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WHEN RESOURCES ARE NOT ENOUGH: LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AS A KEY DRIVER OF SME's PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the relationships between resources, local knowledge, and SME's performance by integrating the Resource-Based View and Knowledge-Based View perspectives. A quantitative cross-sectional approach was employed using primary data collected through a structured questionnaire. The study was conducted among batik MSMEs in Pekalongan, Central Java, Indonesia. A purposive sampling technique was applied with specific criteria. A total of 100 MSMEs were selected as the research sample. Data analysis was carried out using (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS. The results show that resources do not have a significant direct effect on MSME performance, indicating that resource availability alone is insufficient to improve business outcomes. However, resources have a significant positive effect on local knowledge, and local knowledge significantly influences MSME performance. Furthermore, the mediation analysis confirms that local knowledge fully mediates the relationship between resources and MSME performance.

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INTRODUCTION

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a crucial role in national and local economic development (Susanto et al., 2020; Widnyani & Astitiani, 2023). Their contributions to gross domestic product, employment creation, and community-based economic empowerment position MSMEs as the backbone of many developing economies. Despite their strategic importance, however, MSME performance remains uneven and generally suboptimal. Numerous MSMEs continue to face challenges related to low productivity, limited innovation capacity, and weak competitiveness (Setyorini et al., 2022). These challenges are further intensified by globalization, rapid digital transformation, and shifting consumer preferences, which require MSMEs to become more adaptive and sustainable (Chatterjee et al., 2023).

Within the strategic management literature, organizational performance has traditionally been explained through the Resource-Based View (RBV), which emphasizes the importance of possessing and effectively managing strategic resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (Yang et al., 2015). In the MSME context, resources include financial capital, human resources, access to technology, business networks, and institutional support (Garg & Goyal, 2012; Rakshit et al., 2022). A substantial body of empirical research has demonstrated that resources positively influence MSME performance, including business growth, profitability, and long-term survival. Nevertheless, empirical observations reveal a paradox: MSMEs with relatively adequate resources do not always exhibit superior performance. This phenomenon suggests that resources are necessary but not sufficient to fully explain variations in MSME performance.

To address the limitations of RBV, the Knowledge-Based View (KBV) has emerged as an extension that positions knowledge as the most critical strategic resource of the firm. KBV argues that sustainable competitive advantage arises from an organization's ability to create, integrate, and apply knowledge effectively (L'Écuyer et al., 2019). In locally embedded MSMEs, the most relevant form of knowledge is local knowledge, which is rooted in historical experience, cultural practices, social interactions, and long-term engagement with the surrounding environment. Local knowledge encompasses traditional production techniques, deep understanding of local market preferences, community-based values, and adaptive strategies developed through generations (Silapacharanan et al., 2022).

Previous studies have highlighted the strategic role of local knowledge in enhancing product differentiation, fostering innovation grounded in tradition, and strengthening business identity. MSMEs that successfully integrate local knowledge into their business models often develop stronger emotional connections with customers and greater resilience to external shocks. However, empirical findings regarding the effect of local knowledge on MSME performance remain inconsistent. While some studies report a positive and significant relationship, others find weak, indirect, or even insignificant effects.

Field-level phenomena further illustrate that many MSMEs possess rich local knowledge but fail to translate it into superior business performance. Local knowledge is frequently tacit, undocumented, and informally managed, making it difficult to scale or commercialize (Chatterjee et al., 2023; Gatautis et al., 2019). At the same time, limited resources such as insufficient capital, low human resource capacity, and restricted access to technology constrain MSMEs' ability to develop and operationalize their local knowledge. This situation suggests that local knowledge does not function in isolation

but depends heavily on the availability and quality of supporting resources (Herawati et al., 2023).

This condition highlights in MSME research. Existing studies tend to examine resources and knowledge as independent determinants of performance. Many focus on the direct impact of resources on MSME performance, while others emphasize knowledge, innovation capability, or absorptive capacity without sufficiently exploring their antecedents (Anwar et al., 2023; Auliarahman et al., 2023; Widnyani & Astitiani, 2023). Empirical studies that explicitly test the causal relationship between resources and local knowledge and examine their combined effects on MSME performance within a single integrated model remain limited, particularly in the context of locally embedded MSMEs in developing economies (Shahzad & Zhang, 2025).

