



Digital Marketing Strategy for International Expansion: A Case Study of Doctor Helmet Medan

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the digital marketing strategy employed by Doctor Helmet Medan for expanding its presence in international markets. Using a detailed case study approach, the research examines how the company effectively leverages cultural understanding across various global regions to customize its products and tailor digital marketing campaigns to meet diverse consumer preferences. Data collection methods included observation of digital marketing activities, interviews with key management personnel, and content analysis of social media and e-commerce platforms utilized by Doctor Helmet. The findings highlight that product adaptation aligned with regional cultural preferences, integrated use of social media combined with paid advertising, and optimization of e-commerce platforms are essential factors driving successful penetration into international markets. Additionally, challenges such as intense global competition, varying regulatory environments, and logistical complexities were identified as significant barriers that require continuous strategic adaptation. This study offers valuable practical insights for MSMEs and medium-sized enterprises aiming to design and implement effective digital marketing strategies for sustainable international expansion.

Keyword: *Msmes Internationalization, Digital Marketing Strategies, Doctor Helmet*

1. INTRODUCTION

MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) in Indonesia play a crucial role in supporting the national economy. MSMEs are not only a primary source of job creation but also make significant contributions to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth and exports, particularly in manufactured products such as clothing, food, electronics, and handicrafts.

Additionally, MSMEs help introduce local products to international markets, thereby strengthening Indonesia's global competitiveness (Salsabillah *et al.*, 2023). In addition to their economic impact, MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) also serve as a driving force for community-level development. The presence of MSMEs enhances household incomes, reduces unemployment rates, and alleviates poverty, particularly in rural areas and the agricultural sector. Furthermore, MSMEs foster innovation and productivity while expanding market access for small-scale farmers and local entrepreneurs, thereby contributing to inclusive and sustainable economic development (Herissuparman *et al.*, 2024). The Indonesian government continues to promote the strengthening of MSMEs through various policies, including enhancing competitiveness, providing financial support, offering training programs, and facilitating digitalization. These efforts aim to enable MSMEs to withstand the challenges of globalization and international competition while adapting to technological and market changes. Given their strategic role, MSMEs are expected to remain a key pillar of Indonesia's economic growth and equitable prosperity (Maurina and Rusdianto, 2023).

Indonesian MSMEs face numerous challenges in entering international markets, one of which is limited human capital, technology skill and financial resources. These constraints hinder their ability to compete in the highly competitive global market, particularly in developing global supply chains, financial management, and adopting adequate technology. Furthermore, low digital capacity is a major barrier to internationalization, as digital capabilities, market knowledge, and international networks significantly influence MSME performance in global expansion. Consequently, enhancing digital capacity has become an urgent necessity (Amin and Sudarmiatin, 2024). Despite being the country with the largest number of MSMEs in the ASEAN region, Indonesia's MSMEs contribute relatively less to national exports compared to neighboring countries. Data reveals that Indonesian MSMEs account for only approximately 15.7% of total exports, a figure significantly lower than the contributions of Singaporean MSMEs (38.3%), Thai MSMEs (28.7%), or Vietnamese MSMEs (18.7%). This situation indicates the existence of untapped potential in enhancing the participation of Indonesian MSMEs in the global market (Databoks, 2022).

The adoption of e-payment and e-commerce services among Indonesian MSMEs remains relatively low, despite evidence demonstrating their efficacy in enhancing supply chain performance and expanding market access. Key barriers include inadequate digital infrastructure, high technology implementation costs, and insufficient training and support in digital technology utilization. Research identified ten low-scoring indicators as primary obstacles to MSME digitalization, necessitating open innovation and collaborative solutions among businesses, government agencies, and relevant institutions to accelerate digital transformation (Putra *et al.*, 2022). MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) in Indonesia have yet to fully comprehend the significance of sustainable digital marketing strategies for penetrating international markets. The lack of digital knowledge and skills has resulted in suboptimal utilization of digital marketing and e-commerce platforms, consequently limiting opportunities for global market expansion. Substantial efforts in education, mentorship, and digital business model development are imperative to enhance MSMEs' competitiveness and sustainability in the international arena (Kilay *et al.*, 2022). To address these challenges, an integrated digital capacity-building strategy is essential, encompassing training programs,

mentorship initiatives, and the provision of affordable technological infrastructure. Government and stakeholders must actively facilitate digitalization programs, strengthen innovation ecosystems, and promote cross-sectoral collaboration to enable Indonesian MSMEs to compete and thrive in an increasingly competitive global market (Amin and Sudarmiatin, 2024).

