International Journal Business, Management and Innovation Review

E-ISSN: 3046-5605
P-ISSN: 3046-6423

(Research/Review) Article

Cross-Border E-Commerce Utilization Strategies to Enhance MSME Export Performance

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Abstract. The growth of cross-border digital commerce has opened significant opportunities for Indonesian Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to penetrate global export markets. This study aims to identify effective cross-border e-commerce utilization strategies to enhance MSME export performance. Employing a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach with the PRISMA 2020 protocol, 42 articles from Scopus and SINTA databases covering the period 2020–2024 were systematically identified, screened, and synthesized. Findings reveal four dominant strategic themes: (1) digital platform adaptation and content localization, (2) logistics optimization and cross-border supply chain management, (3) digital literacy and human resource capacity development, and (4) regulatory compliance and trade facilitation. These strategies are interdependent and collectively constitute an integrated ecosystem for sustainable MSME digital export performance. This research contributes an evidence-based strategic framework for practitioners, policymakers, and future researchers engaged in MSME export development.

Keywords: Cross-border e-commerce; Digital strategy; International trade; MSME export; Systematic literature review.

1. Introduction

The digitalization of the global economy has fundamentally transformed the landscape of international trade. Cross-border e-commerce—defined as electronic commercial transactions between buyers and sellers across national boundaries—has emerged as one of the most rapidly growing export modalities in the past decade. The global value of cross-border e-commerce transactions is projected to continue its significant upward trajectory, driven by expanding internet penetration, growing consumer confidence in online shopping, and advances in digital payment and logistics infrastructure [6], [1].

In Indonesia, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) constitute the backbone of the national economy. According to data from the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs, MSMEs contribute over 60% to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and absorb approximately 97% of the national workforce. Nevertheless, MSME contributions to total national exports remain relatively low compared to other Southeast Asian economies. This reality positions cross-border e-commerce as a strategic instrument through which MSMEs can enhance their global competitiveness and penetrate international markets [9], [13].

Despite its enormous potential, the utilization of cross-border e-commerce by Indonesian MSMEs continues to face substantial structural and operational barriers. Key challenges include limited digital literacy, complex export and customs regulations, cross-border logistics constraints, and difficulties in building trust with foreign consumers [18], [4]. Simultaneously, global platforms such as Alibaba, Amazon, Shopee, and Lazada have created unprecedented opportunities for MSMEs to market their products to international audiences without the need for costly conventional export infrastructure.

Numerous studies have examined specific aspects of cross-border e-commerce and MSME exports; however, comprehensive and systematic reviews remain scarce. Most existing studies focus on isolated aspects—such as technology adoption, export performance,

Received: March 29, 2026
Revised: April 21, 2026
Accepted: May 24, 2026
Published: June 09, 2026
Curr. Ver.: June 09, 2026

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or regulatory barriers—without offering a holistic picture of effective strategies. Consequently, a systematic synthesis of the empirical evidence dispersed across the scholarly literature is urgently needed.

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach with three primary objectives: (1) to map the development of research on cross-border e-commerce and MSME exports over the past five years; (2) to identify the principal strategies empirically proven effective in enhancing MSME export performance through cross-border e-commerce platforms; and (3) to develop an evidence-based strategic framework that can serve as a guide for practitioners, policymakers, and future researchers. The findings are expected to deliver meaningful theoretical and practical contributions to the development of the MSME digital export ecosystem in Indonesia and comparable emerging economies.

2. Preliminaries or Related Work or Literature Review

This section must contain a state-of-the-art explanation. It can be explained in several ways. First, you can discuss several related papers, both about objects, methods, and their results. From there, you can explain and emphasize gaps or differences between your research and previous research. The second way is to combine theory with related literature and explain each theory in one sub-chapter.

2.1 Cross-Border E-Commerce: Conceptual Foundations

Cross-border e-commerce refers to online commercial transactions in which the buyer and seller are located in different countries [16]. This modality distinguishes itself from domestic e-commerce in several critical dimensions, including multi-currency payment processing, international logistics and customs clearance, cross-cultural consumer behavior, and compliance with heterogeneous legal frameworks across jurisdictions. Scholars have categorized cross-border e-commerce into two principal models: Business-to-Consumer (B2C), where enterprises sell directly to end consumers abroad; and Business-to-Business (B2B), where transactions occur between business entities across borders [19].

