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Conceptual Study of Proactive Attitude in Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)

Andri Yandi¹, Agung Winarno², Heri Pratikno³

¹Doctoral Program Student of Management Science, Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia, andriyandi.ali@gmail.com

²Professor of Doctoral Program in Management Science, Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia, agung.winarno.fe@um.ac.id

³Professor of Doctoral Program in Management Science, Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia, heri.pratikto.fe@um.ac.id

Corresponding Author: andriyandi.ali@gmail.com¹

Abstract: This study is a conceptual review that examines the role of proactive entrepreneurial behavior in Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in relation to exploratory innovation, digital marketing strategies, and business performance. The study is divided into several sections. First, the literature review focuses on proactive attitudes. Second, the research model and propositions developed in this study are based on a review of previous research, such as the relationship between proactiveness and exploratory innovation, proactiveness and digital marketing, as well as proactiveness and MSME performance. Proactive behavior in the entrepreneurial context involves initiative, adaptability, and the courage to seize opportunities, enabling MSMEs to survive and grow amidst increasingly intense competition. Exploratory innovation provides MSMEs with a competitive advantage by creating new products or services that meet the dynamic needs of the market. The adoption of digital marketing strategies enhances market reach and allows MSMEs to leverage technology to attract and retain customers. Overall, this study demonstrates that proactive entrepreneurial behavior not only drives innovation and digital marketing but also significantly impacts MSME performance positively. These findings highlight the importance of fostering proactive attitudes among MSME entrepreneurs to promote business sustainability through responsive and adaptive approaches to market changes.

Keyword: Proactive Behavior, Exploration Innovation, Digital Marketing, MSME Performance

INTRODUCTION

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a critical role in most economies, particularly in developing countries (Kiyabo & Isaga, 2020). This is because MSMEs contribute significantly to job creation, the advancement of local technology, output diversification, the development of domestic entrepreneurship, and forward integration with

large-scale industries (Onyenma & Hamilton, 2020). In fact, in some developing countries, it has been found that the majority of private companies are part of the MSME sector (Rahaman et al., 2021)

The vital role of MSMEs in a country's economy makes them a focal point for academics, educators, and researchers, as MSMEs accelerate overall economic activities (Ribeiro-Soriano, 2017). Moreover, MSMEs are well-known for their impactful role in creating employment opportunities (Rahaman et al., 2021). In addition, MSMEs play a crucial role in the broader economic and business ecosystems, enabling these enterprises to thrive and contribute meaningfully to economic growth (Cusmano et al., 2018).

In an ever-changing business environment, MSME actors are required to adopt proactive attitudes to sustain and enhance their business competitiveness. Rapid changes in technology, consumer preferences, and market trends push MSMEs not only to respond to these changes but also to act as agents of change themselves (Covin & Slevin, 1989). Proactive attitudes are key for MSMEs not only to survive but also to capitalize on emerging market opportunities. Through proactivity, MSME actors can innovate products, services, and marketing strategies tailored to dynamic market demands (Lumpkin & Dess, 2005).

Proactive behavior encourages MSME actors to develop forward-looking strategies and create competitive advantages. In the context of MSMEs, proactivity manifests through the exploration of product innovations, the adoption of digital technologies, and the development of new business networks aimed at enhancing competitiveness (Zahra & Covin, 1995). For example, adopting digital technologies and social media-based marketing allows MSME actors to reach broader audiences and maintain effective customer interactions (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). According to a study by Hughes and Morgan (2007), proactive MSMEs tend to perform better in facing market challenges and are more prepared to respond to rapidly changing consumer needs.

The positive aspect of being proactive lies in the ability to seize opportunities when a company's strengths align with market developments. New innovations, technological advancements, societal movements, and changes in customer perceptions and needs contribute to potential opportunities for business growth. The benefits of being proactive for MSME actors include identifying, planning, and investing in new opportunities before it is too late. Proactive MSMEs are more effective in anticipating potential problems, market evolution, trends, and consumer expectations before such issues arise. This provides them with a greater ability to implement systems, infrastructure, and staffing to address these challenges and opportunities as they emerge. Thus, proactivity consistently benefits MSME performance as it helps business owners keep up with future business trends (Rahaman et al., 2021).

Furthermore, in facing business uncertainties, a proactive attitude helps MSMEs adapt to market risks and opportunities. Proactive MSME actors tend to engage in better strategic planning, increase flexibility, and make decisions based on analyses of the latest market trends (Frese & Fay, 2001). Additionally, proactivity enables them not only to survive but also to thrive by anticipating changes in consumer demand, government policies, and global economic conditions that directly or indirectly affect the market (Bateman & Crant, 1993).

