



## Competitive Advantage and Sustainability of MSMEs: The Key to Successful Economic Growth in Depok City

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### ABSTRACT

This study analyzes how competitive advantage and sustainability contribute to the growth of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and economic development in Depok City. Using a descriptive qualitative approach through interviews, observations, and secondary data, the study finds that MSMEs possess strong competitive potential through business diversity, market opportunities, innovation, adaptability, community engagement, and government support. Their growth contributes to economic development by creating jobs, increasing incomes, boosting GRDP, diversifying the economy, and strengthening local wisdom-based enterprises. However, MSMEs still face challenges such as limited access to capital, high competition, and insufficient management skills. The study concludes that competitive advantage can be enhanced through product quality improvement, expanded business networks, technology adoption, branding, and strategic partnerships. Collaborative support from the government, financial institutions, and MSME associations is essential for sustaining MSMEs and driving Depok City's economic growth.

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## INTRODUCTION

Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) play a crucial role as the backbone of the Indonesian economy, contributing significantly to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), employment, and innovation. The sustainability of MSMEs is not only important for the continuity of the business itself but also as a foundation for stable economic growth. To achieve sustainability and win the competition, understanding and implementing a competitive advantage becomes very relevant.

Ghicajanu (2021) shows that Porter identifies sources of competitive advantage through an analysis of five competitive forces, while sources of superiority can also come from cost leadership and differentiation as well as resources and capabilities that meet the VRISE criteria (Widjaja\*, et al. 2019). Factors such as market orientation, organizational learning, and accounting information systems can also influence competitive advantage (Lasalewo, 2019; Pranata & Tarigan, 2021). Competitive advantage refers to the ability of MSMEs to produce products or services that are considered better by the target market than those of competitors. This advantage can come from various factors such as product uniqueness, competitive prices, or innovation capabilities. In the context of increasingly fierce competition, building a competitive advantage is crucial for MSMEs to not only survive but also contribute significantly to economic growth.

Business sustainability is the ability of a business entity to continue to operate and grow in the long term by considering economic, social, and environmental aspects, or what is known as the triple bottom line concept (Radianti, 2021). Sustainability strategies are influenced by internal and external experiences and economic dynamics, and include financial capabilities, innovation, human resource management, and customer relations (Nurmawati, 2020). Sustainability is an indicator of success that sends a positive signal to stakeholders and is believed to create a competitive advantage. In addition to ensuring the existence of MSMEs, this practice can also increase productivity, open up investment opportunities, increase profits, develop quality human resources, and contribute to overall economic stability and growth.

Business performance is the result of achieving company goals through effective strategies (Khoviani & Izzaty, 2020; Afiyati et al., 2019). MSME performance can be measured through various indicators such as sales growth, product quality, product development (Hoque, 2018; Machmud & Sidharta, 2016), profitability, and capital adequacy (Indriastuti, 2022). Improving business performance is the main objective of MSMEs and is influenced by various internal and external factors. It identifies business performance as one of the key factors affecting sustainability. Stable performance over a certain period of time increases the chances of business sustainability. Conversely, surveys show that most MSMEs in Indonesia are experiencing poor business conditions, exacerbated by the challenge of a lack of innovation that limits competitiveness and makes them vulnerable to competition. Although the government has made efforts to provide support, its implementation is considered suboptimal.

This study focuses on MSMEs in Depok City, an area with great potential but facing the challenge of high business failure rates. Although the city's

economic growth is dynamic, many MSMEs are unable to survive for long. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the role of competitive advantage in the sustainability of MSMEs, which is the key to successful local economic growth. Although previous studies have examined the relationship between competitive advantage, performance, and sustainability separately, research that specifically examines its influence on MSMEs in Depok City is still limited. Given the important role of MSMEs in equitable welfare, this study is expected to provide new insights into the contribution of competitive advantage in improving sustainability and ultimately promoting better economic growth in Depok City.

Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency, the number of MSMEs in Depok City has shown a significant increase, namely 27,158 MSME players in 2022 and 27,763 MSME players in 2023. This increase shows a direct relationship with the local government's efforts to support the micro business sector. The increase in the number of business players has contributed to the economic growth rate of Depok City, which shows a positive and stable trend amid global challenges. The economic growth rate of Depok City in 2022 reached 5.24%, increasing slightly to 5.29% in 2023, which is higher than the average for West Java Province, which reached 5.00%. The increase in the number of business actors and economic growth proves that Depok City has promising investment potential.

This study is based on two main grand theories, namely the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Contingency Theory. RBV views that a company's sustainable competitive advantage stems from the management of resources that are valuable, unique, difficult to imitate, and irreplaceable. MSMEs that are able to identify and utilize their strategic resources effectively will have an advantage over their competitors. Meanwhile, Contingency Theory emphasizes that the best way to manage a company is through effective management practices that depend on the suitability of various organizational variables to the situational context faced. In the context of MSMEs, the ability to adapt to environmental changes is the key to success.

