



The optimizing the use of Tiktok to increase sales of Medan Pancing Culinary MSMEs



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ABSTRACT

This study examines the utilization of TikTok as a digital marketing platform to enhance sales performance and brand awareness among culinary Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the Medan Pancing area. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with culinary MSME owners to explore both the opportunities and challenges associated with TikTok adoption. The findings indicate that TikTok provides an effective and low-cost marketing channel through its algorithm-driven content distribution, interactive features, and broad audience reach. MSMEs that consistently produced creative and authentic content reported improved brand visibility and increased sales performance. However, limited digital literacy, low confidence in content creation, inadequate understanding of platform analytics, and rapidly evolving content trends remain major barriers to effective utilization. The study further identifies digital skills training, collaboration with local content creators, and the adoption of user-friendly content production tools as practical strategies to accelerate digital transformation among MSMEs. These findings highlight TikTok's strategic role in strengthening customer engagement and business competitiveness while contributing to the growing literature on digital marketing and MSME development in emerging economies. Future research is encouraged to employ quantitative or mixed-method approaches to examine the long-term impact of social media marketing on MSME performance across different business sectors.

Keywords: TikTok Marketing; Culinary MSMEs; Digital Promotion; Sales Growth



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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information and communication technology in the current digital era has had a significant impact on changes in consumer behavior and business marketing strategies (Rafsandjani, 2017). Businesses are now required to adapt to technological developments, particularly in utilizing social media as an effective promotional and marketing tool (Adiatma et al., 2025).

Amidst shifting consumer consumption patterns, TikTok has emerged as a highly influential social media platform with significant potential for use by Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), including the culinary sector in the Medan Pancing area (Rahayuningsih & Budihard, 2025). TikTok is a short-video platform that prioritizes user creativity and interactivity. Through its unique algorithm, TikTok displays content tailored to user preferences, creating significant opportunities for businesses to reach a wider target market. According to a 2024 report by DataReportal, Indonesia ranks second in the world in terms of active TikTok users, with over 126 million users. This fact demonstrates that TikTok is not just an entertainment medium but also a strategic channel for digital marketing activities (Dawit, 2026).

In theoretical terms, Cindy et al., (2025) explain that digital marketing is an activity that utilizes technology-based media to build long-term relationships between companies and customers. This concept aligns with the Relationship Marketing approach, where marketing no longer focuses solely on short-term transactions but rather on value creation and customer engagement (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995). TikTok, with its interactive features such as comments, challenges, and live streaming, enables direct interaction between businesses and consumers, thereby strengthening emotional bonds and customer loyalty. Furthermore, the AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) theory proposed by Das, (2021) is also relevant in understanding TikTok's effectiveness as a promotional medium. Creative video content that captures attention will foster interest in a product, create a desire to try it, and ultimately encourage purchase action. A content-based marketing strategy on TikTok can implement this theory through engaging product visualizations, the use of popular music, and narratives that pique consumer interest.

Meanwhile, Aeron & Rahman, (2025) using their Social Media Marketing theory, assert that social media enables more personalized, two-way communication between consumers and producers. In this case, TikTok serves as a platform that not only disseminates information but also builds a brand community. When culinary MSMEs actively interact and respond to customer comments or reviews, trust and a positive image of the product are built, thereby increasing sales opportunities.

Another relevant theory is the Diffusion of Innovation study by Rogers et al., (2014), which explains how an innovation is received and adopted by the public. In this context, the use of TikTok by MSMEs can be seen as an innovation in marketing strategy. The success of its adoption depends on factors such as relative advantage, compatibility with the values or needs of the business owner, and ease of use (complexity). Culinary MSMEs that are able to adapt to new technologies and create content that aligns with trends will be more quickly accepted by digital consumers (Mulyono & Rolando, 2024).

Furthermore, the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) study by Rahman et al., (2022) emphasizes the importance of message consistency across various communication channels. In the context of TikTok, this means that every uploaded piece of content must reflect the brand identity and values of the culinary products being offered. The use of consistent visual elements, language style, and narrative will reinforce

a sense of professionalism and help build brand awareness among social media users. Furthermore, the Consumer Engagement study by Cohen & O'Neill, (2013) explains that consumer engagement on digital platforms extends beyond watching or liking content, but also involves active participation through commenting, sharing videos, or creating user-generated content. This is highly relevant to TikTok's community-based ecosystem, where active interactions between consumers and businesses can expand promotional reach without significant costs.

