

Adoption of Social Media as a Digital Marketing Strategy: A Case Study of Wardi Pallo Mie Balap

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Abstract—Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are crucial pillars of the economy, yet micro-scale culinary entrepreneurs often face operational challenges during digitalization. This study examines the strategic adoption of Instagram and TikTok platforms as digital marketing frameworks for the Wardi Pallo Mie Balap MSME in Medan. Using descriptive qualitative methods, data was collected through observation, documentation, and in-depth interviews with eight informants using a purposive sampling technique. Data analysis employed the Miles and Huberman interactive model integrated with social media marketing dimensions, including interaction, content sharing, accessibility, and credibility. Data credibility was tested through source triangulation. The findings indicate that structured digital interventions successfully transformed temporary physical presence into digital visibility. Dynamic visualizations of the cooking process stimulated consumer purchase intention, significantly increasing monthly sales volume by 19.67 percent, with the highest spike for the yellow noodle variant, reaching 40 percent. However, qualitative analysis also identified critical structural barriers, such as limited human resources (HR) marketing specialists, operational time management constraints, and market volatility due to the fading novelty effect among consumers. This research provides theoretical and practical contributions regarding the importance of shifting from conventional word-of-mouth patterns to local social commerce models in order to maintain the sustainability of micro-scale commercial digitalization.

Keywords: MSMEs; Social Media Marketing (SMM); Consumer Behavior; Digital Visibility; Novelty Effect; Micro-Enterprise Digitalization

1. INTRODUCTION

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are a key pillar of Indonesia's economy, with a very large number and an important role in creating employment and driving economic growth. Despite facing many challenges, MSMEs still have great potential for development, especially with the support of technology and government policies focused on empowering MSMEs. (Permatasari et al., 2022). In this context, MSMEs can also be understood as business activities based on creative products that are carried out to enhance national economic growth. (Qadri & Tyana, 2024). The development of MSMEs in the city of Medan during the New Normal era requires business owners to be more creative in delivering marketing messages. Previous research shows that measuring communication effectiveness through the EPIC Model helps MSME owners understand whether the promotional budget spent has generated a real impact on brand awareness in the minds of consumers (Chandra et al., 2022). According to data from the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs of the Republic of Indonesia. (KEMENKOPUKM, 2023), MSMEs contribute more than 97% of employment and approximately 61.07% of the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The culinary sector is experiencing very rapid growth; however, its main challenge lies in optimizing digital marketing to face increasingly competitive market conditions (Paxel, 2022). In the city of Medan, the growth of culinary MSMEs requires business owners to be more innovative in reaching an increasingly digital consumer base. According to research conducted by (Jackie et al., 2022), in the culinary industry in Medan, social media marketing has a significant positive correlation with consumers' purchase intention. There are four main indicators used to measure social media marketing, namely content creation, content sharing, connecting, and community building. The results of the study show that the influence of social media marketing variables on purchase intention reaches 35.5%. Mie Balap Wardi Pallo, located on Tuasan Street in Medan, is a promising business unit that previously relied solely on conventional word-of-mouth promotion.

Mie Balap Wardi Pallo serves a traditional Medan-style "mie balap" that is cooked quickly, as if in a race, resulting in a savory and delicious dish. Various noodle options are available, such as flat noodles (mie tiaw), rice vermicelli (mihun), and yellow noodles (mie kuning), complemented with toppings like shrimp and meatballs that enhance the flavor. In addition, this MSME also offers a variety of consigned foods, such as shell satay, jengkol satay, fried snacks like bakwan and risol, and other assorted snacks supplied by different vendors. With its authentic local taste and friendly service, Mie Balap Wardi Pallo has become one of the favorites among mie balap and culinary enthusiasts in Medan.

From both mathematical and operational perspectives, the transition of micro-businesses from conventional channels to digital platforms is often oversimplified as merely the technical setup of social media accounts. However, in marketing theory literature, this transition actually represents a critical shift in how consumer information search behavior operates within local culinary markets (Andrean Sukoco et al., 2024). The use of social media as a promotional medium has proven effective in increasing sales volume because it is able to reach a wide target market without geographical limitations (Friska Siahaan et al., 2021). Traditional food vendors rely heavily on word-of-mouth marketing; however, this approach has inherent limitations, including geographical constraints and systemic information asymmetry.

