

A model of perceived business value from social media usage pattern

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ABSTRACT

Background: As social media continues to evolve, it gives transformative opportunities for Micro, Small, dan Medium Enterprises (MSME's), to conduct digital promotion that is not only affordable but also interactive. **Purpose:** This research aims to explore the patterns of social media utilization among MSME actors in Sumedang Regency, West Java, within the context of an increasingly disruptive digital business environment. **Methods:** This research use qualitative approach with case study and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) as the primary method of data collection. There are 15 MSME actors from diverse sectors with varied products and social media practices. In addition, in depth interview were conducted with MSME business owners and officials from the local government division. **Results:** The findings reveal that social media is leveraged to facilitate communication, expand business networks and widen promotional reach. There are several core functions of social media, including identify construction, information dissemination, entertainment, and public opinion formation. Due to limitation in digital literacy, MSME actors tend to exhibit characteristics of undirected information seekers. **Conclusions:** Overall, social media is perceived as a strategic tool that can enhance market access, accelerate communication processes and unlock new entrepreneurial opportunities. **Implications:** These findings emphasize the importance of strengthening digital capabilities and optimizing social media use to improve MSME competitiveness in the disruptive era.

Keywords: Social media; MSME development; digital promotion; communication patterns; disruptive era; business model value

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INTRODUCTION

Previous studies have noted that social media can serve as an entrepreneurial infrastructure that supports product innovation, market access, and informal learning (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Furthermore, with the right content strategy, social media can enhance brand positioning and drive sustained customer engagement.

Among the most accessible and widely utilized digital channels for MSMEs is social media (Solomon et al., 2024). Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp enable business owners to reach customers at minimal cost, foster community engagement, and construct authentic brand narratives (Choi & Thoeni, 2016). Empirical studies have demonstrated that strategic use of social media can generate positive business outcomes, ranging from increased sales to improved customer loyalty (Ahmad et al., 2018; Qalati et al., 2021).

Nonetheless, significant challenges persist, especially those related to digital literacy gaps, inadequate technological infrastructure, and the lack of coherent content strategies. Several studies emphasize that MSMEs in developing countries often engage with social media in a reactive rather than strategic manner (Rafiana et al., 2021).

From a policy standpoint, the Indonesian government has launched various initiatives to support MSME digital transformation. Programs such as *Bangga Buatan Indonesia* (BBI) and digital training schemes led by the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs are designed to strengthen digital adaptability among entrepreneurs. However, the disconnect between technical training and strategic-managerial competencies remains a critical barrier

In this context, it is important to understand how local MSMEs respond to such dynamics. MSMEs current weakness, regarding digital usage are the adoption to utilize the use of social media feature. Sumedang Regency, known for its community-based entrepreneurial culture and progressive digital economy, serves as a representative site for exploring social media usage patterns among MSME actors. This study aims to identify the motivations, strategies, and challenges faced by MSMEs in managing social media as part of their marketing communication transformation.

By integrating managerial, digital, and sociocultural perspectives, this study aims to explore the pattern of social media used by MSME and develop into business value model. This study also offers not only conceptual contributions to the discourse on MSME digital transformation but also

practical recommendations for policymakers. The findings are expected to reinforce community-based interventions and broaden the understanding of social media's role as a catalyst for small business transformation in the knowledge-based economy era (Alalwan, 2018; Wang & Kim, 2017).

RESEARCH METHOD

These research use case study with a qualitative approach. The aim of this study is to explore the use of social media by MSMEs actors in Sumedang, West Java. The choice of research location because of its wide range of MSME sectors which includes creative, agricultural, and culinary enterprises. This variety provides comprehensive analysis of digital communications strategy and perceived business value from the use of social media. The informants were chosen by purposive sampling technique, which sampled based on relevancy consideration with research purposes.

Main criteria of informant are MSMEs actors that use social media actively and sustain in business operations. There are 15 informants from various sectors (see Table 1).

FGDs were conducted to gather collective experiences, perceptions, and digital practices among MSME actors. Discussions were guided using a semi-structured framework covering nine key themes: motives for using social media,

its role in business relationships, access and sharing of information, entertainment and stress management, product and location promotion, brand image and identity, testimonials and public opinion, behavioral patterns, and perceived business value.

