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Digital Innovation and Customer Relationship Management to Improve Competitiveness of Warung De'Sate MSMEs

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ABSTRACT

Warung De'Sate MSME is a local culinary business in Batam City that has been operating for more than 15 years with its main strength in emotional closeness with customers. Despite having high customer loyalty, the business has not fully adopted digital approaches in its marketing and customer management strategies. This study aims to analyze the implementation of conventional customer relationship management (CRM) and evaluate the potential integration of digital strategies to improve competitiveness. The method used is a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study, through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation studies. The results showed that Warung De'Sate's main strength lies in the aspect of customer retention through personalized service, but is weak in the aspect of customer acquisition and development due to the lack of utilization of digital technology. This study recommends the implementation of simple digital CRM such as the use of social media, customer database, and loyalty program as a strategic step to maintain business identity while expanding the market.

Keywords: CRM, Customer Relationship Management, Customer Retention, Marketing Strategy, MSMEs

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary business landscape has undergone substantial transformation driven by digital technologies, fundamentally reshaping how enterprises manage customer relationships and maintain competitiveness (Paşcalău et al., 2024). This transformation is particularly evident in the micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) sector, which constitutes the economic backbone of many developing nations. In Indonesia, MSMEs contribute significantly to employment generation and gross domestic product, yet many continue to rely on traditional operational approaches while facing increasing pressure to adopt digital innovations (Nugroho & Wahjoedi, 2023). The culinary sector, representing a substantial portion of MSME activities, exemplifies this tension between traditional values and modern technological imperatives (Agus et al., 2023; Jamilah & Mardiana, 2024).

Within this evolving context, customer relationship management has emerged as a critical strategic capability for business sustainability and growth. MSMEs play an important role in the economic life of Indonesian society. In addition to providing employment, MSMEs serve as the backbone of the local economy across various regions. One MSME sector that continues to grow and remains closely connected to people's daily lives is the culinary industry. As Wijaya (2019) agreed that food represents not only a necessity but also an integral part of culture and social experience. In the midst of numerous dining options, businesses that can maintain distinctive tastes and comfortable atmospheres will consistently secure a place in the hearts of their consumers (Kusyanda & Masdiantini, 2022).

The integration of customer relationship management systems within MSMEs has received increasing scholarly attention as digital transformation reshapes competitive dynamics in developing economies. Research demonstrates that CRM adoption significantly impacts operational efficiency, sales growth, and customer retention in small and medium enterprises. A systematic review by Nethanani et al. (2024) encompassing 46 studies published between 2014 and 2024 revealed that CRM adoption leads to improvements in customer retention ranging from 25 to 40 percent and sales increases between 15 and 30 percent across SMEs. The analysis further identified that operational efficiency gains range from 20 to 35 percent, primarily driven by process automation and enhanced data management capabilities. Successful CRM implementation is strongly linked to managerial support, system customization, and user training, with the study emphasizing that CRM systems significantly contribute to SME growth by optimizing customer relationships and enabling data-driven decision-making.

Despite these documented benefits, MSMEs in Indonesia, particularly in the culinary sector, continue to face substantial barriers in digital technology adoption. According to a comprehensive study published in *Economies* by Anatan and Nur (2023), more than 80 percent of MSMEs in Indonesia lack any form of CRM

infrastructure. The leading causes include insufficient human resources (74 percent), high system development costs (65 percent), and low technological literacy (53 percent). These findings align with broader patterns observed in developing economies where digital readiness among MSMEs is typically hampered by both internal and external limitations. A systematic literature review by Purnomo et al. (2024) examining digital transformation of MSMEs in Indonesia confirmed that while MSMEs show moderate technological readiness, organizational readiness remains low, primarily due to inadequate human resource competencies, resistance to change, and limited financial capacity. Nevertheless, the evolution of CRM implementation has been particularly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which pushed businesses to shift to digital systems to enhance customer engagement. These developments underscore the crucial role of digital transformation in maintaining business sustainability and competitiveness in the contemporary market environment, particularly for traditional businesses seeking to balance personal customer relationships with technological efficiency.

