

Enhancing Female Entrepreneurs' Performance through Social Capital, Innovation Capability, and Competitive Advantage in Deli Serdang Regency

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A B S T R A C T

This study aims to analyze the effect of innovation capability, competitive advantage, and entrepreneurial performance on women MSME players in Deli Serdang Regency. The method used is quantitative with a survey approach, where data is collected through questionnaires filled out by 100 female MSME players. The data analysis techniques used were descriptive and average analysis to identify the main strengths in the aspects of innovation, competitive advantage, and business performance. The results showed that innovation capabilities, such as the ability to produce quality products and develop products according to market needs, had a significant effect on business competitiveness. Competitive advantage, reflected in good customer service and durable product quality, is also a determining factor in maintaining and improving market position. In addition, the entrepreneurial performance of women MSME players is strongly influenced by their ability to provide good service and improve product quality on an ongoing basis. The conclusion of this study is that innovation capability, good customer service, and product quality are key factors that support the success and sustainability of women's MSME businesses. This study suggests that intensive training is needed to improve innovation capability, product quality management, and customer service among women MSMEs, in order to strengthen their competitiveness and business performance in an increasingly competitive market.

Keywords: Social Capital, Innovation Capability, Competitive Advantage, Entrepreneurial Performance, Women MSMEs

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world after China, India and the United States, with a population of 273.5 million. This large population results in a significant labor force, which can have both positive and negative impacts. One of the negative impacts is the increase in unemployment. Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the number of unemployed people in Indonesia reached 9.77 million in 2020, an increase of 2.67 million from 2019. The open unemployment rate also rose from 5.23% in 2019 to 7.07% in 2020.

Unemployment has serious social implications, including poverty and increased crime. The problem of poverty is an issue that is prevalent throughout Indonesia, including in North Sumatra (SUMUT). In 2021, the percentage of poor people in North Sumatra reached 9.01%, below the national average of 10.14%. One strategy to reduce poverty is to improve the skills and capacity of human resources through entrepreneurship development, especially for women.

In the midst of increasingly complex global challenges, entrepreneurship is recognized as a vital solution to drive economic progress and independence of a country. Various countries have proven that entrepreneurship is able to become a significant motor of development, including in Indonesia, where entrepreneurship development is a top priority to overcome unemployment and boost national economic growth (Indupurnahayu, 2024).

Entrepreneurship not only plays a role in creating jobs, but is also a strategic tool to reduce poverty (Suhartono, 2023), empower individuals and communities, increase economic independence, and improve people's lives (Renosori et al., 2022). As an integral part of the national economic sector, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a crucial role, especially in the era of globalization and rapid technological advancement. With significant contributions in creating jobs, strengthening local economies, and supporting sustainable development, MSMEs are important pillars in maintaining economic stability and growth (Juwaini et al., 2023).

The strategy of strengthening entrepreneurial performance plays an important role in creating a sustainable business ecosystem. According to research by Nurtjahjani and Utami (2021), entrepreneurship development can be achieved through improving innovation capabilities, expanding business networks, and adopting digital technology. These strategies help entrepreneurs manage resources effectively, create added value, and increase competitiveness in the market.

The role of the entrepreneurial community is also one of the key elements in supporting entrepreneurial performance. According to Rahmanto (2018), entrepreneurial communities provide a platform for sharing knowledge, experience and motivation. This encourages productive collaboration and enhancement of individual business capabilities. In addition, collaboration strategies with educational institutions and the government can provide support

in the form of training, access to capital, and policies that support business sustainability (Sutanto, 2020).

The importance of strengthening entrepreneurial strategies is needed to take the best approach to improving entrepreneurial performance in Indonesia. This includes developing social capital, implementing innovation capabilities, and strengthening sustainable competitive advantage.

Social capital plays an important role in supporting entrepreneurial performance, especially for women MSMEs. Social capital includes aspects of trust, networks and norms that encourage collaboration and support between individuals in the entrepreneurial community. According to Coleman (1988), social capital can strengthen relationships between individuals and create an environment conducive to business development. Studies by Putnam (1993) also show that strong social capital contributes to increased productivity and business efficiency through better cooperation and solidarity.

Innovation capability is another key element in driving entrepreneurial success. The ability to adopt and create new innovations enables MSMEs to improve operational efficiency, meet market needs and create added value. According to Schumpeter (1934), innovation is the essence of entrepreneurship that enables businesses to create competitive advantages in a dynamic market. Research by Utami and Mulyawan (2020) shows that innovation capability has a significant relationship with competitiveness and business sustainability of MSMEs.

