

Digital Marketing Strategy of Threads of Life Ubud in the Context of Local Culture

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify and analyze digital marketing strategies based on local culture in creative MSMEs, with a case study focus on Threads of Life in Bali. The background of the research is rooted in the significant role of creative MSMEs in the regional economy, particularly in Bali, which possesses rich cultural heritage as a primary resource. However, in the digital era, business actors face challenges such as limited digital literacy, resource constraints, and the need to preserve cultural authenticity in global marketing. The method used is a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) consisting of planning, literature searches in reputable databases (Scopus, Web of Science, Sinta, Google Scholar), study selection based on inclusion–exclusion criteria, data extraction, and content analysis to identify relevant strategy patterns. The findings reveal that Threads of Life successfully utilizes social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, as well as its official website, to develop brand storytelling that emphasizes traditional weaving, sustainability, and community empowerment. The integration of local cultural values such as mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) and heritage preservation strengthens brand image and competitiveness in the global market. This study contributes novelty by combining perspectives of digital marketing, cultural preservation, and the creative industry within a single analytical framework. Research recommendations include expanding digital collaborations, developing interactive content, and strengthening sustainability narratives to enhance consumer engagement. These findings are relevant as strategic references for culture-based creative MSMEs seeking to optimize digital marketing without losing their local identity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Creative MSMEs based on culture make a significant contribution to Bali's economic growth, both in the tourism sector and the creative industry. Local wisdom reflected in products such as *endek*, *songket*, and *geringsing* is not only a symbol of cultural heritage but also an economic asset with high market value. The uniqueness of motifs, production techniques, and the philosophical meanings of traditional textiles serve as attractions for both domestic and international tourists. According to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, Bali's creative industry sector contributes significantly to the Regional Gross Domestic Product (GRDP), particularly from the handicraft and fashion subsectors. The existence of these MSMEs not only preserves tradition but also creates job opportunities and encourages the economic independence of local communities. In the context of globalization, their role becomes increasingly vital as guardians of cultural identity amid the homogenization of products. Furthermore, the sustainability of the local economy through cultural MSMEs also provides social benefits such as strengthening communities and enhancing the skills of younger generations. Thus, culture-based creative MSMEs can be regarded as both economic drivers and custodians of Bali's cultural heritage (BPS, 2023).

One concrete example of a culture-based creative MSME that has successfully combined tradition preservation with innovation is Threads of Life. This company focuses on producing and marketing traditional Balinese textiles created with natural dyeing techniques and handwoven by local artisans. Threads of Life not only sells products but also highlights the

stories behind each fabric, including the origin of the motifs, the production process, and the cultural values embedded within them. This strategy helps consumers appreciate the products not only for their aesthetic value but also for their historical and cultural significance. In practice, Threads of Life builds partnerships with artisan communities in various regions, creating a sustainable economic ecosystem. Their products are marketed not only through physical stores but also via digital platforms that reach international consumers. Through this approach, Threads of Life has succeeded in maintaining the relevance of traditional products in a highly competitive modern market. Such a business model demonstrates that cultural preservation can coexist with commercial success (Putra & Dewi, 2022).

Despite its great potential, marketing culture-based products faces significant challenges in the digital era. One of the main obstacles is the limited digital literacy among MSME actors, particularly in managing social media, search engine optimization (SEO), and marketing data analysis. Many entrepreneurs struggle to build a consistent and professional brand image on digital platforms, thereby reducing their competitiveness. In addition, the cost of producing high-quality content often becomes a barrier, as many MSMEs face budget constraints. Another challenge lies in how to communicate cultural values authentically without losing commercial appeal for global audiences (Amalia et al., 2025; Roqybah et al., 2023; Widiastika et al., 2025). Competition with similar products that are mass-produced and sold at cheaper prices further complicates the situation. In Bali's context, culture-based MSMEs must compete with imported products that imitate local designs but are marketed with more aggressive digital strategies. This condition requires innovation in marketing strategies so that cultural uniqueness remains the main attraction.

In academic discourse, studies on digital marketing strategies for culture-based products remain relatively limited. Most previous research has focused more on the technical aspects of digital marketing, such as the use of social media or e-commerce, without paying sufficient attention to the integration of local cultural values. Existing studies often discuss promotional effectiveness in general but rarely explore how cultural narratives can become central elements in building emotional connections with consumers. Yet, culture plays a crucial role in creating product differentiation and strengthening brand positioning, especially in competitive global markets. This limitation indicates a literature gap that needs to be addressed through research approaches that combine digital marketing perspectives with cultural preservation. Research that integrates these two aspects will provide deeper insights for MSME actors and policymakers. Therefore, this study is directed at filling that gap through a systematic and comprehensive approach (Amalia et al., 2025).