Digital capability has emerged as a critical indicator for MSMEs seeking to compete internationally. Digitalization enables MSMEs to enhance operational efficiency, expand market access, and strengthen competitiveness amid intensifying global competition. Digital capacity, market knowledge, and international networks significantly influence MSMEs' internationalization performance, making digital capability development a primary strategy for effective global expansion (Amin and Sudarmiatin, 2024). Information technology and digital marketing present substantial opportunities for MSMEs to reach global consumers, introduce products to international markets, and build strong brand awareness. Through digital platforms such as social media, e-commerce, and websites, MSMEs can directly engage with foreign consumers and increase export sales. Digital marketing innovations have also proven effective in enhancing customer loyalty and expanding MSMEs' international market share. Digital transformation not only improves efficiency but also fosters business innovation and sustainability (Mala *et al.*, 2024).

One of the MSMEs in Medan City, North Sumatra, demonstrates how MSMEs can leverage digital transformation for global market penetration. Doctor Helmet, a local helmet retailer, successfully entered international markets through strategic digital technology adoption. This case illustrates how small and medium enterprises can utilize digital transformation to extend their global reach. By effectively employing e-commerce platforms, social media marketing, and digital payment systems, this MSME has overcome traditional barriers in international trade. Doctor Helmet's technological capabilities underscore the growing importance of digital adoption for globally competitive MSMEs. As a result, the company achieved international sales growth, increasing profits while reducing customer acquisition costs by 40% through strategic digital implementation (Doctorhelmet, 2019).

This study conducts an in-depth analysis of Doctor Helmet's digital strategies for international market penetration across Asia and Africa. The research is particularly significant given the limited literature examining the global success of Indonesian manufacturing MSMEs through digital approaches. The study investigates the combined use of e-commerce, social media marketing, and supporting technologies, including how the company addresses regulatory, cultural, and logistical challenges in diverse markets. The analysis of Doctor Helmet not only provides insights into digital expansion patterns for safety equipment MSMEs but also yields a strategic framework adaptable by similar businesses. This research is expected to contribute to government policy development and MSME mentorship programs while enriching academic literature in digital economics and small business internationalization. The case study findings will serve as a valuable reference for MSMEs seeking to enhance global competitiveness amidst rapid digital transformation. The study particularly addresses the research gap concerning digital-driven internationalization of manufacturing MSMEs from developing economies, offering both theoretical and practical implications for stakeholders in the digital ecosystem.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach utilizing case study methodology to analyze Doctor Helmet Medan's digital marketing strategy for international expansion. The qualitative approach was selected as this research aims to achieve an in-depth understanding of digital marketing strategy phenomena within real-world contexts, including its challenges, opportunities, and key success factors. The case study method was adopted because it enables detailed exploration of Doctor Helmet Medan's business practices as a unique entity undergoing global market development (Creswell, 2014).

The rationale for selecting case study methodology lies in its capacity to yield rich contextual analysis through multi-source data collection, including in-depth interviews with management, digital content analysis, challenges, obstacles, and observation of the MSMEs online marketing activities. This approach is particularly appropriate as international expansion through digital marketing involves complex dynamics encompassing cultural adaptation, technology utilization, and interactions with global consumers. Furthermore, the case study method facilitates the identification of replicable patterns and strategies for other MSMEs with similar characteristics (Eisenhardt, 2007).

This study employs a three-phase data collection approach to ensure comprehensive and valid findings, beginning with preparatory activities where researchers identify key informants (including the founder, digital marketing team, and export staff of Doctor Helmet) and develop semi-structured interview protocols focusing on digital platform selection, content adaptation for global markets, and logistical/regulatory challenges. The second phase involves primary data collection through in-depth interviews with key stakeholders combined with three months of participant observation of social media campaigns to capture real-time consumer interactions, supplemented by secondary data including export reports, social media analytics, and e-commerce performance metrics. The final phase employs methodological triangulation to verify consistency between interview responses, digital performance data, and company documents, ensuring robust analysis through multiple evidence streams while maintaining flexibility to accommodate emergent themes in line with established qualitative research standards for studying digital globalization.



Figure 1. Research Scheme

3. RESULTS

This study identified the owner of Doctor Helmet SME as the primary respondent, who plays a pivotal role in strategic decision-making regarding international market expansion.