Lumpkin and Dess (2005) define proactivity as anticipating and acting upon future market desires and needs, thereby creating advantages as a pioneer. Pioneer advantages refer to the benefits gained by companies that are the first to produce new products or services, build brand identity, enter new markets, or adopt new operational technologies (Ferrier et al., 1999). Proactivity is a strategic orientation of the firm that captures entrepreneurial aspects of decision-making styles, methods, and practices (Frank, Kessler, & Fink, 2010).

Thus, proactivity becomes an essential capability for MSME actors in navigating increasingly intense business competition. By fostering a proactive attitude, MSME actors can not only enhance adaptability but also optimize growth potential through innovation and active

market engagement. Therefore, amidst constant change, proactivity must be an integral part of MSME development strategies to ensure their survival, adaptability, and ability to capitalize on emerging opportunities in this competitive business environment (Sethna et al., 2013).

Based on the aforementioned background, this study aims to examine the extent to which the application of proactive concepts among MSME actors can improve exploratory innovation, digital marketing, and MSME performance.

METHOD

The qualitative descriptive method in this conceptual study on proactivity in Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in influencing exploratory innovation, digital marketing, and MSME performance is used to examine how far this concept has developed. This method explains the types, designs, or research frameworks commonly used to study natural objects or conditions in their real state, without being controlled or manipulated as in experimental research. According to Sugiyono (2019), qualitative research methods, derived from postpositivist philosophy, are employed to investigate subjects in their natural conditions (real states, not pre-arranged or experimental conditions), with the researcher serving as the primary instrument.

To support the findings, a literature review consistent with methodological assumptions is also utilized. This means that the approach must be applied inductively to avoid leading questions from the researcher. The exploratory aspect of this research is one of the main justifications for conducting qualitative studies (Ali & Limakrisna, 2013).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Proactive Concept

Proactive refers to the ability to think ahead, anticipate, initiate change, or take the first step rather than adopting a reactive or defensive posture (Onyenma & Hamilton, 2020). It describes an ongoing perspective in which businesses actively seek to anticipate and capitalize on opportunities to develop and introduce new products while making adjustments to existing strategies and tactics. Proactivity also involves the ability to detect future market trends, secure first-mover advantages in the short term, and shape the direction of the market environment in the long term (Lyon et al., 2000; Lumpkin & Dess, 2005; Hughes & Morgan, 2007). Strong proactive behavior enables SMEs to anticipate market needs and foresee competitors' demands (Eggers et al., 2013).

Proactivity is about taking action to influence and lead into the future rather than waiting to be shaped by it. It involves seizing opportunities and taking responsibility for failures (Kuratko et al., 2007). Proactive companies gain competitive advantages by placing competitors in a position where they must respond to first-mover initiatives. Chang et al. (2007) argue that proactive companies act before their competitors rather than after. They lead in the development of new technologies, products, and services, as well as in building capacities to foster growth. Meanwhile, Keh et al. (2007) suggest that a proactive orientation enables companies to innovate and utilize internal knowledge and information to exploit competitors' weaknesses. Proactivity often involves market and product development, which poses significant challenges for many businesses in today's competitive environment (Henderson & Cool, 2003; Urban, 2008).

Additionally, proactivity means actively seeking new opportunities while addressing threats or challenges before they arise (Wales et al., 2016). Proactive organizations are capable of planning and shaping the future they desire, rather than waiting for external forces to determine their direction (Wiklund & Shepherd, 2005). Proactive entrepreneurs are less likely to be caught off guard, as they tend to mitigate risks and turn changes into opportunities rather than challenges (Lumsdaine & Binks, 2007). Proactive companies are more focused on

forward-looking strategic planning than on reactive strategies to address problems or seize opportunities as they arise. This approach offers businesses numerous advantages in pursuing opportunities and managing challenges (Zahra & Covin, 1995). Consequently, proactivity is often linked to achieving higher performance levels for businesses (Rahaman et al., 2021).

When a company adopts a proactive stance, it aims to gain a competitive edge by introducing new products and processes to the market ahead of its competitors (Lyon et al., 2000). Thus, proactivity reflects a forward-thinking and opportunity-seeking approach to business development, characterized by the introduction of products or services before competitors and anticipating future customer demands (Rauch et al., 2009). Proactivity also includes the ability to shape the business environment and address competitive challenges through initiatives that leverage existing advantages (Zhang et al., 2021).

