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Original Article

The Influence of Human Resources on MSME Export Capability with Digital Competence as a Mediating Variable

(Study on the Manufacturer of Pot Growing Balls (Bobupot), Green Galeria Indonesia Surabaya, and Terracotta Pots UD Gerabah Merah Malang)

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the influence of human resources (HR) on the export capabilities of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) with digital competence as a mediating variable. The study focused on two MSMEs producing crafts, namely the producer of Bola Tumbuh Pot (Bobupot) Green Galeria Indonesia from Surabaya and the producer of terracotta pots UD Gerabah Merah from Malang. The research method used is a quantitative approach with the Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) analysis technique. Data were obtained through questionnaires distributed to 97 respondents who were employees of the two MSMEs. The results of the study indicate that: (1) The quality of HR has a positive and significant effect on digital competence with a path coefficient of 0.683 ($p < 0.001$); (2) Digital competence has a positive and significant effect on export capability with a path coefficient of 0.572 ($p < 0.001$); (3) The quality of HR has a direct effect on export capability with a path coefficient of 0.317 ($p < 0.05$); (4) Digital competence is proven to significantly mediate the relationship between HR quality and export capability with a partial mediation effect of 0.391 ($p < 0.01$). This study provides theoretical and practical implications for HR development in the MSME sector, especially in increasing export capability through the development of digital competence.

Keywords: Human Resources, Digital Competence, Export Capability, MSMEs, SEM-PLS.

1. Introduction

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) have a strategic role in the Indonesian economy, especially in absorbing labor and contributing to Gross Domestic Product (GDP). According to data from the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs (2023), MSMEs contribute around 61.07% to Indonesia's GDP and absorb 97% of the total workforce. However, the export capability of Indonesian MSMEs is still relatively low compared to other ASEAN countries. Of Indonesia's total exports, the contribution of MSMEs only reaches 14.37% (BPS, 2023).

In the current era of globalization and digitalization, the export capability of MSMEs is becoming increasingly important to increase competitiveness in the global market. One important factor that influences export capability is the quality of human resources (HR). Previous studies have shown that good HR quality can increase a company's export capability (Leonidou et al., 2018; Oura et al., 2016). However, the relationship between HR quality and export capability is not always direct, but can be mediated by other factors, one of which is digital competence.

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Digital competence is very important in the era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0, where digitalization is the key to business success, including in export activities. Digital competence includes the ability to use digital technology, access information, communicate, and collaborate digitally, and manage security and privacy in a digital environment (van Laar et al., 2020). In the context of MSMEs, digital competence can facilitate access to global markets, expand international business networks, and increase the efficiency of the export process.

This study focuses on two MSMEs producing crafts from East Java, namely the producer of Bola Tumbuh Pot (Bobupot) Green Galeria Indonesia from Surabaya and the producer of terracotta pots UD Gerabah Merah from Malang. These two MSMEs were chosen because they have high export potential and have begun to penetrate the international market. Bobupot is an innovative product that combines the concept of hydroponics with aesthetic design, while the terracotta pots from UD Gerabah Merah have a unique design and quality that have been recognized in the international market.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the influence of HR quality on MSME export capabilities with digital competence as a mediating variable. Specifically, the objectives of this study are:

a. Analyzing the influence of human resource quality on digital competence.
b. Analyzing the influence of digital competence on export capabilities.
c. Analyzing the direct influence of human resource quality on export capabilities.
d. Analyzing the mediating role of digital competence in the relationship between human resource quality and export capabilities.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Human Resources (HR) in the Context of MSMEs

Human Resources (HR) are strategic asset for organizations, including MSMEs. According to Barney (1991), in the Resource-Based View (RBV) framework, quality HR can be a source of sustainable competitive advantage. In the context of MSMEs, HR quality can be seen from several dimensions, including education level, work experience, technical skills, managerial skills, and international orientation (Onkelinx et al., 2016).

