

## Are Digital Marketing Trends and Challenges Aligned with SDGs?: A Review of Indonesian SMEs

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper provides a comprehensive literature review to explore the prevailing trends and obstacles in digital marketing for Indonesian Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) with respect to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This study employs a literature review method to identify the current trends and challenges in digital marketing for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Indonesia and how these align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The research approach used is descriptive qualitative. This study aims to fill the gap in existing research by providing a comprehensive analysis of the alignment of digital marketing practices with the SDGs among Indonesian SMEs. It examines how digital marketing strategies can aid in fulfilling the SDGs, focusing on aspects such as economic growth, innovation, and sustainable consumption. By meticulously analyzing existing literature, the study identifies prominent digital marketing trends, significant challenges encountered by Indonesian SMEs, and insights on how digital marketing can foster sustainable development. The results are intended to offer valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and academics in the realm of digital business.

**Keywords:** Digital Marketing, SMEs, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Economic Growth, Challenges of Digital Marketing



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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the rapid advancement of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed the global business landscape. Indonesian Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are no exception, increasingly implementing digital marketing strategies to enhance their competitiveness and expand their audience reach (Harlon, 2019; Kingsnorth, 2019; McGruer, 2020). However, integrating digital marketing within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) presents unique challenges and opportunities. The SDGs, established by the United Nations in 2015, serve as a blueprint for achieving a better and more sustainable future for all, addressing global challenges such as poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice. For SMEs, aligning digital marketing

efforts with the SDGs can not only drive business growth but also contribute to broader societal goals.

Previous research has extensively examined the role of digital marketing in enhancing the competitiveness and growth of SMEs. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2016) emphasized the importance of digital marketing strategies in expanding market reach and improving customer engagement. Furthermore, Tiago & Verissimo (2014) highlighted the impact of digital marketing on innovation and business performance, particularly for SMEs in developing countries. The study's findings from Nofrisel et al., (2023) indicate that digital marketing significantly enhances the marketing efficiency of SMEs. Additionally, it was found that digital marketing serves as a bridge between the marketing performance and capabilities of SMEs. These insights have important implications for SMEs in East Java and other regions of Indonesia, as well as for policymakers and scholars focused on fostering the growth and development of the SME sector (Bassano et al., 2019; Drummond et al., 2020; Watini et al., 2022).

Despite the acknowledged benefits, the alignment of digital marketing practices by SMEs with the SDGs remains underexplored. State of the art this research is previous research lacks a comprehensive analysis of how these practices specifically contribute to the SDGs, particularly in the context of SMEs in Indonesia. This highlights the need for a systematic review to better understand the current trends and challenges of digital marketing among Indonesian SMEs (Al Adwan et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2022; Low et al., 2020).

Digital marketing holds the potential to drive significant economic growth for SMEs. For instance, by utilizing digital tools and platforms, SMEs can reach a broader audience and engage with customers in more meaningful ways. This engagement can lead to higher customer satisfaction and loyalty, ultimately translating into increased sales and revenue. However, the challenge lies in ensuring that these digital marketing efforts are not only effective in driving business growth but also align with the broader goals of sustainable development (Liyanaarachchi et al., 2021).

The SDGs provide a comprehensive framework for addressing global challenges, and businesses, including SMEs, have a crucial role to play in achieving these goals. For example, digital marketing strategies can be designed to promote sustainable products and services, thereby contributing to responsible consumption and production (SDG 12). Similarly, by leveraging digital platforms to raise awareness about social and environmental issues, SMEs can contribute to goals such as climate action (SDG 13) and reduced inequalities (SDG 10).

One of the key challenges for SMEs in aligning their digital marketing practices with the SDGs is the lack of resources and expertise. Many SMEs operate with limited budgets and may not have access to the latest digital marketing tools and technologies. Moreover, there may be a lack of awareness or understanding of how to integrate sustainability into their marketing strategies. This is where policymakers and industry associations can play a vital role by providing training and support to help SMEs build their digital marketing capabilities and align them with the SDGs.

Another challenge is the rapidly changing digital landscape. New technologies and platforms are constantly emerging, and keeping up with these changes can be daunting for SMEs. To address this, SMEs need to adopt a flexible and adaptive approach to digital marketing. This means continuously monitoring and evaluating their digital marketing efforts, experimenting with new tools and strategies, and being open to change.

