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Research Article

Between Canvassing and Clicks: Analyzing the Impact of Digital Transformation on SME Growth

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Abstract: This study investigates the effectiveness of digital transformation in enhancing client acquisition, using a case study of a lamp business in Indonesia. Established in 2021, the company initially operated through traditional offline channels but expanded to online platforms in 2022, integrating digital tools including AI-based financial management systems to streamline operations and support decision-making. The research focuses on comparing offline and online strategies, examining key performance indicators such as revenue contribution, customer acquisition costs, conversion rates, and operational challenges encountered in both modes. In addition, the study explores whether the observed revenue growth following digitalization is primarily driven by online sales or whether it benefits from a hybrid approach that combines both online and offline channels. By analyzing these aspects, the study seeks to provide insights into the practical implications of digital transformation for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), particularly in the Indonesian market. The findings are expected to clarify whether adopting digital strategies offers a measurable advantage over traditional methods in terms of efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and market reach. Ultimately, this research aims to inform SME owners and managers about best practices for leveraging digital tools to enhance client acquisition and drive sustainable business growth.

Keywords: Client Acquisition; Digital Transformation; Hybrid Strategy; Online Sales; SMEs

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1. Introduction

Digital transformation has become a fundamental shift in how businesses operate and compete, especially in the post-pandemic era where digital presence increasingly defines market relevance. Across sectors, companies large and small are under growing pressure to adapt their operational and marketing strategies through the integration of digital tools, platforms, and data-driven systems. While these transformations are often associated with efficiency, scalability, and increased profitability, the path toward digitalization remains uneven, particularly for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in developing economies like Indonesia. For many of these enterprises, traditional business models still dominate, built upon personal networks, in-person relationships, and offline transactions that are difficult to replicate in the digital space.

The challenges of digital adoption in MSMEs are not simply technical. As highlighted by Mou et al. (2022), digital transformation encompasses deeper shifts in organizational structure, internal workflows, client engagement, and decision-making models. Technologies such as web analytics, search engine optimization (SEO), and AI-powered systems are designed to offer businesses the ability to monitor customer behavior, optimize marketing strategies, and automate key processes. Yet, access to these technologies does not guarantee success. The real challenge lies in how businesses integrate digital tools meaningfully into their everyday operations. Based on a study published in Current Research in Ecological and Social Psychology (2023), emphasizes that adaptability, strategic alignment, and the readiness of human resources are key factors that determine the success or failure of digital transformation efforts among small enterprises. Without these, even the most sophisticated digital systems can remain underutilized or become burdensome.

In the Indonesian context, the digital transformation of MSMEs is further complicated by varying levels of digital literacy, infrastructure availability, and cultural preferences for interpersonal engagement. While e-commerce platforms, social media marketing, and financial technologies have proliferated, many business owners still find comfort and effectiveness in direct, face-to-face interactions when building trust and closing deals. This is especially true for industries or product types where tactile experience, customized negotiation, and long-term relationships are essential. As such, conventional client acquisition strategies like door-to-door canvassing, relationship-based referrals, and on-site product presentations are still perceived as reliable and impactful, even if they are more labor-intensive and geographically limited.

This study examines the case of a lamp business in Indonesia that embodies this tension between conventional and digital approaches. Established in 2021, the business began with a fully offline model, relying on traditional sales practices such as visiting prospective clients, building local networks, and negotiating deals in person. These methods, while effective in the early stages, began to show limitations in reach, scalability, and cost-efficiency. In response, the business initiated a digital transformation in 2022, incorporating online marketplaces, targeted social media advertising, and AI-based financial tracking systems. This shift coincided with a noticeable increase in year-on-year revenue, raising important questions about the actual drivers behind the company's growth. Was the revenue surge primarily a result of the newly implemented digital strategies? Or did the conventional offline methods continue to play a substantial role in the company's client acquisition success?