Table 1. MSME Information

MSME Brand	Doctor Helmet
MSME Actor	Muhammad Idris Nasution
Address	Perjuangan Street, No.118, Sei Kera Hilir I, Medan City
Year Founded	2010
Products	Character helmet, local helmet service, local helmet washing
Sales Destination	USA, Canada, Spain, Greece, Africa, Brazil, Australia, Singapore, India, China, Malaysia, others

3.1 International Target Market Analysis and Consumer Preferences

The analysis of international target markets for Doctor Helmet identifies varying consumer preferences influenced by the cultural backgrounds of regions such as America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia. For example, customers in American and European markets show a preference for designs inspired by contemporary pop culture, superheroes, and video game characters, while consumers in Asia predominantly favor motifs drawn from anime and manga. In contrast, African and Australian consumers increasingly appreciate designs that blend traditional cultural elements with modern styles. By recognizing these cultural distinctions, Doctor Helmet can customize its product offerings to align with the unique tastes and cultural identities of each regional market, thereby improving product appeal and competitive advantage worldwide.

Additionally, the study highlights the strategic use of trending and distinctive characters popularized on social media platforms, including Western comic heroes, Japanese anime figures, and viral internet memes. Incorporating these well-known and culturally relevant characters into helmet designs enables Doctor Helmet to engage with existing fan communities and digital audiences effectively. This approach, combining local cultural understanding with viral digital content, allows for innovative product creation that serves both protective and aesthetic purposes. As a result, the company enhances its brand exposure internationally and fosters stronger consumer connections through marketing strategies grounded in cultural relevance and digital trends.

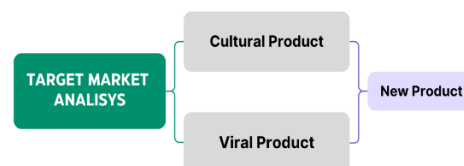


Figure 2. Research Product Analysis

3.2 Leveraging Digital Platforms in International Expansion

Doctor Helmet MSME strategically utilizes various digital platforms in its international expansion efforts, including marketing through social media, paid advertising, and expansion into e-commerce and global marketplaces. Through social

media marketing, Doctor Helmet actively builds communities and engagement with consumers in various countries with relevant and interesting content, especially using interactive features and viral helmet character-based campaigns. In addition, they optimize paid advertising to reach a wider and segmented audience, using platforms such as Facebook Ads, Instagram Ads, and Google Ads to increase visibility and sales conversions. No less importantly, Doctor Helmet also expands its presence in various international marketplaces that make it easier for consumers from various regions to access products directly, while strengthening its digital distribution channels. This integrated strategy allows UMKM to increase global market penetration effectively and efficiently.

3.2.1 Sosial Media Marketing

Doctor Helmet MSME has intensively leveraged social media marketing to facilitate its international expansion, promoting its unique and innovative character-themed motorcycle helmets. Through popular platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, the company develops visually appealing content showcasing helmets featuring hero, anime, and trending pop-culture designs tailored to different countries. This strategy not only enhances brand awareness and captures the attention of global consumers but also fosters a loyal fan community through interactive engagement methods, including giveaways, live streaming, and collaborations with international influencers relevant to target markets. This approach effectively communicates the cultural value of the products while aligning with regional consumer preferences.

In addition to creating original content, Doctor Helmet actively monitors and analyzes competitors' social media strategies in international markets. By examining competitors' marketing activities, communication styles, and high-performing content, the company gains critical insights to refine its own marketing approach. This competitive analysis enables Doctor Helmet to optimize content for greater relevance and innovation while identifying untapped market opportunities. The combination of original content creation and in-depth competitor research provides the SME with a significant competitive advantage in penetrating global markets and increasing sales of its character-themed helmets.

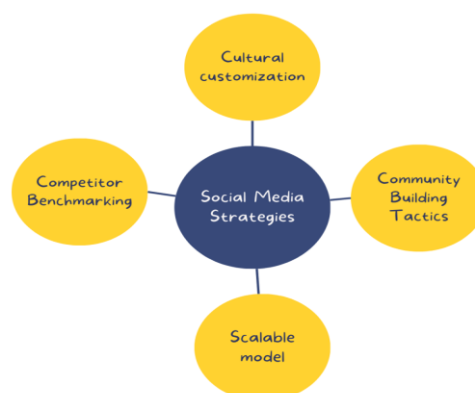


Figure 3. Social Media Stragies

3.2.2 Paid Advertising

Doctor Helmet SME leverages paid advertising as a crucial component of its international expansion efforts to market character-themed motorcycle helmets. Utilizing digital advertising platforms such as Facebook Ads, Instagram Ads, and Google Ads, Doctor Helmet targets specific audiences based on demographics, interests, and consumer behavior across various target countries. This approach enables the company to reach a broader and more precise market segment, including communities of anime enthusiasts, fans of popular heroes, and consumer groups seeking products with cultural value and unique designs. The paid advertising campaigns are crafted with engaging visual content and messages tailored to local preferences to effectively enhance conversion rates and sales.