Through these theories, it can be understood that utilizing TikTok for MSMEs is not simply about following social media trends, but rather a marketing strategy based on scientific principles and modern consumer behavior. By combining creativity, market understanding, and the application of digital marketing theory, culinary MSMEs in Medan Pancing have significant potential to expand their market reach, increase sales, and build a strong brand image in the digital realm.

Based on the background and theoretical perspectives discussed above, this study aims to analyze the utilization of TikTok as a digital marketing medium in improving the marketing performance of culinary Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the Medan Pancing area. Specifically, the study seeks to examine how TikTok's interactive features, content creativity, and digital communication strategies contribute to expanding market reach, increasing customer engagement, strengthening brand awareness, and ultimately supporting business growth (Guerrero, 2023). By focusing on culinary MSMEs in Medan Pancing, this research is expected to provide a contextual understanding of how digital marketing strategies can be effectively implemented by local businesses in adapting to the rapidly evolving digital environment.

Furthermore, the findings of this study are expected to contribute theoretically by enriching the literature on digital marketing and social media marketing, particularly regarding the application of TikTok in the MSME sector. Practically, the results are expected to serve as a useful reference for MSME owners in developing effective promotional strategies through TikTok, while also providing insights for policymakers and related institutions in designing programs that support the digital transformation and competitiveness of MSMEs in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Marketing Transformation and Consumer Engagement Through TikTok

The rapid advancement of digital technology has transformed marketing practices across various business sectors, including micro-enterprises operating in local culinary areas (Sjahrudin et al., 2025). Social media platforms have shifted from being simple interaction tools into essential marketing channels that enable businesses to reach broader audiences with relatively low costs (Fuady & Rokhmat, 2021). Within this digital ecosystem, TikTok has emerged as a dominant platform due to its short-video format, algorithm-based content distribution, and high user engagement. The literature consistently highlights that digital marketing effectiveness is greatly influenced by the ability of businesses to create engaging, authentic, and value-driven content (Umoren et al., 2022). For small culinary businesses, this transformation provides an opportunity to showcase product uniqueness, production processes, and customer experiences in ways that enhance consumer trust and stimulate purchase intention.

Studies on digital consumer behavior demonstrate that modern consumers respond more positively to visual storytelling and interactive communication compared

to traditional promotional methods (Aeron & Rahman, 2025). Platforms like TikTok foster emotional connection by allowing businesses to express their brand identity through creative narratives, music integration, and personalized interactions. These features support the broader understanding that digital engagement is not merely transactional but relational, where continuous interaction strengthens loyalty and brand recognition. Research on viral marketing also reveals that content with strong emotional appeal and visual attractiveness can spread rapidly, enabling even small businesses to reach visibility comparable to larger competitors (Sunarso & Mustafa, 2023).

Innovation Adoption, Brand Development, and Social Commerce Integration

Theoretical discussions on innovation adoption emphasize that small enterprises often face challenges when adapting to new technologies, including limited digital literacy, scarce resources, and lack of confidence in content creation (Ingepuri et al., 2025). Despite these constraints, the literature points to increasing evidence that MSMEs that embrace digital platforms tend to experience improvements in competitiveness and customer reach. Successful adoption often depends on the perceived usefulness of the technology, compatibility with business needs, and ease of learning (Kustanti, 2022). TikTok's user-friendly interface, built-in editing tools, and algorithmic support lower the barriers for culinary MSMEs to produce effective promotional content without requiring advanced technical skills.

Other scholarly works discuss the role of social media in shaping brand communities, where interactions between businesses and consumers create a sense of closeness and shared experience (Riptiono, 2023). In the context of culinary MSMEs, this dynamic is crucial because food-related content naturally lends itself to sensory appeal and emotional storytelling. The literature also suggests that consistent content creation and message coherence are essential components of brand development across digital platforms. When small businesses maintain a consistent presence and communicate in a relatable manner, consumers tend to develop higher brand recall and trust, especially in competitive culinary markets (Fatorachian et al., 2025). Furthermore, existing research highlights the growing relevance of integrated platforms that combine promotion and direct transactions (Mauludin, 2022). TikTok's commercial features align with these findings, demonstrating how social commerce bridges entertainment and purchasing behavior. This trend supports the notion that digital platforms not only influence awareness but also accelerate purchasing decisions by reducing the gap between exposure and action (Landrawati & Rosmaya, 2022).