Specifically, this research aims to identify, analyze, and synthesize digital marketing strategies based on local cultural wealth, with Threads of Life as the main case study. This approach allows the researcher to deeply explore how cultural elements such as weaving motifs, color symbolism, and traditional narratives can be integrated into effective digital marketing strategies. The analysis is conducted not only on the strategies already applied but also on potential innovations that can be developed to expand market reach. By focusing the study on Threads of Life, this research is expected to provide a concrete example of digital marketing implementation grounded in cultural preservation. The findings of this study are expected to serve as a reference for other creative MSMEs that wish to optimize the digital marketing of their cultural products. In addition, the results of this research have the potential to contribute to academic literature in the field of marketing, particularly in the context of culture-based creative economies (Putra & Dewi, 2022).

The novelty of this study lies in the integration of three perspectives that are rarely combined within a single conceptual framework: digital marketing, cultural preservation, and the creative industry. By using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, this research seeks to present a comprehensive overview of effective digital marketing strategies for cultural MSMEs. This approach enables the researcher to collect and evaluate findings from various previous studies systematically, producing a valid and relevant synthesis of knowledge. The integration of these three perspectives provides a more holistic understanding of how digital marketing

can serve as both a tool for cultural preservation and a driver of the creative economy. Thus, this research is expected not only to contribute to the development of digital marketing theory but also to provide practical strategies for culture-based MSME actors in Bali. Furthermore, the findings of this study have the potential to serve as a reference for policymakers in designing support programs for the culture-based creative industry sector (Amalia et al., 2025; Widiastika et al., 2025).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital marketing is defined as the use of technology to promote products and services through various online channels, such as search engines, social media, and email marketing. Effective digital marketing strategies for MSMEs typically combine the use of creative content, search engine optimization, and marketing analytics to understand consumer behavior (Halik & Halik, 2023). Digital channels allow real-time measurement of campaign performance, enabling MSMEs to quickly adjust their strategies (The Impact of Digital Marketing on the Performance of SMEs, 2023). However, resource limitations, low digital literacy, and technological barriers often become major challenges. Therefore, in-depth knowledge of channel structures and appropriate strategies is essential for improving business performance.

Culture-based storytelling has been proven effective in building emotional connections between consumers and brands. Narratives that highlight symbols, history, and cultural values can strengthen brand image while differentiating it from competitors (Vrettakis et al., 2019). Digital storytelling in the field of cultural heritage leverages interactive media to create immersive experiences for audiences (Hochreiter & Waldhauser, 2014). This approach provides opportunities for culture-based MSMEs to present their products in authentic and engaging ways. In the digital era, delivering cultural narratives through platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and websites can enhance engagement and expand global market reach.

Creative MSMEs rooted in culture hold a product differentiation advantage through authentic production techniques, symbolic meanings, and connections to regional identity (Koliby et al., 2024). This sector contributes to the creative economy by creating jobs, preserving cultural heritage, and fostering innovation based on local wisdom. In the competitive global market, integrating cultural values into digital marketing strategies can serve as a source of sustainable competitive advantage. The ability to adapt to technology and manage cultural narratives becomes key to maintaining product relevance amid modernization and digitalization trends.

Threads of Life is an example of a creative MSME that has successfully combined cultural preservation with the utilization of digital platforms. Established in 1998, this enterprise produces traditional textiles using natural dyeing techniques and designs that preserve cultural values (Now Bali, 2025). Collaborations with local artisans across various regions of Indonesia not only safeguard ancient weaving techniques but also provide direct economic impact to communities (Honeycombers, 2025). The digital presence of Threads of Life through its website and social media serves as both an educational tool and a means of global marketing. This demonstrates that culture-based MSME actors can compete in modern markets without sacrificing traditional values.

Previous research has shown that digital marketing can significantly enhance MSME performance, while cultural storytelling can strengthen consumer loyalty (Vrettakis et al., 2019). However, studies that specifically integrate both concepts within the context of culture-based MSMEs remain scarce. Many studies address them separately, leaving no comprehensive synthesis regarding the application of cultural narratives in digital marketing strategies. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by combining perspectives of digital marketing, cultural preservation, and the development of creative MSMEs within a single conceptual framework.

