

Research Article

Transformation of East Java MSMEs: Superior Strategies for Independence and Sustainability

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Abstract: This research aims to formulate a strategy to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of SMEs in East Java, supporting their independence. Using a descriptive qualitative method, data collection involved observation, interviews, and documentation. Key informants included SME actors, relevant agency officials, representatives from SME Banks in East Java, and academics. The analysis revealed that the strategy for enhancing competitiveness focuses on adopting digital marketing, product and process innovation, and strengthening partnerships with government, financial institutions, and large companies to expand market access and resources. Sustainability is supported by effective financial management, compliance with legal requirements, and potential circular economy practices for resource efficiency. The strategy for independence emphasizes entrepreneurship training, mentoring, easier access to capital, and facilitating business matching and exhibitions for market expansion. The government and supporting institutions play a vital role in creating a conducive ecosystem. The relationship between competitiveness, sustainability, and independence is synergistic: increasing competitiveness enhances sustainability, which in turn stabilizes the business environment. Independence allows SMEs to be proactive in achieving both competitiveness and sustainability. With sustained support, East Java's SMEs have significant growth potential, contributing to the economy, but policies, empowerment programs, and resource access facilitation will be crucial to realizing their full potential.

Keywords: competitiveness; East Java; independence; SMEs; sustainability

1. Introduction

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are the backbone of the Indonesian economy, playing a crucial role in job creation, income equality, and national economic growth. In East Java Province, the contribution of MSMEs to Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) is significant, reaching over 57% by 2024 (East Java Cooperatives and SMEs Office, 2021; East Java Provincial Statistics Agency, 2024). These figures demonstrate that the MSME sector in East Java not only supports the local economy but also contributes significantly to the national economy. MSMEs in East Java have also demonstrated remarkable resilience, able to grow and survive amidst various challenges, including the political situation and post-pandemic recovery (Bank UMKM Jatim, 2025a).

Despite their vital role, MSMEs in East Java still face various complex challenges, particularly in terms of increasing competitiveness, business sustainability, and achieving independence. Competitiveness challenges include limited access to capital, low digital literacy, and difficulties in penetrating broader markets (Bank UMKM Jatim, 2025b). Many MSMEs still rely on traditional marketing methods, which limits their market reach (Susyanti, 2022). Furthermore, product and packaging innovation are often suboptimal, reducing product attractiveness in a competitive market (Fitrianti et al., 2024).

In the context of sustainability, MSMEs need to adopt business practices that are not only economically profitable but also socially and environmentally responsible. Legality issues, such as PIRT permits, halal certification, and BPOM (Indonesian Food and Drug Authority) permits, remain a barrier for many MSMEs, even though legality is a key requirement for products to enter a broader and more sustainable market (GoNews, 2025). Wise financial management and access to affordable financing are also crucial factors in maintaining business sustainability (Izin.co.id, 2024).

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The independence of MSMEs, which includes the ability to operate and grow without excessive external dependence, is also a primary goal. Capital and marketing challenges are the biggest obstacles to achieving this independence (UKMINDONESIA.ID, 2024). Existing empowerment programs, such as entrepreneurship training, intensive mentoring, entrepreneurial competitions, and business matching, aim to equip MSMEs with the knowledge and skills necessary to become independent and resilient (UKM INDONESIA.ID, 2024). This research is important because it will examine in-depth strategies that can be implemented to increase the competitiveness and sustainability of MSMEs, as well as support their independence in East Java. By understanding key factors and effective strategies, this research is expected to make a tangible contribution to the development of stronger and more competitive MSMEs in the future.

Several previous studies have examined aspects related to the competitiveness, sustainability, and independence of MSMEs. Research by (Nur Faizah & Majid, 2024) highlights digital marketing strategies and product innovation as key to increasing MSME competitiveness. According to (Susyanti, 2022), the role of marketing and digital networking in MSME sustainability is emphasized. An article by (UKMINDONESIA.ID, 2024) outlines various MSME empowerment programs aimed at achieving independence, including training, mentoring, and business matching.

Research Novelty: There are still research gaps that this study will address. Previous research tends to focus on only one or two aspects (e.g., competitiveness or sustainability separately). This study will integrate these three concepts (competitiveness, sustainability, and independence) in the context of MSMEs in East Java, and analyze the interrelationships between them. Furthermore, this study will attempt to identify the long-term impacts of government programs and the role of other supporting ecosystems that may not have been fully explored in the East Java context. This research is expected to provide a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of strategies for increasing MSME competitiveness in East Java.