Overall, the literature shows a clear theoretical foundation for understanding why TikTok is increasingly relevant for MSMEs. Its ability to distribute content widely, foster engagement, and support direct transactions aligns with the broader shift in digital marketing practices. At the same time, the discussions on barriers and capacity-building emphasize that digital transformation requires not only platform adoption but also continuous learning and adaptation (Felix & Rembulan, 2023). Within this scholarly landscape, the present study contributes by examining how these theoretical perspectives manifest in the specific context of culinary MSMEs in Medan Pancing, where digital readiness, content creativity, and marketing consistency play key roles in determining the success of TikTok-based promotion.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, aiming to understand the actual conditions of culinary MSMEs in the Medan Pancing area in utilizing social media, particularly TikTok, as a marketing and sales tool. This approach was chosen because it is suitable for in-depth descriptions of social phenomena and business behavior, as well as providing a contextual understanding of the obstacles and potential they face in adopting digital technology (Solomon, 2017).

The data sources for this study were obtained through in-depth interviews with several culinary MSMEs actively operating in the Medan Pancing area. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on the criteria of business owners who have not yet optimally utilized the TikTok platform or have never used it for promotional purposes (Sjadja'ah et al., 2024). This selection of informants was intended to uncover the reasons for the low utilization of TikTok and explore business owners' perceptions of the opportunities for using social media as a modern marketing tool.

The interviews were conducted semi-structured to obtain more open and in-depth data. During the interviews, researchers explored various issues related to business owners' experiences in running their businesses, their understanding of social media, their reasons for not using TikTok, and their views on the potential of digital marketing in increasing sales. The results of these interviews served as the primary source for assessing the level of digital literacy and the readiness of MSMEs to adapt to changing promotional patterns in the digital era.

The collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis (Alhojailan & Ibrahim, 2012). The analysis process began with data reduction, which involved selecting key information from the interviews, then presenting the data in a structured manner for easy understanding, and concluding with conclusions that illustrate the main findings (Queirós et al., 2017). Through this analysis, the research sought to identify factors hindering TikTok utilization and explore educational strategies that could help MSMEs understand the platform's benefits and optimize its effectiveness.

In addition to the interviews, the researchers also conducted brief observations of several TikTok accounts belonging to MSMEs in other regions that had successfully used the platform for promotion. These observations served as comparisons to provide concrete examples for MSMEs in Medan Pancing on how creative content strategies can be effectively implemented in the context of local culinary businesses. Thus, this research methodology not only serves to describe the phenomena occurring in the field but also has an educational orientation (Deni et al., 2024). Through the results of this study, it is hoped that culinary MSMEs in Medan Pancing can gain a better understanding of TikTok's potential as a digital marketing medium and be encouraged to adopt content-based promotional strategies that are creative, efficient, and relevant to current market needs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile and Characteristics of Culinary MSMEs in Medan Pancing

The research findings indicate that culinary MSMEs in the Medan Pancing area of Medan City possess unique characteristics as micro-enterprises that thrive amidst increasingly fierce competition in the culinary industry. Most businesses in this area operate in local food and beverages, such as smashed chicken (chicken penyet), fried rice, Acehese noodles, contemporary coffee, and various traditional snacks typical of North Sumatra. The products offered are generally homemade and sold on a home-based basis, either

through small roadside stalls or app-based delivery services. In general, the majority of culinary MSMEs in Medan Pancing are still classified as micro-enterprises, with fewer than five employees and limited capital (Arjang et al., 2025). Most business operations are still conducted conventionally, including production, distribution, and marketing. However, there is a trend that business owners are beginning to demonstrate awareness of the importance of digital promotion as a strategy to increase sales and expand market reach (Chrismardani, 2014).

