

Export Capability and Performance in West Java: Evidence From Women's MSMEs in West Java

Sefira Zalsadilla¹, Lia Yuldinawati²

^{1,2} Telecommunication and Informatics Business Management, Faculty of Economics and Business, Telkom University
dillasefira@student.telkomuniversity.ac.id, liayuldi@telkomuniversity.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The development of digital technology and the strengthening of reliable infrastructure have transformed the way entrepreneurs conduct business, greatly influencing the global expansion process of export-focused MSMEs.

Objectives: This study aims to examine the influence of export capabilities including “market intelligence capability, product innovation capability, pricing capability, marketing communication capability, distribution capability, and product development capability” on MSME performance through competitive advantage, with a particular focus on women-led export-oriented MSMEs in West Java.

Methods: The research employed a quantitative SEM-PLS approach on a non-probability purposive sample of 254 women entrepreneurs in West Java managing export-focused MSMEs. Data was gathered through a Google Forms online questionnaire.

Results: The study's results suggest a positive and significant influence of most export capability dimensions on competitive advantage, which in turn significantly enhances MSME performance. However, distribution capability and product development capability did not demonstrate a significant relationship with competitive advantage or performance.

Conclusions: The results reinforce RBV theory, indicating that competitive advantage from internal capabilities strongly determines export performance, particularly for women-led MSMEs.

Keywords: omen MSMEs, Export Capability, Competitive Advantage, MSME Performance.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has made markets increasingly connected and competitive around the world. Therefore, for MSMEs, expanding to international markets or internationalization is a strategic step to maintain competitiveness. Innovation, human resource development, and the sustainable adoption of technology are critical drivers of competitive MSME growth (Meldona et al., 2022). Rapid advances in information and communication technology have accelerated the rhythm of business activities, which has a major positive impact on MSMEs by making it easier for them to reach a wider market and encouraging innovation that ultimately improves entrepreneurial performance (Yuldinawati et al., 2018). As a developing economy, Indonesia actively promotes entrepreneurship, where women possess substantial opportunities and potential to engage in entrepreneurial activities (Hamdani et al., 2023). Women entrepreneurs have a significant impact on the development of the MSME sector. By starting and managing businesses, they not only increase economic opportunities for themselves, but also positively impact the economy as a whole, including contributing to the country's GDP. In addition, the role of women entrepreneurs supports the creation of a sustainable economy by introducing environmentally friendly business models, as well as creating more equitable employment and business opportunities (Anggadwita et al., 2023). In West Java, women hold a prominent role in the MSME sector, not only in production but also in innovation, marketing, and overall business development (Nurlatifah et al., 2023). Despite their significant contributions, women-led MSMEs continue to face barriers such as limited access to capital and low export market penetration. This phenomenon highlights the high potential of

women entrepreneurs to boost MSME exports, which remains underutilized due to inadequate supporting infrastructure. Although the potential is substantial, export-oriented MSMEs in West Java still encounter numerous challenges.

Internal challenges include a limited understanding of export regulations, international quality standards, and the lack of marketing strategies aligned with global market demands. Additionally, restricted access to financing and capital hinders production capacity expansion and overall competitiveness (Fridayani et al., 2024). Externally, issues such as suboptimal logistics infrastructure, high shipping costs, and exchange rate volatility further weaken the price competitiveness of MSME products (Arisinta et al., 2024). In this context, more targeted efforts are required to enhance MSME competitiveness by fostering competitive advantage. Competitive advantage for a business can be gained through several key factors, such as cost savings, product variety, and high service standards (Hasniati et al., 2022; Maltz et al., 2023; Zahara et al., 2024)—is a critical success factor for export-oriented MSMEs, particularly those led by women entrepreneurs. The value chain approach (Ateljević et al., 2023) provides a systematic framework for MSMEs to strengthen their competitive positioning. This study posits that export capabilities serve as a pivotal factor influencing MSME performance, with competitive advantage acting as the primary mediating variable (Kaleka & Morgan, 2017).