Furthermore, proactivity involves the ability to think ahead, forecast, initiate change, or take leaps as a pioneer rather than reacting defensively to strategic circumstances. It emphasizes an ongoing perspective where businesses actively seek to anticipate and capitalize on opportunities for developing and introducing new products while adapting their strategies and tactics (Al-Mamary & Alshallaqi, 2022). It also entails detecting future market trends, securing short-term first-mover advantages, and shaping the market environment in the long term (Hughes & Morgan, 2007). Strong proactive behavior enables SMEs to anticipate market needs and foresee competitors' actions (Eggers et al., 2013).

Proactivity is about influencing and leading toward the future rather than waiting to be influenced by it. It involves utilizing opportunities and taking responsibility for failures (Kuratko et al., 2007). Strategic managers who manage proactively have a forward-looking perspective and seek opportunities to exploit for growth and improved performance, as well as to create competitive advantages (Onyenma & Hamilton, 2020). Proactivity helps businesses build competitive advantages by placing competitors in a position where they must respond to first-mover initiatives.

Proactive Towards Explorative Innovation

The proactivity of SME actors significantly contributes to exploratory innovation, which involves efforts to create new products, services, or processes that have never existed before. This type of innovation is essential for SMEs aiming to remain relevant and competitive in a dynamic business environment. A proactive attitude encourages SME actors to continuously seek and explore new ideas to meet evolving consumer needs and adapt to market trends. According to Covin and Slevin (1989), proactive entrepreneurs tend to have the courage to take risks in creating innovative products or services, enabling them to become market leaders in their respective industries.

Keh et al. (2007) argue that a proactive orientation allows companies to innovate and leverage internal knowledge and information to exploit competitors' novelties. Proactivity is manifested through market and product development, which is a significant challenge for many companies in today's business environment (Onyenma & Hamilton, 2020).

Moreover, proactive SME actors are more likely to view changes as opportunities rather than threats. They are motivated to continuously explore new ideas and adopt technologies that can enhance their business competitiveness (Frese & Fay, 2001). This exploratory innovation creates opportunities for SMEs to develop superior products that differentiate them from competitors and improve the quality of their services. Lumpkin and Dess (2005) emphasize that proactivity is a crucial aspect of entrepreneurial orientation that can boost exploratory innovation, as it enables SME actors to take the initiative in creating new solutions for customers.

In addition, the proactivity of SME actors allows them to identify opportunities and challenges that reactive competitors might overlook. A proactive mindset drives them to

conduct ongoing market research, stay updated on industry developments, and understand consumer trends, all of which provide valuable insights for the exploratory innovation process (Hughes & Morgan, 2007). This enables SMEs to design products and services that not only meet but also anticipate consumer needs, thereby creating higher value and attracting a broader market.

Proactivity also fosters a strong learning culture within SMEs. Proactive actors are unafraid to try new approaches and learn from failures, which are integral parts of the exploratory innovation process (Stam & Elfring, 2008). This learning culture strengthens their ability to understand and apply new technologies to create more innovative solutions. Ultimately, this proactive attitude accelerates exploratory innovation, benefiting companies not only in terms of competitiveness but also in contributing to sustainable growth.

Proactive Towards Digital Marketing

In facing increasingly intense business competition, the ability of SMEs to adopt a proactive approach in digital marketing can provide significant competitive advantages. By investing in effective and sustainable digital marketing strategies, SMEs can expand market access and boost sales at relatively affordable costs compared to traditional marketing methods (Tiago & Verissimo, 2014). This is because a proactive orientation enables SMEs to design digital marketing strategies more effectively and efficiently (Parker et al., 2010; Kozubikova et al., 2017; Wimelius et al., 2021).

The proactive attitude of SME actors fundamentally has a strong influence on the effectiveness of digital marketing implementation in a business (Wu et al., 2024). In a rapidly changing business environment, SMEs are required to take the initiative in identifying and leveraging market opportunities through digital platforms. Digital marketing serves as a key tool for SMEs to reach a wider audience, enhance customer interaction, and build their brand. As Kotler and Keller (2016) point out, proactive business actors are better prepared to face challenges and adapt to continuously evolving digital technologies, enabling them to expand market reach through digital marketing. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) highlight that entrepreneurs who proactively adopt digital marketing strategies have a higher chance of increasing brand awareness and fostering stronger customer relationships.

In addition to expanding market reach, a proactive attitude in digital marketing also encourages SME actors to innovate in marketing content and strategies (Wimelius et al., 2021). Proactivity allows businesses to continuously adapt to the latest marketing trends, such as leveraging social media, SEO, or data-driven advertisements, to ensure their messages reach the right audience (Harrigan et al., 2015). By focusing on innovation and responding swiftly to changing consumer needs, SMEs can use digital marketing to differentiate their products or services from competitors and build customer loyalty (Setiawan & Tjiptono, 2019).

