

BEYOND DIRECT EFFECTS: HOW MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTING INFORMATION SYSTEMS AND DIFFERENTIATION STRATEGIES ENHANCE MICRO-ENTERPRISE PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the mediating effect of differentiation as a competitive advantage of micro-enterprises on the relationship between management accounting information systems and performance. This is a quantitative study, with data collected using a self-administered survey. The respondents were owners and managers of micro-enterprises in Malang City. The sample consisted of 129 respondents, and the data were subsequently processed using the Structural Equation Model - Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) method. The results of this study show that management accounting information systems have a significant effect on the performance of micro-enterprises. Furthermore, the study also indicates that differentiation partially mediates the relationship between management accounting information systems and micro-enterprise performance. The findings imply that MAIS has not only a direct effect but also an indirect effect through the differentiation variable. In addition, this research suggests that to optimize micro-enterprise performance, it is necessary to consider the integrative adoption of both management accounting information systems and differentiation strategies. Practically, the results of this study demonstrate the importance of micro-enterprises to encourage the use of MAIS and foster a data-driven decision-making culture to maximize the potential of differentiation, which will ultimately improve their business performance in a competitive market.

Keywords: Management Accounting Information Systems, differentiation, performance, performance, micro-enterprises

INTRODUCTION

Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) form the backbone of the economy in many developing countries, including Indonesia. This sector plays a significant role in job creation, increasing domestic income, and promoting a more equitable economic distribution. However, MSMEs in Indonesia face several challenges. These include limitations in management, organization, technology, and capital. They also encounter operational and technical difficulties in the field, restricted access to markets, licensing constraints, and unavoidable non-technical costs on the ground (Maulida & Yunani, 2017). Therefore, to remain relevant and sustainable, MSMEs are required to continually innovate and adopt strategies that can enhance their performance in a dynamic business environment. One crucial aspect that needs to be considered is how MSMEs manage information and leverage it to form a competitive advantage.

Management Accounting Information Systems (MAIS) are recognized as a vital component supporting strategic decision-making. MAIS enables organizations to systematically collect, process, and analyze both financial and non-financial data, which is essential for planning, controlling, and evaluating performance (Chenhall, 2005). Several studies have demonstrated that MAIS has a positive correlation with the performance of MSMEs (Ghasemi et al., 2015; Nugraha, 2021; and Maharani & Wuryaningsih, 2024). For MSMEs, the effective implementation of an MAIS can become a valuable intangible resource, facilitating a deeper understanding of costs, profitability, and operational efficiency (Suprayitno et al., 2024).

The Resource-Based View (RBV) posits that an integrated MAIS can serve as a valuable and hard-to-imitate internal resource, thereby creating a foundation for a lasting competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). The information generated by an MAIS enables MSMEs to identify areas of inefficiency and growth opportunities, which ultimately contribute to improved performance. However, enhanced performance relies not only on internal efficiency but also on the ability of MSMEs to differentiate themselves from competitors. Differentiation strategies allow firms to create unique value for customers through various means, such as superior product quality, innovative features, excellent customer service, or a distinctive brand image (Porter & Linde, 1995). This strategy enables MSMEs to charge premium prices and build customer loyalty, which ultimately drives better financial performance (Astuti & Baga, 2020). Nonetheless, for a differentiation strategy to be effective, it must be supported by accurate and relevant information. This highlights the critical function of an MAIS, which supplies the data needed to analyze customer preferences, assess the costs of implementing the strategy, and gauge the effectiveness of marketing efforts.

While extensive research has examined the relationship between MAIS and performance, as well as between differentiation strategies and performance, there remains a gap in comprehensively understanding how MAIS indirectly influences micro-enterprise performance through the mediation of differentiation strategies. A number of studies have found that differentiation strategies positively affect MSME performance (Hariyati et al., 2018; Akingbade, 2020; and Sivashanker, 2021).

This study attempts to address this gap by employing the RBV framework to identify a MAIS as a foundational resource that enables strategic capabilities (i.e., differentiation), subsequently influencing micro-enterprise performance. Thus, this research is anticipated to offer a more profound understanding for both MSME practitioners and policymakers on the necessity of investing in information systems and fostering information-driven competitive strategies to ensure long-term sustainability and growth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theory Resources-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View (RBV) posits that each firm occupies a unique market position, and therefore, acquires and develops resources according to its specific situation (Wernerfelt, 1984). These resources encompass all assets, including capabilities, organizational procedures, firm characteristics, knowledge, and information (Miller, 2013). To ensure their sustainability, MSMEs are fully committed to delivering attractive product value to customers through various initiatives. Wernerfelt, (1984) emphasizes that the resource-based perspective is the cornerstone of strategy formulation. In line with RBV theory, this study investigates the management accounting information system (MAIS) and considers its potential indirect relationship with MSME performance through the mediation of differentiation, which serves as a competitive advantage (Wuryaningsih & Wafiroh, 2025).