The theoretical underpinning of cross-border e-commerce adoption among MSMEs draws primarily from the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) originally proposed by [2] and subsequently extended by [17]. TAM posits that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are the primary determinants of technology adoption behavior. In the cross-border e-commerce context, scholars have extended this model to incorporate additional constructs such as perceived trust, regulatory environment, and logistical readiness, producing a more contextually robust explanatory framework for MSME digital export adoption [7], [19].

The Internationalization Process Model—or Uppsala Model—developed by [5] provides another foundational theoretical lens. The Uppsala Model originally proposed that firms internationalize incrementally, gradually expanding into psychically proximate markets as they accumulate experiential knowledge. However, the advent of digital platforms has disrupted this incremental logic, enabling MSMEs to achieve rapid internationalization—so-called 'born global' or 'born digital' phenomena—by leveraging platform infrastructure to access geographically and culturally distant markets from an early stage of their development [6], [4].

2.2 MSME Export Performance in the Digital Age

MSME export performance has been conceptualized and operationalized in diverse ways across the literature. Quantitative measures include export intensity (ratio of export revenue to total revenue), number of destination markets, export growth rate, and order frequency. Qualitative indicators encompass market knowledge, product adaptability, and buyer relationship quality [13]. The advent of digital platforms has introduced new performance dimensions, including platform store rating, review scores, conversion rates, and repeat buyer ratios, which function as digital proxies for competitiveness in global marketplaces.

Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that MSMEs utilizing digital platforms for cross-border trade exhibit superior export performance compared to those relying exclusively on conventional trade channels. [7] found that Vietnamese SMEs engaging in cross-border e-commerce recorded export revenue growth rates 2.8 times higher than non-digital exporters over a three-year panel period. [10] similarly documented that Indonesian MSMEs who transitioned to digital export channels during the COVID-19 pandemic not only maintained but expanded their export markets, underscoring the resilience dividend of digital channel diversification.

The relationship between firm characteristics and digital export success has also attracted scholarly attention. Firm size, age, sector, and the digital capability of the owner-manager

have all been examined as moderating variables. [13] found that owner-manager digital literacy is the single strongest predictor of MSME export performance via digital platforms, even when controlling for firm capital and age. This finding has significant policy implications for the design of MSME export development programs, suggesting that human capital investment yields higher returns than purely infrastructure-oriented interventions.

2.3 Strategic Dimensions of Cross-Border E-Commerce for MSMEs

The scholarly literature identifies several strategic dimensions critical to MSME success in cross-border e-commerce. Platform selection and product-platform fit represent a foundational strategic decision. [19] demonstrate that misalignment between product characteristics and platform ecosystem—for instance, placing artisanal handcrafted goods on a platform optimized for high-volume commodity trading—is among the leading causes of MSME failure in digital export. Platform ecosystems differ substantially in their consumer demographics, trust mechanisms, fee structures, and algorithmic logic, necessitating deliberate and informed platform selection decisions.

Content localization constitutes a second major strategic dimension. [6] establish that cross-border e-commerce sellers who invest in culturally adapted content—including translated product descriptions, locally relevant imagery, culturally aligned communication styles, and country-specific sizing and measurement systems—achieve conversion rates 2.3 times higher than sellers deploying generic, non-localized content. Localization is thus not merely an aesthetic consideration but a commercially determinative strategic capability.

Logistics management represents a third dimension of enduring strategic significance. The complexity and cost of international shipping, customs clearance, and last-mile delivery in destination countries impose disproportionate burdens on small exporters with limited scale and bargaining power. [18] document that logistics costs can absorb 15–35% of product value for Indonesian MSMEs exporting to ASEAN markets, rendering price competitiveness a severe challenge. Innovative logistics solutions—including marketplace fulfillment services, regional logistics aggregators, and shared warehousing arrangements—have emerged as strategic responses that partially offset these structural disadvantages.

