

Navigating Market Paradoxes: A Philosophical Reconstruction of MSME Marketing Strategy in the Era of Digital Transformation

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Abstract

The marketing strategy development process can be characterized as nonlinear, iterative, and responsive to new technologies, market opportunities, and evolving social ethics. This article aims to contribute to the investigation of the application of dialectical philosophy to the evolution of marketing practices, particularly concerning micro and small enterprises (MSEs). This article is the result of an exploratory literature review and thematic analysis of scientific communication published between 2020 and 2026. The marketing practices of MSEs are subject to paradoxical, and especially dualistic, factors, including tensions between resource constraints and technology adoption, data-based personalization versus individual privacy, and the ethics of disruptive digital business innovation. From a dialectical perspective, these dualisms are not merely obstacles; rather, they can be viewed more positively as focal points that enable organizations to adjust, grow, and improve strategies under resource limitations. An integrated dialectical marketing philosophy provides a framework for MSEs that captures this iterative process and, above all, aims to achieve an ethically, contextually, and constructively evolving sustainable paradigm—the Positively Change Framework. When small and micro enterprises (SMEs) develop marketing strategies, they should give careful consideration to both ethics and context.

keywords: dialectical philosophy; marketing strategy; MSMEs; digital marketing, exploratory literature review

INTRODUCTION

The marketing strategies used by small and medium-sized businesses (MSMEs) have changed due to digital transformation (Anatan & Nur, 2023; Hendrawan et al., 2024; Kurniawati et al., 2022; Rayter et al., 2024; Rupeika-Apoga & Petrovska, 2022; Setiawan et al., 2025). This circumstance is forcing businesses to employ technology to reposition themselves in the marketplace. Nowadays, marketing is more than just a fixed strategy; it responds to various opportunities for innovation. In addition to being operational tools, digital marketing and an innovation-focused approach act as catalysts for businesses to continuously improve their performance and strategies (Setiawan et al., 2024).

From a dialectical perspective, marketing change occurs through the interaction of conflicting forces, such as automation and human interaction, or rapid growth and resource constraints (Çılğın, 2026; Kondratenko & Slovianov, 2026; Van Veldhoven & Vanthienen, 2022). Therefore, marketing strategies evolve through continuous adjustment rather than in a linear manner. Furthermore, digitalization is transforming how businesses and consumers interact and create value through digital experiences (Haryanto et al., 2024).

The development of digital marketing practices has also introduced new challenges for companies. Businesses must move quickly to keep up with technological advancements in order to remain relevant in the market; however, they must also maintain long-term

sustainability. This situation often creates a dilemma. On one hand, companies need to continue innovating; on the other, they must address various risks, such as limited organizational capabilities, the need to acquire new knowledge, and dependence on complex digital ecosystems involving multiple actors. Among these environmental factors, formulating a business strategy becomes a paradoxical challenge. Such strategies develop through an ongoing process of trial and error, modification, and learning. Thus, MSMEs must strengthen their ability to learn and adapt. In this context, MSMEs need to integrate business ethics, market needs and behavior, and emerging technologies so that the strategies formulated remain fair and sustainable (Hafeez et al., 2025).

The urgency of this research is therefore twofold. Practically, millions of MSMEs are currently navigating these digital paradoxes without a guiding framework, leading to trial-and-error strategies that can be costly and inefficient. Theoretically, the field of marketing strategy lacks an updated philosophical foundation that accounts for the nonlinear, contradictory nature of change in the digital age. Developing such a framework is critical to move beyond simplistic cause-and-effect models and toward a more nuanced understanding of how MSMEs can thrive amid constant disruption. This research is urgent because it addresses a real-time, global phenomenon with significant economic and social consequences.

The novelty of this research lies in its explicit and systematic application of dialectical philosophy to reconstruct a marketing strategy framework specifically for MSMEs. While dialectical thinking has been applied in organizational theory and broader management studies, its focused use to synthesize the seemingly paradoxical dualities of digital marketing—such as technological empowerment versus resource constraints, and personalization versus privacy—into a coherent, actionable model represents a distinct contribution. This study proposes the "Positively Change Framework," which conceptualizes marketing strategy as an emergent property of the continuous interaction between opposing forces.

While dialectically, innovation represents progress, it does not imply any degree of finality, which would be inaccurate. Instead, it can be understood as an emergent process of continuous change based on evolving market conditions, shifting consumer expectations, and the changing competencies of the organization. Innovation operates as a cycle: each incremental advancement in capability prompts organizations to reevaluate and redirect their focus toward the next stage of development. In this way, innovation supports the pursuit of sustainability and, in a broader sense, the ongoing continuity of organizational development.