2. Preliminaries or Related Work or Literature Review

The concept of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are business entities that play a central role in the economic structure of a country, including Indonesia. The definition of MSMEs in Indonesia is regulated in Law Number 20 of 2008 concerning Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises. In general, MSMEs are classified based on the criteria of assets and annual turnover. Micro businesses have a maximum net worth of IDR 50 million (excluding land and buildings where the business is located) or a maximum annual turnover of IDR 300 million. Small businesses have a net worth of more than IDR 50 million to IDR 500 million or an annual turnover of more than IDR 300 million to IDR 2.5 billion. Meanwhile, medium businesses have a net worth of more than IDR 500 million to IDR 10 billion or an annual turnover of more than IDR 2.5 billion to IDR 50 billion (Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2008).

The characteristics of MSMEs generally include relatively small business scale, simple management, individual or family ownership, and limited access to capital and advanced technology. Nevertheless, MSMEs have high flexibility in adapting to market changes and are able to create product innovations tailored to local needs. The role of MSMEs in economic development is vital, including as job creators, drivers of local economic growth, drivers of the real sector, and contributors to income equality and poverty reduction (Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2021). In East Java, MSMEs have proven to be a driving force of the regional economy, with significant contributions to GRDP and employment (Bank MSME Jatim, 2025a).

Competitiveness of MSMEs

Competitiveness is the ability of an entity (in this case, an MSME) to produce better or more efficient products or services than its competitors, thereby enabling it to survive and thrive in the market. The concept of MSME competitiveness is not limited to price, but also encompasses product quality, innovation, operational efficiency, and adaptability to market changes (Sugiarti et al., 2020). Factors influencing MSME competitiveness are very diverse, including the quality of human resources, access to technology, innovation capabilities, access to capital, and marketing strategies (Nur Faizah & Majid, 2024).

Strategies to increase the competitiveness of MSMEs are crucial in facing increasingly fierce competition. One key strategy is digital marketing. Utilizing social media, marketplaces,

and e-commerce allows MSMEs to reach a wider consumer base, increase product visibility, and reduce traditional marketing costs. Digital marketing training, packaging innovation, and product labeling are also essential components of this strategy to increase product appeal in the digital marketplace (Fitrianti et al., 2024).

Furthermore, product and process innovation also play a crucial role. MSMEs need to continuously innovate to create unique, high-quality products that meet consumer preferences. Innovation extends beyond the final product to the production process to increase efficiency and reduce costs (Vicky Yoga Satria, 2024). Strengthening partnerships and collaborations with various parties, such as the government, financial institutions, and large corporations, can open MSMEs' access to resources, technology, and broader markets (Wulansari et al., 2024). Business matching is an effective form of collaboration to connect MSMEs with potential investors or buyers (UKM INDONESIA.ID, 2024). MSME Sustainability

Business sustainability refers to a business's ability to continue operating and generating profits in the long term, while considering economic, social, and environmental impacts. The dimensions of MSME sustainability include economic (profitability, growth), social (employee welfare, social responsibility), and environmental (waste management, efficient resource use) aspects (Rahmantari et al., 2023). Factors influencing MSME sustainability include sound financial management, business legality, adaptability to changes in the business environment, and adoption of responsible business practices (Angrian Permana, 2025).

Strategies for improving the sustainability of MSMEs involve several important aspects. Wise financial management is the main foundation, including cash flow management, budget planning, and access to affordable financing such as low-interest credit programs (Bank UMKM Jatim, 2025a). The importance of legality and certification, such as PIRT, halal certification, and BPOM, cannot be ignored as these are absolute requirements for MSME products to be accepted in the wider market and avoid legal issues (GoNews, 2025).