Regulatory compliance represents a fourth strategic dimension that intersects with all others. [4] demonstrate that the regulatory environment—encompassing customs procedures, de minimis thresholds, product certification requirements, and value-added tax arrangements for cross-border digital trade—significantly shapes the feasibility and profitability of MSME cross-border e-commerce. Countries with streamlined digital customs procedures and higher de minimis thresholds exhibit substantially higher MSME cross-border e-commerce export volumes, confirming that regulatory architecture is a critical enabling or constraining factor in the digital export ecosystem.

2.4 Research Gaps Addressed by This Study

Despite the growing body of literature on cross-border e-commerce and MSME exports, several research gaps persist. First, most existing studies are single-country and context-specific, limiting the transferability of findings. Second, previous reviews have not systematically applied PRISMA protocols, raising concerns about selection bias and reproducibility. Third, the literature lacks an integrated strategic framework that simultaneously addresses platform, logistics, human capital, and regulatory dimensions as an interdependent system rather than isolated variables. This study directly addresses these gaps by conducting a PRISMA-guided SLR that synthesizes evidence across multiple national contexts and develops a holistic, evidence-based strategic framework for MSME cross-border e-commerce export performance.

3. Proposed Method

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design as its primary methodological approach. SLR is a research method designed to identify, evaluate, and synthesize all relevant research evidence in a systematic, transparent, and replicable manner [15], [12]. Unlike traditional narrative reviews, SLR applies rigorous protocols to minimize selection bias and ensure reproducibility. This approach was selected for its capacity to integrate findings from diverse empirical studies and generate more robust, comprehensive conclusions regarding cross-border e-commerce strategies for MSMEs.

The SLR protocol employed in this study adheres to the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines established by [8].

PRISMA constitutes the internationally recognized reporting standard most widely adopted in social science and management SLRs, ensuring transparency and completeness in documenting the review process.

3.2 Data Sources and Search Strategy

Literature searches were conducted across two primary academic databases: (1) Scopus, the world's largest multidisciplinary abstract and citation database covering internationally reputed peer-reviewed journals; and (2) SINTA (Science and Technology Index), the national scientific journal database administered by the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. The dual-database approach was designed to capture a balanced perspective integrating international scholarship with contextually grounded Indonesian empirical research.

The search strategy employed a structured combination of keywords with Boolean operators. Primary search terms included: "cross border e-commerce" OR "cross-border electronic commerce" OR "e-commerce export" AND "MSME" OR "SME" OR "small medium enterprise" AND "strategy" OR "export" OR "export performance" OR "international trade". Searches were restricted to the period 2020–2024 to ensure the currency and relevance of the analyzed literature, and were applied across article titles, abstracts, and author-defined keywords.

3.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Article selection was governed by pre-specified inclusion and exclusion criteria as presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Article Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication Period	2020 – 2024	Before 2020
Language	English and Indonesian	Languages other than English and Indonesian
Document Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Books, theses, conference proceedings, editorials, opinion pieces
Topic	Cross-border e-commerce, MSME exports, digital international strategy	Domestic e-commerce only, B2B without export component, non-MSME focus
Availability	Full text accessible via open access or institutional subscription	Full text inaccessible
Indexation	Indexed in Scopus (Q1–Q4) or SINTA (S1–S3)	Non-indexed or predatory journals

3.4. Article Selection Process (PRISMA Flow)

The article selection process followed the four-stage PRISMA flow: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion. The identification stage yielded 487 articles in total: 312 from Scopus and 175 from SINTA. Following duplicate removal, 431 unique articles proceeded to the title and abstract screening stage. Articles failing to meet the topical relevance criteria were eliminated, leaving 89 articles for full-text eligibility assessment. After full-text reading and methodological quality appraisal using a modified Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist, 42 articles met all inclusion criteria and were incorporated into the final synthesis.

Methodological quality assessment was conducted independently by two reviewers using the adapted CASP checklist for management and business research. Each article was assessed on clarity of research objectives, appropriateness of research design, validity of measurement, rigor of data analysis, and relevance of findings to the research questions. Inter-rater disagreements were resolved through consensus discussion.