Digitalization fundamentally transforms this dynamic by creating "digital visibility," converting a temporary physical presence into a searchable and permanent digital asset. Limitations in digital promotion and the use of social media are common weaknesses frequently found among local MSMEs (Sanusi et al., 2025). A significant research gap exists in understanding how micro culinary MSMEs face the direct challenges of transitioning from conventional operations to digital adoption without dedicated marketing personnel. Previous studies have often evaluated well-established brands while overlooking the highly unstable context of micro-vendors, where operational limitations severely restrict the consistency of content creation. Understanding this mechanism is essential, as merely creating social media accounts does not guarantee consumer engagement unless the content aligns with the behavioral patterns of the target demographic. Therefore, this study goes beyond a consultant-style technical implementation by providing an empirical evaluation of how a traditional culinary business, Mie Balap Wardi Pallo, experiences short-term market shifts and changes in consumer interaction dynamics after entering visual-based platforms such as Instagram and TikTok.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study was designed using a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the real-time dynamics and adoption of digital marketing among micro-enterprises. This approach was selected because it provides an in-depth understanding and broader contextual perspective on how social media marketing strategies are implemented within the traditional culinary business ecosystem. The research was conducted directly at Mie Balap Wardi Pallo MSME, located at Jl. Tuasan No. 7, Sidorejo Hilir, Medan Tembung District, Medan City, North Sumatra 20222, Indonesia. to obtain authentic multi-perspective insights regarding the implementation of these strategies, informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on their direct interaction with the business's operational and promotional ecosystem. The sample consisted of exactly eight informants who were specifically categorized to ensure internal data validity and source triangulation. Main decision-maker; manages daily finances, overall operations, and business marketing strategies.

2.1 Informant Profile and Data Collection

Table 1. Informant Interview

Informan Code	The Role of Stakeholders	Selection Criteria / Rationalization	Method of collecting data
INF-01	Owner	Main decision-maker; manages daily finances, overall operations, and business marketing strategies.	In-depth Interview
INF-02	Owner	Manages taste consistency, raw material portions, oversees kitchen workflow, and executes the main menu.	In-depth Interview
INF-03	Staff Leader	Manages taste consistency, raw material portions, oversees kitchen workflow, and executes the main menu.	In-depth Interview
INF-04	Staff	Oversees front-of-house service, directly observes customer influx, and manages physical queuing behavior.	In-depth Interview
INF-05	Staff	Responsible for providing data regarding daily raw material procurement trends (such as daily noodle stock and sides).	In-depth Interview
INF-06	Chef	Responsible for daily operations, supporting order service efficiency, and ensuring smooth food distribution to customers.	In-depth Interview
INF-07	Chef	Responsible for maintaining dish flavor quality and visual appeal (visual attraction) that consumers frequently share on Instagram.	In-depth Interview
INF-08	Wood Supplier	External firewood supplier vendor; understands monthly logistics supply volume and provides an independent assessment of business operations.	In-depth Interview

2.2 Data Analysis

Primary data was collected through observation, semi-structured interviews based on SMM theoretical guidelines, and digital documentation (change logs of account analytics). Data analysis was conducted strictly following Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis model, which includes three main stages:

- Data Reduction:** Raw interview recordings were fully transcribed, and irrelevant conversational data were filtered out. Open coding was then applied to categorize the text into structural themes (e.g., operational constraints, consumer trust factors, and visual appeal).
- Data Display:** The coded data were systematically organized into descriptive matrices based on Social Media Marketing (SMM) indicators to isolate emerging behavioral patterns.
- Conclusion Drawing/Verification:** Preliminary patterns were cross-verified with physical observation logs and raw material purchase records to formulate verified qualitative conclusions.

Test the validity and credibility of the data using data source triangulation techniques (comparing the owner's statement with the researcher's physical observation notes and cross-recognition from waiters and cooks) and increasing the persistence of observations periodically throughout the implementation cycle.