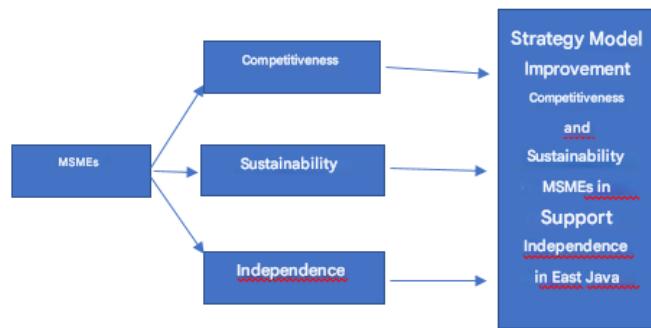
Furthermore, implementing the circular economy concept is also a relevant strategy for sustainability. A circular economy aims to extend the life cycle of products, raw materials, and resources to extend their useful life, reduce waste, and create added value (Surabaya Population and Civil Registration Office, 2024). Marketing and digital networking also significantly impact business sustainability, enabling MSMEs to remain relevant and connected to the ever-growing market (Susyanti, 2022).

MSME Independence

MSME independence refers to the ability of entrepreneurs to manage and develop their businesses independently, without over-reliance on external assistance. This includes independence in decision-making, financial management, product development, and marketing. Indicators of MSME independence can be seen in their ability to independently access capital, manage risks, innovate, and expand markets without excessive intervention from external parties (Sukirman, 2014).

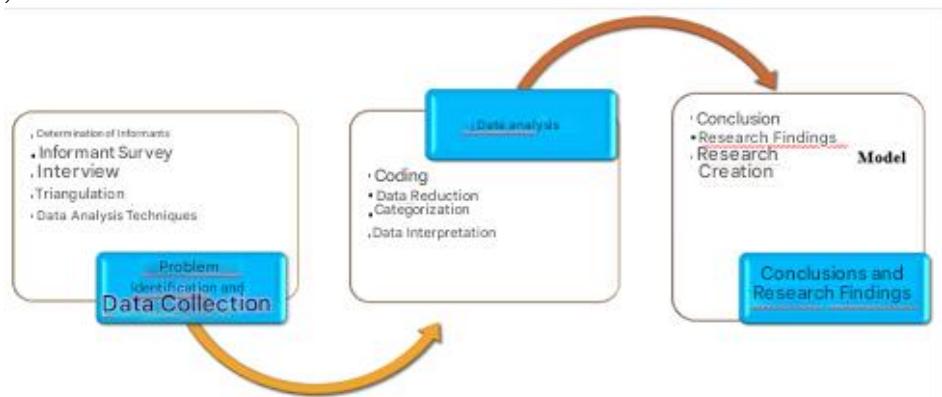
The main challenges in achieving MSME independence often lie in capital and marketing. Therefore, strategies to support MSME independence focus on empowering entrepreneurs through various programs. Entrepreneurship training aims to improve entrepreneurs' knowledge and skills in various business aspects, from production to marketing and financial management. Intensive mentoring provides personalized guidance and specific solutions to problems faced by MSMEs, helping them overcome operational and strategic obstacles (UKMINDONESIA.ID, 2024).

Easy and affordable access to capital is key to independence. Programs such as the MSME Prosperity Credit (Prokesra) and the Revolving Fund Credit (Dagulir) by Bank UMKM Jatim play a major role in facilitating this access (Bank UMKM Jatim, 2025a). Furthermore, business matching and exhibitions/bazaars provide opportunities for MSMEs to expand their networks, find business partners, and market products directly, ultimately reducing dependence on conventional marketing channels (UKMINDONESIA.ID, 2024). Improving digital financial literacy is also crucial so that MSMEs can better manage their finances and utilize technology for business growth (Kominfo Jatim, 2025).

**Figure 1.** Framework Thinking.

3. Proposed Method

This research will use a qualitative approach with a case study design. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of complex phenomena related to strategies for increasing competitiveness, sustainability, and independence of MSMEs in East Java from the perspective of MSME actors, the government, and other related parties. The case study will focus on several selected informants in East Java, namely 5 MSME actors, 1 representative of the East Java Cooperative and SME Office, 1 representative of a financial institution/East Java MSME Bank and 2 academics/MSME experts in East Java. This approach allows for a rich exploration of narrative data, perceptions, and experiences, which are difficult to measure quantitatively (Ishtiaq, 2019), (Miles et al., 2014).

