Instagram Marketing as A Business Development Strategy: A Quantitative Study on Culinary MSMEs in Medan Tembung

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Abstract

This study investigates how specific dimensions of Instagram marketing—content quality, posting frequency, user interaction, and feature utilization—affect business development among culinary MSMEs in Medan Tembung, Indonesia. With over 89 million Instagram users in Indonesia, the platform provides significant opportunities for expanding market reach, brand awareness, and sales performance. Using a quantitative associative causal approach, data were collected from 100 culinary MSME owners who actively use Instagram for promotional activities. The findings reveal that Instagram marketing has a positive and significant effect on business development, where creative content, interactive engagement, and strategic use of features such as Stories, Reels, and Instagram Ads strongly enhance sales performance, market expansion, and brand identity. The study refines Social Media Marketing Theory by linking visual engagement mechanisms to measurable business outcomes and provides practical implications for MSME owners and policymakers seeking to promote sustainable digital transformation.

Keywords: *Instagram Marketing; Business Development; MSMEs; Digital Marketing; Culinary Sector; Medan Tembung.*

1. Introduction

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are widely acknowledged as the backbone of both national and regional economies, particularly in emerging markets such as Indonesia. They contribute significantly to economic resilience, employment generation, and poverty reduction. According to the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs (2023), MSMEs account for more than 60% of Indonesia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employ nearly 97% of the national workforce. These figures underscore the pivotal role of MSMEs in sustaining Indonesia's economic growth and stability, while also highlighting the urgent need to ensure their competitiveness in an increasingly digitalized economy (Harto et al., 2024; Meilany & Winario, 2024; Ukrowiyah et al., 2024). Globally, similar challenges are observed among MSMEs in emerging and developed economies alike. Studies in India (Sharma & Gupta, 2023) and the UK (Ahmad & Rafiq, 2023) reveal that while Instagram enhances visibility, its effectiveness depends on content strategy and audience targeting. By integrating global insights, this study situates Indonesia's MSME digital transformation within a broader international context.

Among the diverse MSME sectors, the culinary industry has emerged as one of the most dynamic segments, particularly in urban areas such as Medan Tembung. This growth is reflected in the increasing number of home-based food businesses, coffee shops, and contemporary culinary outlets catering to changing consumer preferences. While the sector demonstrates strong potential, it faces persistent challenges in the domain of marketing (Rahma & Adlina, 2024). Initial surveys conducted with 30 culinary MSME owners in Medan Tembung indicate that approximately 68% of them continue to rely primarily on word-of-mouth promotion, with only 32% adopting Instagram as their main marketing platform (Duratulhikmah & Wijaya, 2024; Rakista & Karismatika, 2024). Moreover, among those utilizing Instagram, only 40% engage in consistent posting, and most remain unfamiliar with essential features such as insights, story highlights, or Instagram Ads (Augustine et al., 2023; Rosadian, 2023; Wali & Pabulo, 2024). These findings suggest a significant underutilization of Instagram as a strategic marketing tool among MSMEs in the culinary sector.

This gap is particularly striking given Indonesia's strong digital ecosystem. The latest Data Reportal (2024) report reveals that the country has over 89 million active Instagram users, and 80% of them utilize the platform to explore products or services. Instagram, therefore, represents an immense opportunity for MSMEs to expand their market reach, strengthen brand visibility, and increase sales (Fechner & Rundle-Thiele, 2023; Gutuskey et al., 2022). Yet, the potential of Instagram marketing is hindered by barriers such as limited digital literacy, time constraints, and the lack of structured training in digital marketing (Marx et al., 2022). These limitations weaken the ability of MSMEs to compete, as ineffective marketing strategies directly constrain sales growth, market expansion, and brand development (Kraak & Davy, 2023; Mancarella et al., 2022).