The combination of all these capabilities results in competitive advantage, which is the mediating factor linking export capabilities to MSME performance. Previous studies have confirmed that competitive advantage has an important role in improving MSME performance, and this is evident through research involving a sizable number of respondents (119 people). Falahat et al. (2020) revealed that capabilities such as skills and knowledge that MSMEs possess to deeply understand market conditions (market intelligence), continuously develop products that are attractive and in line with market needs (product innovation), and set competitive prices for their products (pricing). These three capabilities support each other in creating a competitive advantage for MSMEs, which in turn contributes to improved export performance, enabling businesses to compete better globally. Similarly, research by Zou et al. (2003) proved significant contribution of marketing communication, distribution, and product development capabilities to cost efficiency and product differentiation strategies. However, most of these studies remain generalized and have yet to specifically address the part played by women business owners in MSMEs engaged in export, particularly in regions like West Java. Therefore, examining the interplay between product development capability, competitive advantage, and MSME international performance from a gender-based perspective is expected to contribute valuable insights for strategies aimed at enhancing the export competitiveness of women-led MSMEs in West Java.

OBJECTIVES

This research primarily aims to assess the link between export capability and competitive advantage, considering the background and identified issues. Moreover, this research also wants to see how these advantages contribute to the export performance of MSMEs, especially those led by women. The research area is limited to West Java, which allows for a contextual analysis export activities in the region. The explicit goal of the study is to quantify the degree to which “market intelligence capability, product innovation capability, pricing capability, marketing communication capability, distribution capability, and product development capability” affect “competitive advantage”.

Then, the research also has a more in-depth objective to understand how competitive advantage affects MSME performance. Not only does it look at the direct relationship between export capabilities and MSME performance, it also examines how competitive advantage can act as a mediator in this relationship. That is, this research seeks to uncover whether the export capabilities of MSMEs can increase factors that give them an edge over competitors, and this in turn will contribute positively to their overall business success.

With this approach, research not only assesses how much direct influence export capabilities have on MSME success, but also evaluates the important role of competitive advantage as an indirect pathway that can strengthen the relationship. This approach provides a more comprehensive picture of how MSMEs can leverage their advantages to strengthen their market position and achieve more optimal business outcomes.

METHODS

The target population for this study comprises MSMEs engaged in export activities based in West Java. The primary respondents are key decision-makers responsible for managing export operations within these MSMEs, who are typically women entrepreneurs. A sample of 254 MSMEs actively engaged in regular exports was identified and chosen for the study.

The process of gathering data for this research was conducted in two distinct main steps, namely preliminary studies and distribution of the main questionnaire. Before full-scale data collection, the research instrument was tested in a pilot study involving 30 randomly chosen individuals from MSMEs. The purpose of this stage is to test the clarity, consistency and feasibility of the questionnaire to be used, thus enabling researchers to identify and correct questions that are inappropriate or confusing. Feedback from respondents and follow-up interviews informed necessary adjustments to the final survey instrument. Data collection was completed in 2025, resulting in 254 valid responses from MSMEs that met the defined export sales criteria.

This research adopts a causal or conclusive research design. According to Creswell & Creswell (2022), causal research aims to understand whether one variable influences or causes changes in another variable. Similarly, Sugiyono (2023) A causal relationship indicates a cause leading to an effect between variables.

This study's core analysis involves investigating the influence of export capabilities "market intelligence capability, product innovation capability, pricing capability, marketing communication capability, distribution capability, and product development capability" on "the export performance of women-led MSMEs", with "Competitive Advantage" serving as a mediating variable. To examine the relationships among the variables, a quantitative approach was employed, which involved the use of numerical data and statistical analysis techniques. As stated by Wada et al. (2024), The goal of quantitative research is to provide explanatory descriptions of the relationships between measurable variables. Furthermore, Sugiyono (2023) emphasizes that quantitative research is designed to test predefined hypotheses through the study of specific populations or samples, with data collected using structured research instruments.

