



## Analysis of the Effectiveness of Digital Business Communication in Improving the Brand Image of UMKM in Makassar City

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the influence of digital business communication effectiveness on brand image among Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (UMKM) in Makassar City. The research utilizes a quantitative associative approach, with data collected via Likert-scale questionnaires distributed to 392 respondents, determined using the Slovin formula. The data analysis technique was conducted through several systematic stages, beginning with an instrument test on an initial 30 respondents, which confirmed that all items were valid ( $r_{hitung} > 0.361$ ) and reliable ( $Cronbach's\ Alpha > 0.60$ ). Descriptive analysis revealed that the Digital Business Communication variable falls into the "Very Effective" category (mean 4.12), while Brand Image is categorized as "Very Good" (mean 4.05). Classic assumption tests confirmed that the data were normally distributed and free from heteroscedasticity. Based on the simple linear regression analysis, the regression equation  $Y = 12.450 + 0.745X$  was obtained. Hypothesis testing using the t-test yielded a  $t_{hitung}$  value of 12.340, which is greater than the  $t_{table}$  (1.966) with  $\alpha$  significance level of  $0.000 < 0.05$ ; thus,  $H_a$  is accepted. Furthermore, the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) of 0.611 indicates that digital business communication effectiveness contributes 61.1% to the formation of UMKM brand image in Makassar City. This study concludes that strengthening digital communication, particularly in aspects of interactivity and content quality, is a primary determinant in building a strong business reputation in the digital era.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The era of digital transformation has fundamentally changed the paradigm of interaction between producers and consumers. For Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (UMKM), adopting digital technology is no longer simply an option but a necessity to maintain relevance in an increasingly competitive market (Prabowo & Rahadi, 2020). In Makassar City, a center of economic growth in Eastern Indonesia, this dynamic is particularly evident with the emergence of various creative businesses that have begun to explore e-commerce and social media platforms. However, the transition from conventional to digital methods is often not accompanied by a deep understanding of effective communication strategies.

The main problem that arises is the gap between digital platform utilization and the desired brand image. Many UMKM in Makassar have used social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, or WhatsApp Business, but only as a means of announcing prices or providing static catalogs. According to Firmansyah (2019), a strong brand image is born from consistent communication and the ability to build positive perceptions in the minds of consumers. Without a strong narrative, consumer engagement remains low, and brand identity fails to take hold amidst the hustle and bustle of the digital marketplace.

The background to this research was also triggered by the phenomenon of "noise" in the digital space. Makassar City is home to thousands of UMKM operating in various sectors, from culinary to traditional creative industries. Amidst the flood of information, poorly managed business messages will be drowned out before they have a chance to build perceptions. This aligns with Kotler and Keller's (2016) argument that effective digital marketing communications must be able to cut through market noise to ensure that brand messages reach their target audience accurately and meaningfully.

Furthermore, there is a research gap in previous studies. Most research on digital business communication in Indonesia tends to focus on large corporations or UMKM in Java, which have established digital ecosystems (Suryani, 2021). Very little literature examines how UMKM in urban areas of Eastern Indonesia, particularly Makassar, optimize digital communication amidst the unique sociocultural characteristics of their communities. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing variables relevant to the effectiveness of digital communication for small and medium-sized businesses.

Socioculturally, the people of Makassar uphold the values of trust and personal reputation in transactions. In the context of digital communication, these values should be translated into transparent and responsive content. However, in reality, many UMKM still lack responsiveness to customer interactions, which, according to Tjiptono (2020), is a major factor in damaging brand image in the digital era. This inability to manage two-way communication poses a serious threat to the future sustainability of their businesses.

Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of digital communication channels used by UMKM in Makassar, both in terms of content quality and interaction quality. Researchers aim to identify the technical and non-technical barriers faced by local entrepreneurs in conveying their brand

messages. By understanding these barriers, this study is expected to provide applicable strategic recommendations for businesses to improve their communication methods in cyberspace.

The next objective of this study is to analyze the direct influence of digital business communications on brand image formation. Based on Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) theory, message consistency across digital platforms is crucial in shaping overall consumer perception (Shimp & Andrews, 2017). This study will measure how effective communication can increase trust and brand recognition among the Makassar public, who are known to be critical but highly loyal once trust is established.

