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TRANSFORMING MSME ECONOMIC PRACTICES THROUGH DIGITALIZATION: EVIDENCE FROM SAMOSIR REGENCY, INDONESIA

Jurnal Analisa Sosiologi

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Abstract
This study examines the digital transformation of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Samosir Regency from the perspective of economic sociology. Using a qualitative approach, the study explores how digitalization reshapes the socio-economic practices of MSMEs through an analysis of social interactions, institutional dynamics, and local community networks. The findings reveal that MSME digitalization is not merely a technological transition or the adoption of digital marketing tools but a broader transformation of socio-economic relations. Digital technologies have reshaped patterns of interaction, created new competitive fields, and shifted economic practices from traditional face-to-face transactions to digitally mediated exchanges. The study further shows that the success of digital transformation is strongly influenced by the embeddedness of economic activities within local social networks. Despite limited digital capabilities, MSME actors have adapted by relying on strong social capital, particularly kinship (*marga*) networks and local solidarity. Trust-based relationships within traditional communities have become essential resources for technological adaptation. In addition, the local government plays a strategic institutional role by enhancing digital capacity, expanding access to technology, and fostering an ecosystem that supports MSME participation in the digital economy. This study concludes that the digital transformation of MSMEs cannot be adequately explained solely through rational economic approaches emphasizing efficiency or marketing strategies. Instead, an economic sociology perspective demonstrates that social relations, habitus, and local social structures are the primary determinants of successful digital transformation. These findings contribute to the literature by highlighting that technological adoption is fundamentally a socially embedded process rather than merely a technological or economic phenomenon.

Keywords: Economic Sociology; Digital Transformation; Socio-economic Relations; Social Capital; MSMEs.

INTRODUCTION

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a highly significant role in Indonesia's economic structure, a significance that has been historically demonstrated, particularly through their resilience in helping the country overcome the 1997 economic crisis (Ferdinand & Tresyanto, 2020). Currently, MSMEs have become the backbone of the national economy, contributing 61.07% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), absorbing 97% of the workforce, and accounting for 60.4% of national investment (ekon.go.id). Based on the formal regulatory framework, this sector is classified according to business scale. One category is Medium Enterprises, which are defined as productive economic businesses that operate independently, are managed by individuals or business entities, and are neither subsidiaries nor branches of large enterprises, with criteria concerning net assets or annual sales regulated under Law Number 20 of 2008 and Government Regulation Number 7 of 2021. Despite these substantial contributions, MSMEs continue to face various persistent challenges, particularly in developing effective marketing strategies to maintain business sustainability (Kompas.com).

In the current digital economy era, the rapid development of information technology has become a key driving force behind comprehensive business transformation. The utilization of technologies such as e-commerce, social media, digital payment systems, and digital marketing is no longer merely an option but has become an essential strategy for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of MSME operations (Marsalena & Wati, 2024). The phenomenon of e-commerce, or online commerce, has grown remarkably over the past decade. This development has fundamentally transformed commercial activities, ranging from sales systems and consumer interactions to promotional techniques, ultimately bringing significant changes to the overall economic system (Herdioko et al., 2025). In simple terms, e-commerce refers to the activities of distributing, purchasing, and marketing products, whether goods or services, through internet-based networks or other computer telecommunications systems, gradually replacing the existence of conventional offline stores (Wijoyo et al., 2020). This shift has given rise to the concept of digital entrepreneurship. This concept emphasizes the fundamental transformation of business practices, in which the digital environment offers new approaches that differ from conventional methods, including customer acquisition, product development, revenue generation with minimized operational costs, and the creation of new collaborative opportunities through various digital platforms (Sudirman et al., 2022).