2.3 Previous Research

In the preparation of this qualitative study, the author draws on previous studies relevant to the research problem as references and comparisons between existing research and the study to be conducted:

- a. (Ageng et al., 2020) in their study titled “*Optimization of Social Media for Marketing in Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises*” used a qualitative method. The results of their analysis show that promotion through social media is an effective marketing strategy. This is indicated by the increase in followers on the Teh Rina catering social media accounts and the growing number of product orders through social media applications. This improvement is supported by the MSME owner’s ability to enhance product presentation, including business cards, brochures, photos, and videos, making them more organized and professional. The study focuses on social media marketing strategies to increase MSME sales. The difference from (Ageng et al., 2020) lies in this study’s more specific analysis of Instagram and TikTok.
- b. (Mansyur, 2021) in the study titled “*Utilization of Social Media for Marketing the MSME Rose Tea Industry in Cluntang Village, Musuk*” also used a qualitative method. This included raising awareness about the importance of promotion for MSMEs producing rose tea, providing guidance on how to promote their products through social media, and assisting in promotional efforts. The findings show that COVID-19 affected all sectors, especially the economy. The rose tea MSME in Cluntang was one of those impacted, as indicated by declining sales. In addition to the pandemic, another cause was the lack of promotional activities. Social media was found to help MSMEs promote their products effectively, largely due to the increasing number of social media users, which expands market reach. While this study demonstrates the efficient and effective use of social media as a marketing tool, it differs by focusing on a single MSME product (rose tea), whereas the present study specifically analyzes Instagram and TikTok strategies for a culinary MSME.

The use of social media as a marketing tool has now become a fundamental necessity for players in the creative industry and MSMEs. Social media functions not only as a means of entertainment but also as an efficient medium for education and business promotion (Malimbe et al., 2021). According to (Jubilee Enterprise, 2021), visual platforms are highly effective in building brand identity through graphic design and engaging content.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach. Data analysis is conducted by referring to Social Media Marketing (SMM) indicators, which include aspects of interaction, content sharing, accessibility, and credibility (Tong & Subagio, 2020). This strategy is developed based on a community service framework that has proven successful in similar MSME units (Perdana & Hendriati, 2024). Data credibility is tested through source triangulation and synchronization with national data on MSME social media utilization (Pemerintah, 2022).

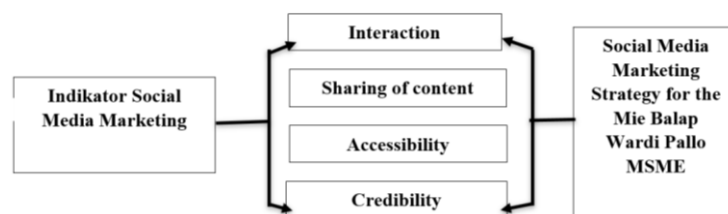


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

- a. Interaction - Companies must create interaction with customers, such as responding to customer comments, sending messages, and sharing information, so that customers can easily obtain information from the company.
- b. Sharing of content - Social media marketing is used to share information and content with customers, such as through direct messages and comment sections.
- c. Accessibility - An element that emphasizes ease of use and low cost in social media advertising.
- d. Credibility - Refers to how a business can demonstrate its credibility by providing information, helping solve customer problems, and responding to customer feedback or suggestions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Social Media Marketing Analysis Results Based on Informant Perspectives

Based on the indicators established in Chapter 2, this section outlines the analysis of Social Media Marketing (SMM) implementation according to Tong & Subagio (2020) at the Wardi Pallo Mie Balap MSME. Primary data collected from in-depth interviews with eight key informants, whose profiles were described in Chapter 2, is now further analyzed through four main SMM indicators:

a. Interaction

Regarding the interaction indicator, interview results indicate that the Wardi Pallo Mie Balap MSME actively builds responsive and friendly communication with customers. According to frontline staff (INF-06 and INF-07), physical

interactions at the outlet include direct service, order taking, and receiving instant feedback or complaints from customers. However, management and business owners (INF-01, INF-02, and INF-03) acknowledged that they have not yet optimally utilized social media platforms for digital interaction. Nevertheless, all informants agreed that social media plays a crucial role in accelerating two-way communication and supporting future business sustainability.

b. Content Sharing

In the content sharing indicator, current marketing activities still focus on providing information about new menu variations and the use of conventional visual media such as food and beverage price list banners. Business owners (INF-01 and INF-02), who determine the direction of digital adoption policy, stated that publishing promotional content through social media is considered crucial for reaching a wider market segment. This is supported by observations from employee leaders (INF-03), who monitor daily work rhythms, where the dissemination of clear visual information digitally is seen as helping educate potential consumers about the uniqueness of the product more efficiently.