In addition, in-depth interviews were also conducted with three government stakeholders from relevant local institutions: the Department of Cooperatives and SMEs, the Department of Industry and Trade, and the Division of Creative Economy under the Sumedang regional government to capture public policy perspectives and institutional support for social media use in MSME empowerment. This method allows for a more personal and reflective understanding of key actors' views. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, as developed by (Braun & Clarke, 2024). The process involved data transcription, open coding, axial coding for category grouping, and identification of core themes. The analysis was conducted manually and supported by memo writing to ensure transparency of the interpretive logic. This approach allowed for the emergence of patterns grounded in the lived experiences of the informants. The informants in this study were owners and/or managers of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) operating within Sumedang Regency.

Table 2 List of Informants

No	Initials	Age	Gender	Education	Type of Business	Number of Employees	Number of Employees	Social Media Platforms Used	Years Using Social Media
1	ER	42	Female	High School	Opak Production	5	8	Instagram, WhatsApp	6
2	DA	45	Male	Bachelor's Degree	Melinjo Chips	3	10	Facebook	5
3	II	38	Female	Junior High	Spinach Chips	4	6	Instagram	4
4	DS	50	Female	High School	Wood Carving	6	12	WhatsApp, Facebook	7
5	OS	36	Male	High School	Wood Craft	3	7	Instagram, TikTok	5
6	AS	40	Male	High School	Air Rifle	4	5	Facebook, WhatsApp	4
7	NS	37	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Muslim Clothing	3	9	Instagram	6
8	NN	43	Female	High School	Garment	6	11	Facebook, TikTok	5
9	EE	48	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Embroidery	4	8	WhatsApp	3
10	DM	39	Female	Junior High	School Uniforms and Hijabs	2	4	Instagram, Facebook	6
11	HS	41	Female	High School	Knitting and Macrame	3	6	Instagram, WhatsApp	4
12	S	46	Male	High School	Wooden Puppets	5	10	Facebook, TikTok	5
13	YH	44	Male	High School	Wood Carving	4	9	Instagram	6
14	NK	49	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Wood Carving	5	11	Instagram, Facebook	7
15	NM	35	Female	Junior High	BATik	2	5	Facebook	4

Source: Author's elaboration based on FGD, 2025

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The informants of this study represent a diverse cross-section of the local MSME ecosystem, both in demographic and business characteristics, each serving as the owner and/or principal decision-maker of their business. All informants fall within the productive age range of 35 to 50 years, a period often associated with peak professional maturity. In terms of gender composition, 10 out of 15 informants (66.7%) are female. This finding

noted the increasing involvement of women entrepreneurs in leveraging social media as an economic empowerment tool.

Educational background among informants is varied: 4 informants (26.7%) hold a bachelor's degree, 6 (40%) completed senior high school, and 5 (33.3%) have junior high school education. This diversity suggests that formal education is not necessarily a prerequisite for effective digital engagement. The profiles of these informants reflect that social media adoption among MSMEs is both widespread

and multifaceted. Far from being a mere trend, digital engagement is a product of adaptive strategies to survive, grow, and compete in a disrupted economy. The combination of age diversity, gender dynamics, and sectoral spread demonstrates that digital transformation is no longer limited to highly educated or urban-centric entrepreneurs but is increasingly embraced by grassroots businesses.

The findings affirm that social media is not merely a promotional tool. For MSMEs in Sumedang, it functions as a strategic space for relational engagement, product display, learning, and identity-building. The data reveal that even with limited financial and technical resources, MSMEs are creatively leveraging digital platforms to maintain competitiveness and market relevance.

In summary, the informant profile illustrates the strategic shift among local entrepreneurs in embracing social media as a critical infrastructure for business sustainability. Their practices underscore the need for continued support through training, community-based digital ecosystems, and inclusive policy frameworks that recognize MSMEs not as peripheral actors but as digital citizens co-creating value in the broader digital economy.

