

## Strategic Marketing in the Development of the Tourism Economy: Meleura Beach

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### ABSTRACT

Tourism plays a significant role in the economic development of Indonesia, particularly in areas like Meleura Beach, Muna Regency, Southeast Sulawesi, which offers unique natural landscapes and cultural heritage. However, local MSMEs in the region face challenges in promoting their products and services due to limited digital marketing skills and technological adaptation. This study aims to explore the role of strategic marketing, especially digital marketing, in enhancing the attractiveness of the Meleura Beach tourism destination. A qualitative research approach, combining SWOT analysis and FGDs, was employed to assess the current marketing strategies of MSMEs and their potential for growth. The findings revealed that while businesses possess strengths in their unique products and local resources, many face weaknesses such as insufficient digital marketing capabilities and infrastructure. Opportunities for growth lie in leveraging digital marketing tools and community-based tourism, but threats from competition and regulatory changes remain significant. The study concludes that enhancing digital literacy among MSMEs, supported by government and private sector collaboration, is essential for increasing market reach and competitiveness. It is recommended that MSMEs focus on digital marketing, community involvement, and partnerships with international agencies to ensure long-term growth and sustainability in the global tourism market.

**Keywords:** Economic Development; Industrial Technology 4.0; Marketing Strategy; Mix Marketing; Tourism

## **INTRODUCTION**

Tourism serves as a fundamental pillar of economic development, contributing significantly to national income, employment creation, and the promotion of cultural heritage on a global scale. Indonesia, as a country endowed with diverse natural and cultural attractions, has sought to leverage tourism as a strategic sector to boost economic resilience. One of the emerging tourism destinations with untapped potential is the Meleura Tourism Area, located in Muna Regency, Southeast Sulawesi. This destination boasts unique natural landscapes, including exotic beaches, crystal-clear waters, and distinctive coral formations, which, if managed effectively, can attract both domestic and international tourists. However, the full realization of this potential remains hindered by several challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, limited promotional efforts, and insufficient community participation in sustainable destination management (Kompuyurini et al., 2023).

Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) play an integral role in supporting the tourism industry in the Meleura Tourism Area. These enterprises contribute to the local economy by offering products such as traditional crafts, culinary specialties, and tourism-related services. Despite their significance, many MSMEs in the region continue to rely on conventional marketing strategies, such as word-of-mouth and offline advertising, which limit their market reach and competitiveness. Digital marketing has a significant impact on the financial performance of MSMEs. One of the marketing strategies involves using various media or technology to enhance business performance (Kompuyurini et al., 2023). Studies indicate that digital marketing has become a crucial tool in enhancing destination attractiveness and increasing tourist arrivals by providing real-time information and interactive experiences (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2013).

A key issue hindering the advancement of MSMEs in Meleura is the lack of technological adaptation. Many businesses face challenges in accessing digital platforms due to limited technological literacy, inadequate financial resources, and a lack of strategic planning for market expansion. Aprilani et al. (2021) state that the role of the government in developing community-based tourism is crucial, as it requires partnerships among stakeholders, including the government, private sectors, and the community. A participatory approach necessitates coordination and cooperation, ensuring a balanced role between various stakeholders. Community-based tourism development also requires full support from the government.

The Muna Regency Government has recognized the need for policy interventions to support MSMEs in tourism development. Various initiatives, including training programs, infrastructure development, and financial assistance, have been introduced to enhance business sustainability. However, further collaboration between government agencies, private stakeholders, and academic institutions is required to build a robust tourism ecosystem. Empirical evidence suggests that successful tourism development relies on a multi-stakeholder approach, where local communities actively participate in the branding and management of tourism assets (Goodwin, 2016).

In addition, consumer behavior trends indicate a growing preference for digital interactions when searching for travel information and making reservations. Tourists increasingly rely on online reviews, social media recommendations, and personalized marketing messages to inform their travel decisions. Consequently, MSMEs in Meleura must adapt to this evolving landscape by leveraging data-driven marketing techniques and digital storytelling to enhance visitor engagement and destination branding (Gretzel, 2018).

This study has high significance in the context of sustainable tourism development in Indonesia, especially in the Meleura Beach area, Muna Regency. By examining the role of strategic marketing, especially digital marketing, in increasing the attractiveness of tourism destinations, this study contributes to the understanding of how technology-based marketing can accelerate regional economic growth. This study also provides important insights into local community involvement in tourism management, which is expected to encourage the development of inclusive and sustainable community-based tourism.