One of the culinary MSMEs that has grown and survived for more than 15 years is Warung De'Sate, located in Taman Kota Mas Complex, Lubuk Baja, Batam City. The business is managed by a husband-and-wife team with a simple organizational structure. The owners are directly involved in all activities, from purchasing raw materials to serving food at customers' tables. Signature menu items such as signature satay, ayam chili ijo, and ayam selimut janda represent the characteristics that distinguish Warung De'Sate from other stalls.



Figure 1 Warung De'Sate Best Seller Menu

Source: Instagram De'Sate (2024)

Warung De'Sate stands out not only because of the quality of its food but also because of the distinctive manner in which it builds relationships with its customers. Unlike many modern eateries that rely heavily on digital marketing or formal

loyalty programs, Warung De'Sate creates a sense of belonging and warmth that makes customers feel as though they are part of a community. This emotional connection becomes a key differentiator that keeps customers returning, even without formal promotional efforts. Customers who visit Warung De'Sate often describe the experience as more than merely dining. The experience feels like coming home to a familiar and comfortable place. The welcoming atmosphere, combined with the owner's genuine hospitality, transforms every visit into a personal experience. This level of comfort encourages customers to spend more time at the establishment and to return regularly, creating a loyal customer base built on trust and personal interaction.

The owner and staff play an important role in creating this bond. They greet every visitor warmly, engage in casual conversations, share humor, and even remember the names and favorite dishes of loyal customers. These simple gestures, though informal, leave a lasting impression and help build a strong emotional connection between the business and its patrons. This reflects a people-centered approach that prioritizes personal touch over technological sophistication. Most of Warung De'Sate's customers come not from paid advertisements but from word-of-mouth recommendations. Many first-time visitors are introduced to the establishment by friends or colleagues who share their positive experiences. This organic form of promotion has proven effective in attracting diverse groups of customers, including local residents, office workers, students, and families. As a result, the stall has built a steady customer flow purely through community trust and personal reputation.

However, despite these strengths, the business still faces limitations due to the absence of a structured system for managing customer data or tracking behavioral patterns. Without proper records or digital tools, Warung De'Sate cannot fully identify customer preferences, monitor visit frequency, or design targeted promotions. Consequently, much of its growth potential remains untapped. If the stall can combine its personal approach with simple customer management systems, it could strengthen loyalty even further and optimize business performance in the long term. In today's rapidly evolving business landscape, digital technology has become a key factor in determining competitiveness and growth. Businesses are expected not only to provide quality products or services but also to adapt to digital trends in order to remain relevant. However, Warung De'Sate faces challenges in this area as it has not yet maximized the use of digital tools and platforms to support its operations. The lack of technological adaptation has limited its potential to reach a wider audience and optimize customer relationship management.

Currently, Warung De'Sate still relies heavily on traditional methods of communication and promotion. The business has not fully utilized social media platforms, which are now among the most effective channels for brand promotion and customer engagement. Moreover, the absence of a structured customer record system and loyalty program means the business lacks the data needed to analyze

customer behavior or personalize its services. This becomes an obstacle when looking to expand the market or attract new customers, especially from the younger generation who are more active in the digital world (Maryatmo & Pamenta, 2023). This gap between personal interaction and digital engagement highlights the need for a more strategic approach to customer relationship management. A well-implemented CRM system can help Warung De'Sate organize customer data, track preferences, and design programs that enhance loyalty while maintaining its signature personal touch. The integration of even simple digital tools such as customer databases or social media engagement plans could significantly improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its customer management process.