Understanding the motives for using social media among MSMEs is important for interpreting the evolving dynamics of digital

adoption in everyday business practices. MSMEs tend to rely on social media due to a combination of practical necessity, emotional engagement, and limited operational resources. Findings from Focus Group Discussion with fifteen MSMEs from various sectors in Sumedang, indicate that social media play multiple roles beyond mere promotion.

These purposes are categorized across three major motivational dimensions: functional, relational, and aspirational. Functionally, over 80% of participants emphasized that through platforms such as WhatsApp Business and Instagram Direct Message facilitating order coordination and customer support with fast, direct and low cost.

Relational motivations were also prominent in the discussions. Approximately 20.2% of participants stated that social media helped them build and maintain social relationships with both loyal and potential customers. These interactions, often informal and personalized, foster a sense of community and trust, reflecting the social integration motives.

The aspirational dimension of social media uses also emerged strongly. As many as 20.8% of informants viewed digital presence as essential for enhancing business visibility and legitimacy. According to a handmade accessory entrepreneur, having an Instagram account was no longer optional, as potential customers would

often hesitate to make purchases if a business had no online footprint. This finding supports Cialdini (2021) concept of perceived credibility through social proof. Moreover, social media served as a source of emotional affirmation and professional pride. As 18.0% of respondents stated that customer encouragement and positive feedback helped maintain their motivation, especially during difficult times. A healthy snack producer, for instance, described feeling deeply encouraged when customers posted and praised her products on their own feeds.

The use of social media for competitor observation was reported by 19.4% of participants. This group indicated that they followed other businesses to keep up with industry trends, promotional tactics, and visual presentation strategies. For many, this activity was not merely passive browsing but an informal learning process that contributed to strategic decision-making and product innovation. Overall, the most frequently cited motive was ease of communication, which was mentioned by 21.6% of the MSME actors. Visibility and legitimacy followed closely at 20.8%, with relational maintenance at 20.2%, market observation at 19.4%, and customer support and encouragement at 18.0%.

These findings suggest that MSMEs perceive social media as a multifunctional ecosystem. It enables seamless communication,

relationship building, brand credibility, informal learning, and psychological reinforcement. In the context of a disruptive economic landscape, such varied and layered motivations illustrate how MSMEs adapt, survive, and thrive through the affordances of social media platforms. The motivations range not only from survival needs to operational efficiency, but also from community engagement to digital transformation and identity development.

This study identifies six core functions of social media for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) which are introducing the business and building relationships, accessing and sharing information, providing entertainment and emotional relief, promoting products and business locations, shaping brand identity, and generating public opinion through customer testimonials. These platforms serve as expressive, emotionally charged, and dialogical communication spaces that allow two-way interaction between businesses and their audience. Social media, particularly through features such as Instagram Stories, allows MSME actors to humanize their businesses by sharing the behind-the-scenes reality of their work. Positive testimonials from customers are often showcased as social proof to enhance business legitimacy and build. In this context, social media becomes a vital space for nurturing long-term engagement and credibility. This

shift reflects the evolution from transactional to relational marketing wherein emotional connections and sustained customer loyalty become critical elements of business strategy.

The role of social media in establishing and strengthening relationships between MSMEs and consumers is closely aligned with the Social Presence Theory developed by Short, Williams, and Christie. According to this theory, communication effectiveness increases when the medium can convey a sense of personal presence and emotional intimacy (Son et al., 2025). Within the MSME context, the ability to communicate in a warm, responsive, and authentic manner via social media is a key determinant of brand trust, especially for new business.

Further supporting this view is the concept of parasocial interaction, proposed by Horton and Richard (1956) and Hadiyati and Luthfia (2026), which explains how followers of MSME social media accounts often perceive a sense of direct personal connection with business owners. Through regular posts, comment exchanges, and private messaging, a simulated social relationship is cultivated that enhances the customer's emotional attachment to the brand. In community driven regions like Sumedang, such relationships are further amplified by strong local social capital. Trust and reciprocal exchange embedded within

community networks exert a stronger influence than formal advertising. Social media, in this case, extends those local bonds into the digital space, reinforcing offline relationships and transforming them into strategic digital trust (Tarso et al., 2025).