3.5. Data Extraction and Synthesis

Data were extracted using a standardized form capturing: article identity (authors, year, title, journal), research objectives, methodology, research context (country and sector), key variables, principal findings, and strategic implications. Data synthesis was conducted using thematic synthesis [14], whereby findings from individual articles were systematically grouped into recurrent and complementary strategic themes. This process yielded a comprehensive strategy framework grounded in empirical evidence from the 42 analyzed studies.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Profile of Analyzed Articles

Of the 42 articles included in the final synthesis, the annual distribution reveals a consistent upward trend: 5 articles (2020), 8 articles (2021), 11 articles (2022), 12 articles (2023), and 6 articles (2024, through the search cutoff date). This trajectory reflects the growing academic attention directed toward cross-border e-commerce issues following the COVID-19 pandemic, which dramatically accelerated digital platform adoption among small business operators globally [10], [3].

By country of study context, Indonesia constitutes the most frequent research setting (18 articles, 42.86%), followed by China (9 articles), Malaysia (5 articles), Vietnam (4 articles), and other Asian economies (6 articles). Methodologically, quantitative research predominates (21 articles, 50.00%), followed by qualitative approaches (13 articles, 30.95%) and mixed methods (8 articles, 19.05%). The most frequently examined platforms are Alibaba/AliExpress, Shopee, Amazon, and Lazada. By database indexation, 24 articles are indexed in Scopus (Q1: 7, Q2: 9, Q3: 6, Q4: 2) and 18 in SINTA (S1: 6, S2: 8, S3: 4). Table 2 presents a representative sample of 15 articles included in the analysis.

Table 2. Representative Sample of Analyzed Articles

No	Author(s)	Year	Journal / Index	Research Focus
1	Luo et al.	2022	Journal of International Marketing (Scopus Q1)	Content localization strategies and their effect on cross-border sales conversion rates
2	Ramadhani et al.	2022	Jurnal Manajemen Indonesia (SINTA 2)	Barriers to cross-border e-commerce adoption among Indonesian craft MSMEs
3	Susanto & Wahyuni	2023	Jurnal Ekonomi dan Bisnis (SINTA 2)	Role of digital literacy in MSME export performance via digital platforms
4	Wulandari & Prabowo	2021	Jurnal Bisnis dan Manajemen (SINTA 3)	Logistics barriers and shipping solutions for MSMEs exporting to ASEAN markets
5	Firmansyah et al.	2023	Asian Journal of Business Research (Scopus Q2)	Digital customs regulations and their impact on MSME export volumes in ASEAN
6	Zhang & Liu	2022	Electronic Commerce Research (Scopus Q1)	Platform adoption model and success determinants for small cross-border exporters
7	Salsabila & Kurniawan	2022	Jurnal Ilmu Manajemen (SINTA 2)	MSME export transformation via digital platforms in the post-pandemic period
8	Fatimah et al.	2023	Jurnal Administrasi Bisnis (SINTA 2)	Southeast Asian market penetration strategies for

No	Author(s)	Year	Journal / Index	Research Focus
				Indonesian fashion MSMEs via Shopee
9	Nguyen et al.	2021	International Journal of Emerging Markets (Scopus Q2)	Cross-border e-commerce as an export channel for SMEs in developing countries
10	Santoso & Hendri	2023	Jurnal Pengembangan Wiraswasta (SINTA 3)	Digital export mentoring programs and their impact on MSME performance

4.2. Thematic Mapping of Strategic Findings

The thematic synthesis of 42 analyzed articles reveals four dominant strategic themes that consistently emerge as key determinants of MSME success in cross-border e-commerce. These themes are interconnected and together constitute a holistic strategy ecosystem. Each theme is elaborated below with supporting empirical evidence.

4.3. Strategy 1: Digital Platform Adaptation and Content Localization

The first and most prominent finding of this SLR is the critical importance of digital platform adaptation and content localization as a fundamental strategy in cross-border e-commerce. [6] found that small businesses investing in product content localization—encompassing translated product descriptions, adapted visual materials, adjusted sizing and measurement systems, and culturally personalized marketing communications—achieved conversion rates 2.3 times higher than those deploying generic, non-localized content.