The results of this study are expected to provide practical recommendations for stakeholders, such as the government, business actors, and the community, to strengthen cooperation in building a stronger and more competitive tourism ecosystem. By integrating strategic and digital marketing approaches in the context of tourism in a relatively new area, namely Meleura Beach, this study presents a significant new contribution. Although this area has great potential, challenges in marketing and adaptation to technology are still obstacles. This study not only focuses on digital marketing but also explores community involvement in the development of community-based tourism and the importance of cooperation between the public and private sectors as a holistic development model. In addition, this study maps how consumer behavior trends that are increasingly dependent on digital platforms can be utilized by MSMEs in Meleura to expand market reach and increase competitiveness in the global market. With this comprehensive approach, this study is expected to provide practical guidance for tourism destinations in areas facing similar challenges in digital adaptation.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Tourism Economic Development**

Tourism is a critical driver of economic growth, contributing to GDP, employment, and infrastructure development. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council ([WTTC, 2019](#)), the tourism sector accounted for 10.4% of global GDP and generated 319 million jobs worldwide in 2019. Tourism is a sector with a multiplier effect, meaning its development can drive growth in various supporting industries, including infrastructure, services, transportation, and food and beverage, while also expanding employment opportunities. Additionally, tourism has a strong and sustainable connection with agriculture, food production, and small and medium enterprises, fostering synergies in regional development. Moreover, tourism has been shown to contribute to the economic improvement of underprivileged areas ([Ferrari et al., 2018](#); [Hjerpe & Kim, 2007](#)).

Tourism has long been recognized as a vital sector for economic growth, job creation, and infrastructure development ([WTTC, 2019](#)). Tourism has both direct and indirect impacts on the economy. When tourists spend money at hotels, they directly contribute to job creation and add value to the hospitality sector. However, the effects extend beyond hotels, benefiting other industries such as agriculture, which supplies food, the craft industry, which provides souvenirs, and the textile industry, which produces hotel amenities. As a result, tourism generates a significant multiplier effect across various sectors, making it a crucial driver of economic growth ([Rusu, 2011](#)). This sector represents a significant portion of global GDP, and its growth is often driven by the attraction of international tourists. In the context of Indonesia, a country with an abundance of natural and cultural attractions, tourism serves as a pathway for both national and regional development. For instance, the integration of tourism with sustainable practices can further enhance the long-term viability of this sector, ensuring it contributes to environmental conservation and cultural preservation ([Honey, 2008](#)).

Sustainability is a key principle in the development of tourism destinations. Sustainable tourism involves balancing economic growth with the conservation of natural and cultural resources (Elkington & Rowlands, 1999). In this regard, Meleura Beach, located in Southeast Sulawesi, presents a unique opportunity for the development of sustainable tourism practices. However, challenges such as environmental degradation, improper waste management, and the potential loss of cultural heritage due to mass tourism must be addressed (Gössling et al., 2015). Community-based tourism (CBT) is a model where local communities actively participate in the planning, development, and management of tourism activities. This approach ensures that tourism benefits are distributed equitably, fostering sustainable development and preserving cultural and natural resources (Astuti, 2020). By engaging the local community in the management of tourism resources, Meleura can achieve a more inclusive and equitable distribution of the benefits of tourism, which could lead to poverty reduction and the promotion of social cohesion (Scheyvens, 1999).

Sustainable tourism development emphasizes balancing economic benefits with environmental and cultural preservation. Honey (2008) argues that sustainable tourism practices are essential to mitigate negative environmental impacts and protect cultural heritage, which is often the primary attraction for tourists. The concept of sustainability in tourism is rooted in the triple-bottom-line approach, which integrates economic, environmental, and social dimensions to achieve long-term viability (Elkington & Rowlands, 1999).

Grandcourt (2020) states the importance of integrating local communities into tourism planning to ensure inclusive growth and cultural sustainability. Community involvement not only enhances the authenticity of tourism experiences but also promotes equitable distribution of benefits. By empowering local populations through capacity building and participatory governance, tourism can become a tool for poverty alleviation and social cohesion (Scheyvens, 1999). Furthermore, the resilience of tourism economies in the face of global challenges, such as climate change and pandemics, is strengthened by diversified and community-driven tourism models (Gössling et al., 2015).

### **Marketing Strategy**

Kotler and Armstrong (2023) define marketing strategy as the rational approach a business entity takes to create value and profitability through customer relationships. Similarly, Kotler and Keller (2023) describe marketing strategy as a comprehensive concept used to achieve marketing objectives, incorporating detailed strategies related to target markets, the marketing mix, and budget allocations. These strategies are designed to fulfill consumer needs and wants, whether on an individual or group level, with the ultimate goal of achieving consumer satisfaction (Kotler & Keller, 2023).

In addition, Porter (2008) emphasizes that marketing strategy is a means by which a firm positions itself in the competitive landscape. It involves the selection of markets, value proposition development, and the application of a competitive advantage framework. Furthermore, Rachmawati et al. (2018) state that marketing strategy aims to understand customer needs and wants, develop unique value propositions, and build strong relationships with customers.

Recent research underscores the growing importance of digital marketing strategies in the tourism sector. According to Buhalis and Amaranggana (2013), digital marketing encompasses a range of activities, including content marketing, search engine optimization, and data analytics, which are essential for engaging consumers and

enhancing brand visibility. Similarly, Gretzel (2018) emphasizes the role of artificial intelligence (AI), big data, and automation in personalizing marketing efforts and optimizing consumer experiences.

Community-based tourism marketing has also gained prominence as a strategic approach to destination promotion. Goodwin (2016) highlights that local community involvement in marketing initiatives fosters a sense of ownership and enhances the authenticity of tourism experiences. This aligns with the concept of sustainable tourism development, where marketing strategies integrate cultural preservation and environmental conservation (Honey, 2008).