Moreover, the SME regularly conducts evaluations and optimizations of its paid advertising campaigns by leveraging analytical data from advertising platforms to measure key performance indicators such as click-through rates (CTR), cost per click (CPC), and sales conversions. Consequently, Doctor Helmet can adjust budgets and bidding strategies to maximize return on investment (ROI). The integration of paid advertising with other digital marketing strategies strengthens Doctor Helmet's presence in the international market, accelerates brand awareness growth, and significantly boosts sales of its character-themed helmets.

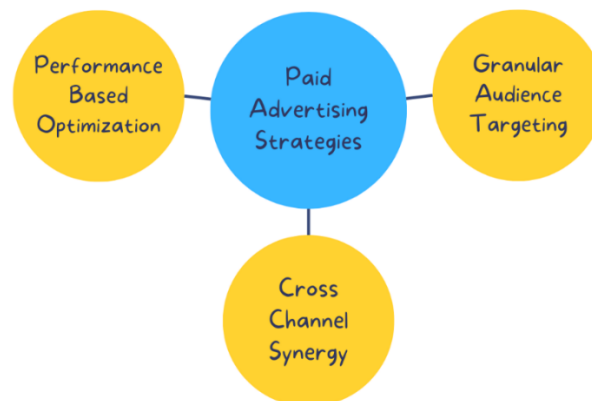


Figure 4. Paid Advetising Strategies

3.2.3 E-commerce & Marketplace Expansion

Doctor Helmet SMEs utilize e-commerce platforms and marketplace expansion as a primary strategy to broaden their international market reach for character-themed motorcycle helmets. By joining various popular global marketplaces such as Amazon, Alibaba, Tokopedia International, as well as regional e-commerce platforms focused on Asia, Europe, and America, Doctor Helmet effectively reaches consumers across multiple countries. Presence on these marketplaces not only facilitates transaction and product shipping processes but also provides access to built-in marketing features such as customer reviews, special promotions, and loyalty programs, which help enhance trust and loyalty among international consumers.

Furthermore, Doctor Helmet optimizes product presentation on e-commerce platforms by employing informative and engaging product descriptions, high-quality images, and price adjustments tailored to local markets. The integration of international payment and logistics systems streamlines the ordering and delivery processes, thereby offering customers a convenient shopping experience. Through a well-planned marketplace expansion strategy supported by digital technology, this SME has successfully increased its product visibility globally, expanded its market share, and significantly driven growth in sales of its character-themed motorcycle helmets.

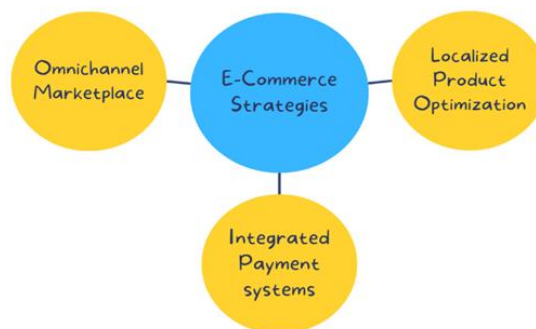


Figure 5. E-commerce Strategies

3.2.4 Challenges and Obstacles in Implementing International Digital Marketing Strategies

Cultural and language adaptation presents a significant challenge in Doctor Helmet's international digital marketing strategy. Consumer preferences differ across markets, necessitating tailored content, product designs, and communication strategies specific to each region. For example, anime characters that are popular in Asia may not resonate in European or American markets, requiring thorough research to develop products and campaigns that are culturally relevant. Additionally, language barriers involve more than just translation; they include an understanding of local idioms and cultural subtleties that impact the effectiveness of marketing messages. Intense competition from well-established global brands restricts Doctor Helmet's capacity to gain optimal visibility. Larger companies with more substantial marketing budgets dominate paid advertising and influencer partnerships, creating difficulties for Doctor Helmet to compete effectively on platforms such as Google Ads or Instagram. This situation is further complicated by frequent algorithm changes on digital platforms that often favor content from major brands, pushing Doctor Helmet to continuously innovate its content strategies and engagement methods.

