

# Community Based Marketing Strategy in Culinary Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)

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## Abstract

Community-based marketing strategies have become an increasingly relevant approach for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the culinary sector to increase competitiveness amidst changing consumer preferences. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of implementing community-based marketing strategies in increasing brand awareness, customer loyalty, and business growth. The research method used is a qualitative approach with data collection techniques through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies on several culinary SMEs in Indonesia. The results of this study indicate that the implementation of community-based marketing strategies has a significant positive impact on the development of culinary SMEs. Through the use of social media platforms, organizing community events, and referral programs, culinary SMEs can strengthen relationships with customers, build brand loyalty, and expand market reach organically. In addition, by listening and responding to customer feedback, culinary SMEs can continue to develop products and services that are more relevant to market needs. Collaborations with influencers and public figures have also proven effective in introducing brands to a wider audience. Overall, community-based marketing can increase brand awareness, strengthen reputation, and provide sustainable benefits for culinary SMEs.

**Keywords:** SMEs, Marketing Strategy, Community, Culinary, Customer Loyalty

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## 1. Introduction

Micro-enterprise development is one of the main focuses in the local economy in many countries because of its significant role in improving community welfare (Ningtyas & Kusuma, 2024). Micro-enterprises are often considered the backbone of the local community economy, given their significant contribution to job creation and supporting domestic economic growth (Janah & Tampubolon, 2024). In addition, micro-enterprises are often able to create products or services that suit local needs and preferences, thus playing a role in maintaining economic stability in their communities. With this potential, the development of micro-enterprises is not only beneficial for the business actors themselves but also encourages more inclusive economic development at the national level (Al-Farisi & Fasa, 2022).

However, micro-enterprises face various challenges that cannot be ignored, especially in terms of marketing and market penetration. According to research by Hojnik & Huđek (2023), one of the main obstacles faced is the difficulty in building an effective marketing network to develop a business. Many

micro-entrepreneurs have limitations in terms of resources, be it finance, technology, or marketing skills, which hinder their ability to compete in the wider market (Nurhidayanti et al., 2023). In addition, low access to digital technology and modern marketing networks often makes it difficult for micro-enterprises to reach larger target markets. Therefore, innovative strategies and adequate support are needed, both from the government and the private sector, to help micro-enterprises overcome these obstacles and increase their competitiveness (Sudirman, 2020).

One of the rapidly growing Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) sectors is the culinary sector. Culinary SMEs have great opportunities to grow along with the high consumer demand for food and beverage products that not only meet basic needs but also offer uniqueness and innovation (Nikmah & Siswahyudianto, 2022). Modern consumers tend to look for new experiences in every product they consume, both in terms of taste, packaging, and presentation concept. This condition opens up opportunities for culinary SMEs to be creative and meet the needs of the growing market, while creating differentiation among competitors (Krisna, 2024)

However, the culinary sector also faces major challenges amidst increasingly competitive competition. One of the main challenges is building customer loyalty that not only buys once but also keeps coming back, as well as expanding the market amidst global competition (Sastradinata, 2024). In addition, increasing brand awareness is key to attracting the attention of consumers who are increasingly selective in choosing products. Therefore, it is necessary to implement marketing strategies that are not only effective but also innovative, such as utilizing digital technology, building close relationships with local communities, and creating added value through creative collaboration (Andirwan et al., 2023). These strategies not only help culinary SMEs survive in a competitive market but also provide sustainable competitive advantages.

One approach that has proven successful in increasing the marketing of culinary micro-enterprises is through community-based programs. This program relies on the strength of local communities to support and expand the reach of product marketing (Sitorus & Sumantika, 2023). By involving community members, both in product promotion and the development of new ideas, micro-businesses can build closer, more personal relationships with their customers. This not only increases customer loyalty, but also creates a more effective buzz or news in the local market (Susanti et al., 2018). Community-based programs, such as local events or campaigns, can encourage deeper interactions and increase brand awareness in a more natural and organic way (Rosyidi, 2018).