By employing a qualitative case study method, this research explores the effectiveness of digital versus conventional strategies in acquiring clients, with a focus on four core dimensions: revenue contribution, client acquisition costs, lead-to-deal conversion rates, and operational challenges. Through interviews, document analysis, and interpretive evaluation of business records, the study seeks to uncover nuanced insights into how both online and offline pipelines function within the real-world dynamics of an evolving small business. Rather than presuming that digital transformation is always superior, the research aims to investigate whether a hybrid approach one that strategically blends digital tools with relationship-based engagement may provide a more adaptive and sustainable model for MSMEs operating in complex market environments.

This inquiry contributes to a growing body of knowledge on MSME digitalization by grounding the discussion in practical, empirical realities. It addresses the theoretical assertions made by Abdullah et al. (2025), who argue that while digital adoption can improve competitiveness and market access, the success of such initiatives among Indonesian MSMEs depends heavily on internal readiness, gradual transition, and contextual adaptation to market conditions. Rather than imposing a rigid digital agenda, Abdullah et al. emphasize the importance of flexibility and blended strategies that integrate existing business practices with new technological capabilities. Ultimately, this research challenges the often-assumed binary between "modern" and "traditional" business strategies, suggesting instead that effectiveness may be contingent upon context, organizational capacity, and the ability to integrate diverse approaches into a coherent, value-driven business model.

2. Literature Review

Digital Transformation in SMEs

Digital transformation is broadly understood as the integration of digital technologies into all aspects of business operations to improve efficiency, innovation, and competitiveness (Mou et al., 2022). It is not merely the adoption of digital tools, but rather a fundamental shift in organizational processes, culture, and value creation models. For small and medium enterprises (SMEs), this transformation carries particular significance, as SMEs often operate with limited resources yet face increasing competition in both local and global markets. Through digitalization, SMEs are offered opportunities to expand market reach, lower operational costs, and improve decision-making by leveraging data-driven insights (Hendrawan et al., 2024).

Several studies highlight the potential benefits of digital adoption for SMEs. According to OECD (2022), SMEs that embrace digital technologies experience higher revenue growth, improved export capacity, and enhanced resilience compared to those that rely solely on traditional business models. For instance, digital tools such as e-commerce platforms enable SMEs to bypass geographic barriers and reach customers outside their immediate localities. Similarly, customer relationship management (CRM) systems and business analytics allow firms to tailor their offerings, improve customer engagement, and reduce inefficiencies in the sales process. However, the literature also emphasizes the uneven pace of digital adoption, particularly in developing economies. Structural barriers such as inadequate digital infrastructure, limited access to financing, and regulatory uncertainty often hinder SMEs from fully embracing digital transformation. SMEs also frequently struggle with a shortage of skilled labor, resistance to change, and difficulties in aligning digital tools with existing workflows (Givan & Pancasilawan, 2025).

While digital transformation provides SMEs with unprecedented opportunities for growth, efficiency, and resilience, it is not a uniform process. Its success depends heavily on contextual factors such as infrastructure, organizational readiness, human capital, and adaptability to changing environments. Hence, researchers aim to study how digital transformation in Indonesia SME, using a case study from lamp business in Indonesia truly effect their profitability in comparison with the traditional approach.

Conventional and Digital Client Acquisition Strategies

Traditional client acquisition strategies such as door-to-door canvassing, relationship-based referrals, and face-to-face negotiations have historically been central to SMEs in Indonesia. These approaches rely heavily on personal trust and direct engagement, making them particularly effective in industries where tactile experience, customized negotiation, and long-term relationships are valued (Handriana, 2016). However, their effectiveness is often constrained by geographic limitations, high labor costs, and reduced scalability. Digital methods, on the other hand, provide SMEs with tools to reach larger audiences and optimize marketing efficiency. E-commerce platforms, social media advertising, and customer relationship management (CRM) systems allow for real-time data tracking and targeted outreach (Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Yet, low digital literacy and infrastructure challenges often restrict adoption in developing economies (Givan & Pancasilawan, 2025).