Therefore, the main objective of this study is to analyze how CRM is implemented at Warung De'Sate and how it supports the business in building and maintaining close relationships with customers. By examining the current conventional methods and identifying areas where digital strategies could be integrated, the study seeks to understand how Warung De'Sate can evolve without losing its warmth and authenticity. The focus is not solely on technology adoption but on balancing digital efficiency with human connection. Ultimately, this research is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the strengths, weaknesses, and development opportunities in Warung De'Sate's customer relationship strategies. The findings aim to serve as a valuable reference for MSMEs facing similar challenges in the digital era. By learning from Warung De'Sate's experience, other small businesses can better understand how to blend traditional values with modern CRM practices to achieve sustainable customer loyalty and business growth.



Figure 2 Preparation of Grilled Skewers at Warung De'Sate
Source: Author's Personal Documentation (2024)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) represent one of the strategic sectors that play a vital role in supporting economic growth and stability in Indonesia. MSMEs are recognized for their flexibility and adaptability to rapidly changing market dynamics (Gunawan et al., 2023). In the culinary sector, MSMEs demonstrate tremendous potential as they offer products based on local wisdom that are not easily replaced by large-scale industries. Warung De'Sate, as a clear example, demonstrates that the emotional connection built with customers and the uniqueness of local flavors constitute competitive advantages that are difficult to imitate. Research by Rachmawaty et al. (2023) indicates that the competitive advantage of culinary MSMEs often lies in emotional closeness to customers and the originality of the products offered.

According to the Ministry of Cooperatives and Small and Medium Enterprises, MSMEs have a vital role not only in creating jobs but also in encouraging economic equality across various regions, especially in rural areas and areas far from large economic centers. MSMEs contribute to strengthening the people's economy based on local potential and community empowerment (Candra et al., 2022). Thus, MSMEs are regarded as the main pillar in supporting national economic resilience, especially in facing global challenges and evolving economic dynamics. In addition, MSMEs possess high flexibility and adaptability to market changes, enabling them to survive amid uncertain economic conditions, including during economic crises. Therefore, strengthening MSMEs represents one of the main focuses in national economic development policies, both through providing access to capital, training, and business assistance, as well as technology development and digitalization to increase their competitiveness in the era of globalization.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is a framework used to build, maintain, and develop long-term relationships with customers (Adams, 2021). CRM consists of three main dimensions: new customer acquisition, old customer retention, and customer development. In MSMEs, CRM can serve as an effective tool to increase customer loyalty while expanding networks through word-of-mouth promotion that occurs organically. This strategy is particularly relevant for small businesses that rely on personal relationships and trust to build a loyal customer base.

Faizah and Majid (2024) emphasizes the importance of digital CRM as a link between business strategy and customer needs in the digital era. Digital CRM not only facilitates the systematic management of customer data but also enables businesses to provide more personalized and responsive services. Through

platforms such as social media, customer database systems, and digital-based communication applications, MSMEs can reach more customers efficiently, monitor consumer behavior, and customize offers based on recorded preferences. Thus, the integration of technology in CRM represents a crucial step to improve competitiveness and business sustainability amid modern market dynamics.

Business Innovation

Business innovation is one of the keys to the sustainability of MSMEs. Croitoru (2012) states that innovation is a form of creative destruction, which is the process of creating new value through improvement or replacement of old methods. Innovation also encompasses production processes, business models, service systems, and marketing strategies. The ability to continuously renew itself is an important asset so that MSMEs do not stagnate and are able to compete sustainably. In the culinary sector, innovation is not limited only to taste but also extends to product appearance, presentation, and packaging.

Djuarni (2023) demonstrates that product innovation has a significant relationship with consumer buying interest and customer loyalty. The main purpose of implementing innovation in the business world is to create added value for consumers and strengthen the position and competitiveness of businesses amid growing industrial competition (Eniola et al., 2022). Innovation in the business context is not limited only to physical product development but also includes innovations in business processes, business models, technology, distribution, customer service, and marketing strategies. With innovation, a business is able to meet the changing needs and expectations of consumers, thereby increasing customer loyalty and opening up new market opportunities. According to Cayadi and Robin (2021), MSMEs that consistently adopt innovation not only increase purchase interest and customer loyalty but also strengthen long-term competitiveness in the digital era and globalization.

