

Digital marketing strategy for Micro, Small and Medium Culinary Enterprises (MSMEs) In Sidoarjo City

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Abstract

Digital transformation has fundamentally changed the competitive landscape of the culinary business, but digital marketing adoption among culinary Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) remains suboptimal, including in Sidoarjo City. This study aims to explore the digital marketing strategies implemented by culinary MSMEs in Sidoarjo City, identify the obstacles they face, and analyze the factors supporting their success. The study used a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with ten culinary MSMEs, observations of their social media accounts and managed digital platforms, and documentation studies. Data were then analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana. The results show that culinary MSMEs in Sidoarjo have utilized a combination of Instagram, WhatsApp Business, and food delivery services as their primary marketing channels, with content strategies that are still relatively simple and not fully planned. The main obstacles identified include limited digital competency, limited time, and a minimal budget for paid promotions. Meanwhile, key success factors include consistent content uploads, the ability to build personal relationships with customers through digital interactions, and active involvement in the community of fellow entrepreneurs. This research provides a practical contribution to the development of a more contextual and targeted digitalization mentoring program for MSMEs.

Keywords: Digital Marketing; Culinary Msmes; Marketing Strategy; Social Media; Sidoarjo

1 Introduction

Digital transformation has become a major driving force fundamentally changing the way businesses interact with their consumers, including in the culinary sector, which is one of the largest contributors to the Indonesian Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise (MSME) economy. Sari and Wulandari (2022) stated that the accelerated adoption of digital platforms post-pandemic has permanently changed consumer behavior, with product information searches and purchasing decisions increasingly conducted online before consumers make in-person transactions.

Recent data shows that internet and social media penetration in Indonesia continues to experience significant growth. Hootsuite and We Are Social (2024) reported that the number of active social media users in Indonesia has surpassed 167 million, with an average time spent on social media reaching over three hours per day. This situation creates a vast digital market opportunity, while simultaneously requiring culinary businesses to develop adequate digital marketing competencies to effectively reach and retain their customer base.

The contribution of the MSME sector to the national economy cannot be underestimated. The Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs (2023) noted that MSMEs contribute more than 60 percent to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employ a large portion of Indonesia's workforce. Among the various MSME sectors, the culinary sector holds a

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particularly strategic position due to its relatively stable market demand and continued growth in line with increasingly dynamic lifestyle changes (Pratama & Hidayati, 2021).

Previous research on digital marketing for culinary MSMEs has developed considerably in recent years, but the majority still focuses on quantitative approaches that examine the influence of digital marketing variables on sales performance, without in-depth exploration of the processes and dynamics behind the implementation of these strategies. Anggraini and Susanto (2021), for example, in their study of culinary MSMEs in Central Java, demonstrated the positive influence of social media use on sales volume, but did not explain how the formulation and implementation of these strategies occurred in the field.

A study conducted by Nugroho, Santoso, and Wibowo (2022) on culinary MSMEs in the Yogyakarta region found that digital marketing success is significantly influenced by the business owner's ability to adapt to changing consumer preferences and consistency in producing relevant content. This research suggests the need for further studies in different geographic contexts to deepen our understanding of the variations in digital marketing practices of culinary MSMEs across Indonesia. This recommendation was one of the reasons for selecting Sidoarjo City as the location for this research.

The fundamental problem underlying this research is the limited in-depth understanding of how culinary MSMEs in Sidoarjo City concretely formulate and implement their digital marketing strategies, the real obstacles they face in practice, and the factors that significantly differentiate successful businesses from those that have not yet successfully optimized digital channels. A comprehensive understanding of these three aspects is crucial both academically and practically, given the limitations of qualitative studies that focus specifically on the local context of Sidoarjo.

Based on this description, this study aims to: (1) explore the digital marketing strategies implemented by culinary MSMEs in Sidoarjo City; (2) identify the obstacles faced in implementing digital marketing; and (3) analyze the factors that support the success of digital marketing in culinary MSMEs in Sidoarjo City. The results of this study are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of MSME digital marketing studies, as well as practical contributions for business actors, local governments, and other stakeholders in designing more contextual MSME empowerment programs.