c. Accessibility

Regarding the accessibility indicator, the Wardi Pallo Mie Balap MSME still predominantly relies on conventional promotional techniques through word-of-mouth marketing. Customers generally obtain culinary information and recommendations from their networks of friends, family, or personal consumer posts on their own social media. Based on a comprehensive perspective from all internal operational lines (INF-01 to INF-07), the biggest challenge in meeting the strong digital accessibility indicator is consistency. Time constraints and operational focus in the field are major obstacles for partners in regularly uploading content to achieve sustained viral exposure.

d. Credibility

In terms of credibility, customer trust is inherently built through the physical quality of the product presented. The chefs (INF-04 and INF-05) strictly maintain control over the authentic taste of "mie balap" and maintain consistent portion sizes. This credibility of traditional taste is also supported by the readiness of the wood supplier (INF-08), who ensures the availability of wood fuel, a crucial element in maintaining traditional cooking methods. Business owners (INF-01 and INF-02) emphasized that maintaining product quality is the main foundation of business credibility. However, they also view social media as having significant potential to transform product credibility into a strong, broad, and low-cost digital brand image to build long-term trust with consumers.

3.2 Potential Social Media Marketing Strategies

Based on the data analysis, there is significant potential to develop social media marketing strategies for UMKM Mie Balap Wardi Pallo. Several strategies can be implemented based on the four Social Media Marketing (SMM) indicators:

a. Instagram Platform, Instagram can be utilized for this MSME in the following ways:

1. Interaction can be enhanced by posting attractive photos and videos, as well as utilizing features such as Instagram Stories. These features allow question-and-answer sessions, polls, or simply sharing behind-the-scenes moments of the noodle-making process.
2. Sharing of Content: Instagram is a visual platform. Sharing high-quality product photos, appetizing cooking process videos, and creative Reels can become the main strategy.
3. Accessibility: Using relevant hashtags such as #miebalap, #kulinervedan, and #jajananmedan, along with location tags, makes the products easier to find for potential customers in the Medan area.
4. Credibility can be built by posting high-quality photos, customer testimonials, and content showing cleanliness and the quality of raw ingredients.

b. TikTok Platform, TikTok can be utilized for this MSME in the following ways:

1. Interaction: TikTok is known for its fast and trend-based interactions. Sharing content relevant to local and global trends and responding to comments are essential strategies.
2. Sharing of Content: The most effective content on TikTok is short, entertaining, and informative videos. This content can include the cooking process, behind-the-scenes activities, or collaborations with local content creators.
3. Accessibility: Utilizing local and global trending hashtags and viral sounds allows content to be easily accessed by audiences who are not specifically searching for the product.
4. Credibility on TikTok can be built through honest, transparent, and authentic content, such as clean cooking process videos and behind-the-scenes business activities.

3.3 Theoretical Discussion and Implications for Consumer Behavior

3.3.1 Triangulation of Digital Communication Strategy and Shifts in Consumer Behavior

This sub-chapter triangulates Social Media Marketing (SMM) theory, empirical evidence in the field, and primary data provided by informants to analyze how digital interventions have changed the business landscape of Mie Balap Wardi Pallo. The results of the new visual identity initiated by the researcher are depicted in the image below:

a. Official Account Creation: Creating official Instagram and TikTok accounts for the business.

Instagram account name: @mieballapwardipallo

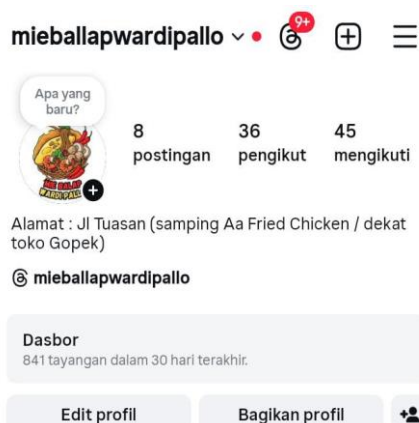


Figure 2. MSME Instagram Account

Tiktok Account name: @MieBalapWardiPallo



Figure 3. MSME Tiktok Account

b. Designing the Mie Balap Wardi Pallo logo for the profile accounts on Instagram and TikTok.