Management Accounting Information Systems (MAIS)

Accounting systems serve two primary functions: first, they support the creation of sustainable economic decisions, and second, they act as a tool for accountability regarding those decisions (Dahal, 2018). Management accounting information is a vital instrument in the process of identifying problems, solving them, and evaluating organizational performance (Supratinigrum & Lukas, 2021). Currently, management accounting information is no longer dominated by financial data alone, as non-financial information has also become a crucial input for financial decision-making (Hariyati et al., 2018). Furthermore, a Management Accounting Information System (MAIS) is an accounting instrument used to assess resource requirements and whether resources are allocated efficiently and effectively (Latif et al., 2023). Chenhall & Morris, (1986) categorize accounting information systems into four characteristics: scope, timeliness,

aggregation, and integration. (1) Scope refers to the external environment, including both economic factors (such as GDP, total market sales, and market share) and non-economic factors (for instance, demographics, consumer preferences, competitor actions, and technological developments). (2) Timeliness refers to how quickly information can be provided upon request, as well as the frequency with which reports containing systematically collected data are presented. (3) Aggregation is the combination of data collected based on time and function (e.g., sales, cost centers, and marketing and production departments), in addition to information specifically generated for decision-making. (4) Integration serves as a powerful coordination tool, enabling the control of various decisions and simplifying coordination between different segments and sub-units within an organization.

Differentiation Strategy

A differentiation strategy primarily aims to distinguish a firm's product offerings and create unique value in the eyes of customers (Anthony et al., 2014). This strategy is about standing apart from competitors, which can be achieved through a strong brand image, technical excellence, superior service, or innovative marketing approaches (Yunus Amar, 2015). Anthony et al. (2014) note that firms pursuing a differentiation strategy often demonstrate three key tendencies: (1) tight coordination across R&D, product development, and marketing functions; (2) a reliance on subjective performance metrics; and (3) the ability to attract highly skilled and creative employees through supportive facilities. Yunus Amar (2015) further specifies that MSMEs can apply product differentiation in two ways: vertical differentiation, which involves offering different quality levels, and horizontal differentiation, which focuses on unique product features and delivery.

Micro-Enterprise Performance

Organizational performance is the process of achieving the key objectives of efficiency, process flexibility, and operational improvement (Yunus Amar, 2015). Financial performance, in particular, indicates an MSME's ability to generate profits and manage its assets, liabilities, and the financial interests of owners and investors (Gyamera et al., 2023). The Balanced Scorecard (BSC) is widely considered a fitting measurement tool for MSMEs (Giannopoulos et al., 2013). Empirical evidence demonstrates that the BSC is a comprehensive framework that integrates both financial and non-financial metrics (Hariyati et al., 2018). This tool provides a holistic view of a company's performance by balancing four core perspectives: Financial, Customer, Internal Business Process, and Learning and Growth (Kaplan & Norton, 2001)

HYPOTHESIS

This research investigates the role of Management Accounting Information Systems (MAIS) as a strategic resource that drives improved performance in Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs). The conceptual framework is built upon the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory, which emphasizes that a firm's competitive advantage and superior performance come from possessing and utilizing valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable internal resources and capabilities (Barney, 1991).

In the context of MSMEs, MAIS functions not merely as a transaction recording tool but evolves into a dynamic capability that enables MSMEs to manage information effectively. The accurate, relevant, and timely information generated by an MAIS allows MSME management to make more informed strategic and operational decisions, such as efficient resource allocation, market opportunity identification, cost management, and product or service profitability evaluation. Previous studies have indicated a positive correlation between accounting information systems and MSME performance (Ghasemi et al., 2015; Nugraha, 2021; Maharani & Wuryaningsih, 2024; and Wuryaningsih, 2024). Based on the above explanation, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₁: Management Accounting Information Systems have a positive effect on Micro-enterprises' performance

An essential intangible resource for MSMEs is a Management Accounting Information System (MAIS). The timely and accurate information from an MAIS empowers managers to make superior strategic decisions. A key strategic choice it supports is a differentiation strategy, which aims to create unique value for customers through product features, service quality, or brand image to stand out from rivals (Anthony et al., 2014). An MAIS is vital for enabling differentiation by supplying detailed data on customer preferences, the cost of unique features, and the effectiveness of marketing efforts. As Gatti (2013) notes, management accounting systems provide information for strategic dialogue and commercial strategy reviews. Furthermore, research consistently shows that differentiation positively impacts MSME performance (Hariyati et al., 2018; Akingbade, 2020; and Sivashanker, 2021). By using a MAIS, micro-enterprises can better spot market gaps, develop unique offerings, manage associated costs, and measure the strategy's overall impact. Without this information, differentiation attempts may be ineffective and difficult to evaluate, limiting their positive effect on performance. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H₂: Differentiation strategies mediate the relationship between Management Accounting Information Systems and Micro-enterprises' performance.