Although digitalization provides substantial opportunities for MSMEs to enhance their competitiveness through market expansion, technology adoption at the grassroots level remains constrained by limited digital literacy and inadequate resources (Morisson & Fikri, 2025). In practice, MSMEs' decisions to adopt social media as a marketing platform are influenced by their perceptions of its usefulness, ease of use, and associated costs. Business actors are generally willing to adopt social media when they perceive clear opportunities to improve productivity and business performance (Bado et al., 2025). On the one hand, the use of social media has proven to be an effective marketing strategy (Effendi et al., 2022) for strengthening brand awareness and significantly increasing sales turnover (Simanjuntak et al., 2024). On the other hand, empirical evidence indicates that its implementation has not yet reached its full potential because many business actors are still unable to maximize digital marketing features effectively (Saputri & Antoni, 2023). These challenges demonstrate that successful digital adoption cannot be achieved individually but is strongly influenced by effective communication, tangible government support, and strong collaboration among stakeholders (Mariani & Budiana, 2024), including mentoring programs focused on strengthening managerial capabilities within MSMEs (Fitriani et al., 2025).

This condition is clearly evident in Samosir Regency, an area with considerable potential in the tourism and creative economy sectors, where business actors continue to face significant challenges in optimizing digital technology. As one of Indonesia's tourism destinations, the implementation of digital-based technologies such as smart tourism has been shown to significantly increase tourist arrivals. The success of this ecosystem requires adequate infrastructure support, including broader internet coverage, optimization of digital application features, and continuous digital capacity-building programs for local business actors (Sihombing & Sartika, 2025). Therefore, optimizing digital media as a platform for interaction and marketing has become increasingly important in Samosir Regency to stimulate consumer purchasing interest and expand the market reach of local products (belajarlagi.id). From the perspective of public governance, this initiative requires a well-designed regional strategy. Such a strategy serves as a long-term framework guiding government management functions, including planning, organizing, directing, and supervising the MSME development process.

Previous studies have extensively examined the strategic role of technology in improving MSME sales performance and business productivity. Research conducted by Saputri and Antoni (2024) highlights that the implementation of digital marketing among

MSMEs at the grassroots level continues to encounter various obstacles. Meanwhile, Simanjuntak et al. (2024) and Fitriani et al. (2025) agree that continuous mentoring significantly improves the technical capabilities of business actors in independently managing social media accounts and marketplace platforms. However, most previous studies have primarily approached this phenomenon from a business and economic perspective, focusing mainly on technical performance and financial outcomes. Studies that comprehensively integrate the roles of local government policies, community social adaptation, and structural challenges in tourism-oriented regions such as Samosir Regency remain relatively limited.

The novelty of this study lies in its analysis of MSME digitalization as an economic practice that is strongly embedded within the social relations of the Samosir community. By examining the strategies implemented by the Samosir Regency Government through the perspective of economic sociology, this study integrates economic, social, and public policy dimensions into a unified analytical framework. The focus extends beyond digital technology and profit generation to explore the government's role as a facilitator, the cultural adaptation processes of business actors, the influence of social networks, and the practical challenges encountered during digital transformation. Ultimately, this study aims to analyze the strategies implemented by the local government and to identify the social and structural factors influencing the success of MSME digitalization in Samosir Regency.

METHODS

This study was designed using a qualitative approach with a descriptive analytical method. The selection of the qualitative approach was based on the need to explore a social phenomenon comprehensively and in depth within its natural context, without any manipulation or intervention by the researcher. A qualitative approach enables researchers to capture the meanings underlying participants' actions, understand their perceptions, and construct the social realities they experience into a comprehensive and holistic descriptive narrative (Moleong, 2017).

To address the research problem focusing on digital transformation within the MSME ecosystem in Samosir Regency, this study employed the perspective of Economic Sociology. This approach does not regard digital transformation merely as the rational and individual adoption of technological tools. Instead, it is used to understand how the digital economic activities of business actors are strongly embedded within their social networks, which subsequently influence how they utilize digital technology to adapt, compete, and sustain their businesses within the local community of Samosir.

