

Human Resource Competence as a Moderating Variable in the Relationship between Digital Marketing Strategy and Restaurant Business Performance in Ambon City

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ABSTRAK

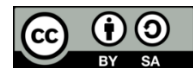
Pengaruh strategi pemasaran digital terhadap kinerja usaha serta menguji peran moderasi kompetensi sumber daya manusia dalam hubungan antara strategi pemasaran digital dan kinerja usaha pada industri kuliner di Kota Ambon, Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain explanatory research yang melibatkan 150 responden yang terdiri atas pemilik, manajer, dan karyawan usaha kuliner. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner terstruktur menggunakan skala Likert lima poin dan dianalisis menggunakan Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) dengan bantuan perangkat lunak SmartPLS. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi pemasaran digital berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap kinerja usaha. Selain itu, strategi pemasaran digital juga berpengaruh signifikan terhadap kompetensi sumber daya manusia, sementara kompetensi sumber daya manusia terbukti memiliki pengaruh positif terhadap kinerja usaha. Hasil analisis moderasi menunjukkan bahwa kompetensi sumber daya manusia memperkuat hubungan antara strategi pemasaran digital dan kinerja usaha, yang mengindikasikan bahwa efektivitas implementasi pemasaran digital sangat bergantung pada kualitas sumber daya manusia dalam organisasi. Temuan ini mendukung teori Resource-Based View dan Human Capital Theory yang menekankan bahwa kemampuan internal organisasi memiliki peran penting dalam memaksimalkan hasil strategi bisnis. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi pada literatur pemasaran digital dan manajemen sumber daya manusia dengan menghadirkan bukti empiris dari usaha kuliner skala kecil di negara berkembang, khususnya pada wilayah nonmetropolitan seperti Kota Ambon.

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the effect of digital marketing strategy on business performance and to examine the moderating role of human resource competence in the relationship between digital marketing strategy and business performance in the culinary industry of Ambon City, Indonesia. The study employed a quantitative explanatory research design involving 150 respondents consisting of owners, managers, and employees of culinary businesses. Data were collected using structured questionnaires based on a five-point Likert scale and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with SmartPLS software. The findings reveal that digital marketing strategy has a positive and significant effect on business performance. In addition, digital marketing strategy significantly

influences human resource competence, while human resource competence also positively affects business performance. The moderation analysis indicates that human resource competence strengthens the relationship between digital marketing strategy and business performance, suggesting that the effectiveness of digital marketing implementation depends largely on the quality of organizational human resources. These findings support the Resource-Based View and Human Capital Theory, emphasizing that internal capabilities play a critical role in maximizing strategic outcomes. This study contributes to the literature on digital marketing and human resource management by providing empirical evidence from small-scale culinary businesses in a developing-country context, particularly in non-metropolitan areas such as Ambon City.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Research on the relationship between digital marketing strategy and business performance has expanded significantly alongside the widespread adoption of digital platforms across various industries, including the food service sector. Prior studies consistently demonstrate that digital marketing strategies, such as social media marketing, digital promotions, and online customer engagement, play a crucial role in enhancing brand visibility, strengthening customer interaction, and improving sales performance in culinary businesses (Tubalawony & Kurniawan, 2024; Tehuayo et al., 2024; Tubalawony, 2025). In the culinary context, visually driven content and interactive digital platforms enable businesses to communicate value propositions more effectively and influence consumer purchase intentions.

Nevertheless, empirical evidence suggests that the impact of digital marketing strategies on business performance is not always uniform across firms. Several studies indicate that the effectiveness of digital marketing is highly contingent upon internal organizational factors, particularly the quality and competence of human resources responsible for designing and executing digital strategies (Endayani & Mukhlis, 2024; Ferdianto et al., 2025). This finding implies that digital marketing strategies alone are insufficient to guarantee superior business performance without adequate internal capabilities to support their implementation.

From the perspectives of the Resource-Based View and Human Capital Theory, human resource competence is regarded as a strategic asset that enables firms to convert marketing strategies into tangible performance outcomes (Gituma & Beyene, 2018; Ruiz et al., 2024). Human resource competence encompasses knowledge, skills, and abilities related to digital technology utilization, marketing analytics, content creation, and adaptive decision-making, all of which are essential for the effective execution of digital marketing strategies (Kraugusteeliana & Zaakiyyah, 2024; Wang et al., 2024).

Although previous research has widely acknowledged the importance of human resource competence for business performance, much of the existing literature positions this variable primarily as a direct predictor or a mediating mechanism (Ardianto et al., 2025; Respati et al., 2024). Empirical studies that explicitly examine human resource competence as a moderating variable influencing the strength of the relationship between digital marketing strategy and business performance remain relatively limited. In practice, however, the success of digital marketing strategies may vary substantially depending on the level of human resource competence within an organization.