Additionally, digital platforms such as social media and e-commerce have revolutionized marketing practices. A study by Kim and Hall (2019) revealed that immersive technologies, including virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), play a critical role in influencing tourist decision-making. These tools enable potential visitors to explore destinations virtually, increasing engagement and reducing uncertainty in travel planning.

### **Tourism Marketing Mix**

In an increasingly competitive tourism industry, destinations compete fiercely for tourists' attention. A key strategy to gain competitive advantage is the implementation of a well-structured marketing mix, traditionally defined by the four Ps: Product, Price, Place, and Promotion.

#### **Product**

The product in destination marketing goes beyond the tangible, offering travelers an intangible experience that includes the destination's natural landscape, historical landmarks, and cultural celebrations, as well as amenities such as accommodation, transportation, and dining options (Rahman et al., 2019). Effective destination marketing centers on crafting a compelling narrative that encapsulates these elements. For example, a coastal destination may emphasize attributes such as sun-drenched beaches, vibrant nightlife, and luxurious accommodations to appeal to those seeking relaxation and luxury (Gaffar, 2022). The uniqueness and appeal of these experiences are critical in differentiating a destination in a saturated tourism market.

#### **Price**

Pricing strategies in the tourism industry encompass more than just accommodation costs; they involve all cost components associated with the travel experience, such as transportation, meals, activities, and even local taxes. A deep understanding of this pricing requires consideration of a variety of factors, including competitor pricing, the season of the visit, and the economic profile of the target market (Tjiptono, 2014). Destinations can offer value-for-money travel packages to attract cost-sensitive travelers or create high-end experiences that justify a premium pricing strategy. Dynamic pricing, which adjusts prices based on current demand levels, is a sophisticated approach to maximizing revenue while maintaining appeal to diverse traveler segments (Ahani et al., 2019).

#### **Place**

Distribution or Place concerns how travelers can access a destination. This includes not only physical accessibility through strong airline connections and efficient local transportation but also the ease of information and booking processes through online platforms (Binter et al., 2016). Strategic partnerships with travel agents and tour



operators also play a critical role in enhancing distribution channels, making it easier for potential visitors to plan and book their trips (Karl, 2018).

### **Promotion**

Promotion in destination marketing involves all activities aimed at communicating with potential travelers. This includes leveraging social media platforms for targeted advertising and engagement, which allows destinations to showcase their appeal directly to consumers (Al-Azzam, 2016). Collaborations with travel bloggers and influencers can provide authentic travel experiences and generate significant buzz. Additionally, traditional and digital public relations efforts play a significant role in securing positive media representation that can raise a destination's profile (Dwyer & Kim, 2003).

In conclusion, the four Ps of the marketing mix are essential components that, when combined strategically, create an engaging, accessible, and reasonably priced travel experience that appeals to target audiences. By leveraging these elements effectively, destinations can increase their market presence, attract more travelers, and ultimately succeed in the competitive global tourism landscape.

### **Industrial Technology 4.0**

The Industrial Revolution 4.0 has had a significant impact on the tourism sector, especially through digitalization and automation that increase efficiency in destination management and tourist experiences (Schwab, 2024). One of the technologies that is widely applied is big data and AI, which allows for in-depth analysis of tourist preferences and the development of more personalized marketing strategies (Gretzel, 2018). In addition, the use of AR and VR is increasingly growing in the tourism industry, allowing tourists to gain immersive experiences before visiting the destination directly (Tussyadiah et al., 2018). The concept of smart tourism has also begun to be applied through the use of the Internet of Things (IoT) and digital platforms in destination management, which not only increases operational efficiency but also increases tourist satisfaction (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2013). In the context of Meleura Beach, the use of social media, interactive websites, and AI-based applications can be effective strategies in increasing the attractiveness and promotion of destinations globally.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative research approach using SWOT analysis combined with focus group discussions (FGDs), which is well-suited for exploring complex social phenomena and understanding the perspectives of various stakeholders (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The qualitative method allows for an in-depth exploration of the role of strategic marketing in the development of Meleura Beach as a tourism destination. The research design incorporates SWOT analysis to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, which provides a comprehensive view of the current situation. FGDs are used to gather insights from entrepreneurs, policymakers, and other key stakeholders, ensuring triangulation and enhancing the validity of the findings (Denzin, 2017). The data collection process involves organizing FGDs to explore the challenges and opportunities in tourism marketing, alongside interviews with policymakers to gain deeper insights into potential government support for the sector. These methods collectively offer a thorough understanding of the landscape, challenges, and opportunities in leveraging digital marketing for tourism development at Meleura Beach.

To evaluate their understanding, a scoring system was applied, assigning "1" or "0" to three categories of measurement parameters Good (B), Sufficient (C), and Lacking (K)

based on the SWOT framework. The survey questions are summarized on the dimensions of the SWOT analysis, as follows in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Survey Questions

Strengths	What sets your business apart from competitors?
	What are the advantages of your product or service?
	What resources do you have that can be a strength for your business?
Weaknesses	What are the major weaknesses that may limit the growth of your business?
	What would you like to improve in your business operations?
	What are the major challenges facing marketing your product or service?
Opportunities	What are the emerging trends in your industry that you could capitalize on?
	Are there new opportunities that you could explore?
	Are there any market segments that are not yet covered?
Threats	What are the major competitors that could disrupt your market share?
	What changes in government regulations could negatively impact your business?
	What economic risks should you be aware of?