Competitive advantage is the result achieved through a combination of social capital and innovation capabilities. Competitive advantage allows women MSMEs to survive and thrive in increasingly fierce competition. Porter (1985) asserts that competitive advantage can be obtained through product differentiation, cost efficiency, or focus on specific market segments. In the context of women's MSMEs, competitive advantage can be achieved by utilizing strong social networks and the ability to innovate to deliver unique and value-added products or services.

Various studies show that the relationship between social capital, innovation capabilities and competitive advantage significantly affects entrepreneurial performance. A study by Saraswati and Wulandari (2021) found that a combination of social capital and innovation can improve competitiveness and overall business performance. Therefore, an in-depth understanding of the relationship between these three aspects is important to support the development of women's MSMEs in Indonesia.

By understanding the strategic roles of social capital, innovation capability and competitive advantage, further research is needed to identify the best ways to improve the entrepreneurial performance of women MSMEs. This research is expected to contribute to the development of policies and programs that support the sustainability and growth of MSMEs in Indonesia, especially Deli Serdang Regency.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research method used is quantitative descriptive method. This method aims to describe or describe a phenomenon that occurs in the field using numbers or measurable data. In this study, data was collected through surveys or questionnaires filled out by respondents, then analyzed statistically to describe patterns, trends, or relationships between the variables studied.

According to Sugiyono (2016), this method aims to describe situations or conditions that occur in the field by collecting numerical data through standardized instruments, such as questionnaires or surveys. This is in line with the opinion of Creswell (2014) who explains that in quantitative descriptive research, the data collected is analyzed using statistical techniques to provide a clear picture of the variables studied. Arikunto (2013) also states that this approach is suitable for describing certain conditions or situations without changing or manipulating existing variables. In addition, Sekaran and Bougie (2016) explain that quantitative descriptive research aims to understand the characteristics of populations or samples in a more structured and systematic manner, with results often presented in the form of tables, graphs, or diagrams. Overall, this method is very effective in providing an objective and measurable description of the phenomenon that occurs, which can be used for further analysis or decision making.

Quantitative descriptive methods allow researchers to explore information that is objective and measurable, which can provide a clear picture of the ongoing situation or condition. The results of this research are usually presented in the form of tables, graphs, or diagrams that facilitate understanding of the data collected. Quantitative descriptive methods are used to determine how much, how often, or how much a phenomenon occurs or relates to the variables under study. In this context, for example, research aims to determine the characteristics, behavior, or conditions of a population or sample based on quantitative data that has been collected.

In this study, the sample used amounted to 100 respondents consisting of female micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Deli Serdang Regency. Sampling was conducted using the quota sampling method, which selects respondents based on certain characteristics, such as gender and entrepreneurial status. With this method, researchers ensured that the number of respondents from relevant groups of women MSMEs was sufficient to provide a representative picture of the conditions and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in the region. Quota sampling allows the researcher to focus on the target group in a more structured way and ensure appropriate representation of the research objectives.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

In this section, the results of the analysis obtained from the research conducted on women MSME actors in Deli Serdang Regency are presented. The analysis provides an in-depth picture of the characteristics and conditions faced by women entrepreneurs.

Respondent Characteristics

The following presents the characteristics of respondents that form the basis for analyzing the results of research on women MSME actors in Deli Serdang Regency. The characteristics of the respondents include various important aspects, such as age, education, involvement in the community, length of entrepreneurship, type of business, and business legalization.

Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents Based on Age, Education and Community

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
<21 Years	2	2.0
21-30 Years	15	15.0
31-40 Years	48	48.0
41-50 Years	26	26.0
>50 Years	9	9.0
Education		
Elementary School	29	29.0
Junior High School	0	0.0
Senior High School/Vocational High School	50	50.0
Diploma	5	5.0
Bachelor	16	16.0
Community		
HAPSARI	59	59.0
UMKM Deli Serdang	20	20.0
IWAPI	4	4.0
IPEMI	3	3.0
FKMI	1	1.0
Portugal	11	11.0
Pasar Kamu	2	2.0

Source: Processed Data, 2024

Based on Table 1 above, the majority of female MSME players in Deli Serdang Regency are in the 31-40 years age group, which accounts for 48% of the total respondents. This age group can be considered the most productive in entrepreneurship because it is at the peak of career and experience. This result supports the research findings by Henderson and Weitzel (2007), which show that age is related to emotional stability and decision-making ability in business. On the other hand, education shows that 50% of respondents have a high school/vocational school educational background, indicating that higher basic education tends to be more dominant among female MSME actors. This is in line with research by the World Bank (2012) which states that education influences decision-making ability in entrepreneurship. However, only a

few respondents had higher education, such as a diploma or bachelor's degree, indicating that women MSME players in this area still have limitations in accessing higher formal education. In terms of community, respondents who are members of the HAPSARI community dominate with 59% of the total respondents, which indicates the great influence of this community in supporting women MSME players, both in terms of information, networking, and learning. This finding is consistent with research by Putnam (2000), which states that membership in social communities is very important in women's economic empowerment, especially in entrepreneurship. Overall, age, education, and involvement in the HAPSARI community play an important role in supporting the development of women's MSMEs in Deli Serdang District.

