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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Analysis of Digital Adaptation Strategy Formulation Based on the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) for Sustainable Competitive Advantage in Rural MSMEs in Indonesia

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**.Abstract**
The Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector plays a vital role in the Indonesian economy; however, MSMEs in rural areas continue to face significant challenges in digital adaptation. This study aims to formulate a digital adaptation strategy that can create a sustainable competitive advantage for rural MSMEs by integrating the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) theories. This study employs a qualitative approach based on a systematic literature review and secondary data analysis. Data were collected from 45 relevant scientific articles, both national and international, published between 2020 and 2026, as well as from official reports issued by the Ministry of Cooperatives and Small and Medium Enterprises of Indonesia. The analysis was conducted using a thematic approach and narrative synthesis to identify patterns in digital adaptation strategies. The results indicate that digital literacy and managerial capabilities function as strategic resources (RBV) that influence the rate of technology adoption (DOI), which, in turn, strengthens strategic management and sustainable competitive advantage. This study highlights the importance of an inclusive approach that combines community-based training programs with the development of digital infrastructure in rural areas. The practical implications include policy recommendations for the government to prioritize human resource capacity development alongside technological support and infrastructure provision.

**Keywords**
Digital Adaptation; Sustainable Competitive Advantage; Rural MSMEs; Resource-Based View; Diffusion of Innovation.

# 1 | INTRODUCTION

Digital technology has reshaped business competition by altering how firms communicate with customers, manage operations, and create market value. The growing integration of digital platforms into commercial activities has increased pressure on enterprises of all sizes to adjust their business practices. For Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), the ability to adapt to technological change is no longer viewed merely as an option but as a strategic requirement for sustaining market relevance. In Indonesia, rural MSMEs constitute a substantial share of local economic activity and provide income opportunities for millions of households. Despite their economic role, many rural enterprises encounter persistent obstacles in translating digital opportunities into tangible business outcomes. Resource constraints, uneven access to technology, and varying levels of managerial capability often slow the adoption of digital practices. These conditions create disparities in how rural MSMEs respond to market shifts and emerging competitive pressures. As digitalization continues to influence consumer behavior and business models, questions remain regarding how rural enterprises formulate adaptation strategies and leverage available resources to strengthen their competitive position over time.

The digital economy era requires Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to respond quickly to shifts in technology, consumer behavior, and competitive pressure across markets (Ausat *et al.,* 2025; Siregar *et al.,* 2024). Business activity is increasingly shaped by digital platforms that redefine how transactions occur, how products are marketed, and how relationships with customers are maintained. Under these conditions, adaptation is closely tied to the ability of firms to align operational practices with technological developments and evolving demand patterns. Rural MSMEs in Indonesia experience these shifts in a more constrained setting, where access to supporting infrastructure does not always match the pace of digital change. Internet connectivity remains uneven, while exposure to digital tools and services varies significantly across business actors. In addition, differences in managerial capability and familiarity with digital systems influence how far technology can be integrated into daily operations. Although digital transformation opens opportunities for broader market reach and improved efficiency, adoption among rural MSMEs often progresses unevenly, shaped by internal readiness and external conditions that do not always move in the same direction.

This study responds to the need to clarify how rural MSMEs shape their responses to digital change by linking two theoretical perspectives, the Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991) and the Diffusion of Innovation theory (Rogers, 2003). The Resource-Based View explains how differences in firm performance are closely tied to internal capabilities, particularly resources that hold value, are not widely available to competitors, are difficult to replicate, and are effectively managed within the organization. Such conditions influence how far an enterprise can sustain its position when market conditions shift. In parallel, the Diffusion of Innovation theory explains how new technologies and practices spread across individuals and organizations, including the factors that influence decisions to adopt or resist innovation. Adoption patterns often vary depending on exposure, perceived benefits, and social interaction among business actors. When both perspectives are considered together, a clearer relationship appears between internal readiness and external adoption processes in shaping digital responses. Rural MSMEs often experience uneven progress in this regard, where capability differences inside the firm interact with varying levels of exposure to digital technologies, shaping distinct pathways in how adaptation decisions are formed and implemented over time.