Research by Haque (2024) shows that collaboration between micro-entrepreneurs and local communities can produce more relevant and targeted marketing strategies. By understanding the needs and wants of the communities they serve, culinary SMEs can tailor their products and marketing messages to better suit local market preferences. This collaboration also allows entrepreneurs to get direct feedback from customers, which can be used to improve products and services (Mutaqin et al., 2023). Thus, a community-based approach not only supports marketing, but also helps micro-entrepreneurs in creating innovations that are in line with local market demands, which in turn can increase the competitiveness of their businesses in the wider market (Astuty et al., 2024).

The success of community-based marketing strategies has been proven in several culinary SMEs that have succeeded in utilizing the community as the main catalyst in driving their business growth (Mere et al., 2023). By utilizing social media for more direct interactions, organizing community events that involve consumers in the product experience, and creative collaborations with various parties, SMEs can create more relevant and memorable experiences for customers (Hariyono et al., 2024). However, although this strategy is promising, its implementation faces various challenges, such as limited resources owned by SMEs, difficulties in maintaining consistent relationships with community members, and the need to have a deeper understanding of the dynamics and preferences of the

communities served. Therefore, further research is needed to explore how SMEs can optimize the implementation of this community-based strategy, taking into account these challenges and the opportunities that exist in order to create stronger and more sustainable relationships with their customers.

## **2. Research Design and Method**

Qualitative methods were chosen in this study because of their ability to explore deeper understanding of the phenomena that occur in the implementation of community-based marketing strategies in culinary SMEs. In the context of this study, a qualitative approach allows researchers to gain richer and more detailed insights into how culinary SMEs interact with their communities, and how this contributes to their business development. This technique also provides space for exploring the perceptions, motivations, and experiences of the various parties involved, both from entrepreneurs, customers, and members of the community concerned, so that it can provide a more holistic picture of the effectiveness and challenges of the strategy (Sugiyono, 2011).

Data collection was conducted through two main techniques, namely interviews and literature studies. In-depth interviews with culinary SMEs and community members will provide direct information related to the implementation of community-based marketing strategies, as well as the challenges and successes they experienced in the process. In addition, literature studies are used to enrich the understanding of relevant community-based marketing theories, as well as to see case examples and findings from previous studies that can provide additional perspectives. The combination of these two data collection techniques is expected to provide a clear picture of the best ways to implement effective community-based marketing strategies in culinary SMEs, as well as contribute to the development of knowledge on this topic.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

Community marketing is an increasingly popular approach in the business world, where companies focus on building closer relationships with specific groups or communities, particularly through digital channels such as social media and online forums. This approach aims to create a stronger bond between brands and consumers by involving them directly in business activities. By fostering deeper relationships, community marketing can strengthen customer loyalty, which in turn will drive brand reputation improvement and expand referral networks that bring long-term benefits. Through this approach, companies strive to create a supportive environment, where customers feel valued and connected, and are more likely to become loyal brand advocates (Wardhana, 2016).

In practice, community marketing is not only about promoting products or services, but also creating content that is relevant and useful to community members. The goal is to foster a deeper sense of ownership and engagement, so members feel part of the brand's journey. Companies that are successful with this strategy usually provide a space for customers to discuss, share experiences, and provide input. This not only increases customer trust but also gives them a sense of ownership in the brand's development (Kuspriyono, 2020). With active interaction, community marketing can be a means to increase revenue streams through more referrals and increased long-term loyalty.

Community marketing also allows businesses to gain deeper insights into their customers' needs, wants, and concerns. By understanding community dynamics directly, companies can tailor their offerings more precisely, create more relevant solutions, and provide more responsive services (Primasari et al., 2020). In addition, through community marketing, companies can strengthen emotional bonds with customers, creating enjoyable and memorable experiences. This provides additional benefits,

where customers feel valued and involved in the business process, increasing their chances of becoming brand promoters and helping to boost the brand's reputation and appeal in a competitive market.

Community-based marketing provides significant benefits to businesses, especially in building stronger customer loyalty. Through this approach, businesses can create deeper bonds between brands and customers by developing a sense of belonging within the community. Customers who feel emotionally connected to a brand and the community around it are more likely to remain loyal customers. Not only will they continue to purchase the product, but they will also become brand advocates, recommending the product to their friends, family, or social networks. This expands the market reach organically, without requiring a large investment in advertising. The loyalty that grows through these communities helps brands to survive and thrive in a competitive market.