[19] reinforce this finding by identifying platform selection as the single most critical strategic decision for MSME newcomers in cross-border e-commerce. Platforms such as Alibaba/AliExpress tend to be better suited for competitively priced manufactured goods, while Etsy proves more effective for high-value artisanal and handcrafted products. Misalignment between product characteristics and platform ecosystem is one of the leading causes of MSME failure in digital exports.

In the Indonesian context, [9] identified that most craft MSMEs failing to leverage cross-border platforms encountered difficulties in producing internationally standardized product photography, composing persuasive English-language product descriptions, and setting prices that account for international shipping costs while maintaining competitive margins. This research confirms that digital product presentation capacity is not merely an aesthetic consideration but a commercially determinative factor in foreign consumer purchasing decisions [9].

[10] add the dimension of platform algorithm management to the digital adaptation strategy. Understanding marketplace Search Engine Optimization (SEO) mechanisms, rating and review systems, and paid advertising management within cross-border marketplace ecosystems has been shown to significantly enhance MSME product visibility in international markets. MSMEs actively managing their digital reputation through rapid responses to foreign buyer reviews and inquiries demonstrate higher customer retention rates.

4.4. Strategy 2: Logistics Optimization and Supply Chain Management

The second dominant strategic theme is logistics optimization and cross-border supply chain management. [18] identify logistics costs and uncertainty as the second most significant barrier—after digital capability limitations—for Indonesian MSMEs seeking to enter export markets via e-commerce. International shipping costs can absorb 15–35% of product value, a proportion that frequently renders MSME products non-competitive in global markets.

[7] compared various logistics models utilized by MSMEs across Southeast Asia and found that Fulfillment by Marketplace (FBM)—whereby the e-commerce platform manages warehousing, packaging, and shipping on behalf of sellers—significantly reduces MSME operational burdens while simultaneously improving delivery speed and customer satisfaction. This model proved particularly effective for export-novice MSMEs because it eliminates the need for upfront investment in independent logistics infrastructure.

[3] specifically examined the logistics strategies of Indonesian fashion MSMEs utilizing Shopee for Southeast Asian market penetration. Their findings indicate that partnerships with local logistics aggregators possessing established networks in destination countries reduce average shipping costs by approximately 22% compared to conventional courier services. Furthermore, optimizing packaging for volumetric efficiency and ensuring compliance with destination country customs regulations demonstrably reduces product return rates and customs rejection incidents.

[11] highlight adaptive inventory management as a frequently overlooked supply chain component. The ability to perform demand forecasting based on platform data, maintain proportional safety stock levels, and offer flexibility in multi-warehouse fulfillment arrangements are operational competencies that distinguish long-term digital export success stories from those failing due to an inability to fulfill seasonal demand surges.

4.5. Strategy 3: Digital Literacy and Human Resource Capacity Development

The third consistently prominent theme is the central role of digital literacy and human resource capacity in determining cross-border e-commerce success. [13] found that the digital literacy level of MSME entrepreneurs—measured through platform usage capability, data analytics comprehension, and digital marketing competence—is the strongest single predictor of export performance, surpassing even capital endowment and business age as explanatory variables. This finding carries significant policy implications for the design of MSME development programs.

In their study of 240 MSMEs in Central Java, [13] classified MSME digital readiness into three categories: digital novices, digital adopters, and digital leaders. MSMEs classified as digital leaders recorded average export values 4.7 times higher than digital novices, confirming a robust causal relationship between digital capacity and export performance.

[11] evaluated the effectiveness of government- and private-sector-initiated digital export mentoring programs. Programs combining technical platform training with international business mentoring and global buyer networking generated an average 67% increase in participant export revenues within 12 months of program completion. By contrast, programs focusing exclusively on technical aspects without business mindset development and networking components demonstrated substantially lower effectiveness.

The dimension of language and cross-cultural communication capacity also receives significant attention in the literature. [4] emphasize that English-language—or target market language—communication ability, not only for product descriptions but also for negotiation, complaint handling, and repeat buyer relationship building, constitutes a critical competence that MSME export training programs must explicitly and purposefully address.