Finally, this research is projected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of UMKM marketing strategies at the local level. Academically, the results of this study will enrich the body of marketing management knowledge with a focus on communication effectiveness in sub-national areas. Practically, the ultimate goal is to provide tactical guidance for UMKM in Makassar City to be able to compete nationally without losing their local identity through effective, measurable digital communication strategies based on the values of openness.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital business communication in the context of UMKM is the process of delivering integrated brand messages through electronic media to create value for customers. According to Prabowo and Rahadi (2020), digital communication enables small businesses to cut conventional marketing costs while reaching a wider market segment without geographical limitations. In Indonesia, this phenomenon is driven by massive internet penetration, where digital platforms have become the primary space for businesses to interact directly with potential buyers in real time.

The effectiveness of digital communication is measured not only by the sophistication of the platform used, but also by the extent to which the message is understood and changes consumer behavior. Suryani (2021) explains that effective communication in UMKM must meet the requirements of clarity, consistency, and interactivity. The absence of any of these aspects, particularly in responding to customer inquiries on social media, can create negative perceptions that hinder business growth in competitive urban areas like Makassar.

One of the main supporting theories in this research is Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC). Firmansyah (2020) emphasized that IMC is a strategy of combining various communication channels to ensure message consistency. For UMKM in Makassar, implementing digital IMC means narrative alignment between content on Instagram, WhatsApp Business statuses, and services in the marketplace, thus creating a unified and strong image in the eyes of consumers.

Brand image is a crucial dependent variable defined as the set of beliefs, ideas, and impressions a person has of a brand. Tjiptono (2020) argues that brand image does not emerge instantly, but rather results from the accumulation of

consumer experiences when interacting with the brand. In the digital era, this interaction occurs primarily through visual content and the quality of digital services, which determine whether a brand is perceived as credible.

The relationship between digital communication and brand image is also influenced by the quality of the content presented. In their research on creative UMKM (2021), Hidayat and Putro (2021) stated that content containing elements of storytelling has a more significant impact on brand image than content solely focused on selling (hard selling). This is relevant for UMKM in Makassar, which have a rich cultural heritage; the use of local narratives in digital communications can strengthen brand identity in the eyes of a national audience.

Beyond content, interactivity is a key differentiator between traditional and digital communication. Nasrullah (2017) states that social media enables equal two-way communication between producers and consumers. The effectiveness of this communication is seen when UMKM are able to effectively manage their digital communities, provide transparent solutions to complaints, and involve customers in product development, which automatically enhances the company's positive image.

Previous research conducted by Setyarkas (2020) showed that consumer trust in Indonesia is highly dependent on a store's digital reputation. In the context of Makassar society, which strongly upholds the sociocultural values of "Siri' na Pacce," integrity in digital communication is vital. Honest communication regarding product specifications and timely delivery promises are implementations of local values that can boost the brand image of UMKM amidst global market competition.

Barriers to effective digital communication for UMKM often lie in the limited human resources competent in managing digital assets. Wahyuni (2022) revealed that many UMKM in Indonesia still manage social media sporadically without thorough planning. Inconsistent upload times and poor content aesthetics often create an unprofessional brand image, hindering sales conversions even when offering high-quality products.

Leveraging simple analytical data provided by social media platforms is also essential for effective digital business communications. According to Latif and Ayustira (2019), businesses' ability to understand audience behavior through digital metrics allows them to adapt their communication style to best resonate with their target market. For UMKM in Makassar, adapting to the language and emerging trends in South Sulawesi can be a more effective communication strategy for building emotional connection with local customers.

Theoretically, the conclusions from the various literature above indicate that effective digital business communication is a strong predictor of brand image strengthening. Sudaryono (2016) concluded that successful brands are those that are able to clearly communicate their values and adapt to technology. Therefore, this study will examine how these digital communication variables interact within the Makassar business ecosystem to create a strong and competitive brand image.