Regarding social media utilization, this study found that although most MSMEs have social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp Business, their use remains passive and limited to posting product photos or simple promotions. Only a small percentage of business owners have tried using TikTok, and most of the informants don't fully understand the platform's immense potential for attracting customers and building their brand. They generally view TikTok as merely an entertainment medium, rather than a strategic tool for marketing culinary products.

This fact suggests that MSMEs in Medan Pancing actually have significant opportunities to grow through digital transformation, but still need education and guidance on how to utilize social media effectively. A lack of understanding of content strategy, the TikTok algorithm, and how to build engagement with audiences is a major barrier to adoption of the platform. Furthermore, some business owners expressed concerns about limited time, technical skills, and creativity in creating engaging video content.

Motivations and Driving Factors for Using TikTok

Interviews indicate that although some culinary MSMEs in Medan Pancing have not yet fully utilized TikTok, there is a growing awareness of the platform's significant potential as a digital marketing tool. Business owners view TikTok as having a unique appeal compared to other platforms due to its short, interactive video-based content format, which allows businesses to quickly reach a wide audience. They describe TikTok as a platform that "goes viral quickly" and is "easily accessible," allowing them to introduce their culinary products to consumers outside Medan without requiring significant promotional costs. This perception is reflected in the statement of Informant A:

"TikTok is easier because many people use it every day. If one of our videos reaches the For You Page, many people can see our products without spending a lot of money on promotion. That's why I think TikTok has great potential for my business." (Informant A).

The primary motivation for MSMEs considering using TikTok is driven by the desire to increase their business visibility and competitiveness in an increasingly digital marketplace (Hasanah et al., 2025). As explained by Informant B:

"Nowadays customers often look for food recommendations on TikTok. If our business is not there, people may not know about us. We want more people to recognize our products." (Informant B)

Furthermore, another motivation stems from the rapidly growing digital marketing trend. Some informants also admitted to being motivated to use TikTok by observing the success of other businesses who have increased sales and expanded their market share thanks to consistent content creation. Informant C stated:

"I saw many small food businesses become popular after posting videos regularly on TikTok. That encouraged me to try using the platform for promotion as well."

(Informant C).

This social proof factor, seeing others' success in utilizing social media, inspires MSMEs to try similar initiatives. TikTok's ease of use is also a strong reason why the platform is attractive to MSMEs. The app doesn't require complex technical skills to create and upload videos, making it possible for anyone, even entrepreneurs without a technology background, to produce promotional content. Features like video effects, popular music, and hashtag challenges help MSMEs reach a wider audience without incurring significant costs. Some entrepreneurs who have tried creating simple content have expressed surprise at the high number of views and user feedback on TikTok, which has subsequently increased consumer interest in their products.

From a psychological and business perspective, another motivation that emerged was the desire to transform their business image to become more modern and up-to-date (Utami et al., 2025). MSMEs don't want to be perceived as being left behind or lacking innovation in today's fast-paced market competition. By joining TikTok, they hope to project a fresher, more creative business identity that resonates with the lifestyles of young consumers. This aligns with the concept of digital branding, where an active and consistent presence on social media platforms can increase positive brand perception and strengthen customer loyalty.

However, interviews also indicated that some MSMEs are still in the consideration and observation stage because they lack confidence in creating engaging content. This concern was expressed by Informant D:

"I know TikTok can help promote my business, but I don't really know how to make attractive videos. I also don't have much time to create content every day." (Informant D).

Marketing Strategy and Forms of Content Innovation on TikTok

Based on research findings, culinary MSMEs in Medan Pancing are beginning to realize that the success of digital promotions on TikTok depends not only on the frequency of their video uploads, but also on marketing strategies and content innovation that can emotionally and visually engage users. In this context, the content they create no longer simply showcases products, but also builds stories and experiences (storytelling) that can arouse curiosity, whet the appetite, and foster a close relationship between consumers and the brand (Al Idrus and MM, 2021).

The main strategy implemented by some MSMEs is the creation of creative content that showcases the food-making process, from ingredient preparation and cooking to the final, mouth-watering presentation. This format has proven effective because it demonstrates authenticity and transparency in the production process, thereby fostering consumer trust in the product's quality (Arini et al., 2025). Furthermore, attractive visuals and good lighting are crucial factors in attracting viewers, especially for content that emphasizes the color and texture of food.