Source: Author's Elaboration (2024)

## RESULTS

### Survey Results

The following Table 2 presents the results of the survey that describe the perceptions of business actors regarding their conditions, based on the predetermined categories: "Good (B)", "Sufficient (C)", and "Poor (K)". By using this score, this research can identify areas that need to be improved, as well as opportunities that can be utilized to increase the competitiveness of MSMEs in Pantai Meleura.

**Table 2.** Survey Results

BAC	Strengths (S)			Weakness (W)			Opportunities (O)			Threats (T)		
	B	C	K	B	C	K	B	C	K	B	C	K
1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
2	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0
3	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
4	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
5	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
6	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
7	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
8	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0
9	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
10	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
11	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
12	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
13	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
14	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
15	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0
Σ	6	5	4	10	5	3	5	8	2	6	9	0
%	40%	33%	27%	67%	33%	20%	33%	53%	13%	40%	60%	0%

Note: BAC (Business Actor Code)

The findings as shown in Table 2 reveal that most business actors at Meleura Beach have limited knowledge of digital marketing and Industry 4.0 technologies. Strengths are fairly well-distributed across the business actors, with 40% of them indicating strong capabilities (Good). This suggests that some businesses in the area have solid strengths, such as unique products or services or strong local resources. However, 33% of the businesses are performing at a sufficient level, meaning they have room for improvement in leveraging their strengths. 27% of businesses are perceived as lacking in their strengths, indicating that a considerable portion of businesses might not yet fully utilize or recognize their advantages, such as unique offerings or local assets, that could be pivotal in attracting tourists.

The weaknesses dimension shows a significant concentration in the Good (B) category (67%), which indicates that a majority of businesses are aware of their weaknesses or challenges. This could mean they understand the areas where they need improvement, such as limited access to digital marketing, lack of technological tools, or insufficient infrastructure. The remaining 33% of businesses have weaknesses that are considered sufficient but not critical. Only 20% of businesses are perceived to have no major weaknesses, suggesting that most businesses in the area face some form of obstacle in their operations or marketing strategies, especially when it comes to digital adaptation and marketing.

Opportunities show that more than half (53%) of the businesses feel they have sufficient opportunities available, suggesting that they recognize trends in the tourism industry that can be capitalized on, such as the growing interest in community-based tourism or digital marketing tools. However, only 33% of businesses strongly believe that they are well-positioned to take advantage of these opportunities, indicating a need for better preparation or strategic planning. Only 13% of businesses believe they have no opportunities, showing that despite current limitations, most business owners remain optimistic about the future.

The threats dimension shows that 53% of businesses feel that threats are sufficiently recognized, indicating that many business owners are aware of the external challenges, such as competition, changes in government regulations, or economic instability. 40% of businesses are fully aware of the threats they face, suggesting that these actors are more proactive in addressing potential risks in the market. There are no businesses that feel they are completely lacking awareness of the threats, which suggests that businesses in the Meleura tourism area are relatively conscious of the risks in the tourism industry, even though they may not always have the resources or strategies to mitigate them.



**Figure 1.** Implementation of Survey Stages (2024)



**Figure 2** shows the implementation phase of the survey in the Meleura Beach tourism area. The photographs capture the interactions between researchers and local business owners during data collection, with participants answering questions and researchers taking notes. The setting is a local market with small businesses, illustrating the fieldwork process of gathering information for the study on community-based tourism and digital marketing.

### FGDs Results

Based on the results of the FGDs that has been conducted, the following results were obtained and presented in **Table 3**.

**Table 3.** SWOT Strategies for MSMEs in Meleura Beach

Factor	Strategy Action
<b>Strength</b>	
Uniqueness of Products and Services	Introducing traditional products through digital platforms to reach international tourists.
Natural Beauty and Accessibility	Develop nature-based tours to attract tourists seeking unique experiences in nature.
Local Natural Resources	Increase collaboration with the tourism sector to utilize marine products and handicrafts in product promotion.
<b>Weakness</b>	
Lack of Access to Digital Technology	Provide digital marketing training to MSMEs to improve their skills in online marketing.
Human Resource Limitations in Digital Marketing	Opening access and opportunities for digital marketing training through collaboration with the government and private sector.
Inadequate Infrastructure	Ask for government support for infrastructure improvements, such as faster and more stable internet connections.
<b>Weakness</b>	
Growing Tourist Interest in Community-Based Tourism	Increase promotion of community-based tourism through social media and websites to attract tourists.