The RBV theory, pioneered by Wernerfelt (1984), states that a company's sustainable competitive advantage comes from its ability to identify, manage, and utilize strategic resources. These resources can be tangible assets (such as facilities and raw materials) or intangible assets (such as brands, reputation, knowledge, and corporate culture) (Priyono et al., 2021). RBV emphasizes that successful companies focus on improving competence and innovation to differentiate themselves from competitors (Dasuki, 2021; Andersén, 2021). Strategic resources that can generate sustainable competitive advantage have the characteristics of being valuable, rare, difficult to imitate, and non-substitutable (Busby, 2019; Priyono et al., 2021). In the context of MSMEs, RBV highlights the importance of identifying and developing unique resources and organizational capabilities (the ability to combine assets, people, and processes) to create competitive advantage.

Contingency Theory states that there is no single best way to manage an organization, and the effectiveness of management practices depends on the fit between various organizational factors and the situational context (Azhari et al.,

2021; Wijaya, 2022). This theory emphasizes that management control systems and corporate strategies must be adapted to contingency variables such as environmental uncertainty, technology, company size, structure, competitive strategy, and oversight factors (Purwati & Zulaikha, 2019). In relation to MSMEs, Contingency Theory implies that business success is greatly influenced by flexibility and adaptability to external environmental changes such as market demand, consumer preferences, competition, and technological developments.

This study aims to analyze how competitive advantage plays a role in the sustainability of MSMEs in Depok City and its implications for the region's economic growth. By utilizing the RBV and Contingency Theory frameworks, this study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of effective competitive advantage strategies for MSMEs to achieve sustainability and drive local economic growth.

## **THEORETICAL REVIEW**

Competitive advantage is an advantage possessed by a company that enables it to produce products or services that are better in the eyes of the target market than its competitors (Sudaryono, 2019). This advantage can be built through the development of unique core competencies in terms of quality, service, innovation, flexibility, and speed (Aditi & Pentane, 2019). Porter's five forces model is a framework developed by Michael E. Porter to analyze the attractiveness and profitability of an industry. This model was first introduced in his article entitled "How Competitive Forces Shape Strategy" in 1979, and was later expanded in his famous book, *Competitive Strategy: Techniques for Analyzing Industries and Competitors*, in 1980. The five competitive forces include: buyer bargaining power, supplier bargaining power, substitute products, new entrants, and rivalry among competitors. According to Porter, competitive advantage arises from a company's ability to create added value, either through lower costs or by offering something unique that sets it apart from its competitors. This advantage is the reason a company can perform better. Competitive advantage is a strategy that distinguishes a company from its competitors and gives it a unique position in the market so that it is superior to its competitors (Hajar & Sukaatmaja, 2021). Competitive advantage must be possessed by a company for the products it produces (Gwee, L., & Giantari, 2021). Every business is required to be able to highlight its competitive advantage from the products or services it produces, which will then improve the company's performance to remain viable and competitive in the market.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to interpret the phenomenon of MSME sustainability through competitive advantage in enhancing economic growth in Depok City. This approach aims to describe in depth the symptoms or phenomena related to the research subject through direct data collection in the field. Researchers play a key role in gathering relevant information. The research was conducted by selecting MSMEs in Depok City, considering the diversity and significant development of MSMEs in the city.

The data required in this study were sourced from primary data obtained directly from MSME actors in Depok City as informants through interviews and observations. The data also consists of verbal, oral, and behavioral information relevant to competitive advantage and business sustainability. To support the primary data, secondary data was also used in the form of statistical data on the development of MSMEs, data related to competitive advantage in improving the economy of Depok City, and information about the MSME market segment in Depok. The sources of secondary data were documents, photos, and other records.

Informants in this study were selected using purposive sampling. This technique allows researchers to determine informants based on specific considerations relevant to the focus of the study, thereby facilitating understanding of the phenomenon being studied. The data collection technique was carried out by the researcher as the research instrument. The validity of the researcher as an instrument was ensured through accuracy and validity in data collection. Data collection was also carried out through open observation of informants (MSME actors in Depok City) with the aim of conducting preliminary research and obtaining an in-depth initial understanding of the research focus. The interview technique used was semi-structured interviews, which allowed researchers to ask open-ended questions to informants to explore their opinions, ideas, and issues in greater depth. Documentary studies are also used to support the implementation and compilation of research results. Source triangulation is used to test data credibility. Data obtained from various sources of different MSME actors will be compared and cross-checked using the same data collection techniques or by combining several methods to obtain diverse perspectives on the phenomenon being studied. Data analysis is conducted descriptively, beginning before, during, and after data collection in the field. The stages of data analysis include: Data collection through observation, interviews, and documentation at the research site. Data reduction through the process of selection, focusing, abstraction, and transformation of raw data obtained from the field. Data reduction begins when the researcher focuses on the research area. Presentation of data by organizing the information obtained in the form of descriptive narratives or interview excerpts to facilitate understanding. Conclusions are drawn by analyzing patterns that emerge from the data presented to describe the results of the analysis related to the role of competitive advantage in the sustainability of MSMEs and its impact on economic growth in the city of Depok. This study will use descriptive statistical analysis to explain the data collected on competitive advantage, business performance, and the sustainability of MSMEs in Depok City. This analysis aims to describe the data collected without making statistical generalizations.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