The customer engagement framework proposed by Brodie et al. (2011) the role of "customer engagement" (CE also supports this perspective, highlighting how emotional and cognitive engagement fosters both customer loyalty and active participation. MSMEs that respond thoughtfully to customer comments, share user-generated content, and maintain open channels of dialogue tend to create loyal digital communities around their brand. While time and resource constraints remain considerable challenges, consistent presence and authentic expression allow MSMEs to cultivate emotional ties and foster long-term brand loyalty through digital means.

Insights from the FGDs conducted with fifteen MSME actors further reveal that social media has become a strategic domain for identity building, relationship development, and the cultivation of trust ecosystems. About 22.4% of participants emphasized the importance of showcasing their personal brand, often by appearing directly in Instagram Stories. One herbal soap entrepreneur remarked that they often show up in their stories, and it feels like

customer know them. This underscoring the value of personal presence in creating emotional connections.

Approximately 21.0% of respondents highlighted the role of direct engagement in comments and private messages. A home-based culinary business owner stated that they always take the time to reply to comments, and it makes a difference. It suggesting that even small gestures can generate warmth in digital interactions. Emotional engagement was mentioned by 19.4% of participants, one of whom explained how simple affirmations like the expression “That’s such a great idea!” made them feel appreciated and motivated to continue innovating.

Social networking and storytelling also featured prominently. Around 18.9% of informants used social media to build peer connections, while 18.3% expressed the desire to tell community-based narratives through their brand. A local coffee entrepreneur explained that they feel like they not only sell coffee but also share stories about their farmers. These narratives demonstrate how MSMEs use social media to connect values, identities, and aspirations with their audience in deeply human and meaningful ways.

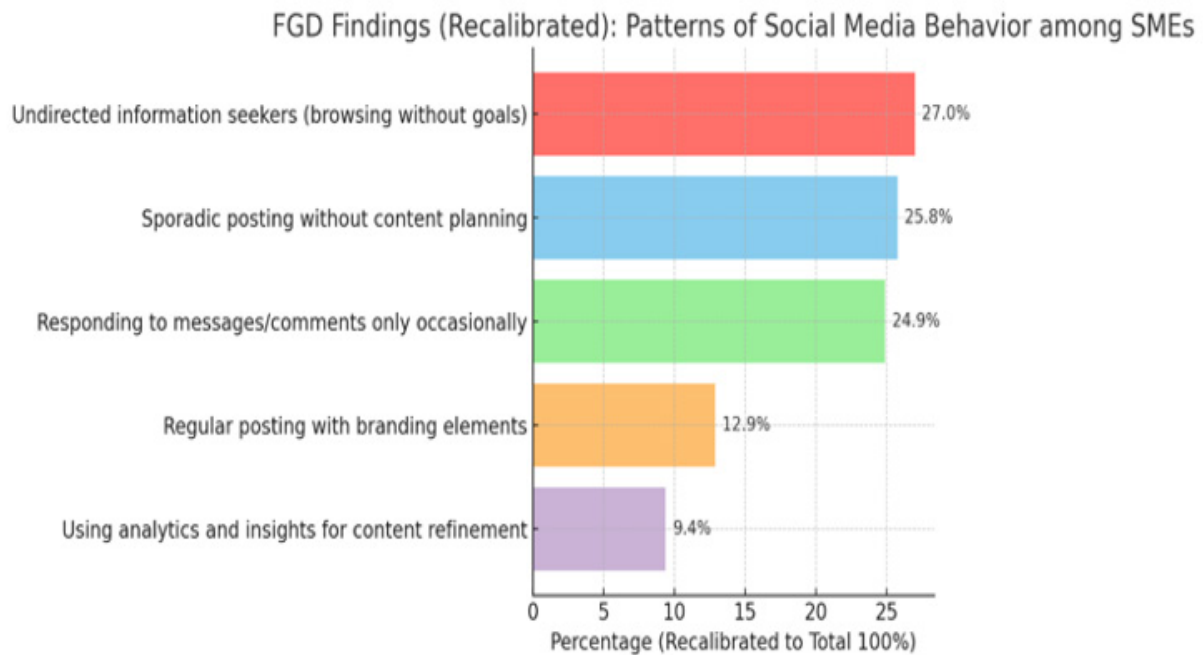
Altogether, these findings emphasize that social media now functions as a sociocultural space where the values and aspirations of

MSMEs converge with their audiences. It enables more than visibility. It nurtures emotional resonance, builds trust capital, and fosters shared identity in ways that traditional marketing could rarely achieve (Pertiwi et al., 2022).