Figure 4. Social Media Account Logo

c. Planning content and creative ideas for marketing purposes.

d. Implementing the Social Media Marketing indicators, namely Interaction, Sharing of Content, Accessibility, and Credibility.

3.3.2 Consumer Behavior Dynamics and SMM Indicator Analysis

The implementation of official accounts on Instagram (@mieballapwardipallo) and TikTok (@MieBalapWardiPallo) has provided a new digital identity that strengthens the MSME's market position (Wibowo et al., 2022). The application of Social Media Marketing (SMM) indicators based on Tong & Subagio's (2020) theory qualitatively shows a profound shift in consumer psychology and behavior patterns, which goes beyond just the usual platform metrics:

a. Interaction

The limitations of digital interaction acknowledged by business owners (INF-01 and INF-02) prior to this research were immediately mitigated through active two-way communication management. When the admin responded to audience questions regarding prices and locations in Figure 5 (Comment Interaction), this activity went beyond simply conveying information, but also building an online social presence. For traditional culinary businesses, this digital interaction successfully reduced the perception of purchase risk in consumers' minds. Today's digital consumers demand a quick

response; when microbusinesses respond warmly, they transfer the friendliness of physical service into the digital realm, effectively converting casual viewers into physical visitors (Sihura et al., 2025).

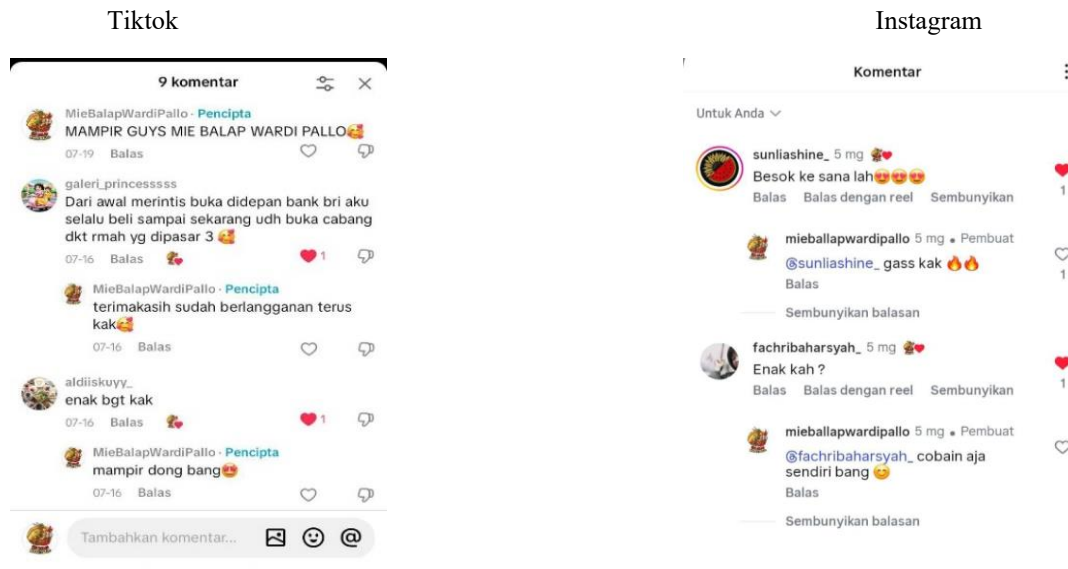


Figure 5. Comment Interaction

b. Sharing of Content

The expectations of employee leaders (INF-03) regarding the importance of educating about product uniqueness were realized through the shift in content format to short videos based on TikTok and Reels as shown in Figure 6 (Video Feed). This format has been proven to achieve up to 70% wider reach than static photos. Culinary choices are strongly influenced by the audience's emotions from what they see; the dynamic, steaming visualization of the "race noodles" cooking process immediately triggers an instant sensory response in the form of appetite appeal. This type of content works more effectively because it replicates the real-life experience of consumers waiting in line and seeing their dishes being prepared live (Aldiyana et al., 2024).