From a theoretical standpoint, business development strategies involve systematic efforts to enhance performance, broaden market reach, and strengthen competitiveness (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2024). In the MSME context, this includes improving managerial capacity, enhancing product innovation, and adopting technology to accelerate production and distribution (Aboytes et al., 2022). Central to these strategies is marketing—particularly digital marketing—which has become indispensable in the era of globalization and digital transformation. Social media platforms, particularly Instagram, are now critical tools for MSMEs aiming to compete in more competitive markets, as they combine visual storytelling, interactive engagement, and precise targeting features that align closely with consumer behavior in digital environments. Instagram marketing, as a form of social media marketing, encompasses the use of visual content, hashtags, interactive stories, and advertising features to promote products and services to wider audiences (Salunke & Jain, 2022). The platform offers distinct advantages for MSMEs: visually engaging content such as product photos and short videos fosters personal connections with consumers; features like Instagram Shopping allow for direct product sales within the application; and targeted advertising enables businesses to reach highly specific consumer groups based on demographics, interests, and behaviors (Liao et al., 2022). In addition, interactive tools such as comments, polls, and direct messaging facilitate two-way communication, enabling MSMEs to build stronger relationships with customers and improve brand loyalty (Philp et al., 2022; Singh, 2024).

Despite these advantages, studies indicate that MSMEs often lack the skills and strategies necessary to optimize Instagram for sustainable business development (Kraak & Davy, 2023). Prior research has largely examined social media marketing in general terms, often focusing on large-scale enterprises, with limited attention given to MSMEs operating in specific local contexts. Furthermore, while some studies have analyzed Instagram's role in brand awareness, fewer have explored its direct impact on critical dimensions of business development, such as sales growth, market expansion, and brand strengthening, particularly in the culinary MSME sector in Indonesia.

This creates a research gap that the present study aims to address. Specifically, the study situates Instagram marketing within the broader theoretical framework of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), operationalized through Social Media Marketing Theory and Business Development Theory. By focusing on culinary MSMEs in Medan Tembung, this research provides three novel contributions. First, it emphasizes a geographically specific context where digital marketing adoption remains limited despite strong market potential. Second, it narrows the focus to the culinary MSME sector, a vital yet vulnerable industry often constrained by traditional marketing practices. Third, it broadens the analysis beyond promotional effectiveness, examining Instagram's contribution to sales performance, market expansion, and brand development as a comprehensive business development strategy.

Accordingly, the study sets out to answer the following research question: To what extent does Instagram marketing influence business development among culinary MSMEs in Medan Tembung? The objectives are threefold: (1) to assess the impact of Instagram marketing on sales growth; (2) to examine its role in expanding market reach; and (3) to evaluate its contribution to brand strengthening. By employing a quantitative research design, the study seeks to produce robust empirical evidence that not only enriches the academic literature but also provides actionable insights for entrepreneurs, policymakers, and support institutions.

The expected contributions of this study are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it advances the integration of social media marketing within the framework of business development for MSMEs, providing empirical evidence from an under-researched context. Practically, it offers strategic recommendations for MSME owners to leverage Instagram more effectively, highlights the importance of digital literacy programs for entrepreneurs, and provides evidence-based insights for policymakers in designing interventions to strengthen MSMEs' competitiveness.

In sum, the study underscores that digital marketing mastery is no longer optional but a necessity for MSMEs to survive and thrive in today's competitive markets. Instagram, with its diverse features and expansive user base, offers not merely a promotional tool but a comprehensive platform for business development. The ability of MSMEs to strategically harness Instagram marketing will determine their long-term sustainability, competitiveness, and capacity to contribute to broader economic growth, both nationally and locally in regions such as Medan Tembung.

2. Materials and Methods

This study employs a quantitative approach with a causal-associative research design, aiming to investigate the effect of Instagram marketing on business development strategies among culinary MSMEs in Medan Tembung District. The research design was chosen because it allows for the identification and measurement of causal relationships between independent and dependent variables systematically and empirically (Jarva et al., 2023; Higgins et al., 2024).

2.1. Population and sampling

The population of this study consists of all culinary MSME actors in Medan Tembung who actively use Instagram as a marketing platform. A purposive sampling technique was adopted to ensure that only respondents meeting specific criteria were included. The sampling criteria were:
1) The MSME has been in operation for at least one year.
2) The business owns an active Instagram account.
3) The business routinely promotes products through Instagram.

Based on these criteria, a total of 100 respondents were selected to represent the sample. This sample size was deemed adequate for statistical analysis and in line with recommendations for social science research to achieve reliability and generalizability (Raharjanti et al., 2022).