Utilizing Digital Technology for Marketing	Using digital platforms, such as social media and ordering applications, to introduce MSMEs to a wider market.
Government Support Program	Take advantage of government programs to obtain training and financing assistance for developing MSME businesses.
International Tourist Market Expansion	Introducing local products through collaboration with international travel agents and e-commerce platforms.
<b>Opportunities</b>	
Growing Tourist Interest in Community-Based Tourism	Increase promotion of community-based tourism through social media and websites to attract tourists.
Utilizing Digital Technology for Marketing	Using digital platforms, such as social media and ordering applications, to introduce MSMEs to a wider market.
Government Support Program	Take advantage of government programs to obtain training and financing assistance for developing MSME businesses.
International Tourist Market Expansion	Introducing local products through collaboration with international travel agents and e-commerce platforms.
<b>Threats</b>	
Increasing Competition	Develop more efficient marketing strategies, such as digital-based promotions and collaboration with local travel agents.
Changes in Government Regulations	Monitor changes in government policies that may affect tourism activities and adapt quickly.
Economic Instability	Diversify products and services to reduce dependence on one type of tourist or one market.

### **Strengths**

The FGD results highlight several strengths of MSMEs operating in Meleura Beach, as outlined in Table 3. One key strength is the offering of unique products and services, including traditional handicrafts, regional culinary specialties, and immersive tourism experiences that provide visitors with authentic cultural encounters. This distinctiveness serves as a significant draw for tourists seeking genuine and memorable experiences. Another major strength lies in the natural beauty and accessibility of Meleura Beach, which features stunning beaches, clear waters, and captivating coral reef formations. These natural attributes not only attract tourists but also support the tourism sector and MSMEs that provide related services. Additionally, the effective utilization of local natural resources, such as seafood for culinary offerings and materials for handicrafts, enables MSMEs to maintain the authenticity and appeal of their products, further enhancing their competitiveness in the tourism market.

### **Weaknesses**

Table 3 revealed several key weaknesses faced by MSMEs in Meleura Beach, particularly in their adoption of digital technology. Many MSMEs still rely on traditional marketing methods, such as word of mouth and offline promotions, limiting their ability to expand market reach in an increasingly digital-driven business environment. This challenge is further exacerbated by a lack of human resources skilled in digital marketing, as many MSME operators struggle to effectively utilize digital platforms and social media to enhance their visibility. The inadequate adoption of digital marketing strategies hampers their ability to compete with businesses that have embraced online marketing. Additionally, infrastructure limitations, particularly the unreliable internet connection in

the area, present a significant barrier to the development of digital-based MSME businesses. Without sufficient digital access and technical expertise, MSMEs in Meleura Beach face difficulties in leveraging digital platforms to grow their businesses and reach a wider audience.

### ***Opportunities***

The FGD results in [Table 3](#) reveal several opportunities for MSMEs in Meleura Beach to enhance their growth and competitiveness. One significant opportunity lies in the growing tourist interest in community-based tourism, which aligns with the demand for authentic and sustainable local experiences. MSMEs can capitalize on this trend by deepening their engagement with the tourist market and offering unique, culturally rich experiences. Another opportunity is the potential to leverage digital technology for marketing. Despite existing challenges in technological skills, MSMEs can expand their reach by utilizing platforms such as social media, websites, and online booking applications, enabling them to connect with a broader audience. Additionally, government support programs present a valuable opportunity, as the local government has demonstrated its commitment to tourism development through initiatives such as training, infrastructure assistance, and financing. By participating in these programs, MSMEs can enhance their technological adaptability and maximize their market potential. Furthermore, the expansion of the international tourist market offers a promising avenue for growth. With the global tourism sector on the rise, MSMEs can attract international visitors by promoting their products and services through online platforms or partnerships with travel agents.

### ***Threats***

The FGD results identify several threats facing MSMEs in Meleura Beach, as outlined in [Table 3](#). One significant threat is the increasing competition from new tourism destinations that offer more sophisticated facilities, services, and efficient marketing strategies. This poses a challenge for MSMEs in maintaining their market share and attracting visitors. Another threat stems from changes in government regulations, such as policies that may restrict tourism activities, including limitations on international tourists or regulations in the fisheries sector that could impact the availability of local products. These regulatory changes could disrupt operations and affect the sustainability of MSMEs. Additionally, economic instability, both globally and locally, presents a considerable threat. Fluctuations in tourists' purchasing power due to economic uncertainty can lead to unpredictable demand in the tourism sector, directly impacting the income and stability of MSMEs in Meleura Beach.

## **DISCUSSION**

The analysis in this study used the SWOT framework to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats faced by MSMEs in the Meleura Beach tourism area. The data derived from surveys, FGDs, and interviews highlighted several critical factors that shape the current landscape of the tourism economy in the region.

### **SWOT Analysis**

#### ***Strengths***

The strengths identified for businesses in the Meleura Beach tourism area align with broader research on coastal tourism and its dependence on natural and cultural resources. As observed in the survey, approximately 40% of businesses felt their strengths were significant, including unique products such as traditional crafts, local cuisine, and cultural tourism services. These strengths are rooted in the natural beauty of the region, which includes pristine beaches, clear waters, and unique coral formations,

factors that are crucial in attracting tourists. Studies, including those by [Buhalis and Amaranggana \(2013\)](#), have shown that such natural resources often serve as a key attraction in coastal destinations, contributing to the area's competitive advantage.

Additionally, the rich local seafood culture enhances the authenticity of offerings, providing another competitive edge. As emphasized by other studies on sustainable tourism, local food culture is becoming increasingly sought after by tourists who desire authentic, memorable experiences ([Richards, 2012](#)).