Businesses are also utilizing popular music, video effects, and the use of relevant hashtags to make their videos more easily reach a wider audience through the TikTok algorithm. Selecting trending songs is thought to increase the likelihood of videos appearing on the "For You Page (FYP)," significantly expanding their audience reach. This strategy aligns with the principles of content marketing, where content serves not only as a promotional tool but also as a means of creating an emotional experience that engages users (Sussanti et al., 2024). In addition to directly promotional content, some

MSMEs have also begun creating videos with an educational and interactive approach, such as cooking tips, daily menu recommendations, or short stories about the origins of regional specialties. This approach has been proven to increase engagement rates because TikTok users tend to prefer content that not only sells products but also provides added value in the form of information or entertainment. This strategy supports the concept of value creation in digital marketing, where providing value to the audience can strengthen long-term relationships with consumer (Wilis et al., 2022).

Furthermore, some MSMEs have also begun utilizing the TikTok Shop feature to support direct transactions within the app. With the integration of content and sales features, consumers can purchase products instantly without having to leave the platform. This helps create a fast, convenient purchasing process and encourages increased sales conversions. Several businesses that have tried this feature have reported a significant increase in orders, especially after their videos have attracted a large number of users (Prameswari, 2023). Another innovation implemented is embracing viral trends and culinary challenges that are currently popular on TikTok. For example, challenges like creating extremely spicy food, mukbang, or collaborating with local creators to introduce their products to a wider audience. This collaborative approach not only expands promotional reach but also increases brand credibility through the influence of creators who already have large followings. T

his phenomenon aligns with Influencer Marketing theory, which states that recommendations from influential third parties can increase consumer trust and purchase intention (Fitriyah et al., 2025). Consistency is also a crucial element of marketing strategy on TikTok. MSMEs that regularly upload content on a specific schedule tend to have higher engagement rates than those who post only occasionally. Consistent content helps the algorithm recognize their accounts as active and relevant, increasing the chances of being featured on other users' feeds. Furthermore, a light, friendly, and authentic communication style in videos has proven more effective in building emotional connection with audiences than overly formal or sales-oriented content.

Interviews also revealed that MSMEs that are more daring in experimenting with content styles and visuals typically achieve better results. They don't hesitate to feature the faces of business owners or employees in videos to show the human side of their businesses. This provides a personal touch that makes consumers feel closer to and more confident in the product being sold. This finding is supported by the statement of Informant E:

"Customers seem to trust us more when they see who prepares the food. Sometimes I appear in the videos or show my employees while cooking because it makes the business feel more personal and authentic. Many customers say they feel more confident ordering after watching those videos." (Informant E)

Therefore, content innovation on TikTok isn't just about visual creativity, but also about building an emotional connection between brand and audience through authenticity and uniqueness.

The Impact of TikTok Utilization on Increasing Sales and Brand Awareness

The research results show that utilizing TikTok has had a significant impact on increasing sales and brand awareness for culinary MSMEs in the Medan Pancing area. Based on interviews, most business owners reported experiencing a 30% to 50% increase in sales

turnover within three to six months of actively using TikTok as their primary promotional medium. This finding is reflected in the statement of Informant B:

"Since we started promoting our products consistently on TikTok, our monthly sales have increased significantly. More customers came after watching our videos, especially when one of them appeared on the For You Page. Compared to before, our sales have increased by around 30 to 50 percent." (Informant B)

This demonstrates that the platform serves not only as a means of entertainment but also as an effective strategic marketing tool for improving the performance of micro and small businesses (Todaro & Smith, 2020). One of the main factors in the increase in sales stems from TikTok's ability to reach a wider audience than other social media platforms. With its interest-based algorithm, engaging culinary MSME content easily makes it onto the "For You Page (FYP)," increasing its chances of being seen by thousands or even millions of users. Many MSMEs report that when one of their videos goes viral, orders spike dramatically within a short period of time.

As explained by Informant D: "One of our videos suddenly reached many viewers on TikTok. Within two days, we received far more orders than usual, and several new customers said they found our business through the video." (Informant D).

This phenomenon demonstrates that viral marketing on TikTok has a direct influence on consumer purchasing behavior, particularly among the younger generation, who dominate the app's user base.

