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# Marketing Strategy for Food MSMEs with WhatsApp as the Main Media

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study investigates the marketing strategies of food MSMEs in the Mataram campus area, focusing on the use of WhatsApp Business as the primary digital marketing tool in the New Normal era of 2024.

**Approach:** Employing a qualitative methodology, the research combines structured interviews and direct observations of MSME participants to understand their strategies and challenges in leveraging digital technology for marketing.

**Results:** Findings reveal that WhatsApp Business is widely embraced among MSMEs, facilitating personalized customer engagement and efficient communication. Notable establishments such as Warung Makan Mama, Kedai Kopi Baru, and Toko Roti Makmur have successfully utilized the platform to enhance customer loyalty and market reach. Despite benefits such as increased visibility and customer interaction, challenges include managing high volumes of communication and maintaining data security.

**Novelty:** This study highlights the significant impact of WhatsApp Business on MSME marketing strategies in a post-pandemic context, demonstrating its role in promoting digital literacy and economic resilience.

**Practical Applications:** The research underscores the need for training initiatives, improved digital infrastructure, and supportive policies to maximize the benefits of digital marketing tools for MSMEs. These measures can foster sustainable growth and enhance the economic resilience of local communities in Mataram.

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## 1. Introduction

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the food sector have played a non-negligible role in the Indonesian economy (Trinh, Morgan, and Sonobe 2020). According to the latest data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the MSME sector contributes more than 60% to the national gross domestic product (GDP) and absorbs around 97% of the total workforce in the private sector (Suhaili and Sugiharsono 2019). This shows that MSMEs not only serve as the driving force of the local economy, but also as a

significant employer, helping to reduce unemployment and poverty in Indonesia (Tambunan 2019). The growth of food MSMEs over the past decade reflects their rapid adaptation to social, economic and technological changes (Candra et al. 2022). As part of a dynamic economic structure, food MSMEs not only produce a variety of products from local wisdom and community innovation, but also enrich the nation's cultural treasures and intellectual property (Rembulan, Kusumowidagdo, and Rahadiyanti 2023). Food MSME products often contain cultural added value that not only meets

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the needs of the local market, but also attracts the interest of the global market (Deku, Wang, and Das 2023).

Nevertheless, the COVID-19 epidemic, which has been spreading globally since early 2020, has presented food MSMEs with unparalleled difficulties (Engidaw 2022a). The operational and marketing strategies of food MSMEs have been greatly impacted by lockdown rules, movement constraints, and changes in customer behavior (Nordhagen et al. 2021). For instance, social constraints put in place to slow down the virus's spread have compelled MSMEs to use digital marketing solutions; as a result, WhatsApp and other social media platforms have emerged as the primary means of connecting with clients and retaining a customer base (Engidaw 2022b).

Shankar et al. (2022) In this environment, the significance of digital marketing theory and communication methods cannot be overstated. Utilizing digital technology enables MSMEs to broaden their market reach, engage in direct consumer interaction, and enhance operational efficiency. Shawky et al. (2020) argue that social media serves not only as a means to promote items, but also as a platform for establishing and sustaining enduring consumer relationships.

According to Hafni & Gozali (2006), previous studies indicate that MSMEs exhibit more resilience in dealing with economic crises when compared to large enterprises. MSMEs should endeavor to overcome significant obstacles such as limited resources, inadequate expertise, and ineffective inventory management (Gupta and Kumar Singh 2023). This is corroborated by the capacity of MSMEs to exhibit more adaptability in modifying their business models in response to market fluctuations and evolving consumer demands (Putritamara et al. 2023). Nevertheless, the COVID-19 epidemic has necessitated swift and efficient adaptations from MSMEs in their marketing and operational strategies due to significant shifts in customer behavior and economic situations (Behl et al. 2022). The objective of this study is to ascertain the various results of marketing techniques employed by food MSMEs both prior to and following the COVID-19 pandemic, and evaluate their influence on

company success (Pusung, Narsa, and Wardhaningrum 2023). This research aims to provide specific recommendations to assist the growth and sustainability of food MSMEs in Indonesia by comprehending the problems and opportunities they encounter in embracing digital technology.