The measurement method applied in this study utilized a Likert scale to capture respondents' opinions on a series of statements, rated by their level of agreement. The Likert scale, fundamentally an ordinal scale, allows respondents to indicate their responses leveraging ordered classifications, such as "Strongly Disagree," "Disagree," "Neutral," "Agree," and "Strongly Agree" (Ghozali, 2021).

RESULTS

A. Measurement Model Assessment (Outer Model)

Convergent Validity Testing

Convergent validity testing assesses how well indicators relate to their underlying latent variables (Indrawati, 2015). Measurement is valid if "the loading factor ≥ 0.70 " and "AVE > 0.50 " (Hair et al., 2022). The following are the results of the convergent validity assessment based on loading factor values and AVE, analyzed using SmartPLS version 4.1.0.9.

Table 1 Convergent Validity Test Results

Variabel	Indikator	Loading faktor	AVE	Kesimpulan
Market Intelligence Capability (X)	MI1	0.784	0.736	Valid
	MI2	0.817		Valid
	MI3	0.777		Valid
	MI4	0.787		Valid
	MI5	0.770		Valid
Product Innovation Capability (X)	PIC1	0.947	0.752	Valid
	PIC2	0.870		Valid
	PIC3	0.880		Valid

Pricing Capability (X)	PRICE1	0.787	0.619	Valid
	PRICE2	0.735		Valid
	PRICE3	0.823		Valid
	PRICE4	0.809		Valid
Marketing Communication Capability (X)	MKT1	0.857	0.816	Valid
	MKT2	0.956		Valid
	MKT3	0.921		Valid
	MKT4	0.876		Valid
Distribution Capability (X)	DC1	0.886	0.623	Valid
	DC2	0.762		Valid
	DC3	0.906		Valid
	DC4	0.906		Valid
Product Development Capability (X)	PDC1	0.749	0.636	Valid
	PDC2	0.853		Valid
	PDC3	0.709		Valid
	PDC4	0.868		Valid
Competitive Advantage (Z)	CA1	0.868	0.810	Valid
	CA2	0.850		Valid
	CA3	0.852		Valid
	CA4	0.860		Valid
	CA5	0.854		Valid
	CA6	0.884		Valid
	CA7	0.845		Valid
	CA8	0.858		Valid
	CA9	0.850		Valid
	CA10	0.855		Valid
MSME's Performance (Y)	PERF1	0.818	0.621	Valid
	PERF2	0.768		Valid
	PERF3	0.778		Valid
	PERF4	0.762		Valid
	PERF5	0.813		Valid
	PERF6	0.785		Valid
	PERF7	0.798		Valid
	PERF8	0.779		Valid

Based on the results shown in Table 1, all indicators show a loading factor value that exceeds 0.70. This indicates that each indicator is able to represent the measured construct strongly and validly. In addition, the AVE value for all variables is above 0.50, which means that the proportion of variance explained by the indicators to their constructs is greater than the variance caused by errors. The data suggests that the research model possesses good convergent validity, meaning that the multiple indicators used to measure a single theoretical construct are strongly associated and consistently capture the essence of that construct.

Discriminant Validity Testing

Discriminant validity was assessed using “Cross Loadings, Fornell-Larcker, and HTMT”.