The informants in this study were selected using a purposive sampling technique, in which research participants were chosen based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives rather than statistical representativeness. The primary reason for applying this technique was to identify socio-economic actors who possess key roles, significant socio-economic relationships, and extensive knowledge of the dynamics of MSME digital transformation in Samosir. Accordingly, the criteria for selecting informants included:

To ensure that the collected data possessed sufficient sociological depth, thirteen informants were selected because they represented various key stakeholders within Samosir's digital economic ecosystem, encompassing not only technical aspects but also the social interactions and relationships that characterize the local community. These informants consisted of the following categories:

Structural Actors (State/Government). Informants No. 1, 2, and 3 were selected because they represent power relations within the local institutional structure. From the perspective of economic sociology, the state functions as both a regulator and facilitator in creating an institutional ecosystem. These informants possessed the capacity to explain local government strategies, formal policies, and the mechanisms through which resources, such as training programs and financial assistance, are distributed to business actors in the context of digital transformation.

Market Actors Based on Social Networks and Social Capital. Informants No. 4 to 13 were selected not merely because of the types of products they offered but because they represent different forms of social embeddedness in their economic practices. Representatives of Producer and Artisan Communities (Informants No. 4, 5, 6, and 9). These informants represent MSMEs whose digital activities are influenced by social cohesion within communities or associations, such as artisan centers or coffee farmer associations.

Representatives of Kinship Networks and Local Small Businesses (Informants No. 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, and 13). These informants represent the most common type of MSMEs in Samosir, where digital economic practices, where applicable, remain highly dependent on social capital—including trust, clan (*marga*) relationships, and rotating savings groups (*arisan*)—as well as offline social networks such as local coffee shops, traditional markets, and mobile vendors.

Based on these criteria, this study involved thirteen informants who were considered to possess adequate sociological and economic knowledge relevant to the research objectives. The informants consisted of three representatives from the Department of Cooperatives and MSMEs of Samosir Regency, representing the state/government sector, and ten business actors representing market participants with diverse business characteristics and social network backgrounds. The characteristics of these informants are presented in the following table to demonstrate the relevance of their positions and roles to the focus of this study:

No.	Informant Name	Position/Institution	Description
1	Rista Sitanggang, S.Pd., M.Pd.	Head of the Department of Cooperatives, MSMEs, Manpower, Industry, and Trade	Department of Cooperatives, MSMEs, Manpower, Industry, and Trade
2	Togar Siboro, S.Pd., M.M.	Head of the Cooperative and MSME Division, Department of Cooperatives, MSMEs, Manpower, Industry, and Trade	Department of Cooperatives, MSMEs, Manpower, Industry, and Trade
3	Anjel Silalahi, S.E.	Head of the Cooperative and MSME Development Section, Department of Cooperatives, MSMEs, Manpower, Industry, and Trade	Department of Cooperatives, MSMEs, Manpower, Industry, and Trade
4	Ruba Franklin Silaen	Coffee Toba Habinsaran	Arabica Ground Coffee; Robusta Ground Coffee
5	Judiman Siallagan	JD.Art	Handicrafts
6	Henri H. Samosir	Punkngukir Souvenir	Handicrafts
7	Romauli Sinurat	Holang-holang	Holang-holang, Snow White Cookies, Pineapple Tarts, Doughnuts
8	Justina Br Tarigan	Tigan Bakery	Putu Ayu, Birthday Cakes, Steamed Vanilla Sponge Cake
9	Samosir Coffee Industrial Center (Sentra IKM Kopi Samosir)	Samosir Coffee Industrial Center	Arabica Coffee Beans; Robusta Coffee Beans
10	Frenti Samosir	Frenss (Mobile Bandrek Vendor)	Frenss Bandrek
11	Dosma Naibaho	Wiljesvi	Fried Shallots
12	Kiki Andrea	Samandali	Andaliman Seasoning
13	Robeka Simalango	Tangiang Dainang	Cassava Chips; Incir Sweet Potato Chips

Table 1. informants

Data were collected through three primary techniques: semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentation. The interviews were conducted using a flexible semi-structured interview guide, allowing the researcher to explore in greater depth the perspectives, experiences, and strategies of the local government, as well as the practical challenges encountered by business actors during the digital transformation process.