Moreover, empirical evidence within the context of small-scale culinary businesses in developing countries remains scarce. Most prior studies have focused on large firms or businesses operating in metropolitan areas and developed economies, thereby overlooking the distinctive characteristics of small culinary enterprises in non-metropolitan regions (Tehuayo et al., 2024; Endayani & Mukhlis, 2024). Variations in resource availability, market structures, and levels of digital readiness may result in different outcomes from the implementation of digital marketing strategies...

Therefore, there remains a lack of empirical research that explicitly investigates the moderating role of human resource competence in the relationship between digital marketing strategy and business performance within the food service sector in developing-country contexts. This study seeks to address this gap by examining how human resource competence can strengthen or weaken the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies in enhancing business performance. By doing so, this research contributes theoretically to the digital marketing and human resource management literature while offering practical implications for the management of small-scale culinary businesses.

In response to these gaps, this study seeks to examine the moderating role of human resource competence in the relationship between digital marketing strategy and business performance within the food service sector in a developing-country setting, specifically among small-scale culinary businesses in Ambon City. By integrating RBV and Human Capital Theory, this research contributes theoretically by offering a more refined understanding of how internal organizational capabilities condition the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies. Practically, the findings are expected to provide evidence-based insights for culinary business owners and managers on how investments in employee competence can amplify the returns of digital marketing initiatives and enhance sustainable business performance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Resource-Based View (RBV)*

The Resource-Based View (RBV) posits that a firm's sustainable competitive advantage is derived from its ability to effectively utilize internal resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable. Within this perspective, organizational performance is not solely determined by external market conditions but is largely influenced by how well internal resources are managed and deployed. In the context of digital transformation, digital marketing strategy can be conceptualized as a strategic organizational resource that enables firms to enhance customer engagement, strengthen brand positioning, and improve overall business performance.

Empirical evidence suggests that the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies is closely linked to internal organizational capabilities. For instance, digital marketing activities such as content creation, customer interaction, and data-driven decision-making require structured internal support to produce optimal outcomes (Tubalawony, 2024; Tubalawony & Kurniawan, 2024). Moreover, studies indicate that strategic resources alone are insufficient unless they are supported by the capability to utilize them effectively (Gituma & Beyene, 2018). Therefore, RBV provides a strong theoretical foundation for explaining that the impact of digital marketing strategy on business performance is contingent upon the organization's internal strengths, particularly its human resources.

2.2 *Human Capital Theory*

Human Capital Theory emphasizes that individuals' knowledge, skills, and abilities represent a form of capital that contributes significantly to organizational productivity and performance. Organizations that invest in developing human capital are more likely to achieve superior outcomes, as employees with higher competencies are better equipped to adapt to technological advancements and execute complex strategies effectively (Ruiz et al., 2024).

In the context of digital marketing, human resource competence plays a critical role in determining the success of strategic implementation. Competencies such as digital literacy, analytical capabilities, creativity, and responsiveness are essential for managing digital platforms and responding to dynamic market conditions. Previous studies highlight that the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies is strongly influenced by the level of human resource competence within the organization (Kraugusteeliana & Zaakiyyah, 2024; Wang et al., 2024). Furthermore, empirical findings demonstrate that human resource competence significantly contributes to business performance, both directly and indirectly, by enhancing the organization's ability to leverage digital tools and market insights (Endayani & Mukhlis, 2024; Ferdianto et al., 2025).

Human Capital Theory also supports the role of human resource competence as a moderating variable in this study. It explains that the outcomes of strategic initiatives, such as digital marketing, are highly dependent on the quality of human capital available within the organization. Thus, firms with higher levels of competence are more capable of translating digital strategies into improved business performance. Conversely, limited competence may weaken the effectiveness of such strategies.

2.3 *Digital Marketing Strategy*

The rapid advancement of digital technology has significantly transformed modern marketing practices through the utilization of platforms such as social media, websites, and e-commerce. Digital marketing strategy refers to an integrated effort to leverage digital technologies in order to enhance brand visibility, expand market reach, and build more effective customer engagement. In the culinary industry, this strategy is particularly relevant due to the product characteristics that heavily rely on visual appeal and customer interaction. Previous studies have demonstrated that digital marketing, especially through visual content and online engagement, plays a crucial

role in influencing consumer purchasing decisions (Tubalawony & Kurniawan, 2024; Tehuayo et al., 2024; Tubalawony, 2025).