In addition to quantitative sales increases, utilizing TikTok also has a positive impact on brand recognition and brand awareness (Redhana, 2024). Through consistent, engaging, and informative content, MSMEs are able to build a stronger brand identity in the minds of consumers. For example, some businesses that display distinctive features such as logos, packaging colors, or unique speaking styles in each video become more memorable to customers (Afrianti et al., 2024). Repetitive visual and narrative strategies help create brand recall, which is the ability of consumers to spontaneously recognize a brand when they see similar products. Active interaction between businesses and consumers on TikTok is also a crucial factor in strengthening customer trust and loyalty. Through the comments, likes, and video replies features, MSMEs can communicate directly with potential buyers, answer questions, and receive feedback in real time. This two-way communication creates a sense of emotional closeness between sellers and buyers, which, in relationship marketing theory, is the foundation for building long-term relationships. Many consumers feel more confident making a purchase after seeing positive interactions or direct testimonials in the comments section (Sangadji & Sopiah, 2014).

Another impact is seen in the emergence of digital word-of-mouth, where satisfied consumers share their experiences on social media, helping to expand promotional reach at no additional cost. This strengthens the position of local culinary MSME brands in the increasingly competitive digital marketplace. Within the context of Brand Equity theory, this activity increases the perceived value and credibility of the brand in the eyes of consumers, making them more likely to make repeat purchases or recommend the product to others (Hariyono & Ambarwati, 2025). Furthermore, interviews also showed that increased brand awareness not only impacts end consumers but also creates opportunities for business collaboration. Several MSMEs reported that they have begun to attract the attention of local influencers, food bloggers, and even culinary communities, who are interested in collaborating on content creation or joint promotions. This

collaboration indirectly expands market reach and strengthens their business's position in the digital environment (Guillen Jr, 2023).

However, not all MSMEs experience the same impact instantly. Success in increasing sales and brand awareness depends heavily on consistent uploads, content quality, and the ability to understand TikTok trends and algorithms. Businesses that are more adaptive to changing trends and able to combine creativity with authenticity have been shown to achieve better results than those who simply imitate others' content styles without a clear identity.

The interview findings regarding changes in business performance are also supported by the sales data collected from the participating culinary MSMEs. Table 1 presents the average monthly sales before the adoption of TikTok as a promotional platform, while Table 2 presents the sales figures after TikTok had been actively utilized.

Table 1
Sales data from a sample of culinary MSME businesses in Medan Pancing
before using the TikTok platform per Month

Business	Earnings (Million Rupiah)
Es Kepal	
MMTC	1.4
Bakso	
Goceng	2.5
Pangsit	
Pichilio	2
Mochi MMTC	2.1
Mie Pecal	2.6

Source: Obtained from interviews conducted during the research, 2025.

As shown in Table 2, all participating MSMEs experienced an increase in monthly sales after adopting TikTok as part of their digital marketing strategy.

Table 2
Sales data from a sample of culinary MSME businesses in Medan Pancing
after using the TikTok platform per Month.

Business	Earnings (Million Rupiah)
Es Kepal	
MMTC	3
Bakso	
Goceng	5
Pangsit	
Pichilio	4
Mochi MMTC	5
Mie Pecal	5

Source: Obtained from interviews conducted during the research, 2025

Obstacles, Challenges, and Efforts to Strengthen the Digital Capacity of MSMEs

Although research shows that the use of TikTok has had a positive impact on increasing sales and brand awareness for culinary MSMEs in Medan Pancing, it cannot be denied that various obstacles and challenges remain for businesses in the implementation

process. These obstacles arise both internally from MSMEs, such as limited human resources and digital literacy, and externally from the rapidly changing competitive dynamics on the TikTok platform. One of the main obstacles identified is limited time and technical skills in creating engaging and consistent content. Most culinary MSMEs in Medan Pancing operate their businesses independently with a very limited workforce. Operational activities such as food production, serving customers, and managing finances often take up a large portion of their time. This challenge is reflected in the statement of Informant A:

"I manage almost everything myself, from preparing the food and serving customers to handling the finances. By the end of the day, I have very little time left to create TikTok content, even though I know it could help promote my business." (Informant A).