Importantly, research indicates that conventional methods remain relevant. For example, Lesscher et al. (2021) found that traditional approaches such as direct mail advertising can have a positive impact across the entire purchase funnel, generating both direct and indirect sales effects. However, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift toward digitalization, pushing SMEs to explore new customer acquisition techniques, including algorithm-driven online stores, social media advertising, and livestream commerce (Zheng et al., 2022). These digital methods are among the fastest-growing channels of customer acquisition worldwide, highlighting the necessity for SMEs to adopt digital tools. While previous research already identified the effectiveness of either conventional or digital approaches, in this study, researchers aim to analyse which methods are more relevant for a lamp business that mostly has a B2B customer in Indonesia.

3. Research Method

Research Design

To achieve the research objectives, this study employs a qualitative case study approach, which is designed to generate an in-depth understanding of the ways in which digital and conventional strategies influence the growth trajectories of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The case study design is particularly appropriate for research on SMEs, as it allows for detailed exploration of contextualized and complex business dynamics that cannot be fully captured through purely quantitative methods (Yin, 2018). Rather than relying solely on statistical generalizations, the case study method emphasizes analytical depth, enabling the researcher to examine how digital transformation is experienced, negotiated, and operationalized within a specific organizational setting.

The focal point of this study is a lamp business in Indonesia, established in 2021, which initially operated using an offline canvassing model. At its early stage, the enterprise relied heavily on personal networks, word-of-mouth referrals, and direct, face-to-face interactions to acquire clients and generate sales. These conventional methods were effective in building customer trust and loyalty; however, they also revealed limitations in terms of scalability, geographical reach, and cost-efficiency. Recognizing these challenges, the business began a gradual transition toward digitalization in 2022, adopting online marketplaces such as Shopee and

Tokopedia, investing in paid advertisements, and later integrating digital management systems such as Olsera.

This enterprise was deliberately selected as a case study because it embodies the tension between traditional and digital business practices that characterizes many Indonesian SMEs. On the one hand, offline strategies remain vital for maintaining customer relationships and credibility, particularly in business-to-business (B2B) contexts. On the other hand, digital tools provide scalability, efficiency, and access to previously unreachable markets. By situating the research within this case, the study is able to capture not only the measurable financial impacts of digital adoption but also the experiential realities, managerial perspectives, and organizational adjustments that accompany such a transformation.

Ultimately, the case study design enables a nuanced evaluation of whether digital transformation is inherently superior to conventional strategies or whether a hybrid approach integrating both online and offline pipelines offers a more sustainable pathway for SME growth. This methodological choice aligns with the research aim of contributing both theoretical insights into SME digitalization and practical implications for small business owners navigating similar transitions in developing economies.

Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative techniques to generate a comprehensive understanding of the comparative effectiveness of offline and online client acquisition strategies. This design is consistent with recommendations in SME research, which emphasize the importance of combining objective financial indicators with subjective managerial insights in order to capture the multifaceted nature of digital transformation outcomes (Reinartz et al., 2005). By doing so, the analysis does not merely assess numerical trends but also contextualizes these patterns within the lived experiences and strategic decision-making of the business owner.

On the quantitative side, the analysis focuses on three key performance measures: client acquisition cost (CAC), revenue attribution, and cost–benefit comparisons between online and offline channels. CAC is calculated by dividing total marketing and sales expenditures by the number of customers acquired within each channel, providing a direct measure of cost efficiency. Revenue attribution is carried out by tracing the proportion of sales generated from offline canvassing versus digital platforms, thereby highlighting the relative contribution of each pipeline to overall profitability. Finally, cost–benefit analysis compares acquisition costs against channel-specific revenues to evaluate the net returns of each strategy, offering insights into the scalability and sustainability of different approaches. Together, these measures provide a clear financial picture of how digital transformation has impacted business performance.