Moreover, the knowledge-based MSME literature has predominantly emphasized modern forms of knowledge, such as digital knowledge, market knowledge, or technological capabilities, often overlooking local knowledge as a strategic asset. This neglect persists despite the fact that local knowledge possesses characteristics of inimitability and contextual embeddedness that make it a potentially powerful source of sustainable competitive advantage especially when supported by adequate resources. Consequently, there remains a theoretical and empirical gap regarding how resources enable the activation and strategic utilization of local knowledge to enhance MSME performance.

Based on this state of the art, the novelty of this study lies in several key aspects. First, the study integrates RBV and KBV into a unified conceptual framework to explain MSME performance, positioning local knowledge as a strategic mechanism that mediates the relationship between resources and performance. Second, this study empirically examines the influence of resources on local knowledge as a relationship that has often been assumed conceptually but rarely tested directly. Third, the study emphasizes the dual role of resources, not only as direct determinants of MSME performance but also as enabling factors that strengthen the development and effective utilization of local knowledge.

Accordingly, this study contributes to the MSME literature both theoretically and practically. From a theoretical perspective, it advances a more nuanced understanding of how resources and local knowledge interact to shape MSME performance. From a practical standpoint, the findings are expected to inform policymakers and MSME development practitioners that improving access to resources alone is insufficient; equal attention must be given to enhancing MSMEs' capacity to manage and leverage local knowledge as a strategic asset. Such an approach is essential for fostering MSME performance that is competitive, resilient, and sustainable within local economic contexts.

METHOD

This study employs a quantitative research design with an explanatory approach to examine the relationships between resources, local knowledge, and MSME performance. A cross-sectional survey method was adopted to capture empirical data from MSMEs operating within a specific local economic cluster. The unit of analysis in this study is the owner or manager of MSMEs, as they possess comprehensive knowledge regarding resource availability, utilization of local knowledge, and business performance.

The research was conducted in Batik MSME clusters in Pekalongan, Central Java, Indonesia, a region widely recognized as one of the most prominent centers of traditional batik production in the country. Pekalongan was deliberately selected due to its strong

local identity, deep-rooted local knowledge in batik craftsmanship, and the coexistence of traditional production techniques with modern business challenges. This context provides a relevant empirical setting to investigate how resources enable the development and utilization of local knowledge and how both factors influence MSME performance.

The population of this study consists of all batik MSMEs operating in Pekalongan. Due to the absence of an exact population frame and practical constraints, a purposive sampling technique was applied. The sampling criteria included: (1) MSMEs that have been operating for at least three years, (2) businesses that actively utilize local batik knowledge or traditional motifs in their production process, and (3) owners or managers who are directly involved in strategic and operational decision-making. Based on these criteria, a total of 100 MSMEs were selected as the research sample. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed directly to MSME owners or managers.

All measurement items were adapted from validated instruments in prior studies and modified to fit the local MSME context. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS version 4, following a two-stage evaluation procedure (Joseph F. Hair, 2021). First, the measurement model was assessed by examining indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability), convergent validity (average variance extracted). Second, the structural model was evaluated by analyzing path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics

The descriptive analysis presents the profile of MSME respondents involved in this study to provide an overview of their demographic and business characteristics. A total of 100 batik MSME owners and managers operating in Pekalongan, Central Java, participated in the survey. The respondent profile is important to contextualize the findings and to ensure that the sample adequately represents MSMEs embedded in a strong local knowledge environment.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	62	62.0
	Female	38	38.0
Age (Years)	26–35	28	28.0
	36–45	40	40.0
	46–55	22	22.0
	>55	10	10.0
Education Level	Primary School	8	8.0
	Junior High School	15	15.0
	Senior High School	45	45.0
	Diploma/Bachelor's	32	32.0
	Degree		
Business Age	3–5 years	18	18.0
	5–10 years	34	34.0
	>10 years	48	48.0

Number of Employees	1–5 employees	57	57.0
	6–10 employees	31	31.0
	>10 employees	12	12.0
Market Orientation	Local/Regional	52	52.0
	National	33	33.0
	Export	15	15.0

Source: Data Processed, 2025

Based on Table 1, the descriptive profile of the respondents shows that the MSMEs involved in this study are predominantly managed by male entrepreneurs (62%), although female participation (38%) remains substantial, reflecting the traditional involvement of women in batik-related activities. In terms of age, most respondents fall within the 36–45 years age group (40%), followed by those aged 26–35 years (28%), indicating that the majority of MSME owners are in their productive and mature working years, combining experience with adaptability to business challenges.

