



Utilization of Social Media as a Marketing Tool for Startup Entrepreneurs (Case Study of Mpasi Tibiya in Cicalengka Bandung)

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Abstract

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a strategic role in the Indonesian economy, particularly in job creation and innovation. Among them, the food and beverage sector—especially baby food—continues to show rapid growth. In this context, social media has emerged as a cost-effective and accessible marketing tool for novice entrepreneurs. This study examines how MPASI Tibiya, a startup business in Cicalengka Bandung, utilizes Instagram and WhatsApp to market complementary baby food products designed for children aged 6–24 months. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation to explore marketing practices and challenges. Findings indicate that strategies such as creating engaging content, fostering direct consumer interaction, and leveraging customer testimonials effectively enhance brand awareness and build consumer trust. However, the study also highlights key challenges, including intense digital competition and changing platform algorithms. The research contributes to understanding how MSMEs can adopt adaptive and innovative content strategies to strengthen consumer relationships and sustain competitiveness in the digital marketplace.

Keywords: Social media marketing, MSMEs, Startup entrepreneurs, Baby food industry, Case study

1. Introduction

The rapid development of digitalization and technology has significantly changed marketing strategies for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Social media platforms offer entrepreneurs high flexibility in promoting products, analyzing consumer behavior, and building long-term relationships with customers (Islam & Sheikh, 2024). For novice entrepreneurs, social media is particularly valuable because it allows wider market access at relatively low cost compared to conventional methods.

In Indonesia, the food and beverage sector—especially baby food products—has become one of the fastest-growing MSME categories. Startups in this sector face the dual challenge of ensuring product quality while competing in an increasingly saturated digital marketplace. Previous studies emphasize that social media is not only a promotional tool but also an interactive medium that enables two-way communication, thereby fostering consumer trust and loyalty (Rose et al., 2024; Syahputra, 2025).

Despite these advantages, entrepreneurs must adapt to dynamic market conditions. Algorithm changes, negative consumer feedback, and intense competition present significant challenges for maintaining visibility and reputation. Therefore, understanding how MSMEs design adaptive and sustainable social media strategies is essential.

This study investigates the case of MPASI Tibiya, a startup business in Cicalengka, Bandung, that produces complementary baby food for children aged 6–24 months. By applying a qualitative case study approach, this research explores how MPASI Tibiya leverages Instagram and WhatsApp for marketing, identifies the strategies used to engage consumers, and analyzes the challenges encountered. The findings are expected to contribute to both academic literature and practical insights for MSMEs in developing effective and resilient digital marketing strategies.

2. Literature Review

Marketing strategies have long been recognized as central to the competitiveness of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). The marketing mix framework (product, price, place, promotion) provides businesses with

tools to meet consumer needs while positioning themselves in the market (Xia, 2023). However, in the context of digital transformation, this framework requires adaptation to the dynamics of online consumer behavior.

Kotler (2017) defines marketing strategy as an integrated plan that guides companies in achieving marketing goals within a competitive environment. In practice, MSMEs must not only rely on the traditional 4Ps but also incorporate digital tools that enable interaction, engagement, and value co-creation with consumers. Studies by Islam and Sheikh (2024) and Rose et al. (2024) show that social media-based strategies enhance brand awareness and profitability by fostering two-way communication and community building.

Another essential concept in digital marketing is brand image, which reflects consumers' overall perception of a product (Setiadi, 2015). Positive brand image is strongly correlated with consumer trust and loyalty, especially in industries such as baby food where product safety and quality are central concerns. Consumer decision-making, as explained by Kotler and Keller (2016), is influenced not only by price but also by perceived value, trust, and prior experiences shared through digital platforms.

Despite these established insights, research focusing on how startup entrepreneurs in niche sectors, such as complementary baby food, utilize social media for marketing remains limited. Most studies emphasize general e-commerce or large-scale businesses, leaving a gap in understanding how small, early-stage ventures adapt social media strategies to overcome resource constraints and intense competition.

Based on this gap, the present study contributes by examining the case of MPASI Tibiya in Bandung, Indonesia. The analysis not only draws on theoretical perspectives of marketing mix, brand image, and consumer behavior but also contextualizes them within digital platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp. This literature review thus positions the study to investigate how MSMEs implement adaptive social media strategies, what challenges they face, and how these strategies contribute to building consumer trust and sustaining business growth.

3. Method

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design, as it allows for in-depth exploration of how social media is utilized by startup entrepreneurs in real-life contexts (Yin, 2018). A qualitative method was chosen because the research seeks to understand experiences, meanings, and strategies rather than measure variables quantitatively (Creswell, 2014). The case of MPASI Tibiya was selected as it represents an early-stage business in the baby food sector that intensively uses social media for marketing.

3.1. Data Collection

Data were gathered through three techniques to ensure credibility and triangulation: (1) In-depth interviews – conducted with the owner of MPASI Tibiya, focusing on marketing practices, challenges faced, and consumer engagement strategies. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing flexibility to probe emerging themes. (2) Observation – direct observation of MPASI Tibiya's social media activities on Instagram and WhatsApp over a three-month period (August–October 2023). This included documenting content type, frequency of posting, and interaction patterns with consumers. (3) Documentation – collection of supporting evidence such as screenshots of posts, customer comments, and business sales records.