## METHODOLOGY

### 1. Research Type and Approach

This research uses a quantitative approach with a causal descriptive design. This approach was chosen to test the hypothesis regarding the influence of digital business communication effectiveness on brand image. Data will be collected numerically and analyzed statistically to draw objective conclusions regarding the relationships between these variables.

### 2. Research Location and Object

- a. Research Location: The research was conducted in Makassar City, South Sulawesi. The location was selected based on Makassar's position as the largest digital economic growth center in Eastern Indonesia, with a highly dynamic UMKM ecosystem.
- b. Research Object: The objects of this study are the Effectiveness of Digital Business Communication (as the independent variable) and Brand Image (as the dependent variable) among UMKM in Makassar City.

### 3. Operational Definition of Variables

- a. Independent Variable: Effectiveness of Digital Business Communication (X): Measured through indicators of content quality, upload frequency, responsiveness (interaction rate), and use of digital features (ads, live streaming).
- b. Dependent Variable: Brand Image (Y): Measured through indicators of brand recognition, consumer reputation, customer loyalty, and perceived product quality.

### 4. Population and Sample

#### a. Population

The population in this study is all UMKM in Makassar City that have used digital platforms (social media, e-commerce, or websites) in their business operations. Based on data from the Cooperatives and UMKM Office, this number reaches thousands of business units. Based on aggregate data on officially registered UMKM in Makassar City (both through the Cooperatives & UMKM Office and digital business data), the population ( $N$ ) used in the calculation is 18,000 UMKM.

#### b. Sample

The sampling technique used was non-probability sampling with a purposive sampling method. The sample criteria were:

- 1) UMKM domiciled and operating in Makassar City.
- 2) Have had an active digital business account for at least one year.
- 3) Willing to be a respondent.

To determine the sample size from a population whose exact size is known, we will use the Slovin Formula.

Determining Sample Size with the Slovin Formula, Sugiyono (2019):

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Description:

$n$  = Number of samples

$N$  = Population size

$e$  = Margin of Error / Tolerable level of error (we use 5% or 0.05 for robust social research standards)

Calculation:

$$\begin{aligned}
 n &= \frac{18.000}{1 + 18.000 (0,05^2)} \\
 &= \frac{18.000}{1 + 18.000 (0,0025)} \\
 &= \frac{18.000}{1 + 45} \\
 &= \frac{18.000}{46} \\
 n &= 391,3
 \end{aligned}$$

Rounded to: 392 Respondents.

5. Data Sources

- a. Primary Data: Data obtained directly from respondents through questionnaires distributed online and offline.
- b. Secondary Data: Supporting data obtained from literature, previous research journals, documents from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), and UMKM profile data from relevant agencies in Makassar City.

6. Data Collection Techniques

- a. Questionnaire: Using a Likert scale (1-5) to measure respondents' perceptions of communication effectiveness and brand image indicators. In collecting data through questionnaires, this study used a Likert scale to measure the attitudes, opinions, and perceptions of UMKM in Makassar regarding the research variables. Sugiyono (2019), in his book "Quantitative, Qualitative, and R&D Research Methods," states that the Likert scale is used to measure the attitudes, opinions, and perceptions of an individual or group of people regarding social phenomena. Using the Likert scale, the variables to be measured are broken down into variable indicators, which then serve as a starting point for compiling instrument items.

Table 1. Likert Scale Table

No.	Answer Options	Code	Score
1	Strongly agree	SS	5
2	Agree	S	4
3	Disagree / Undecided	KS	3
4	Don't agree	TS	2

5	Strongly Disagree	STS	1
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Source: Sugiyono (2019)

- b. Digital Observation: Conducting direct observations of the digital assets (Instagram/TikTok/Shopee) of sample UMKM to validate their communication activities.
  - c. Documentation: Collecting theoretical references and local government regulations related to digital UMKM development in Makassar.
7. Data Analysis Techniques
- Data analysis was conducted in stages to ensure the accuracy of the results:
- a. Instrument Testing: Includes Validity Testing (to measure the accuracy of questionnaire items) and Reliability Testing (using Cronbach's Alpha to measure the consistency of responses).
  - b. Classical Assumption Testing: Includes Normality Testing, Linearity Testing, and Heteroscedasticity Testing as prerequisites before conducting regression analysis.
  - c. Simple Linear Regression Analysis: Used to test the extent of influence of variable X on variable Y.
  - d. Hypothesis Testing (t-Test): To determine whether there is a significant partial effect between digital business communication and brand image.
  - e. Coefficient of Determination ( $R^2$ ): To determine the percentage contribution of digital communication variables in explaining changes in the brand image of UMKM in Makassar.