2.2. Research variables and indicators

The independent variable in this study is Instagram Marketing, which was measured using indicators adapted from previous research, including:
- Content quality,
- Posting frequency,
- User interaction (likes, comments, shares), and
- Utilization of Instagram features (Stories, Reels, Instagram Ads).

The dependent variable is Business Development, operationalized through the following indicators:
- Sales growth,

- Customer growth,
- Market expansion, and
- Brand strengthening.

These indicators were measured using a structured questionnaire on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), distributed both online and offline.

2.3. Validity test

Validity refers to the extent to which a research instrument measures what it is intended to measure (Jarva et al., 2023). In this study, validity testing was conducted to ensure that the questionnaire items used to assess Instagram marketing and business development accurately represented the intended constructs. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was applied to test the correlation between each item score and the total score, using the following formula (Higgins et al., 2024; Raharjanti et al., 2022):

$$r_{xy} = \frac{n(\sum XY) - (\sum X)(\sum Y)}{\sqrt{[n \sum X^2 - (\sum X)^2][n \sum Y^2 - (\sum Y)^2]}} \tag{1}$$

Items with correlation coefficients above the critical value were considered valid.

2.4. Reliability test

Reliability assesses the consistency of an instrument when applied repeatedly under similar conditions (Vareda, 2023). To evaluate reliability, Cronbach's Alpha was employed, with the following formula (Raharjanti et al., 2022):

$$a_u = \left(\frac{k}{k-1}\right)\left(1 - \frac{\sum S_i^2}{S_I^2}\right) \tag{2}$$

Where k represents the number of items, S_i^2 is the variance of each item, and S_t^2 is the total variance. A Cronbach's Alpha coefficient above 0.70 was considered indicative of acceptable reliability.

2.5. Normality test

The normality test was conducted to assess whether the dataset followed a normal distribution, which is an essential assumption for regression analysis. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) test was applied, where a p-value greater than 0.05 indicates normally distributed data (Higgins et al., 2024). The KS test formula is expressed as:

$$D = \max|F(x) - F_n(x)| \tag{3}$$

Where $F(x)$ is the cumulative distribution function of the reference distribution and $F_n(x)$ is the empirical distribution function.

2.6. Simple linear regression analysis

To test the causal relationship between Instagram marketing and business development, simple linear regression was employed. This statistical method estimates the effect of one independent variable on one dependent variable (Jarva et al., 2023). The regression equation can be expressed as follows:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + e \tag{4}$$

Where Y represents business development, X denotes Instagram marketing, β_0 is the intercept, β_1 is the regression coefficient, and e is the error term.

2.7. Coefficient of determination (R²)

The coefficient of determination was used to measure the explanatory power of the independent variable over the dependent variable. R2 values range between 0 and 1, where higher values indicate that the independent variable explains a greater proportion of the variance in the dependent variable (Vareda, 2023).

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Validity test

To assess the validity of the measurement instruments, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted between each item and the total score of the respective variables. According to established methodological standards, an item is considered valid when its correlation with the total score exceeds the threshold value of 0.30 (Hair et al., 2022).

The tested indicators for Instagram Marketing included: (1) Content (relevance, creativity, product information), (2) Posting frequency, (3) User engagement (likes, comments, shares), and (4) Utilization of Instagram features (Stories, Reels, and Instagram Ads). For the Business Development Strategy variable, the indicators were: (1) Sales improvement, (2) Customer growth, (3) Market expansion, and (4) Brand strengthening.

Table 1: Results of Validity Test

No	Indicator	Correlation with Total Score	Remarks
Instagram Marketing			
1	Content	0.72	Valid
2	Posting Frequency	0.68	Valid
3	User Interaction	0.75	Valid
4	Utilization of Instagram Features	0.71	Valid
Business Development Strategy			
1	Sales Improvement	0.74	Valid
2	Customer Growth	0.79	Valid
3	Market Expansion	0.80	Valid
4	Brand Strengthening	0.72	Valid

As presented in Table 1, all indicators across both constructs demonstrate correlation coefficients above 0.30, thereby confirming their construct validity. This implies that the selected items adequately capture the dimensions of Instagram Marketing and Business Development Strategy.