Previous studies have shown that HR quality plays an important role in the success of MSMEs. For example, research conducted by Muogbo (2013) found that effective HR management practices have a positive effect on MSME performance. Meanwhile, research conducted by Cerrato & Piva (2012) showed that HR characteristics, such as international experience and foreign language proficiency, have a positive effect on MSME internationalization.

2.2. Digital Competence

Digital competence is defined as the ability to use digital technologies effectively and efficiently in different contexts (Ferrari, 2012). According to the Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp 2.1) developed by the European Commission, digital competence covers five areas: (1) information and data literacy, (2) communication and collaboration, (3) digital content creation, (4) security, and (5) problem solving (Carretero et al., 2017).

In a business context, digital competence refers to the ability to use digital technologies to support business activities, such as digital marketing, e-commerce, customer relationship management (CRM), and data analysis (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015). Research conducted by North et al. (2019) shows that digital competence can improve MSME performance and facilitate internationalization.

2.3. Export Capabilities

Export capability is defined as a company's ability to identify, develop, and exploit international market opportunities (Kabongo & Okpara, 2019). Export capability encompasses various dimensions, including international marketing capability, product adaptability, risk management capability, and international networking capability (Torkkeli et al., 2019).

Leonidou et al. (2011) identified that high export capability can improve a company's export performance, both in terms of sales volume, growth, and profitability. In the context of MSMEs, export capability is becoming increasingly important given the limited domestic market and increasingly tight global competition (Paul et al., 2017).

2.4. Relationship between Human Resources Quality, Digital Competence, and Export Capability

The relationship between HR quality and digital competence has been discussed in several previous studies. For example, research conducted by Ukko et al. (2019) shows that HR quality, especially in terms of education and training levels, has a positive effect on the adoption of digital technology and the development of digital competence in organizations.

Meanwhile, the relationship between digital competence and export capability has also been discussed in several studies. Research conducted by Eduardsen & Ivang (2016) found that the adoption of digital technology and the development of digital competence can facilitate the internationalization of MSMEs by reducing barriers and increasing access to global markets.

Research conducted by Mathews et al. (2016) shows that effective use of social media and e-commerce can improve the export capabilities of MSMEs. Meanwhile, research conducted by Giotopoulos et al. (2017) found that the adoption of information and communication technology (ICT) has a positive effect on the export performance of MSMEs.

Based on the literature review above, this study proposes a conceptual model that links HR quality, digital competence, and export capability. In this model, digital competence is hypothesized as a mediating variable in the relationship between HR quality and export capability.

2.5. Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis

Based on the literature review above, the conceptual framework in this study can be described as follows:

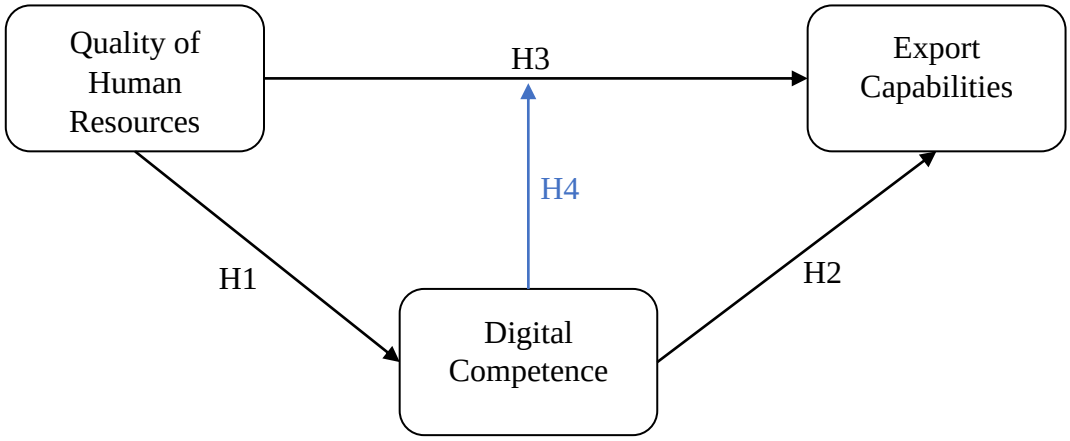

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Research

From the conceptual framework, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H1: The quality of human resources has a positive influence on digital competence.