Table 2. Characteristics of Respondents Based on Length of Entrepreneurship, Type of Business and Business Legalization

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Duration of Entrepreneurship		
<5 Years	67	67.0
5-10 Years	23	23.0
>10 Years	10	10.0
Business Type		
Culinary	64	64.0
Arts, Creative, Tourism	8	8.0
Agriculture and Animal Husbandry	7	7.0
Services and Trade	19	19.0
Digital Business	2	2.0
Business Legalization		
Halal Certificate	20	20.0
NIB/OSS/IPRT	18	18.0
SIUP/SITU/SKU	1	1.0
HKI	1	1.0
None	60	60.0

Source: Processed Data, 2024

Based on Table 2 above, it can be seen that most of the women MSME players in Deli Serdang Regency have less than 5 years of entrepreneurial experience, with a percentage of 67%. This shows that many women MSME players are just starting a business and face initial challenges in developing their business. Correspondingly, the most common type of business is in the culinary sector, with a percentage of 64%. This reflects that the culinary sector is a popular choice and has great potential among women MSME players, given the high market demand for food and beverage products. Meanwhile, other business types such as arts, creative and tourism (8%), agriculture and livestock cultivation (7%), and services and trade (19%) show less business diversification, with digital businesses accounting for only 2% of total

respondents, which may reflect challenges in accessing digital technology or a low understanding of digital marketing among women MSME players.

Regarding business legalization, the majority of respondents, 60%, do not have clear business legality, indicating that many women MSME players are still operating without official permits or required certifications. Only 20% have halal certificates, 18% have NIB/OSS/IPRT, and 1% have SIUP/SITU/SKU or IPR. This reflects the importance of improving understanding and access to business legality for women MSME actors, as business legality can increase their credibility and open up opportunities for them to access various financing facilities and support from external parties. Overall, these results indicate the challenges faced by women MSME players in terms of business experience, dominant business type, and business legality, which still need to be improved.

Analysis Description

An explanation of the results of the questionnaires and in-depth interviews conducted with respondents provides an overview of the distribution of their answers to the questions asked. The results of the distribution are presented in the following table.

Table 3. Social Capital

Statement	Description										Mean	Desc
	SS		S		KS		TS		STS			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
I am able to build relationships with employees in running my business	21	21	50	50	8	8	20	20	1	1	3.7	Agree
I am able to establish relationships with social networks (communities)	27	27	58	58	5	5	9	9	1	1	4.01	Agree
Suppliers trust my business	24	24	63	63	5	5	8	8	0	0	4.03	Agree
My business partners trust me in running my business	33	33	59	59	4	4	3	3	1	1	4.2	Agree
I follow business ethics norms in running my business	39	39	53	53	6	6	2	2	0	0	4.29	Strongly Agree
Customers trust the business I run	39	39	52	52	5	5	2	2	2	2	4.24	Strongly Agree
I am able to manage myself from work stress with others	25	25	59	59	7	7	9	9	0	0	4	Agree
I have the awareness to do business with others honestly	40	40	49	49	4	4	4	4	0	0	4.32	Strongly Agree
Social Capital											4.10	Agree

Source: Processed Data, 2024

Based on Table 3, the statements with the highest mean scores are *"I have the awareness to do business with others honestly "* (mean: 4.32) and *"I follow business ethics norms in running my business "* (mean: 4.29). These two aspects show that integrity and adherence to business ethics are the main advantages possessed by women MSME players.

The awareness to do business honestly is an important factor because it reflects integrity and commitment to high moral principles. In the context of social capital, honesty is a key element that builds long-term trust with customers, business partners and suppliers. This is in line with the social capital theory proposed by Putnam (1993), where trust and social norms serve as the foundation for successful collaboration. In addition, Tambunan's (2019) research shows that MSME actors who embed honesty in their business practices are better able to maintain relationships with external parties, making them more resilient to market challenges.

The application of business ethics norms also recorded high scores, indicating that women MSME players consistently prioritize ethical principles in their business activities. This is important for building a good business reputation and creating customer loyalty. Data from BPS (2023) also supports this finding, where 82% of women MSMEs in Indonesia that adhere to business ethics report increased trust from customers and business partners. Adherence to business ethics norms also contributes to business sustainability, as it creates a professional and transparent business environment.