Conceptual Framework.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Digital Marketing

Digital marketing is a marketing approach that utilizes digital technology and channels to achieve marketing communication and transaction objectives. Hidayat and Maulana (2020) define digital marketing as marketing activities that use electronic media and the internet to promote products or services, including the use of websites, social media, email, and mobile applications as primary channels of communication with consumers. The main characteristics of digital marketing that distinguish it from conventional marketing lie in its ability to be measured precisely, its flexibility in real-time message adjustments, and its ability to reach a more targeted audience at a relatively more cost-effective rate (Wulandari & Pranata, 2021).

Setyawan and Pradana (2023) explain that digital marketing for MSMEs generally centers on the use of social media as the primary tool, given its easy access, low cost, and the ability to directly interact with consumers. This research also confirms that the effectiveness of MSME digital marketing is largely determined by consistency in content management and the business owner's ability to dynamically read the preferences and consumption habits of their target market.

2.2 Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing is the most relevant component of digital marketing for small and medium-sized businesses. Ramadhan and Kusnandar (2022) define social media marketing as leveraging social media platforms to build brand awareness, encourage consumer engagement, and direct consumers toward purchasing decisions. The study found that Instagram and TikTok are the most dominant channels used by culinary MSMEs in Indonesia due to their highly visual characteristics and their suitability for culinary products, which rely on visual appeal.

Furthermore, Permatasari, Wicaksono, and Handayani (2023) identified that the success of culinary MSMEs' social media marketing is significantly influenced by three main aspects: the visual quality of the content produced, the frequency and consistency of posts, and the speed and quality of responses to consumer interactions. These three aspects collectively shape the perception of brand professionalism and credibility in the eyes of digital consumers, which in turn influences purchasing decisions.

2.3 Digital Technology Adoption in MSMEs

The process of digital technology adoption by MSMEs can be understood through the innovation diffusion framework, which explains how an innovation is accepted and adopted by members of a social system over time. Referring to this framework, Firmansyah and Lestari (2021) explain that the speed of digital technology adoption among MSMEs is influenced by business actors' perceptions of the technology's relative benefits compared to conventional methods, its compatibility with business habits and needs, and the perceived complexity of learning and operating it.

Andriani and Saputra's (2022) research on MSMEs in East Java found that limited digital competency, limited time allocated to digital platform management, and minimal paid promotional budgets were three key barriers consistently identified in various studies on MSME digital marketing adoption. The study also highlighted the importance of ongoing mentoring and training in accelerating digital technology adoption among small businesses.

2.4 Consumer Trust in Digital Transactions

Consumer trust is a crucial determinant in the context of digital transactions, given that the absence of direct physical interaction between sellers and buyers creates a higher level of uncertainty than in conventional transactions. Oktaviani and Yuliana (2020) explain that consumer trust in MSMEs in the digital context is formed through consistent communication, transparency of product information, and the availability of social proof such as reviews and testimonials from previous customers.

Rahmawati, Putri, and Suryanto (2023) added that actively managing online reviews, including responding to negative reviews, is a crucial determinant in building and maintaining consumer trust on digital platforms. The study found that culinary MSMEs that responded to reviews promptly and professionally tended to have higher customer retention rates compared to MSMEs that ignored such interactions.

2.5 Previous Research

Several previous studies provide relevant empirical foundations for this research. Anggraini and Susanto (2021) examined the influence of social media usage on sales volume of culinary MSMEs in Central Java using a quantitative approach and found a significant positive effect, but did not reveal the processes behind this finding. Nugroho et al. (2022) conducted a qualitative study of culinary MSMEs in Yogyakarta and found that content consistency and adaptation to consumer trends were key success factors, while also recommending further research in other geographic contexts.

Hidayanto and Rahmawati (2023) examined the digital readiness of culinary MSMEs in Sidoarjo and Surabaya through a descriptive survey. They found that the level of digital readiness of entrepreneurs varied significantly and was influenced by the entrepreneur's age and educational background. This research provides relevant initial context, but did not explore in depth the qualitative dynamics behind these differences in readiness levels. Setyawan and Pradana (2023) examined the social media content strategies of culinary MSMEs in Bandung and found that educational content and content that transparently displayed the production process generated higher levels of audience engagement than directly promotional content.