Furthermore, digital marketing strategy has been empirically proven to positively affect business performance, particularly in terms of increasing sales, customer loyalty, and competitive advantage (Tubalawony, 2024). However, the effectiveness of this strategy is not automatic and largely depends on the organization's capability to implement it effectively. Therefore, it is essential to empirically examine the direct relationship between digital marketing strategy and business performance in the culinary business context.

H1: Digital marketing strategy has a positive and significant effect on business performance.

2.4 Human Resource Competence

From the perspectives of the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Human Capital Theory, human resource competence is considered a strategic asset that determines an organization's ability to achieve competitive advantage (Gituma & Beyene, 2018; Ruiz et al., 2024). Human resource competence encompasses technical skills, digital knowledge, creativity, and analytical capabilities in understanding market dynamics and responding to environmental changes. In the digital era, such competencies are increasingly important, as business success is highly dependent on the ability of individuals to effectively utilize technology.

Empirical studies indicate that digital marketing strategy not only impacts business performance but also contributes to the development of human resource competence through continuous learning and technological adaptation (Wang et al., 2024; Kraugusteeliana & Zaakiyyah, 2024). This suggests that the more intensively digital strategies are implemented, the greater the need for and enhancement of human resource capabilities within the organization.

H2: Digital marketing strategy has a positive and significant effect on human resource competence.

2.5 Business Performance

Business performance is a key indicator used to measure the success of an organization in achieving its economic objectives, including dimensions such as sales growth, customer satisfaction, operational efficiency, and business sustainability. In the culinary sector, business performance is strongly influenced by the ability of business actors to manage resources effectively and respond to rapidly changing consumer behavior in the digital era.

Previous research has shown that human resource competence significantly contributes to improved business performance, as competent individuals are better able to manage strategies, technologies, and operational processes effectively (Endayani & Mukhlis, 2024; Ferdianto et al., 2025). Human resources with strong digital and analytical skills tend to enhance productivity and create greater value for the organization.

H3: Human resource competence has a positive and significant effect on business performance.

2.6 The Moderating Role of Human Resource Competence

The relationship between digital marketing strategy and business performance is not always direct, but is often influenced by internal organizational factors, particularly human resource competence. In strategic management literature, human resource competence is not only viewed as an independent variable but also as a moderating variable that influences the strength of the relationship between strategy and performance (Ardianto et al., 2025; Respati et al., 2024).

In this context, human resource competence determines the extent to which digital marketing strategies can be effectively implemented to achieve optimal performance outcomes. Organizations with higher levels of competence are more capable of leveraging digital tools, analyzing market data, and developing innovative content, thereby enhancing business performance. Conversely, limited competence may hinder the effectiveness of digital strategies. In the context of culinary businesses in Kota Ambon, this moderating role becomes even more critical due to resource limitations and varying levels of digital literacy. Therefore, it is important to examine whether human resource competence strengthens the relationship between digital marketing strategy and business performance.

H4: Human resource competence moderates the relationship between digital marketing strategy and business performance.

3. METHODS

This study adopts a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design to examine the effect of digital marketing strategy on business performance and the role of human resource competence as a moderating variable. The object of the study is Restaurant operates in Ambon City. The research population includes all individuals directly involved in the management and operational activities of the business, including owners, managers, and employees. A total sampling technique was applied, resulting in 150 respondents, which is considered adequate for causal relationship analysis and moderation effect testing.

The research data were obtained from primary sources through the distribution of structured questionnaires using a five-point Likert scale (1–5). The study variables consist of digital marketing strategy as the independent variable, human resource competence as the moderating variable, and business performance as the dependent variable. Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with the assistance of SmartPLS software, encompassing the evaluation of the measurement model, structural model, and moderation effects. Hypothesis testing was performed based on path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values at a 5% significance level, while adhering to research ethics principles and ensuring the confidentiality of respondents’ data.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tabel 1. Outer Loading

Variabel	Business Performance	Digital Marketing Strategy	Human Resource Competence
X1.1		0,823	
X1.2		0,822	

X1.3		0,838	
X1.4		0,797	
X1.5		0,786	
Z1.1			0,808
Z1.2			0,783
Z1.3			0,794
Z1.4			0,825
Z1.5			0,826
Y1.1	0,820		
Y1.2	0,869		
Y1.3	0,867		
Y1.4	0,827		
Y1.5	0,819		

The measurement model was evaluated by examining outer loadings to assess convergent validity for the constructs of Digital Marketing Strategy, Human Resource Competence, and Business Performance. The analysis results show that all indicators of the Digital Marketing Strategy variable have outer loading values ranging from 0.786 to 0.838, those of Human Resource Competence range from 0.783 to 0.826, and those of Business Performance range from 0.819 to 0.869. All these values exceed the recommended minimum threshold of 0.70, indicating that each indicator adequately represents its respective latent construct. Accordingly, all indicators across the three constructs are considered valid and suitable for retention in the research model. No indicators were eliminated, as all meet the criteria for convergent validity. These findings demonstrate that the measurement model satisfies the SEM-PLS evaluation standards and can be advanced to the structural model assessment to examine the relationships among the study variables.