Table 2 Cross Loading Test Results

Indikator	CA	DC	MI	MKT	PDC	PERF	PIC	Pricing
CA1	0.849	0.082	0.090	0.000	-0.048	-0.034	-0.033	-0.096
CA10	0.836	0.060	0.080	-0.085	-0.141	-0.093	0.070	-0.007

CA2	0.837	0.027	-0.016	-0.047	-0.093	-0.070	-0.070	-0.111
CA3	0.871	0.005	-0.004	-0.094	-0.094	-0.094	-0.096	-0.096
CA4	0.843	0.008	-0.073	-0.105	-0.046	-0.046	-0.040	-0.132
CA5	0.868	0.065	0.090	-0.086	-0.086	-0.086	-0.086	-0.086
CA6	0.854	0.024	-0.009	-0.048	-0.036	-0.035	-0.066	-0.067
CA7	0.844	0.057	0.021	-0.046	-0.059	-0.040	-0.049	-0.084
CA8	0.876	0.066	0.049	-0.071	-0.049	-0.049	-0.090	-0.049
CA9	0.886	0.064	0.049	-0.031	-0.053	-0.058	-0.059	-0.059
DC1	0.051	0.891	0.051	0.015	-0.021	-0.015	-0.017	0.053
DC2	0.091	0.820	-0.051	0.026	0.026	-0.020	-0.053	0.053
DC3	0.073	0.851	-0.018	0.032	0.032	-0.032	-0.065	0.072
DC4	0.051	0.891	0.051	0.015	-0.021	-0.015	-0.017	0.053
MI1	0.014	0.096	0.077	0.072	-0.065	-0.064	-0.033	-0.033
MI2	0.926	0.077	0.810	0.327	-0.043	-0.045	-0.063	-0.063
MI3	0.037	0.018	0.745	0.272	-0.028	-0.026	-0.026	-0.026
MI4	0.086	0.081	0.815	0.285	0.046	0.056	0.056	0.056
MI5	0.011	0.085	0.887	0.843	0.040	0.048	0.048	0.048
MKT1	0.004	0.018	0.018	0.574	0.174	0.150	0.051	0.097
MKT2	0.000	0.027	-0.016	0.832	0.016	0.061	0.097	0.091
MKT3	1.000	0.140	0.312	0.312	0.126	0.126	0.126	0.097
MKT4	-0.003	0.061	-0.012	0.194	0.058	0.058	0.136	0.136
PDC1	0.767	0.676	0.426	0.798	0.799	0.334	0.239	0.326
PDC2	0.799	0.799	0.416	0.799	0.408	0.321	0.321	0.540
PDC3	0.893	0.809	0.409	0.489	0.351	0.351	0.511	0.519
PDC4	0.805	0.905	0.398	0.496	0.376	0.376	0.578	0.578
PERF1	-0.083	0.088	-0.027	0.119	0.019	0.179	0.457	0.457
PERF2	0.129	0.031	0.009	0.007	0.007	0.907	0.909	0.492
PERF3	0.043	0.005	0.004	0.046	0.046	0.836	0.354	0.482
PERF4	-0.026	0.104	0.105	0.107	0.067	0.509	0.509	0.508
PERF5	0.008	0.026	0.026	0.004	0.804	0.499	0.499	0.509
PERF6	-0.001	0.095	0.426	0.297	0.297	0.542	0.548	0.548
PERF7	0.043	0.014	0.008	0.040	0.087	0.354	0.354	0.354
PERF8	0.043	0.014	0.004	0.040	0.040	0.354	0.354	0.482
PIC1	-0.026	0.026	0.106	0.107	0.087	0.509	0.509	0.509
PIC2	0.008	0.026	0.026	0.074	0.804	0.499	0.499	0.499
PIC3	-0.001	0.095	0.426	0.297	0.297	0.542	0.548	0.548
PRICE1	0.240	0.018	0.018	0.105	0.108	0.326	0.509	0.509
PRICE2	0.050	0.011	0.026	0.074	0.082	0.482	0.499	0.499
PRICE3	0.043	0.028	0.033	0.032	0.032	0.354	0.553	0.553
PRICE4	0.045	0.025	0.066	0.059	0.048	0.902	0.902	0.902

Table 2 shows each indicator loads highest on its intended construct. This indicates that each indicator is able to measure the right construct consistently and does not overlap with other constructs. Thus, it can be concluded that the model has good discriminant validity, meaning that each construct in the model is truly uniquely measured and can be clearly distinguished from one another.

