



Marketing Communication Strategies for MSMEs in the Digital Era : A Case Study of Culinary MSMEs in Samarinda

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Abstract

This study examined digital marketing communication strategies employed by culinary micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) at Teras Samarinda, a riverside MSME cluster in Samarinda, East Kalimantan, Indonesia. The study aimed to analyze how these enterprises utilized digital media platforms, constructed communication messages, and engaged consumers in the context of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC). A qualitative case study method was employed, with data collected through in - depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation involving four MSME informants - Bebaya Mart, Gaya Ice Cream, Rustic Camp & Café, and Pedas Manis - as well as two consumer informants. The findings revealed that all four MSMEs actively used Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and Facebook, primarily for brand awareness and sales conversion. Message construction varied from structured approaches using hooks and calls to action to spontaneous content creation. Consumer engagement remained largely at a responsive or interaction level rather than progressing toward long - term relational engagement. The study concluded that while digital marketing communication has positively impacted sales and consumer interest, implementation has not yet fully adhered to IMC principles of integration, consistency, and strategic sustainability. Practical and policy recommendations are provided for MSME actors, platform managers, and local government.

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Introduction

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) represent a critical pillar of Indonesia's national economy. According to the Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2024), Indonesia is home to more than 64.2 million MSME units, contributing approximately 61% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and absorbing nearly 97% of the national workforce. These figures are corroborated by the Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs (2025), which affirms that MSMEs serve as key stabilizers of the national economy, particularly during crises. The culinary sub - sector is among the most dominant in Indonesia's MSME landscape. In East Kalimantan Province, which is currently undergoing major structural transformation due to the development of Nusantara, the new national capital city (IKN), the number of MSMEs reached 336,045 units in 2023, with food and beverage enterprises forming the largest sub - sector (Satu Data Kaltim, 2023). The construction of the IKN has intensified population growth and economic activity around Samarinda, the provincial capital, heightening the strategic importance of local MSME development.

Samarinda hosts over 3,500 culinary MSMEs, yet only approximately 40% have adopted digital platforms in an optimal manner (Dinas Koperasi & UMKM Samarinda, 2023). The majority still rely on conventional promotional methods such as word - of - mouth and printed flyers. A significant research gap exists regarding the digital marketing communication strategies of culinary MSMEs in Samarinda - a mid - sized city with distinct sociocultural characteristics that differ from those of metropolitan centers such as Jakarta or Surabaya. Previous studies have explored digital marketing practices among MSMEs in other Indonesian cities (Sulistyo & Siang, 2025; Lydia Irena, 2023; Isnaini & Siregar, 2023), yet none has specifically addressed culinary MSMEs in Samarinda within an integrated framework. A critical gap exists regarding the holistic application of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) principles among local culinary actors, as many operate their digital channels sporadically without consistent messaging, audience segmentation, or long - term engagement strategies (Kaltim Post, 2025).

This study addresses this gap by examining how culinary MSMEs at Teras Samarinda - a riverside MSME development cluster officially inaugurated by the Samarinda city government on September 9, 2024 - employ digital marketing communication strategies. The theoretical framework is anchored in Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) as conceptualized by Kotler and Keller (2016), which emphasizes the consistent and integrated delivery of messages across multiple communication channels. Analysis is structured around three indicators: (1) digital media utilization, (2) communication message construction, and (3) consumer engagement (customer engagement). The purpose of this study is to analyze these strategic dimensions and provide empirically grounded recommendations for practitioners and policymakers.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a case study design (Sugiyono, 2019; Rahardjo, 2017). The case study method was selected because it enables intensive, contextual investigation of a specific phenomenon - namely, digital marketing communication practices by culinary MSMEs within a bounded spatial and temporal setting (Teras Samarinda, 2025 - 2026). This approach is well-suited to capturing the complexity of communication strategies as they unfold in their natural social, economic, and cultural context. The research site was Teras Samarinda, located at Jalan Gajah Mada, Kelurahan Jawa, Kecamatan Samarinda Ulu, Samarinda, East Kalimantan. Teras Samarinda is a government-developed MSME cluster situated along the Mahakam Riverbank. It was

selected as the research site for three reasons: first, it represents an officially structured MSME empowerment initiative; second, it houses culinary MSMEs that actively use digital media for promotion; and third, it serves as a high – footfall public space enabling direct observation of business – consumer interactions.