However, while a substantial portion of businesses recognize these strengths, 33% rated their strengths as sufficient. This indicates that there is untapped potential in utilizing these local resources and cultural heritage. This challenge is not unique to Meleura Beach; many emerging tourism destinations fail to fully leverage their cultural and natural assets due to underutilization and a lack of strategic marketing ([Goodwin, 2016](#)). Businesses in Meleura Beach could benefit from strategic collaborations to better highlight their cultural offerings and create more immersive experiences for tourists.

### **Weaknesses**

The weaknesses identified in the survey point to significant barriers that many small businesses in Meleura Beach face, particularly in the realm of digital marketing and technological adoption. Approximately 67% of businesses identified limited access to digital tools and marketing skills as a primary weakness. This finding is consistent with studies on small businesses in developing regions, which often face challenges in adopting digital technologies ([Kompuyurini et al., 2023](#)).

The lack of digital infrastructure, particularly high-speed internet, exacerbates these challenges, preventing businesses from expanding their reach beyond local markets. In today's competitive global tourism environment, the ability to engage with international tourists through online platforms is crucial. [Aprilani et al. \(2021\)](#) emphasize that the digital divide significantly hampers small businesses in tourism, preventing them from reaching a broader audience and limiting growth potential.

Additionally, businesses in Meleura Beach may benefit from strengthening their internal processes, improving service quality, and enhancing their overall value proposition. A study by [Beritelli and Bieger \(2014\)](#) highlighted that small tourism businesses that invested in improving service quality and digital strategies saw a significant increase in customer satisfaction and loyalty.

### **Opportunities**

The survey results indicate that businesses in Meleura Beach are well-positioned to capitalize on several emerging opportunities, particularly in community-based tourism and digital marketing. About 53% of businesses recognize the growing trend of tourists seeking authentic, local experiences, which has been a significant shift in global tourism trends ([Gretzel, 2018](#)). This aligns with the increasing demand for sustainable tourism practices, where tourists seek to immerse themselves in local cultures, support small businesses, and contribute to community well-being ([Richards & Palmer, 2010](#)).

Community-based tourism, in particular, presents a major opportunity for businesses to promote the unique cultural heritage of Meleura Beach. Research suggests that by leveraging local knowledge and traditions, businesses can offer distinctive products that cater to the desires of today's eco-conscious travelers ([Gursoy et al., 2019](#)). However, to fully capitalize on this opportunity, businesses must improve their digital literacy, as the shift towards digital marketing is essential for reaching the global market.

Moreover, the rise of digital platforms presents another significant opportunity. Digital marketing strategies, including social media, online booking systems, and travel review platforms, are critical for attracting tourists. While 33% of businesses feel well-positioned to take advantage of these digital opportunities, a greater focus on building digital marketing capacity is essential. Therefore, the integration of digital tools such as online booking systems, mobile applications, and e-commerce platforms is crucial for small businesses in the tourism sector to remain competitive and reach a wider customer base.

### ***Threats***

The threats identified in the study highlight several external challenges that could undermine the sustainability of businesses in the Meleura Beach tourism area. Competition from other emerging tourism destinations with better infrastructure, facilities, and marketing strategies is a major concern for 53% of businesses. The global tourism market is highly competitive, and destinations with more developed marketing strategies tend to attract a larger share of the tourism pie (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2013).

In addition to competition, government regulations and economic instability pose significant threats. Businesses expressed concerns over potential changes in tourism policies, such as restrictions on international visitors or increased regulations, which could negatively impact their operations. This is a challenge faced by many small businesses in tourism-dependent regions, where external factors like government policies and economic conditions heavily influence market dynamics (Kompyurini et al., 2023). For businesses in Meleura Beach, adapting to regulatory changes and diversifying their offerings could help mitigate some of these external risks.

### **Strategies for Addressing SWOT Factors**

#### ***E-Commerce Adoption***

The study found that many business actors lacked awareness and skills in using e-commerce platforms. E-commerce has revolutionized the way businesses interact with customers, offering unprecedented access to global markets (Laudon & Traver, 2021). The adoption of e-commerce provides various advantages, such as increased accessibility, cost efficiency, and expanded market reach (Kresnawati & Rasyidah, 2021). However, the low technological literacy among entrepreneurs limits their ability to utilize digital tools effectively. This digital divide hampers the competitiveness of small businesses in the global tourism market (Joseph, 2001).

Training programs that educate business owners on the benefits and usage of e-commerce platforms such as Shopee, Tokopedia, and international platforms like Airbnb could enhance market penetration and profitability. These platforms not only facilitate transactions but also offer marketing tools and analytics to help businesses understand consumer behavior and preferences (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2015). Integrating e-commerce with traditional marketing strategies can create a hybrid model that maximizes both online and offline opportunities.

#### ***Digital Content Creation***

Effective digital marketing requires high-quality product presentation. Digital content, including images, videos, and written descriptions, plays a crucial role in attracting and engaging potential tourists (Sasongko et al., 2020). Compelling product photography significantly impacts consumer interest and purchasing decisions by enhancing the visual appeal of tourism offerings (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012).