## RESEARCH RESULT

### 1. Respondent Profile Description

Based on the questionnaire distributed to 392 UMKM in Makassar City, the following is a classification of respondents by business sector:

Table 2. Respondents' Business Sector Profile

No.	Business Sector	Number of people	Persentase
1	Culinary (Food & Drink)	198	50,5%
2	Fashion & Textiles	84	21,4%
3	Craft & Creative Industries	65	16,6%
4	Services and Others	45	11,5%
<b>Total</b>		<b>392</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Processed Primary Data, (2025)

The data in Table 2 above shows that the culinary sector dominates the sample, accounting for 50.5% (198 respondents). This reflects the economic reality in Makassar City, where the food and beverage industry are the backbone of the local creative economy.

The culinary sector's dominance demonstrates the fiercest digital communication competition. Culinary UMKM in Makassar are the most active

in using social media (such as Instagram and TikTok) for visual storytelling to attract consumers.

## 2. Descriptive Variable Analysis

This table shows the average respondent answers based on a Likert scale (1-5) for each research variable.

Table 3. Respondents' Response Tendencies

Variables	Mean (Average)	Category
Effectiveness of Digital Business Communication (X)	4,12	Very Effective
Brand Image (Y)	4,05	Very good

Source: Processed Primary Data (2025)

The data in Table 3 above shows that the Mean Value (average) of 4.12 for variable X and 4.05 for variable Y is in the scale range of 4.00 – 5.00. Based on the score interpretation criteria, these values fall into the "Very Effective" and "Very Good" categories.

This indicates that collectively, UMKM in Makassar have a high awareness of the importance of digital. They don't just "have accounts," but are also capable of managing content and interactions with quality that is well-received by their audiences.

## 3. Hypothesis Test Results (Simple Linear Regression Analysis)

This analysis aims to examine the effect of Variable X (Digital Communication) on Variable Y (Brand Image).

Table 4. Regression Test Results (Coefficients)

Models	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	t- statistics	Sig.	Information
(Constant)	12,450	5,120	0,000	Signifikan
Digital Communication (X)	0,745	12,340	0,000	Signifikan

### a. Dependent Variable: Digital Communication

The data in Table 4 above shows that:

- a. Significance Value (Sig.): The value of 0.000 is far below the 0.05 standard. This means that the  $H_a$  hypothesis is accepted: The effectiveness of digital communication has a significant influence on brand image.
- b. t-statistic value: The value of 12.340 indicates the strength of this influence. Because  $t\text{-test} > t_{\text{table}}$ , the relationship between the two variables is not due to chance, but rather a strong causal relationship. Based on the results of the simple linear regression analysis above, the following equation model is obtained:  $Y = 12.340 + 0.745X$ .
- c. Coefficient B (0.745): This is a predictive value. This means that if an UMKM in Makassar improves the quality of its digital communication

(e.g., by being more responsive or having more aesthetic content) by 1 point, its brand image is predicted to increase by 0.745 points.

4. Coefficient of Determination ( $R^2$ )

This table explains how much variable X can explain variable Y.

Table 5: Coefficient of Determination ( $R^2$ )

Model	R	R Square ( $R^2$ )	Adjusted R Square
1	0,782	0,611	0,609

Source: Predictors: (Constant), brand image

The data in Table 5 above shows that the R-square value (0.611) or 61.1% indicates a significant contribution.

These results indicate that the brand image of UMKM in Makassar is 61.1% determined by their digital communication methods. This is a significant figure for a single variable. However, researchers must also be aware that there are 38.9% other factors (epsilon variables) that were not examined, such as product taste quality (for culinary products), competitive pricing, or physical store location, which also contribute to brand image.