Apart from using cross loading analysis, discriminant validity is also further analyzed by applying the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Discriminant validity is confirmed using Fornell-Larcker when the square root of a construct's AVE is higher than its correlation with any other construct.

Table 3 Fornell-Larcker Test Results

Construct	CA	DC	MI	MKT	Price	PDC	PIC	PERF
Competitive Advantage	0.858							
Distribution	-	0.867						
	0.053							
Market Intelligence	0.480	0.010	0.787					
Marketing Communication	0.126	-	-	0.903				
		0.025	0.060					
Pricing	0.518	-	-	-	0.789			
		0.064	0.053	0.128				
Product Development	0.051	-	0.056	-	0.100	0.798		
		0.051		0.038				
Product Innovation	0.279	-	0.047	-	-0.011	0.008	0.900	
		0.086		0.042				
MSME's Performance	0.940	-	0.489	0.103	0.483	0.043	0.260	0.788
		0.066						

Paint: The bold number is the value of the square root of AVE and the highest correlation

According to the Fornell-Larcker results in Table 12, the square root of each construct's AVE exceeds its correlations with other constructs. In conclusion, the model exhibits good discriminant validity based on the Fornell-Larcker test. Furthermore, the HTMT matrix was also employed to assess this validity.

Table 4 Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) Test Results

Construct	CA	DC	MI	MKT	Price	PDC	PIC	PERF
Competitive Advantage								
Distribution	0.853							
Market Intelligence	0.527	0.111						
Marketing Communication	0.123	0.049	0.551					
Pricing	0.588	0.095	0.073	0.159				
Product Development	0.071	0.079	0.085	0.060	0.563			
Product Innovation	0.298	0.081	0.069	0.061	0.058	0.067		
MSME's Performance	0.053	0.076	0.077	0.099	0.142	0.037	0.285	

Table 4 shows all variables have HTMT values below 0.90, thus confirming good discriminant validity in the model.

Reliability Testing

Reliability testing was conducted to assess the consistency of respondents' answers across all items within each measurement construct. For indicator reliability, Hair et al. (2022) recommend "Cronbach's Alpha, rho_A, and Composite Reliability values greater than 0.70".

Table 5 Reliability Test Results

Construct	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Conclusion
<i>Market Intelligence</i>	0.960	0.965	Reliabel
<i>Product Innovation</i>	0.897	0.923	Reliabel
<i>Pricing</i>	0.847	0.891	Reliabel
<i>Marketing Communication</i>	0.927	0.947	Reliabel
<i>Distribution</i>	0.798	0.868	Reliabel
<i>Product Development</i>	0.824	0.874	Reliabel
<i>Competitive Advantage</i>	0.882	0.927	Reliabel
<i>MSME's Performance</i>	0.913	0.929	Reliabel

Table 5 shows each variable has a Cronbach's Alpha above 0.60 and Composite Reliability above 0.70, indicating that the measurement instruments are reliable. This demonstrates that the indicators consistently and accurately measure their respective constructs.

Structural Model Assessment (Inner Model)

To understand how the different constructs in the model relate to each other, a structural model assessment was performed (J. F. Hair et al., 2022).

Coefficient of Determination (R²)

The R-square statistic is employed to establish the proportion of the dependent variable's variance that is predictable from the independent variables. The R-square values for each dependent variable are listed below.

Table 6 R-Square Test Results

Relationship	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted
COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE	0.653	0.645
MSME'S PERFORMANCE	0.884	0.884

Competitive Advantage's variance is explained by the model at 65.3% (Adjusted R² = 0.645). The model explains a larger 88.4% of the variance in SMEs Performance, leaving the rest to external factors.