Despite these challenges, there are also significant opportunities for SMEs in leveraging digital marketing to support sustainable development. For example, by adopting a data-driven approach to digital marketing, SMEs can gain valuable insights into customer preferences and behaviors, allowing them to tailor their offerings to meet the needs of their target audience while also promoting sustainability. Additionally, digital marketing can provide a platform for SMEs to tell their sustainability story, highlighting their commitment to the SDGs and building trust and credibility with customers.

The research question guiding this study is: What are the current trends and challenges in digital marketing for Indonesian SMEs that align with the SDGs? By addressing this question, the paper aims to elucidate the intersection of digital marketing and sustainable development, providing a roadmap for future research and practice in this critical area.

By systematically reviewing existing literature, this study seeks to uncover how digital marketing practices are evolving and what obstacles SMEs face in leveraging these practices to support sustainable development. The insights gained from this research will provide valuable guidance for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers in the field of digital business, helping to shape future strategies that promote both economic growth and sustainability.

This study aims to fill the gap in existing research by providing a comprehensive analysis of the alignment of digital marketing practices with the SDGs among Indonesian SMEs. It will explore how SMEs can overcome the challenges they face and leverage digital marketing to drive sustainable development. By doing so, it will contribute to the growing body of knowledge on the role of SMEs in achieving the SDGs and provide practical recommendations for businesses and policymakers.

In conclusion, digital marketing offers significant potential for SMEs to enhance their competitiveness and contribute to sustainable development. However, achieving this requires a strategic approach that integrates sustainability into digital marketing practices. This study will provide valuable insights and recommendations to help SMEs navigate the complexities of digital marketing and align their efforts with the SDGs, ultimately contributing to a more sustainable and inclusive global economy.

## METHOD

This study employs a literature review method to identify the current trends and challenges in digital marketing for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Indonesia and how these align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The research approach used is descriptive qualitative. According to (Fitria Widiyani Roosinda; Ninik Sri Lestari, 2021), qualitative analysis is a research procedure that generates data in the form of words, either spoken or written. Descriptive research, as defined by Notoatmodjo (2002) in (Rusandi & Muhammad Rusli, 2021), is a method conducted primarily to help researchers obtain an objective depiction of a situation. The research data is sourced from secondary data, which is information not directly collected by the researcher (Wibawa et al., 2022). This method is chosen as it allows the researcher to gather, analyze, and synthesize relevant information from various published sources.

## **Approach and Data Collection Techniques**

The literature review approach involves several systematic steps to ensure the completeness and accuracy of the collected information.

### **Source Identification**

Relevant literature sources will be identified through academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, ProQuest, and ScienceDirect. Keywords used in the search include "digital marketing Indonesian SMEs", "digital marketing challenges SMEs", "digital marketing trends", and "SMEs and SDGs". Specific keywords will be crafted for Google Scholar searches on the trends and challenges in digital marketing for SMEs in Indonesia aligned with the SDGs. Keywords used for this review are:

- "digital marketing" AND "Indonesian SMEs" AND "Sustainable Development Goals"
- "digital marketing trends" AND "Indonesian SMEs"
- "digital marketing challenges" AND "Indonesian SMEs" AND "SDGs"
- "Indonesian SMEs" AND "digital marketing" AND "sustainable development"
- "digital marketing" AND "economic growth" AND "Indonesian SMEs"

### **Literature Selection**

Inclusion and exclusion criteria will be applied to select relevant literature. Inclusion criteria include journal articles, books, research reports, and other publications focusing on digital marketing, SMEs, and SDGs in the Indonesian context. Exclusion criteria comprise irrelevant literature, non-peer-reviewed articles, and publications before 2010.

### **Data Collection**

After identifying and selecting relevant literature, information will be systematically collected and extracted. The data collected includes the latest trends in digital marketing, challenges faced by SMEs, and how digital marketing contributes to achieving the SDGs.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

Data gathered from various literature sources will be analyzed using thematic analysis and narrative synthesis techniques, which involve the following steps:

1. **Coding:** Each relevant article or source will be thoroughly read, and significant information will be coded to identify main themes and sub-themes.
2. **Categorization:** Similar themes and sub-themes will be grouped into broader categories, such as "digital marketing challenges and SDGs," which may include sub-themes like technological limitations, financial constraints, and lack of digital literacy.