3. METHOD

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach designed to identify, evaluate, and synthesize research findings in a structured manner based on replicable procedures (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007). The planning stage began with formulating research questions focused on digital marketing strategies for culture-based creative MSMEs, particularly in Bali with a case study on Threads of Life. The keywords used included “digital marketing,” “cultural-based business,” “creative industries,” “Threads of Life,” and “Bali.” The literature search strategy applied Boolean logic (AND, OR) and truncation to broaden the results. This approach is essential to ensure that all relevant studies are captured while minimizing researcher bias (Snyder, 2019).

The literature search was conducted across five main databases: Scopus, Web of Science, Sinta, Google Scholar, and national journal portals, covering publications from 2019 to 2024. A total of **236 articles were initially identified** through the database searches. After removing duplicates and conducting title and abstract screening, **84 articles remained for full-text review**. Following a thorough eligibility assessment, **27 articles met the final inclusion criteria** and were selected for analysis.

The **inclusion criteria** consisted of studies that (1) discussed the application of digital marketing in MSMEs or culture-based creative industries, (2) were published between 2019–2024, and (3) were available in full text. Meanwhile, the **exclusion criteria** included (1) highly technical research that did not address cultural perspectives, (2) articles without full-text access, and (3) non-scholarly sources such as opinion pieces or editorial notes.

The selection process was carried out in three stages: title and abstract screening, full-text reading, and eligibility evaluation. Extracted data included research objectives, methods, key findings, and cultural relevance (Tranfield et al., 2003). To maintain consistency, the researcher used a pre-designed data extraction form. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis to identify themes, patterns, and relationships among variables emerging from the selected literature (Krippendorff, 2018). The synthesis of findings was carried out narratively, highlighting trends, challenges, and opportunities in culture-based digital marketing strategies for creative MSMEs. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, cross-referencing, and transparent documentation of each stage of the study selection (Gough et al., 2017). These steps aimed to reduce potential bias, ensure the reliability of results, and facilitate replication by future researchers.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Digital Marketing Ecosystem of Creative MSMEs in Bali

In the past decade, creative MSMEs in Bali have accelerated their adoption of digital technology as a survival and growth strategy amid dynamic consumer behavior. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp serve not only as digital storefronts but also as interactive spaces for storytelling, enabling local entrepreneurs to build authentic brand images. Complementary channels such as e-commerce websites allow consumers to access product information, trace cultural stories behind the making process, and purchase directly online. According to Saputra et al. (2024), structured digital marketing upskilling programs held at Jerman Beach, Kuta, enhanced MSME actors' skills in visual merchandising and content creation. Supporting facilities such as mini digital studios, product photography training, and content calendar development accelerated entrepreneurs' readiness to embrace technology effectively. Despite the opportunities for global expansion, not all creative MSMEs in Bali fully capitalize on these tools. Sudiartana and Narayani (2024) reveal that limited understanding of SEO, social media algorithms, and digital analytics undermines the ability of MSMEs to optimize engagement rates and conversion. Additional barriers include language limitations and uneven internet infrastructure in rural areas. This demonstrates that digital strategies must be complemented by cultural positioning and policy support. In this ecosystem,

cultural values can act as a **moderator**, determining the extent to which digital adoption translates into market success. MSMEs with culturally embedded narratives tend to achieve stronger consumer responses, as their products carry both functional and symbolic meanings.

4.2. Digital Marketing Strategies of Threads of Life

Threads of Life employs an omnichannel approach centered on cultural storytelling. Instagram highlights high-quality visuals of textiles, artisan profiles, and production processes, while Facebook facilitates long-form storytelling and discussions. The brand's website acts as a hub for catalogs, educational resources, and transactions. This strategy is consistent with Pulker et al. (2022), who emphasize that omnichannel narratives foster deeper emotional bonds between consumers and brands, especially for culturally symbolic goods. Beyond transactional content, Threads of Life develops educational campaigns explaining weaving motifs, natural dyeing methods, and the socio-economic impact of purchasing artisan products. This form of educational content marketing (Kotler et al., 2021) enhances brand authority and raises consumer awareness of heritage preservation. Email newsletters further reinforce consumer-brand bonds by integrating exclusive cultural stories with promotional elements.

Collaboration is another pillar of their strategy. Partnerships with cultural influencers and participation in exhibitions such as the Santa Fe International Folk Art Market expand brand credibility and access to global consumers. According to Fillis et al. (2020), cross-cultural collaborations not only extend distribution but also stimulate innovation. In this context, cultural values mediate the impact of Threads of Life's digital strategies, explaining why campaigns that highlight sustainability and authenticity generate stronger trust and loyalty than those focusing solely on aesthetic appeal.