Additionally, community marketing also provides businesses with the opportunity to increase brand advocacy naturally. When a community grows and members feel valued, they are more likely to promote the brand willingly. These advocates become an integral part of the marketing strategy, spreading positive information and experiences about a company's products or services to others. A major benefit of this advocacy is that it significantly increases brand visibility and credibility, which can lead to faster and more lasting new customer growth. Community-based marketing creates a more efficient marketing channel, where promotions are guided more by customer recommendations than advertising costs.

Community marketing also provides benefits in terms of customer support and gaining more valuable market insights. Communities allow customers to interact and provide support to each other, and allow businesses to respond to questions, feedback or issues more directly and quickly. By providing a platform for this open communication, companies not only improve the customer experience, but also strengthen their relationships with customers. Additionally, an active community allows businesses to gain valuable insights into market trends, customer preferences, and the challenges they face. This allows companies to adapt their products and strategies to be more relevant and meet the needs of the market. Community marketing can also reduce the costs of traditional marketing which are often expensive and indirect, offering a more cost-effective way to promote a brand and acquire new customers.

Community-based marketing strategies are very appropriate to be applied to culinary SMEs because they can help create strong and sustainable relationships between businesses and customers. In the culinary industry, customer experience is heavily influenced by word-of-mouth recommendations and personal relationships. Through communities, customers not only buy products, but also feel connected to the brand and the community around it. Culinary SMEs can leverage social media platforms, community events, and various face-to-face interactions to build customer loyalty, promote their products, and increase brand awareness. This approach also enables SMEs to better understand their customers' needs and preferences, and provide more personalized and relevant service. Additionally, due to its more organic and recommendation-based nature, community marketing can reduce the often expensive costs of traditional marketing, making it a cost-effective and effective option for culinary SMEs to grow and compete in the market.

The implementation of community-based marketing strategies in culinary SMEs can be done through several structured steps and focuses on customer involvement and the use of social networks. Here are some ways that can be applied:

#### **Building Community on Social Media**

Culinary SMEs can utilize social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, or TikTok to build a loyal customer community in a very effective way. One of the main ways is to create an active account and interesting and varied content, such as sharing unique recipes, cooking tutorials, customer

stories, or holding special events such as cooking competitions or giveaways. By presenting relevant and creative content, businesses can not only attract the attention of potential customers but also build deeper relationships with existing audiences. The use of special hashtags and invitations to interact, such as asking customers to share their experiences, provide suggestions, or comment on food photos, will strengthen the bond between the brand and its community.

Additionally, social media allows businesses to create more personal and authentic customer experiences. Culinary SMEs can respond to questions, comments, or feedback from customers directly, which shows that the brand cares and listens to their wishes. Using features such as stories, live streaming, or IGTV to show the product-making process, share behind-the-scenes stories, or hold Q & A sessions can also increase customer engagement. This makes customers feel closer to the brand and feel appreciated, thus strengthening their loyalty. With more intense interactions, customers feel part of a larger community, which in turn encourages them to become more active brand advocates.

### **Hosting a Community Event**

Organizing events that involve customers and the local community is one effective way to strengthen the relationship between culinary SMEs and customers. Events such as cooking together, food tasting, or cooking classes provide a more in-depth, hands-on experience for customers. In such events, customers not only have the opportunity to try new products or dishes, but also get involved in the process of making or enjoying the food together with fellow customers and culinary entrepreneurs. These experiences create positive memories that make customers feel more connected to the brand, while also providing an opportunity for businesses to showcase the uniqueness of their products.

In addition, holding regular events also offers various other benefits, such as introducing new products to loyal and new customers. Events like this are a place for culinary SMEs to educate customers about new products, how to serve them, or recipes that they can try at home. This not only strengthens relationships with customers who attend, but also creates opportunities to expand the reach of the brand. Customers who are satisfied with their experience at the event are more likely to tell others about it, thus creating effective word-of-mouth promotion. By consistently holding events, culinary SMEs can build a more solid customer community, increase loyalty, and strengthen the brand's position in the market.

### **Referral and Rewards Program**

Providing incentives to customers who recommend a product or service to others is one very effective way to harness the power of community in marketing. By offering discounts, prizes, or even free products in exchange for customer referrals, culinary SMEs can encourage customers to become active followers in promoting their brand. This referral program leverages a community-based marketing approach that relies on trust between individuals, where recommendations from friends or family are often considered more credible than traditional advertising. This not only expands the market reach organically, but also strengthens the sense of community within the community, where customers feel valued for their contribution in introducing the brand to others.