Participant observation was conducted not merely to examine the physical use of digital media by business actors. More importantly, the observation focused on the patterns of socio-economic interaction, trust relationships between sellers and buyers in both offline and online settings, social networking practices within business communities and kinship groups that influence technology adoption, as well as the socio-economic distribution patterns emerging from the development of digital markets in Samosir. Documentation was carried out by collecting relevant materials, including photographs of activities, screenshots of social media utilization, government policy documents, and MSME profiles, to support and enrich the descriptive narrative of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The Social Reality of MSMEs Prior to Digitalization

The condition of MSMEs in Samosir Regency prior to the digitalization era reflected the strong dominance of a traditional economic habitus embedded within a physical geographical space. Production, distribution, and marketing activities, which were centered in traditional markets (onan), local shops, and tourist destinations, indicate that the economic activities of business actors were still highly dependent on direct face-to-face interactions. The predominance of word-of-mouth promotion during this period was not merely a technical limitation but rather a tangible manifestation of a market mechanism based on personal trust, which had become institutionalized within the social structure of the Samosir community.

The slow adoption of technology during this period should not be narrowly interpreted as a matter of operational reluctance. Instead, it reflects an inequality in cultural capital, particularly embodied cultural capital in the form of digital literacy, which was shaped by structural factors such as age, educational background, and the uneven distribution of telecommunication infrastructure across peripheral areas. Before digitalization, business actors experienced a condition of hysteresis, in which inherited commercial habitus passed down through generations was no longer aligned with the demands of a rapidly evolving modern market. Consequently, the limited economic mobility of the pre-digital era reinforced geographical isolation, weakening the bargaining position of local producers within the broader market structure.

Local Government Intervention as an Agent of Change

The training and mentoring programs initiated by the Department of Cooperatives, MSMEs, Manpower, Industry, and Trade of Samosir Regency represent a form of state intervention aimed at redistributing cultural capital to grassroots business actors. According to Rista Sitanggang, Head of the Department, the training focuses on the use of digital marketplaces, such as Shopee, Tokopedia, and Bukalapak, as well as social media platforms. This initiative reflects a systematic effort by the bureaucratic institution to transform the traditional economic habitus of MSME actors, enabling them to adapt to the rules of the game within the emerging digital field.

From the perspective of economic sociology, however, the effectiveness of this intervention cannot be understood as a purely mechanical process. Togar Siboro, Head of the Cooperative and MSME Division, explained that the training emphasizes hands-on practical learning, while Anjel Silalahi, Head of the Cooperative and MSME Development Section, highlighted the involvement of academics and practitioners through continuous workshops. These initiatives illustrate the institutionalization of cultural capital, whereby the state seeks to equip business actors with new competencies and capabilities necessary to compete effectively in the digital marketplace.

Furthermore, these mentoring programs provide symbolic capital for business actors. Being recognized as an "MSME Fostered by the Department" grants social legitimacy and a sense of credibility, benefiting not only the business actors themselves but also increasing the confidence of financial institutions and consumers from outside the region. Nevertheless, this institutional intervention often encounters the persistent challenge of the digital divide. Business actors with higher educational backgrounds or younger generations tend to acquire and internalize this new cultural capital more rapidly than senior entrepreneurs, resulting in the emergence of new forms of stratification within the community of government-assisted MSMEs.

The Structure of Social Capital in Digital Marketing

When MSMEs successfully expand into markets beyond their local region through digital marketing, this phenomenon does not occur in a social vacuum. The success of Ruba Franklin Silaen (Coffee Toba Habinsaran) in reaching markets in Medan and Jakarta, as well as Judiman Siallagan (JD Art) in exporting ulos cloth to international markets, provides clear evidence of the conversion of social capital embedded within community networks and the Batak diaspora (Bona Pasogit). From the perspective of embeddedness, the digital economic activities of business actors in Samosir—including the Samosir Coffee Industrial Center, Dosma Naibaho, and Yispan Rumapea—are highly dependent on the strength of their social ties. The expansion of local products into digital markets is often driven by kinship networks (marga), alumni associations, and Batak migrant communities in major cities, which serve as both pioneer consumers and agents of cultural distribution. Motivated by an emotional attachment to their homeland through identity-based consumption, members of the Batak diaspora utilize digital platforms to purchase local products and subsequently promote them within their own social networks. Therefore, information technology does not operate independently in this context; rather, social media and digital marketplaces function merely as technical instruments that extend and accelerate the reach of traditional social capital, which has long been deeply embedded in the kinship structure of the Samosir community.