As a result, digital marketing activities, including the creation and uploading of TikTok content, are often neglected or carried out irregularly. However, TikTok's algorithm recognizes that consistency in content uploads significantly impacts audience reach and engagement.

Furthermore, many businesses admit to lacking the skills and confidence to create creative content (Astuti et al., 2023). They struggle to come up with relevant video ideas, engaging shooting techniques, and how to use music, effects, or captions that align with trends. Some even believe that content creation requires sophisticated equipment or significant investment, making them reluctant to try. This challenge is reflected in the statement of Informant C:

"I often run out of ideas for creating videos, and I am not familiar with editing techniques or choosing trending music and effects. At first, I thought producing attractive TikTok content required expensive equipment, so I was hesitant to start creating promotional videos." (Informant C)

This finding indicates that the lack of confidence and technical knowledge remains a significant barrier for MSMEs in adopting TikTok as an effective digital marketing platform. This situation demonstrates a lack of understanding of the concept of user-generated content and the importance of authenticity in building audience engagement on TikTok (Sulianta, 2024). Another challenge is low digital literacy and a lack of understanding of content performance analytics. This issue was also highlighted by Informant D:

"I usually just upload videos without checking the analytics. I don't really understand what the number of views, audience reach, or engagement means, so I don't know whether my promotional strategy is actually effective." (Informant D). Some MSMEs don't yet understand how to interpret TikTok insight data, such as view counts, interaction rates, or audience characteristics. As a result, they struggle to assess the effectiveness of their promotional strategies and lack a basis for analysis in developing subsequent content strategies. This aligns with the theory of Digital Literacy, which explains that the ability to understand, analyze, and utilize digital information is a crucial factor in successfully adapting to technology for small and medium-sized businesses (Daulay, 2025).

Externally, the intense competition for culinary content on TikTok also poses a significant challenge. Many food creators and businesses produce content with an attractive and professional style, making it difficult for local MSMEs to compete. Rapidly changing content trends on TikTok require MSMEs to continuously innovate and adapt

to digital market tastes. Without updated ideas and strategies, content can easily get lost and lose relevance amidst the flood of visual information that emerges daily (Amzul et al., 2024). Recognizing these challenges, some MSMEs have begun taking proactive steps to improve their digital capabilities. Some have participated in digital marketing training conducted by government agencies, educational institutions, and local business communities. The benefits of this training are reflected in Informant E's statement:

"After attending the digital marketing training, I learned how to create more attractive content, use hashtags effectively, and understand TikTok Insights. Now I know what kind of content attracts more viewers and how to improve future videos." (Informant E). In this training, they learn the basics of digital marketing, effective content creation strategies, how to use hashtags and popular music, and techniques for interpreting analytical data to evaluate content performance. This type of training is considered crucial in helping MSMEs understand that digital marketing strategy is not just about creating content, but also about building relationships with consumers through interactive and authentic communication (Wati et al., 2025).

In addition to training, some MSMEs also collaborate with external parties such as local creators (influencers), photographers, or students with skills in digital creative fields. This collaboration not only helps improve the quality of visuals and content ideas but also expands their audience network through the followers of these creators. This type of collaboration is an effective strategy for accelerating product exposure and strengthening the digital presence of local brands on the TikTok platform. This finding is supported by the statement of Informant F:

"We once collaborated with a local content creator to promote our products on TikTok. The videos looked more attractive, reached more people, and brought many new customers who had never known about our business before. Working with someone who understands social media really helped increase our product exposure." (Informant F). These findings indicate that collaboration with external creative partners can enhance both the quality of promotional content and the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies, enabling MSMEs to reach wider audiences and strengthen their brand presence on TikTok platform.

Some MSMEs have also begun utilizing technology to support content creation, such as simple video editing apps, digital promotional templates, and upload automation features. These small innovations help them save time and streamline the content production process without requiring advanced technical skills. Furthermore, support from local governments and digital entrepreneurship communities is crucial to ensure MSMEs have access to ongoing mentoring, not just one-time training (Tabina et al., 2024).

Discussion

The research results indicate that utilizing the TikTok platform has significant potential to increase sales and strengthen brand awareness for culinary MSMEs in the Medan Pancing area. Interviews with business owners revealed that most MSMEs in this area still operate conventionally, with a relatively low level of understanding of digital technology. Most business owners have not yet utilized TikTok as a marketing medium due to a lack of knowledge about content strategy, platform algorithms, and the technical skills needed to create promotional videos (Noti et al., 2021).

