal human resource strengthening strategy before distributing programs to the community. Internal training activities for government officials can be a first step to ensure professional quality public services. In addition, partnerships with professional training institutions or digital volunteers (such as the digital talent scholarship program) can also be a solution in closing this competency gap. In terms of policy output, several indicators of success can be achieved, such as an increase in the number of MSMEs that have business social media accounts, training certificates, and legal documents such as NIB (Business Identification Number). However, this administrative success does not necessarily reflect substantive success. Many MSME players merely fulfill administrative requirements without experiencing significant changes in their business practices, such as digital marketing, stock management, or market expansion.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study shows that the effectiveness of policies to strengthen the competitiveness of MSMEs in the era of digitalization, particularly in the city of Cirebon, has shown a number of positive achievements but also faces various structural, technical, and socio-cultural obstacles. The MSME digitalization policy initiated by the Cooperative, SME, Trade, and Industry Agency (DKUKMPP) has targeted digital marketing training, assistance in creating

marketplace accounts, and simplifying technology-based business licenses. However, the digital transformation of MSMEs requires not only policy intervention but also synergy between actors, equitable distribution of resources, adequate technological literacy, and continued government support.

Referring to Thomas R. Dye's public policy theory, which emphasizes the decision of "what the government chooses to do or not to do," this study shows that government policies have not fully addressed the root of the problem, especially for vulnerable groups such as elderly entrepreneurs, micro-entrepreneurs in suburban areas, and those with low digital literacy. The training programs implemented have increased administrative outputs such as certifications and marketplace accounts, but have not yet had a substantial impact on improving competitiveness.

The evaluation of policy effectiveness still focuses too much on quantitative indicators such as the number of training sessions, while quality aspects, such as changes in digital behavior and market expansion, are not optimized. The gap between businesses in central and peripheral areas indicates that the distribution of resources and information is not yet inclusive. In addition, there are challenges in the capacity of policy implementers, not all of whom have digital competencies. The government's communication strategy also needs to be adapted, especially in conveying policy information clearly, interactively, and in accordance with the local cultural context. To that end, a holistic policy approach is needed that actively involves MSME actors, strengthens the internal capacity of the government, and builds sustainable cross-sector collaboration. Thus, the effectiveness of policies to strengthen the competitiveness of MSMEs in the digital era will only be optimal if they focus on sustainability, equity, community participation, and local context relevance. The government needs to shift from a one-way approach to a collaborative and adaptive model that can respond to the dynamics of MSME development in an inclusive and transformative manner.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Future advanced research on the effectiveness of MSME digitalization policies in Cirebon City should incorporate a multi-level analytical model that connects policy design, implementation capacity, and digital market behavior using both qualitative and computational approaches. Studies can integrate big data analytics to track MSME digital performance in real time—such as marketplace traffic, consumer engagement metrics, and algorithm-driven visibility—combined with ethnographic fieldwork to understand socio-cultural barriers faced by marginalized entrepreneurs. Experimental or quasi-experimental designs could be applied to evaluate which policy interventions (e.g., personalized digital coaching, AI-based business tools, targeted subsidies, or community-based digital hubs) generate the most significant and sustainable improvements in competitiveness. Moreover, comparative research across cities with varying digital ecosystems would help identify structural determinants such as infrastructure quality, institutional trust, and social capital networks. By merging behavioral economics, digital sociology, and public policy analytics, advanced research can produce predictive models that guide adaptive and

inclusive policy innovations tailored to the diverse needs of MSMEs, ensuring long-term competitiveness in the digital economy.

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