Structural and Cultural Barriers in the Digital Market

Field findings indicate that the digital transformation process has been characterized by a multidimensional digital divide, which reduces the effectiveness of online economic interactions. Complaints from Ruba Franklin Silaen and Henri H. Samosir regarding high logistics costs, together with the internet connectivity issues reported by Dosma Naibaho, highlight the existence of geographical structural barriers that place business actors on Samosir Island at a disadvantage compared to competitors located in major urban centers.

From the internal perspective of MSMEs, cultural barriers are reflected in limited time availability and human resource capacity. Justina Br Tarigan's difficulty in balancing production activities with digital promotion, as well as the technical challenges experienced by Frenti Samosir, illustrate disparities in adaptation resulting from differences in the ownership of cultural capital. Digital transformation requires a greater degree of role specialization; however, the predominantly family-based structure of local MSMEs compels business actors to perform multiple roles simultaneously, creating a considerable operational burden.

Furthermore, economic sociology highlights the emergence of changing interaction patterns and new forms of dependency relations. The challenges experienced by Judiman Siallagan and Kiki Andrea, particularly regarding the low level of digital literacy among consumers, indicate that the local digital ecosystem has not yet reached sufficient maturity, thereby reducing trust in online transactions. Meanwhile, the concerns expressed by Yispan Rumapea and Romauli Sinurat about increasing digital competition challenge the assumption that digital markets provide equal opportunities for all participants. In reality, the shift toward digital marketplaces has created a new form of dependence on the algorithms of capitalist platform providers. Consequently, local business actors with limited economic capital are now required to compete against large-scale distributors within an asymmetric and impersonal digital market structure.

An Economic Sociology Perspective

From the perspective of economic sociology, the analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats should not be understood merely as a rigid mathematical calculation within business management. Instead, this phenomenon should be interpreted as an arena of contestation between agency—the capacity of business actors to act—and the systemic structural pressures that shape their economic behavior. On the one hand, business actors in Samosir Regency possess significant internal strengths in the form of objectified cultural capital, represented by the uniqueness of local commodities rooted in traditional cultural values, such as *ulos* textiles and Samosir coffee. These culturally distinctive products provide a strong distinction that differentiates them from competitors in the eyes of consumers outside the region. Moreover, the emergence of the digital field, driven by expanding internet penetration and the growth of smart tourism, has created new structural opportunities that enable local business actors to achieve upward socio-economic mobility without being constrained by geographical isolation.

On the other hand, these promising opportunities in the digital field are confronted by the realities of limited individual cultural capital and the asymmetrical structure of the digital marketplace. The fundamental weaknesses of local business actors lie in their low levels of digital literacy and the absence of a modern business *habitus* capable of managing digital markets professionally. This internal vulnerability is further intensified by external structural challenges, including high logistics costs associated with peripheral regions such as Samosir Island and the dominance of marketplace algorithms that tend to favor large-scale businesses with greater economic capital. Consequently, local entrepreneurs with limited financial resources are often marginalized and excluded within the very digital market they seek to enter.

Therefore, from the perspective of economic sociology, the success of digital transformation cannot be attributed solely to the individual agency of business actors. When local governments encourage MSMEs to "go digital" without addressing the structural inequalities embedded in the marketplace, digitalization risks widening existing social inequalities among grassroots communities. Equitable digital transformation can only be achieved through policies that balance the strengthening of individual agency with structural reforms. Future development policies should therefore extend beyond improving individual digital skills by restructuring the supporting ecosystem through regional logistics subsidies, the provision of community-based internet infrastructure, and the utilization of traditional social networks—such as customary communities and *marga* (clan) institutions—as a foundation for collective digital literacy, thereby strengthening the bargaining position of MSMEs in Samosir within an increasingly impersonal global market.