Tabel 2. Construct Reability dan Validity

Variabel	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extractred (AVE)
Business Performance	0,896	0,923	0,707
Digital Marketing Strategy	0,872	0,907	0,661
	0,867	0,903	0,652

The measurement model was evaluated by assessing internal consistency reliability and convergent validity in accordance with established SEM-PLS guidelines (Hair et al., 2019). Business Performance, measured through indicators reflecting sales growth, customer growth, customer satisfaction, operational efficiency, and business sustainability, demonstrates strong internal consistency, as indicated by a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.896 and a Composite Reliability of 0.923. These results confirm that the selected indicators consistently represent the underlying performance construct in the context of small-scale culinary businesses.

Similarly, Digital Marketing Strategy, operationalized through indicators capturing digital content utilization, social media engagement, customer interaction, digital promotion, and evaluation of digital activities, exhibits satisfactory reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.872 and a Composite Reliability of 0.907. Human Resource Competence, measured by indicators related to digital skills, creativity, communication ability, responsiveness, and customer understanding, also

shows strong internal consistency (Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.867; Composite Reliability = 0.903). Convergent validity is further confirmed as all constructs achieve Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above 0.50, namely 0.707 for Business Performance, 0.661 for Digital Marketing Strategy, and 0.652 for Human Resource Competence, indicating that each construct explains more than half of the variance of its respective indicators. Overall, these findings demonstrate that the indicators employed are theoretically and empirically aligned with their constructs, supporting the adequacy of the measurement model for subsequent structural analysis.

Tabel 3. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Variables	Business Performance	Digital Marketing Strategy	Human Resource Competence
Business Performance			
Digital Marketing Strategy	0,701		
Human Resource Competence	0,803	0,691	

Discriminant validity of the measurement model was assessed using the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) criterion, which is recommended as a more stringent approach compared to the Fornell–Larcker method (Henseler et al., 2015). The HTMT values between Business Performance and Digital Marketing Strategy (0.701), Business Performance and Human Resource Competence (0.803), and Digital Marketing Strategy and Human Resource Competence (0.691) are all below the conservative threshold of 0.85, indicating adequate discriminant validity among the constructs.

These findings confirm that each construct captures a conceptually distinct phenomenon, despite being theoretically related within the proposed research model. The acceptable HTMT values suggest that Digital Marketing Strategy, Human Resource Competence, and Business Performance are empirically separable constructs, thereby supporting the robustness of the measurement model and justifying the use of these variables in subsequent structural model analysis.

Tabel 4. Hypothesis Testing

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T-Statistic	P Values
Digital Marketing Strategy -> Business Performance	0,305	0,305	0,065	4,670	0,000
Digital Marketing Strategy -> Human Resource Competence	0,609	0,612	0,051	11,977	0,000
Human Resource Competence -> Business Performance	0,525	0,525	0,057	9,241	0,000
Digital Marketing Strategy -> Human Resource Competence -> Business Performance	0,320	0,321	0,045	7,049	0,000

The results of hypothesis testing using the SEM-PLS bootstrapping procedure indicate that all structural relationships in the research model are positive and statistically significant. Digital marketing strategy has a significant effect on business performance ($\beta = 0.305$; $t = 4.670$; $p < 0.001$), indicating that the effective implementation of digital marketing strategies enhances business performance, particularly in terms of sales, growth, and competitiveness. In addition, digital marketing strategy has a strong and significant influence on human resource competence ($\beta = 0.609$;

$t = 11.977$; $p < 0.001$), suggesting that the intensity and quality of digital marketing activities contribute to the development of employees' skills, knowledge, and capabilities in managing digital technologies and responding to market dynamics.

Furthermore, human resource competence is found to have a significant effect on business performance ($\beta = 0.525$; $t = 9.241$; $p < 0.001$), underscoring the strategic role of competent human resources in optimizing business outcomes. The indirect effect analysis reveals that human resource competence significantly mediates the relationship between digital marketing strategy and business performance ($\beta = 0.320$; $t = 7.049$; $p < 0.001$). These findings indicate a partial mediation effect, in which digital marketing strategy influences business performance both directly and indirectly through the enhancement of human resource competence. Therefore, all proposed research hypotheses are supported.