Effect Size (f²) Testing

Effect size (f²) analysis was conducted to evaluate the impact of omitted variables. Table 7 summarizes the results:

Table 7 Test Effect size (f²)

Relationship	f-square	Category
<i>Competitive Advantage -> MSME's Performance</i>	7.636	Big
<i>Distribution -> Competitive Advantage</i>	0.000	Small
<i>Market Intelligence -> Competitive Advantage</i>	0.752	Big
<i>Marketing Communication -> Competitive Advantage</i>	0.165	Big
<i>Pricing -> Competitive Advantage</i>	0.946	Big
<i>Product Development -> Competitive Advantage</i>	0.002	Small
<i>Product Innovation -> Competitive Advantage</i>	0.211	Big

With an f^2 of 7.636, the effect size test indicated Competitive Advantage's dominant influence on MSME performance. The variables of Pricing, Market Intelligence, Marketing Communication, and Product Innovation also contributed greatly in forming a competitive advantage, with f^2 of 0.946, 0.752, 0.165, and 0.211, respectively. In contrast, Distribution and Product Development exerted very little influence ($f^2 = 0.000$ and 0.002), indicating that these two aspects had not exerted a significant influence in the context of this study.

Q-Square Testing

The structural model's Q^2 , indicating predictive relevance ($Q^2 > 0$), is also assessed. See the table for blinfolding results:

Table 8 Q^2 Predictive relevance test

Endogen	Q^2	Conclusion
<i>Competitive Advantage</i>	0,558	Have Predictive Relevance
<i>MSME's Performance</i>	0,516	Have Predictive Relevance

Since the Q^2 values for both endogenous variables (0.558 and 0.516) are above zero, the model has satisfactory predictive relevance.

Hypothesis Testing Results

In this study, a total of 13 hypotheses were tested. This section summarizes hypothesis testing results using bootstrapped path coefficient values.

Table 9 Recapitulation of Hypothesis Test Results

No	Hip.	T Statistics	P Values	Conclusion Ha
1	Competitive Advantage -> Msme's Performance	155.800	0.000	Accepted
2	Distribution -> Competitive Advantage	0.172	0.432	Rejected
3	Market Intelligence -> Competitive Advantage	14.376	0.000	Accepted
4	Marketing Communication -> Competitive Advantage	4.968	0.000	Accepted
5	Pricing -> Competitive Advantage	15.163	0.000	Accepted
6	Product Development -> Competitive Advantage	0.632	0.264	Rejected
7	Product Innovation -> Competitive Advantage	7.206	0.000	Accepted
8	Distribution -> Msme's Performance	0.171	0.432	Rejected
9	Market Intelligence -> Msme's Performance	14.296	0.000	Accepted
10	Marketing Communication -> Msme's Performance	4.962	0.000	Accepted
11	Pricing -> Msme's Performance	14.903	0.000	Accepted
12	Product Development -> Msme's Performance	0.631	0.264	Rejected
13	Product Innovation -> Msme's Performance	7.179	0.000	Accepted

The following provides an explanation of each hypothesis:

Table 10 shows that Competitive Advantage (CA) serves as a significant mediator between export capabilities and the performance of women-led export-oriented MSMEs (MSME Performance). CA has been proven to significantly enhance MSME performance. Furthermore, Market Intelligence, Marketing Communication, Pricing, and Product Innovation exhibit significant influences on both CA and MSME Performance. Conversely, Distribution and Product Development do not show significant effects. The findings underscore the significant intermediary function of CA in channeling the benefits of specific export capabilities towards improved MSME performance.