Insights drawn from focus group discussions (FGDs) with MSME actors in Sumedang reveal a wide range of social media usage behaviors, reflecting a spectrum that spans from casual engagement to emerging strategic practices. These patterns mirror how small business owners navigate the digital landscape, often oscillating between spontaneous habits and structured content strategies.

A significant proportion, more than 60%, still engage with social media in an unstructured manner (see Figure 1). They tend to post content without a defined plan, write improvised captions, and rarely review engagement metrics. This phenomenon aligns with the typology of “undirected digital users” in which users engage with content passively and inconsistently, limiting the strategic potential of the platform (Lim & Kesumahati, 2023).

Nonetheless, a smaller segment of approximately 30% has begun transitioning toward more intentional digital practices. These business owners have started using content calendars, paying attention to optimal posting times, and tracking Instagram insights. One



Source: Author’s elaboration based on FGD, 2025

Figure 1 Social Media Behavior

food business owner shared that they used to post randomly, but then they use templates and check the best time to upload.

This transition echoes Rogers (2003) diffusion of innovation curve, where early adopters pave the way for broader adoption among their peers. Despite this progress, the burden of multitasking remains a critical constraint. Many MSME owners are solely responsible for production, logistics, customer service, and digital marketing, which often leaves social media engagement as a low-priority task. As one participant noted that that only check their phone at nighttime and have no idea what to post to their social media.

This underscores the urgent need for

practical digital support, user friendly tools, targeted training, and supportive peer networks to help MSMEs convert social media from a reactive activity into a strategic growth engine. In a discussion, participants disclosed that although they use social media daily, many have yet to adopt fully strategic approaches. Their hesitation is not due to unwillingness, but rather time constraints and limited capacity. As a result (see Figure 1), social media is often used reactively rather than proactively. Around 27% of participants admitted to mindlessly scrolling without a clear purpose. Another 25.8% confessed to posting content irregularly, dictated by mood or impulse. Response management is another area of concern. Approximately 24.9%

only reply to customer messages in real time. Like a herbal products seller said that they might lose customer if they reply late.

Meanwhile, only 12.9% consistently maintain visual branding elements, and a mere 9.4% make use of analytics to inform their content strategies. These findings highlight the pressing need for contextually relevant digital mentorship for MSMEs. To ensure that social media functions as a true catalyst for growth rather than merely a digital presence entrepreneurs must be equipped with accessible strategies, tools, and community-based support systems (Damayanti et al., 2024).

For micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) actors, social media has evolved beyond its traditional role as a promotional tool. During in-depth focus group discussions (FGDs), participants consistently described social media as an integral business companion, facilitating customer outreach, accelerating communication, and even sparking new ideas for growth. WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook emerged as the most frequently used platforms among participants. As one snack business owner put that through Instagram, they can attract new customers without having to leave their house.