Based on a review of various previous studies, a research gap can be identified, consisting of a lack of qualitative studies that deeply and contextually explore digital marketing strategies, obstacles, and success factors for culinary MSMEs in Sidoarjo City. This research seeks to fill this gap through a descriptive case study approach, allowing for a richer and more contextual understanding of the phenomenon under study.

3 Research methods

This research employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design. This approach was chosen because the research objective was to gain a deep and contextual understanding of the digital marketing phenomenon in culinary MSMEs from the perspective of the business owners themselves. As suggested by Maharani and Kurniawan (2021), a

qualitative approach is more appropriate when researchers seek to capture the complexity of the processes and meanings behind a business phenomenon, rather than simply measuring the relationships between variables statistically.

The research was conducted in Sidoarjo City, East Java, with the subjects being culinary MSMEs who had used at least one digital platform in their marketing activities for at least the past six months. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, which involves selecting informants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives (Wijaya & Hartanto, 2022). This study involved ten key informants who were owners or managers of culinary MSMEs with varying product types, business scales, and levels of experience in digital marketing, plus three triangulation informants consisting of active consumers and staff from relevant agencies.

Data collection was conducted using three main techniques. First, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with all informants, with an average duration of one to one and a half hours per session. Second, observations of social media accounts and digital platforms managed by informants were conducted to obtain an objective picture of actual digital marketing practices. Third, documentation was conducted to examine supporting data such as content screenshots, account performance statistics, and transaction records that informants were willing to share.

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive analysis model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which consists of the stages of data condensation, data presentation, and continuous conclusion drawing (Prasetyo & Anindita, 2021). The data condensation process was carried out through inductive thematic coding of interview transcripts and observation notes, which were then grouped into categories relevant to the three research focuses: digital marketing strategy, implementation barriers, and success factors.

The validity of the data in this study was maintained through source and technical triangulation techniques. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained from various primary informants and triangulation informants, while technical triangulation was conducted by comparing data from interviews, observations, and documentation (Nababan & Simanjuntak, 2022). Furthermore, member checking was conducted by reconfirming initial findings with several informants to ensure the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation of the data provided.

4 Discussion

4.1 Characteristics of Research Informants

This study involved ten key informants who are culinary MSMEs in Sidoarjo City, operating a variety of products, including main meals, snacks, cakes, and beverages. The majority of informants have been running their businesses for between one and five years, with digital platform usage ranging from six months to more than three years. This variation in characteristics allows the study to capture the diversity of experience and varying levels of digital maturity among culinary MSMEs in the region.

4.2 Implemented Digital Marketing Strategies

The results show that all informants use a combination of more than one digital platform in their marketing activities. Instagram is the most widely used platform, followed by WhatsApp Business, and food delivery services such as GoFood and GrabFood. Some informants, particularly younger informants, have also begun utilizing TikTok as an additional marketing channel. This finding aligns with research by Ramadhan and Kusnandar (2022), which states that Instagram and TikTok are the dominant platforms for culinary MSMEs due to their highly visual nature.

In terms of content strategy, the majority of informants rely on product photos as their primary content type, with a small number having begun producing short video content. The uploaded content is generally simple, informative, featuring product photos along with prices and ordering information, without any theme planning or structured content calendar. One informant reported that the content creation process is spontaneous and without specific planning, explaining that content is usually created around mealtimes when the product is freshly cooked and looks attractive to photograph.

This finding indicates that although culinary MSMEs in Sidoarjo have adopted digital platforms quite extensively, the quality of content strategy planning remains relatively modest compared to best practices identified by Permatasari et al. (2023), which emphasize the importance of consistency and planned visual quality to build perceptions of brand

professionalism. This gap opens up opportunities for mentoring programs focused on improving the capacity for more systematic content planning and production.