Complementing these financial metrics, the qualitative strand draws upon semi-structured interviews with the business owner to uncover the subjective experiences, challenges, and adaptive strategies associated with the digital transition. Interview data are analyzed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006), with coding categories developed around managerial perceptions of digital tools, organizational adjustments, trust-building processes, and hybrid strategy implementation. This qualitative analysis allows for a deeper exploration of how decisions are made, how challenges are navigated, and how conventional practices are integrated with emerging digital tools in the day-to-day realities of SME operations.

By integrating these two strands, the study is able to triangulate findings and strengthen the validity of its conclusions. The quantitative data illuminate measurable differences in efficiency and profitability between offline and online channels, while the qualitative insights contextualize these differences within broader business strategies, cultural preferences, and organizational capacities. This dual focus not only provides a holistic understanding of digital transformation in the case of Rajawali Electric but also offers a more nuanced basis for assessing whether digitalization should be viewed as universally superior to conventional methods or as one component of a hybrid approach to SME growth.

Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative component of this study focuses on three key measures. First, Client Acquisition Cost (CAC) is calculated by dividing the total marketing and sales expenditure by the number of customers acquired within a specific channel (Farris et al., 2010). In this study, CAC is computed separately for offline channels, such as canvassing and referrals, and online channels, including social media advertisements and marketplace fees, to determine cost efficiency. Second, Revenue Attribution involves examining business records to trace which sales pipelines originate from offline and online sources, allowing for an assessment of each channel's revenue contribution. This process is particularly important for SMEs, as previous research indicates that different customer acquisition strategies may vary in long-term profitability. Third, a Cost–Benefit Analysis is conducted by comparing CAC with the revenue attributed to each pipeline. This approach evaluates the net benefits of offline versus online strategies, following marketing finance literature that emphasizes aligning acquisition costs with customer value to optimize resource allocation efficiency (Kumar et al., 2010; Reinartz et al., 2005). Together, these measures provide a comprehensive framework for assessing the effectiveness and financial implications of digital and traditional acquisition strategies.

Qualitative Analysis

To complement the financial data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the business owner to gather insights into challenges and opportunities arising from digital transformation. Interview data are analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), focusing on themes such as managerial perceptions of digital tools, organizational adjustments, and hybrid strategy implementation. This qualitative strand provides depth and contextual understanding beyond numerical measures, consistent with Creswell & Poth, (2018), who argue that qualitative inquiry enhances the interpretation of case-specific dynamics in SMEs.

The findings from both strands are integrated to give a holistic conclusion. Quantitative data highlight the measurable differences in cost efficiency and revenue contribution between offline and online pipelines, while qualitative findings capture the experiential realities of the business owner in adopting digital practices. This integration allows for a balanced evaluation that combines objective financial measures with subjective experiential insights, thereby strengthening the validity and richness of the conclusions.

4. Results and Discussion

Document Analysis

The business records of Toko Rajawali from 2021 to 2025 were analyzed to evaluate the impact of digital transformation on revenue generation and profitability. The internal data provided by the owner reveals evidence of a significant shift in growth patterns following the adoption of online channels in 2022. In 2021, when operations were fully offline, revenues were manually recorded and remained modest, with estimated net profits ranging from IDR 5 to IDR 30 million per month. With the integration of online marketplaces and targeted advertisements in 2022, revenues expanded rapidly, and the firm recorded a gross income of IDR 2.34 billion and a net profit of IDR 742 million. This trajectory continued in subsequent years, with net profits of IDR 1.58 billion in 2023, IDR 2.31 billion in 2024, and IDR 1.92 billion by July 2025. These figures demonstrate that digital adoption coincided with a steep and sustained revenue increase. To assess these changes, the analysis was conducted in three steps, consistent with the framework of quantitative evaluation in marketing finance.