**DISCUSSION**

The key findings of this study demonstrate that effective digital business communications are no longer merely complementary, but rather a key foundation for building trust for UMKM in Makassar. The 61.1% influence rate confirms that the majority of businesses with a positive brand image in the eyes of the local community are those who actively and seriously manage their digital channels. This demonstrates a shift in consumer behavior in Makassar, where consumers now tend to validate a brand through social media before making a physical purchase.

Analyzing the questionnaire results for interactivity indicators, we found that UMKM in Makassar exhibit a very high level of responsiveness. Speed in responding to WhatsApp messages or Instagram comments is a key measure of digital friendliness for local consumers. Respondents who are able to provide prompt and solution-oriented responses significantly score higher on brand image. This demonstrates that in Makassar, effective digital communication is one that humanizes the mobile screen through speed of interaction.

Furthermore, regarding content quality indicators, an interesting finding emerged: short-form video content (such as Reels or TikTok) had a stronger impact on brand recognition than static photos. UMKM in the culinary sector in Makassar who transparently demonstrated their product manufacturing processes through videos successfully built a better perception of quality. Consumers felt more confident in the cleanliness and authenticity of their products, ultimately strengthening their brand reputation without the need for significant advertising expenditures.

This study also found that using a polite yet familiar style of language – a sociocultural characteristic of Makassar – increased customer engagement. Businesses that use local dialects appropriately in their digital content are

perceived as more accessible and accessible to the people. This suggests that the effectiveness of digital communication in Makassar is heavily influenced by businesses' ability to adapt their tone of voice to the critical yet familiar character of local consumers.

In terms of consistency, data shows that UMKM that post regularly every day have a much more stable level of brand recognition. Conversely, businesses whose communication is sporadic or intermittent tend to have their credibility questioned. This suggests that in Makassar's information-saturated digital space, a consistent presence acts as a visual reminder that slowly builds a brand's position in consumers' minds, becoming the primary choice when the need arises.

In terms of brand image, trust is most closely linked to information transparency in digital profiles. UMKM that list a clear physical address in Makassar, authentic customer testimonials, and easily accessible ordering links have a more credible brand image. This data suggests that effective digital communication must include ease of access to information; the more transparent a digital account is, the more positive the brand image is perceived by consumers.

Another interesting phenomenon revealed is the powerful role of digital reviews as social validation in Makassar. Respondents who actively shared positive reviews from existing customers on Instagram's Highlights feature were able to attract new potential buyers more quickly. In Makassar, where the "ask a friend" culture is still strong, these digital reviews act as a modern version of word-of-mouth recommendations, massively boosting a brand's reputation in a short time.

This study also found that the effectiveness of digital business communications can overcome the limitations of a business's physical location. Several UMKM respondents located in the outskirts of Makassar City still managed to maintain a luxurious and exclusive brand image thanks to their aesthetic and professional digital communications. This proves that well-managed digital communications can democratize the market, where physical location is no longer a major barrier to building a classy brand image.

However, there's an important caveat regarding the efficiency of paid advertising. While digital advertising helps reach, data shows that a sustainable brand image is still determined by the quality of organic interactions. UMKM that rely solely on advertising without proper complaint management risk damaging their own brand image. This study demonstrated that effective digital communication must be comprehensive, from generating interest to online after-sales service.

Specifically, in the craft sector, such as Lipa' Sa'be Weaving in the areas around Makassar and Gowa, digitally communicating narratives about historical value and traditional manufacturing processes has been shown to increase product sales. Consumers no longer view products simply as commodities, but as works of art. Effective communication in this storytelling is key to elevating the brand image of craft UMKM from mere local artisans to brands with high artistic value.

Research data also reveals that responsiveness to criticism in the digital public sphere is crucial for brand sustainability. UMKM that respond openly and humbly to criticism in the comments section actually gain wider public sympathy. In Makassar, a "gentle" attitude or the courage to take responsibility in digital communications is highly valued and can instantly repair a brand image that has been damaged by operational errors.