The primary aim of this research is to enhance comprehension of how food MSMEs may maximize the utilization of digital technologies to enhance their competitiveness in both local and global markets. It is anticipated that by using this strategy, the research will significantly contribute to the creation of efficient and long-lasting marketing plans for Indonesian food MSMEs.

## 2. Critical Review

This introduction highlights the vital significance of MSMEs, or micro, small, and medium-sized in the Indonesian economy, particularly in relation to national economic stability and social progress. Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) have a crucial role in both supporting the local economy and contributing to employment stability, so helping to decrease the unemployment rate in Indonesia. Bachtiar et al. (2023) demonstrated that micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) exhibit greater resilience during economic crises in comparison to giant corporations, which frequently encounter stagnation or even closure.

The capacity of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to adjust to economic and market fluctuations is also seen in their reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic. As an illustration, the pandemic has compelled micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to make significant and fundamental alterations to their marketing strategy. MSMEs are transitioning from traditional methods that involve face-to-face engagement with consumers at events or busy locations to digital marketing strategies that prioritize the utilization of social media and internet platforms. Nielsen (2020) observes that approximately 30% of customers exhibit a preference for online shopping amidst the ongoing pandemic, indicating a notable alteration in consumer conduct that

micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) should be prepared for (Afenyo-Agbe et al. 2021; Nassuna et al. 2023).

Utilizing digital media and technological advances is not only crucial for MSMEs to continue operating during this challenging period, but it is also essential for enhancing their exposure and expanding their market reach. Agnihotri (2020) demonstrated that social media serves as more than just a marketing tool. It is also an efficient platform for customer engagement and support, playing a vital role in fostering consumer loyalty in the current digital age.

Nevertheless, there are obstacles that must be surmounted in the execution of this digital marketing approach, particularly with the restricted availability and comprehension of modern technology among MSMEs (Cueto et al. 2022). Furthermore, alterations in buying habits and laws related to the pandemic significantly impact the market dynamics for food micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) (Suguna et al. 2022). This research will investigate the issues faced by food MSMEs in Indonesia and analyze the marketing techniques they employ to enhance their position in both local and global markets (Kadarisman 2019). This Critical Review emphasizes the significance of adaptable and technology-driven marketing tactics for food MSMEs during the current pandemic era. This research aims to make a substantial contribution to the continued development and viability of food MSMEs in Indonesia. It also provides practical insights for stakeholders to build sustainable policies that support the sector.

### 3. Method Innovation

This study employs a qualitative methodology, specifically focusing on observing food entrepreneurship in the Mataram campus area. The chosen methodology is to acquire a comprehensive comprehension of the strategies and obstacles encountered by MSME participants in the food industry, specifically in the context of utilizing digital technology for marketing during the New Normal 2024 era, which presents technological difficulties.

In this study, MSME participants in the food industry in the Mataram campus region were interviewed in an organized manner and by direct observation. The observation method was employed to personally see the everyday activities of MSME participants, their marketing tactics, and their ability to adjust to changes in the business climate amid the COVID-19 epidemic.

Initially, observations were conducted to gain a direct understanding of the marketing practices implemented by MSME actors (Suguna et al. 2022). This encompasses monitoring their engagement with customers, their utilization of social media or other digital channels, and other tactics they employ to market their food goods. These findings offer an authentic depiction of the marketing difficulties that MSMEs encounter amidst the social constraints imposed during the pandemic.

Subsequently, structured interviews are carried out to investigate the perspectives and firsthand encounters of MSME participants regarding the use of technological advances in marketing (Mutiah 2019). The interviews will encompass subjects such as proficient approaches in addressing issues posed by the pandemic, their interpretation of shifts in consumer behavior, and the influence of New Normal legislation on their firm (Salman, Muslich, and ... 2018).