Figure 6. Feed Video

c. Accessibility

The reliance on word-of-mouth marketing patterns demonstrated across all internal lines (INF-01 to INF-07) has proven to restrict the consumer distribution area geographically, leaving out-of-town consumers frequently struggling to locate the physical shop. This geographic barrier of traditional marketing is eliminated through the optimization of Location Tagging features, as well as the transparency of menu information and operational hours shown in Figure 7 (Detail

Information). This transparent digital information access reduces search costs for consumers, thereby driving an increased flow of new customer traffic to the Jalan Tuasan area. (Gunawan et al., 2021).

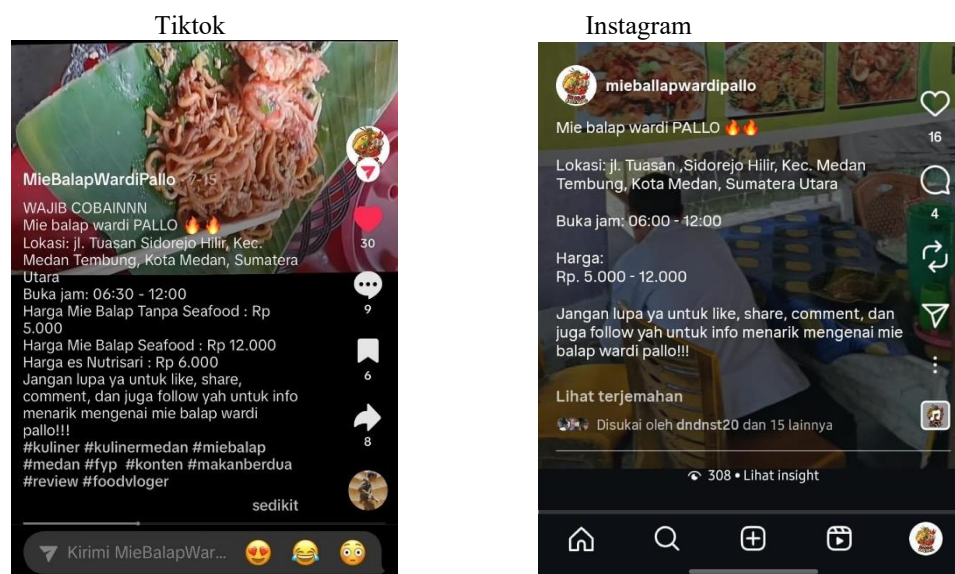


Figure 7. Detail Information

d. Credibility

As chefs (INF-04 and INF-05) and firewood suppliers (INF-08) maintain the consistency of traditional flavors from within the kitchen, social media serves to disseminate this social proof to the public. Documenting the actual physical queue conditions in Figure 8 (The MSME Location) plays a crucial role in objectively building public trust. This footage of busy physical interactions demonstrates a high content conversion rate, where direct confirmation of taste and quality in the eyes of a digital audience significantly increases the confidence of new consumers to make purchases (Gunawan et al., 2021).



Figure 8. The MSME location

3.3.3 Sales Analysis: Novelty Effects vs. Strategic Continuity

Empirical recording of the impact of this SMM strategy is measured through the sales volume of raw materials which is presented in the following table:

Table 2. Sales Results

NO	Noodle Type	Monthly Sales Results			
		Sales Before Using Social Media MEI	Sales After Using Social Media JUNE	Sales After Using Social Media JULY	Sales After Using Social Media AUGUST
1.	Mie Tiaw	725 Kg	755 Kg	870 Kg	900 Kg
2.	Mie Kuning	120 Kg	150 Kg	210 Kg	240 Kg
3.	Mie Hun	260 Kg	290 Kg	350 Kg	375 Kg
Total		1.105 Kg	1.195 Kg	1.430 Kg	1.515 Kg

Based on Table 2, there was a 19.67% increase in total sales volume in the first month of implementation (July), with the highest spike in the Mie Kuning variant, reaching 40%. However, evaluating this data as a definitive long-term success of SMM would introduce academic analysis bias. The researchers identified confounding variables that contributed to these results:

a. Novelty Effect

The spike in July was influenced by the initial curiosity of the digital audience, who were euphoric about seeing this legendary traditional shop finally launch an official account. This purchasing behavior tends to be temporary and risks plateauing if the novelty effect begins to fade in subsequent months.

b. Seasonal Factors

The July cycle coincides with post-holiday payday and the start of the new school year in Medan Tembung, which historically contributes to the local trend of independent dining out.

c. Content Bias

The massive 40% growth in Mie Kuning occurred because content creators' planning in July coincidentally focused entirely on exploring the aesthetic visualization of cooking yellow noodle variants. This demonstrates that content can shift consumer purchasing preferences temporarily, rather than simply expanding the market.