Four culinary MSME informants were purposively selected based on their active use of digital media and minimum one year of operation at Teras Samarinda :

Table 1. Profile of Culinary MSME Informants at Teras Samarinda

MSME	Owner/Manager	Main Products	Digital Platforms
Bebaya Mart	Rizal Efendi	Crackers, basreng, snacks	TikTok, Facebook, Instagram
Gaya Ice Cream	Gaitsa Widaningrum	Ice cream, beverages, snacks	Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp
Rustic Camp & Café	Yogi (Barista)	Coffee and non-coffee drinks	Instagram
Pedas Manis	Rafitha	Pentol variants, fruit juice	Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp

Two consumer informants (Puan Ahmad and Amadea Aryanto) were also selected through purposive sampling to provide audience perspectives on MSME communication effectiveness. Data were collected through three complementary methods. First, in – depth semi – structured interviews were conducted with all six informants at Teras Samarinda from March to May 2026. Second, direct and digital observation was carried out, encompassing on-site observation of business-consumer interactions and systematic monitoring of MSME social media accounts (Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp). Third, documentation was gathered, including screenshots of promotional content, visual branding materials, and social media posts. Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model as described in Sugiyono (2019): data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Validity was ensured through triangulation of sources and techniques

Results and Discussions

1. Results

The findings are organized across three analytical indicators corresponding to the research objectives: digital media utilization, communication message construction, and consumer engagement.

a. Media Utilization

All four MSMEs adopted multi-platform digital communication strategies. Bebaya Mart utilized TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram; Gaya Ice Cream used Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp; Rustic Camp & Café relied exclusively on Instagram managed by a central administrator; and Pedas Manis operated Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp accounts managed directly by the owner. A key finding

was the functional differentiation of platforms. TikTok and Instagram served primarily as awareness and exposure channels, leveraging visual content – short videos, product photography, behind-the-scenes footage to attract new consumers. Facebook and WhatsApp were deployed more for conversion and relational communication. As Rizal Efendi (Bebaya Mart) explained :

"The most effective for spreading content is TikTok because its engagement is high. But for converting to sales, we usually use Facebook. Instagram is more for exposure only." (Rizal Efendi, 2026)

WhatsApp served as an interpersonal communication medium, used to receive orders, respond to inquiries, and maintain customer relationships through personal chat and status updates. This proactive digital orientation was articulated by Gaitsa Widaningrum (Gaya Ice Cream): the intention to "meet the ball" proactively reaching consumers online rather than waiting passively reflects an awareness of consumer behavioral shifts toward digital information seeking. However, when assessed against IMC principles, the multi – platform usage remained largely functional rather than strategically integrated. Platforms operated in relative isolation without a unified communication framework or cross platform narrative coherence. Bebaya Mart demonstrated the strongest integration due to a dedicated marketing administrator. Rustic Camp & Café's centralized management limited its contextual responsiveness at the retail level.

b. Communication Message Construction

Message construction among informants revealed a spectrum from structured to spontaneous approaches. Bebaya Mart employed a deliberate content structure comprising a hook at the opening, product explanation in the middle, and a call to action at the end to stimulate engagement or sales. This structure reflects awareness of consumer psychology and sequential persuasion techniques. Visual elements played a central role in message design. All four MSMEs emphasized high quality product visuals, with Gaya Ice Cream specifically tailoring its visual messaging to Samarinda's hot climate by highlighting product freshness: "Visual freshness and taste because Samarinda's weather is often hot" (Gaitsa Widaningrum, 2026). Rustic Camp & Café utilized process-oriented content, showing coffee preparation sequences to attract specialty coffee enthusiasts.

Conversely, Gaya Ice Cream and Pedas Manis engaged in predominantly spontaneous content creation, generating posts reactively based on available products, ideas, or trending references without systematic planning: "No special concept – if an idea comes to mind, I just make it" (Rafitha, Pedas Manis, 2026). This approach introduces inconsistency in brand messaging. Thematically, message content clustered into two functional categories. Transactional messages focused on product information such as price, taste, quality, and promotions dominated across all four MSMEs. Relational messages, which build emotional connection and experiential resonance, appeared in more advanced content such as atmospheric videos featuring the Mahakam riverfront setting of Teras Samarinda. Consumer responses confirmed the effectiveness of relational content: Puan Ahmad (consumer, 2026) noted that promotional videos that opened with the riverside evening ambiance before presenting products effectively stimulated a desire to visit and experience the space. While visual communication was consistently employed, the overall level of message consistency and strategic intentionality varied across MSMEs, limiting the full realization of brand identity building as emphasized in IMC theory.

c. Consumer Engagement

Consumer engagement emerged through active two-way communication channels: Instagram direct messages (DM), TikTok comment sections, and WhatsApp chats. Consumers most frequently inquired about location, operating hours, product availability, and pricing. Responses from MSME operators were generally prompt and courteous, and critical feedback was treated as input for operational improvement. Overall consumer response was positive. The impact of digital promotion on consumer behavior was concrete: Rizal Efendi (Bebaya Mart) reported increased transaction volume and footfall following active digital promotion, while Yogi (Rustic Camp & Café) observed that "many come because they saw the post or promotion on Instagram." These outcomes indicate that digital communication successfully moved consumers through awareness and interest stages to action.