Regarding educational background, the largest proportion of respondents completed senior high school (45%), while 32% hold a diploma or bachelor's degree, suggesting that business operations are largely driven by experiential learning rather than formal management education. In terms of business age, nearly half of the MSMEs (48%) have been operating for more than 10 years, demonstrating strong local roots and accumulated tacit knowledge embedded in traditional batik production.

Most MSMEs employ 1–5 workers (57%), confirming their classification as micro and small enterprises with limited human resources. Finally, market orientation remains largely local or regional (52%), although a considerable proportion of MSMEs have expanded to national (33%) and export markets (15%).

Measurement Model

Prior to testing the structural relationships among variables, this study conducted an instrument testing procedure to ensure that all measurement items were both valid and reliable. Instrument testing is a critical stage in Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), as the quality of the measurement model directly affects the accuracy and credibility of the structural model results. Following the guidelines for PLS-SEM analysis, the evaluation of the measurement model was carried out by examining construct validity and reliability using SmartPLS. Construct validity was assessed through indicator validity (outer loading) and convergent validity (Average Variance Extracted / AVE). Then, reliability was examined using Cronbach's Alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (CR).

Table 2. Validity Testing

Variables	Indicator	Outerloading	AVE	Conclusion
Resources	X7	0.701	0.634	Valid
	X31	0.821		
	X32	0.873		
	X33	0.775		
	X34	0.802		
Local Knowledge	X1	0.754	0.622	Valid
	X2	0.768		
	X5	0.842		
SME's performance	X6	0.787	0.680	Valid
	X37	0.820		
	X38	0.857		
	X39	0.831		
	X40	0.791		

Sources: Data processed, 2025

Based on Table 2, the validity testing results indicate that all measurement indicators meet the required criteria for construct validity. The outer loading values for the resources construct range from 0.701 to 0.873, for local knowledge from 0.754 to 0.842, and for MSME performance from 0.791 to 0.857, all exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.70. This demonstrates strong indicator validity, as each item adequately represents its respective construct. In addition, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for resources (0.634), local knowledge (0.622), and MSME performance (0.680) are all above the recommended cutoff of 0.50. These results confirm that all constructs exhibit satisfactory convergent validity and are therefore considered valid for further structural model analysis.

Table 3. Reliability Testing

Variables	CA	CR	Conclusion
Resources	0.857	0.865	Reliable
Local Knowledge	0.797	0.804	Reliable
SME's performance	0.843	0.845	Reliable

Sources : Data processed, 2025

Based on Table 3, the reliability testing results demonstrate that all constructs exhibit strong internal consistency. The Cronbach's Alpha (CA) values for resources (0.857), local knowledge (0.797), and MSME performance (0.843) all exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating acceptable reliability. Similarly, the Composite Reliability (CR) values for resources (0.865), local knowledge (0.804), and MSME performance (0.845) are above the minimum standard of 0.70, confirming consistent measurement across indicators. These results suggest that the measurement instruments used in this study are reliable and capable of producing stable and consistent results.

Structural Model

After confirming that the measurement model meets the requirements of validity and reliability, the analysis proceeds to the structural model evaluation. The structural model assessment aims to examine the predictive capability of the model and to test the

hypothesized relationships among the latent constructs. The evaluation of the structural model in this study involves three main stages. First, the coefficient of determination (R^2) is assessed to determine the extent to which the exogenous variables explain the variance of the endogenous constructs. Second, model fit indices are examined to assess how well the proposed structural model fits the observed data. Finally, hypothesis testing is conducted by analyzing the path coefficients and their statistical significance using a bootstrapping procedure. This step evaluates whether the proposed relationships between resources, local knowledge, and MSME performance are empirically supported.

Table 4. R Square

Variables	R Square	Adjusted R Square
SME's performance	0.445	0.432
Local knowledge	0.411	0.405

Source : Data Processed, 2025

The R Square results presented in Table 4 indicate that the structural model has moderate explanatory power. The R^2 value for MSME performance is 0.445, with an adjusted R^2 of 0.432, indicating that resources and local knowledge together explain 44.5% of the variance in MSME performance. This suggests that nearly half of the changes in MSME performance can be attributed to the variables included in the model, while the remaining variance is influenced by other factors not examined in this study. Similarly, the R^2 value for local knowledge is 0.411 (adjusted $R^2 = 0.405$), indicating that resources explain 41.1% of the variance in local knowledge. Overall, these values demonstrate that the model has adequate predictive relevance and supports the theoretical framework linking resources, local knowledge, and MSME performance.