Discussion

The Dynamics of MSME Empowerment: From the Pre-Digital Era to the Digital Ecosystem

The economic activities of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Samosir Regency during the pre-digital era reflected the characteristics of a conventional market that was strongly constrained by geographical boundaries and face-to-face interactions. Based on the empirical findings, the dominance of transactions in traditional markets (*onan*) and the reliance on word-of-mouth promotion were not merely manifestations of operational or technical limitations. Rather, these phenomena represent a clear expression of the concept of strong embeddedness of economic actions within personal social relationships, as proposed by Mark Granovetter. Within the local community structure, economic decision-making and market compliance were fundamentally rooted in face-to-face trust, which was institutionalized through kinship networks and communal relationships.

The emergence of digital technology in Samosir Regency has not merely transformed marketing instruments but has fundamentally reconstructed the rules of the game within the local economic field. The digital environment requires business actors to reorient their ways of thinking and patterns of economic behavior, commonly referred to as habitus. The success of several business actors in expanding beyond local markets—such as Coffee Toba Habinsaran in reaching markets outside the region and JD Art in penetrating international markets with *ulos* handicrafts—demonstrates an effective capacity for capital conversion. Business actors possessing an adaptive *habitus* have been able to convert their traditional social capital into modern economic capital. Conversely, the stagnation experienced by conventional MSMEs in the pre-digital era reflects a condition of hysteresis, a sociological situation in which the traditional *habitus* inherited by business actors is no longer compatible with the structure of the rapidly evolving, mediated, and impersonal digital economic field.

Local Government Policy and the Position of Business Actors

The intervention of the Samosir Regency Government through practical training programs, technical guidance, and continuous mentoring organized by the Department of Cooperatives, MSMEs, Manpower, Industry, and Trade represents a structural intervention aimed at mitigating the effects of the digital divide. From Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical perspective, these knowledge-transfer programs constitute a manifestation of the institutionalization of cultural capital (*institutionalized cultural capital*). Through its local authorities, the state functions as a driving agent by injecting digital literacy as a form of embodied cultural capital, equipping business actors in peripheral areas with the competencies required to participate in the digital economy.

However, economic sociology argues that the effectiveness of such technocratic policies does not operate in a social vacuum but is largely determined by how this newly acquired cultural capital is negotiated within the existing local social structure. When the local government provides promotional support or officially designates businesses as "Government-Assisted MSMEs," it is, in effect, distributing symbolic capital. Within an asymmetric and uncertain digital marketplace, this symbolic capital, embodied in state recognition and legitimacy, functions as a substitute for the trust traditionally established through face-to-face interactions in conventional transactions. Such formal recognition significantly strengthens the bargaining position of MSMEs in Samosir as they compete with more established business actors from outside the region.

Social Capital in Digital Economic Practices

One of the most significant sociological findings of this study challenges the classical economic assumption of actors as atomistic, rational, and individualistic decision-makers. The process of technological adaptation among MSMEs in Samosir demonstrates a distinctly collective and communal character. Limitations in human resource capacity, difficulties in balancing production activities with the management of digital promotional content—as experienced by Justina Br Tarigan and Frenti Samosir—and limited understanding of digital platform features have been mitigated through the mobilization of external actors within their surrounding social environment. This finding confirms that the acceleration of digitalization at the local level is strongly determined by the ownership and effective utilization of social capital.

Within the social structure of Samosir Regency, this social capital is deeply rooted in Batak cultural values, particularly those institutionalized through marga (clan-based kinship) networks and local institutions of social solidarity. These primordial ties, founded upon lineage and clan identity, have been transformed into a supporting infrastructure for the digital economy. Younger family members act as knowledge brokers, bridging the digital literacy gap experienced by senior business actors. In addition, Batak diaspora communities residing in major cities function as a captive market, consciously engaging in identity-based consumption by purchasing local products through digital platforms. This reality demonstrates that digital economic modernity in Samosir does not replace local traditions; instead, it incorporates kinship values and traditional social networks as its primary driving force.