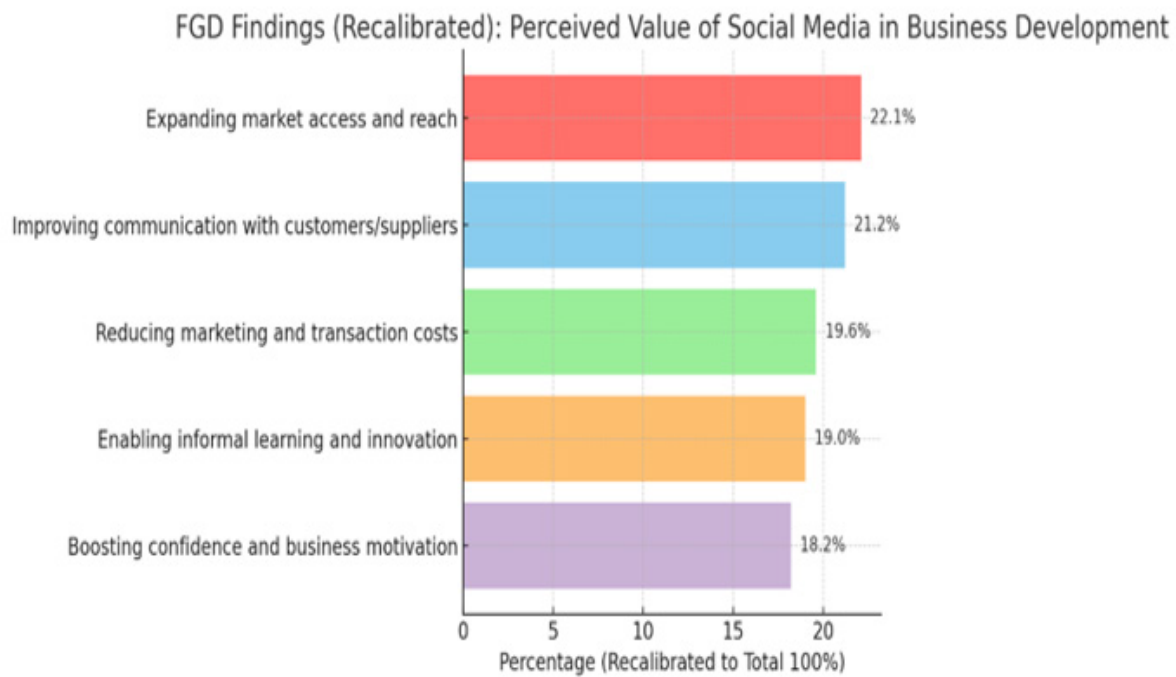
The ability of social media to transcend geographic limitations and mobile accessibility have transformed operational workflows,

view of digital assets as sources of sustainable competitive advantage (Kumi et al., 2026). More significantly, social media enables entrepreneurs to foster closer and more meaningful relationships with their customers. Rapid responses and daily interactions can build trust and reinforcing the core of relationship marketing unlock broader market access. Many participants also emphasized the efficiency benefits of digital platforms. Quick messaging and seamless coordination.

Interestingly, social media also serves as an informal learning environment. Numerous participants reported gaining inspiration for packaging, content strategy, and trend analysis simply by scrolling through Instagram feeds.

Beyond its practical functions, social media was also seen as a source of emotional fulfilment (see Figure 2). Participants expressed a sense of pride when their businesses were positively acknowledged online. Like one artisan remarked that they feel good when someone comments positively or shares their post.

Despite persistent challenges such as limited digital skills or inconsistent content strategies, the narratives collected from the FGD underscore the latent potential of social media to empower MSMEs provided they receive the right guidance, training, and motivational support.



Source: Author’s elaboration based on FGD, 2025

Figure 2 Perceived Value of Social Media

The discussion sessions revealed deeply personal accounts of how social media had become a transformative element in the entrepreneurial journey. For many, a single post could bring visibility to their products well beyond local markets. Like a local accessories crafter said that they never pay for advertising, but still they have customers from Palembang and Batam. In this context, social media functioned as a bridge, extending reach and influence at little to no cost.

Others emphasized the seamlessness of customer communication through direct messages or WhatsApp groups. These digital interactions often replaced the need for physical storefronts, allowing promotion and engagement to be conducted with creativity

and consistency alone. Moreover, social media enabled continuous learning from peers, ranging from packaging designs to campaign styles, reinforcing the community-driven nature of digital innovation.

What resonated most across accounts was the motivational impact of customer feedback. A simple positive comment, a shared post, or a story mention had the power to reignite entrepreneurial passion. To these MSME owners, social media was not merely a technological tool; it was a living space, one that nurtured aspirations, encouraged growth, and became a vital emotional infrastructure in the entrepreneurial journey.

This study reveals that MSME actors

no longer perceive social media merely as a communication tool but as a strategic space that generates tangible value for the sustainability and growth of their businesses. The perceived business value emerges from a combination of motivational drivers for using social media and the gradual formation of digital habits shaped through ongoing interactions and learning (Yacob et al., 2023).