The research findings suggest that many entrepreneurs struggle with creating engaging visual content. Providing training on product photography, lighting techniques, and editing tools could significantly improve online sales performance and customer engagement. Additionally, the use of storytelling in digital content can create emotional connections with potential tourists, enhancing brand loyalty and customer retention (Pulizzi, 2012).

### ***Social Media as a Marketing Tool***

Social media plays an essential role in tourism marketing, allowing businesses to reach a wider audience through targeted advertisements and viral content. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok have transformed how tourism businesses engage with consumers, enabling real-time interactions and personalized marketing (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

The study emphasizes the effectiveness of TikTok over other platforms, as it prioritizes view-based content distribution. The algorithm-driven nature of TikTok allows even small businesses to achieve significant reach with minimal investment (Montag et al., 2021). Business actors should leverage social media to create engaging promotional campaigns, capitalize on trends, and interact with potential customers. Utilizing influencer partnerships and user-generated content can further amplify brand visibility and credibility (Freberg et al., 2011).

### **Relationship Marketing and the Snowball Effect**

Digital marketing has become an essential component of the tourism industry's growth strategy. A growing body of research underscores the critical role of digital platforms in enhancing destination visibility and attracting tourists. Buhalis and Amaranggana (2013) highlight that digital marketing tools—such as content marketing, search engine optimization, and data analytics—can effectively engage consumers and improve the tourism brand's visibility. Through the strategic use of social media, blogs, and websites, tourism destinations can offer real-time information, interactive experiences, and personalized recommendations that cater to the evolving preferences of modern travelers (Gretzel, 2018).

For Meleura Beach, which is relatively unknown on the global tourism map, effective use of digital marketing strategies could be the key to positioning the destination as a competitive player in the Southeast Asian tourism market. The ability to share visually compelling stories through online platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube could play a pivotal role in attracting both domestic and international visitors. Furthermore, leveraging the power of user-generated content through online reviews and social media endorsements can increase the credibility and appeal of Meleura Beach among potential tourists (Freberg et al., 2011).

Sustaining long-term business success requires a strong focus on relationship marketing. Relationship marketing emphasizes building long-term connections with customers rather than focusing solely on individual transactions (Berry, 2002). The snowball effect in marketing refers to the compounding impact of positive word-of-mouth promotion, where satisfied customers become brand advocates, influencing their social networks (Arndt, 1967).

Encouraging satisfied customers to share their experiences, providing excellent service, and maintaining strong relationships with existing clients can drive exponential business growth. Loyalty programs, personalized communication, and consistent quality service are key strategies for fostering strong customer relationships (Morgan, 1994).

Additionally, leveraging online review platforms such as TripAdvisor and Google Reviews can enhance brand reputation and attract new customers.

### **Challenges and Policy Implications**

Despite these opportunities, significant barriers remain, including digital illiteracy, resistance to change, and limited resources for marketing investments. The digital divide, characterized by unequal access to technology and digital skills, poses a significant challenge for small businesses in rural areas like Meleura (Van Dijk, 2005). Resistance to adopting new technologies often stems from a lack of understanding of the benefits and perceived complexity (Rogers et al., 2014).

Despite the potential of digital marketing, the adoption of technology among MSMEs in Meleura remains limited. Many entrepreneurs lack the necessary skills and resources to utilize e-commerce platforms and digital marketing tools effectively. This challenge is further compounded by a digital divide, where small businesses in rural areas face barriers to accessing technology and internet connectivity (Van Dijk, 2005). According to Joseph (2001), businesses in rural areas often struggle with inadequate digital literacy, which limits their ability to tap into global markets and leverage the full potential of the digital economy.

To bridge this gap, targeted training programs aimed at increasing digital literacy among entrepreneurs are essential. A study by Kresnawati & Rasyidah (2021) underscores the importance of these programs, which should cover topics such as website creation, social media marketing, and e-commerce platforms like Airbnb and Shopee. By empowering MSMEs with the tools and knowledge to effectively use these platforms, businesses in Meleura can expand their market reach and improve profitability.

Government intervention is crucial in supporting business actors through policy measures such as subsidized digital marketing training, financial incentives for technology adoption, and collaborative partnerships with educational institutions. Public-private partnerships can facilitate knowledge transfer and resource sharing, enhancing the overall capacity of local businesses (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). Additionally, creating supportive infrastructure, such as reliable internet access and digital literacy programs, can bridge the digital divide and promote inclusive economic growth (World Bank Group, 2016).

By addressing these challenges, the local government can facilitate a more inclusive and sustainable tourism economy. Policy frameworks that prioritize digital inclusion, capacity building, and community engagement are essential for the long-term success of tourism development in Meleura Beach.

### **The Role of Government in Supporting MSMEs**

The role of the government in fostering the development of MSMEs and supporting the growth of the tourism sector is pivotal. Governments can intervene in various ways, such as offering financial incentives, creating favorable policies, and providing training and capacity-building programs. A study by Bramwell and Lane (2011) emphasizes the importance of public-private partnerships (PPPs) in creating an enabling environment for tourism businesses. The Muna Regency Government has already recognized the potential of tourism in Meleura and has introduced policies aimed at improving the local tourism infrastructure and supporting MSMEs. However, more efforts are needed to facilitate the digital transition of local businesses through targeted programs that provide financial support for technology adoption and digital marketing initiatives.