MSMEs in Depok City show positive economic growth, as evidenced by an increase in the number of businesses in 2023 to 27,763, spread across 11 sub-districts. The Depok City Government pays attention to and supports the development of MSMEs, which have the potential to drive the regional economy.

The MSME sector in Depok is dominated by food and beverages, followed by handicrafts, fashion, and services. The research population consists of all MSMEs registered with the Depok City Cooperative and Micro Business Office, with the majority having business capital from loans. Monthly turnover varies, with the most common range being between 10 and 15 million. Business premises are generally rented, promotions are conducted online, and businesses have employees. Based on the results of observations, interviews, and documentation, the research results show the role and contribution of competitive advantage and the sustainability of MSMEs in supporting the economic growth of Depok City.

Analysis of the research results shows that competitive advantage has a positive role in the sustainability of MSMEs. This finding is in line with the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory, which states that MSMEs are able to identify and manage unique resources such as brand reputation, product quality, or employee skills so that MSMEs tend to have higher competitiveness. MSMEs in Depok that invest in product innovation or build strong customer relationships as a form of differentiation have a higher level of sustainability. Continuous efforts to improve product quality and meet certain standards will increase consumer confidence and competitiveness in a broader market. There is a phenomenon where MSMEs fail because they do not have strong competitive advantages and are unable to adapt to market dynamics. On the other hand, MSMEs that have successfully maintained their business sustainability are those that have implemented effective product differentiation, cost advantage, and market focus strategies. These findings also support Contingency Theory, which emphasizes the importance of flexibility and adaptation. Successful MSMEs in Depok are those that are able to adjust their competitive advantage strategies to changes in the external environment, such as consumer trends or increasingly fierce market competition.

Competitive advantage plays an important role in the sustainability of SMEs. In addition to supporting RBV and contingency theories, it is also in line with the results of research by Zahara et al. (2024) on the role of competitive advantage as a mediating variable between knowledge management and supply chain management and MSME performance, which shows that competitive advantage significantly mediates this relationship, proving that having competitive advantage helps MSMEs improve their performance and achieve optimal profitability. Similar research was also conducted by Budiarto et al. (2024), which showed that digitization and creativity have a positive impact on competitive advantage and, in turn, significantly affect the sustainability of MSMEs. This study confirms that efficient competitive advantage enables MSMEs to compete and survive in the long term.

A descriptive analysis of the collected data shows that MSMEs in Depok City have several potential competitive advantages, including: 1) a dynamic business ecosystem with various business sectors, 2) a strategic location as a buffer for Jakarta with a high population and purchasing power, 3) many MSMEs developing innovative products and services, 4) the flexibility of MSMEs in responding to changes in the business and technological environment, 5) the support and preference of the Depok community for local products, and 6)

government support through various training programs, access to capital, and marketing facilitation from the Depok City Government. The results of a descriptive analysis of MSME data in Depok City show that this region has several unique resources and capabilities that can be developed into competitive advantages. These sources of excellence come from internal and external factors, which collectively create an environment conducive to MSMEs' growth and sustainability. The competitive advantage of Depok MSMEs is driven by strong external factors. Depok's location as a satellite city of Jakarta gives it direct access to a large market with a high population and purchasing power. Coupled with a dynamic business ecosystem, MSMEs can take advantage of the diversity of business sectors to create synergies, forge partnerships, and find specific market niches. Internally, MSMEs in Depok have adaptive and innovative capabilities. Many MSMEs that have successfully developed innovative products and services demonstrate innovation as a source of excellence. The flexibility of MSMEs is also an important asset, allowing them to quickly adapt to changes in the business and technological environment, an ability that is often difficult for large companies to possess. These findings are in line with Ahsan (2025), who states that competitive advantage significantly mediates the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and sustainable business performance. This study emphasizes that competitive advantage helps MSMEs translate entrepreneurial and sustainability strategies into better business performance in terms of financial aspects as well as social and environmental responsibility.