In terms of consumer interactions, the majority of informants demonstrated a fairly good level of responsiveness to messages and inquiries received via WhatsApp Business, with an average response time of less than one hour during operating hours. However, the management of comments and interactions in social media comment sections remains suboptimal, with several informants admitting to rarely actively responding to comments. This contrasts with the recommendations put forward by Rahmawati et al. (2023), who emphasized the importance of actively responding to all forms of digital interaction to build sustainable consumer trust.

4.3 Barriers to Digital Marketing Implementation

The most dominant barrier identified in this study was time constraints, cited by almost all informants. Most informants run their businesses independently or with limited assistance from family members, so the time available to manage digital content often clashes with daily operational demands such as production and direct service delivery. This finding is consistent with the research of Andriani and Saputra (2022), which identified time constraints as a key barrier to digital marketing adoption by MSMEs.

The second barrier frequently cited by informants was limited technical competence in managing digital platforms, particularly regarding understanding platform algorithms, product photography and videography techniques, and utilizing available analytical features. Several informants stated that they learned to use digital platforms independently through online tutorials, but still felt they did not fully understand how to optimize the reach of their content.

The third barrier is a limited budget for paid promotions. Most informants have never used paid advertising features on social media platforms due to limited funds allocated specifically for marketing. Some informants who have tried paid advertising admitted that they felt the results were not commensurate with the costs, leading them to revert to relying on organic marketing strategies. This finding supports research by Andriani and Saputra (2022), which found that budget constraints are a consistent structural barrier among MSMEs across various research contexts.

4.4 Digital Marketing Success Factors

This study identified three key factors that differentiate culinary MSMEs that are relatively successful in optimizing digital marketing from those that are still struggling. The first factor is consistency in uploading content, with informants who regularly post content at least three to four times per week reporting a more stable increase in reach and interaction compared to informants who post sporadically. This consistency aligns with the principles emphasized in various digital marketing literature as a key factor in maintaining algorithmic visibility on social media platforms.

The second factor is the ability to build personal relationships with customers through authentic digital interactions. Several informants who have successfully built a loyal customer base demonstrate more personalized communication patterns, such as greeting customers by name, remembering previous order preferences, and providing warm responses to each interaction. This approach creates an emotional bond that goes beyond mere sales transactions, as Oktaviani and Yuliana (2020) also found that digital consumer trust is strongly influenced by the quality of personal and consistent communication.

The third factor is active involvement in fellow business communities, both online and offline. Several informants stated that participation in MSME groups, whether government-facilitated or independently formed, provides significant benefits in terms of sharing practical knowledge, content strategies, and moral support in facing business challenges. Such communities serve as effective sources of informal learning, especially for entrepreneurs who lack access to formal training.

4.5 Implications of Research Findings

The findings of this study have several important implications. Theoretically, this study enriches our understanding of the dynamics of digital marketing adoption and implementation among culinary MSMEs in the context of metropolitan buffer zones, which have distinct characteristics from the large urban and rural contexts that have been more extensively studied in previous literature. Practically, these findings provide concrete recommendations for MSME policymakers and mentoring programs, particularly regarding the need for more structured content planning training, capacity building in managing digital interactions, and strengthening business community networks as a mechanism for sustainable collective learning.

5 Conclusion

This study concludes that culinary MSMEs in Sidoarjo City have adopted digital marketing through a combination of Instagram, WhatsApp Business, and food delivery services. However, the content strategies implemented are generally rudimentary and lack systematic planning. Key obstacles include limited time, limited technical competency, and limited budget for paid promotions. Meanwhile, factors supporting successful digital marketing include consistent content uploads, the ability to build personal relationships with customers, and active involvement in the community of fellow entrepreneurs.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings and guiding future research. First, the relatively limited number of informants makes the findings statistically incapable of generalization, although they provide a rich contextual understanding. Second, this study was conducted over a limited period of time and therefore cannot capture the dynamics of changes in MSME digital marketing strategies longitudinally. Future research is recommended to develop longitudinal studies or compare digital marketing practices of culinary MSMEs in other regions of Indonesia to broaden our comparative understanding of this phenomenon.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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