3.4 Barriers to Adopting a Social Media Marketing Strategy

Based on data reduction results from in-depth interviews with eight informants and direct field observations, the transition of Mie Balap Wardi Pallo's marketing from conventional methods to digital platforms was not without a number of structural obstacles. The main obstacles identified include:

a. Limited Specialized Human Resources

The most crucial obstacle faced by the Mie Balap Wardi Pallo MSME is the lack of dedicated personnel or administrators to professionally manage social media accounts. The business owners (INF-01 and INF-02) retain full control over financial management and daily operations, while the staff and chefs focus on the busy kitchen rhythm to maintain order efficiency and taste consistency. As a result, this dual workload makes it difficult for the owners to consistently set aside time to plan, shoot videos, and edit creative content on a regular basis.

b. Consistency and Operational Time Management Constraints

In line with limited human resources, tight operational hours in the field are a major stumbling block in meeting strong accessibility indicators. Partners' primary focus in physical stores is serving the queue of walk-in customers. This intensive operational focus often leads to the neglect of scheduled content uploads to pursue viral algorithms or sustained exposure on Instagram and TikTok.

c. Threat of Declining Intensity after the Novelty Effect Fades

Psychologically and in light of market trends, the significant surge in raw material sales volume in the first month of implementation (July) was largely driven by the novelty effect. Digital consumers in the Medan Tembung area were curious and euphoric to see this legendary traditional shop finally launch an official account. A barrier to the sustainability of this strategy is the risk of a plateau if future content is not varied, given the fast-burning nature of social media audience retention.

d. Dependence on Seasonal Factors and Content Bias

Sales data analysis reveals obstacles in the form of uncertainty about long-term market stability due to confounding variables. Fluctuating sales growth (such as a sharp spike of up to 40% in the Yellow Noodle variant) is highly dependent on the direction of creative content creation that month. This suggests that social media adoption at the micro-scale is still tactical temporary to shift consumer menu preferences, and has not yet fully stabilized in building independent customer loyalty without reliance on new content interventions or seasonal cycles like payday.

4. CONCLUSION

The theoretical synthesis of this study shows that the use of Instagram and TikTok platforms by the Wardi Pallo Mie Balap MSME successfully transformed conventional interaction patterns into digital marketing communications that influenced consumer information-seeking behavior. Based on the Social Media Marketing (SMM) framework, optimizing the dimensions of interaction, content sharing, accessibility, and credibility has been empirically proven to build a social presence and stimulate audience appetite. This digital intervention had a tangible tactical impact on expanding local market reach, as confirmed by a 19.67% increase in sales volume of key raw materials during the initial implementation period. Given the scale of this study, which is a culinary micro-enterprise, the contribution of social media adoption is limited to strengthening local competitiveness in the Medan Tembung area, so macro-impacts at a national scale are considered unrealistic to justify. Despite demonstrating a positive growth trend, this study faces a crucial temporal limitation, as the impact evaluation relies only on data from one month after implementation. This limited timeframe makes it difficult for longitudinal analysis to definitively separate the formation of long-term consumer loyalty from temporal market anomalies, such as the novelty effect and seasonal factors affecting local purchasing power. Furthermore, the depth of qualitative data and the consistency of daily account management also face structural constraints due to the limited operating hours of business owners and the lack of dedicated personnel dedicated to producing creative content on an ongoing basis. To maintain the continuity of partners' digital presence, a practical recommendation is the implementation of a micro-work delegation model, where business owners can train front-line staff to simply document

shop activities or collaborate with local culinary micro-influencers using a barter partnership system. Meanwhile, for future research, it is recommended to expand the observation period (at least 12 months) to filter out seasonal fluctuation bias and measure the actual conversion rate of social media followers into repeat customers. Future research should also focus on developing time-efficient and semi-automated digital marketing models that are operationally friendly for micro-businesses with limited human resources.

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