Table 5. Model Fit

Indicator	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.103	0.103
d_ ULS	0.959	0.959
d_ G	0.435	0.435
Chi Square	209.146	209.146
NFI	0.708	0.708

Source : Data Processed, 2025

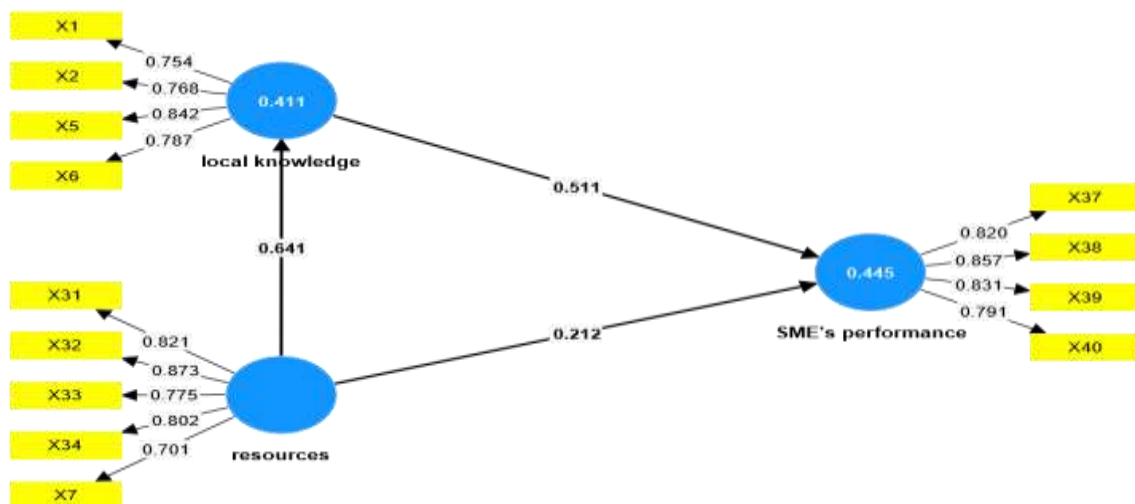
The model fit results indicate that the proposed structural model demonstrates an acceptable overall fit. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value of 0.103 is slightly above the ideal threshold of 0.08; however, it is still considered tolerable in PLS-SEM, particularly for exploratory and prediction-oriented studies involving complex models and relatively small samples. The d_ ULS (0.959) and d_ G (0.435) values show no critical discrepancies between the empirical and model-implied correlation matrices, indicating a reasonable model specification. Furthermore, the Normed Fit Index (NFI) value of 0.708 suggests a moderate level of model fit, which is acceptable in PLS-SEM contexts. Overall, these results suggest that the structural model is adequate for hypothesis testing and predictive analysis.

Table 6. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Original Sample	P Value	Conclusion
Resources => SME's performance	0.212	0.076	Not Supported
Resources => Local Knowledge	0.641	0.000	Supported
Local knowledge => SME's Performance	0.511	0.000	Supported
Resources => Local Knowledge => SME's Performance	0.328	0.000	Supported

Source : Data Processed, 2025

Picture 1. Mediation test



Source: Data Processed, 2025

The hypothesis testing results presented in Table 6 provide important insights into the relationships among resources, local knowledge, and MSME performance. The direct effect of resources on MSME performance shows a path coefficient of 0.212 with a p-value of 0.076, indicating that this relationship is not statistically significant. This suggests that resources alone are insufficient to directly enhance MSME performance. In contrast, resources have a strong and significant effect on local knowledge ($\beta = 0.641$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that adequate resources enable MSMEs to develop and utilize local knowledge more effectively. Furthermore, local knowledge significantly influences MSME performance ($\beta = 0.511$, $p < 0.001$), highlighting its critical role as a strategic asset. Importantly, the indirect effect of resources on MSME performance through local knowledge is also significant ($\beta = 0.328$, $p < 0.001$), indicating a mediation effect. These findings demonstrate that local knowledge acts as a key mechanism through which resources contribute to improved MSME performance.