The Digital Field and Emerging Patterns of Dependency

Although digital infrastructure promises greater market democratization, empirical evidence reveals the persistence of multidimensional barriers that reinforce spatial inequalities between the core and the periphery. Structural obstacles, including high logistics costs associated with the island geography of Samosir and unstable internet connectivity, constitute systemic constraints that place local MSMEs at a disadvantage compared to urban competitors who benefit from lower operational costs and superior infrastructure. At the same time, cultural barriers are reflected in the resistance and limited readiness of local consumers to adopt impersonal, cashless transaction systems. Furthermore, from the perspective of economic sociology, the migration of MSMEs to global marketplace platforms such as Shopee, Tokopedia, and Bukalapak has, paradoxically, created a new form of dependency on the algorithms governing these platform-based corporations. Within this objective and capitalist digital field, relationships between producers and consumers become increasingly mechanistic. Business actors in Samosir with limited economic capital are compelled to compete asymmetrically with large-scale distributors. Without sufficient cultural capital to understand and strategically navigate marketplace algorithms, digital market participation risks generating new forms of social exclusion that marginalize small-scale and subsistence-oriented enterprises.

Agency and Structural Constraints

From a theoretical perspective, the analysis of MSME digital transformation in Samosir Regency should be situated within the dialectical relationship between agency and structure. The internal strengths of MSMEs in Samosir, particularly the uniqueness of culturally based commodities such as local coffee and *ulos* textiles, represent a form of objectified cultural capital that possesses high value by offering a distinctive identity within an increasingly homogeneous global marketplace. These opportunities are further strengthened by the expansion of digital tourism (*smart tourism*), which has broadened public appreciation and market access for local cultural products. However, the capacity of business actors to exercise agency remains constrained by monopolistic market structures and logistics policies that disadvantage peripheral regions. Consequently, economic sociology argues that digital economic transformation in the MSME sector cannot be adequately understood through the reductionist perspective of conventional business economics, which primarily emphasizes individual creativity or technical marketing instruments. Government policies that merely encourage MSMEs to establish digital accounts without addressing systemic constraints—such as negotiating logistics costs for tourism-based peripheral regions—or without integrating local social networks, including customary institutions and marga-based communities, as the foundation for collective digital literacy, are likely to produce only superficial policy outcomes. An emancipatory and equitable digital transformation in Samosir Regency can only be achieved when technological modernity is able to synergize with and remain deeply embedded in the community's existing social structures and cultural relationships.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the digitalization of MSMEs is not merely a process of technological transformation or the adoption of new marketing tools, but rather a transformation of the socio-economic relations within the community. The emergence of digital technology has reshaped patterns of interaction, created new competitive arenas (fields), and transformed transaction practices between business actors and local consumers from traditional face-to-face interactions into digitally mediated exchanges.

The success of the digitalization process is strongly influenced by the embeddedness of economic activities within community social networks. In overcoming individual limitations in digital capabilities, business actors have been able to adapt successfully because they are supported by strong social capital, particularly kinship (*marga*) networks and local solidarity. The trust-based relationships embedded within traditional communities have been transformed into a driving force that facilitates the process of technological adaptation.

The role of the local government in promoting digital MSMEs extends beyond serving as a facilitator of economic capacity building. It also functions as an institutional actor that strengthens the social capacity of business actors to adapt to technological change. Through training programs, mentoring, digital infrastructure development, and the promotion of local products, the government has contributed to the creation of an ecosystem that supports the expansion of both the social and economic networks of MSMEs. These efforts demonstrate that the success of MSME digital transformation depends not only on access to technology but also on institutional support, the strengthening of social networks, and the availability of opportunities that enable business actors to participate more actively in the digital economy.

This study demonstrates that the digital economic practices of MSMEs cannot be adequately understood solely through the lens of rational economic approaches that emphasize efficiency, marketing strategies, or technical cost–benefit calculations. Instead, this phenomenon should be analyzed from the perspective of economic sociology, which recognizes that social relations, cultural dispositions (habitus), and local social structures are the primary factors shaping the success of community economic transformation in the digital era.

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