METHODS

A quantitative methodology was utilized for this research. The data were obtained through a survey conducted on 129 owners and managers of micro-enterprises located in Malang City. The measurement of all research variables relied on instruments that have been widely established and employed in prior literature. The management accounting information system (MAIS) construct was operationalized using the scale by Chenhall & Morris (1986). The differentiation and MSME performance constructs were measured by adapting instruments from Chenhall (2005) and Kurniawati & Meilianaintani (2016)

RESULTS

Measurement Model Analysis

The initial assessment in the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach focuses on evaluating the measurement model. In this study, the evaluation of the reflective measurement model was carried out by analyzing Composite Reliability (CR) to measure internal consistency, as well as by examining the reliability of individual indicators and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) to assess the convergent validity of the constructs (Hair et al., 2021).

Table 1 below presents the reliability and convergent validity in this study. According to Hair et al. (2021) The outer loading value of an indicator item on its latent construct should ideally be ≥ 0.70 . However, values between 0.40 and 0.70 can be retained if the removal of the item does not significantly increase the AVE or CR value of the latent construct, and if the item is theoretically important. Items with a value < 0.40 are generally recommended for removal. Furthermore, Table 1 shows that each item has an outer loading exceeding the acceptable threshold of > 0.40 (Hair et al., 2021). Although AG4, AG5, SC1, SC2, TL2, and TL5 had low outer loading values, these items were removed to increase the CR and AVE values (Hair et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the AVE value must be ≥ 0.50 . This indicates that more than 50% of the indicator's variance is explained by its latent construct. Table 1 shows that the MAIS construct has an AVE value of 0.526, the differentiation construct has an AVE value of 0.505, and the MSME performance construct has an AVE value of 0.532. These results indicate that the convergent validity criteria have been met.

Additionally, Table 1 also presents the reliability values for each construct, which are all above the recommended threshold of >0.70 . Specifically, the MAIS construct ($CA = 0.924$ and $CR = 0.934$) and the differentiation construct ($CA = 0.754$ and $CR = 0.775$) both meet the excellent and good criteria, respectively (≥ 0.70). Furthermore, the micro-enterprises' performance construct ($CA = 0.780$ and $CR = 0.791$) also satisfies the good criteria (≥ 0.70). These results confirm that the internal consistency reliability for each construct has been met.

Table 1. Convergent Validity and Reliability

Latent Construct	Item	Convergent Validity		Reliability	
		Outer Loading	AVE	CR	CA
Management Accounting Information Systems	AG1	0.761	0.526	0.935	0.924
	AG2	0.686			
	AG3	0.619			
	IT1	0.769			
	IT2	0.752			
	IT3	0.761			
	IT4	0.745			
	SC3	0.728			
	SC4	0.647			
	SC5	0.736			
	TL1	0.678			
	TL3	0.720			
	TL4	0.802			
Differentiation	DF2	0.561	0.505	0.775	0.754
	DF5	0.744			
	DF6	0.729			
	DF7	0.789			
	DF8	0.711			
Performance	PE1	0.751	0.532	0.791	0.780
	PE2	0.812			
	PE5	0.638			
	PE6	0.742			
	PE9	0.692			

Source: Processed Data (2025)

The reflective measurement model was also evaluated for discriminant validity. Consistent with current best practices, the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio was used for this (Hair et al., 2019). As presented in Table 2, all constructs exhibited HTMT values below the required 0.90 threshold, thereby confirming the discriminant validity of the model's distinct constructs (Hair et al., 2019).