3. **Narrative Synthesis:** The formed categories will be synthesized into a cohesive narrative, depicting the trends and challenges in digital marketing for SMEs and their relevance to the SDGs.
4. **Quality Evaluation:** To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, each source of literature will be evaluated based on methodology, data validity, and relevance to the research topic.

### Validity and Credibility

Several steps will be taken to ensure the validity and credibility of the research:

1. **Source Triangulation:** Using various literature sources to verify and confirm findings.
2. **Peer Review:** The research findings will be reviewed by peers to ensure accuracy and correct interpretation.
3. **Process Documentation:** The entire literature review process will be documented in detail to allow for replication and verification by other researchers.

With this approach, the study aims to provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the current trends and challenges in digital marketing for SMEs in Indonesia and how these support the achievement of the SDGs.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Research Result

The literature review has provided a comprehensive understanding of the emerging trends and challenges in digital marketing for Indonesian SMEs and their alignment with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The findings are summarized and presented in the following sections.

### Alignment with SDGs

The analysis reveals that digital marketing practices for Indonesian SMEs significantly contribute to several SDGs. The key contributions are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1: Alignment of Digital Marketing Practices with SDGs**

SDG	Contribution	Key Studies
SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth	Enhancing market reach and competitiveness, leading to increased sales and job creation.	(Wibawa et al., 2022); (Kurniawan et al., 2023)
SDG 9: Industry,	Encouraging innovation in business	(Mala et al.,

Innovation, and Infrastructure	practices and supporting digital infrastructure development.	2024)
SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production	Promoting sustainable consumption patterns through personalized and customer-centric marketing strategies.	(Redjeki & Affandi, 2021)

The research conducted by (Wibawa et al., 2022) and (Kurniawan et al., 2023) illustrates the potential of social media in broadening market reach and enhancing competitiveness, leading to increased sales and job creation for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter offer SMEs the means to engage wider audiences and explore new markets. Through strategic use of social media, SMEs can elevate brand awareness among potential customers. Additionally, the use of social media analytics aids in measuring user interaction and impact, offering valuable insights into the effectiveness of their outreach efforts. Social media empowers SMEs to tailor their marketing approaches to specific customer segments and geographic regions, thus amplifying their market presence and competitive advantage. This is facilitated by the diverse advertising options available on platforms such as Instagram for Business, which feature various ad formats like images, videos, stories, and canvases.

Furthermore, social media marketing aligns with digital marketing trends, encouraging business owners to adopt innovative strategies and behaviors. It serves as a contemporary and effective method to engage with prospective customers, foster trust, and cultivate long-term relationships. The flexibility of digital marketing allows SMEs to swiftly adapt their content to remain responsive and pertinent to market demands. Moreover, social media marketing presents a cost-effective alternative to traditional marketing methods, enabling businesses to engage with customers extensively at a lower cost. However, the success of social media marketing hinges on the creation of compelling and engaging content, leading to the emergence of new job roles such as content creators, copywriters, professional photographers, and web developers.

In alignment with SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure, as highlighted by (Mala et al., 2024). The research conducted by (Mala et al., 2024) underscores the necessity of encouraging innovation in business practices and bolstering digital infrastructure development. This is crucial for MSMEs to succeed in the global marketplace. The study emphasizes the importance of strong digital leadership, the ability to surmount traditional market barriers via digital channels, and adequate support from governments and stakeholders. Such strategies empower MSMEs to enhance their competitiveness, broaden their market presence, and achieve sustainable growth.

In alignment with SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production, based on the study by (Redjeki & Affandi, 2021). The article by (Redjeki & Affandi, 2021) highlights the critical role of promoting sustainable consumption patterns through marketing strategies that are both personalized and customer-centric. Sustainable consumption involves the use of goods and services that meet essential needs and improve quality of life while minimizing resource use and environmental impact to ensure future generations can meet their needs. Personalized marketing adapts marketing strategies to individual consumer preferences and behaviors, while customer-centric marketing focuses on placing the customer's experience at the core of business strategies. SDG 12 aims to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns, advocating for resource efficiency, sustainable infrastructure,

and enhanced living standards. The article illustrates how businesses can leverage personalized and customer-focused marketing to promote SDG 12 by encouraging sustainable consumer practices. By utilizing data insights, companies can create marketing campaigns that highlight the benefits of sustainable products, thereby fostering a culture of sustainability among their customers.