Tabel 5. R-Square

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Business Performance	0,564	0,558
Human Resource	0,371	0,367

The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to evaluate the explanatory power of the structural model. The results indicate that Business Performance has an R^2 value of 0.564 (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.558$), meaning that 56.4% of the variance in business performance can be explained by digital marketing strategy and human resource competence. This level of explanatory power can be categorized as moderate to substantial in the context of PLS-SEM, suggesting that the proposed model has strong predictive capability in explaining variations in business performance within the culinary industry context.

Meanwhile, Human Resource Competence shows an R^2 value of 0.371 (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.367$), indicating that 37.1% of the variance in human resource competence is explained by digital marketing strategy. This value reflects a moderate explanatory power, implying that digital marketing strategy plays an important role in shaping HR competence, although other factors outside the model may also contribute.

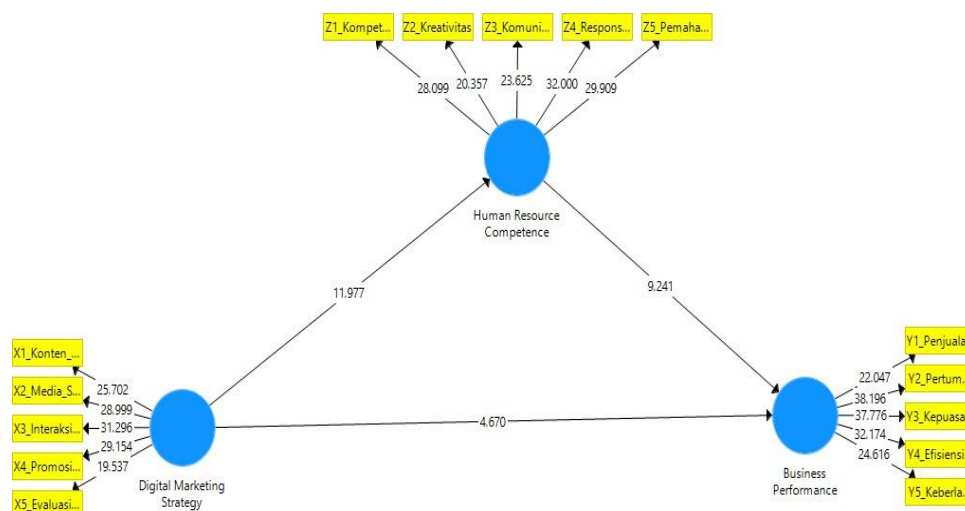


Figure 1. Research Result Mode

5. CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence on the role of digital marketing strategy in enhancing business performance, with human resource competence acting as a critical explanatory mechanism in the context of a small-scale culinary business in a developing region. The findings demonstrate that digital marketing strategy has a direct and positive impact on business performance, indicating that the effective use of digital platforms, customer engagement, and online promotions contributes significantly to improved sales growth, customer expansion, and business sustainability. These results reinforce prior studies emphasizing the strategic importance of digital marketing in the food service industry, particularly in environments characterized by intense competition and shifting consumer behavior.

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends the Resource-Based View and Human Capital Theory by empirically demonstrating that human resource competence functions not only as a strategic asset but also as a contextual mechanism that shapes the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies. The findings highlight that digital marketing capabilities alone are insufficient to generate superior business performance unless they are supported by competent human resources capable of leveraging digital tools and market insights. By positioning human resource competence as a moderating mechanism within the digital marketing–performance nexus, this study enriches the existing literature and provides a more nuanced understanding of how internal capabilities interact with digital strategies to drive performance outcomes in small-scale culinary businesses.

More importantly, the results reveal that digital marketing strategy significantly enhances human resource competence, which in turn positively influences business performance. The significant indirect effect confirms that human resource competence partially mediates the relationship between digital marketing strategy and business performance. This finding supports the Resource-Based View and Human Capital Theory, suggesting that digital marketing strategies yield optimal performance outcomes only when supported by competent human resources capable of managing digital tools, creating engaging content, and responding effectively to customer needs. Overall, this study contributes to the literature by extending empirical evidence on the integration of digital marketing and human resource competence within small-scale culinary businesses in a non-metropolitan, developing-country context.

In addition, the results confirm that the measurement and structural models meet the robustness criteria of SEM-PLS, indicating that the proposed model provides a reliable and valid explanation of the relationships among digital marketing strategy, human resource competence, and business performance. This strengthens the credibility of the empirical findings and supports their use as a basis for managerial decision-making and future academic research.

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