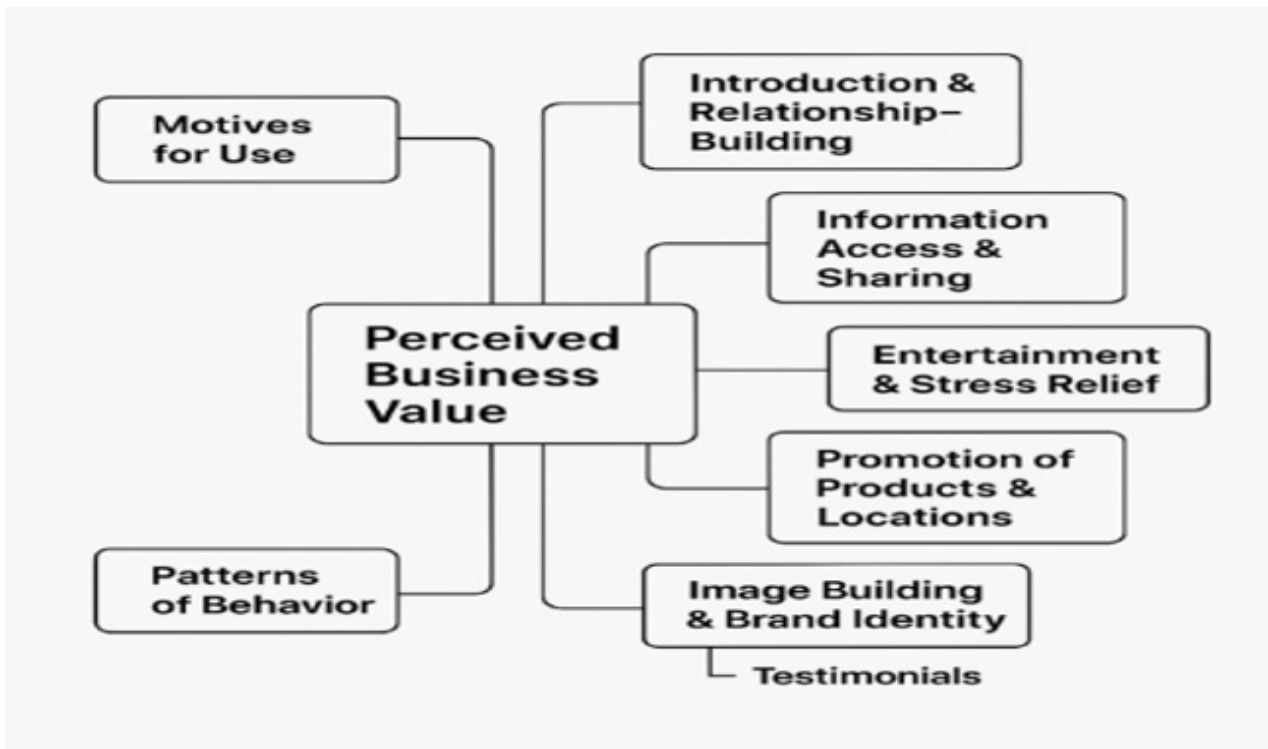
Many MSME practitioners begin their digital journey from basic needs, such as wanting their businesses to be recognized, visible, and personally connected with customers. These needs lead to the development of various motivations that shape consistent behavioral patterns in their daily operations (Yuniarti et al., 2025). They actively upload product photos, share stories, respond to customer comments, and observe competitors' practices for inspiration. These actions have evolved into strategic routines embedded in their business processes.

The benefits they derive from social media usage are manifold. One of the most frequently cited is the ability to reach a wider audience and build more intimate, personalized relationships with customers. For newly small-scale businesses, social media serves as an efficient bridge to overcome geographic constraints without incurring high costs. Entrepreneurs can greet potential customers, highlight their product

strengths, and cultivate emotional proximity without the need for direct interactions.