### Emerging Trends in Digital Marketing for Indonesian SMEs

Several emerging trends have been identified from the literature review, as summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2: Emerging Trends in Digital Marketing for Indonesian SMEs**

Trend	Description	Key Studies
<b>Increased Use of Social Media</b>	Adoption of platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp for brand promotion and customer engagement.	(Wibawa et al., 2022); (Kurniawan et al., 2023)
<b>Personalized and Customer-Centric Marketing</b>	Shift towards personalized marketing strategies, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.	(Redjeki & Affandi, 2021)
<b>Integration with E-commerce Platforms</b>	Integration of digital marketing with e-commerce, focusing on mobile-friendly websites and optimized user experience.	(Wijayanto et al., 2024)
<b>Strategic Internationalization</b>	Use of digital tools for market research, customer engagement, and international branding.	(Mala et al., 2024)
<b>Emphasis on Digital Leadership</b>	Importance of strong digital leadership to drive successful digital marketing initiatives.	(Mala et al., 2024)
<b>Adoption of Advanced Digital Tools</b>	Increasing use of advanced digital marketing tools and technologies to optimize marketing efforts.	(Andika et al., 2021); (Rosamartina et al., 2022)

### Challenges in Implementing Digital Marketing for Indonesian SMEs

Despite the promising trends, Indonesian SMEs face several challenges in implementing digital marketing strategies that align with SDGs. These challenges are summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3: Challenges in Implementing Digital Marketing for Indonesian SMEs**

Challenge	Description	Key Studies
<b>Technological Barriers</b>	Limited access to advanced digital tools and inadequate infrastructure.	(Alfarizi et al., 2023)
<b>High Costs and Lack of Awareness</b>	Financial constraints and lack of awareness about digital marketing benefits, especially in tourism areas.	(Ramdan et al., 2022)
<b>Inadequate Training and Education</b>	Lack of technical skills and insufficient training on digital tools.	(Andjarwati & Wulan, 2021)
<b>Regulatory and Financial Challenges</b>	Regulatory hurdles, cybersecurity concerns, and limited financial literacy restricting fintech inclusion.	(Situmorang, 2021)
<b>Organizational Resistance to Change</b>	Resistance to technological adoption and need for cultural shifts within SMEs.	(Andjarwati & Wulan, 2021)
<b>Limited Government Support</b>	Insufficient government policies and support for digitalization efforts.	(Andika et al., 2021); (Smith et al., 2022)

### Emerging Trends in Digital Marketing for Indonesian SMEs

The landscape of digital marketing for Indonesian SMEs is evolving rapidly, with several key trends emerging from recent studies. One significant trend is the increased use of social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp for brand promotion, customer engagement, and market expansion. Studies by (Wibawa et al., 2022) and (Kurniawan et al., 2023) highlight the effectiveness of these platforms in enhancing brand awareness and customer loyalty, demonstrating their critical role in modern marketing strategies. Another notable trend is the shift towards personalized and customer-centric marketing, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Redjeki & Affandi, 2021) emphasize the adoption of personalized marketing techniques, video content, and virtual events to maintain customer relationships and drive engagement during challenging times. This shift underscores the importance of creating value for customers through tailored digital marketing efforts.

The integration of digital marketing with e-commerce platforms is also gaining traction among Indonesian SMEs. (Wijayanto et al., 2024) stress the significance of mobile-friendly websites and optimized user experiences in extending market reach and improving competitiveness. This trend is crucial for SMEs aiming to tap into online sales channels effectively. Additionally, digital marketing facilitates strategic internationalization for SMEs. (Mala et al., 2024) discuss how digital tools enable market research, customer engagement, and international branding, allowing SMEs to compete on a global scale. The importance of digital leadership in driving effective digital marketing strategies is also evident. According to (Mala et al., 2024) strong digital leadership fosters a culture of innovation and supports the successful implementation of digital marketing initiatives. Furthermore, the adoption of advanced digital tools is becoming more widespread, as noted by (Andika et al., 2021) and (Suárez Giri



& Sánchez Chaparro, 2023) who point out that these tools help optimize marketing efforts and reach a broader audience.