**Figure 2.** Analysis Techniques.

4. Results and Discussion

Strategies to Increase the Competitiveness of MSMEs in East Java

Increasing the competitiveness of MSMEs in East Java is a necessity to ensure the sustainability and growth of businesses amidst intense competition. Based on interviews with MSME actors, representatives of the East Java Cooperative and SME Office, representatives of financial institutions/East Java MSME Banks and academics/MSME experts in East Java, several key strategies that are effective in increasing the competitiveness of MSMEs in East Java are: Implementation of Marketing Strategies

Digital marketing has proven to be a highly effective strategy in increasing the competitiveness of MSMEs. Many MSMEs in East Java have begun adopting social media platforms, marketplaces, and e-commerce to expand their market reach. Utilizing digital technology allows MSMEs to reach consumers beyond traditional geographic boundaries, reduce marketing costs, and increase product visibility. Digital marketing training, packaging innovation, and attractive product labeling are crucial to ensuring MSME products can compete in the increasingly crowded digital marketplace (Fitrianti et al., 2024). For example, the Wingko Dapur Fira Lamongan MSME successfully increased its competitiveness through the use of social media and digital marketing, as well as focusing on niche markets (Sugiarti et al., 2020).

Product and Process Innovation

Innovation is a crucial factor in creating competitive advantage. MSMEs in East Java need to continuously innovate by developing unique, high-quality products that meet evolving consumer tastes. Innovation extends beyond the final product to include innovations in the production process to increase efficiency, reduce costs, and ensure consistent quality. Support from the government and relevant institutions in the form of innovation training and access to more modern production technology can accelerate this process (Vicky Yoga Satria, 2024).

The Role of Partnership and Collaboration

Partnerships and collaboration with various parties are powerful strategies for increasing the competitiveness of MSMEs. Collaboration with governments, financial institutions, universities, and even large corporations can provide MSMEs with access to resources, knowledge, and networks that were previously difficult to access. A concrete example is the business matching program that connects MSMEs with foreign importers, opening up export opportunities and expanding international markets (Bank MSME Jatim, 2025a). Furthermore, collaboration with cooperatives can also provide a capital solution for MSMEs that are not yet bankable (GoNews, 2025).

Strategies for Improving the Sustainability of MSMEs in East Java

The sustainability of MSMEs in East Java depends not only on profitability but also on their ability to manage social and environmental impacts. Several strategies that can be implemented to improve MSME sustainability include:

Wise Financial Management Practices

Sound financial management is the foundation for business sustainability. MSMEs need a good understanding of cash flow management, budgeting, and accurate financial record keeping. Access to affordable financing, such as the MSME Prosperity Credit Program (Prokesra) and the Revolving Fund Credit (Dagulir) from Bank UMKM Jatim, significantly assists MSMEs in managing capital and developing their businesses without the burden of high interest rates (Bank UMKM Jatim, 2025a). The low NPL rates of these programs demonstrate their effectiveness in supporting MSME financial sustainability.

The Importance of Legality and Certification

Business legality and product certification (such as PIRT, halal certification, and BPOM) are crucial for the sustainability of MSMEs. Legality provides legal protection, increases consumer confidence, and opens access to broader markets, including modern markets and exports. Many MSMEs still face obstacles in obtaining these permits, requiring active government facilitation, including the provision of shared kitchens to meet production standards (GoNews, 2025).

Implementation of the Circular Economy Concept

Implementing the circular economy concept can be an innovative strategy to improve the sustainability of MSMEs. A circular economy focuses on extending the life cycle of products, raw materials, and resources through recycling, reuse, and waste reduction (Disdukcapil Surabaya, 2024). This not only reduces environmental impact but can also create economic value and cost efficiencies for MSMEs. Although not many MSMEs have fully implemented it, this potential needs to be further encouraged through education and technical support.

Strategies to Support MSME Independence in East Java

The independence of MSMEs is the ultimate goal of various empowerment programs, enabling them to grow and develop independently. Strategies that support MSME independence in East Java include: Effective Training and Mentoring Programs

Entrepreneurship training and intensive mentoring are crucial tools in building MSME independence. These programs equip entrepreneurs with knowledge and skills in various business aspects, from production management and marketing to finance and legal aspects (UKMINDONESIA.ID, 2024). Personalized and ongoing mentoring helps MSMEs address specific challenges they face, enabling them to make better business decisions independently.

Access to Capital and Business Matching

Easy and affordable capital is key to financial independence for MSMEs. Low-interest credit programs with simple procedures, such as Prokesra and Dagulir, significantly assist MSMEs in developing their businesses (Bank UMKM Jatim, 2025a). Furthermore, business matching, which connects MSMEs with potential investors or buyers, opens up opportunities for collaboration and expands business networks, reducing dependence on a single source of income or market (UKMINDONESIA.ID, 2024).