4.3. Integration of Local Cultural Values

Threads of Life anchors its marketing in cultural identity and heritage preservation. Narratives of weaving traditions, sustainable dyeing, and community livelihoods are central to its campaigns. Holt's (2004) cultural branding theory explains this effectiveness: brands that embody cultural myths resonate more strongly with consumers seeking authenticity. Artisans are presented as cultural bearers, not invisible laborers. Their stories—told through photos, interviews, and videos humanize the brand and reinforce transparency. Haryanti and Suharyono (2022) note that this practice fosters consumer trust, as buyers perceive direct social impact from their purchases. cultural values mediate the pathway between digital engagement and consumer loyalty. Digital platforms provide visibility, but it is the cultural narratives that transform this visibility into emotional resonance, leading to deeper consumer attachment and repeat purchases. Simultaneously, cultural values moderate the degree of effectiveness: consumers with strong cultural or sustainability orientation respond more intensely, while less culturally oriented consumers engage primarily with visual aesthetics. cultural values operate as both an explanatory mechanism (*why* digital strategies succeed) and a contextual variable (*when* and *for whom* they are most effective).

4.3. Synthesis of Literature Findings

The literature confirms that creative MSMEs worldwide rely on storytelling, collaboration, and cultural positioning as digital marketing strategies. Chinomona and Sandada (2021) emphasize that authenticity and message consistency are decisive success factors. Threads of Life aligns with this pattern, demonstrating coherence between its cultural narratives, digital presence, and offline artisan empowerment. From a theoretical standpoint, the findings indicate dual roles of cultural values: As a mediator – They explain how digital marketing activities (e.g., campaigns, social media storytelling) translate into consumer loyalty and brand trust. The narrative of heritage preservation bridges functional promotion and emotional consumer engagement. As a moderator – They influence the strength of digital marketing outcomes across consumer groups.

For global consumers with strong cultural appreciation, campaigns resonate deeply; for less culturally oriented audiences, effectiveness is weaker. Practically, this implies that MSMEs must design strategies that not only master digital tools but also embed cultural storytelling into every marketing activity. Iglesias et al. (2020) highlight that value-driven brand communities achieve stronger loyalty compared to transactional strategies. Threads of Life demonstrates this through online workshops, artisan village visits, and participatory preservation projects. A conceptual model can thus be formulated: effective digital marketing for creative MSMEs rests on three pillars (1) authentic heritage-based narratives, (2) strategic cultural collaborations, and (3) community empowerment. Within this framework, cultural values act as both mediator and moderator, determining not only the pathways but also the strength of digital marketing effectiveness. This dual role underscores that sustaining competitive advantage for culture-based MSMEs requires balancing digital innovation with cultural authenticity.

5. CONCLUSION

The digital marketing strategy implemented by Threads of Life has proven effective because it successfully aligns modern marketing technology with strong local cultural values. The use of storytelling rooted in traditional weaving narratives, educational campaigns on sustainability, and the empowerment of artisan communities creates a brand differentiation that is difficult for competitors to replicate. According to Kotler et al. (2021), brands that are able to integrate authentic values with digital channels have greater opportunities to build sustainable brand equity. Threads of Life's success demonstrates that digital marketing is not only about reaching a wide audience but also about building deep emotional connections through relevant and meaningful cultural values.

The integration of culture into marketing strategies not only strengthens brand identity but also enhances competitiveness in the global market. Threads of Life has shown that international consumers are not only attracted to the aesthetics of a product but also value the meaning, processes, and stories behind it. This aligns with Iglesias et al. (2020), who emphasize that cultural branding can foster strong brand loyalty through emotional attachment and symbolic meaning. In this context, values such as communal cooperation (gotong royong), environmental sustainability, and cultural preservation become core elements that provide unique appeal, particularly for market segments with high social awareness.

Based on the research findings, three strategic recommendations can be applied by Threads of Life as well as other culture-based creative MSMEs. First, expand digital collaborations with niche influencers and global community platforms that are committed to culture and sustainability. Second, develop interactive content such as virtual tours of the weaving process, educational webinars, or online workshops that allow audiences to engage directly. Third, strengthen sustainability narratives by presenting transparent data on social and environmental impacts. As highlighted by Pulker et al. (2022), transparency and active consumer participation in brand activities can increase engagement and reinforce long-term loyalty.

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