3.2. Data Analysis

The data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman (1994) interactive model, consisting of: (1) Data collection from interviews, observations, and documents. (2) Data reduction by identifying key themes relevant to social media marketing and consumer engagement. (3) Data display in narrative and tabular formats to highlight strategies and outcomes. (4) Conclusion drawing and verification to interpret findings in relation to existing theories and to ensure trustworthiness.

3.3. Validity and Reliability

To enhance the trustworthiness of findings, the study employed: (1) Triangulation across interview, observation, and documentation data. (2) Member checking, where preliminary findings were shared with the business owner for confirmation. (3) Thick description, providing detailed contextual information to enable transferability of results.

By combining these methods, the research provides a comprehensive understanding of how MPASI Tibiya leverages social media for marketing and how these practices contribute to building brand awareness, consumer trust, and business growth.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Sales Performance of MPASI Tibiya

Table 1 presents the sales performance of MPASI Tibiya between August and October 2023. The data indicate a steady increase in sales volume, suggesting that the marketing strategies implemented through social media platforms contributed positively to business growth.

Table 1. Sales data of MPASI Tibiya

Month	Product	Units Sold (Cups)	Unit Price (IDR)	Total Sales (IDR)
August	Baby porridge	7,500	3,000	22,500,000
September	Baby porridge	9,000	3,000	27,000,000
October	Baby porridge	9,300	3,000	27,900,000

Source: MPASI Tibiya internal records

The increasing trend reflects the effectiveness of combining content marketing, consumer interaction, and testimonial-based promotions. However, fluctuations may also be influenced by external factors such as consumer purchasing power and seasonal demand, which require further monitoring.

4.2. Marketing Strategy Implementation

4.2.1. Content Creation

High-quality visuals and informative descriptions on Instagram helped position MPASI Tibiya as a trustworthy brand in the baby food sector. This finding aligns with Kotler (2017), who emphasized the role of product positioning in shaping consumer perception. Moreover, the educational element embedded in the content supports Setiadi's (2015) concept of brand image as a determinant of consumer trust.

4.2.2. Consumer Interaction

WhatsApp served as a direct communication channel, enabling personalized responses to customer inquiries. This practice illustrates the shift from one-way promotion to interactive engagement, echoing Islam and Sheikh's (2024) assertion that social media fosters two-way communication crucial for consumer loyalty.

4.2.3. Use of Testimonials

Publishing consumer testimonials enhanced credibility and reduced perceived risk for new buyers. This supports Kotler and Keller's (2016) argument that prior consumer experiences significantly influence purchasing decisions. Nevertheless, overreliance on testimonials may limit the diversification of marketing strategies, suggesting the need for complementary approaches such as influencer partnerships.

4.3. Challenges Encountered

While social media provides opportunities, MPASI Tibiya faces several challenges: (1) Platform algorithm changes reduce organic reach, requiring continuous adaptation of content strategy. (2) High competition from similar MSMEs intensifies the struggle for consumer attention. (3) Consumer feedback management, particularly negative reviews, poses risks to brand reputation.

These findings resonate with Syahputra (2025), who noted that digital marketing strategies must remain adaptive to shifting online ecosystems.

4.4. Discussion

The case of MPASI Tibiya illustrates that effective utilization of social media depends not only on creating attractive content but also on building trust through interaction and transparency. Compared with prior studies on e-commerce firms (Rose et al., 2024), this research highlights that even resource-constrained startups can achieve growth if strategies are carefully aligned with consumer needs. However, sustainability requires continuous innovation to address algorithm shifts and competition.

5. Conclusion

This study examined how MPASI Tibiya, a startup business in the baby food sector, utilizes social media platforms—specifically Instagram and WhatsApp—as marketing tools. The findings demonstrate that social media marketing enables MSMEs to enhance brand awareness, strengthen consumer trust, and increase sales performance

through three main strategies: (1) creating engaging and informative content, (2) establishing interactive communication with consumers, and (3) leveraging customer testimonials as a credibility mechanism.

The sales data from August to October 2023 show a positive growth trend, indicating that these strategies effectively contributed to business development. However, challenges such as algorithm changes, market saturation, and management of consumer feedback remain significant barriers. These results confirm the arguments of prior studies that social media marketing must be adaptive, interactive, and consumer-oriented to ensure sustainability in competitive markets.

From a practical perspective, this research provides insights for MSME entrepreneurs, particularly in niche sectors such as baby food, on how to optimize social media not only as a promotional channel but also as a platform for building long-term relationships with customers. For policymakers and business support institutions, the findings highlight the importance of capacity building in digital marketing literacy for small entrepreneurs.

Future research could expand the scope by comparing multiple case studies across different industries, employing mixed methods, or analyzing the long-term impact of social media strategies on brand loyalty and financial sustainability.

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