These two aspects, namely honesty and adherence to business ethics, show that strong social capital is not only a competitive advantage, but also a solid foundation for business sustainability and development. Strategies to strengthen these two elements can continue to be carried out through training programs that emphasize ethical values and integrity in doing business.

Table 4. Innovation Capability

Statement	Description										Mean	Desc
	SS		S		KS		TS		STS			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
I have the ability to produce good products	43	43	49	49	4	4	4	4	0	0	4.31	Strongly Agree
I am able to develop products according to market needs	37	37	51	51	10	10	2	2	0	0	4.23	Strongly Agree
I am able to make changes in the production process	28	28	52	52	12	12	11	11	1	1	3.95	Agree
I was able to improve efficiency in the production process	24	24	52	52	12	12	11	11	1	1	3.87	Agree
I am able to use new technology to do product marketing	32	32	50	50	7	7	11	11	0	0	4.03	Agree

Statement	Description										Mean	Desc
	SS		S		KS		TS		STS			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
I am able to make changes in the organizational structure of my business	26	26	59	59	9	9	6	6	0	0	4.05	Agree
Innovation Capability											4.07	Agree

Source: Processed Data, 2024

Based on Table 4, the statements with the highest mean scores related to innovation capabilities are "I have the ability to produce good products " (mean: 4.31) and "I am able to develop products according to market needs " (mean: 4.23). These two aspects reflect the main strengths of women MSME players in creating and customizing products that are competitive in the market.

The ability to produce good products is the main foundation of innovation capability. This shows that the majority of MSME actors are committed to product quality. Good quality not only improves competitiveness but also builds consumer trust, as expressed in Porter's (1990) study, which states that product quality is a key element in competitive advantage. Data from BPS (2023) also shows that MSMEs that focus on product quality are able to increase market share up to 20% higher than those that do not.

The ability to develop products according to market needs shows that MSME players understand market dynamics and seek to adapt their products to meet consumer demand. This reflects sensitivity to trends and customer needs, which is the essence of market-based innovation. According to Kotler & Keller (2016), the ability to adapt products to market needs not only creates customer satisfaction but also strengthens their loyalty to the brand. In the context of MSMEs, this is an important strategy to maintain business sustainability amid competition.

These two aspects reflect high innovation capabilities, which support the success of MSME actors in creating quality and adaptive products. To improve these aspects, intensive training related to product development based on market needs and improving quality standards can be a strategic step.

Table 5. Competitive Advantage

Statement	Description										Mean	Desc
	SS		S		KS		TS		STS			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
I have a unique product design	22	22	47	47	12	12	17	17	2	2	3.7	Agree
I have attractive product packaging	18	18	47	47	9	9	24	24	2	2	3.55	Agree

Statement	Description										Mean	Desc
	SS		S		KS		TS		STS			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
I have a brand identity/logo	27	27	37	37	5	5	28	28	3	3	3.57	Agree
I pay attention to the durability of the products I sell	42	42	49	49	4	4	4	4	1	1	4.27	Strongly Agree
I am able to maintain product quality so that it is not easily damaged	46	46	47	47	4	4	2	2	1	1	4.35	Strongly Agree
I have competitive prices compared to my competitors.	32	32	52	52	10	10	6	6	0	0	4.1	Agree
I set the price according to the quality of the products I offer	43	43	51	51	3	3	3	3	0	0	4.34	Strongly Agree
I set the price according to the perceived benefits of the products I sell	37	37	56	56	3	3	4	4	0	0	4.26	Strongly Agree
I am able to adapt (adjust) in the business environment	40	40	51	51	6	6	3	3	0	0	4.28	Strongly Agree
I am able to provide service to customers	43	43	51	51	5	5	1	1	0	0	4.36	Strongly Agree
Competitive Advantage											4.08	Agree

Source: Processed Data, 2024

Based on Table 5, the statements with the highest mean scores related to competitive advantage are "*I am able to provide service to customers*" (mean: 4.36) and "*I am able to maintain product quality so that it is not easily damaged*" (mean: 4.35). These two aspects indicate MSME actors' primary focus on customer satisfaction and product quality assurance, which are key factors in building competitiveness in the market.

The ability to provide good service to customers (mean: 4.36) shows that MSME players pay close attention to interactions with consumers as an important element in business. Good service not only increases customer loyalty but also creates effective word-of-mouth recommendations. This is in line with research from Kotler & Keller (2016), which states that customer service is one of the key differentiating factors that can build long-term relationships between customers and businesses. BPS data (2023) also supports this finding, where 85% of MSMEs that prioritize customer service report increased customer satisfaction.