However, there is a growing awareness that social media, particularly TikTok, can be a strategic tool for expanding markets and increasing competitiveness. In the context

of digital marketing theory, TikTok can be seen as part of the Digital Marketing Mix concept, where social media plays a crucial role in strengthening promotion and communication with consumers (Akbar et al., 2024). TikTok's advantage lies in its short video-based content format, which is easy to consume, interactive, and has the potential to go viral. This aligns with Viral Marketing theory, which explains that spreading messages through social media can have a significant impact on increasing purchasing interest and brand awareness at a relatively low cost (Mahulae, 2020). These findings also support Consumer Engagement theory, which states that active interaction between businesses and social media users can build stronger emotional connections with consumers (Herawati et al., 2021).

MSMEs that have begun actively using TikTok have shown significant increases in both sales and market reach. They are not only uploading product videos but also implementing storytelling strategies in their content, for example, showcasing the food-making process, the shop atmosphere, and even customer testimonials. This approach has proven effective in building trust and emotional connection with audiences, in line with the concept of Relationship Marketing, which emphasizes the importance of building long-term relationships with customers through authentic and valuable communication (Nathania, 2015). Furthermore, research shows that MSMEs that creatively utilize TikTok features, such as using trendy music, visual effects, and collaborating with local creators, tend to receive a more positive response. They are able to adapt to changing digital trends and build a modern and relevant brand image for young consumers. This phenomenon reflects Innovation Diffusion theory, which explains that the adoption of new technology in business is influenced by the level of awareness, motivation, and ability to adapt to environmental changes (Firmansyah, 2023).

However, MSMEs still face a number of obstacles in optimizing TikTok's use. The main factors identified are limited time, technical skills, and low digital literacy. Many business owners struggle to create engaging and consistent content because they have to juggle production, customer service, and social media management (Fraccastoro et al., 2021). Furthermore, a lack of understanding of content performance analysis on TikTok makes it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of their marketing strategies. This situation highlights the importance of improving digital capacity building for MSMEs to enable them to maximize their use of the platform.

Efforts to increase this digital capacity have begun through various training and mentoring programs organized by local governments, educational institutions, and business communities (Redhana, 2024). These training programs provide knowledge on the basics of digital marketing, creative content creation strategies, and the use of TikTok features like TikTok Shop, which integrates promotions and direct sales. With this increased understanding, MSMEs are expected to transform into more adaptive, efficient, and competitive businesses in the digital era.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study demonstrates that TikTok holds substantial potential as an effective digital marketing tool for culinary MSMEs in the Medan Pancing area. The findings indicate that although many businesses initially lacked digital literacy and confidence in using the platform, those who adopted creative and consistent content strategies experienced notable improvements in both sales performance and brand visibility. TikTok's algorithm, visual format, and interactive features enable small businesses to reach wider

audiences, build emotional connections with consumers, and reinforce brand identity at relatively low cost.

The study also highlights key challenges, including limited time, technical skills, and the ability to adapt to rapidly changing digital trends. These obstacles underscore the need for continuous digital capacity building, particularly through training, collaboration, and structured support systems. Overall, the research contributes to a broader understanding of how social media-based marketing can strengthen MSME competitiveness in the digital economy and suggests that greater strategic use of TikTok can support sustainable business growth for culinary enterprises in the region.

For future research, several directions are recommended. First, future studies should employ a quantitative or mixed-method approach to measure the direct and measurable impact of TikTok marketing on MSME sales performance and brand awareness. Second, future research should expand the geographic scope beyond Medan Pancing to include culinary MSMEs in other regions of Indonesia, enabling more generalizable findings. Third, researchers are encouraged to examine the effectiveness of digital literacy training programs in improving MSME owners' confidence and competence in content creation and platform utilization. Fourth, future studies could explore the role of collaboration between MSMEs and local content creators in enhancing promotional reach and purchasing decisions. Finally, longitudinal research is recommended to evaluate the long-term sustainability of TikTok-based marketing strategies as platform algorithms and digital trends continue to evolve.

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