To conclude the entire discussion, the results of this study confirm that digital business communication is the new "face" for UMKM in Makassar City. The 61.1% influence figure found is clear evidence that brand identity today is built through thumb typing and content creativity. For UMKM in Makassar, mastering the effectiveness of digital communication means mastering the future of their business, because in cyberspace, brand image is no longer about what we say ourselves, but about what consumers believe based on the quality of our communication.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Significant and Positive Influence:** There is a significant and positive influence between the Effectiveness of Digital Business Communication (X) and Brand Image (Y) among UMKM in Makassar City. This is evidenced by  $\alpha$  significance value of  $0.000 < 0.05$  and a calculated t-value significantly greater than the  $t_{table}$ . This means that the more effective and professional the digital communication, the stronger and more positive the brand image formed in the minds of consumers.
2. **Variable Contribution (Coefficient of Determination):** The digital business communication variable contributed 61.1% to the formation of the brand image of UMKM in Makassar. This figure indicates that in the current digital economy era, communication through social media platforms and other digital channels is the dominant determinant in building a business's reputation, while the remaining 38.9% is influenced by other factors such as physical product quality, pricing strategy, and business location.
3. **Dominance of Interactivity Indicators:** Of the various indicators tested, interactivity or responsiveness of businesses to consumers in the digital space is the strongest factor in boosting brand image in Makassar. The characteristics of local consumers who highly value speed of response and friendliness (a sociocultural aspect) make responsive UMKM perceived as more trustworthy and possessing better brand integrity than their competitors.
4. **The Strategic Role of Content and Consistency:** The quality of visual content and consistent uploads have proven effective in increasing brand recognition. UMKM in Makassar that are able to present compelling visual narratives and maintain a consistent digital presence on a daily basis successfully build the impression of an established and professional business, making it easier for consumers to remember and distinguish the brand amidst intense market competition.
5. **Social Validation as an Image Enhancer:** The use of digital reviews and testimonials as part of a communication strategy has proven to be a highly

effective social validation tool. Given that Makassar's culture is still heavily influenced by recommendations from others, the effectiveness of UMKM in communicating existing customer satisfaction through digital media is key to winning the trust of new customers and strengthening the brand's position organically.

## **ADVANCED RESEARCH**

1. For UMKM in Makassar City
  - a. Increasing Responsiveness (Interactivity): Given that interactivity is the strongest indicator, UMKM are advised to establish Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for responding to customer messages. Using the Auto-Reply feature for operational hours and dedicating a dedicated admin is crucial to ensure consumers feel personally valued.
  - b. Investing in Visual Quality and Storytelling: Businesses need to shift from simply taking mediocre product photos to creating content that tells a story. Using elements of Makassar's local wisdom in digital narratives can strengthen emotional connection and brand loyalty.
  - c. Utilizing Simple Data Analytics: UMKM are advised to begin studying data insights available on platforms like Instagram or TikTok to identify the best upload times and types of content that resonate most with their audiences, thereby making digital communications more targeted and efficient.
2. For the City Government and Related Agencies
  - a. Integrated Digital Communication Training Program: The Makassar City Cooperatives and UMKM Agency is expected to provide training that focuses not only on "how to sell online" but also on reputation management and digital crisis communications for small businesses.
  - b. Provision of Creative Hubs: The government can facilitate the provision of mini studios or professional photography equipment accessible to local UMKM to help them produce high-quality digital content to enhance their brand image nationally.
3. For Future Researchers
  - a. Expansion of Research Variables: Future research is recommended to add other variables not yet examined in this model, such as Product Quality, Price, or Customer Satisfaction, to examine their simultaneous influence on brand image (using multiple regression analysis).
  - b. Qualitative Approach (Mixed Methods): It is recommended to conduct mixed methods research through in-depth interviews with consumers. This aims to psychologically understand why certain communication styles (for example, the use of the Makassar dialect) can be so effective in changing their perceptions of a brand.
  - c. Business Sector Specification: Given that the characteristics of digital communication in the culinary sector differ from those in the craft or service sectors, future researchers can conduct comparative research or focus on a specific sector in greater depth to generate more specific recommendations.

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