The analysis also shows that the competitive advantage possessed by sustainable MSMEs contributes to the economic growth of Depok City. This can be proven by the fact that MSMEs are the main sector in creating jobs, thereby increasing community income. If community income increases, the contribution of MSMEs to Depok City's Gross Regional Domestic Product will continue to increase. In addition, Depok City MSMEs players have expanded into new sectors, reducing their dependence on traditional sectors. This can increase the added value of products and preserve regional culture. The Depok City government also actively contributes to promoting the competitiveness of MSMEs through training, coaching, capital facilitation, exhibitions, and the MSMEs Center. The results of this analysis are in line with the results of research by Lu & Shaharudin (2024), which highlights that digital transformation is the key for MSMEs to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. By adopting digital technology, MSMEs can increase their innovation capabilities, overcome resource constraints, and better adapt to market changes. This adoption is very important for business resilience and economic contribution. Similar research was also conducted by Suriani et al. (2024), which discussed the strategic role of MSMEs in promoting economic growth. The results of this study confirm that MSMEs with financial management and technological skills will develop better, thereby increasing sustainable economic competitiveness.

MSMEs with competitive advantages tend to be more productive and efficient, enabling them to offer more competitive prices that drive sales volume and profitability. Thus, sustainable and competitive MSMEs can grow the ability to grow and develop, which directly creates new jobs. This increase in

employment opportunities not only reduces unemployment but also increases per capita income, which is a key indicator of economic growth. This increase in productivity will aggregate to increase a country's economic output, which is directly reflected in an increase in GDP. In addition to creating jobs, competitive MSMEs are often a source of innovation in products, services, and business models. This innovation can increase overall market competitiveness and drive dynamic economic growth.

Synergy between various parties (government, financial institutions, MSME associations) is crucial to strengthening the competitiveness of MSMEs. The government acts as a facilitator, financial institutions provide appropriate financial products, and MSME associations facilitate cooperation and provide training. With good cooperation, MSMEs in Depok are expected to overcome obstacles and continue to grow, contributing significantly to sustainable economic growth in the city of Depok. The analysis of the competitive advantage of MSMEs has important implications for the formulation of effective MSME development policies and strategies. The results of this study confirm that the sustainability of MSMEs is key to economic growth in Depok. With evidence that competitive advantage drives sustainability, local governments and stakeholders need to focus on developing programs that support the creation of such advantages. Improving access to training and mentoring on strategic resource management and product innovation must continue so that MSMEs can maintain sustainability and competitiveness at both the national and international market levels. MSMEs must be able to form a conducive business ecosystem to collaborate and share resources. These results reinforce the argument that this research can provide new insights and have a positive impact on the performance of MSMEs in Depok, thereby indirectly contributing to economic stability and growth in the region.

In the process of developing competitive advantage and sustainability, MSMEs face many challenges, such as difficulty in obtaining loans from financial institutions, a lack of management knowledge, and competition with products from large companies. In addition to facing challenges, SMEs also face obstacles such as limited marketing, inadequate infrastructure, complicated licensing, unstable product quality, and limited human resources. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is also still being felt, such as a decline in demand and supply chain disruptions. Therefore, it is necessary to synergize with various parties to address challenges, overcome obstacles, and increase competitiveness. MSMEs need to proactively identify, develop, and maintain unique competitive advantages that are relevant to the market. This can be done through product innovation, service quality improvement, technology utilization, strong brand development, or building close relationships with customers. MSME players must improve their knowledge and skills in business management, including financial management, marketing, operations, and human resources. Training and mentoring can be effective solutions. Collaborating with other SMEs, large companies, or related parties can open access to broader markets, resources, and new knowledge, as well as overcome obstacles.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This descriptive qualitative study analyzed the role of competitive advantage in the sustainability of MSMEs in the context of economic growth in Depok City. The results show that MSMEs in Depok City have various competitive advantages derived from internal characteristics and external support. These advantages have been proven to contribute positively to Depok City's economy through employment, increased community income, and increased GRDP. However, MSMEs in Depok also face significant challenges related to capital, competition, and management capacity. The results of this study indicate that competitive advantage plays a crucial role in ensuring the sustainability of MSMEs in Depok City. MSMEs that are able to develop and maintain competitive advantages have a greater opportunity to survive, grow, and make a more significant contribution to regional economic growth. Synergy between MSME actors, the government, financial institutions, and related associations is a determining factor in maximizing the potential of competitive advantage to achieve sustainability and drive more inclusive and sustainable economic growth in Depok City.

## FURTHER STUDY

Future studies should explore more specific aspects of competitive advantage among MSMEs in Depok City by using mixed-method or longitudinal approaches to capture changes over time. Further research could also examine the role of digital transformation, innovation capability, and market adaptation strategies in strengthening MSME sustainability. In addition, comparative studies between regions or sectors would provide deeper insights into the factors that differentiate levels of competitiveness. Expanding the scope to include quantitative measurements of economic impact and the effectiveness of government and financial institution interventions would also strengthen the understanding of how competitive advantage contributes to sustainable regional economic growth.

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