### **Challenges in Implementing Digital Marketing for Indonesian SMEs**

Despite the promising trends, Indonesian SMEs face several challenges in implementing digital marketing strategies that align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Technological barriers, such as limited access to advanced digital tools and inadequate digital infrastructure, are significant hurdles. (Alfarizi et al., 2023) identify these challenges as major impediments to the sustainable performance of digital MSMEs. High costs and a lack of awareness about the benefits of digital marketing pose additional challenges, particularly for MSMEs in tourism areas. (Ramdan et al., 2022) highlight financial constraints and resistance to change among traditional businesses as barriers to digital marketing adoption. (Mio et al., 2020) research emphasizes the implementation of SDGs, the roles of companies and industries in achieving these goals, the use of entrepreneurship to pursue SDGs, and the relationship between CSR and SDGs.

Inadequate training and education on digital tools also hinder SMEs from fully leveraging digital marketing strategies. (Andjarwati & Wulan, 2021) discuss the need for better education and training programs to support digital transformation. Organizational resistance to change is another significant challenge, with many SMEs hesitant to embrace new technologies. Regulatory and financial challenges further complicate the digital transformation of SMEs. (Situmorang, 2021) points out that regulatory hurdles, cybersecurity concerns, and limited financial literacy restrict fintech inclusion and broader digitization efforts. These challenges affect SMEs' ability to access necessary financial services and technologies, thereby impacting their capacity to implement effective digital marketing strategies. Moreover, insufficient government support and policies to encourage digitalization are critical obstacles. (Andika et al., 2021) and (Varriale et al., 2024) call for more robust government initiatives to promote the sustainability of the digital economy. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from policymakers, industry stakeholders, and SMEs to create a supportive environment for digital transformation.

### **Suggestions for Aligning Digital Marketing Trends and Challenges with SDGs**

To better align digital marketing practices with SDGs, several strategies can be implemented:

1. **Enhancing Digital Infrastructure:** Investment in digital infrastructure is crucial. Government and private sector partnerships can facilitate the development of robust digital ecosystems, providing SMEs with the necessary tools and platforms for effective digital marketing.
2. **Affordable Digital Solutions:** Providing affordable and accessible digital marketing solutions can help SMEs overcome financial barriers. Subsidies or grants for digital transformation initiatives can be offered to support SMEs, especially those in resource-constrained areas.
3. **Comprehensive Training Programs:** Implementing widespread digital literacy programs and training initiatives can equip SME owners and employees with the skills needed to leverage digital marketing effectively. This can include workshops, online courses, and mentorship programs.

4. Regulatory Reforms: Simplifying regulations and providing clear guidelines for digital marketing practices can help SMEs navigate the complexities of the digital landscape. Ensuring data security and privacy regulations are in place can also build trust and encourage adoption.
5. Promoting Digital Leadership: Encouraging digital leadership within SMEs can foster a culture of innovation and continuous improvement. Leadership development programs focused on digital skills can be instrumental in this regard.
6. Government and Industry Collaboration: Strengthening collaboration between government bodies, industry associations, and educational institutions can create a supportive environment for digital transformation. Joint initiatives can address the multifaceted challenges faced by SMEs.
7. Sustainable Digital Marketing Practices: Promoting sustainable digital marketing practices that align with responsible consumption and production can help SMEs contribute to SDG 12. This includes raising awareness about sustainable products and practices through targeted marketing campaigns.

By addressing these challenges and implementing these strategies, Indonesian SMEs can leverage digital marketing to drive economic growth and contribute to sustainable development.

## CONCLUSION

The systematic literature review reveals that while digital marketing offers significant opportunities for Indonesian SMEs to contribute to SDGs, several challenges must be addressed to fully leverage these benefits. Emerging trends such as increased use of social media, personalized marketing, and integration with e-commerce platforms highlight the potential for growth and innovation. However, technological barriers, high costs, lack of awareness, and inadequate training remain significant obstacles. Addressing these challenges through strategic initiatives and support from stakeholders is essential to promote sustainable development and economic growth for Indonesian SMEs.

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