The study is directed toward three main objectives that relate to the evolving dynamics of digital adoption among rural MSMEs. The first objective examines factors that shape the ability of rural enterprises to adjust to digital change, particularly those related to internal capabilities and exposure to technological innovation. The second objective focuses on developing a digital adaptation strategy by linking the Resource-Based View and Diffusion of Innovation frameworks, allowing both internal resources and innovation adoption patterns to be considered simultaneously. The third objective identifies implications that can support the development of sustained competitive positioning for rural MSMEs in changing market conditions. Attention is also given to how these findings can be translated into practical direction for business owners who face uneven access to digital tools and knowledge. Local authorities and related stakeholders are also positioned within this discussion, as their role often influences the pace and direction of digital uptake in rural areas. Through these objectives, the study seeks to clarify how strategic responses can be shaped in ways that align organizational readiness with external technological developments while supporting long-term business continuity in rural economic settings.

Digital transformation has altered how MSMEs operate and sustain competitiveness, particularly in rural Indonesia where access to infrastructure and technological capability differs widely across regions. Many rural enterprises face difficulty in aligning internal capacity with the pace of digital change, which leads to uneven levels of adoption and readiness. This condition raises questions about how adaptation decisions are formed when organizational resources and exposure to innovation do not develop at the same speed. By combining the Resource-Based View and Diffusion of Innovation theory, the study examines how internal strengths and patterns of technology adoption shape digital adjustment among rural MSMEs and influence their position in increasingly competitive markets.

# 2 | BACKGROUND THEORY

## 2.1 Resource-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory proposed by Barney (1991) explains that differences in firm performance and long-term competitive position are strongly influenced by internal resources and capabilities. These resources become strategic when they meet the VRIO criteria, namely Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, and Organized in a way that supports effective utilization within the organization. In MSMEs, internal capabilities such as digital literacy, entrepreneurial skills, and managerial competence play a central role in shaping how business activities are carried out and how opportunities are responded to in changing market conditions. When these capabilities are developed consistently, they can strengthen the ability of firms to adapt to technological change and improve operational effectiveness. Digital literacy, in particular, enables business actors to use digital tools more effectively in marketing, communication, and transaction processes. Managerial capability also influences decision-making quality and resource allocation. In rural MSMEs, these resources often vary significantly across actors, creating differences in how firms respond to competitive pressure and technological development in their business environment (Askiyanto *et al.,* 2025).

## 2.2 Diffusion of Innovation (DOI)

The Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) theory proposed by Rogers (2003) explains how new technologies spread within a social system and how adoption decisions are formed. The process is shaped by five characteristics, namely relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability. Each characteristic influences how individuals or organizations assess whether an innovation fits their operational needs and capacity. In rural MSMEs, the perception of complexity often becomes a decisive factor in slowing adoption. When digital tools are viewed as difficult to understand or apply, hesitation tends to increase even when potential benefits are acknowledged. Limited opportunities to test new technologies and the absence of visible examples from similar businesses also reduce confidence in adoption decisions. Social interaction among business actors further affects how quickly information about innovation circulates. Differences in exposure and experience create uneven adoption patterns across rural enterprises, shaping varying levels of engagement with digital technologies (Ndraha *et al.,* 2024; Pratama *et al.,* 2025).

## 2.3 Sustainability Theory

Sustainability Theory emphasizes the importance of maintaining a balance among three core dimensions: economic, social, and environmental sustainability. In the context of MSMEs, digitalization is not solely intended to improve operational efficiency and profitability but also to generate positive impacts on society and the surrounding environment. For example, the use of digital technologies can reduce production waste through more efficient inventory management while expanding market access through e-commerce platforms. Sustainable digital transformation enables MSMEs to achieve long-term growth by aligning these three dimensions: economic sustainability through enhanced competitiveness and increased income, social sustainability through job creation and improved welfare in rural communities, and environmental sustainability through the adoption of efficient and environmentally friendly technologies (Sitompul *et al.,* 2025).