Government initiatives could include the provision of low-interest loans for MSMEs to purchase necessary technology, subsidies for digital marketing training, and partnerships with educational institutions to develop local talent in digital marketing and e-commerce (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). Additionally, the development of infrastructure, such as reliable internet access and improved transportation networks, is crucial to making the destination more accessible to tourists and supporting the growth of MSMEs (World Bank Group, 2016).

### **Tourism Marketing Mix and Strategic Positioning of Meleura**

The tourism marketing mix, which includes product, price, place, and promotion, is a useful framework for developing a competitive strategy for Meleura Beach. The product element refers to the destination's unique offerings, including its natural beauty, cultural experiences, and hospitality services. Effective destination marketing should emphasize these unique attributes to differentiate Meleura from other tourism destinations (Rahman et al., 2019). The price element involves determining appropriate pricing strategies that attract both budget and luxury travelers. Dynamic pricing strategies that adjust prices based on demand fluctuations can be employed to maximize revenue while maintaining affordability for different market segments (Ahani et al., 2019).

In terms of place, access to the destination through efficient transportation and digital booking platforms is crucial. The use of online travel agencies, such as Booking.com and Agoda, can help streamline the booking process for potential tourists (Karl, 2018). Promotion, the final element of the tourism marketing mix, involves the use of targeted digital marketing campaigns to reach potential visitors through social media, content marketing, and partnerships with influencers and bloggers (Al-Azzam, 2016). By strategically utilizing the marketing mix, Meleura can position itself as a desirable and competitive destination in the regional tourism market.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study aims to analyze the SWOT faced by MSMEs in the Meleura Beach tourism area, with a focus on identifying factors that influence their marketing strategies and business development, as well as finding solutions to increase competitiveness in the global market. Based on the results of the SWOT analysis, it can be concluded that MSMEs in Meleura Beach have significant potential, especially in terms of the strength of unique products and services, such as local handicrafts, culinary specialties, and attractive natural beauty.

However, there are still major challenges in terms of digital marketing and technology adoption that limit the ability of businesses to reach wider markets, especially international markets. Nevertheless, the majority of business actors recognize that there are great opportunities, such as community-based tourism trends and the use of digital technology, which can be utilized to strengthen their position in the tourism industry. In addition, the threat of increasingly fierce competition and changes in government policy indicate the need for rapid adaptation from business actors. Thus, the purpose of the study to explore the factors that influence the development of MSMEs in Meleura Beach has been achieved, and the results show that there is great potential that can be further explored with a more strategic approach in terms of digital marketing and technological capacity development.

MSMEs need to receive digital marketing training to develop skills in using digital platforms such as social media, websites, and online booking applications. This training program is very important to increase their visibility in the global market, considering the

growing trend of digitalization in the tourism industry. Support from the government and the private sector is needed in the form of improving digital infrastructure and skills training for MSMEs. Collaboration with digital service providers can help introduce MSMEs to e-commerce platforms and expand their access to international markets. MSMEs in Meleura Beach can strengthen their product promotions by highlighting local culture and authentic community-based tourism experiences. This can be an attractive selling point for tourists looking for a more sustainable experience and direct contact with the local community. To overcome the threat of increasing competition, MSMEs need to establish partnerships with international travel agents and influencers to increase their visibility in the global market. Collaboration with travel agents can open up opportunities to attract tourists from abroad and introduce local products through global digital platforms.

### **LIMITATION**

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research focuses exclusively on Meleura Beach in Muna Regency, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other tourism destinations with different socio-economic and cultural conditions. Second, the study primarily employs qualitative methods, which, while valuable for in-depth insights, may not capture broader statistical trends that a quantitative approach could provide. Third, the sample size of business actors and government officials is relatively small, potentially restricting the diversity of perspectives obtained. Finally, the study does not extensively address external macroeconomic factors, such as national tourism policies and global market trends, which may influence the effectiveness of strategic marketing in tourism development.

Despite these limitations, the findings of this study offer valuable insights into the role of strategic marketing in enhancing tourism development at Meleura Beach. The integration of digital marketing strategies and Industry 4.0 technologies demonstrates the potential to transform Meleura into a prominent tourism destination. However, for sustained growth, continuous efforts in technology adoption, capacity building, and stakeholder collaboration are essential.

Future research could expand on this study by incorporating quantitative methods to validate the findings across different tourism contexts. Additionally, comparative studies involving other coastal destinations could provide a broader understanding of the effectiveness of strategic marketing in diverse settings. Examining the impact of macroeconomic factors and national tourism policies on local tourism development could further enrich the discourse, offering more comprehensive strategies for sustainable tourism growth.

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### **DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this

research. All data and findings presented in this study were obtained objectively and without any external influence that could compromise the integrity of the research. The research was conducted independently, and no financial, professional, or personal relationships influenced the study outcomes. Any potential biases have been minimized through rigorous academic review and adherence to ethical research guidelines.

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