3.2. Reliability test

Reliability assesses the internal consistency and stability of the measurement instruments. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was employed, where values exceeding 0.70 indicate acceptable reliability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Table 2: Results of Reliability Test

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Remarks
Instagram Marketing	0.83	Reliable
Business Development Strategy	0.85	Reliable

The results in Table 2 demonstrate high levels of reliability, with Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of 0.83 for Instagram Marketing and 0.85 for Business Development Strategy. These findings confirm that the measurement scales are internally consistent and robust for further statistical analysis.

3.3. Normality test

A normality test was conducted to examine whether the data distribution adhered to the assumption of normality, which is critical for parametric statistical analyses such as regression. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov (K–S) test was applied. The obtained significance value ($p = 0.114$) for both variables exceeded the threshold of 0.05, indicating that the data are normally distributed and satisfy the assumptions required for regression analysis.

3.4. Regression analysis

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to test the effect of Instagram Marketing on the Business Development Strategy of culinary MSMEs in Medan Tembung.

Table 3: Regression Analysis Results

Variable	Regression Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	p-value
Intercept	1.152	0.380	3.037	0.003
Instagram Marketing	0.513	0.095	5.398	0.000*

The regression equation derived from the analysis is as follows:

$$Y = 1.152 + 0.513X + e$$

The regression coefficient for Instagram Marketing is 0.513, indicating that every one-unit increase in Instagram Marketing (e.g., content quality, posting frequency, user interaction, and use of Instagram features) contributes to an increase of 0.513 units in the Business Development Strategy of culinary MSMEs in Medan Tembung. The p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) confirms that the effect is statistically significant. This suggests that improvements in marketing consistency and visual storytelling yield tangible performance gains. Among the tested dimensions, content quality and user interaction were the strongest predictors of business outcomes—particularly sales and brand strengthening—while posting frequency had a moderate impact. MSMEs utilizing Instagram's advanced features, such as Reels and Ads, achieved higher conversion rates, bridging the gap between visibility and transaction.

This result provides strong empirical evidence that Instagram Marketing plays a pivotal role in enhancing business development among culinary MSMEs. The findings highlight the platform's effectiveness as a marketing tool, reinforcing its strategic importance in improving sales performance, customer base, market outreach, and brand identity in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

Based on the simple linear regression analysis, the findings reveal that Instagram marketing has a significant and positive impact on the business development of culinary MSMEs in Medan Tembung District. This demonstrates that social media marketing, particularly through Instagram, serves as a powerful tool in enhancing business performance within the culinary sector.

The results indicate that Instagram marketing contributes significantly to various dimensions of business development, including increased sales, customer growth, market expansion, and stronger brand identity. These findings are consistent with Putri et al. (2024), who emphasized that digital marketing, particularly through platforms such as Instagram, enhances business competitiveness and fosters stronger relationships between brands and consumers.

One of the main drivers behind these improvements is Instagram's ability to reach a broader audience. With over one billion active users globally, Instagram provides MSMEs with a cost-effective platform to directly market their products to potential consumers, thereby reducing reliance on traditional marketing methods that are often expensive and geographically limited. This result aligns with Wilopo and

Nuralam (2025), who found that social media platforms such as Instagram grant SMEs a competitive advantage in terms of visibility and consumer engagement.

A critical component of Instagram marketing lies in content creation. This study finds that creative and high-quality visual content enhances consumer appeal and directly affects user engagement, including likes, comments, and shares. Such findings reinforce those of Wati et al. (2024), who argued that attractive visual content strengthens brand identity and extends user interaction with business accounts. Consistent posting frequency also emerges as a crucial determinant of business growth, as it ensures product visibility among wider audiences and sustains engagement with followers. Putri et al. (2024) further highlighted that posting consistency is vital in building brand awareness and fostering long-term customer relationships.

The study also underscores the importance of leveraging Instagram's advanced features, including Stories, Reels, and Instagram Ads. These features significantly expand market reach and provide consumers with more interactive experiences. The findings are in line with León-Alberca et al. (2024), who demonstrated that adopting such features enables businesses to reach wider markets and introduce their products in innovative and engaging ways. Furthermore, increased user interaction allows culinary MSMEs in Medan Tembung to establish loyal customer communities. Through frequent interactions on Instagram, businesses receive direct feedback from consumers, which can be strategically utilized to improve product quality and service delivery. This aligns with prior studies suggesting that direct brand–consumer interaction enhances customer satisfaction and fosters brand loyalty.