H2: Digital competence has a positive impact on export capabilities.
H3: The quality of human resources has a positive effect on export capabilities.
H4: Digital competence mediates the relationship between human resource quality and export capabilities.

3. Methods

This study uses a quantitative approach with a causal research design to test the effect of HR quality on MSME export capabilities with digital competence as a mediating variable. This study is cross-sectional, where data is collected at a certain point in time.

3.1. Population and Sample

The population in this study was all employees in two MSMEs, namely the producer of Pot Growing Balls (Bobupot) Green Galeria Indonesia from Surabaya and the producer of terracotta pots UD Gerabah Merah from Malang. The total population was 127 employees, with details of 68 employees from Green Galeria Indonesia and 59 employees from UD Gerabah Merah.

The sample determination used the Slovin formula with a 5% error rate, so that the number of samples obtained was 97 respondents. The sampling technique used was proportional stratified random sampling to ensure representation from both MSMEs. Thus, the number of samples from Green Galeria Indonesia was 52 respondents, and from UD Gerabah Merah was 45 respondents.

3.2. Operationalization of Variables

Table 1. Operationalization of Variables

Variables	Indicator	Reference
Human Resources Quality (X)	Level of education	Onkelinx et al. (2016); Cerrato & Piva (2012); Muogbo (2013)
	Work experience	Leonidou et al. (2018); Cerrato & Piva (2012); Oura et al. (2016)
	Technical skills	Barney (1991); Oura et al. (2016); North et al. (2019)
	Managerial skills	Muogbo (2013); Paul et al. (2017); Torkeli et al. (2019)
	International orientation	Cerrato & Piva (2012); Leonidou et al. (2018); Torkeli et al. (2019)
Digital Competence (M)	Information and data literacy	Ferrari (2012); Carretero et al. (2017); van Laar et al. (2020)
	Digital communication and collaboration	van Laar et al. (2020); Carretero et al. (2017); Taiminen & Karjaluoto (2015)
	Digital content creation	Ferrari (2012); Carretero et al. (2017); North et al. (2019)
	Digital security	Carretero et al. (2017); van Laar et al. (2020); Ukko et al. (2019)
	Digital problem solving	Ferrari (2012); van Laar et al. (2020); North et al. (2019)

Export Capability (Y)	International marketing capabilities	Leonidou et al. (2011); Mathews et al. (2016); Oura et al. (2016)
	Product adaptability	Kabongo & Okpara (2019); Paul et al. (2017); Leonidou et al. (2011)
	Export risk management capabilities	Kabongo & Okpara (2019); Torkeli et al. (2019); Leonidou et al. (2018)
	Ability to build international networks	Torkeli et al. (2019); Eduardsen & Ivang (2016); Mathews et al. (2016)

3.3. Data Collection

Primary data were collected through a questionnaire compiled based on the operationalization of the indicator. The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. Before being distributed, the questionnaire was tested for validity and reliability through a pilot test with 30 respondents. In addition, semi-structured interviews were also conducted with the owners and managers of the two MSMEs to obtain in-depth information related to the research indicator.

Secondary data was obtained from various sources, such as annual reports of MSMEs, data from the Cooperatives and MSMEs Service, and relevant scientific publications

3.4. Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using the Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) method with the help of SmartPLS 4.0 software. SEM-PLS was chosen because of several indicators: (1) it is suitable for complex models with many constructs and indicators, (2) it does not require the assumption of normal distribution, (3) it is suitable for small sample sizes, and (4) it can test mediation effects simultaneously (Hair et al., 2019).

Data analysis was carried out in two stages: (1) evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) to test the validity and reliability of the construct, and (2) evaluation of the indicator model (inner model) to test the hypothesis.