## 2.4 Conceptual Theory of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a central role in economic development and business activity across many countries. In Indonesia, this sector contributes significantly to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and provides extensive employment opportunities for the workforce. The broad distribution of MSMEs across urban and rural areas positions them as a major driver of local economic activity while also supporting income generation for households. Beyond their economic function, MSMEs are closely linked to community resilience through their ability to sustain everyday business transactions and create new market opportunities. Within the evolving digital economy, MSMEs are expected to adjust their operational practices by adopting digital tools in production processes, marketing strategies, and customer engagement. Such adjustments influence how businesses compete and maintain relevance in changing market conditions. The ability to respond to technological shifts is increasingly associated with long-term business continuity and improved performance outcomes in a competitive environment (Harahap *et al.,* 2024).

## 2.5 Digital Economy Theory and MSMEs

The digital economy creates significant opportunities for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) by broadening access to wider markets, including international buyers, while also supporting improvements in productivity and operational efficiency. Digital tools enable faster communication, streamlined transactions, and more efficient business processes, which can reduce certain operational costs. Despite these advantages, adoption levels remain uneven across different regions and business groups. Many MSMEs, particularly in rural areas, face limitations related to digital literacy, infrastructure availability, and unequal access to technological resources. These conditions influence the pace and extent of digital integration within business activities. Differences in readiness between urban and rural enterprises also

shape competitive outcomes in the digital marketplace. Addressing these gaps requires structured efforts that support capability development and improve access to digital systems, so that MSMEs can participate more effectively in an increasingly technology-driven economy and maintain their competitiveness over time (Ndraha *et al.,* 2024).

## 3 | METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a systematic literature review (SLR) method. This approach is selected because it enables the identification, evaluation, and synthesis of findings from previous studies in a structured manner, providing a solid foundation for formulating digital adaptation strategies for rural MSMEs. The SLR approach allows the researcher to capture patterns, gaps, and tendencies in existing research related to MSME digital transformation. Data collection was conducted from March to May 2026 using several academic databases, namely Google Scholar, Scopus, and the official website of the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs. The keywords used included "MSME digital adaptation," "rural MSME digital transformation," "MSME competitive advantage," "Resource-Based View MSMEs," and "Diffusion of Innovation MSMEs," in both Indonesian and English. Inclusion criteria covered publications from 2020 to 2026, relevance to MSME digital transformation, and articles published in reputable journals, conference proceedings, or official government reports. Studies not relevant to MSMEs, unavailable in full text, or written in languages other than Indonesian and English were excluded. From an initial identification of 127 articles, a further screening process based on relevance and quality resulted in 45 articles selected for analysis.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). The process included repeated reading of all selected studies, initial coding, theme searching, theme reviewing, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. In addition, secondary data from official statistical reports of the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs (2021–2025) were used to strengthen the understanding of digital adoption trends among MSMEs. Validity and reliability were ensured through source triangulation by comparing national journals, international publications, and government reports. Peer debriefing among researchers was conducted to reduce subjective bias. The SLR process followed PRISMA guidelines to ensure transparency and reproducibility. The final findings were mapped into research variables based on RBV and DOI frameworks to support further analysis.

Table 1. Mapping of Research Variables Based on Theoretical Frameworks

| No | Independent Variable | Mediating Variable | Dependent Variable | Theoretical Framework | Source |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Digital Literacy | Managerial Capability | Sustainable Competitive Advantage | Resource-Based View (RBV) | Barney (1991); Askiyanto et al. (2025) |
| 2 | Digital Literacy | Innovation Adoption Speed | MSME Strategic Management | Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) | Rogers (2003); Siregar et al. (2025) |
| 3 | Digital Infrastructure Support | Community-Based Training Programs | Business Resilience and Sustainability | Sustainability Theory | Sitompul et al. (2025); Ndraha et al. (2024) |
| 4 | Digital Resource Access | Data Analytics Capability | Rural MSME Competitiveness in the Digital Era | RBV + DOI (Integration) | Harahap et al. (2026); Pratama et al. (2025) |

Table 1 presents the mapping of research variables based on four theoretical frameworks, namely RBV, DOI, Sustainability Theory, and their integration. Each relationship links independent variables such as digital literacy and infrastructure support with mediating factors including managerial capability and innovation adoption speed, leading to outcomes related to competitiveness, resilience, and strategic management of rural MSMEs in the digital era. Sources from previous studies support each relationship structure.