4.6. Strategy 4: Regulatory Compliance and Trade Facilitation

The fourth strategically significant theme identified in the literature is regulatory compliance and trade facilitation mechanism utilization. [4] analyze the impact of digital customs regulatory frameworks—specifically de minimis threshold policies and simplified customs procedures—on MSME e-commerce export volumes across ASEAN member states. They find that countries implementing higher de minimis thresholds and streamlined digital customs procedures experience significantly higher MSME cross-border e-commerce export growth rates.

In the Indonesian context, [9] identify that unfamiliarity with export regulations—including export documentation procedures, product certification requirements, and export tax restitution mechanisms—constitutes a serious barrier for 68% of surveyed MSMEs. This finding underscores the necessity of systematic regulatory assistance as an integral component of digital export development programs.

[7] compare trade facilitation models in Vietnam and Indonesia, finding that an integrated digital single window export system—enabling MSMEs to complete all export licensing and documentation processes through a unified platform—demonstrably reduces regulatory compliance time and costs by up to 40%. Integration between e-commerce platforms and national digital customs systems represents the highest-impact policy intervention for MSME digital exporters.

Intellectual property protection emerges as a significant regulatory concern in the literature. [6] note that MSMEs with innovative or culturally distinctive products—such as batik, traditional carvings, and artisanal food products—are particularly vulnerable to imitation and counterfeiting on international platforms. Proactive trademark registration,

copyright protection, and geographical indication certification constitute protective strategies with not only legal but also commercial dimensions, as authenticated cultural products command trust premiums and higher price points in international markets.

4.7. An Integrated Strategic Framework

Based on the synthesis of the four strategic themes, this study develops an integrated strategic framework for cross-border e-commerce utilization in MSME export development. The framework conceptualizes how the four principal strategies—digital platform adaptation, logistics optimization, digital literacy and human resource development, and regulatory compliance—interact synergistically to produce optimal export performance outcomes. It is conceptualized as a layered system in which digital human capital forms the foundational layer, the regulatory environment functions as an enabling infrastructure, and logistics and digital platforms serve as the operational engines of export activity.

A critical implication of this framework is that cross-border e-commerce strategy cannot be approached in isolation. Interventions narrowly focused on a single dimension—for instance, platform training without simultaneously addressing the logistics ecosystem and regulatory compliance—tend to produce limited and unsustainable impacts [19], [11]. A holistic approach that simultaneously integrates all four strategic dimensions is a prerequisite for meaningful and durable digital export transformation among MSMEs.

6. Conclusions

This study yields several important conclusions through the systematic synthesis of 42 peer-reviewed articles from Scopus and SINTA databases covering the period 2020–2024. First, cross-border e-commerce has been empirically confirmed as a viable and strategically significant export modality for MSMEs, particularly in Southeast Asian developing economies. While structural barriers remain substantial, converging evidence demonstrates that MSMEs equipped with appropriate strategies are capable of competing effectively in global markets through digital platforms.

Second, four principal strategies are empirically demonstrated to enhance MSME export performance through cross-border e-commerce: (1) target-market-oriented digital platform adaptation and content localization; (2) efficient and responsive logistics optimization and cross-border supply chain management; (3) comprehensive and sustained digital literacy and human resource capacity development; and (4) proactive international trade regulatory compliance combined with strategic utilization of available trade facilitation mechanisms.

Third, these four strategies are not independent but interact within a synergistic ecosystem. Maximum effectiveness is achieved when all four are implemented in an integrated and holistic manner rather than in isolation. This finding has important implications for MSME export policy design, government and private sector mentoring program architecture, and future research prioritization.

This SLR acknowledges several limitations. First, the search was confined to two primary databases, meaning potentially relevant literature may have been missed. Second, methodological and contextual heterogeneity across included studies limits the generalizability of findings. Third, quantitative meta-analysis was precluded by insufficient uniformity in effect size reporting across studies. Future research directions include: (1) expanding database coverage in subsequent SLRs; (2) developing standardized instruments for measuring MSME cross-border e-commerce readiness; (3) conducting longitudinal studies to examine the dynamics of strategy implementation over time; and (4) exploring strategic variation across industrial sectors and MSME size categories.

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