Table 10 Hypothesis Results of Mediation Variables

Variable	Indirect Effect	Direct Effect	Total Effect	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	P Value	Annotation
Distribution → Competitive Advantage → Msme's Performance	0.008	0.007	0.015	-0.051	0.088	> 0.05	Not Proven
Market Intelligence → Competitive Advantage → Msme's Performance	0.483	0.483	0.966	0.43	0.54	<0.05	Proven
Marketingcommunication → Competitive Advantage → Msme's Performance	0.456	0.456	0.912	0.294	0.564	<0.05	Proven
Pricing → Competitive Advantage → Msme's Performance	0.548	0.548	1.096	0.49	0.612	< 0.05	Proven
Product Development → Competitive Advantage → Msme's Performance	-	-	-	-	0.027	> 0.05	Not Proven
Product Innovation → Competitive Advantage → Msme's Performance	0.256	0.256	0.512	0.2	0.317	<0.05	Proven

Results of the mediation tests reveal a significant indirect influence of Market Intelligence (0.483), Marketing Communication (0.456), and Pricing (0.548) on MSME Performance, mediated by Competitive Advantage. The confidence intervals for these effects do not cross zero, confirming their significance. Conversely, Distribution and Product Development are not significant mediators, as indicated by their low indirect effects and confidence intervals that cross zero. These findings suggest that Competitive Advantage plays a critical mediating role for specific strategies in enhancing MSME performance.

DISCUSSION

Research shows Competitive Advantage significantly impacts MSME performance. Shows that elements such as product quality, brand image, ability to innovate, and effectiveness in running business operations have a direct influence on improving MSME performance. These factors are part of the competitive advantage that can determine the extent to which MSMEs are able to compete in the market. Good product quality creates customer satisfaction and loyalty. A positive brand reputation strengthens consumer trust and increases selling points. Innovation allows MSMEs to continuously adapt to market changes and consumer needs. Meanwhile, operational efficiency helps reduce costs and increase productivity. Proper management of these aspects allows MSMEs to become more competitive and achieve better sales, growth, and profits. MSMEs that provide unique export value have a higher chance of long-term success in sales, customer satisfaction, and international standing.

Furthermore, Market Intelligence Capability affects Competitive Advantage, indicating that expertise in market analysis, trend recognition, and competitor assessment is essential for establishing a competitive edge. Having access to accurate and timely data on export markets empowers MSMEs to more effectively adapt their business strategies to satisfy the requirements of international consumers and trends. Additionally, the effectiveness of marketing communication plays a significant role in shaping competitive advantage. Strong marketing communication, especially through digital platforms and consistent visual branding, fosters positive consumer perceptions of MSME products. This supports entrepreneurs in building strong relationships with consumers in export markets and enhancing product identity. The impact of Pricing Capability on Competitive Advantage was acknowledged. Effective pricing strategies—such as competitive pricing, transparency, and adjustments aligned with the market—were identified as factors that enhance the competitive advantage of MSMEs. Companies that successfully balance consumer purchasing power with product value tend to be more competitive on a global scale.

A significant impact of Product Innovation Capability on Competitive Advantage is evident. Innovations in design, functionality, packaging, and technology serve as crucial sources of competitive advantage. Ongoing product innovation increases their attractiveness in global markets and enhances the brand positioning of MSMEs.

Conversely, the findings confirmed the existence of a relationship between a company's Market Intelligence Capability and its Performance as an MSME. The ability to gather and analyze market data allows MSMEs for more targeted and adaptable strategies. Accurate export market insights enable effective marketing, boosting business performance. Strong marketing communication with international markets is essential for customer loyalty and wider reach. The use of localized promotional materials and social media is essential for achieving outstanding performance. The hypothesis regarding Pricing Capability's positive effect on MSME Performance is validated, as rational pricing strategies, informed by competitor analysis and production costs, can boost sales volume, profit margins, and appeal to foreign consumers for MSME offerings.

The research substantiates the hypothesis regarding the positive correlation between Product Innovation Capability and MSME Performance, indicating that innovation is crucial for drawing in international consumers and enhancing customer allegiance. Innovative products enable MSMEs to distinguish themselves from competitors and provide additional value in export markets.

There are 4 analyses that were rejected in this study, namely : “The relationship between Distribution Capability and Competitive Advantage, the role of Product Development Capability in contributing to Competitive Advantage, The Distribution Capability to Competitive Advantage and MSME Performance , the analysis of Product Development Capability was deemed inconclusive regarding its impact on MSME Performance”.