DISCUSSION

This study provides empirical evidence on the relationships among resources, local knowledge, and MSME performance, offering important theoretical and practical insights. The findings reveal that while resources are essential for MSMEs, their influence on performance is not always direct. Instead, local knowledge plays a pivotal mediating role in transforming available resources into improved business outcomes. This result enriches the understanding of MSME performance within culturally embedded and resource-constrained contexts.

The results indicate that resources do not have a statistically significant direct effect on MSME performance. This finding partially contradicts the traditional assumptions of the Resource-Based View (RBV), which posits that valuable and scarce resources directly enhance organizational performance (Yang et al., 2015). In the MSME context, particularly in traditional industries, resources such as financial capital and technology may not immediately generate performance gains if MSME owners lack the capability to strategically deploy them. This finding supports prior studies suggesting that MSMEs often struggle with resource utilization due to limited managerial expertise and strategic orientation (Rakshit et al., 2022).

In contrast, the study finds a strong and significant effect of resources on local knowledge, supporting the Knowledge-Based View (KBV). Resources enable MSMEs to preserve, develop, and adapt local knowledge through training, experimentation, and incremental innovation (Garg & Goyal, 2012; Gatautis et al., 2019). In traditional sectors such as batik production, resources facilitate the documentation of tacit knowledge, improvement of production processes, and alignment of cultural heritage with contemporary market demands. This result emphasizes that resources function more effectively as enablers of knowledge activation rather than as direct drivers of performance.

Furthermore, local knowledge has a significant positive effect on MSME performance, confirming its role as a strategic intangible asset. MSMEs that successfully integrate local knowledge into their products and business practices achieve greater differentiation, authenticity, and customer trust. These advantages contribute to higher sales performance, stronger market positioning, and enhanced business sustainability (Herawati et al., 2023). This finding aligns with previous studies highlighting the importance of contextualized knowledge in fostering innovation and resilience among MSMEs.

Importantly, the mediation analysis reveals that local knowledge fully mediates the relationship between resources and MSME performance. This finding explains why resources alone are insufficient to improve performance and highlights the critical role of local knowledge as a transformation mechanism. Resources enhance performance only when they are effectively converted into knowledge-based capabilities rooted in local context (Fu et al., 2024; Lou & Xie, 2021; Purwana et al., 2017).

The findings offer several practical implications for policymakers, development agencies, and MSME practitioners. First, MSME support programs should move beyond a sole focus on financial assistance and infrastructure provision. While such support is necessary, it must be accompanied by initiatives that strengthen MSMEs' ability to develop and manage local knowledge, such as capacity-building programs, mentorship schemes, and knowledge documentation initiatives. Second, policymakers should design interventions that integrate cultural preservation with business development, enabling MSMEs to transform local heritage into sustainable economic value. Third, MSME owners should be encouraged to strategically leverage local knowledge as a core asset for differentiation rather than relying solely on price or scale-based competition.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the sample size is limited to 100 MSMEs in a single regional cluster, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other sectors or geographical contexts. Second, the study relies on self-reported measures of performance, which may be subject to respondent bias. Future research could incorporate objective performance indicators and longitudinal designs to capture dynamic changes over time. Additionally, future studies may explore moderating variables such as innovation capability, digital adoption, or institutional support to further enrich the understanding of how resources and local knowledge jointly shape MSME performance.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study examines the relationships among resources, local knowledge, and MSME performance within a locally embedded business context. The findings demonstrate that resources alone do not directly enhance MSME performance. Instead, their impact becomes significant only when resources are effectively transformed into local knowledge. This result highlights the limitation of relying solely on tangible resources and underscores the importance of intangible, knowledge-based capabilities in driving MSME success. The study confirms that resources play a crucial role in strengthening local knowledge. Adequate financial capital, human resources, technological access, and business networks enable MSMEs to preserve, develop, and adapt local knowledge to meet evolving market demands. In turn, local knowledge significantly improves MSME performance by fostering product differentiation, authenticity, and stronger customer relationships. These advantages contribute to improved sales growth, productivity, and long-term business sustainability. Importantly, this study reveals that local knowledge fully mediates the relationship between resources and MSME performance. Then, this study contributes to the MSME literature by emphasizing the strategic role of local knowledge in performance enhancement. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that MSME development policies should not only focus on increasing access to resources but also prioritize capacity-building initiatives that strengthen the management and utilization of local knowledge. Such an approach is essential for fostering competitive, resilient, and sustainable MSMEs grounded in local cultural identity.

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