## 4 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Results

A systematic literature review of 45 relevant articles indicates that digital adaptation strategies for rural MSMEs represent a complex and multidimensional process. Digital transformation is not limited to technology adoption, but also

depends on strengthening internal resources and understanding innovation adoption dynamics. The findings are grouped into four interconnected themes: digital literacy, innovation adoption processes, managerial capability, and implementation challenges and strategies.

4.1 Digital Literacy as a Strategic Resource (RBV Perspective)

From the Resource-Based View perspective (Barney, 1991), digital literacy is considered a valuable and difficult-to-imitate resource for rural MSMEs. It includes the ability to use e-commerce platforms, interpret basic data, and apply digital marketing effectively. These capabilities can support sustained competitive advantage. Empirical studies show that MSMEs with higher digital literacy tend to achieve better market access and operational efficiency compared to those with lower literacy levels (Ausat *et al.,* 2025; Askiyanto *et al.,* 2025). However, in rural areas, digital skills remain uneven. Many business actors only use basic features such as social media promotion without utilizing advanced functions like analytics or digital inventory systems (Sitompul *et al.,* 2025; Meliawati *et al.,* 2025). This limitation reduces the long-term value of digital resources.

4.2 Digital Innovation Adoption Process (DOI Perspective)

The Diffusion of Innovation theory (Rogers, 2003) explains the slow adoption of digital technologies among rural MSMEs. Relative advantage and compatibility are key factors influencing adoption decisions. Many entrepreneurs hesitate when technologies appear complex or misaligned with traditional business practices (Siregar *et al.,* 2026; Pratama *et al.,* 2025). National trends in MSME digital onboarding (Table 2) show continuous growth reaching an estimated 30 million units by 2025, although the growth rate is declining. This pattern reflects barriers in advanced adoption stages, particularly in artificial intelligence and data analytics use (Ndraha *et al.,* 2024; Daulay *et al.,* 2025). Therefore, adaptation strategies need to consider gradual and context-sensitive adoption stages.

4.3 Managerial Capability as a Key Mediator

Managerial capability plays an important role in translating digital resources into sustainable competitive advantage. Without adequate managerial skills, technology investments often do not generate optimal outcomes. Studies indicate that training in data-driven decision-making, digital supply chain management, and consumer behavior analysis can significantly improve MSME performance (Harahap *et al.,* 2026; Faturrahman *et al.,* 2025). In rural settings, managerial capability remains limited, with many entrepreneurs relying on intuition and personal experience rather than data-based decisions (Maimuna *et al.,* 2024; Sari, 2025). The integration of RBV and DOI suggests that strengthening digital literacy must be accompanied by improved managerial capability to support more effective innovation adoption processes.

4.4 Key Challenges and Recommended Adaptation Strategies

The main challenges faced by rural MSMEs include uneven digital infrastructure, high implementation costs, resistance to change, and weak ecosystem support in remote areas (Sitompul *et al.,* 2025; Evangelista *et al.,* 2023). These conditions slow down digital adoption and create differences in the ability of MSMEs to compete in the digital economy. Literature frequently recommends community-based strategies as a practical response. These strategies include collective training programs, the development of village digital centers, and collaboration between government agencies, universities, and technology providers. Such approaches help improve access to knowledge and digital tools while encouraging shared learning among business actors in rural areas. These efforts align with sustainability principles, where digital transformation is directed not only toward economic efficiency but also toward social improvement. The integration of Resource-Based View and Diffusion of Innovation theory provides a structured basis for designing more inclusive and adaptive strategies for rural MSMEs development.