Social media has also become an important platform for knowledge exchange and information seeking. Many participants reported being able to keep up with consumer trends, customer preferences, and competitor strategies in real time. This information proves useful for making informed decisions regarding product packaging, pricing, and communication strategies. Interestingly, social media is also viewed as a source of emotional relief and entertainment. In between production activities and daily business pressures, MSME actors often use social media to enjoy humorous or inspiring content or to read encouraging customer feedback. These seemingly trivial moments can restore confidence and motivation, helping sustain entrepreneurial resilience over time.

Among the many functions identified, product and location promotion stood out as the most dominant. Almost all participants actively used visual and interactive features such as Instagram stories, Facebook posts, or short-form videos on TikTok to introduce their products. Compared to conventional promotional methods, these digital formats were considered more impactful and cost-effective. Instead of relying on expensive advertising, a well-composed image paired with an engaging



Source: Author’s elaboration based on FGD, 2025

Figure 3 Model of Perceived Business Value

caption could attract attention and even trigger purchase decisions (Hanum et al., 2024). On another level, participants were increasingly aware of the importance of brand identity and reputation. Many began to pursue consistency in visual style, establish unique brand impressions, and utilize customer testimonials to build trust. These activities reflect a transition from mere selling to the strategic construction of brand narratives and reputational capital in the digital domain.

These findings affirm that social media has become an integral part of MSME business life cycle not only as a functional tool but also as a dynamic space for growth, learning, and connection. In the face of a disruptive digital

economy, the ability to utilize social media both intelligently and humanely emerges as a vital competitive advantage for long-term sustainability (Titin et al., 2024). Echoing these insights, the study reiterates that the motivations behind MSMEs’ adoption of social media are rooted in their desire to be seen, acknowledged, and closely connected with their customers. These motivations, when consistently practiced, can shape patterns of digital behavior, such as posting product updates, storytelling, customer engagement, and competitor monitoring.

Social media enables MSMEs to expand their market reach at low cost, foster personal connections unconstrained by geography, and streamline communication with both customers

and suppliers (Coombs, 2007). Many business owners even reported that positive comments and warm customer interactions became sources of psychological resilience in times of business stress. Moreover, social media serves as a form of informal learning where MSMEs can track emerging trends, study competitors' tactics, and generate new ideas based on audience insights.

Most notably, nearly all FGD participants utilized visual features such as Instagram stories, short videos, and location tags, as core promotional strategies. Testimonials, once considered supplementary, are now understood as powerful tools for shaping brand reputation and trust (Cialdini, 2021). Altogether, the findings underscore that social media is no longer an optional enhancement, but rather a vital, integrated domain in the business ecosystems of MSMEs it is a space where they grow, adapt, learn, and shape the brand identities amid the complexities of a rapidly evolving digital economy (See Figure 3).

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the multifaceted and profound role of social media in the everyday lives of micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) actors in Sumedang Regency. Social media is not merely regarded as a cost-efficient promotional tool, but also as a space for

learning, sharing, and constructing business identity. Focus group discussions revealed that MSME actors utilize social media for a variety of purposes, ranging from information access and entertainment to customer relationship management and brand image development.

While the majority of participants use social media in a spontaneous and adaptive manner, a growing number have begun to plan their content using strategic approaches. Features such as stories, geotagging, and customer testimonials have proven effective in expanding market reach and fostering emotional closeness with consumers. Beyond its promotional function, social media is increasingly viewed as a shared growth space—a platform for innovation, motivation reinforcement, and capacity development. Amidst the uncertainty of today's business landscape, social media emerges as a strategic partner in ensuring MSME sustainability. Finally, social media strategies should be embedded in broader MSME development policies, including infrastructure support and digital inclusion initiatives. Through this holistic approach, MSMEs can grow collaboratively and competitively in the digital era.

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AI Declaration: AI tools were used for grammatical corrections and analysis.

Ethical Clearance: This study adhered to ethical principles of social research, including informed consent from all participants, assurance of confidentiality, and restriction of data use for academic purposes only. Participants were also granted the right to withdraw from the study at any point without consequence. Where required, the research process conformed to the ethical guidelines of the affiliated academic institution.

Data availability statement: The data is available by request to the author

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