METHOD

The purpose of this study was to analyze dialectical philosophy and marketing strategies in the context of MSMEs from a literature perspective. This study aimed to identify patterns of ideas, core debates, and conceptual tensions across a wide range of publications. In addition, the approach contributed to consolidating findings from cross-disciplinary studies, considering the complexity of marketing phenomena in the digital era. A systematic literature review was conducted using the keywords “dialectics in marketing,” “marketing strategies for SMEs,” and “digitalization of SMEs.” To maintain relevance to the research subject, the review was limited to peer-reviewed papers published between 2020 and 2026.

An exploratory literature review was considered appropriate for this study because it enabled the integration of diverse theoretical approaches into a unified framework for marketing strategy development, an area often underexplored in empirical studies. This approach also supported broader philosophical inquiry, allowing the analysis to extend beyond descriptive literature and contribute to the advancement of theoretical marketing research (Ayuanti et al., 2024).

The analysis began with the collection of literature relevant to SME marketing, marketing philosophy, and related theoretical foundations. These sources were examined through a dialectical lens to explore how contrasting perspectives within digital marketing discourse generated intellectual tension and contributed to theoretical development. This approach facilitated a deeper understanding of how competing ideas shaped marketing frameworks for MSMEs, particularly within the context of the digital economy.

The synthesis of the literature revealed several key patterns, including the increasing role of digital innovation, the emergence of more balanced and ethically informed marketing approaches, and the growing emphasis on long-term sustainability within the MSME ecosystem. By integrating insights from diverse studies and theoretical perspectives, this analysis identified broader patterns that may not have been evident in individual studies, thereby contributing to the development of a more comprehensive and forward-looking marketing framework (Naldi et al., 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Technological Capability Dialectics in Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)

Digital transformation can be understood as a prolonged process from two sides. On the one hand, there is digital marketing, which provides a way for MSMEs to improve operational efficiency, data-driven decision making, and provides a way to access markets without geographical restrictions. On the other hand, there are still many challenges that must be overcome. In many MSMEs, there are still obstacles such as inadequate human resources, variations in technical and managerial levels, and a mindset that is still resistant to digitalization. As a result, many MSMEs have not been able to optimize their digitalization processes (Rahman et al., 2025).

In this case, several systematic iterations must be carried out. Moreover, many MSMEs have begun to implement open innovation systems, thanks to collaboration with various integrations, such as digital platforms, business partners, or knowledge networks. Integration enables them to try new ways of working with new technologies without major changes. This approach provides opportunities for MSMEs to learn, test, and adapt digital marketing strategies that suit their capabilities. This strategy, in addition to the implementation of marketing systems, also encourages organizational learning. MSMEs learn to innovate with technology and adapt to limited resources. Through collaborative innovation, MSMEs are able to bridge the gap between reality and expectations to achieve digital transformation (Halik & Halik, 2024).

Dialectics of Market Orientation and Business Ethics

Zaroni & Norvadewi (2024) demonstrate how ethical principles can be applied in digital marketing, where honesty and transparency in information dissemination can build customer trust and positively impact brand equity and competitive advantage in SMEs. From a dialectical perspective, rather than viewing marketing strategies solely from an economic benefit standpoint, marketing strategies can be understood as a space where achieving economic goals must also include ethical, sustainable, and environmentally friendly objectives. This means that in the digitalization of the economy in business, ways to expand the market must also include ethical, honest, positive, and valuable offerings to consumers.

The separation of antitheses becomes clear when data-driven marketing begins to reduce the human side. The focus of algorithms is becoming increasingly socially irresponsible, emotionally dishonest, and disregards privacy. This conflict highlights the need for balance. In this case, human-centered marketing as a form of compassion, ethical data, and relational marketing. Technology is intended to amplify the role of humans. Thus, digital innovation becomes a tool for organizations to realize the full potential of technology and social civilization and hope for a sustainable future.

Dialectics of Innovation and Business Sustainability

In the field of digital marketing, there are several challenges related to balancing two opposing poles. One is organizations that face marginalization accompanied by technology-based innovation. Another is organizations that face long-term, sustainable attitudes. In this case, digital marketing positioning is relatively important, although high mobility and technology cannot be expected to yield profits. In this case, improvisation and maintenance are targeted at technology and SMEs. SMEs must learn internationally, be adaptable, and constructively respond to market changes (Wu et al., 2024).