The study found a negligible relationship between Distribution Capability and Competitive Advantage, and its effect on MSME Performance is also very small. These findings reinforce the results of Brouthers et al. (2007), who observed that MSMEs in developing countries often face distribution challenges due to inadequate logistics infrastructure, high costs, and limited international distribution networks. Consequently, while distribution is a vital component of the value chain, its effect on competitive advantage and performance is constrained without sufficient systemic support.

Conversely, the role of Product Development Capability in contributing to Competitive Advantage was dismissed, suggesting that product development does not play a significant role in competitive advantage within the context of this research. This finding is consistent with Zhang & Hartley (2018), who observed that product development efforts among export-oriented MSMEs often fall short due to inadequate market research and difficulties in differentiating products for international markets. In this analysis, it appears that product development efforts lacked a comprehensive understanding of export consumer preferences and cohesive launch strategies.

Similar to earlier studies, the hypotheses connecting Distribution Capability to Competitive Advantage and MSME Performance were not supported, highlighting the ongoing challenges MSMEs encounter in distribution logistics, costs, and network constraints.

Conversely, the analysis of Product Development Capability was deemed inconclusive regarding its impact on MSME Performance. Despite efforts in product development, no significant effect on MSME performance was detected,

aligning with Lages et al. (2009), who noted that product development significantly influences export performance only when bolstered by effective marketing strategies and compliance with international standards. In this regard, MSMEs may be constrained by limited resources and capabilities to adapt their product development to competitive export conditions.

The conclusion shows that not all export capabilities have the same impact on the success of MSMEs. The findings show that competitive advantage plays an important role in improving MSME performance, especially when supported by capabilities such as market intelligence, effective marketing communication, appropriate pricing, and continuous product innovation. In contrast, capabilities in terms of distribution and product development do not show a meaningful influence on competitive advantage or MSME performance.

The implications of the findings provide recommendations that MSMEs, especially those managed by women and export-oriented, should focus development on capabilities that are proven to significantly improve competitive advantage and performance, namely market intelligence, marketing communication, strategic pricing, and product innovation. On the other hand, since distribution capabilities and product development have not yet had a significant impact, it is recommended that the government, MSME support institutions, and the private sector play a role in improving distribution infrastructure, providing access to market research, and increasing the capacity of MSME resources through training, mentoring, and targeted financing. These recommendations aim to create a more conducive ecosystem for MSMEs to be able to build sustainable competitive advantages, so as to increase export competitiveness and make a greater contribution to regional and national economic growth.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, export capabilities play a crucial role in improving the performance of women-led MSMEs in West Java, with competitive advantage acting as a key mediating factor. Capabilities such as market intelligence, marketing communication, pricing, and product innovation significantly contribute to building a strong competitive edge, which in turn enhances business performance. On the other hand, distribution and product development capabilities were found to have no significant impact, reflecting ongoing challenges in logistics and product differentiation strategies for export markets. Beyond its theoretical contributions, this study also offers practical insights for policymakers to design gender-responsive strategies that strengthen the most impactful capabilities. Ultimately, the research provides a valuable foundation for developing targeted policies to support and scale the export performance of women entrepreneurs in the region.

Due to the study's focus solely on the West Java region, the applicability of these results to other geographical areas with varying economic and social landscapes may be limited and should be considered with caution. In addition, the quantitative approach used, although effective in testing relationships between variables, is less able to explore in depth the contextual aspects and subjective experiences of MSME actors. The data collected is also cross-sectional, so it has not been able to capture the dynamics of changes in capabilities and performance longitudinally. Therefore, it is recommended that future research expand the scope of the study area to other regions, use a mixed methods approach to gain more holistic insights, and consider a longitudinal study design to capture changes that occur over time. With these steps, future research results are expected to provide a more comprehensive picture in formulating policies and strategies to improve the export performance of women's MSMEs.

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