Table 2. Growth of Digital Onboarding of Indonesian MSMEs (2021–2025)

| Year | Number of Digitally Onboarded MSMEs | Growth (%) | Main Focus |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2021 | 16.4 million | - | Pandemic adaptation (e-commerce) |
| 2022 | 20.9 million | 27 | Social media & QRIS |
| 2023 | 24.0 million | 15 | Cashier applications & bookkeeping |
| 2024 | 27.5 million | 14 | Digital logistics integration |
| 2025 | 30.0 million (estimated) | 9 | AI & data analytics |

Source: Adapted from the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs and the National Digital Transformation Report

The table presents the growth of digitally onboarded MSMEs in Indonesia from 2021 to 2025, increasing from 16.4 million to an estimated 30.0 million. However, the growth rate gradually declined from 27% in 2022 to 9% in 2025. This trend reflects a transition from initial pandemic-driven e-commerce adoption toward more advanced stages, including social media use, bookkeeping systems, logistics integration, and the adoption of AI and data analytics.

### 4.2 Discussion

The slowdown in growth indicates the need to shift strategy from simply expanding access to technology toward strengthening internal capabilities. From a Resource-Based View (RBV), digital literacy and data analysis skills among MSME owners are difficult-to-imitate resources that form the basis of competitive advantage. Meanwhile, the Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) theory explains that technology adoption progresses more quickly when business actors clearly perceive relative advantages and are given opportunities for trialability through community-based programs.

Digital transformation brings significant benefits for MSMEs, yet it is also accompanied by several challenges, particularly in digital literacy. Meliawati et al. (2025) show that MSME actors in Jakarta and Bekasi still face difficulties in utilizing digital platforms effectively. These limitations reduce their ability to fully access e-commerce, social media, and digital financial applications. In addition, infrastructure issues such as unstable internet connections and high hardware costs further worsen the situation. As a result, strengthening digital foundations needs to be carried out gradually and in a structured way.

To address these challenges, MSME digital transformation should begin with a community-based mentoring approach that combines digital literacy education and shared infrastructure provision. Government and stakeholders need to establish local digital centers that provide reliable internet access and shared devices. Practical and step-by-step mentoring programs—from e-commerce usage, social media marketing, to digital financial recording—are also essential. This approach can reduce both technical and cost barriers, enabling MSMEs across regions to build stronger digital capabilities.

Overall, national MSME digital onboarding data shows a positive upward trend, although the growth rate has slowed. The decline from 27% in 2022 to around 9% in 2025 reflects a shift in challenges, from basic pandemic-era adaptation to more complex technological integration. This shows that owning digital tools alone is not sufficient; MSMEs, especially in rural areas, require deeper changes in management strategies to sustain competitiveness in the digital era. In the end, the quality of human resources becomes the key determinant of successful digital transformation. Skilled MSME actors are not only able to automate business processes and reduce costs, but also to leverage data analytics, digital marketing, e-commerce, and customer relationship management (CRM) to generate added value and new innovative business opportunities (Askiyanto *et al.,* 2025).

## 5 | CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

This study concludes that digital adaptation strategies for rural MSMEs in Indonesia should not be viewed merely as the adoption of technology, but as a structured strategic process that integrates the Resource-Based View (RBV) and the Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) theories. Within this framework, digital literacy and managerial capability emerge as core internal resources that shape competitiveness and determine how effectively innovation is adopted. RBV explains the importance of these internal strengths, while DOI clarifies how innovation spreads when business actors perceive clear benefits and have opportunities to experiment in real settings. The findings indicate that although the number of MSMEs participating in the digital ecosystem continues to grow, the slowing growth rate and persistent disparities between rural and urban areas suggest a need to shift priorities. The main focus should move beyond expanding technological access toward strengthening human capacity. Without adequate skills, digital tools risk being underutilized and fail to generate meaningful business value. This shows that digital transformation is not only a technical issue but also a capability-building process. From a practical standpoint, government efforts should emphasize community-based training programs and the provision of shared digital infrastructure at the village level. MSME actors are encouraged to develop stronger skills in data interpretation and decision-making based on evidence to improve business performance. Future research is recommended to empirically test the integration of RBV and DOI, as well as to examine the role of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence in supporting MSME development in creative and agricultural sectors.

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