However, the nature of engagement remained predominantly at the interaction level. Interactions were largely reactive prompted by consumer inquiries or content discovery rather than strategically designed to build lasting relational bonds. Amadea Aryanto (consumer, 2026) disclosed passive engagement behavior: bookmarking videos and making mental notes to visit without direct interaction. This pattern reflects a wider reality that passive engagement (likes, saves, views) constitutes a significant portion of digital consumer behavior. Critically, no MSME had implemented proactive engagement strategies such as scheduled interactive content, loyalty programs, user-generated content campaigns, or community building initiatives. In IMC terms, engagement remained functional and demand driven rather than relationship driven. The emotional resonance generated through relational content such as atmospheric videos represents an emerging but underdeveloped pathway toward deeper engagement.

2. Discussion

The findings collectively reveal a pattern consistent with early-stage digital marketing adoption among culinary MSMEs in Teras Samarinda. While digital transformation has occurred at a functional level with all four MSMEs actively present across multiple platforms strategic integration, message consistency, and relational engagement remain underdeveloped. From an IMC perspective (Kotler & Keller, 2016), effective integrated communication requires not merely the simultaneous use of multiple channels, but the coherent orchestration of those channels around a unified brand narrative. The findings show that platform selection and content strategies at Teras Samarinda reflected implicit audience segmentation (TikTok and Instagram for younger, awareness-oriented consumers; Facebook for conversion; WhatsApp for personal service), but this segmentation was not undergirded by explicit, documented communication planning. This pattern aligns with Nopal & Sofyan (2023), who found that Indonesian MSMEs tend to employ IMC components flexibly and adaptively rather than through formal strategic planning.

The contrast between Bebaya Mart's structured content approach (hook explanation all to action) and Pedas Manis's spontaneous content generation illustrates a resource and knowledge driven variation that has been consistently observed in MSME digital marketing studies. Sulistyo & Siang (2025) similarly found that culinary MSMEs in Bandung and Melaka maximized social media interactivity but lacked systematic planning frameworks. Lydia Irena (2023) demonstrated that visual content consistency on Instagram significantly increases consumer interaction and purchase intention a finding this study supports through consumer testimony on the persuasive power of atmospheric video content.

The dominance of transactional messaging over relational messaging represents a strategic limitation. While transactional content efficiently delivers product information and stimulates short term purchase decisions, it does not cultivate the emotional bonds, brand loyalty, and long-term customer relationships that IMC emphasizes (Kotler & Keller, 2016). The relational content seen in Teras Samarinda particularly videos showcasing the Mahakam riverfront ambiance demonstrates the untapped potential of place based storytelling and local cultural identity as communication assets, as highlighted by Sarjana & Harliantara (2025) in the context of heritage branding.

Consumer engagement at the interaction level rather than the relationship level reflects a structural gap between the communication outputs (posts, stories, videos) and the relational inputs needed to deepen consumer loyalty. Widiyanti & Fikri (2021) established that customer engagement, when bilateral and emotionally resonant, produces loyal consumers who not only repurchase but also act as voluntary brand advocates. The current reactive engagement model at Teras Samarinda MSMEs, while functional, falls short of this relational potential. Resource constraints limited personnel, content creation capacity, time management challenges, and digital literacy gaps are structural barriers to implementing more sophisticated IMC strategies. This finding is consistent with Diniati et al. (2024), who demonstrated that targeted social media management training significantly enhances MSME digital communication capabilities. The importance of consistent content production is also underscored by Salas et al. (2023) in their study of culinary MSME "Basreng Endul," which maintained digital brand presence through consistent visual communication and direct consumer interaction

Conclusion

This study investigated digital marketing communication strategies among culinary MSMEs at Teras Samarinda through the analytical lens of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), focusing on three indicators: digital media utilization, communication message construction, and consumer engagement. The findings demonstrate that all four MSMEs have embraced digital communication as a primary marketing channel, utilizing Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and Facebook to reach consumers and promote products. Digital promotion has produced positive outcomes including increased sales volume, footfall, and consumer interest. However, implementation has not yet fully aligned with IMC principles of integration, message consistency, and sustained relational engagement. Specifically: (1) digital media utilization remains functional and platform-specific rather than strategically integrated across channels; (2) message construction is dominated by transactional content, with relational and culturally-anchored messaging largely underdeveloped; and (3) consumer engagement operates primarily at the interaction level, driven by consumer initiated inquiries rather than proactive relationship building strategies. These gaps are attributable to limited resources, digital literacy disparities, and the absence of formal communication planning.

This study offers several recommendations. For MSME operators, structured content planning incorporating hooks, storytelling, calls to action, and consistent visual branding is recommended. Platform analytics tools should be utilized to guide data-driven content decisions. Engagement should be designed to cultivate emotional bonds rather than merely respond to inquiries. For Teras Samarinda management, a collective promotional strategy through an official Teras Samarinda digital channel could amplify MSME visibility through integrated messaging. For local government and related agencies, targeted training programs focused on digital marketing communication strategy - beyond basic platform usage are needed, alongside support for local-identity-based branding initiatives. For future researchers, the study's limitations in informant scope and geographic breadth

suggest the value of expanded qualitative or mixed-method investigations examining IMC adoption depth, brand equity outcomes, and consumer loyalty in MSME digital communication contexts.

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