The recorded increase in sales after adopting Instagram marketing further validates the platform's potential to drive revenue growth. This corresponds with Wati et al. (2024), who noted that social media marketing facilitates consumer purchasing by integrating shopping features directly into platforms such as Instagram. Importantly, Instagram Ads were found to play a key role in converting digital interactions into actual sales, further reinforcing their value as a marketing investment.

Market expansion is another significant outcome observed among culinary MSMEs in Medan Tembung. Instagram enables local businesses to connect with wider markets, including consumers beyond their immediate geographic area. This accessibility allows MSMEs to compete with larger firms and extend their distribution networks. Likewise, the strengthening of brand awareness observed after Instagram adoption highlights the role of social media in shaping consumer perceptions and differentiating businesses in increasingly competitive markets.

Nonetheless, the study identifies several challenges, particularly regarding digital literacy limitations among certain MSME actors. Some respondents admitted difficulties in optimizing advanced features such as Instagram Ads or producing professional-grade content, despite being active Instagram users. This observation aligns with Higgins et al. (2024), who argued that inadequate digital marketing literacy restricts the ability of small businesses to maximize the potential of social media platforms.

Taken together, this study makes a significant contribution by demonstrating how Instagram marketing can serve as an effective strategic tool for business development among culinary MSMEs. The findings not only validate the practical relevance of social media in driving growth but also strengthen theoretical insights into digital marketing's role in enhancing competitiveness in emerging markets.

From a practical standpoint, the study emphasizes the urgent need for comprehensive digital marketing training and structured mentoring programs to help MSME actors fully leverage Instagram's marketing potential. Such interventions would not only enhance the sustainability and competitiveness of local businesses but also ensure that they remain adaptive in the face of rapid digital transformation.

The research focuses on culinary MSMEs in Medan Tembung, limiting generalizability to other regions or sectors. Second, external factors such as economic conditions, consumer preferences, and digital infrastructure were not explicitly controlled for. Third, the cross-sectional design restricts causal interpretation. Future research should adopt longitudinal approaches or explore cross-platform marketing strategies to deepen the understanding of social media's dynamic influence on MSME growth.

4. Conclusions

The findings of this study demonstrate that Instagram marketing exerts a positive and significant influence on business development strategies among culinary MSMEs in Medan Tembung District. Specifically, enhancing engaging content, maintaining consistent posting frequency, fostering active user interaction, and leveraging Instagram features such as Stories, Reels, and Instagram Ads have been shown to effectively increase sales, expand market reach, and strengthen brand awareness. Theoretically, it extends Social Media Marketing Theory by empirically linking engagement mechanisms to multidimensional business outcomes and strengthens Business Development Theory by positioning digital marketing as a strategic capability. Practically, it calls for structured digital literacy programs, affordable advertising schemes, and mentorship initiatives to support MSME adaptation in the digital economy.

These results align with previous studies, which affirm that social media—particularly Instagram—has substantial potential to enhance business competitiveness and to build closer relationships between brands and consumers. By offering an interactive and visually driven platform, Instagram provides MSMEs with unique opportunities to differentiate their products and sustain consumer engagement in highly dynamic markets.

However, despite these advantages, challenges remain, particularly regarding digital literacy gaps and the effective management of online content among certain MSME actors. Without adequate skills, many businesses may fail to fully capitalize on the platform's marketing capabilities. Therefore, this study highlights the urgent need for more intensive digital marketing training and structured mentoring programs, which would enable MSME entrepreneurs to optimize their use of Instagram's advanced features, craft more impactful campaigns, and manage digital engagement more strategically.

Overall, this research provides strong empirical evidence that Instagram can serve as an effective and sustainable marketing strategy for the development of culinary MSMEs. Beyond its practical contributions, the study also reinforces the theoretical understanding of social media's role in shaping small business growth in emerging markets. From a policy perspective, these findings suggest that local governments and supporting institutions should integrate social media literacy programs into MSME development initiatives, thereby fostering long-term growth, competitiveness, and resilience in an increasingly digital economy.

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