Digital Marketing

The development of digital technology has transformed the way MSMEs interact with their consumers, market their products, and build their brand image. Digital marketing provides opportunities for small businesses to reach a wider market efficiently and economically. Through platforms such as social media, e-commerce, websites, and email marketing, MSMEs can deliver brand messages, promotions, and communicate directly with customers (*Mekari Jurnal - Software Akuntansi Online Terintegrasi*, n.d.). Strategies such as social media engagement, creative content, and online promotions have become an important part of building brand awareness and strengthening relationships with customers (Resty et al., 2023). According to Faizah and Majid (2024), the integration of digital marketing with CRM strategies can significantly increase customer acquisition and retention. Strategies such as the use of interactive content, customer reviews, local

influencers, and the use of WhatsApp Business enable more personalized and responsive interactions. Digital marketing is no longer an option but a strategic necessity for MSMEs to survive and thrive in the digital economy era.

According to Faizah and Majid (2024), the use of digital media in marketing activities provides various advantages for business actors. One of the main advantages is the efficiency of promotional costs compared to traditional marketing methods such as advertising in print, television, or radio. In addition, digital marketing is able to expand market reach globally without geographical restrictions, allowing products or services to be recognized by consumers from various regions and countries. Furthermore, digital marketing also enables direct and intense interaction between businesses and consumers. Through comment features, direct messages, or online customer service, consumers can submit questions, complaints, or reviews in real time. This certainly improves the quality of relationships between companies and customers and provides useful feedback for future product development.

Operational Digitalization in MSMEs

Apart from marketing, technology also plays a role in operational efficiency. Digital cashier systems, app-based stock management, and online financial records help MSMEs run their businesses more professionally (Eniola et al., 2022). In the case study of Warung De'Sate MSME, observations indicate that although the relationship with customers is quite strong on a personal level, digitalization has not been implemented to the fullest. This suggests an opportunity to combine local values with technology to improve competitiveness.

Digital transformation also provides significant opportunities for MSMEs to expand market access globally through e-commerce platforms and social media (Eniola et al., 2022; *Mekari Jurnal - Software Akuntansi Online Terintegrasi*, n.d.). With the right digital marketing strategy, MSMEs can reach consumers on a wider scale, not only limited to local markets but also regionally and internationally. The use of digital technology also facilitates direct interaction between businesses and consumers, thus building more personalized relationships and increasing customer loyalty (Rusdana et al., 2022).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach to understand in depth how customer relations are conducted by Warung De'Sate MSME in its daily activities. This approach was considered most suitable for describing reality in the field as it is, according to the context experienced by business actors and customers (Sugiyono, 2019). To explore this topic more thoroughly, the researcher employed the case study method. This method is particularly suitable when observing a single object in depth and comprehensively within a complex real-world setting. Through

a case study, researchers can reveal detailed information about the interactions, processes, and patterns that occur in customer relationship management at Warung De'Sate.

The research was conducted directly at Warung De'Sate's place of business in Taman Kota Mas Complex, Lubuk Baja, Batam City. Field research was carried out over a three-month period, from April to June 2025. During this time, the researcher was able to observe the daily operations, customer interactions, and overall atmosphere of the business. The main research subjects consisted of the business owner, who manages and oversees daily activities, and several loyal customers who frequently visit and interact with the business. These participants were selected purposively because they possess firsthand experience and relevant insight into the service process, communication patterns, and customer relationship strategies implemented by Warung De'Sate.

To collect data, researchers conducted direct observation by witnessing the process of serving food, the manner of serving customers, and the work dynamics in the establishment. This observation was performed so that researchers could directly see and experience the atmosphere and practices that occur without intermediaries (Ishtiaq, 2019). In addition, semi-structured interviews were also conducted with business owners. This form of interview allowed researchers to ask questions flexibly while maintaining the focus of the conversation. With this approach, information such as business background, marketing strategies, and challenges in dealing with customers could be obtained naturally (Angeles & Delhi, 2008).