Logistical challenges and international regulatory differences further complicate Doctor Helmet's digital market expansion. Extended shipping durations and varying product regulations in different countries pose considerable obstacles. For instance, the helmet certification standards differ by market and can hinder product distribution. Moreover, managing online reputation across multiple countries with diverse customer expectations requires additional resources to maintain consistent and positive consumer experiences. Addressing these challenges demands strategic planning and sustained investment to ensure Doctor Helmet's success in the global marketplace.

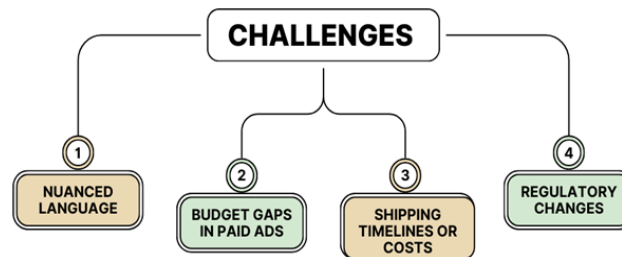


Figure 6. Challenges and Obstacles

4. CONCLUSION

The results indicate that Doctor Helmet's strategy for international growth relies heavily on a thorough comprehension of varying cultural preferences across major global regions including America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia. By customizing helmet designs to suit regional tastes, such as Western preferences for pop culture heroes and Asian inclinations toward anime themes, Doctor Helmet effectively tailors its products to local consumer identities, thereby increasing their attractiveness and competitive edge. The incorporation of popular social media characters enhances this cultural alignment, allowing the brand to connect with dedicated fan bases and utilize digital virality to expand its global presence. This culturally sensitive product development, paired with a flexible response to evolving digital trends, supports Doctor Helmet's capacity to produce innovative helmets that fulfill both practical and aesthetic requirements (Behl *et al.*, 2022)

The company's deliberate use of digital marketing channels, including social media engagement, targeted paid advertising, and expansion into e-commerce marketplaces, reflects a well-rounded and coordinated effort to access international markets. Social media platforms function as vital tools for brand awareness and consumer interaction, while paid advertising enables precise audience targeting and campaign optimization to improve return on investment. Meanwhile, establishing a footprint on global and regional e-commerce sites facilitates seamless purchasing processes and takes advantage of built-in marketplace features that build consumer trust and loyalty. Collectively, these digital strategies empower Doctor Helmet to efficiently extend its market reach, tailor approaches to diverse market environments, and maintain steady sales growth across countries (Sifwah *et al.*, 2024)

Nonetheless, Doctor Helmet encounters significant challenges typical of international digital marketing endeavors. Adapting to cultural and linguistic differences requires sophisticated, market-specific content and product modifications to effectively engage distinct consumer groups. The presence of well-established global competitors with larger marketing budgets restricts Doctor Helmet's visibility, demanding ongoing innovation in content creation and engagement tactics to navigate algorithmic preferences favoring major brands. Furthermore, logistical difficulties and variations in international regulations such as differing product certification standards, introduce operational complexities that can slow distribution and impact customer satisfaction. Addressing these issues calls for persistent strategic effort and investment. Overall, Doctor Helmet's integrated and culturally attuned digital marketing framework equips the company for sustained expansion, contingent on its ability to continually adapt to shifting global market dynamics and consumer demands.

5. SUGGESTION

For future research, it would be valuable to explore how emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and machine learning can support MSMEs like Doctor Helmet in automating and optimizing culturally tailored marketing strategies. Additionally, investigating the potential of immersive technologies such as augmented reality to enhance consumer engagement and differentiation in niche markets could offer new pathways for growth. Research focusing on overcoming logistical and regulatory challenges through innovative partnerships or frameworks could also provide practical solutions for improving international distribution and customer satisfaction, thereby supporting sustainable global expansion for small and medium enterprises.

Moreover, there is a critical need for research dedicated to developing comprehensive and complex business models tailored specifically for the internationalization of MSMEs. Such models should integrate multi-dimensional factors including cultural adaptation, digital marketing strategies, supply chain management, regulatory compliance, and financial planning. By constructing a robust framework that addresses these interconnected elements, future studies can provide MSMEs with actionable guidance to navigate the complexities of global markets effectively, ensuring scalable and sustainable international growth.

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