Additionally, referral programs can encourage customers to become more engaged and committed to a brand. When customers feel like they are directly benefiting from their efforts in recommending a product to friends, they feel more connected and loyal to the brand. These programs also provide an opportunity to create a more personal relationship with customers because they feel cared for and appreciated for their contribution in introducing the product to a wider market. By offering relevant and attractive incentives, culinary SMEs can motivate customers to actively promote their products, which ultimately not only expands the customer base but also strengthens the loyalty of existing customers.

### **Collaboration with Influencers or KOL (Key Opinion Leaders)**

Collaborating with influencers or public figures who have influence in the culinary community is

a very effective strategy to introduce products to a wider audience. Influencers have the ability to reach a large number of people through social media platforms, and their audiences often have similar interests or relevance to the products offered by culinary SMEs. By choosing influencers who have credibility and influence in the culinary industry, SMEs can gain access to a larger community that may not have been reached through conventional marketing. Collaborating with these influencers can also significantly increase brand visibility, allowing businesses to introduce their products to a wider audience and build brand awareness in a more organic way .

However, in order for collaboration with influencers to be successful, it is necessary to prioritize an authentic approach that is in line with the culinary SME brand values. The influencers chosen should have a genuine connection with their audience, so that the product promotion feels natural and not just a paid advertisement. Authenticity in collaboration is crucial because audiences are more likely to trust recommendations that feel genuine and not forced. Therefore, culinary SMEs need to ensure that the influencers they collaborate with truly reflect their brand values and have the influence to build product credibility. In this way , collaborations not only introduce products to a wider audience but also strengthen deeper relationships with existing consumers.

#### **Listening and Responding to Customer Feedback**

Community-based marketing not only focuses on product promotion, but also on building two-way relationships with customers. One of the most important aspects of this approach is the ability to listen to customer needs and wants. Culinary SMEs can leverage the feedback they receive from their communities to continually develop and refine the products and services they offer. Through platforms such as social media, customer forums, or community events, businesses can solicit feedback and criticism from consumers to understand what they like, as well as areas for improvement. By actively listening, culinary SMEs not only meet customer expectations but also create a deeper sense of involvement in the community.

Additionally, responding quickly and constructively to customer feedback is critical to building mutual respect and trust within the community. When customers feel that their opinions are valued and taken seriously, they are more likely to feel emotionally connected to the brand and become more loyal. This action shows that the business is not only focused on profit, but also cares about the customer experience. Through this positive interaction, culinary SMEs can create an inclusive and supportive atmosphere, where customers feel cared for and appreciated, which in turn will increase loyalty and strengthen the long-term relationship between the brand and its community.

By consistently implementing community-based marketing strategies, culinary SMEs can create a strong foundation for sustainable growth. Building a solid community not only strengthens relationships with customers, but also creates deep loyalty and increases brand awareness organically. This approach allows culinary SMEs to grow in a more efficient way , because marketing is done through references and real experiences shared by the community itself. In addition, by listening to customer needs and feedback, businesses can adapt quickly and continue to improve their products and services, making them more relevant and attractive to consumers. Over time, this strong community will become a key driver in the success and competitiveness of culinary SMEs in an increasingly competitive market.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Community-based marketing is a very effective strategy for culinary SMEs in building long-term relationships with customers and increasing brand loyalty. By leveraging social media platforms, hosting community events, and listening to customer feedback, culinary SMEs can create authentic and relevant experiences for consumers. This approach not only allows businesses to expand their market reach, but

also builds an ecosystem that supports and benefits both customers and the company. Referral programs, collaboration with influencers, and providing incentives for customers who recommend products also help strengthen existing community networks. By implementing community-based marketing strategies, culinary SMEs can develop efficiently and sustainably. By building a sense of ownership among customers and listening to and responding to their needs, businesses can improve the customer experience, introduce new products, and build a stronger reputation. In addition, community-based marketing allows culinary SMEs to compete in an increasingly crowded market in a more affordable and profitable way, leading to long-term success

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