In summary, the entire measurement model has been confirmed to be both valid and reliable. All constructs are therefore ready for the assessment of the structural model and the associated hypothesis testing.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity

	DF	MAIS	PE
Differentiation			
Management Accounting Information Systems	0.360		
Performance	0.466	0.468	

Source: Processed Data (2025)**Structural Model Analysis**

The structural model was tested to evaluate how the exogenous variables affect the endogenous ones. As shown in Table 3, both H1 and H2 are supported. A strong and statistically significant positive relationship exists between MAIS and Micro-enterprises' performance. An increase in MAIS will lead to a 0.309 increase in Micro-enterprises' performance, with a p-value of 0.000, confirming its high significance. Moreover, a significant indirect effect was found. Differentiation partially mediates the relationship between MAIS and MSME performance. While the indirect coefficient (0.092) is smaller than the direct one, its statistical significance ($p = 0.014$) indicates that MAIS impacts Micro-enterprises' performance both directly and indirectly via Differentiation.

Table 3. Hypothesis Results

Construct Relationships	Original sample	T statistics	P values
Differentiation → Performance	0.287	3.178	0.001
MAIS → Differentiation	0.321	4.062	0.000
MAIS → Performance	0.309	3.984	0.000
MAIS → Differentiation → Performance	0.092	2.465	0.014

Source: Processed Data (2025)

The findings suggest that both an effective management accounting system and differentiation strategies are vital for improving micro-enterprises' performance. The study also reveals that a management accounting system facilitates differentiation, which then contributes to micro-enterprises' performance. The value R-squared for differentiation is 10.3%, indicating that MAIS provides a small to moderate level of explanatory power for this construct (Hair et al., 2019). Meanwhile, the R-squared for micro-enterprises' Performance is 23.5%, which suggests that the predictor variables have a moderate explanatory power for the construct. With a Q-squared value of 695.073, the model demonstrates very high predictive relevance for micro-enterprises' performance.

Discussion**The Effect of Management Accounting Information Systems on Micro-enterprises' Performance**

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that Hypothesis 1, which states that Management Accounting Information Systems (MAIS) have a positive and significant effect on Micro-enterprises' performance, is supported. This finding is consistent with (Ghasemi et al., 2015; Nugraha, 2021; Maharani & Wuryaningsih, 2024; and Wuryaningsih, 2024). The results align with literature that emphasizes the importance of accurate and timely management accounting information in helping micro-enterprises make better strategic and operational decisions, manage costs, identify opportunities, and effectively monitor their financial performance. In the context of the Resource-Based View (RBV), not all resources must have a "large" effect individually; competitive advantage often emerges from a synergistic combination of various resources and capabilities (Grant, 1996). A MAIS may act as a catalyst or enabler that strengthens the effectiveness of other resources (e.g., by allowing managers to more effectively manage human resources, production technology, or differentiation strategies).

The Mediating Role of Differentiation Strategies

This hypothesis tests whether Differentiation Strategies act as a mediating variable in explaining how Management Accounting Information Systems (MAIS) influence micro-enterprises' performance. The results show that Differentiation Strategies significantly mediate the relationship between MAIS and micro-enterprises' performance, thus supporting Hypothesis 2. In line with the Resource-Based View (RBV), a firm's competitive advantage and superior performance do not arise from a single resource alone, but from a synergistic combination of unique resources and capabilities that are then externalized through strategies that are difficult for competitors to imitate (Barney, 1991). The findings of this study underscore the important strategic role of an MAIS as a valuable internal resource that not only contributes directly to performance but also critically facilitates the development and implementation of Differentiation Strategies. Differentiation, as a manifestation of the unique capabilities built from these resources, then becomes a key driver of sustainable competitive advantage and micro-enterprises' performance. Micro-enterprises that want to improve their performance should consider not only investing in MAIS but also how the system can be optimally utilized to develop strong differentiation strategies that are difficult for competitors to copy (Oktaviana et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this research was to investigate the influence of an MAIS on micro-enterprises' performance, including the indirect relationship mediated by differentiation strategies. The study's results indicate that a MAIS has a significant effect on micro-enterprises' performance, and this relationship is partially mediated by differentiation. The findings suggest that an MAIS contributes to performance not only directly but also indirectly by facilitating the development and execution of effective differentiation strategies.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the Resource-Based View (RBV) by establishing a MAIS as a complex internal resource that not only directly influences performance but also acts as an enabler for other strategic capabilities, specifically differentiation. This confirms that competitive advantage for micro-enterprises can stem from the synergistic interaction between a firm's informational resources and its strategic actions.

From a practical standpoint, the results underscore the need for micro-enterprises to invest beyond mere MAIS software. They must also develop the organizational skills to effectively leverage the system's output. Successful MAIS implementation is a strategic endeavor aimed at improving operational efficiency and empowering the business to pursue differentiation. Therefore, micro-enterprises should focus on training their staff and promoting a data-oriented culture to fully harness the system's potential to drive better performance through unique market offerings.

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