Furthermore, the course will employ both lecture and discussion approaches to impart a comprehensive comprehension of fundamental principles pertaining to the New Normal period, tactics for the creative economy, and the utilization of social media for marketing purposes (Nikmatuniyah et al. 2023). These lectures aim to communicate pertinent information and facilitate discussions and knowledge sharing among MSME actors who are dealing with similar difficulties.

The presentation and practice method will actively include participants in marketing activities by utilizing digital technologies. This includes practical instruction on how to use social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp Business to promote and sell more of their items. This method aims to enhance the comprehension and utilization of digital marketing among MSME players, enabling them to effectively utilize it in

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their business environment. This research is backed by relevant literature on digital marketing strategies in the New Normal period and case studies on technology deployment in MSMEs. This literature will offer a robust theoretical framework for analyzing and comprehending the observations and interviews carried out in the field. The research employs a qualitative approach to gain significant insights into the dynamics of MSMEs in the food sector in Mataram. It specifically focuses on how these businesses adapt to the shifting marketing landscape caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the New Normal era.

#### 4. Result and Discussion

This study specifically examined micro, little, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) operating in the food industry near the Mataram campus. This part provides an analysis of the observations, interviews, and discussions conducted with MSME entrepreneurs addressing the utilization of WhatsApp Business as a digital marketing tool in the current era of the New Normal. Observations conducted around the Mataram campus yielded results that indicate a variety of MSME enterprises are actively operating in the vicinity. One notable establishment is Warung Makan Mama, renowned for its authentic Sasak dishes including tumpeng rice and grilled chicken. The stall appeals to guests not just via the genuine nature of its cuisine, but also through a welcoming ambiance that fosters an enjoyable dining experience. Warung Makan Mama has effectively utilized WhatsApp Business to directly advertise its exceptional menu to both existing and new consumers.

Furthermore, Kedai Kopi Baru has emerged as a popular gathering place for students and young professionals in the vicinity of Palasari Street. This café not only focuses on serving high-quality coffee sourced from local producers, but it also provides a serene ambiance that is ideal for social gatherings and intellectual conversations. By utilizing WhatsApp Business, Kedai Kopi Baru can disseminate exclusive promotions regarding discounts on their coffee goods or convey details about special events directly to their clients,

thereby enhancing customer engagement and fostering loyalty.

Warung Sate Kita, located on Jalan Gajah Mada, is renowned for its delectable chicken and goat satay, which offers both affordability and authentic flavors. It is a highly preferred option for individuals who enjoy satay in the vicinity. Using WhatsApp Business, Warung Sate Kita may promptly communicate new satay deals or remind clients of their hours of operation and location, thereby fostering customer loyalty. Conversely, Toko Roti Makmur located on Jalan Darmawangsa provides a wide range of bread options made from superior local ingredients. The business is renowned not just for its unique flavors, but also for its constantly excellent service. WhatsApp Business enables Toko Roti Makmur to directly engage with clients, providing efficient updates on new goods and prompt responses to inquiries. Last but not least, fresh veggies from nearby farms are available at the Healthy Vegetable Depot on Jalan Merdeka, which prioritizes organic quality and offers reasonable prices. It is an excellent option for individuals that prioritize their well-being and are interested in promoting locally sourced food. In addition to providing unique discounts that can be accessible through the messaging app, WhatsApp Business assists Depot Sayuran Sehat in educating its clients about the advantages of organic products.

MSMEs in the food sector using WhatsApp Business as a digital marketing tool: The analysis of WhatsApp Business's uptake among MSMEs in the Mataram area is the main goal of this study project. Through careful observation, interviews, and discussions with MSME businesses, it has been determined that WhatsApp Business is widely embraced by this group. The accessibility of this platform enables MSMEs to directly engage with clients in a personalized manner, hence facilitating its utilization (Mohanty and Mishra 2020). According to Addin et al. (2021), the majority of MSME entrepreneurs found WhatsApp Business user-friendly and value its features, such as business profiles, which enhance client confidence and enable more effective communication (Wan et al. 2019). Prior research

has demonstrated that using digital technologies, such as WhatsApp Business, can enhance operational efficiency and generate fresh prospects for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to broaden their market reach (Pingali et al. 2023). The findings of this study align with these results, highlighting the significance of digital platforms in facilitating the expansion and competitiveness of MSMEs in the present digital age.