3.4.1 Evaluation of Measurement Model (Outer Model)

Evaluation of the measurement model is carried out to test the validity and reliability of the construct, including:

1. Convergent validity, measured by the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value > 0.5 and loading factor > 0.7.
2. Discriminant validity, measured by the Fornell-Larcker Criterion method and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio < 0.9.
3. Reliability, measured by the Composite Reliability (CR) value > 0.7 and Cronbach's Alpha > 0.7.

3.4.2 Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)

Evaluation of the indicator model is carried out to test the hypothesis, including:

1. The coefficient of determination (R^2) value is used to measure the predictive power of the model.
2. Stone-Geisser's Q^2 value to measure the predictive relevance of the model.
3. The path coefficient and t-statistic values are used to test the significance of the relationship.
4. Indirect effects analysis to test mediation effects.

To test the significance of the relationship and mediation effects, bootstrapping was performed with 5,000 resamples.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Respondent Characteristics

Of the 97 respondents who participated in this study, 52 respondents (53.6%) came from Green Galeria Indonesia, and 45 respondents (46.4%) came from UD Gerabah Merah. Based on gender, there were 61 respondents (62.9%) male and 36 respondents (37.1%) female. In terms of age, the majority of respondents were aged 31-40 years (43.3%), followed by respondents aged 21-30 years (28.9%), 41-50 years (18.6%), and above 50 years (9.3%).

In terms of indicators, 11.3% of respondents had a junior high school education or equivalent, 45.4% had a high school education or equivalent, 10.3% had a diploma education, 27.8% had a bachelor's degree, and 5.2% had a master's degree. Meanwhile, in terms of length of service, 27.8% of respondents had worked for less than 2 years, 38.1% had worked for 2-5 years, 24.7% had worked for 6-10 years, and 9.3% had worked for more than 10 years.

4.2. Results of Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

4.2.1 Convergent Validity

The results of the analysis show that all indicators have a loading factor value > 0.7. According to Hair et al. (2019), a loading factor value > 0.6 is still acceptable if the construct AVE value is > 0.5.

Table 2. AVE Values of Constructs

Construct	AVE
Human Resources Quality (X)	0.648
Digital Competence (M)	0.673
Export Capability (Y)	0.715

4.2.2 Discriminant Validity

The results of the Fornell-Larcker Criterion analysis show that the square root value of AVE for each construct is greater than the correlation value between the construct and other constructs (Table 3), which indicates good discriminant validity.

Table 3. Fornell-Larcker Criterion Results

4.3. Construct	4.4. Human Resources Quality (X)	4.5. Digital Competence (Y)	4.6. Export Capability (Z)
4.7. Human Resources Quality (X)	4.8. 0.805	4.9.	4.10.
4.11. Digital Competence (M)	4.12. 0.683	4.13. 0.82	4.14.
4.15. Export Capability (Y)	4.16. 0.607	4.17. 0.695	4.18. 0.846

Note: Numbers in bold are the square root values of AVE

In addition, the results of the HTMT ratio analysis show that all HTMT values < 0.9 (Table 4), which also indicates good discriminant validity.

Table 4. HTMT Ratio Results

Construct	Human Resources Quality (X)	Digital Competence (Y)	Export Capability (Z)
Human Resources Quality (X)			
Digital Competence (M)	0.729		
Export Capability (Y)	0.641	0.747	

4.2.3 Reliability

The results of the analysis show that all constructs have Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha values > 0.7 (Table 5), which indicates good reliability.

Table 5. Reliability Test Results

Construct	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
Human Resources Quality (X)	0.916	0.895
Digital Competence (M)	0.925	0.907
Export Capability (Y)	0.937	0.921

4.3 Structural Model Evaluation Results (Inner Model)

4.3.1 R^2 and Q^2 values

The results of the analysis show that the R^2 value for digital competence (M) is 0.466, which means that 46.6% of the variation in digital competence can be explained by the quality of human resources. Meanwhile, the R^2 value for export capability (Y) is 0.531, which means that 53.1% of the variation in export capability can be explained by the quality of human resources and digital competence. According to Chin (1998), the R^2 values of 0.466 and 0.531 are included in the moderate category.