Dialectically, innovation implies progress, but in this case, there are definite implications of innovation, which in this context is something that contradicts reality. Nevertheless, innovation can be interpreted as a process of hole and for global emergent in the context of continuous analysis of constantly changing market conditions, changing consumer expectations, and organizational profile development. Innovation operates in cycles. With each incremental change, organizations tend to be driven to assess and, in certain contexts, shift towards more capacity-building changes. Innovation in this context is worthy of consideration and of achieving more meaningful empowerment.

Social Dialectics in the Transformation of MSME Identity

As marketing continues to evolve for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), more innovative strategies are beginning to align with digital marketing trends. Selling items themselves is only one function of online platforms. MSMEs are learning to use online platforms to tell stories related to product value, brand authenticity, and strengthen customer relationships. MSMEs are able to build business identities with the added ability to show themselves interacting with their customers. In this regard, entrepreneurial marketing is one of the new approaches. This type of marketing focuses on innovation and creativity, as well as the ability to empathize with customers. Considering that the MSME sector has a high degree of competition and resource scarcity, this form of marketing is

particularly effective. To address resource limitations, MSMEs use their resourcefulness as well as their ability to build networks and create valuable customer experiences. In this way, they are able to not only endure, but also prosper within a rapidly changing marketplace (Wulandari & Febriati, 2026).

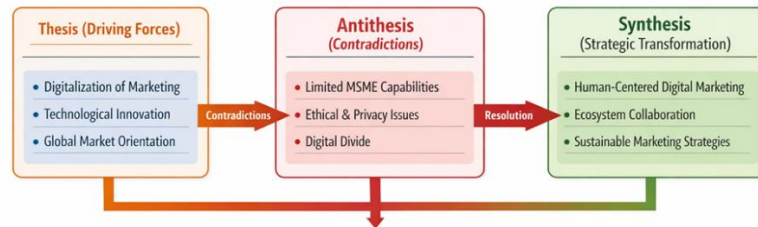


Figure 1. Dialectical Framework of MSME Marketing Strategy

Upon further examination, dialectical philosophy can help explain how MSMEs market their products in the digital environment. Marketing changes, in this case, do not necessarily mean that technology is always at the forefront. The changes are more about the various challenges faced by business actors. MSMEs are required to improve in order to remain competitive. The dominance of marketing trends in the digital environment is not only due to technology, but also various business dilemmas, such as those related to ethics and demand in business. These challenges are being addressed in an effort to integrate technology with ethics and sustainability. This study shows that in order to market their products, SMEs must possess these qualities. These three things need to be integrated into a flexible strategy so that MSMEs can adapt to market changes and the expectations of entrepreneurs.

This study contributes to the development of a dialectical marketing framework for MSMEs. This framework integrates philosophical and marketing systems of thought. This integration will help researchers understand how various conflicting challenges contribute to the proposal of more flexible and sustainable strategies for MSMEs. In addition, this framework also provides a basis for future research to explore marketing strategies in greater depth.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of Law Number 35 of 2009 concerning Narcotics, particularly Article 112 paragraph (1) and Article 127 paragraph (1)(a), revealed significant normative overlap and disparities in criminal sanctions, which affected the legal outcomes for offenders. Article 112 was often applied repressively with severe minimum penalties, even in cases where individuals were merely users who should have been directed toward rehabilitation under Article 127. This issue was compounded by differing interpretations among law enforcement officials, resulting in inconsistent verdicts in similar cases and difficulties in proving intent due to the ambiguous purpose of narcotics possession. Consequently, many cases proceeded to further legal remedies and contributed to prison overcrowding. Judicial approaches also diverged between positivistic interpretations, which strictly followed statutory text, and non-positivistic perspectives, which emphasized social context and substantive justice. In practice, lower courts, including the District Court and the

Medan High Court, often failed to fully apply the guidelines outlined in SEMA Number 3 of 2015 in conjunction with SEMA Number 4 of 2010, leading to custodial sentences instead of rehabilitation for users. In contrast, the Supreme Court's more contextual approach reflected a stronger commitment to humane justice. Future research should focus on developing clearer legal standards and interpretive guidelines to harmonize the application of these provisions, as well as evaluating the effectiveness of rehabilitation-based approaches compared to punitive measures in reducing recidivism and prison overcrowding.

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