WhatsApp Business has a substantial influence on the marketing strategy of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Mataram. Entrepreneurs utilized the network to transmit promotional messages, disseminate product updates, and establish direct relationship with customers. MSMEs can successfully exhibit their items and captivate customer interest by utilizing the capability to transmit multimedia communications, such as images and videos (Agyapong 2022). WhatsApp Business communication's real-time aspect enables prompt responses to consumer inquiries, hence enhancing customer satisfaction and fostering loyalty (Palazón and López-López 2023). Prior research indicates that using social media into digital marketing strategies might enhance brand recognition and foster engagement with customers (Shawky et al. 2019, 2020). Using WhatsApp Business as a direct communication tool gives micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) a competitive edge in both keeping and acquiring new clients.

MSME entrepreneurs have many obstacles when it comes to efficiently utilizing WhatsApp Business, despite its notable advantages. Major obstacles involve effectively handling large quantities of communications, guaranteeing prompt replies, and upholding uniformity in the caliber of content provided to clients. Despite the use of end-to-end encryption on the WhatsApp Business platform to safeguard conversations, certain entrepreneurs have raised apprehensions over data privacy and security (Bameyi et al. 2021). Prior research has shown comparable obstacles encountered by MSMEs when it comes to using digital technologies, such as the requirement for infrastructure assistance and

enhanced digital literacy (Alfarizi and Widiastuti 2023). Hence, it is crucial for the government and related institutions to offer the requisite training and assistance to MSMEs in order to fully harness the potential of WhatsApp Business.

In order to address current obstacles and enhance the utilization of WhatsApp Business, micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Mataram are implementing a range of tactics. These strategies encompass generating captivating and pertinent material, employing automation for repetitive responses, and incorporating consumer feedback into the development of new products (Lestari et al., 2022). Efficient interpersonal communication and effective customer relationship management are crucial for establishing enduring corporate success (Dewnarain, Ramkissoon, and Mavondo 2019).

The utilization of WhatsApp Business not only yields business advantages but also generates substantial socio-economic effects within the MSME community in Mataram. The enhanced proficiency in using digital technology and the ability to access online markets have empowered entrepreneurs to effectively target a larger consumer base and extend the geographical scope of their firm. Furthermore, this action plays a role in enhancing economic resilience within the neighborhood by bolstering local enterprises and maintaining job opportunities (Ahmad et al. 2022).

Policy and support recommendations can be made to assist MSMEs in maximizing the utilization of WhatsApp Business, based on the research findings. The recommendations encompass training initiatives for digital marketing proficiency, enhancing internet infrastructure in remote regions, and formulating regulations that foster innovative digital businesses (Gómez-Carmona et al. 2023). To ensure the continued development of MSMEs, it is essential to foster collaboration among academia, government agencies, and the private sector. This collaboration will promote the exchange of knowledge and pooling of resources.

## 5. Conclusion

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This research highlights the importance of WhatsApp Business as an effective digital marketing tool for MSMEs in the food sector around the Mataram campus. The widespread adoption of this platform has helped MSMEs to increase visibility, expand markets, and improve interactions with customers. Despite facing some challenges, the potential of WhatsApp Business to

strengthen marketing strategies and increase customer engagement is significant. With the right support from the government and relevant stakeholders, MSMEs can continue to optimize the benefits of digital technology to achieve sustainable growth and improve the economic resilience of local communities.

## 6. Table Data and Image



**Figure 1: Crepes Vendor Interview & Interview to Check the Food Condition of Potato Sticks**



**Figure 2: Interview to check the condition of Bakpao and Es Dawet Ayu Business**

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