The analysis results also show that the Q^2 value for digital competence (M) is 0.301 and for export capability (Y) is 0.362. The Q^2 value > 0 indicates that the model has good predictive relevance.

4.3.2 Hypothesis Testing Results

The results of the hypothesis testing are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Connection	Path Coefficient	t-statistic	p-value	Information
H1	Human Resources Quality (X) → Digital Competence (m)	0.683	11,724	0	Accepted
H2	Digital Competence (M) → Export Capability (Y)	0.572	5,863	0	Accepted
H3	Human Resources Quality (X) →	0.317	3,254	0.001	Accepted

	Export Capability (Y)				
H4	Human Resources Quality (X) → Digital Competence (M) → Export Capability (Y)	0.391	5,118	0.004	Accepted

The results of the hypothesis testing show that:

1. H1: Human resource quality has a positive and significant effect on digital competence with a path coefficient of 0.683 (t = 11.724, p < 0.001), so H1 is accepted.
2. H2: Digital competence has a positive and significant effect on export capability with a path coefficient of 0.572 (t = 5.863, p < 0.001), so H2 is accepted.
3. H3: Human resource quality has a positive and significant effect on export capability with a path coefficient of 0.317 (t = 3.254, p = 0.001), so H3 is accepted.
4. H4: Digital competence significantly mediates the relationship between HR quality and export capability with an indirect effect of 0.391 (t = 5.118, p = 0.004), so H4 is accepted. Since the direct effect (X→Y) is also significant, the mediation that occurs is partial.

4.3.3 Comparison between Green Galeria Indonesia and UD Gerabah Merah

To enrich the research results, a multi-group analysis (MGA) was conducted to compare the results between Green Galeria Indonesia and UD Gerabah Merah. The results of the MGA analysis are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Multi-Group Analysis (MGA) Results

Connection	Path Coefficient GGI	Path Coefficient UGM	Difference	p-value Difference
Human Resources Quality (X) → Digital Competence (M)	0.715	0.651	0.064	0.182
Digital Competence (M) → Export Capability (Y)	0.598	0.547	0.051	0.217
Human Resources Quality (X) → Export Capability (Y)	0.328	0.305	0.023	0.345

Description: GGI = Green Galeria Indonesia; UGM = UD Gerabah Merah

The results of the MGA analysis showed that there was no significant difference between Green Galeria Indonesia and UD Gerabah Merah in all tested relationships (p > 0.05). This indicates that the proposed research model can be applied to both MSMEs.

4.4 Discussion

4.4.1 The Influence of Human Resources Quality on Digital Competence

In the context of UMKM Green Galeria Indonesia and UD Gerabah Merah, the results of the study showed that employees with higher levels of education, more diverse work experience, and stronger international orientation have better digital competence. This can be explained because employees with these characteristics tend to have higher awareness and motivation to develop their digital skills. In addition, employees with good technical and managerial skills are also more adaptable to digital technology because they have a more systematic knowledge base and framework of thinking.

The results of the interview with the owner of Green Galeria Indonesia revealed that the company actively encourages the development of employees' digital competencies through training and performance-based reward systems. Meanwhile, the owner of UD Gerabah Merah emphasized the importance of intergenerational knowledge transfer, where younger employees with good digital competencies share their knowledge with more senior employees with good technical skills

4.4.2 The Influence of Digital Competence on Export Capabilities

The results of the study show that digital competence has a positive and significant effect on export capability with a path coefficient of 0.572 ($p < 0.001$). This means that the higher the digital competence, the higher the export capability. This finding supports research conducted by Eduardsen & Ivang (2016) which found that the adoption of digital technology and the development of digital competence can facilitate the internationalization of MSMEs by reducing barriers and increasing access to global markets.