Furthermore, the researcher also collected documentation such as photographs of business activities, promotional content on social media, and sales records to strengthen the analysis. All of this data was then analyzed using a thematic approach by Braun and Clarke (2006), by grouping the information into broad themes that align with customer relationship management theory, specifically Adams's (2021) CRM framework which includes customer acquisition, retention, and development. In this way, the researcher could identify emerging patterns and provide a fuller understanding of CRM practices at Warung De'Sate.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of observations and in-depth interviews conducted at Warung De'Sate, it was found that the relationship between business owners and customers is built through a very strong personal approach. The owner is directly involved in daily operations, from welcoming customers, serving food, to establishing informal communication that creates a family atmosphere. Many customers feel comfortable and eventually become loyal customers because they experience an emotional closeness that is rarely found in other dining establishments. This demonstrates that the retention dimension in the concept of

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) has operated naturally at Warung De'Sate.

However, in terms of marketing strategies and customer management, Warung De'Sate still does not utilize digital technology optimally. There is no customer record system, loyalty program, or social media-based acquisition strategy. Promotion is still conducted passively through word-of-mouth recommendations without the support of digital platforms. In addition, menu and service information is still delivered manually without any online media such as websites or booking applications. In fact, based on previous studies, digital integration in CRM strategies has proven effective in reaching new consumers and increasing customer loyalty (Faizah & Majid, 2024).

The findings from Warung De'Sate align closely with the systematic review conducted by Nethanani et al. (2024), which identified that CRM adoption leads to improvements in customer retention ranging from 25 to 40 percent and sales increases between 15 and 30 percent across SMEs. Warung De'Sate demonstrates strong capabilities in customer retention through its direct, personal interactions with customers, which form the foundation of its customer relationship strategy. The research revealed that operational efficiency gains from CRM implementation range from 20 to 35 percent, primarily driven by process automation and enhanced data management capabilities. While Warung De'Sate excels in creating positive customer experiences through personal touch, it has not yet leveraged digital CRM tools to systematically capture, analyze, and act upon customer data, thereby missing opportunities for enhanced profitability and operational efficiency. The study by Nethanani et al. (2024) emphasizes that successful CRM implementation is strongly linked to managerial support, system customization, and user training, suggesting that even businesses like Warung De'Sate could achieve significant performance improvements through accessible digital CRM tools adapted to their operational context.

The challenges faced by Warung De'Sate are consistent with broader patterns identified in Indonesian MSME research. Anatan and Nur (2023) found that over 80 percent of MSMEs in Indonesia lack any form of CRM infrastructure, with leading causes including insufficient human resources (74 percent), high system development costs (65 percent), and low technological literacy (53 percent). Warung De'Sate exemplifies this phenomenon, as the business operates with a simple husband-and-wife team structure and has not invested in digital infrastructure due to similar resource constraints and limited technological familiarity. This condition reinforces that many Indonesian MSMEs still focus on conventional approaches in establishing customer relationships but lack capabilities in developing new customers (acquisition) and increasing old customer transactions (extension) (Wahyudi et al., 2024). The systematic literature review by Purnomo et al. (2024) confirmed that while MSMEs show moderate technological readiness, organizational readiness remains low, primarily due to inadequate human resource

competencies, resistance to change, and limited financial capacity. These findings indicate that even businesses like Warung De'Sate, which currently lack digital infrastructure, face systemic barriers that require strategic intervention and support.

The acceleration of digital transformation during the COVID-19 pandemic further underscores the urgency and potential benefits of digital CRM adoption for traditional businesses. The pandemic pushed businesses to shift to cloud-based CRM systems to enhance customer engagement, resulting in improved operational efficiency and customer satisfaction. Warung De'Sate's reliance on word-of-mouth promotion and face-to-face interactions, while valuable for building emotional connections, limits its growth potential in an increasingly digital marketplace. Technologies such as WhatsApp Business, Google Forms, or promotional content on social media can be easily accessed and used by MSME actors to expand their market reach. In the context of Warung De'Sate, consistent use of social media and simple digital-based recording can represent the first step toward a more modern and structured CRM system without sacrificing the personal touch that currently differentiates the business.