Client Acquisition Cost (CAC)

Client acquisition costs were identified from two major categories: advertising expenditure for online channels and client meeting expenses for offline channels. Annual advertising costs were recorded at IDR 12 million, while offline canvassing and meetings also accounted for IDR 12 million per year, yielding a combined acquisition cost of IDR 24 million annually. When compared to net revenues, CAC represented only 3.2 percent of net profits in 2022 and less than 1.5 percent in later years. This indicates that both channels were highly cost-efficient, though online acquisition showed superior scalability as revenues grew faster while costs remained relatively fixed.

Revenue Attribution

Based on owner-reported ratios, revenues were distributed at 70 percent from online sources and 30 percent from offline sources. For instance, in 2023, net profits of IDR 1.58 billion consisted of approximately IDR 1.11 billion from online pipelines and IDR 474 million from offline sales. This distribution underscores the dominant role of online channels in driving growth while confirming that offline sales continued to contribute significantly. The persistence of offline earnings suggests that clients acquired through direct engagement remained loyal and continued to generate value, demonstrating complementarity between the two channels.

Cost-Benefit Analysis

By comparing acquisition costs against channel-specific revenues, the analysis highlights substantial net benefits. Online revenues in 2023 (IDR 1.11 billion) far exceeded the IDR 12 million annual advertising cost, while offline revenues (IDR 474 million) similarly outweighed the IDR 12 million spent on meetings and canvassing. This confirms that both acquisition methods generated a positive return on investment, with online channels offering higher absolute returns due to greater reach and scalability. Offline approaches, however, yielded strong relational value, supporting trust-based conversions that are essential in business-to-business (B2B) contexts.

In conclusion, the document analysis confirms that digital transformation has substantially enhanced revenue growth, while offline methods have remained a vital complement. Online channels emerged as the primary revenue driver, accounting for the majority of profits, yet offline strategies reinforced client trust and contributed meaningfully to overall performance. The hybrid strategy thus represents the most effective approach for sustaining growth in SMEs such as Toko Rajawali.

Entrepreneurial Perspective on Hybrid Client Acquisition

Revenue Contribution

Reza highlighted that the digital transformation of Rajawali Electric yielded substantial impact following the company's entry into online marketplaces in 2022. Prior to this transition, monthly revenues generated solely through offline channels amounted to approximately IDR 50 million in 2021; however, the adoption of platforms such as Shopee and Tokopedia effectively doubled monthly revenues to IDR 100 million, while simultaneously expanding the consumer base beyond the immediate Tangerang area to wider regions including Yogyakarta and Surabaya. Despite the dominant contribution of online channels to revenue growth, offline sales remained significant, particularly in sustaining loyal customers and fostering trust through direct engagement and word-of-mouth referrals. This pattern suggests a complementary dynamic, whereby digital platforms function as a gateway for market expansion, while conventional methods continue to reinforce relational capital and long-term customer loyalty.

Conversation Rates

Reza explained that conversion rates were generally higher in online channels, as potential customers typically required only a brief confirmation of product availability before proceeding directly with a purchase. This pattern illustrates the transactional efficiency of digital platforms, where the decision-making process is accelerated by streamlined interactions and reduced negotiation barriers. In contrast, offline conversions tended to involve a more complex and time-consuming process. Buyers often preferred to inspect the products in person, engage in detailed discussions, and negotiate prices before reaching an agreement. While this slower conversion cycle limited the volume of immediate transactions, Reza emphasized that offline interactions fostered stronger relational bonds, trust, and customer loyalty over the long term. Consequently, the findings suggest a clear distinction between the two channels: online sales are characterized by speed and efficiency, while offline sales, despite their lower conversion efficiency, provide enduring relational capital that supports repeat purchases and long-term business sustainability.