In today's digital era, digital competence is key to accessing and utilizing information about international markets, interacting with customers and business partners in various countries, and optimizing the export process. Good digital competence allows MSMEs to conduct market research online, conduct effective digital marketing, manage relationships with international customers virtually, and use e-commerce platforms for export sales.

At Green Galeria Indonesia, the use of social media and e-commerce platforms has successfully expanded market reach to Japan, Australia, and several European countries. Employees with good digital competence are able to develop effective digital marketing strategies, create engaging content, and interact with international customers responsively. Meanwhile, at UD Gerabah Merah, digital competence helps in the process of adapting products to meet international market standards and preferences, as well as in optimizing the export logistics process.

4.4.3 Direct Influence of Human Resources Quality on Export Capability

The results of the study show that the quality of human resources has a positive and significant effect on export capability with a path coefficient of 0.317 ($p = 0.001$). This means that the higher the quality of human resources, the higher the export capability. This finding is in line with research conducted by Leonidou et al. (2018) and Oura et al. (2016) which found that good quality human resources can increase a company's export capability.

The quality of human resources can affect export capabilities through various mechanisms. First, employees with higher levels of education and more diverse work experience have a better understanding of international markets and global business dynamics. Second, employees with good technical skills can produce quality products that meet international standards. Third, employees with good managerial skills can optimize the export process, from raw material procurement to product delivery to international

customers. Fourth, employees with a strong international orientation have higher motivation and confidence to develop export markets.

At Green Galeria Indonesia, good quality human resources are reflected in the ability to develop innovative and environmentally friendly Bobupot products, which are the main attraction in the international market. In addition, the ability to communicate in English and understanding of foreign cultures facilitate the negotiation process and build relationships with international business partners. Meanwhile, at UD Gerabah Merah, expertise in the production of high-quality terracotta pots owned by senior employees is the foundation for producing products that meet international standards.

4.4.4 The Mediating Role of Digital Competence in the Relationship between Human Resources Quality and Export Capabilities

The results of the study show that digital competence partially mediates the relationship between HR quality and export capability, with an indirect effect of 0.391 ($p = 0.004$). This means that part of the influence of HR quality on export capability is mediated by digital competence. This finding enriches the understanding of the mechanisms linking HR quality and export capability, which have not been widely discussed in the literature.

Partial mediation shows that digital competence is not the only mechanism linking HR quality and export capability. HR quality can also affect export capability directly through other mechanisms, such as international experience, business networks, and entrepreneurial orientation.

In the current era of digitalization, digital competence is becoming increasingly important in mediating the relationship between human resource quality and export capabilities. Quality human resources with good digital competence can be more effective in identifying international market opportunities, developing effective digital marketing strategies, building relationships with international customers and business partners virtually, and optimizing the export process.

At Green Galeria Indonesia and UD Gerabah Merah, digital competency development has become a priority in the HR development strategy. Both MSMEs realize that to improve export capabilities, it is not enough to rely on good HR quality, but also need to develop employee digital competencies. This is reflected in training programs that not only focus on developing technical and managerial skills, but also on developing digital competencies

5 Conclusion

Based on the research results and discussion, several conclusions can be drawn as follows:

a. The quality of human resources has a positive and significant effect on digital competence in UMKM producers of Pot Growing Balls (Bobupot) Green Galeria Indonesia, and terracotta pot producers UD Gerabah Merah. This shows that the higher the quality of human resources, the higher the digital competence.
b. Digital competence has a positive and significant effect on export capability in both MSMEs. This shows that the higher the digital competence, the higher the export capability.
c. The quality of human resources has a positive and significant effect on export capabilities in both MSMEs. This shows that the higher the quality of human resources, the higher the export capabilities.
d. Digital competence partially mediates the relationship between HR quality and export capability in both MSMEs. This shows that part of the influence of HR quality on export capability is mediated by digital competence.

e. There is no significant difference between Green Galeria Indonesia and UD Gerabah Merah in all tested relationships. This shows that the proposed research model can be applied to both MSMEs, even though they have different product characteristics.

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