The Role of Government and Supporting Institutions

The East Java Provincial Government and various other supporting institutions play a crucial role in promoting MSME independence. Pro-MSME policies, facilitating licensing, providing digital infrastructure, and supporting the marketing and promotion of MSME products are some forms of support that can accelerate independence. Collaboration between the government, banks, academics, and the MSME community (the Penta Helix approach) is crucial for creating a conducive ecosystem for the growth of independent MSMEs (Susyanti, 2022).

The Relationship between Competitiveness, Sustainability, and Independence of MSMEs

Power Competitiveness, sustainability, and independence of MSMEs are three interrelated concepts that form a positive cycle. Improving MSME competitiveness, for example through the adoption of digital marketing and product innovation, will directly contribute to increased sales and profitability, which are important indicators of economic sustainability. Highly competitive MSMEs tend to be better able to withstand market fluctuations and attract investment, thus strengthening the foundation of their sustainability.

Conversely, MSME sustainability, supported by sound financial management, business legality, and responsible business practices, will create a stable environment for MSMEs to innovate and increase competitiveness. Sustainable MSMEs have a good reputation, easier access to financing, and the ability to attract and retain talent, all of which support increased competitiveness.

The independence of MSMEs bridges the gap between competitiveness and sustainability. Independent MSMEs, with the ability to make strategic decisions, manage resources, and develop markets independently, will be more proactive in seeking ways to increase their competitiveness and ensure the sustainability of their businesses. Training and mentoring that foster independence will equip MSMEs with the skills necessary to adapt to change, innovate, and capitalize on opportunities, simultaneously enhancing both competitiveness and sustainability. Thus, these three concepts are mutually reinforcing: high competitiveness supports sustainability, sustainability creates stability for competitiveness, and independence empowers MSMEs to achieve both.

5. Conclusions

Including: The Strategy for Increasing the Competitiveness of MSMEs in East Java is centered on the adoption of digital marketing (utilization of social media, marketplaces, and e-commerce), product and process innovation (development of unique and quality products, production efficiency), and strengthening partnerships and collaboration with various parties (government, financial institutions, large companies) to expand market access and resources. The strategy for enhancing the sustainability of MSMEs in East Java relies heavily on sound financial management practices (cash flow management, access to affordable financing such as Prokesra and Dagulir), compliance with legality and certification (PIRT, halal, BPOM), and the potential application of circular economy concepts for resource efficiency and waste reduction. The strategy for supporting the independence of MSMEs in East Java focuses on a comprehensive empowerment program, including entrepreneurial training and intensive mentoring for capacity building, easy access to capital, and facilitation of business matching and exhibitions/bazaars for network and market expansion. The active role of the government and supporting institutions is crucial in creating a conducive ecosystem. The link between MSME competitiveness, sustainability, and independence is synergistic and mutually reinforcing. Increasing competitiveness directly contributes to economic sustainability. Sustainability creates stability that allows MSMEs to continue to innovate and improve competitiveness. Meanwhile, independence empowers MSMEs to be proactive in achieving competitiveness and sustainability, with the ability to make strategic decisions and adapt to change. Overall, MSMEs in East Java have significant potential to continue growing and contributing to the economy. However, sustained support through appropriate policies, relevant empowerment programs, and facilitating access to essential resources will be key to realizing MSMEs that are not only competitive and sustainable, but also fully self-sufficient.

For the East Java Provincial Government and related agencies, strengthen the MSME digital ecosystem by encouraging and facilitating MSMEs to adopt digital technology comprehensively, not only in marketing but also in operational and financial management. Provide more specific and sustainable training on digitalization. Facilitate access to legality and certification, strive to simplify procedures and reduce costs for PIRT (Islamic Product

Recognition), halal certification, and BPOM (Food and Drug Monitoring Agency) processing. Consider subsidy programs or technical assistance for MSMEs that have difficulty meeting these requirements. Evaluate the long-term impact of the program, by conducting in-depth evaluation studies of existing MSME empowerment programs (e.g., Prokesra, Dagulir) to measure their long-term impact on MSME competitiveness, sustainability, and independence holistically. Use the evaluation results to improve future programs. Encourage the implementation of a circular economy, educate and provide incentives for MSMEs to adopt circular economy practices, such as recycling, material reuse, and waste reduction, which can improve efficiency and environmental sustainability.

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