Operational Challenges and Adaptation

Reza identified two primary categories of challenges encountered in operating the business, each specific to offline and online channels. On the offline side, the main difficulties involved geographic limitations, high transportation costs, and restricted market reach beyond the immediate locality. These barriers made it difficult to scale operations and limited the efficiency of client acquisition efforts outside the Tangerang area. In contrast, online channels posed challenges of a different nature. The most significant issue was establishing customer trust in the quality of products, particularly given the absence of face-to-face interaction. Furthermore, reliance on digital marketplaces introduced structural constraints in the form of relatively high commission fees, ranging from 13 to 15 percent of total sales, which directly reduced net profit margins.

To address these challenges, Rajawali Electric began adopting digital management systems such as Olsera between 2023 and 2024. These tools facilitated more accurate record-keeping, streamlined inventory management, and improved reporting processes, thereby enhancing operational efficiency. The firm also expanded its workforce in line with increasing sales volume, signaling organizational adaptation to a more complex and digitally integrated workflow. In terms of marketing, Rajawali Electric diversified its promotional channels by actively engaging through Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, while simultaneously developing a dedicated website to strengthen brand identity and extend its market presence at the national level. Collectively, these adaptations highlight the firm's efforts to balance the operational constraints of offline engagement with the structural demands of digital platforms, thereby enabling sustained growth under a hybrid model.

Future Strategic Outlook

Looking ahead, Reza emphasized that Rajawali Electric's strategic orientation will remain strongly committed to further investment in digital channels. Planned initiatives include the integration of AI-based chatbots to improve customer service responsiveness and the development of a dedicated website that functions not only as a promotional tool but also as a central distribution hub for the company's products. These innovations are intended to enhance efficiency, expand visibility, and strengthen the firm's competitiveness in an increasingly digitalized market environment. Nevertheless, Reza acknowledged that offline strategies will continue to hold strategic importance, particularly in cultivating trust among business-to-business (B2B) clients who often prefer face-to-face engagement before committing to larger transactions. Reflecting this recognition, Rajawali Electric has already expanded its physical presence by establishing several branch outlets in major cities such as Jakarta, Bekasi, Semarang, and Surabaya. This dual-track approach underlines the company's reliance on a hybrid strategy, where online platforms serve as scalable growth drivers while offline operations consolidate relational capital and client loyalty. In sum, Rajawali Electric views the hybrid model as the most relevant and sustainable pathway for ensuring long-term business growth in the evolving Indonesian SME landscape.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study, derived from both document analysis and in-depth interviews with the owner of Rajawali Electric, demonstrate that digital transformation has played a decisive role in accelerating revenue growth and expanding market reach. Since entering online marketplaces in 2022, the firm experienced a significant increase in monthly revenues, with online channels contributing approximately 70 percent of total profits by 2023–2024. Digital acquisition also proved to be highly cost-efficient, with advertising expenditures generating returns far exceeding the initial investment. Furthermore, conversion rates in online channels were consistently higher due to the simplified purchasing process, which enabled faster transactions compared to the more negotiation-intensive offline model.

Nonetheless, the research also highlights that conventional offline methods remain indispensable. Despite their limited scalability and higher time and labor costs, offline strategies continue to provide unique relational value by fostering trust, ensuring customer loyalty, and sustaining B2B partnerships. The complementarity between online and offline channels was evident, as many customers initially discovered Rajawali Electric through digital platforms but later engaged offline for long-term transactions and referrals.

In addressing the research question, the evidence suggests that digital transformation alone cannot be regarded as universally superior to conventional approaches. While online channels have become the dominant revenue driver, the hybrid integration of digital and offline methods has proven to be the most effective and sustainable strategy. Digital tools provide scalability, efficiency, and broader visibility, whereas offline engagement consolidates relational capital and reinforces client trust. Therefore, in the context of Indonesian SMEs such as Rajawali Electric, a blended strategy that leverages the strengths of both approaches represents the most adaptive model for sustaining long-term growth in competitive markets.

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