The implementation of a digital CRM strategy will provide numerous benefits, such as increasing customer loyalty, collecting consumer behavior data for more precise marketing strategies, and strengthening communication efficiency between businesses and customers (Hasan et al., 2023). By combining the strength of existing personal relationships with digital technology, Warung De'Sate can expand its market reach, increase customer transaction value, and maintain its competitive advantage amid increasingly fierce business competition. The research findings suggest that digital transformation does not require complete abandonment of traditional practices but rather strategic integration that preserves core strengths while addressing identified weaknesses.

Specifically, Warung De'Sate could benefit from implementing simple digital tools in three key areas corresponding to the CRM framework dimensions identified by Adams (2021). For customer acquisition, establishing active social media presence on platforms such as Instagram and Facebook would enable the business to reach younger demographics and new customer segments beyond its current word-of-mouth network. For customer retention, creating a digital customer database using accessible tools like Google Sheets or WhatsApp Business lists would allow systematic tracking of customer preferences, visit frequencies, and purchase histories, enabling more personalized service delivery. For customer development or extension, implementing a simple digital loyalty program through mobile messaging platforms could incentivize repeat purchases and increased transaction values while maintaining the personal communication style that customers appreciate.

Thus, the results of this study demonstrate that Warung De'Sate possesses main strengths in terms of emotional connection and humanistic service but still requires transformation in the aspect of digitizing customer management. The

combination of personal touch with a simple technological approach will constitute a relevant and sustainable strategy in facing market challenges and changes in consumer behavior in the digital era. This balanced approach addresses the tension between traditional values and modern technological imperatives identified at the outset of this research, providing a practical pathway for MSMEs to evolve without losing their distinctive character and competitive advantages.

CONCLUSION

From the observations and interviews conducted during the research, it can be concluded that Warung De'Sate possesses significant strength in maintaining personal relationships with its customers. The warm atmosphere, friendly greetings from the owner, and familiar interactions make customers feel comfortable and willing to return repeatedly. This indicates that Warung De'Sate has successfully built strong customer relationships, particularly in terms of customer retention. However, despite this strong personal connection, the establishment still lacks the utilization of technology and digital strategies that could help expand its market reach and improve customer management. The business operations remain largely manual, relying heavily on direct interactions and word-of-mouth promotion rather than leveraging digital tools for broader visibility.

The absence of customer data records, loyalty programs, and consistent social media promotions represents a notable weakness. These aspects require immediate improvement, especially considering the increasingly digital behavior of modern consumers. Without adopting such strategies, Warung De'Sate risks being left behind by competitors who are more adaptive to current marketing trends. Nevertheless, there are numerous opportunities that can be harnessed if this business begins integrating a more modern Customer Relationship Management (CRM) approach. By combining digital tools with the existing personal touch that has become its hallmark, Warung De'Sate can strengthen customer loyalty, enhance operational efficiency, and ensure sustainable growth in the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Warung De'Sate can begin with simple yet impactful steps such as creating a list of loyal customers, sharing promotions or menu information through WhatsApp Business, and becoming more active on social media by posting engaging content. There is no need to immediately adopt complex technology. Instead, the focus can be on using accessible tools that are easy to operate and can be managed independently by the owner or staff.

In addition, developing basic loyalty programs such as offering a complimentary menu item on the fifth visit or providing discounts for customers on their birthdays can serve as an effective strategy to maintain strong relationships

while simultaneously increasing the average purchase value. These programs encourage repeat visits and create a sense of appreciation among loyal customers, strengthening their emotional connection to the brand.

If implemented consistently, these simple actions will help Warung De'Sate remain close to its customers while gradually adapting to modern business trends. Most importantly, Warung De'Sate does not need to lose its identity as a warm and friendly business. In fact, its signature personal touch can become an even stronger differentiator when combined with a more modern and data-driven approach.

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