Furthermore, proactivity in digital marketing helps SMEs maximize the use of available marketing tools and technologies. Through a proactive approach, business actors not only respond to market changes but also create new opportunities to enhance customer interaction and conduct in-depth analysis of consumer preferences (Leeflang et al., 2014). By utilizing digital analytics tools and data, SMEs can better understand consumer behavior, identify more specific market segments, and plan more targeted campaigns. Ultimately, this contributes to improved marketing performance and supports the sustainable growth of SMEs.

Proactive Towards MSME Performance

The proactive attitude of SME actors plays a vital role in improving business performance in an era of increasingly intense competition. Proactivity involves taking the initiative to seek and seize new opportunities, even before clear market demands arise, enabling proactive SMEs to anticipate emerging trends and take early action (Covin & Slevin, 1989).

By adopting a proactive stance, SME actors can develop more targeted strategies to respond to changing customer needs and the fast-paced dynamics of the market, ultimately having a positive impact on business performance.

Ogundare & van der Merwe (2024) highlight in their study that proactivity plays a critical role in determining the performance of SMEs. By leveraging opportunities, gaining a first-mover advantage, adapting to changes, driving innovation, reducing risks, enhancing customer focus, gaining competitive advantages, optimizing resource allocation, building resilience, and boosting reputation, proactivity proves crucial for SMEs to achieve sustainable growth, success, and long-term profitability in a dynamic and competitive business landscape (Onyenma & Hamilton, 2020; Zhang et al., 2021).

Furthermore, Onyenma & Hamilton (2020) argue that a proactive attitude is a key predictor of SME performance. Their findings expand empirical studies by demonstrating that proactivity has a positive effect on business performance. This is because a proactive attitude allows SMEs to adapt their products to the ever-changing market preferences, thereby improving their competitive edge and overall business performance (Frese & Fay, 2001).

Proactivity within companies serves as a valuable resource for identifying competitive environments and achieving higher performance (Colicev et al., 2018; Feng et al., 2017; Gelhard et al., 2016; Skarmeas et al., 2016). Proactive companies can actively alter their competitive strategies and may discover superior strategic approaches compared to their competitors by swiftly responding to consumer demands (Feng et al., 2017; Gelhard et al., 2016). Companies can enhance their proactivity to improve performance (Gelhard et al., 2016; Martin-Rojas et al., 2017) and rely on technology to achieve better outcomes (Mikalef & Pateli, 2017; Yunis et al., 2018).

In addition, a proactive attitude also plays a role in driving operational efficiency within SMEs. Proactive business actors tend to be more effective in planning and managing available resources to achieve optimal productivity (Lumpkin & Dess, 2005). By identifying areas for improvement and swiftly addressing operational needs, SME actors can enhance efficiency, reduce costs, and maximize output with limited resources. This operational efficiency contributes to improved financial performance, enabling businesses to thrive even with fewer resources compared to larger corporations.

Proactivity also enables SMEs to build stronger relationships with customers and business partners. By taking the initiative to establish strong networks and relationships, SME actors gain access to better market information and support from various parties that can aid business development (Stam & Elfring, 2008). These relationships not only expand their market access but also create strategic alliances that enhance competitiveness and performance. Strong business networks facilitate the flow of information and resources, which SMEs can leverage to strengthen marketing strategies and expand their market share.

Thus, the proactive attitude of SME actors has been proven to be one of the key factors driving growth and long-term success for small businesses. Through proactivity, SME actors can not only respond to market changes but also create new opportunities that support sustainable business performance. In an ever-changing business environment, the critical role of proactivity cannot be overlooked, as it serves as a major driver of success and resilience for small and medium enterprises.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that the proactive attitude of SME actors plays a crucial role in enhancing exploratory innovation, digital marketing, and overall business performance. Proactivity drives entrepreneurs to quickly respond to changes in a dynamic and competitive business environment while creating new opportunities through forward-looking innovation. By implementing effective digital marketing strategies, proactive SMEs can reach a broader

market and strengthen relationships with customers, directly impacting competitiveness and business performance.

The exploratory innovations resulting from this proactivity also strengthen the market position of SMEs by adding value to their products or services. Furthermore, a proactive attitude improves operational efficiency and strengthens business networks, both of which contribute to the long-term stability and growth of SMEs. Therefore, fostering proactivity in SME entrepreneurship becomes an essential element for achieving sustainability and success amidst ongoing market changes.

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