The ability to maintain product quality so that it is not easily damaged (mean: 4.35) reflects the commitment of MSME actors to high quality standards. Durable products provide added value to customers and reduce the risk of complaints. According to Porter (1990), consistent product quality is one of the key pillars in competitive advantage, as it can strengthen brand reputation and increase market share. In the context of MSMEs, focusing on product quality also creates greater trust from customers and business partners.

Customer service and maintaining product quality are important cornerstones for MSME players to maintain a competitive advantage. To strengthen these two aspects, training programs related to customer service management and the implementation of product quality control systems can be a strategic step to improve business competitiveness.

Table 6. Entrepreneurial Performance

Statement	Description										Mean	Desc
	SS		S		KS		TS		STS			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
I am able to increase my business profits every month	31	31	52	52	14	14	3	3	0	0	4.11	Agree
I am able to increase my business income every month	35	35	46	46	16	16	3	3	0	0	4.13	Agree
I am able to improve product quality	35	35	54	54	9	9	2	2	0	0	4.22	Strongly Agree
I am able to provide good service	47	47	48	48	4	4	1	1	0	0	4.41	Strongly Agree
I am able to learn to improve my business	30	30	51	51	13	13	5	5	1	1	4.04	Agree
I am able to produce creative products every month	26	26	55	55	9	9	10	10	0	0	3.97	Agree
I participated in training to develop myself	31	31	50	50	11	11	8	8	0	0	4.04	Agree
Entrepreneurial Performance											4.13	Agree

Source: Processed Data, 2024

Based on Table 6, the statements with the highest mean scores related to entrepreneurial performance are "*I am able to provide good service*" (mean: 4.41) and "*I am able to improve product quality*" (mean: 4.22). These two aspects show the main focus of MSME actors on customer service and improving product quality as the main factors for the success of their business.

The ability to provide good service reflects the high awareness of MSME players on the importance of customer satisfaction. Quality service not only increases customer loyalty but also strengthens the business image. Research by Kotler & Keller (2016) shows that good customer service can be a key differentiator in a competitive market. In addition, BPS data (2023) supports that MSMEs that focus on customer service have a higher customer retention rate, which has a positive impact on business financial performance.

The ability to improve product quality shows that MSME players understand the importance of quality as a key element in creating added value. High-quality products help MSME actors maintain customer trust and open up market expansion opportunities. According to Porter's (1990) theory, improving product quality is one of the effective strategies to achieve

competitive advantage and business sustainability. This is also supported by a survey from Bank Indonesia (2023), which noted that good product quality directly contributes to an increase in MSME revenue.

These two aspects are strong indicators that MSMEs are customer- and quality-oriented, which are key pillars in improving business performance. To strengthen these aspects, intensive training programs on customer service strategies and quality management are recommended, as well as technological support to ensure consistency in production and service processes.

CONCLUSION & SUGGESTION

The results of the analysis show that women MSME actors have great potential to continue to grow through the utilization of social capital, innovation capabilities, competitive advantage, and entrepreneurial performance. In terms of social capital, MSME players show high integrity in doing business, as evidenced by their awareness to do business honestly and adherence to business ethics norms, which strengthens the trust of customers, business partners, and the community. In terms of innovation capabilities, the ability to produce quality products and adapt to market needs is their main strength in adapting to market dynamics. Competitive advantage is also reflected in their focus on customer service and consistency in maintaining product quality, which builds customer loyalty while strengthening competitiveness. In entrepreneurial performance, good service and improved product quality are indicators of success in creating customer satisfaction and expanding market share. Overall, women MSMEs show a strong commitment to innovate, improve quality, and build mutually beneficial relationships with customers and business partners, which is an important foundation for the sustainability of their businesses.

To support the development of women MSMEs, several strategic suggestions can be made. First, MSME players need to be given intensive training on managing social relationships with customers, business partners and communities to strengthen social capital and open up new collaboration opportunities. Second, in improving innovation capabilities, it is recommended to attend training that focuses on technology-based product development and digital marketing, as well as the implementation of production efficiency through process innovation. Third, to increase competitive advantage, MSME players need to access resources that support innovation such as packaging design and strengthening brand identity, and utilize digital platforms to reach a wider market competitively. Fourth, optimizing entrepreneurial performance can be achieved through training in customer service and product quality management, supported by a regular evaluation system to ensure customer satisfaction and business sustainability. With these measures, women MSME players can strengthen their position in the market and achieve better business sustainability.

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